

THE SPIRIT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL POLITICS:  
HUMAN NATURE, COMMUNICATION, AND COMMUNITY

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## ABSTRACT

Mary E. Domenico: *The Spirit of Transformational Politics:  
Human Nature, Communication, and Community*  
Under the Direction of Christian Lundberg

This project in communication ethics explores the interrelations among views of human nature, theories of communicative action, and conceptualizations of the constitutive forces of community in Western thought. The central argument, that doctrines of human nature that include extra-material human capacities open avenues for rethinking contemporary political agency, is developed through a genealogy of doctrines of human nature intended to display how ideas of the self are historically configured and influential in thinking about human capacities. I begin with ancient Greek theories of a robust human spirit as portrayed by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. The second cluster of theorists depicts the degradation of human spirit in religious (Augustine), philosophical (Descartes), and modern scientific doctrines. The third cluster addresses the recuperation of human spirit in the theories of Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy. These genealogical clusters represent three distinct ways of viewing human nature and capacities for political agency. I challenge theories that presume ideational rationality and discourse are constitutive of community and reformulate the foundation of ethical community based on human spiritual capacities for knowledge beyond the empirical, the creation of new ways of relating to one another, and materializing our ontological connectedness.

To my mother,  
who taught me to smile at strangers.

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*We are the authors of the future.*

Dan Aid

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INTRODUCTION:  
THE SPIRIT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL POLITICS

*Know Thyself.*

Inscription, Temple of Apollo, Delphi

This project addresses the human future and our ability to transform a broken and suffering world. The contemporary moment, characterized as it is by injustice and violence coupled with crises of collectivity, can make belief in the human potential to heal the world and hope in a better future seem naïvely nostalgic. Technology, capital, and worldwide migration are forming a global human assembly that appears incapable of peaceful coexistence. Shared symbolic systems, long assumed to be the foundations of community, are proving grossly inadequate for bridging cultures and ideologies and instead reinforce seemingly unsurpassable divisions. A dearth of leaders with the vision and ethical stature to inspire and motivate humane action forces us to imagine our own political possibilities. Many people suffer. Some detach, retreat into cynicism, or unthinkingly or defensively exploit privilege. Others, of course, perform acts of social justice. Regardless of our political positions, many of us share a profound doubt that we can salvage human community. What follows is a response to that doubt we have about our own power to create and sustain relations with one another. My claim is that belief in the

human ability to realize a transformed world becomes more possible through the revitalization of a casualty of Western philosophy, science, religion, and discourse-centered theory—the human spirit. I argue that one reason we question our ability to be change agents is that we are out of touch with the latent possibilities of our spiritual attributes and do not know how to hone spiritual capacities that have political power.

A politics centered on human spirit is not the sole means of advancing ethical community, but attention to spirit does have the power to disrupt preconceptions about creating and sustaining community. A dominant Western belief is that rational discourse constitutes community. In this model, community develops around ideational commitments arrived at through a process of publically critical communication in which different circulating views are debated toward rational consensus (Habermas 1991, 248-249). One preconception of this model is that community is formed around ideational symbolic dynamics, which largely brackets off materiality and reduces human nature to minds and mental processes. A related assumption is that the process of communication that contributes to the formation of community is divorced from physical and emotional affectivity. In this view, the bonds of community are constituted through a sharing of ideas that provokes mental, and not material, or material-immaterial investments. A third presumption is that autonomous minds interact according to the laws of rationality in order to achieve consensus. These presumptions of ideality and rationality contribute to a view of rationality itself as thinking and discursive expression that is scientific or even mathematical in nature, logically consistent, and detached emotionally. Reason

becomes a mental process of agreed upon classification that must be mastered in order to contribute to sociality.

I suggest that what is missing in this model is an acknowledgement of the differences between requirements of reason that are oriented toward instrumental mastery in and on the world and the affective attachments that are capable of fueling passionate commitments for ethical community. I propose that community is grounded not in discursive rational consensus but in interactions that are affectively powerful and commanding that precede discursive interactions. I maintain that community is the product not of persuasive linguistic encounters but of experiences that physically, emotionally, and mentally orient humans toward ethical sociality. This orientation is not one of instrumentality toward a particular end but one of opening possibilities toward an undeterminable future, in an attitude of belief that precedes what is undertaken (Bergson 1977, 24). Such passionate commitment to creating and maintaining community is grounded not in logic or scientific calculations but in ethically potent truths that stem from an experience of “stumbling upon something vital, absolute, and indisputable” that arouses an awakening of spirit (Kristeva 2009, 3). This experience is one of disrupting what is known, and breaking habits of rational thought, in order to apprehend connections and possibilities that do not yet exist and being compelled to act by an understanding that is in excess of discursive logic and empirical knowledge. This kind of spiritual understanding provokes a response to what Jean-Francois Lyotard refers to as an *absent presence*, a compelling meaning that hovers inaudibly to announce what is desired and missing in the world, a meaning that can be

apprehended and, while never completely expressible by language, can be imaginatively articulated toward transformative political acts (2012, 113). My claim is that recuperating a sense of the human as material and immaterial and as affectively connected to existence writ large can help fuel belief in the human ability to apprehend what the world needs, and to imagine, articulate, and realize new forms of collectivity.

John Berger calls secular political spirituality an “illegitimate but loved child who was never given a name,” and he reminds us that claims of justice are always of a spiritual nature, products of imaginations that are not content with injustice and so desire and envision different futures (2001, 572). The problem is not that the resolve to make the world more just and livable has dissipated; those who desire social justice continue to imagine better worlds and perform acts of risk and generosity. The dilemma we face is that traditional discourses of orientation and meaning, like those of religion, political ideology, or nationhood, have been rejected without replacement. The significations through which we order and understand our world, the “immensely complex web of meanings that permeate, orient, and animate” our modes of sociality have become vulnerable (Castoriadis 1997, 7). Indeed, the power of our symbolic systems is collapsing, and representations of community no longer efficiently serve as unproblematic “moral anchors” that command our allegiance and complicity (Žižek 2000, 331-332). Ours is a time of rapid, change, instability, and anxiety in which many of our frames of thinking have become inadequate for understanding our world. We need new ways of thinking about the meaning of human existence and ethical lives, both in terms of the values

we commit to and in terms of actions taken in the name of those values. We cannot help but attempt give meaning to something that is possibly “indefinable and unrepresentable,” that is, to goodness itself and to how goodness can be realized among ourselves, goodness not as a set of normative standards but as an aspirational goal that each person must struggle to define and realize (Murdoch 1970, 72). The issue at hand is how we configure this aspirational goal, and how we see our own ability to construct and live by values that can subtend humane community. One approach to responding to this need is the generation of new frameworks, novel conceptual backdrops to our politics, that have the expressive capacity to ethically ground and vitalize our political practices.

My contribution to this effort is to focus on human spirit in order to reconsider our conceptualizations of human nature, communication, and community. This is a project that brings to communication theory a variety of rhetorics of human nature in Western philosophy from the ancient Greeks to the contemporary moment in order to reimagine the foundations of community. This is not human nature given in advance as something solid and factual to be discovered, but nature as constituted in different historical moments by a range of intellectual and cultural attachments and by passionate desires. I offer alternatives to the qualities that have come to define being human in community in Western thought, this is, autonomy and the capacity for ideational rationality. I suggest that we recognize the potential of the human capacity to connect sensually and spiritually with others, and for the imagination, innovation, and agency necessary for political action. Community in the model I propose is a product of imagination, the work of a

shared social imaginary that institutes a historically situated field of interrelatedness that is a community (Castoriadis 1997, 13). This is a non-deterministic model that does not rely on given discursive interactions producing predictable formations of sociality. Instead, the “unity, coherence, and organized differentiation” that come to characterize a given configuration of community is, and must be, *created* anew time and again. This is to say that new social forms are possible *because* humans have the power to imagine, and to materialize, new networks of sociality that are ethical and humane (Castoriadis 1997, 14-15). Politics, in this frame, begins with the process of re-imagining our views of ourselves and our social configurations. The sense of politics I pursue, a politics aimed at ethical community, begins with a reinterpretation of self and world.

I propose expanding the common conception of communication as intersubjective message sharing aimed at persuasion and consensus to think of the preconditions for discursive communication as an intentional opening of self in recognition and sympathetic understanding of others. Communication here is communion with others as opposed to the product of exchanges of information or consensus. Communication in the model I propose *is* community, communication among passionately attached subjects that express, often and primarily pre- and extra-discursively, their desire to be in communion with and to constitute community with others (Davis 2010, 3). This line of thinking questions the dominant view of shared discourse and other representational symbol systems as the constitutive forces of community. I suggest a basis for community that is irreducible to these symbolic mechanisms, one that is based in the capacities of

human to sense and respond to the fragile existence of other beings and to form sensible and spiritual attachments with one another. The rhetorical basis for community that I claim, in other words, is based in affectivity, in an openness to others and in shared attachments (Davis 2010, 3; Lundberg 2012, 105). All of these shifts in thinking are founded on a belief that the human spirit can be nurtured toward furthering community and that the ability to nurture one's spirit depends on the intentional effort to know what it means to be human and to understand who one is and what one is capable of achieving.

In advocating for recognition of a "secular" human spirit, I am not proposing anything religious or mystical; spirit in the sense I use it is secular not because it is irreligious or cannot be accommodated within religious frames, but because it does not require religion as an authorizing principle. I am revitalizing a foundational, if now controversial, Western perspective that to be human is to be at once material and immaterial, body and spirit (Spinoza 1992, 237; Bergson 2007, 103; Nancy 2008, 126; Grassi 1994, 8). Since the dawn of Western philosophical and rhetorical thought in ancient Greece, the human spirit has been a means of exploring human activities to explain the origins of various kind of insight and knowledge, the participation of finite beings in an infinite cosmos, and the relation of the self to the rest of existence. For early Greek philosophers, the human spirit accounted not only for life, but for uniquely human life, including the ability to be just and fair and so contribute to ethical community. Attention to the human spirit has been a theoretical strategy to consider questions such as: What are the limitations of views that reduce human existence to materiality? and What role does human

immateriality play in possibilities for ethical individual and collective life? The human spirit has been employed historically to account for understandings of self and world and for moral deliberation and human freedom (Long 2015, 1). My theory regarding the importance of human spirit, in other words, involves not the creation of a new concept, but reclaiming for rhetoric what was once assumed to be a vital aspect of being human in a form relevant to contemporary politics.

In Western intellectual thought, a conception of the human spirit is considered now largely intellectually insupportable. As Thomas Frenzt notes, secular Western intellectual history is a saga of the “depreciation of the interior,” where human spirit has been erased not only in rhetorics of human nature but in theories of communication and community as well (1991, 83). What was once considered the human spirit or soul has largely been replaced by the concept of *mind*, with a corresponding focus on the individual human capacity for rational thought. Contemporary theories of communication that accommodate this view of human nature primarily focus on a discursive exchange of rational discourse between separate and autonomous minds. This view is reflected in current models of communication that focus on the “extension of messages in space” and on an intersubjective process of sending and receiving information (Carey 2009, 14). Contemporary theories of community are dominated by discourse models that posit individual rational humans who, through engagement with circulating texts and intentional deliberation, are constituted as collectives. Such theories, structured by discursive logic, have resulted in a tension between exclusively mental rationality and a human that is both matter and spirit, a tension that is resolved by eliminating

the spirit and disavowing its centrality for communication and collectivity. In contrast, I advance a theory of communication grounded in a recognition of human being as both material and immaterial, as body and spirit. So doing shifts attention from communication as discursively produced to communication as an affective orientation to others, a receptivity, persuadability, and responsiveness that “testifies” to the fundamental conditions of existence as interconnection and interdependence (Davis 2010, 3-4).

Rhetorically, conceptualizations of human nature have suffered not only by the reduction of human nature to autonomous, rational mind but also as a consequence of critiques of humanism. Humanism is characterized by various theories that acknowledge human agency, but as rhetorical accounts of the human have conformed to postmodern tenets, our understanding of what we are and what we can do has become “epistemologically vulnerable” to the point that we question whether human agency itself is a possibility (Archer 2000, 2). In his philosophical genealogy of the imagination, Richard Kearney notes that the deconstruction of humanism has resulted in a loss of belief in the human as a source of meaning; human creative potential has been reduced to the repetition and dissemination of existing images and signs by what is essentially a nonexistent entity (1998, 14). The postmodern resistance to narratives of universal advancement and emancipation and cynicism toward ethics as an attempt to impose ideology have, for Kearney, wrought an age “apparently devoid” of emancipatory agency and the potential of human experience for liberation (1998, 30). The solution, he suggests, is not revert to a humanism that overvalues the autonomous, sovereign individual’s generation

of self-serving illusions but to pursue emancipatory action through inventing alternate modes of existence that, however partial and contingent, are necessary for responding ethically to the suffering of others. Recognizing a capacity for creative imagination requires a reinterpretation, and the ongoing composition, of narratives of human nature that can restore and rejuvenate the human capacity for creating new forms of humane collectivity (Kearney 1998, 396). My project responds to this necessity for reconceptualizing human nature by recuperating a rhetorical conceptualization of spirit as a source of potent agency relevant to ethical communication and community.

In doing so, I extend an Italian rhetorical humanist tradition that began with the rhetorician and philosopher, Vico (1668-1744). Vico's rejection of modern rationalism and Cartesian-inspired scientific reductionism is the basis for Ernesto Grassi's twentieth-century efforts to counter the deconstruction of humanism by reclaiming the human power of invention and by reclaiming rhetoric as a powerful means of discovery and bringing meaning to human life (2001, 7). Departing from rhetorical theories that are based in autonomy and rationality, Grassi maintains that rhetoric is not primarily a tool for argument and persuasion, rather, rhetoric itself is discourse that articulates our ontological condition of togetherness and thus creates meaning. Such expression, which is of the nature of a discovery, cannot be a product of scientific proofs or of logical language that is based in assumptions about the nature of reality because such discourses consider anything "outside of the symbolic world" to be only "silence and mystery" (2001, 5). Rhetorically articulating a passionate experience of reality, giving expression to knowledge of our

immaterialized but existent commonality with one another, can only be accomplished through passionate language. Insight into what our senses reveal to us about the human world, into existing interconnectedness and interdependence, can only occur through an imaginative process of invention. For Grassi, the language capable of expressing an experience of the unity that underlies apparent multiplicity, that is, of an experience that is itself the foundation of community, is rhetoric. Rhetorical metaphors, as imagistic, original, and meaningful forms of articulation, alone can motivate human ethical actions toward community (2001, 88). Grassi restores to the human a place of primacy in constituting community by emphasizing rhetoric's affective and imaginative qualities. I echo this conceptualization of rhetoric by emphasizing the affective insights and attachments that are pre-discursive necessities for communication aimed at constituting community. I call attention to how *human nature*, *communication*, and *community* are themselves metaphors in need of imaginative reconfiguration.

In the remainder of this introduction, and as prelude to the development of my project, I discuss my research methodology, clarify my use of the terms *human nature* and *human spirit*, and discuss the relevance of analyzing these concepts for theories of communication and community. I end with a synopsis of the upcoming chapters.

#### Notes on Method

This project is both theoretical and practical, intended as a rhetorical and philosophical investigation that has political implications for ethical practices. My

approach to the fields of rhetoric and philosophy is pragmatic. Pragmatism, according to John Dewey's insights, is a critique of philosophical positivism, or the belief that philosophy's concern should be the correspondence of reality to knowledge or at least the correspondence of reality to modes of representation (Vattimo 2011, 2). Pragmatism is less concerned with notions of truth and more concerned with how what we believe plays out in the world, a view that sees questions of human goodness as more important than "questions of truth and being" (Kearney 1998, 352). Pragmatism is grounded in the belief that philosophy should focus not on describing the world but on changing it for the better (Rorty 2008, 4). Among the tenets of pragmatism is a belief that human action can improve the human condition, and a focus on the relationship between knower and world (Seigfried 1996, 6-7). In my rhetorical investigations into various accounts of human nature and communication, it is this relationship between humans and the world that I develop into an ethical praxis for creating and maintaining community. In reconfiguring communication as a foundation for community, I identify human spiritual capacities for imagining, articulating, and materializing novel approaches to human social formations. Throughout this project, I am invested less in investigating foundations of knowledge or infallible truths than I am in contributing to ways of thinking about being human that can enhance human well-being individually and collectively. My reconfiguration of the communicative basis of community as affectively-oriented communion with others is undertaken in this spirit.

While philosophy has become a theoretical discipline that can seem largely

divorced from everyday practices, here I pursue philosophy in the spirit with which it began in ancient Greece, that is, as a means of investigating and providing a route to a meaningful human life. Philosophy in ancient Greece was a rhetorical practice intended explicitly to have an effect on the character and the lives of those who engaged with it, and an assumption was that a foundational goal of philosophy was to promote the “art of living” and “the terms through which one can fashion a good self” (Nehamas 1998, 4). Ancient philosophical texts were rhetorical addresses to the inner self, geared toward spiritual progress, and concerned with individual destiny in terms of achieving a life lived well (Hadot 1995, 66-69). Pre-Socratic and Hellenistic schools of philosophy were therapeutic and attempted to engage the entire person—sensibly, intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively—in order to affect a transformation of the self. This transformation had direct rhetorical and social implications. In Plato’s works, for example, Socrates as philosophical mentor continually advises his students and the citizenry of Athens to attend first to their virtue and the goodness of their souls in order to become rhetorically adept at fostering community (*Republic* 609c-d). Aristotle considers *ethos*, the discernable virtue of a speaker, to be the basis of an art of rhetoric that can motivate actions that contribute politically to the highest collective good (*Politics* 1253a1-2). Such a transformation of self has contemporary political relevance in that it can effect a transformation of community through speech and action aimed at perceiving and achieving a sense of ethical community. In reclaiming a rhetoric of human spirit, my intention is draw attention to the human capacity for self growth and for revealing and forging connections with others, capacities that require acknowledgement and

reinforcement in order to transform both self and world.

My method for reclaiming a secular human spirit is a genealogy of rhetorical doctrines of human nature in Western thought that proceeds through three clusters of theorists. I begin with doctrines of the human at the dawn of Western philosophy in ancient Greece. Through an analysis of Homeric, Platonic, and Aristotelian texts, I demonstrate how a robust doctrine of secular human spirit figured centrally in ancient Greek theories of rhetoric and collectivity. In the second cluster of theorists, I investigate Augustinian theology, Cartesian philosophy, and materialist science, significant points in theorizing the human that have resulted in the degradation and eventual erasure of a secular concept of human spirit. The third genealogical cluster links the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza with the more contemporary theories of Henri Bergson, and Jean-Luc Nancy to explore philosophical systems that again view the human as both matter and spirit. These three philosophers revive, although in strikingly different forms, many of the key aspects of the ancient Greek sense of human spirit as foundational to ethical collectivity. Obviously, this genealogy is not exhaustive, and there are other philosophers who could have been included or substituted for those on whom I focus. My goal is not to provide a systematic and complete account of Western doctrines of human nature but rather, by focusing on key theoretical moments in the tradition, to illustrate the variety of consequential ways that different rhetorical modes regarding human nature influence theories of sociality. As I proceed through the three clusters of my genealogy, I have intentionally grouped theorists together in order to demonstrate how the inclusion or exclusion of a secular human spirit

imposes restraints on, or opens possibilities for, rethinking the mechanisms of communication and community.

I adopt a genealogical strategy for a number of reasons. First, while my theoretical references do not provide a complete narrative of Western thought, the thinkers on whom I focus do portray how rhetorics of human nature, theories of communicative action, and conceptualizations of community change through time and are intimately related. At different historical moments, theories regarding the attributes and capacities of human being lead to particular conceptualizations of the mechanisms and purposes of communication and to different speculations regarding the constitutive forces of community. My genealogy also displays the ways in which rhetorics of human nature and theories of communication and community are responses to particular historical moments. Each rhetorical account I discuss is placed in a historical context that reveals the variety of investments—cultural, intellectual, scientific, philosophical and, in some cases, theological—that each theorist holds or attempts to accommodate. Beyond revealing the interrelated nature of my three subjects, a genealogical account shows the variety of ways that theoretical tensions have been resolved between human materiality and immateriality, human autonomy and human collectivity, and rationality as abstract thought versus a sense of rationality that involves emotion and sensation as well as intellect. My genealogy explores the consequences of the resolutions of these theoretical tensions on rhetorics of human agency, human value, and possibilities for collectivity. Most significantly, a genealogical approach lends to the exposure of how, over time, the gradual adoption of a dominant materialist view of human

nature coupled with an ideational and representational view of the mechanisms of communication result in an eclipse of spiritual capacities for affective commitments and imaginative creations of new communal possibilities. Finally, a genealogy also allows for the recovery of a stream of Western thought that restores these human capacities and allows for a reconfiguration of theories of communication and community based on human spirit.

My genealogy displays a hermeneutic engagement with Western thinking regarding human nature and, in particular, with human spirit. Hermeneutics, in the sense conveyed by Hans-George Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, is a historically-situated method of understanding grounded in language, a dialogue between a reader in the present and voices from the past. In an effort to understand a past textual meaning, a theorist brings to the task of understanding a *horizon*, an existing understanding of a concept, along with a set of questions that motivate a deep conversation with the knowledge that a past figure, a Thou, communicates in a text. The text presents a second historically-situated horizon, and through a process of self-reflection coupled with a dialogue with the past textual voice, a “sharing of common meaning,” an overlapping of the two horizons, can be achieved (2013, 302-303). Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle portrays this overlap as a process in which tradition is treated not as a “permanent condition” but as the product of an understanding that allows participation with past conceptual work (2013, 305). The hermeneutical method assumes that “the past has something to say to me,” and that entering into a dialogue with the text enables me to “work through” to a common meaning that then becomes a means of extending traditional concepts into the

present and future (2013, 376-377).

There are a number of options for doing hermeneutics. The first, a complete merging of horizons, presumes a literal correspondence among things, the words that represent them, and meanings. This merging achieves historical consensus regarding the meaning of a text. A second option is analogical and presumes that there is a correspondence between a literal meaning and what it is analogized to; again, the assumption is that there is a correspondence among things, words, and meaning. The third option, and the one that I employ in my reading of past texts, is anagogical, a method that assumes there exists no strict correspondence between a text and possible meanings. The text in this case is reducible neither to history nor to a correspondence between things and words. An anagogical approach assumes that the rhetoric of a text, the range of possible meanings, exceeds the grammar of a text (De Man 1979, 10). There is something available in the text that is not simply the apparent meaning, and rhetoric functions to open up a possibility of multiple meanings that arise from the clusters of concepts in a text to gesture toward other resonances. The sign, irreducible to one meaning, overflows into polysemic registers.

In theology and in poetics, an anagogical interpretation is one that looks beyond literal, allegorical, or explicitly moral meanings for a spiritual reading that speaks to the highest human abilities and values (Baldick 2015, 13). My genealogy proceeds through three clusters of thinkers, each that allows for the development of a particular rhetorical and anagogical resonance. In employing this interpretive strategy, my intention is to pursue *human spirit* both as a set of human attributes

and capacities and as a force that reveals something ambiguous, even mysterious about human life and human commonality, an insight that is not amenable to empirical or strictly linguistic understanding. The spirit that arises anagogically from the texts I engage is that force which involves flashes of sensible and emotive insight into reality that provoke, enliven, motivate, and even compel an ethical response. My interpretation of spirit in this sense exceeds an intellectual or language-based understanding of past texts to engage with a meaning that is understood intuitively, sensually, and passionately. This engagement is rhetorical in the sense of being profoundly persuasive, albeit persuasive not on the level of *logos* or rationality or ideational symbolic content, but on a level that explicitly requires engagement of the entire material/immaterial, physical/spiritual, self.

This anagogical analysis provides a basis for reconceptualizing rhetoric as it pertains to constituting community, rhetoric seen not as processes of symbolic exchange but as an ethics, a praxis, that fuels community through passionate insights and attachments. The rhetorical basis for community that I claim, in other words, is based in affectivity, in an openness to others and in shared attachments (Davis 2010, 3; Lundberg 2012, 105). Rhetoric so framed positions a material-immaterial human actor that cannot be reduced to material and deterministic dynamics and interactions, but envisions the human as capable of responding to contingent human conditions through capacities for sensible and emotional recognition of others, and for imaginatively creating conditions of relations that are not reducible to symbolic constructions. This is a configuration of rhetoric based on powerful experiences of the nature of the world and of others, experiences that

impose a sense of responsibility for community and compel ethical interactions.

### Human Nature

While a historical genealogy of rhetorics of human nature in Western thought is at the center of this project, I want to be clear from the outset that I am not proposing that an essential and enduring human nature exists, can be identified, and is amenable to description. Indeed, as my genealogy makes clear, human nature is a human construct, and doctrines of human nature are historically contextualized theories. New theories of human nature are responses to changing human conditions, and theorists who propose different versions of human nature do so in response to prevailing scientific, philosophical, and sometimes religious states of knowledge and belief. Doctrines of human nature are typically one part of larger systemic investigations and reflect the theoretical, social, and political investments of the thinker. The many different philosophical conceptualizations of the human that exist exemplify how, while there are some aspects of human existence that seem apparent from observation and experience, other aspects continue to elude certainty or allow only tentative conclusions: What is the relation of the human to the rest of reality? Do humans possess free will? What is a life lived well? How is that life possible? What grounds this quest? These, and other questions, continue to motivate new rhetorics of human nature that attempt to provide answers for questions that may well ultimately be unanswerable. I treat each historically-situated doctrine of human nature not as truth, but as a consequential “reality of each era and for each era” that has the power to confine humans to repeating

history or to liberate us to pursue a changed future (Meyer 2000, 278). The genealogy I construct is meant, as Foucault says, to open the possibility of moving beyond the limits that have been constructed in the past in order to “give new impetus” to our political work by rethinking our spiritual agential capabilities (1984, 43). My claim is that what we think we are capable of directly influences what we will attempt to do and that efforts to create and maintain ethical community are made more possible by restoring a vibrant sense of immaterial capacities for passionate attachment and commitment, imagining new social configurations, and for materializing a sense of communication as communion.

Rhetorics of human nature, regardless of when they are conceived, have several features in common, most obviously an attempt to describe the attributes and capacities of the human, including the biological and mental constitution of the human organism. Accounts of human nature not only clarify what we observe about ourselves from being human, but are also reflexive and analytic attempts to give meaning to what being human involves (Kupperman 2010, *vii-viii*). Doctrines of human nature attempt to give meaning to human existence, to the fact that to be human is to be *something* in the universe and *someone* among others. Human nature typically ascribes normative universals concerning what we can expect of ourselves and other people, whether and how someone can change the self and the world, what is most valuable in human life, and which human capacities are relevant to this quest (Kupperman 2012, 1-2). Importantly, a given rhetoric of human nature is not conceptualized in a vacuum, and the attempt to give meaning to being human engages metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions. These dimensions,

in turn, influence views of the political mechanisms through which community is created and maintained. Rhetorical configurations of human being, in other words, are not simply portraits of human attributes and capacities, but are consequential interpretations that create both subjects and the political and social worlds in which subjects dwell (Castoriadis 1997, 3). The doctrines of human nature that I discuss throughout this project engage, explicitly or implicitly, a description of the universe and a characterization of the human place in that universe, an account of human capacities for different types of knowledge, and a moral or ethical dimension that both posits a sense of the *good* and addresses this value in terms of individual and collective human lives. An explanation of human life that begins with a creator who creates and sustains human life, for example, is vastly different from portrayals of the human that do not propose a transcendental ground to human existence. A materialist doctrine of human life differs substantially from a doctrine that admits both material and immaterial aspects of human being. Regardless of the particular account, the Western perspectives on human nature that I include in this project address cosmic, social, and ethical dimensions as necessary understanding what it means to be human.

My intention in tracing various historically situated rhetorical accounts of human nature is to pursue rhetoric not as a symbolic system, but as an account of the ways in which contingent, non-ideational, ethically oriented communication functions to open possibilities for the creation and maintenance of community. I treat rhetoric not as a shared field of ideational content, but as those imagined conditions of being and relatedness that are not reducible to symbolic interchange.

This is rhetoric as creation, as a process of imagining and articulating the underlying interconnectedness and interdependence that characterize human existence (Grassi 2001, 88). Rhetoric as the basis for community as I construct it here has nothing to do with a transfer of messages, a need for consensus, or discursive competence, but is rather what occurs before, and makes possible, any of these processes. Rhetoric in this sense is communication aimed at humans opening themselves to, and risking, a shared exposure to one another that reveals our codependence and “issues a rhetorical imperative,” an obligation to respond that is the condition for symbolic exchange (Davis 2010, 9). This is rhetoric reconfigured as those sensible, emotional, intellectual, imaginative, and material interactions that contribute to a non-symbolic foundation for ethical community.

### Human Spirit

Human spirit is accommodated in much Western theory through a dualistic paradigm that positions spirit in contrast to materiality, spirit as unavailable to empiricism. In this frame, human spirit tends to take on the characteristics of a *something*, an object or aspect of being, that although invisible is substantially real. Spirit so conceptualized involves a set of attributes and capacities that are unique, special aspects of being that cannot be explained materially. In what follows, I evaluate the rhetorical work this split does in configuring the conditions for human connectedness and reject a clear distinction between material and immaterial, or physical and mental, aspects of human being. My claim is that no spiritual *thing* exists that is separate from materiality, and that spirit is not a deeper or other self

waiting to be discovered. Rather, spirit encompasses those aspects of human being, both attributes and capacities, that cannot be explained entirely in materialistic terms such as thinking, imagination, and moral deliberation. Spirit, then, is immaterial, but intimately related to, and inseparable from, materiality. My research into the various rhetorical modes in which philosophers portray human spirit exhibits that spiritual capacities are not unique to spirituality, rather, spirituality involves using differently those human capacities that are in excess of materiality but are also within the realm of everyday human experience, capacities, for example, for intuition, imagination, and sympathetic understanding of others. Recovery of a secular human spirit does not involve the invention of novel human capacities, but entails revitalizing aspects of human nature from which secularists have become alienated, an alienation that has resulted in spiritual capacities being abandoned and rarely employed toward improvement of both self and world.

I adopt the list of terms Pierre Hadot offers in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* to explain what is meant by human “spirituality.” Hadot eschews any mystical or religious special psychic sense of the term to focus attention on a wide range of human attributes and capacities, including psychic, moral, ethical, intellectual, soul, thoughts, imagination and sensibility (1995, 81). Human spirit, then, is the self, one could say the inner self, parts of the normally unconscious and unreflective self that can be made conscious through intentional effort. Spirit is an aspect of self that for self-knowledge requires self-examination and for transformation requires intentionality. Like the philosophers I address in this project who include spirit in rhetorics of human nature, I focus attention on the spirit as a set of latent abilities

that can be honed. Plato proposes that honing memory allows one to recall transcendent and infinite Forms or Ideas; for Augustine, attention to imagination allows one to know reality; for Descartes and Bergson, intuition turned outward and inward reveals the nature of existence; for Nancy, acknowledging the full range of human sensations opens new connections to the world. In each of these accounts, improvement of human spirit speaks to two movements, one an opening to one's own underdeveloped capacities and another that is an opening of self to the world to create new connections and ethical commitments. The internal sense of developing spirit is the ability to disrupt habits of thought built on discursive logics and rationality in order to advance sympathetic understanding of the world and of others and to imagine alternative forms of collectivity. The external sense of developing spiritual capacities is an experience of apprehending unmade connections in the world, of pursuing knowledge of that which has potential to be realized but has not yet been brought into speech and action.

I work toward invigorating a sense of human spirit that, as Iris Murdoch says, can be a "substantial and continually developing mechanism of attachments" (2001, 63). The spirit can be honed, I suggest, to develop attachments that acknowledge existing connections in the world. To say there are already existing connections in the world is to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all of existence and that an intimate apprehension of this interdependence can be a basis for furthering ethical politics. This approach to the human spirit echoes that in ancient Greece, where the spirit was assumed to benefit from, to develop a capacity for goodness through, knowledge of existence. For Plato, a transcendent Good that characterizes all of

existence, once apprehended, commands “love and allegiance” that motivate a good life (Taylor 1989, 122). For Aristotle, knowledge of the order of natural existence is achieved through intentional awareness. This awareness of cosmic order is considered one of the highest activities of humans and is the basis for the ability to achieve a fulfilled, good life (Taylor 1989, 125). Centuries later, Bergson will appeal to the human capacity for intuition as the mechanism to discern the true nature of the interconnectedness of all being (2007, 103). Nancy will refer to this capacity to sense the world’s interconnected nature as *sensing* (1997, 8). All of these rhetorical accounts consider the insights brought by intentional spiritual experiences to be made possible by both movements toward the inner self and toward the external world. Such intimate experiences of what exists is connected to becoming a good actor in the world through the mechanisms of communication, communication as an alternative to articulated, rational mastery of the world. Communication becomes a process of the spiritual and material interrelatedness that is exposed through these encounters being brought into human dynamics in new forms of community.

These spiritual movements require both body and mind, both the sensorium and the thought process, which undoes a strict dichotomy between body and mind. Instead of opposing a transcendent spirit to a material body, or positing something mystical or religious, I am theorizing an immanent spirit that involves the whole person, a being that is simultaneously part of a plane of existence that is both material and spiritual. In this existence, to imagine or create something new, or to consciously sense something by opening one’s receptivity toward what is inside and outside, is not only the faculty of thought being used a particular way but also the

body sensually concentrating in one direction or another. This challenges a dominant conceptual approach to being human that focuses on human minds and the capacity for rational thought and theories of constituting collectives that focus on rational discourse aimed at persuasion and consensus. The distinction to be made is between how minds and bodies are usually employed in carving up and acting on the world and ways of using minds and bodies to reveal and manifest the ever-changing, dynamic, underlying fabric of existence. Spiritual progress then becomes an openness, an orientation of desire that turns toward and acknowledges that which is not normally sensed or thought to sense oneself as part of, and responsible for, the universal condition of fragile finite existence.

### Communication and Community

Near the end of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks to the foundation of ethical communication with others: "First, you must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking and writing about . . . Second, you must understand the nature of the soul . . ." (2012, 55). Socrates insists that communicating ethically in order to nurture community requires knowledge of the human spirit as soul, specifically, knowing the various types of souls that different people have (or are) and taking care not to harm other souls through deception. Avoiding harm is coupled with a responsibility to help others progress spiritually and, for Socrates, a primary purpose of communication is to better the souls, the spirits, of those around you in order to create good, ethical community. In the contemporary moment, there are a number of ways of theorizing communication—as the competent transmission of

intersubjective messages aimed at persuasion for example, or as a means of constructing a meaningful symbolic shared reality—but none of the common ways that we now approach communication direct us to acknowledge and participate in human spirit. To explain how models of communication have changed over time, we typically attribute the evolution to such factors as the impact of science and communicative technologies, a greater understanding of power dynamics, or a more sophisticated knowledge of language and meaning, all of which are partial and important explanations for how models of communication have developed. An additional reason that I propose here is that our theories of communication and community have changed because our rhetorics of human nature have changed. In the long transition from an ancient Greek communication model based on human souls interacting to one of autonomous, rational interlocutors, in the shift from a model that took into account immaterial aspects of human being to models based on philosophical rationalism and scientific materialism, we have lost something of value in how we think about the possibilities of communication contributing to community.

Dominant models of communication in the field of rhetoric and in studies of the public sphere share a perspective that discourse itself is constitutive of community. Beginning with Aristotle, who holds a foundational place in rhetorical studies, is his model of communication as choosing, among the available means of persuasion, those that are the most appropriate and effective for a particular audience. Aristotle looks at three public communicative genres, the juridical, the ritual, and the governmental, and notes that different styles and content render the

most persuasive speeches. Aristotle's emphasis is on different audiences and contexts in which persuasive rhetorical events have the potential to bring people together as cohesive groups, as communities. A more contemporary of community view is that of Michael Warner, who defines a public as "a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (2002, 413). For Warner, a public is a mobile, temporary social structure that does not exist except for those times that being addressed by discursive texts brings together allies of particular views, opinions, and beliefs. Jürgen Habermas's work on the public sphere similarly states that public discourse and consensus are the processes through which individuals negotiate the normative standards that will form them as a public. For Habermas, the public sphere is a field of discursive connections through which people are brought together collectively (Calhoun 1999, 37). What these models have in common is that they consider contexts in which shared meaning is produced through a process of rational symbolic communication to be the basis of community.

This focus on intersubjective, ideational message sharing as constitutive of community carries two assumptions that I challenge. The first assumption is that the process of communication is a process of intersubjective exchange, and that to the degree that humans exercise their discursive abilities effectively to send and receive messages from one autonomous subjectivity to another, community is possible. The second assumption is that symbolic rational language is a force capable of bringing together people who would otherwise not recognize one another or bond together as community. As will become apparent in the genealogy I pursue, a focus on human rationality and representation comes at the expense of

other human capacities for knowledge that are not grounded in discursive logics, for example, capacities for intuition and sensing others. I maintain that privileging intersubjective message sharing and persuasive rational discourse as the constitutive force for collectives ignores other factors that are preconditions for discursive interactions.

A number of contemporary theorists challenge the notion of communication as fundamentally a process of intersubjective, rational exchange. The alternative definitions of communication they envision complement my turn to human spirit as having a significant function in community formation. Diane Davis, who reads through Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy, theorizes what she calls *originary rhetoricity*. Davis says that communication would not be possible at all were it not for the capacity for people to be affected or persuaded that must be present as a precondition for rhetorical exchange. Drawing on Nancy, she calls this a *clinaman*, by which she means the human capacity to be open to, and receptive toward, communicating with one another. Proximity, or a bounded context, is not sufficient to evoke this possibility; there must exist ethical intentionality (Davis 2010, 3). Christian Lundberg also theorizes a pre-condition for rhetorical exchange. Lundberg bases his theory on the work of Jacques Lacan to point out that meaning, in fact, does not arise from bounded rhetorical contexts of intersubjective exchange, but pre-exists rhetorical exchange as a system, a symbolic economy of tropes to which persons are affectively invested. It is this shared symbolic economy that makes it possible for people to imagine a dynamic of shared affinity or, as Lundberg calls it, “feigned unicity.” Lundberg considers a person not a maker of meaning but the site

where affective investments attach to meanings. A community is not a group of interlocutors who share intersubjective meaning, but a group of similarly affected people who share investments in certain tropes (2012, 105). James Carey points out that what drives a transmission model of communication is both scientism and an obsession with individualism which leads to the necessity of separate minds transmitting message. Carey offers an alternative to the scientific transmission model in what he terms the “ritual model” of communication, a model directed not “toward the extension of messages in space, but toward the maintenance of society over time” (2009, 15). A model, in other words, that begins not with individual minds transmitting messages, but with the need for humans to approach one another in ways that acknowledge and reinforce their shared interdependence. Communication for Carey is a ritual that reinforces community.

Taken together, these theories suggest that understanding communication as the intersubjective sharing of meaning based on a system of representation does not sufficiently explain what constitutes communities. There is something more basic—a quality of *rhetoricity*, an investment in circulating tropes, an ethical view of other people, or a focus on the public ceremonies we enact—that grounds our coming together as community. My point is not that the intersubjective sharing of information doesn’t matter to politics oriented toward creating community, but rather that intersubjective sharing is not enough; an ethical attitude, an openness, an acknowledged affectivity, must also be present. Rhetoricity as affectivity is prior to symbolization, and is the condition of possibility for it. I propose that what is necessary for constituting community is an opening of the spirit—the ability to open

to connections with other people that are not based on intersubjective exchange but on ethical orientations to one another.

A second, related limitation I see in traditional discursive models of constituting community is the focus on rational language and persuasive discourse aimed at ideational identification. This focus tends to restrict the knowledge that is relevant to communication in community to that which is ideationally and discursively known. Rationality so defined is confined to the representational and mental, and so excludes types of understanding that are based on direct and unmediated human experience, forms of knowledge that are sometimes termed irrational but that I see as more-than-rational, as means to knowing the world differently. The political importance of this type of knowledge is that it is the basis for discerning unmade connections in the world based on human experience and bringing them into rhetorical events. It is a way to link human creativity to communication and community through passionate attachments rather than through ideational content or fields of representation. As humans we are capable of insights that are not limited by representational and ideational systems, insights that instead are spiritually apprehended. These products of spiritual connection fuel passionate social attachments are under-recognized in most communication models as a condition for community.

Conceptualizing community, the political possibility for community, as something other than a product of intersubjective exchange based on rational discourse shifts attention to other human capacities. If rationality and intersubjective meaning transferred through representation are not the basis for

community, what is? What would a non-discursive politics of community look like? I think it would be a politics based on nurturing capacities for what Davis calls *originary rhetoricity*, Bergson calls *intuition*, and Nancy calls *immediacy*, a politics that would gather from earlier moments in Western thought tools to reconsider ethical action aimed at collectivity. It would be a politics of community based on an experiential sensitivity to the world and the effort to manifest what is revealed in such an experience by creating new metaphors that better express our interdependence and interconnectedness. This politics would require that we depend not on the exchange of symbolic or ideational messages to constitute community, but on our own abilities to become more ethical, responsible people.

This is what is missing in our current politics of community. Products of a Western conceptualization of human nature that privileges mind and abstract thought, we pursue rational discourse or shared symbolic systems as routes to community. This is so despite the continual failure of public discourse or shared symbols to constitute us *as* community. What we ask of public figures is consistency, that they create and articulate closed systems of meaning without contradictions. We engage in endless debate with one another in order to prove the superiority of one system of rational thought over another. We categorize and immobilize the world into discrete identities, and then focus on these abstract creations instead of dealing with our complex, ever-changing and interconnected co-existence. Theorizing community and politics from a basis other than that of ideational rationality and intersubjectivity would mean recognizing that we need to suspend products of representation in order to lean toward and open to the beings with

whom we share the world. Such a rhetorical position undercuts Western conceptualizations of community that begin with an ontology of the individual and privilege autonomy and rationalism and instead focuses attention on emotions and feelings, on those passionate attachments and commitments that fuel ethical sociality (Taylor 1989, 305). In this communicative model, it is sensible, imaginative, and emotive opening to our interconnectedness and interdependence that creates possibilities of new modes of realizing our relations with each other, relations based not on rational discourse or shared symbolic meaning, but on the desire to make our basic state of existence, our co-existence, more livable.

### Chapter Overview

The first cluster of theorists in my genealogy (chapter 1) engages with texts by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle in order to illustrate how the human spirit was a central concept in rhetorics of human nature in ancient Greece. Homer portrays human spirit as the animating force in life and as the source of righteous anger and a desire for justice. Hellenistic conceptualizations of the human spirit as *soul* were attempts to understand human nature based on human experience. This effort to understand what it means to be human generated theories of soul encompassing a rich cluster of concepts such as *nous*, *anima*, and *psyche*. As *nous*, the soul engages not only rational knowledge but sympathetic understanding (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*); as *anima*, the soul is mental activity extended to imagination and creativity (Aristotle, *de Anima*); and as *psyche*, the soul opens to shared, extra-material conditions of existence (Plato, *Phaedo*). For Plato and Aristotle, among

other early Greek philosophers, the soul accounted not only for life but for uniquely human life, including the ability and responsibility to be just and fair and so contribute to humane community. A requirement for just community was healthy, active human souls. In this chapter, I expose how a human spirit in ancient Greece is not reducible to theological contexts; rather, the spirit is a capacity for knowledge and relationality grounded outside of discursive rationality that allows for human creation of imaginative novelty, bridges the interstices between individuals and community, and considers the ethical dimensions of collectivity.

In the second genealogical cluster (chapter 2), I investigate how spiritual attributes and capacities that contributed substantially to theories of communication and community in Hellenistic Greece are displaced by religion, philosophy, and scientific materialism. In an exploration of the works of St. Augustine, I explore how a religious, metaphysical view of human spirit conceptualized as soul positions spirit as an immaterial, immortal substance that is a gift from and properly directed toward the divine. There is no shared spirit immanent to the natural world and the relationship between a nonmaterial soul and a material world is oriented primarily beyond that world, to a transcendent God. Reading Descartes, I illustrate how philosophy severs spirit as *mind* from materiality and comes to privilege mental processes and rationality, and how the focus of the philosophies that rely on a Cartesian view are preoccupied with individualism, rationality, and the correspondence of thought to the material world. I also explore how scientific materialism reduces human nature to bodily organs, including the brain and the central nervous system, that interact with the world in a cause-and-

effect mode governed by rationality and empirical verifiability. My intention in this chapter is to show how these theories bracket off, even erase, a secular conceptualization of human spirit that may be theoretically useful for explaining human capacities for developing new possibilities for community.

In the final cluster of this genealogy (chapter 3), I pursue a recuperation of secular spirit as it is expressed in the philosophies of Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy. These theorists do not provide a linear corrective to an intellectual history that diminishes the potential of human spirit. Rather, each productively offers some means of countering dominant conceptualization of human agency, communication, and collectivity. Spinoza rejects dualistic conceptions of reality to theorize a unified, monistic universe that is expressed in two forms, as extension and as thought. He positions the human as a material/spiritual entity in an immanent plane of being. Bergson and Nancy not only theorize human nature as both material and spiritual and critique the Western compulsion to elide spiritual capabilities, both also explicitly demonstrate the relevance of human spirit to communication and collectivity. These theorists write at different historical moments and they do not have uniform conceptualizations of human nature. However, they do offer ways to think humanness that begin not with the individual, but with humans as dependent on one another, and indeed on all of existence, for the well-being of self and others. Each sees human life as intimately and inescapably linked to others, and each considers the human spirit a capacity for understanding beyond the discursive, symbolic, or empirical, and as a human capacity that must be nurtured and improved for collectivity. In these ways, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy echo the

ancient Greeks. My point is not that these three philosophers repeat exactly the conceptualizations of human spirit the Greeks advocated, but that they replicate some of the key characteristics of human spirit that the Greeks saw as foundational to community. Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy agree with the ancient Greeks that to have spirit, to be spirit as well as matter, is more than affectability on a plane of immaterial or transcendent existence. Spirit is a metaphor encompassing human connections and interdependence with all of existence, a capacity for intuitive knowledge, and an understanding of oneself and one's place in the universe that can fuel ethical relations with others. These theorists respond to their own historical moments and offer productive insights to a contemporary moment that can benefit from renewed attention to the principles they offer.

I conclude with a discussion of the implications of a secular human spirit for contemporary politics. I argue that reviving a secular human spirit is relevant for contemporary political theories of communication and community because acknowledgement of a human that is both material and spiritual gives us modes to rethink human agency and its role in human collectivity. While we are accustomed to thinking that we are bodies that act on the world and minds that think about the world, many of us are less familiar with, and distanced from, our spirits. We do not think of ourselves as material/spiritual entities. While we think of what bodies and minds do as labor, we are less inclined to think of spirit as a set of latent abilities that must be exercised and honed in order to affect the world. To be spirit is not only to be open to affective encounters on a plane of nonmaterial being; to be spirit means having the capacity for understanding in excess of the symbolic and

ideational and the ability to experience the self and the world beyond existing conceptual frameworks. These spiritual capacities, which allow us to open ourselves up to the risk and challenge of community, require self-knowledge in preparation for politics. Drawing on works by Michel Foucault and Ernesto Grassi, I offer practical means of spiritual progress aimed toward realizing community through communicative acts.

CHAPTER 1  
ANCIENT RHETORICS OF HUMAN SPIRIT  
IN HOMER, PLATO, AND ARISTOTLE

The central premise of this project is that the way in which human nature is conceptualized bears significantly on doctrines of communication and community, and that these doctrines are consequential for the belief we have in our political capabilities. This is to say that our political agency is affected by our ability to acknowledge that we have the attributes and capacities necessary to understand what is needed in the world, create alternatives, and manifest change in our collective life. In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for an extended discussion of the consequences of different Western rhetorics of human nature on political possibilities by beginning with the views of three influential figures in ancient Greece: Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. My purposes are to explore the intellectual frames through which we theorize our humanness that originated in ancient Greece and to expose how different rhetorics of human nature contribute to different beliefs about human agency in creating and maintaining community. Ancient Greek political theory, and in particular the creation of democratic institutions in the *polis*, is foundational to later Western political thought. My discussion of the centrality of human spirit as *soul* to this politics sets the stage for a later discussion of the erasure of human spirit as central to human community. I attend to these aims first by

reading selected works by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle in order to discern how each formulated a rhetoric of human nature. Next, I examine how these versions of human nature are reflected in their theories of rhetoric and community. I end with a discussion of the relevance of ancient Greek doctrines to the development of subsequent Western doctrines of human nature, communication, and community.

At the dawn of Western intellectual thought in ancient Greece, articulating an understanding of what it is to be human involves both a description of the human as an organism and a speculative attempt to orient the human within cosmic, social, and ethical realms (Taylor 1989, 99; Long 2015, 4). Homer's view of the human reflects his belief in a mythological pantheon of gods and goddesses and the warrior culture of his society. Plato's doctrine of the human develops within an idealized philosophical system and in response to an Athenian democracy toward which his attitude was, at best, ambivalent. Aristotle's version of the human mirrors his emphasis on nature and his observational approach to human psychology and sociality. Each of these accounts of the human also articulates a horizon for human life, a moral or spiritual compass aimed at motivating action toward fulfilling human potential (Taylor 2007, 5). This ethical horizon—variously characterized as Honor (Homer), Goodness (Plato), or Happiness (Aristotle)—addresses questions like: What constitutes an ethical, fulfilled life? What attitudes and behaviors are necessary? How can this life be achieved? It is within the relation of this ethical orienting principle to a given cosmic and social background that each thinker defines possibilities for human agency. For Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, human agency emerges not as a capability of an isolated organism within a physical world,

but as a field of possibilities created through interactions with, and responses to, a given cosmic order, social structure, and ethical ideal.

My focus on Homer, Plato, and Aristotle's conceptualizations of human nature yields a far from complete portrayal of early Greek thought. My intention is not to be historically exhaustive, but to give significant examples of how human nature was theorized, and how rhetorics of the human developed over time, before the influences of philosophical logic and materialist science solidified into a dominant strand of Western intellectualism. I focus on Homer and his portrayal of human nature in *The Iliad* because his is the first-known account of the human in the Western textual tradition. A reading of Homer provides a baseline, a pre-philosophical and pre-scientific view of the human from which other thinkers, including Plato and Aristotle, develop their own. I emphasize Plato and Aristotle's doctrines for two reasons. First, as will be apparent throughout this project, both are very influential on later Western thinkers, and their philosophical formulations will echo through the centuries to the contemporary moment. Second, Plato and Aristotle's views of human nature figure centrally in their theories of rhetoric and community. I argue that through attention to these theories, with their emphasis on immaterial human capacities, ethical intentionality, and knowledge and understanding beyond the rational and discursive, we can recover ideas about ourselves as political agents that are vital to transformative politics.

Recovering the Greek sense of a secular spirit that is foundational to community requires resisting the traditional, developmental approach to historical material that dominates Western intellectual thought. The developmental approach

confines interpretation within a frame that considers the ideas of early thinkers to be more primitive than the works of later theorists (Davis 2011, 2; Long 2015, 3). From this perspective, Homer's portrayal of human nature is seen as corrected by the more sophisticated versions that Plato and Aristotle achieve, and their accounts, in turn, are seen as less exact than rhetorics of human nature that emerge later in the context of developing science and knowledge.<sup>1</sup> This teleological orientation, which leads to the conclusion that we have a better grasp now of what it means to be human than did early Greek thinkers, masks that there is much about being human that remains mysterious and that earlier thinkers tended to recognize and attempt to deal with this mystery more than later thinkers who reject immaterial capacities. Accepting the developmental view also means foregoing the opportunity to think humanness remote from the individualistic, capital-driven, and secular mindset that dominates today, a mode of thought that productively challenges how we conceptualize human attributes and capabilities (Long 2015, 2). I reject a developmental approach in order to produce a genealogy of rhetorics of human nature that exposes the lasting theoretical value of understanding what being human meant to Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. With the assumption that we have something to learn from these early thinkers, I emphasize those aspects of human nature included in early rhetorics of human nature that either remain inconclusive

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<sup>1</sup> For an often-cited example of this phenomenon, see Bruno Snell's (1953) *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature*. Snell claims that, due to a lack of understanding of the human, Homer's portrayal of human nature lacks the sense of a unified physical and mental self. Among Classics scholars who dispute this claim is A. A. Long (2015). Long argues against the developmental view and maintains that Homer's characterization of being human, while based in mythology and not science, portrays psychological unity and competency in a dramatic and emotive style that has been misinterpreted as lacking sophistication.

and so open to reconceptualization despite our expanded knowledge base or that speak directly to political agency in ways our current doctrines of the human do not.

Human spirit in early Greek theories was expressed in terms of a *soul*. While Homer's version of human soul had no capacities beyond bare life, a rhetorically strategic reading of the works of Plato and Aristotle reveals how their explorations of attributes and capacities of the human soul coincide with the emergence of a cultural turn toward democracy. The politically-relevant soul is the imaginative product of a culture struggling to define the interface between individuals and a collective engaged in replacing a warrior culture grounded in tradition with a political culture grounded in notions of equality and democratic practices. This cultural turn requires consideration of notions of the Good and the Just, and the soul is constructed as the metaphorical site of human moral deliberation and virtue; a good collective life was predicated on the goodness of individual souls (Taylor 1989, 122). For the Greeks, the central problem of politics is the tension between individual, private "good," and a more public "good," this is, the difference between self-interest and duty to the collective (Davis 2011, 158). Both Plato and Aristotle position the soul at the center of the resolution of this tension. In the *Republic*, Plato delineates the choices an individual soul must make to turn toward the Good and become just, moderate, and courageous in order to contribute to sociality (609 c-d). For Aristotle, the community exists by nature for the sake of living well and achieving human happiness; communal happiness requires care of the soul to nurture the virtues of prudence, courage, and justice, virtues which require community to form (*Art of Rhetoric* 1.5). Well ordered souls, harmonious and

beautiful souls, were considered imperatives for rhetorical processes capable of contributing to democratic processes. Western ideas concerning the constitution of human community continue to be strongly influenced by ancient Greek rhetorical and political traditions. While part of a Greek Western inheritance involves continuing rhetorical invocations of the human spirit as *soul* in a theological sense, human spirit has largely been bracketed off from secular conceptualizations of politics directed toward community. Ancient Greek rhetorical invocations of soul as they pertain to community did not rely on religious doctrine for authorization but were imaginative secular attempts to theorize human nature in ways that contributed to social well-being.

The effort to conceptualize human nature in ancient Greece was, in many ways, similar to the endeavor today. Much of what was, and is, known about being human is empirically verifiable, and theorizing human nature in Western thought has long been an attempt to reconcile human experience with prevailing states of knowledge. Like the ancient Greeks, we know we are born and will die and are material bodies that function according to the laws of nature. We know that, in addition to being bodies that move and require sustenance, we experience painful and pleasurable sensations and have the ability to think, remember, and imagine. Those of us invested in conceptualizing human nature in the contemporary moment also share with the ancients an interest in aspects of being human that confront the limits of empiricism; we wonder if we are completely explainable in terms of materiality or if there are facets of humanness that are immaterial and, perhaps, immortal. We speculate about the structure and function of immaterial human

attributes and capacities and devise various explanations for how these relate to our material bodies and the world. Like the Greeks, depending on the discipline in which we theorize, genre we adopt, and culturally-informed attitudes and ideologies we hold, our explanations differ (Claus 1981, 1-7). We share with the ancient Greeks both knowledge about ourselves that we can assert confidently and a range of questions for which we have only partial answers.

Differences in Greek rhetorical accounts of human nature can be attributed to the historical contexts that I identified earlier. In particular, this contextuality reveals the centrality in ancient thought of a concept of the soul to explain human experiences that are not available to empirical or observational verification. The human soul is described in the oldest known Western texts, the epic poems of Hesiod and Homer, as well as in the writings of the pre-Socratic philosophers. Plato, Aristotle, and their contemporaries discuss the soul at length, as do members of the later Stoic, Epicurean, and Skeptical schools (Davis 2011, 6). The term soul, usually rendered as *psyche*, was employed as a metaphor for immaterial dimensions of human experience that are exposed by the “juxtaposition between the experiencing self and the limits of direct perception,” experiences, for example, like consciousness, rationality, and human agency (Rapp 2014, 1). The soul was a theoretical vehicle for exploring, among other subjects, knowledge beyond empiricism, the human capacity to innovate, immaterial connections among people, and the ethical capacity for community. I emphasize the attributes and capacities of the Greek soul, aspects of human nature that are deemphasized or erased in later Western conceptualizations of the human.

## Psychosomatic Humans in Homer's Enchanted World<sup>2</sup>

The first known account of human nature in the Western tradition comes from the Greek epic poet, Homer, in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.<sup>3</sup> Written sometime between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, Homer's poems offer a view of human nature before the Greeks lost faith in a mythology revolving around the human relation to gods and goddesses and replaced this belief with a focus on the human place in a natural order (Herman 2013, 13). *The Iliad*, the text on which I concentrate here, concerns a few weeks of battle between the Achaeans and the Trojans near the end of the ten-year-long Trojan War. The narrative concerns the godlike human, Achilles, and his struggle to control his anger and become a heroic warrior worthy of honor. My focus, however, is not on narrative development but on the specific ways in which Homer develops a rhetoric of human nature that is consequential for human agency and community. Homer's depiction of the human is overtly artistic and also, we might say, unintentionally philosophical and scientific, as he pursues not theoretical coherence but a dramatic portrayal of human experience. Despite his lack of theoretical intention, Homer offers cosmic, social, and ethical contexts for his conceptualization of human nature. Into these intersecting contexts, he places a human who is comprised of body and soul with a certain potential for agency.

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow the term "psychosomatic" to describe Homer's doctrine of the human from A. A. Long in *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (2015).

<sup>3</sup> While controversy continues regarding the identity of the author(s) of these texts (Alexander 2015, xxv), and the dates of the manuscripts are imprecise, there is general agreement among Classics scholars and historians that the narratives evolved from a centuries-old oral performance tradition that portrayed events in the Trojan War (Martin 2011, 1-2).

In the view of the cosmos portrayed in *The Iliad*, a text focused on the inescapable tragedy of the human condition, human dynamics are inseparable from divine dynamics. Homer's humans interact with, and are vulnerable to, a pantheon that inhabits Mt. Olympus and is governed by Zeus. Gods and goddesses in Homer's text are highly anthropomorphized; Zeus and Hera's marriage, for example, is characterized by bitter squabbling, and the sibling rivalry between Apollo and Athena is constant. These human-like dynamics, however, do not mask the sharp distinctions between deities and humans. Deities have superhuman powers, do not suffer the consequences of their fickle or unwise actions, and are immortal. The mythological, enchanted setting of *The Iliad* portrays the human world as porous and vulnerable to both benevolent and malicious divine intervention as deities interject themselves into human dynamics on the basis of the affinity or animosity they feel toward certain warriors. Gods and goddesses assume the guise of birds or intimate relations to deliver messages, inhabit human dreams to sound warnings, and, imperceptible to humans, interfere with weaponry and weather to affect the outcome of battles. Humans are aware of how powerful divinities are and, because there is no assurance that intervention will be benevolent, they are preoccupied by the need to avert or propitiate divine disposition through prayer and ritual sacrifice (Taylor 1989, 268). In a world where human effort is always subject to divine action, vulnerability to a fate outside of human control defines the human place in the cosmos.

A second level of context for Homer's doctrine of human nature is social and ethical, and *The Iliad* is as much a "saga about communal consciousness as it is about

warfare and human vulnerability” (Martin 2011, 20-21). Collectivity for most humans (or at least for the male, soldiering humans that are the subject of the narrative) is based on a warrior culture of companionship, on the desire of soldiers to support one another in battle, avenge one another’s deaths, and seek retribution for unjust actions. The goal in this system is to achieve honor that will result in a warrior being remembered, and so, in a sense, immortalized, by generations to come. This social order is not upheld by laws, which did not yet exist, but by traditions and customs that reinforce a certain imposed hierarchy of authority (Martin 2011, 22). This hierarchy—divinities and kings at the top, women and slaves at the bottom—provides a cosmic and social order that tradition dictates must be maintained. Within this tradition, humans are called to respond to violations of the given order through a system of reciprocity that demands a like response for the evil or good one has experienced. Humans in Homer’s narrative live in quest of a virtuous, excellent life characterized by the courage, strength, and power necessary to deliver these responses and prevail in a warrior-centered culture (Taylor 1989, 11). Virtue on a human level involves, for example, killing enemies that attack you and honoring comrades who fight with or die for you. Virtue on a cosmic level means making sacrifices to the deities in order to curry their favor when things are going badly or express gratitude when things go well. For Homer, the social order and human values are not, as they will be for Plato and Aristotle, products of individual or communal rational contemplation; humans are motivated to live a good, virtuous life by their vulnerability to divine forces and by adherence to a centuries-old warrior ethic of honor.

Homer's rhetoric of human nature emerges within this polytheistic universe and traditional warrior culture. Of the three portrayals of the human discussed in this chapter, Homer's is the most foreign to contemporary sensibilities because of the lack of distinction between immaterial and material aspects of being human. Homer's humans are associated with both an immaterial soul and a material body, but in a configuration that differs from later conceptualizations that ascribe capabilities to the soul during life. Homer's portrayal of the human soul, the first in the Western textual tradition, appears in the first line of *The Iliad*:

Wrath—sing, goddess, of the ruinous wrath of Peleus' son Achilles  
that inflicted woes without number upon the Achaeans,  
hurled forth to Hades many strong souls of warriors  
and rendered their bodies prey for the dogs (I. 1-4; Alexander 2015, 1).

Here, Homer describes Achilles' potency as a warrior and the many men he has killed in battle in a passage where the human soul is referred to as *psyche*, the breath or life force that leaves the body upon death. In the thirty-three references to *psyche* in the poem, Homer speaks of the soul exclusively in terms of mortality and never as something associated with a living body (Davis 2011, 17). Homer contrasts the *psyche*/soul with the *soma*/body or, more specifically, with the *soma*/corpse that is left on the battlefield to be ravaged by animals. Plato will theorize an immortal soul that transmigrates after death into other bodies and benefits from or is harmed by behaviors during life, but Homer's *psyche* as life force never returns to its original or any other body nor is it held responsible through punishment or reward for activities undertaken in life. Aristotle will view the soul as a set of human capabilities during life, including the capacity for reason, but in Homer the soul lacks this, or any, ability. While Homer's *psyche* travels to Hades after death, this

transition is not one marking immortality; after death, Homer describes the *psyche* as mere *eidon*, an image or ghost that is mindless and unsubstantial. The Homeric soul is merely the breath, an animating force that departs at death to leave the real self, the physical and conscious body, lifeless (Martin 2011, 19).

During life, Homer's humans are intensely and entirely material, physical beings without the body/mind or body/soul dualism that will come to dominate later Western doctrines of the human. Homer describes the human organism by naming all of the parts with which we describe ourselves today—head, torso, limbs, heart, lungs, muscles, and blood, for example—but he does not portray a human mind, or any kind of internal space or process, that differs from physicality (Taylor 1989, 199). Homer's humans think, feel, perceive, and make moral decisions in their bodies rather than in a distinct organ or capacity designated by *mind*. Words that will become standard in Plato and Aristotle's doctrines of the human for labeling psychological or mental processes have different connotations for Homer. The activity or process that will become *intellect* is for Homer a physical process named *nous*. The aspect of the human that will become the *spirit*, or consciousness, Homer designates as a bodily process called *thumos*. The location of these activities is variously described by Homer to take place in the *phren* or *etor*, which loosely translate to the heart and lungs (Davis 2011, 9; Long 2015, 35).

Homer's doctrine of human nature depicts a physical human that lacks a separate psychological level of being. Here is the Trojan hero Hector summoning his troops to convince them to reengage with battle: "Listen to me, you Trojans, . . . while I speak forth what the heart within my breast (*thumos*) urges" (VII. 67-68;

Lattimore 2011, 188). In another example, King Agamemnon threatens to steal one of Achilles' women, and Achilles reacts: "... the heart (*etor*) within his rugged breast (*thumos*) debated two ways whether he should draw the sharp sword by his side and scatter the men . . . or check his anger and restrain his spirit" (I. 188-193; Alexander 2015, 7). Hector's heart urges him to enter a battle; Achilles's heart debates two options. It is tempting, when observing Hector or Achilles in these situations to view them as mentally debating action but, as noted above, for Homer there is no organ of thought. That Homer's doctrine of human nature lacks an internal space, a brain or mind, in which deliberation takes place has been interpreted historically as evidence of his unsophisticated understanding of human psychology (see Snell 1951). This interpretation, however, ignores how Homer's human characters display psychic unity, deliberate over their actions, and pursue one course of action over another (Long 2015, 6). The question is: How does this occur? If there is no soul or mind, as there will be for Plato and Aristotle, positioned to rationally counter physical urges or debate the efficacy of one action over another, how does Homer account for human agency? The body and its organs, which register passions and feelings and accomplish actions, are a partial explanation as the physical self responds to the challenges of life.

Homer's sense of human agency can only be fully understood within the mythological milieu within which the human resides. Lacking an internal space, a mind or brain in which deliberation occurs, Homer's humans when faced with opposing urges experience changing physical states—an awareness that the anger swelling in one's chest is leading to one action over another or a sensation of

enervation in one's arm causing retreat from a violent encounter. Awareness of anger is awareness of an increased heart rate or heavy breathing; awareness of the decision to leave the battlefield is awareness that an arm has grown weak or heavy. Even complex situations, where a human experiences a surge of energy and courage on the battle field that leads to victory, for example, or is able to control a murderous impulse and so avert a wound on community, have nothing to do with self-reflection (Taylor 1989, 117). In Homer's enchanted world, these agentic states are attributed not to human mental processes but to divine intervention.

Early in *The Iliad*, in a fit of jealous anger, King Agamemnon steals a woman Achilles won in battle, an action that enrages the Greeks' strongest warrior. In response, Achilles is overtaken by a blind fury that moves him to lift his weapon against Agamemnon, and he stops not due to self-reflexivity but because the goddess Athena, out of her love for both men, commands his attention by grabbing his hair. Achilles feels the pull on his scalp, stops short, and turns toward the goddess who appears only to him in the assembly and whispers:

From heaven I have come to stop your anger, if you will heed me;  
Hera the white armed goddess sent me forth,  
who in her heart loves and cares for you both alike.  
Come, leave off this contention, stay your hand on your sword,  
but rather cut him with words, telling him how things will be.  
For I will tell you this, and it will be accomplished,  
someday you will have three times as many shining gifts  
because of this outrage; restrain yourself and obey me.

(I. 200-210; Alexander 2015, 7-8)

Achilles lowers his weapon and agrees silently with the goddess because "is it better if a man heeds the gods, [because] then they also listen to him" (I.2 17-21; Alexander 2015, 8). Achilles does not stay his hand against Agamemnon because of reflexivity

or rational deliberation, but because he acknowledges his vulnerability and debt to the divine. He knows that his safety and future success depend on being in good relation with the gods and goddesses who are monitoring, and interfering with, the human war.

Because Agamemnon has stolen Achilles's woman, Achilles refuses to fight on the side of the Greeks. Much of the plot of *The Iliad* concerns how the Greeks suffer without Achilles's prowess as a warrior on their side. When defeat appears imminent, Agamemnon, called out by his own troops who demand an explanation of his ill-fated behavior, responds:

Many times did the Achaeans speak this charge against me,  
and kept faulting me; but it is not I who am to blame,  
but Zeus and Fate and the Fury who walks in darkness,  
they who in the assembly cast savage Delusion in my mind  
on the day when, on my own authority, I took away Achilles' prize.  
But what else could I do? God accomplishes all things to fulfillment—  
the elder daughter of Zeus is delusion, who infatuates all men . . .  
(IXX. 84-92; Alexander 2015, 415-416)

Agamemnon admits his powerlessness in the face of a goddess's intervention; he explains to his men that he did not steal Achilles' women due to faulty reasoning or a failure to control impulsive behavior, but rather due to being overpowered by a dark, divine power. The jealous rage that overtook him is attributed to a "Delusion" that was imposed upon him by a Fury, a goddess of vengeance. His action, in other words, is attributed entirely to Fate.

In Homer's enchanted world, where the self is porous and vulnerable to powers not under the control of any individual person, the line between "personal agency and impersonal force" is not clearly drawn (Taylor 2007, 32). Divine powers are experienced as forces that overtake the body and lead to, or prohibit, action.

Nonetheless, humans bear responsibility for their actions, and divine intervention does not make a person less deserving of scorn or praise. Ultimately, the source of an ethical life is outside of human control, in the hands of deities, and not a product of human subjectivity or effort (Taylor 1989, 268). Throughout *The Iliad*, individual humans vacillate between acquiescence to Fate and resistance through attempting to propitiate the divine. Human agency in community, too, is dependent upon right relations with gods and goddesses, and elaborate communal rituals involving blood sacrifice and exhortations to divinities are repeated throughout the narrative whenever humans feel threatened. This necessity to navigate divine grace and punishment implicates humans individually and communally. Community is maintained only by the participation of all members in rites to appease gods and goddesses. The human position in the mythological order on both individual and communal levels is one of powerful agency when in concert with divinities, and one of fateful disappointment, harm, or even death when divine support is withheld.

Homer's artistic portrayal of human nature in *The Iliad* offers an explanation for how people are constituted and gives an account of that by which people orient their lives. This conceptualization of human nature will change dramatically by the fourth century BCE when Plato theorizes his doctrine. Homer depicts the human as entirely physical, that is, as a being whose capacities for self-awareness and deliberation are products not of a mind or of a process of rational thought. The human capacity for agency is framed in terms of a willingness or refusal to listen and respond to divine guidance and a need to pursue supernatural benevolence by praising and propitiating divinities. By the time Plato theorizes the human, the

pantheon of powerful, fickle divinities who impose as much suffering as grace on humans will be replaced by a divine spirit that is characterized entirely by rationality and goodness. Adherence to traditional values maintained through warfare and divine assistance will be challenged as humans come to see themselves as capable of forming laws in a democratic system of governance. Homer's psychosomatic human will be replaced by a dualistic organism comprised of a body and a soul, and the soul, for Homer the breath of life, will become the defining feature of the human.<sup>4</sup>

#### Rational Humans in Plato's Dualistic Cosmos

Centuries after Homer, Plato (429?-347 BCE) theorizes the human at a historical moment when a belief in mythology is being supplanted by an attempt to understand the human place in the world in a new paradigm. Plato's cosmology is an attempt to explain the origin and nature of the universe in a frame that brings together lingering mythological beliefs and insights consistent with physics. Plato theorizes, too, during a time when the warrior ethic with its emphasis on valuing

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<sup>4</sup> While I jump here to Plato's conceptualization of human nature, the theoretical transition from Homeric to Platonic views was not an abrupt one. Many of the central tenants on which Plato bases his doctrine of the human are the result of an evolution of Greek thought after Homer. Before Plato, Thales (625-545 BCE) will theorize *monism*, or a single principle for all matter; Democritus (460-362 BCE) will theorize *dualism* to characterize reality as the interplay between two opposing forces; Pythagoras (570-495 BCE) will position geometry as an explanation for the order of the material world; and Heraclitus (540-480 BCE) will define the world as in ever-changing flux (Deeley 2001, 17-41). Plato's view of the human soul will follow Empedocles' (ca. 495-435 BCE) theory of intellect as a unique human capacity (Laks 1999, 251-252); Democritus' (ca. 460-370 BCE) conceptualization of the soul as a set of capabilities; Heraclitus' (ca. 535-475 BCE) view of an embodied soul with the capacity to exercise control over the body; and Pythagoras' doctrine of an immortal soul (Long 1999, 68-83).

strength, courage, and the ability to execute great deeds worthy of immortalization has been replaced by a citizen ethic in which values stem not only from tradition, but from democratically established laws and from rational contemplation of what constitutes a good, fulfilled life (Taylor 1989, 117). Within his cosmological theory, and as a response to a political system in which there are conflicting views regarding how humans should ethically orient themselves, Plato articulates an understanding of what it means to be human that engages a speculative attempt to orient the human in the cosmos, a description of the human organism, and a theory of communication and community.

From his mentor, Socrates, Plato adopts a philosophical approach to these theoretical tasks, albeit one that differs from our contemporary understanding of philosophy as a theoretical discipline that generates abstract, self-contained accounts of various subjects like epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. One difference between ancient Greek and contemporary philosophy is that, at the time of Plato, the ancients had not divided philosophy into different fields of study, and their treatises blend what today would constitute different strands of philosophical thought. A second difference is that ancient philosophies, including Plato's, do not aim at the construction and transmission of abstract knowledge but are rhetorical explorations aimed at the transformation of a vision of, and place in, a social milieu and the cosmos. Ancient Greek philosophy, regardless of the school, is pursued from a particular ethical orientation toward life, and philosophical efforts are intended as practical rhetorical guides to retrain the mind and spirit in order to radically change how one lives (Davidson 1995, 21). Ancient philosophy teaches the art of living well,

and theory is pursued not as an end in itself but in service of a praxis that is at once intellectual and moral (Hadot 1995, 87). This means that Plato's philosophical works, which typically are stylized dialogues featuring Socrates as the protagonist, are aimed less at imparting a specific philosophical doctrine than they are rhetorical attempts to engage interlocutors in ethical self-development (Hadot 1995, 89).

While Plato's writings do interpret and respond to existing texts, his primary intention is a rhetorical method of teaching self-awareness and self-examination.<sup>5</sup>

Like Homer, Plato develops a doctrine of the human within a cosmic backdrop that contributes to, and shapes, his view of human nature. In the *Timaeus*, Plato gives an account of the origin and nature of the cosmos based on his observation of the universe. He observes that the universe is characterized by goodness, beauty, and order, and he then constructs an explanation for what is most likely to be cosmologically true for these qualities to exist.<sup>6</sup> His first conclusion is that such a universe could not be the product of randomness, but must be the work of a benevolent intellect (*nous*) he calls the Craftsman (28a6). To explain the basis on which the Craftsman planned and constructed a world characterized by goodness, beauty, and mathematical order, Plato distinguishes between *being*—

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Hadot (1995, 56) points out that both Plato and Aristotle's writings were instructional materials for their respective schools, the Academy and the Lyceum. Hadot maintains that the primary purpose of Platonic and Aristotelian theories was not philosophical coherence but to provide communicable lessons for the young men who were their students, lessons designed to nurture students into being better citizens.

<sup>6</sup> Plato's cosmological theory in the *Timaeus* is narrated by the character, Timaeus, who prefaces his remarks with a disclaimer that his account, based as it is on observations of a changing and unstable physical world, cannot but lack complete accuracy (29c4-7). On the other hand, Timaeus also claims that his account is "no less likely than anyone else's" (Zeyl 2014, 5).

“what always is and never changes”—and *becoming*—“what becomes and never is.” (27d5-28a1). Plato dualistically splits the cosmos into two realms, one immaterial, eternal, and immutable where Forms or Ideas have always existed and never change, and another, material world of becoming that is ever-changing where the physical universe exists. Because the universe exists with such excellence, Plato says it must have been planned by the intelligent Craftsman on the basis of eternal and unchanging principles. The Craftsman engaged what exists as most perfect, the eternal Forms, to fashion a world that is an image or copy.

Because the world is tangible and visible, it is a living body, and because it has been intelligently wrought, it is also a soul:

... the Craftsman, reflecting on the things which by nature are visible, found that no unintelligent creature taken as a whole was fairer than the intelligent taken as a whole; and that intelligence could not be present in anything which was devoid of soul. For which reason, when he was framing the universe, he put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, that he might be the creator of a work which was by nature fairest and best . . . The universe, then, consists of both body and soul” (*Timaeus* 29a6-b1).

The universe is described by Plato as a living, en-souled being. This dichotomy between the body and soul in the *Timaeus* will characterize not only Plato’s cosmology but his ethical theory and his doctrines of human nature, communication, and community (Zeyl 2014, 1).<sup>7</sup> For this reason, dwelling in Plato’s account of creation is helpful in understanding his larger theoretical investments.

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<sup>7</sup> Plato wrote prolifically for over 50 years and, while the order of his works is disputed, the *Timaeus* is considered one of his later, and perhaps his final, dialogue. This means that his doctrine of human nature as portrayed in other works would have preceded explication of his cosmology. Nonetheless, his dichotomous theory, with the distinction between the body and soul, is consistent throughout all of his dialogues (Zeyl 2014, 1).

Plato says that what existed before Creation was disorder and movement without any of the sensible, visible elements of the universe. Surveying this disorder, desiring to fashion the best possible universe, and knowing that only the intellect can apprehend what is permanent and excellent, the Craftsman first “put intelligence in soul and soul in body” thereby creating the best possible world which became a “living creature” (*Timaeus* 394). The Craftsman made the soul “in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject” (*Timaeus* 398). Even before the creation of humans, in other words, the Craftsman positioned a universal soul as the source of the individual souls that are masters of all bodies. Having created the cosmic soul, the Craftsman next “formed within her the corporeal universe,” such that the invisible soul, “began a divine, never-ceasing rational life enduring throughout all time” (*Timaeus* 399). Plato thus theorizes a cosmic spirit, a rational principle characterized by goodness and harmony, that permeates the entire universe. This invisible, immortal, and immaterial soul precedes materiality and has dominion over everything sensible including the earth, heavens, stars, sun, lands, and oceans.

Having created the material universe, the Craftsman then charged lesser gods, descendants of Zeus and Hera, to create mortals. These gods imitated him, and receiving from him the “immortal principle of the soul” they fashioned mortal bodies in which souls are housed (*Timaeus* 407-408). The deities encased the divine immortal human soul, created from the residue of the cosmic soul, in the human head; it is the nature of this soul to love intellect and knowledge and to participate in eternal truth and knowledge. A second soul, a mortal soul affected by pleasure

and pain, and so prey to earthly contamination and evil, the deities placed in the abdomen. A third, passionate and courageous soul was placed in the chest to mediate between the other two souls (Dorter 2001, 171). The human, then, is comprised of body and soul, and the soul is tripartite, part divine and part mortal. The human divine soul comes from and participates in the cosmic soul and, when embodied, is disrupted by the transition from supreme goodness and order to human form. Despite this disruption, a soul that was once part of the cosmic spirit can grasp the universe's unchanging principles through rational understanding. A soul achieving this understanding, the product of intellect alone, knows the truth, is harmonious and ordered, and is able to rule the body well; a soul that knows only from perception, from empirical information, comprehends only *doxa*, or opinion, and is incapable of mastering the body.

Plato offers a number of images to explain the tension of being a human soul that loves eternal truth housed, or *entombed* as he sometimes says, in a mortal body that is vulnerable to bodily urges and pleasures. In the *Republic*, Socrates proposes to his interlocutors that, since the human soul is invisible, they might productively employ the image of the ideal *polis*, something larger and visible, to talk about the features of the soul. The ideal city Socrates describes has three classes of citizens: rulers and guardians with philosophical wisdom, warriors who possess courage and strength, and a working class who produce and desire material goods. Justice, Socrates advises, depends on harmony among these three classes. In the corresponding soul, there are three elements that correspond to the ideal *polis*: the rational (*nous*), spirited (*thumos*), and appetitive physical (*anima*) aspects of soul

(Karasmanis 2006, 2). In the *Phaedrus*, the tripartite soul is imagined as a charioteer pulled by two horses, one black, the other white. Here, the charioteer, the rational soul, struggles to guide the horses upward toward the heavenly realm “occupied by what really is” (274c5-d1). The charioteer’s efforts are threatened by two forces; other chariots, other souls, who are in competition to get to heaven and “trample and jostle” each other, and the black horse that tenaciously pulls the chariot downward toward earthly concerns. Only with the help of the spirited, white horse, can the charioteer reach heaven. In both images, the human soul is divided and struggles not only against the body, but within the tripartite soul itself, to achieve harmony. Importantly, it is the soul’s capacity for rationality that makes such harmony possible.

Plato’s tripartite configuration of the soul will play a historically significant role in influencing later Western conceptualizations of human nature. In his portrayal of the soul based on competing interests in the *polis*, it is the rational soul, the rulers and guardians, who should, with the warriors help, exercise dominion over the base appetites of the ruling class. Correspondingly, it is the intellectual part of the soul, with the aid of the spirited part, that should rule the body. His division of the soul privileges *nous*, or rationality, and positions the appetitive and spirited aspects of the soul—human affectability—as inferior forms. While the spirited capacities of the soul as *thumos*, the capacities for being emotionally motivated by goodness and order, do play a role in achieving the soul’s harmony, it is the rational intellectual capacity of the soul as *nous* that alone is ultimately responsible for deliberating and making decisions that result in a harmonious, well-ordered soul.

This privileging of rational intellectual abilities will be repeated in later rhetorics of human nature that maintain a strict division between materiality and immateriality and so position the immaterial soul, which will with Descartes become *mind* and for Augustine will become the immortal *soul*, with its rational capacity as superior to the affective body. Over time, as Plato's rhetoric of nature becomes influential on other theorists, human being is fragmented into body and mind as the connections between materiality and immateriality are severed. What is lost rhetorically is the central role that the sensual and emotional affectability of the human plays in the passionate attachments that fuel human community. A second outcome is that privileging mind or the human theological soul will lead to a focus on individuality that undermines theories of collectivity.

Plato's division of the human into body and soul creates tensions that are dramatized in the *Phaedo*, a dramatization of Socrates' death scene. Plato elaborates on the problematic nature and mortality of the body, the purity and immortality of the soul, and the soul's rational capacity for dominion over the body. Having been condemned to death by the Athenian court for blasphemy and corrupting the youth, Socrates, surrounded by grieving friends, prepares to drink hemlock. He attempts to console his allies by asking why, when he has spent his life longing for the freedom of his soul from his body, he should mind death: "... for someone who has truly spent his life in philosophy, it is reasonable to have courage when he is to die and to be full of hope that he will find many good things after his death" (63e9-64a2). Death marks the liberation of the soul from a body that threatens the soul's purity and goodness with desires for physical pleasures. In the three arguments Socrates

advances to explain his absence of fear, the human soul is again described as imperceptible, imperishable, and as preexisting mortal existence in the realm of Forms where it will, if perfected during life, return after death.<sup>8</sup> In the *Phaedo*, Plato describes the soul's capacities for rationality and virtue that enable it to dominate and regulate the body's movements and affections. A soul that functions rationally to control the body frees the mind to contemplate the Forms of goodness, beauty, and order on which the Craftsman modeled tangible reality.

These same Forms are Plato's ethical ideals, toward which human life with its nature as body and soul should be oriented to fulfill human purpose. To be ethical means exercising one's rational ability to understand the goodness and order of the eternal. Plato's use of *rationality*, like his approach to philosophy, differs from our contemporary understanding. While rationality currently is a highly contested concept, and analytic and continental philosophers differ in how they conceptualize the term, Western analytic philosophers tend to think of rationality as thought that operates within a certain range of defining features such as, for example, a logical progression, mathematical precision, or abstraction. Such thought leads to coherence and a lack of contradiction or ambiguity and is contaminated by emotion, subjectivity, extraneous information, or lapses in orderly development. In contrast, Plato employs the term as cognition that engages meditation, imagination, imagery, language, psychic sensation, and even emotions like love in the study of the principles underlying the universe (Taylor 1989, 20). The ultimate object of this

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<sup>8</sup> The fate of a soul that is not perfected during life is transmigration into another living form. The immortal soul survives death, but is judged not ready for heaven and so is sent back to earth to be embodied in a less desirable material form, as a slave or a woman, or even as an animal (*Phaedrus* 249a1-b5).

study is not to describe what *is* but to participate in the principles of goodness and beauty that characterize existence in order to achieve a universal and objective perspective on life (Beistegui 2012, 6). The ethical importance of this immersion in the eternal is that Plato believed that a soul's rational understanding of the eternal principles of the cosmos would lead to a person being freed from attachments to sensual pleasures, social illusions and conventions, and the opinions of others. Rationality for Plato has the power to impel a person to transform the self, to want to become as good and beautiful and harmonious as all of existence.

There is an explicit ethical orientation to Plato's cosmology and doctrine of the human that is intended to motivate and guide people to a life lived well (Zeyl 2014, 2). This orientation is an external, idealized model of value that, like Homer's does not originate from human effort or creation. Homer's ethical orientation is based in tradition and custom; Plato's is based in his conceptualization of an idealized realm in which the human soul can participate through rational understanding. For Plato, ethical concepts that should guide life are not human inventions or products of convention, rather they are already-constituted realities that exist transcendentally. It is the nature of the human soul to turn toward this intelligible realm, where, through its understanding of the eternal and immutable, the Good itself, it will acquire capacities for virtues like wisdom, piety, courage, moderation, justice (Dorter 2001, 172).

This ability to reason, this rational capacity, is not based on logic but on recollection of the Forms; because the individual soul was part of the cosmic soul before being embodied, the soul has a prior knowledge of the universe that can be

remembered by becoming absorbed in the supersensible realm of Forms (Karasmanis 2006, 3). For Plato, true knowledge is innate, and knowing is a process of recollecting what was known in a prior existence (Smith 2008, 115). In the dialogue *Meno*, Socrates explains that most people do not understand the difference between true knowledge and opinion (*doxa*) or between what is good or evil; lacking true knowledge, they assume that what is conventionally assumed to be good or true *is* good and true and they pursue these, which actually makes them wretched (77e). His interlocutor, Meno, remarks that surely no one desires to be wretched, but if people are ignorant of the difference between truth and opinion, what are they to do? (80d). Socrates replies that, since the soul once beheld “all things in this world and the world beyond,” it already knows everything, but it needs to be reminded and guided to remember (81b). This occurs through questioning—through the dialectical process of queries and answers—where a person is reminded that knowledge of virtue is accessible. Since the “truth of things is always in our soul,” says Socrates, “it is right to try boldly to inquire into and recollect what you do not happen to know at present—that is, what you do not remember” (86a-b). Self-questioning, or questioning others—Plato’s method in all of the dialogues—is intended to spark remembrance of the eternal.

For Plato, human agency directed at virtue involves choosing to value a process of self-awareness and self-improvement over other, more earthly, concerns. Each of us is a body and a soul, and self-mastery of the tripartite soul and of the body through reason is the route to a virtuous life (Barney, et al. 2012, 2). To be just, for example, requires self-understanding and nurturing one’s soul through

contemplation in order to see justice as a part of cosmic Goodness that is worthy of human aspiration (Crotty 2016, 140). This involves making choices: the soul as intellect chooses whether to engage in activities related to sensation, desire, and the body, or whether to direct itself toward higher activities. Choosing to focus on the Good, which will, in turn, be a choice toward becoming just, moderate, and courageous, results in a healthy, well-functioning soul; choosing the opposites harms and corrupts the soul (*Republic* 609c-d). Through a process of choosing one activity or another, throughout life the soul develops a character based on the choices it has made (Beck 1999, 19). Character is an attribute of soul, here corresponding to the self, and a healthy soul will have good character, an unhealthy soul will have a bad one. To make good choices requires turning not only the body, but the entire tripartite soul, the appetitive and spirited as well as intellectual parts, away from “changing things,” the material world, and toward “what is,” the unchanging and eternal (*Republic* 518c-d). A person becomes a particular type of person—greedy or generous, excessive or moderate—according to what part of the soul rules (Gerson 2014, 55). If the intellectual soul has dominion over the body, even a person who is habituated to seek earthly pleasures can, through the soul’s efforts, be brought into conformity with eternal Goodness.

In the evolution of rhetorics of the human from Homer to Plato, two distinguishing features can now be noted. The first, the origin of the values by which people are to orient their lives, is external in both accounts, but more complex in Plato’s doctrine. For Homer, the source of values is adherence to tradition as encompassed both in a mythology and in a warrior ethic. For Plato, ideal values are

transcendent, and Goodness exists as a Form in a divine, universal realm that the human soul, having been once part of cosmic spirit, can access through memory and rationality. The Good is universal and permeates the universe, but the human soul, having been separated by knowledge of the Good through embodiment, must become aware of its own Good nature through contemplation of the supersensible (Taylor 1989, 146). The means of human agency toward virtue is also different in the two doctrines. For Homer, humans are vulnerable to external, divine forces, and attaining a life of virtue and honor depends on right relations with gods and goddesses. For Plato, human virtue is an achievement that is internal to the human, a process of the highest part of the soul, the intellect, conquering the other parts of the soul and the body. Plato's doctrine of human nature, with its conception of a mind as an internal, unitary space, will be adopted as the dominant Western view (Taylor 1989, 119). While Plato theorizes rationality as the means of this dominion, reason here does not connote moral or mental deliberation. Rather, humans are motivated to be virtuous through intentional, contemplative, and educated experiences that turn the soul toward "what is true" (*Phaedrus* 248c5-7). In this way, all of the soul, rational and irrational, can be brought into harmony.

Plato's conceptualization of human nature, with its concentration on the soul, is central to his doctrines of communication and community. His rhetoric of the soul is, in turn, a response to the collective life of his time, and, specifically, to the role of communication in the life of the *polis* (Laks 1999, 251-252; Long 2015, 110). In Athens, public discourse, or rhetoric, was a common concern as the demand for effective legal and political speech became important to all citizens who participated

in democratic practices. Since authority and brute power alone no longer assured maintenance of the social order, public eloquence became indispensable to rulers and citizens alike (Lawson-Tancred 2004, 3). In the courts, the assembly, and in public forums, citizens represented themselves, and only those who could speak persuasively were likely to have their beliefs supported by others. Plato's preoccupation with public discourse mirrored the social value placed on rhetoric in Athens.

Of particular concern to Plato was the teachings of the Sophists, who not only competed for students, but taught doctrines that countered his own. The Sophists were professional teachers who traveled throughout Greece offering courses in natural science, religion, and rhetoric. Sophists charged money for their instruction and, for a fee, would write legal, funerary, or civic speeches or even, in some cases, serve as surrogate speakers for Greek citizens (Smith 2008, 51). Sophists were known for their clever arguments, which gave them the ability to argue persuasively even against the truth. They also denied that there was any truth that could be known. Protagoras (444-441 BCE) famously said "Man is the measure of all things," a relativistic statement that challenged Plato's belief in universal and transcendental truths. Antiphon (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) argued that there was no natural, universal law, and that all laws are artificial which countered Plato's belief in universal, cosmic order. Gorgias (480-390 BCE) not only argued for the efficacy of even deceptive rhetoric, he also maintained that what is "thought of or apprehended" is not and cannot be what actually is, which opposed Plato's insistence that it is the intellect alone that can know the truth of what exists. Plato writes about the Sophists in a

number of dialogues, always with hostility, and often with regard to how sophistic instruction and beliefs harm the soul.<sup>9</sup>

Plato's doctrine of communication argues against rhetoric and against the political system in which rhetoric dominates on the basis that it harms the soul. In *Gorgias*, Socrates debates the sophist about public speech; his arguments reinforce the Platonic sense of the human as a body and a soul and the soul's necessary dominion over the body. In the dialogue, Socrates discusses the role of communication in the dependent, reciprocal relationship between the health of individual souls and the health of the *polis*. He presents two categories of arts that concern human health, gymnastics and medicine that are aimed at the health of the body, and "politics" which is concerned with communication that affects the health of the soul (92). Gorgias argues that political rhetoric is beneficial because it allows orators to powerfully persuade people and move people to do what they want.<sup>10</sup> In the Athenian political system, he argues, this is the only way to prevail and become a person of honor and good standing. Socrates' position is that the opinion of others does not matter as much as the health of souls; politics that contributes to the health

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<sup>9</sup> Part of Plato's antipathy toward sophistic rhetoric and toward democracy is attributed to the fate of his mentor, Socrates, at the hands of the Athenian courts. Plato blamed the spurious nature of political rhetoric, which Sophists were known for teaching, for Socrates being condemned to death for blasphemy and perverting the minds of Athenian youth (Lawson-Tancred 2004, 6).

<sup>10</sup> In *Gorgias's Encomium of Helen*, his defense of Helen of Troy, he portrays deception as a primary feature of discourse, and he argues that the soul, far from being in control of the body, is always vulnerable to not only physical but psychic corruption. Gorgias thus argues the opposite from Plato, who gives the soul dominion over the body. Gorgias proclaims Helen innocent if she was persuaded by discourse because rhetoric is akin to strong drugs over which the soul has no defense (Long 2015, 101-103).

of individual souls requires communication that does not harm or corrupt souls, and deceptive public speech harms souls by leading them away from truth. Speech has the ability to have a therapeutic affect on souls; conversely, it can make souls ill (Long 2015, 114). This message is underscored in *Protagoras*, a dialogue in which Socrates, who charged no money for his instruction, warns Athenian youth to stay away from the sophist's teaching:

Are you aware of the kind of danger to which you are going to expose your soul . . . There is much greater risk in purchasing lessons than in buying foodstuffs. In that case . . . you can carry them away from the store and the seller in containers. Before taking them into your body by eating and drinking you can store them at home and deliberate, with the help of an expert, on what to eat and drink, how much and at what time. . . but you cannot carry lessons away in a different container from yourself. Once you have paid for them, you have to put them directly into your soul (313a-314b).

This is an example of how Plato's doctrines of rhetoric and community focus on the affects of speech on souls. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes that "the power of speech is in fact a leading of the soul" (271c10-d1). Communication in public forums is not merely a means to explain, debate, or reach consensus; communication is how one ensouled individual affects others with good or bad results. Therefore, only someone who has achieved rational self-rule and whose soul is in harmony is fit to be a public speaker who informs and guides others (Sherman 2013, 87-88). To use public speech virtuously and wisely requires knowing how different kinds of speech will affect different souls (*Phaedrus* 271d2-d10). An orator must know the "truth about each of the things about which he speaks or writes" and be able to offer a complex, mature soul one kind of discourse and a different kind to "simple," young souls (Ibid., 277b5-c8). An individual with this ability is "qualified in both

knowledge and experience" (*Republic* 277b5-c8) and always has in mind when he speaks:

" . . . how justice may be engendered in the souls of his fellow-citizens and how injustice may be removed, how temperance may be bred in them and licentiousness cut off, and how virtue as a whole may be produced and vice expelled . . ." (*Gorgias* 124-125).

The role of communication in making a good *polis*, a just community, is to make citizens as good as possible by using the genuine art of politics to promote the health of souls. For Plato, politics is concerned with caring for souls, and only by confronting one's own illusions and physical desires can one become fit to engage politically (*Phaedrus* 229e; *Gorgias* 472b).

Purification of one's own soul is prerequisite to political engagement with others. Political arts require knowledge of the human soul if they are to be employed to move other people to be virtuous citizens (Cherry 2012, 156). This means, unfortunately, that very few people will be able to engage politics virtuously and, in fact, Socrates claims to be the *only* Athenian who is competent to do so (*Gorgias* 521d7). For Plato, this means that the philosopher must, like Socrates did, live separate from the concerns of daily life in order to pursue knowledge of the transcendent. Plato's prescription for the ideal civic life, then, is not aimed at all citizens, but only those who are capable of pursuing the "contemplative ideal," a life immersed in meditating on the transcendent Forms and questioning one's own beliefs (McKeen 2010, 197). The contemplative life is not possible for politicians, soldiers, or workers because their lives are necessarily bound up with the material, practical, side of communal life. The only people with the potential to purifying and harmoniously unify their souls are philosophers and so they should be the leaders of

the *polis* (*Republic* 496c-e). Philosophers alone are fit to rule because they alone are capable of teaching and leading others to be good citizens.

Plato's doctrine of community is undeniably elitist, an elitism grounded not in social position or inheritance but in ability, but the feature that I want to draw out is how he focuses on the individual as the basis for good collective life.<sup>11</sup>

Philosophers are most fit to lead not because of their knowledge but because of their character; having turned toward the Good, they have become virtuous and so desire to do good for others instead of desiring power or recognition. The true art of politics is to encourage others to pursue what "is truly best rather than what simply appears to be good" (Cherry 2012, 156). This requires education that teach wisdom; legislation alone cannot nurture goodness among citizens. People must be educated to tame and control their physical urges and passions so that they can rationally contribute to just community. As Kevin Cherry notes, for Plato "it is not an external enemy or conflict between [citizens] that will destroy the city but rather something inherent in those who live in the city" (2012, 159). Philosophical wisdom is not aimed at knowledge alone but at helping others to transform themselves into good, just community members. Communication is not aimed only at persuasion or at achieving civic goals, but at making souls, and thus people, better able to be in community.

Plato's doctrines are characterized by dualisms, the dichotomies between concepts like mortal/immortal, material/immaterial, opinion/knowledge, chaos/order, change/stability, and corruption/goodness. What will become most

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<sup>11</sup> For an extended treatment of this discussion, see Kevin Cherry's *Plato, Aristotle, and the Purpose of Politics* (2012).

influential for later thinkers in the dominant thread of Western intellectual history is Plato's dualistic version of human nature and the human capacity for rationality over irrationality. Plato's rhetoric of human nature is characterized by viewing the human as body and soul, with the soul having intellectual and moral superiority over, and responsibility for, the physical self. This doctrine of the human, the basis for his doctrines of communication and community, is consistent with a dichotomous cosmology that posits the universe itself as an ensouled, alive being ruled by the order and goodness the soul commands. In the evolution of doctrines of the human, Plato's conceptualization radically changes the place of the human in the physical and moral universe. Homer's portrayal of the human place in the universe is characterized by human vulnerability to unpredictable divine forces. Plato's doctrine elevates the human as the bridge between divine and earthly realms. The goodness and order of the cosmos become the ideals on which humans should strive to model themselves and their communities. The nature of humans as intellectual, immortal souls and the power of communication to nurture healthy souls opens the possibility for good, just human community.

### Hylomorphic Humans in Aristotle's Natural World

One of Plato's students at the Academy in Athens, Aristotle engages with many of the same philosophical projects as his mentor, including the conceptualization of doctrines of human nature, communication, and community. Aristotle, like Plato, theorizes during a social and political era of early Greek democracy, and his doctrines are also responses to this system. However, Aristotle's

worldview is strikingly different from Plato's because he dismisses Plato's idealistic metaphysics and theorizes the human based on an immanent, rather than a transcendental, perspective of reality (Kraut 2016, 5). For Plato, the most real entities, and the foundational causes of sensible reality, exist as Forms in an immaterial, eternal realm. Each thing that exists is a mere image, a lesser copy, of an ideal Form. In contrast, Aristotle's approach is observational, and he generates theories with origins in what can be experienced through the senses and most directly on that which is experienced through sight (Smith 2008, 211). Aristotle focuses on *actualities*, those entities that exist not as potentialities, but as observable, ever-changing things in the world around him (*De Anima* 1.412b6-9). Aristotle terms this observational approach, a precursor to what is now empiricism, *science*, and he considers not only his work on biology and physics to be science but his ethical, political, and rhetorical theories as well. Employing observational methods, Aristotle articulates an understanding of what it means to be human that describes the composition and capacities of the human organism, ethically orients humans to a life lived well, and develops doctrines of communication and community.

Aristotle's doctrine of the human is based on his concept of *hylomorphism*, a perspective that not only differs from, but opposes, Platonic idealism. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle charges that "none of the ways which are used to show that the Forms exist appears convincing" (990b9-10), and he even refers to such

idealism as “absurd” (1075a26).<sup>12</sup> In place of idealism, Aristotle theorizes hylomorphism, a compound word composed of Greek terms for matter (*hylê*) and form (*morphê*) (Shields 2016, 3). For Aristotle, living things are complex and composed of both underlying matter that has a principle of motion and change and a “shape or form” that makes the actual thing, a man or a tree, for example, the exact thing that it is (*Metaphysics* II. 193a28-31). This form does not exist separately from a material thing; rather, when existing with matter, the form is the cause, the actuality, of the namable thing (Smith 2008, 224). For example, bricks and mortar are the *matter* that, when assembled, have the *form* of a house. A bronze statue is composed of both the base metal and a shape, a form, and both elements must be present for there to be an identifiable statue of, say, a man or a horse. Correspondingly, the various organs that comprise a person are the matter that, when assembled in a particular form, result in a human.

It is the soul that is the form of living entities, “the cause and the principle of a living body” (*De Anima* 415b9). Aristotle’s theory of the soul is presented most completely in *De Anima* where, reminiscent of Homer, he defines the soul as that which gives life to the body (412a20-21). Aristotle’s soul is part of all living beings, not just humans—“Soul is somehow in all beings” (*De Anima* 431b21)—and it accounts for the difference between what is alive and what is not. Aristotle’s soul is more than a life principle, however, and it defines what is unique and identifiable

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle’s argument against the independent existence and causal nature of Forms in the *Metaphysics* has several components, including that immutable Forms cannot explain or cause the motion and change of living things and that immaterial Forms cannot account for the creation or existence of particular things which require matter or substance to *be*.

about different classes of alive beings. Determining whether something is alive requires observation of capacities for activities like reproduction, movement, growth, and perception (*De Anima* 2.2.413a23-25). Once living and nonliving things are distinguished, Aristotle divides the realm of the living into plants, animal, and human beings, and he says that souls account for the different capacities of different living things.<sup>13</sup> Plants, animals, and humans each have a different soul-principle as a cause, and this life-giving cause explains what fundamentally characterizes each living thing (Bos 2010, 8). This is to say that a human being, or any living thing, is a composite of both matter and form/soul, a third thing that is the actual, living entity. It is the form or soul that accounts for the observable, physical presence of a living thing and for its capacities for different life capacities. Aristotle's doctrine characterizes living beings as both material and immaterial, as body and soul, but the soul does not exist separate from the body (*De Anima* 1.413a3-5). All of the attributes and capacities of the soul exist only with a body which means that the soul is not immortal.<sup>14</sup>

To accommodate all living things, Aristotle rejects Plato's tripartite, immortal

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<sup>13</sup> While the soul is generally depicted as a set of capacities (for example, see Davis 2011 and Long 2015), not all Aristotelian scholars agree with this characterization. Rebekah Johnston (2011), for example, argues that the soul confers capacities on bodies, but since the soul is taken by Aristotle to be the form of a body, taking the soul as a set of capacities would make forms themselves sets of capacities which she claims violates Aristotle's metaphysical commitments to a difference between first actualities (forms) and their secondary capacities.

<sup>14</sup> While not immortal in and of itself, Aristotle does allow that the soul has the capacity to participate in immortality to the extent that it turns its attention toward the eternal, immortal divine in acts of contemplation. Like Plato, Aristotle sees the intellectual capacity of the soul as capable of apprehending the divine realm (Long 2015, 157).

soul and instead theorizes four types of souls: nutritive and sensory souls which are shared by all enlivened creatures as *zoe*, locomotive souls that involve life itself and animating principles that involve generalized affectability and are encompassed in the term *anima*, and an intellectual soul known as *psyche*. The soul's capacity for immortality as *nous*, an aspect of humanness toward which Aristotle exhibits ambivalence, is a fourth dimension of the soul. The lowest, nutritive soul distinguishes plant life from inanimate matter and is responsible for nourishment, growth, and decay. The nutritive soul accounts for the life cycle of a plant that comes into existence through reproduction, changes throughout life, and dies according to a certain pattern or form. The next levels of soul are the sensory and locomotive, which distinguish animals from plants and account for sensory capabilities, perception, emotions, and motility. From observation, Aristotle notes that these capacities are shared by nonhuman animals and humans. Animals, like humans, are motivated to find food and reproductive partners and they must perceive what is around them and move through the world in order to live (*De Anima* 3.414b6-9; 434a30-b4). At the highest level of souls is the intellectual soul that distinguishes humans from all other living beings. Humans are unique in that they have the ability to think and have self-awareness (*De Anima* 470b); only humans have cognitive capacities for rationality and reflection. The four types of souls are ordered hierarchically, with the higher levels of soul incorporating lower ones so that humans have nutritive, sensory, locomotive, and intellectual souls that are united in one soul principle.

In this conceptualization of the four levels of soul, Aristotle departs from

Plato's strict dualism, his division of human nature into an immortal and immaterial soul and a finite material body. First, Aristotle's homomorphism denies the independent existence of immaterial aspects of being. The soul as the form of bodies does not have a separate existence from materiality. Aristotle's soul, while involving different levels, is not divisible, and the different aspect of soul—locomotive, sensory, and intellectual—are united into one functioning soul. In Aristotle's schema of the soul, in other words, there is no stark division, as there is for Plato, between human rational capacities and human physicality. For Aristotle, the various levels of soul as *zoe*, *anima*, *psyche*, and *nous* are interconnected and their functioning is interrelated. Whereas for Plato the virtuous goal of soul as *psyche*, as rational intellect, is to achieve a degree of freedom from affective bodily registers, for Aristotle animation and affectability cannot be severed from conscious capacities for intellectual processes.<sup>15</sup> Plato denigrates bodily *anima* and separates it from psychic *nous*. Aristotle also privileges rational intellect but he maintains that the affective material aspect of human being is inseparable from the immaterial intellect. This rejection of a fractured, material and immaterial human being will, centuries later, be echoed in rhetorics of the human constructed by Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy

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<sup>15</sup> A prime example of this interrelatedness of physicality and intellect is Aristotle's discussion of imagination in Book 3 of *De Anima*. Cornelius Castoriadis, in his reading of this material, credits Aristotle with discovering the human imagination and notes that most later theorists will ignore the radical implications of a mode of thought that is theorized as inseparable from physical movement and affectability (1997, 215). Aristotle, like philosophers before him, acknowledges that there are two realms of being, one sensible and another intelligible; unlike other philosophers, he contemplates a complicated relationship between the two such that the subject of imagination, what he terms a *phantasm*, is always tied to, and the result of sensations. "Imagination," says Aristotle, "would be the [psychic] movement that comes about from sensation in actuality" (*De Anima* Book 3.429a1-2).

who will also theorize an immaterial/material human being inhabiting a spiritual/material cosmos. These conceptualizations have significance rhetorically because they do not privilege mentality over physicality and so maintain the centrality of affectability for human interactions.

Plato's dualistic doctrine of the human as body and soul positions the soul's rationality as more valuable than the material body. Likewise, Aristotle's hylomorphism, in which matter exists as the inert substance on which an active principle, the soul, exerts its powers, also privileges rationality as the highest and most valuable of human capabilities. Aristotle describes mind (*nous*) as the "part of the soul by which it knows and understands," abilities that he sees as essential to humanness (*De Anima* 4.429a9-10). The soul's rational primacy over other human capabilities corresponds to Aristotle's teleological conception of all nature, including human nature (Long 2015, 158). The *telos*, or purpose, of any living thing is to grow and develop in order to be the best of its kind; this development fulfills the purpose of a given life. Humans are the apex of the natural order, and the ability to think rationally is at the apex of human capabilities. Therefore, the best human life, the most purposeful, involves exercising rationality to its fullest. Like Plato, Aristotle considers a contemplative life lived according to the intellect as the best life and he, too, cautions that one should not think overmuch about material, mortal things but should turn the mind toward what is eternal and most virtuous (Long 2015, 157). Also similar to Plato's concept of the soul, Aristotle's accounts for rational and non-rational human intellectual abilities. However, where the soul for Plato is primarily valuable for its rational ability to participate in and contemplate transcendent

reality, Aristotle sees exercising the soul's intellectual abilities as important for fulfilling all of life, including the practical tasks of everyday life and politics.<sup>16</sup>

Like Homer and Plato's doctrines of human nature, Aristotle's includes an ethical orientation and a characterization of a life lived well. The requirements of Homeric ethics are based in a warrior culture of honor; Platonic ethics originate in an intellectual understanding by the rational soul of eternal Forms. In keeping with his rejection of eternal, transcendent forms, Aristotle dismisses Plato's universal form of Good, and he posits ethics as the study of "human good" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b5-8). True to his method of scientific observation, Aristotle considers what, by observing humans, can be defined as human good, and he determines that "both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness" (*Ibid.*, 1095a15-20).<sup>17</sup> Popular views, however, land on different accounts of happiness; some see it stemming from wealth, others from engagement with politics, and still others from base enjoyments. None of these however, comprise what is good in and of itself. Wealth is amassed for the things it can buy, politics is an activity aimed at public honor, and the baser enjoyments are aimed at physical pleasure. The accounts of happiness, therefore, are "distinct and diverse" and cannot help with defining what is "good itself, which must be "something final

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<sup>16</sup> Aristotle theorizes two intellectual capacities of the soul. One, *theōria*, is the ability to reason about nonobservable things like mathematics and the divine. The other, *phronēsis*, is practical reasoning aimed at, for example, ethics and politics (Taylor 1985, 185).

<sup>17</sup> Human happiness Aristotle terms *eudaimonia*. To distinguish between ordinary happiness, which is usually considered a pleasant emotion, and the intellectually-inflected, teleological sense of happiness Aristotle obviously intends, some scholars interpret *eudemonia* as "flourishing" or "fulfillment" (Brown 2009, x).

and self-sufficient” (Ibid., 1096b20-25-1097a1-15). The highest form of happiness, the ultimate good, must be a human value chosen for nothing but itself. Because this good must concern only humans, it cannot be only a product of the nutritive soul or sensory soul, and if the defining feature of humans is the intellectual soul, then ultimate happiness must be a function of reason and thought. Aristotle thus contrasts actions that are choice-worthy for their own sake and choice-worthy for the sake of other ends; the former are more virtuous and lead to the ultimate human goal, happiness (Luthra 2015, 425).

Plato theorizes virtue as unitary and known by a soul that contemplates and understands the Forms, and an ethical person is one who uses the intellectual soul to acquire wisdom that will motivate good actions. Emotions and bodily concerns are antithetical to this ethical wisdom. In contrast, Aristotle theorizes different types of virtue for all parts of the soul except the nutritive. The source of ethical virtues is the appetitive part of the soul, the seat of emotions, and ethical virtues are possible when the emotions work in concert with the rational part of the soul (Gottlieb 1994, 279). In Aristotle’s teleological system of classification, only humans have the capacity for happiness because other animals lack the capacity for the non-rational, emotional soul to work with reason in the right way (*Nichomachean Ethics* I.9.1099b32-11a2). Reason and emotion must be fully integrated so that a person is in “harmony with himself and strives for the same things with the whole of his soul,” and virtue entails rationally choosing to do what is right while one’s feelings also urge the same action (Gottlieb 1994, 285; Purshouse 2006, 206).

Temperance, courage, generosity, good temper, friendliness, truthfulness,

justice, are truly virtuous only when knowledge of virtue is combined with voluntary action in finding a mean, a proper proportion of feeling and thinking (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1135a15-25). Self-indulgence of one's physical desires or unbridled emotions results in non-virtuous acts; virtue implies finding a mean, an act that is not excessive nor diminished, that fits the situation. Note that this is not a matter of will, but of knowledge. Virtue is "a matter of acting and feeling" as the rational soul commands, an intellectual process aimed at motivations that results in one not only acting virtuously but being able to connect an act with an underlying explanation that the act is undertaken for the right reasons aimed at the right goal (Moss 2014, 181 & 188). The issue is not only obedience to reason, but the manner in which obedience is achieved such that the nonrational soul listens to, and comes to be in harmony with, the rational soul (Lear 2014, 76). Unlike Plato, then, for whom virtues are associated with the intellect's ability to control emotions and physical desires, for Aristotle, virtues involve not only a type of behavior but also a corresponding emotional state (Gottlieb 1994, 277).

Ethical virtue for Aristotle is both a state of reason and a state of practical wisdom, *phronēsis*, a style or method of moral reasoning that approaches the ever-changing, particular problems of specific human situations (Taylor 1989, 86 & 125). Because no universal, general rule can adequately apply to all situations, Aristotle posits practical wisdom as a process of ordering all the activities of everyday life—running a household, engaging in commerce, being part of a family, politics—in the right proportions, with a balance that reflects not only rationality but emotional investment. Here is the true center of Aristotle's ethics, that is, an ethics of

moderation and proportionality. Human excellence is achieved through a process of choice that brings the demands of reason in line with a non-rational desire, an emotional commitment to pursue actions directed at the happiness of self and others. This involves finding a mean, a sense of proportion between too little and too much, which leads to a life of moderation physically and emotionally. For example, when one is insulted, it is appropriate to be “high on the anger side and low on the gratitude side,” and when courage is needed, it is best not to be too afraid and to have a high degree of confidence (Rescher 2005, 42). The intellect does not strive to diminish emotion but to guide the right kinds and amounts of emotion appropriate to different situations.

Aristotle theorizes human agency consistent with his doctrine of human nature. Virtuous human agency concerns the alignment of the highest good, the rational pursuit of happiness, with both motivations and actions; happiness is an activity of the soul involved with making choices (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102a15-18; 1106b36). All humans are comprised of both body and soul, and so have the capacity for virtue, but not all humans achieve this alignment. Children, for example, can be trained and educated to act in ways that appear virtuous, but they lack the rational knowledge that subtends true happiness. Adults, too, may be ignorant of the knowledge that, combined with actions, results in true happiness. Adults also might have knowledge of virtue but choose not to act in the corresponding way. There are many relations between reason and emotion that result in actions that are not virtuous. A continent person may do the right thing but feel an emotion or drive that wants to do something else (1102b14); an incontinent person experiences internal

(1102b14); and a vicious person reasons badly so chooses to do the wrong act while thinking it is what he should do (1152a6).

Plato dictates that one's life is properly ordered only when in line with knowledge of the truth of transcendent reality; Aristotle, too, considers an awareness of reality an important aspect of ethically ordering one's life. The rational soul has two types of activities—the virtues of mind that engage with theory and the virtues of the non-rational part of the soul, the ethical virtues. The happiest life, the most well-ordered, stems from both contemplation of the divine order of the cosmos, *theōria*, and from practical reason, *phronēsis*. As Charles Taylor notes, the link between the two is ontological; the good life is good because in the rational order of the universe the human is at the apex and to fulfill human excellence the human must be moved by its highest function, rationality. *Theōria*, sustained, careful contemplation of the order of things, allows human knowledge of the hierarchy of the universe, which will enable the human to know its place in the cosmos and strive for the highest human condition, a rationally ordered life (1989, 125). *Phronēsis* is the practical application of this knowledge.

This means that for Aristotle, like for Plato, the aim of philosophy is not purely theoretical but is rather the development of a kind of wisdom that helps people fulfill their nature based on a vision of things as they are, an order that is perceptible through rationality (Hadot 1995, 57). Rationality for Aristotle means the ability to turn one's attention toward a certain experience of reality, to suspend everyday attachments in act of contemplation that can disclose the natural order that should be emulated. The natural order is one of balance, where the proper

proportions of different organisms and their activities are harmonious and lend to the possibility of fulfilled lives for all. In the same way, when a human life is lived with various desires and goals taking proper proportions of thought and effort, when emotions are trained to want to pursue this order, the human will have a harmonious soul and will be happy, thus fulfilling the potential of human life. The purpose behind studying the natural order, is not to “aim at theoretical knowledge,” but to “become good” (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.1. 27-29). Aristotelian philosophy, like Platonic philosophy, is a rhetorical method for transformation, a way to train people to look at and live in the world in the best possible way.

Aristotle’s rhetoric of human nature, with its ethical orientation and focus on the capabilities of the soul, undergirds his doctrines of communication and community. Communication in Aristotle’s philosophy has both individual and collective dimensions. On an individual, intra-psychic level, communication is necessary for a virtuous, happy life. The harmony of the soul depends upon the non-rational, appetitive part of the soul being trained to listen to the reasoning of the rational soul. The appetitive and desiring element of the soul shares in rationality “in so far as it listens to and obeys it” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1102b30-32). What is listened to is the rational soul giving an “account” of why a certain action is virtuous, an explanation, Aristotle says, that is not like accounting for a mathematical property, but like listening to one’s father or a virtuous friend who is giving good advice or reproofing you for doing something wrong (*Ibid.*, 1102b35-37). Happiness requires the rational soul and the non-rational, emotional part of the soul to “speak in the same voice,” and, as noted above, an ethical life is motivated not only by what

one knows but by what one desires and feels (Ibid., I.9.1099b32-11a2). Aristotle describes this state of the rational and emotional soul being in sync as an immediate, non-reflective experience of intellectually and emotionally grasping the appropriate way to act (Lear 2014, 94).

Aristotle's doctrine of human nature also is reflected in his writings on speech with others, and his portrayal of the art of virtuous public speaking is an "implicit bridge" between his philosophical project and rhetoric (Lawson-Tancred 2004, 15). In Aristotle's rhetorical theory, his method is to observe the processes of social life, and he insists that public speech is not concerned with what is immutable and eternal, not oriented at truth, but rather addresses the contingent, uncertain, and ever-changing character of human events. Unlike for Plato, who disdains rhetoric that does not communicate to only the rational part of the soul, Aristotle takes into account conflicting desires and goals and conceptualizes public communication as necessarily responding to both the rational and emotional aspects of being human. Finally, Aristotle's communication theory is aimed at the teleology that characterizes the rest of his philosophy: the art of rhetoric should be employed to motivate actions that contribute to the highest human good. The human is, Aristotle asserts, by nature a social and political animal (*Politics* 1253a1-2). Nature, being supremely ordered toward the good, does nothing in vain, and the human alone among animals by nature has the power of speech (*Politics* 1253a19-10). Speech is an instrument, an art or *techné*, that is intended to serve the social and political needs of the human. Teleologically, the highest form of community would be one in which all members are engaged in pursuing actions and

communicating to one another from a basis of a desire to be good, which would result in happiness for all members.

The approach Aristotle takes to theorizing communication is the same as his approach to conceptualizing human nature, that is, he adopts an observational stance and surveys actual types of speaking situations to explore what kinds of speeches are most effective. Aristotle's rejection of transcendental reality and his focus on particular events that cannot be encompassed in any universal principle is reflected in his classification of rhetorical situations. Unlike Plato, who advises that all public speech be oriented at the truth, Aristotle notes that there are varied occasions during which public speech is necessary and that not only do most of these not concern ultimate truth, the situations themselves demand different approaches. Forensic speech in courts, deliberative (political) speech in the Assembly, and display speech in public forums each have different objectives and to be successful require different orientations to preparing and delivering remarks (*Rhetoric* 1.3). It follows, then, that rhetoric, or public speech, is "the power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits" (*Rhetoric* 1.2). There is no universal standard for what will be persuasive; rather, a speaker must assess who will be listening because, Aristotle says, "persuasiveness is persuasiveness for an individual, a particular person" (*Rhetoric* 1.2). To be persuasive to any person, a speaker has to take into account the nature of that person as a physical, emotional, and intellectual entity, that is, as a body and a soul.

Aristotle offers an orator three proofs, or ways to be convincing, proofs that, like his doctrine of the human, deal with different parts of the soul. These means of

persuasion, directed at a particular audience, are furnished through a speech that contains a cogent argument (*logos*), acknowledges and responds to the disposition of listeners (*pathos*), and displays the character of the speaker (*ethos*) (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1256a). The discourse itself, the logic of the presented argument, is directed at the intellect of an audience; a persuasive speech is constructed in order to be credible and to demonstrate, or seem to demonstrate, a given conclusion. But, Aristotle notes, people are not convinced of anything based solely on an intellectual appeal. A favorable disposition can be encouraged in an audience when the speech induces an emotional state, which means that orators must be schooled in how emotions work. An extended portion of the *Rhetoric* is devoted not to rationality as it contributes to persuasive speech, but to the necessity of developing sympathetic understanding of others, which includes recognizing when people are happy, sad, angry, materially wanting, or lonely. “We do not give judgment in the same way when aggrieved as when pleased, in sympathy or in revulsion,” says Aristotle, and he stipulates that a successful speech is one where an audience feels that an orator understands their emotional states and needs (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1256a). Finally, orators must conduct speeches in such a manner that the audience will see them as worthy of respect; people believe orators who seem to be knowledgeable and honest and who appear to have the well-being of the audience as a goal. Successful speech takes into account the different levels of soul, intellectual and emotional, and responds appropriately to each. A persuasive speaker, in other words, must appeal to, and spark, and audience’s affective reactions. It is affectability, in concert with logical appeals, that is the constitutive basis for community.

Aristotle's doctrine of community, like his doctrine of communication, is consistent with his view of human nature and the teleological orientation of his philosophy. The community exists by nature for the sake of living well, the ultimate ethical goal of which is happiness for members (Cherry 2012, 67). Happiness for individual people, the fulfillment of their natures as humans, is possible only in community because to be happy requires not only such things as a secure life materially and psychically, but a good reputation and a wide circle of virtuous friends (*Nicomachean Ethics* 118-b23). Happiness, too, requires care of the soul to nurture the virtues of prudence, courage, justice, and moderation, virtues which require community to form (*Rhetoric* 1.5). Because virtues are the product of a harmonious soul, a community capable of helping members become virtuous and happy must be led by those who understand the nature of the soul. Unlike Plato, who suggests that only philosophers have the wisdom and character to lead, Aristotle does not see philosophical wisdom as a necessary qualification for leaders; what is required is that leaders understand the complex nature of the soul as rational and irrational and be able to exercise *phronēsis*, the practical art of ordering all the activities of everyday and communal life in the right proportions (Cherry 2012, 164). Leaders able to exercise *phronēsis* will be able to orient a community toward improving the souls of its members which will, in turn, improve the collective.

While Aristotle's conceptualizations of human nature, communication, and community have similarities to Plato's doctrines, his observational approach, as distinct from Plato's transcendental approach, yields some important differences. In

their theories of the human soul, both Aristotle and Plato posit a shared, immaterial plane of existence. For Plato, however, the soul characterizes only humans, while for Aristotle, the soul is shared by all living entities. Both philosophers privilege the human intellect, but where Plato directs the intellect at eternal, immutable truths, Aristotle sees the intellect as important not only for contemplation of the eternal but for managing the practical concerns of human life. Plato positions the body and emotions in an antagonist relationship with the intellectual soul and views only the soul as capable of virtues; Aristotle incorporates body and soul, emotions as well as thought, in his theory of virtues. Human agency is, for the two philosophers, similar in that actions stemming from the intellectual soul's rational capacity are the most desirable, but where Plato considers rationality alone a sufficient basis for agency, Aristotle takes into account the important role that emotions play in motivation. Plato and Aristotle also share a belief that philosophy is a rhetorical art oriented toward the improvement of self and others, and both consider communication an important aspect of an art that must be exercised to achieve ethical community.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to initiate a selective genealogy of rhetorics of human nature in Western thought, a genealogy that focuses explicitly on the human spirit. While the ways in which Homer, Plato, and Aristotle approach conceptualizations of the human differ, there are some shared theoretical trends concerning spirit that I want to emphasize before embarking on the second stage of my genealogy. My intention is not to claim theoretical correspondence among these

ancient perspectives on human life but rather to contemplate a few of the significant themes that emerge in their conceptualizations of being human. The most obvious similarity in how Homer, Plato, and Aristotle view humanness is that they all include an immaterial spirit, which they term a *soul*, as a universal feature of human being. A second theme concerns the capacities of the soul. Homer's soul has no capacities during life, but Plato and Aristotle's conceptualizations include a number of capacities of soul, chief among them being rational thought, that are foundational to ethical development both individually and collectively. The third theme I want to foreground is the soul's capacity for extra-empirical understanding, the requirements gaining this understanding makes on a person, and the role such insight plays in ethical sociality.

Ancient Greek views of human nature as portrayed by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle theorize an immaterial aspect of human life, the soul. For Homer, the soul as *psyche* most fundamentally is life itself, literally the breath that defines the difference between living and nonliving beings. Homer's soul is the immortal, immaterial aspect of life without which mortal existence is impossible. Building on the pre-Socratics, Plato complicates this sense of soul by positing first a cosmic soul that precedes and is the master of materiality. This cosmic soul encompasses the highest level of being, that of perfection, a universal frame of harmony and proposition characterizing the relation of the cosmic elements to one another. This harmonious co-existence becomes for Plato a model for the tri-partite human soul that consists of an immortal rational soul, a mortal sensory soul, and a courageous and passionate mediating soul that strives to keep the entire soul

balanced. Aristotle rejects Plato's immortal, transcendent soul and theorizes soul as *form*, as that which lends to materiality a certain existence. The soul is the form that makes of materiality a specific entity endowed with a range of attributes and capacities. Aristotle theorizes four levels of soul: the nutritive, sensory, locomotive, and intellectual. While humans are the only creatures with an intellectual soul, humans share the other three aspects of soul with other life forms. An assumption shared by these three thinkers is that humans are both material and immaterial, and spirit is an immaterial aspect of being necessary for human existence. Soul in these accounts is a metaphor that attempts to explain somewhat mysterious human characteristics, for all three life itself. For Plato the immortal soul is that aspect of humanness that, after a virtuous life, rejoins the realm of Forms, and for Aristotle the soul is the shaping force that define specific kinds of living organisms. Importantly for my purposes, the soul in Plato and Aristotle's accounts is also what connects humans to the rest of existence. Plato's human soul is linked not only to other humans but to all of creation by being part of the universal, cosmic soul. Aristotle's human soul shares multiple levels of soul with all other living creatures. The human soul is the basis of human connectedness and interdependence with the rest of existence.

While for Homer the soul has no capacities during mortal existence beyond maintaining life itself, Plato and Aristotle develop doctrines of human nature in which an ensouled being has a range of capacities. For both, rationality is the supreme human capacity but, while rationality does involve a certain quality of intellectual thought, it also encompasses other human abilities. For Plato, the ability

to exercise rationality involves imagination, psychic sensation, memory, imagery, language, and emotion. Aristotle, in treating the soul as the form of a living entity, says that being rational involves not only intellectual intentionality but the effort to bring the intellect, physical passions, and emotions into proportionate balance. Rationality for both ancient philosophers differs from the modern analytical sense of a disengaged, purely intellectual, logical process. Rationality engages both intellectual and passionate processes, for Plato, the ability to contemplate, apprehend, and love the Forms enough to fashion a life modeled on them and, for Aristotle, the ability to discern and emotionally commit to the practical wisdom necessary for human flourishing. The point I am making here is that, while soul for the ancient Greeks did involve the mind and intellectual processes, soul also engaged other aspects of human being beyond the mental.

Plato and Aristotle theorize the soul as capable, too, of an intimate knowledge of the universe that is the source of the guiding values that fuel ethical growth. The goal of rationality as it pertains to knowing the nature of reality is not to achieve a description of what is but to become capable of living a fulfilled, ethical life. The goal is to participate in the goodness and perfection of the universal order. While for Homer ethical life is a matter of adhering to tradition and the structure of a warrior culture, for Plato and Aristotle, it is knowledge of the cosmos that is foundational to a meaningful and ethical human life. Plato and Aristotle share a belief that a fulfilled human life is facilitated by having the spiritual ability to apprehend and understand the true nature of cosmic order, an understanding that is obscured by habits of thought, physical passions, language, opinions, and illusions.

For Plato, this understanding of the cosmos is gained by meditating on and contemplating the eternal, transcendent Forms and Ideas. By acquiring knowledge of the order, goodness, and beauty that characterize the cosmos, a human soul is then motivated by love of what is most perfect to model itself on these universal qualities. Aristotle proposes that sustained contemplation, an intimate observation, of the natural world can afford humans knowledge of the balance and harmony of the universe which, in turn, gives humans an understanding of their own place at the apex of existence. This understanding motivates humans to strive for the highest and happiest human existence, that of a harmonious and balanced, virtuous life. The soul has a natural ability to turn toward the highest good and to adopt rational principles that focus on the good and noble actions that facilitate human happiness.

For Plato and Aristotle, it is the soul's immaterial capacities that enable humans to apprehend the nature of existence writ large, that is, the interconnectedness and interdependence of all existence. The values that guide human life toward goodness are not products of subjectivities, they are not humanly created, but are instead external and accessible spiritually. These immaterial capacities include mental processes, but also include bodily sensations and emotions. To exercise one's ensouled abilities requires intentionality, turning away from earthly and bodily concerns and redirecting one's intellectual and emotional capacities toward something external. Ethical agency, then, is a matter of self-awareness and self-improvement, a process of understanding one's own attachments to illusions and physical comforts, breaking these attachments, and becoming capable of prioritizing life on another level, a spiritual level of being that

changes how one thinks and lives. For both Plato and Aristotle, this transformation of self leads to an ability to communicate in ways that nurture other souls and to be a better community member. Both see the purpose of the art of rhetoric as the improvement of souls; communication is not primarily a means of transmitting messages but a process through which, by questioning beliefs, illusions, and attachments, a new orientation toward life is made possible. Community depends on ethical intentionality – human agency in this regard involves intentionally making choices that lead to virtuous actions and make one’s own character better. Ethical agency is a matter of intellectual, physical, and emotional connection to the world.

CHAPTER 2  
RHETORICS OF A DIMINISHED HUMAN:  
RELIGIOUS, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNTS

Introduction

Platonic and Aristotelian conceptualizations of human nature are foundational to later Western theological, philosophical, and scientific doctrines of human nature. Over time, however, the richness of early Greek conceptualizations of the immaterial capacities of human being—the specific ways that spiritual capacities are theorized as grounding ethical sociality—will be diminished, and in some cases displaced entirely. The Greek emphasis on improving the soul as the basis for right conduct collectively and as a way to resolve the tensions between individual freedom and communal needs for order and justice gives way as Christian theology, philosophical rationalism, and scientific naturalism gain ascendancy in Western thought (Foucault 2003, 28). The subject of this chapter is the evolution of Western rhetorical accounts of human nature since ancient Greece in which this diminishment occurs. A complete genealogy is impossible in so short a project, so I have chosen to focus on noteworthy changes in how human attributes and capacities are conceptualized at three theoretical moments: Saint Augustine’s view of the human in his employment of Neoplatonic philosophy to create Judeo-

Christian doctrine in the fifth century, René Descartes' incorporation of the human into rationalist philosophy in the seventeenth century, and portrayals of the human that emerge in the context of materialist science in contemporary moment. While this is not an exhaustive exploration, my selection is not arbitrary, and I focus on these particular moments because they are related theoretically in that each of them, despite their differences, involves a significant reduction of the Greek sense of a secular human spirit. Each represents a different strategy—religious, philosophical, or scientific—that pursues an altered sense of human nature. Taken together, these three perspectives lend to a narrative that reveal how, over time in Western thought, central features of ancient Greek theories of the human are minimized or displaced as human essence comes to be defined as rationality and other human capacities are marginalized, human individualism and autonomy are emphasized over spiritual and physical connections with the rest of existence, and a belief that the human alone creates orienting values replaces a belief that the universe or that God models an objective sense of interconnectivity, a goodness and order, that can be emulated in human community. My claim is that theorizing the human as an essentially rational, individual, self-generator of values differs radically from ancient Greek rhetorics of human nature and diminishes human potential for collectivity.

There are many narratives in Western intellectual history concerning human nature, some that reflect dominant understandings of being human, and others that have remained latent and relatively unexplored. The unexplored account, which I discuss in terms of Spinoza and the more recent philosophies of thinkers like Henri

Bergson and Jean-Luc Nancy, challenges dominant religious, philosophical, and scientific narratives and is the subject of the next chapter. In this chapter, I analyze the theories of Augustine, Descartes, and materialist science to construct a dominant version of human nature that considers materiality and immateriality in starkly dualistic terms. One of my intentions is to highlight how the rhetorics of human nature contributing to the dominant narrative are intellectual constructions that do not merely describe the human based on observation and experience but pursue depictions of human nature that reflect the investments of theorists at different historical moments. Augustine's commitment to a life based on Christian scripture, Descartes' intention to advance mechanistic science, and the scientific materialist commitment to a material universe of closed, determined causal relations fuel representations of human being that attenuate immaterial human capacities that the ancient Greeks express through the concept of the soul. Considered the basis for uniquely human life, these features include the human capacity for ethical orientation and the ability to imagine and bring into existence novel, more just and ethical relational dynamics.

I characterize the dominant narrative of human nature as a diminishment of the human relation to self and the world. This diminishment stems in part from a developing Western orientation toward conceptualizing the human and the world in dualistic terms, as a term and its negation, and positing only one side of the polarization as intellectually valid or existent. The duality of body and soul/mind is paramount in all of the doctrines of human nature I discuss in this chapter, and this binary rests upon further dualisms: immanence and transcendence, the material

and immaterial, and the finite and eternal. These dualities reflect a particular resolution of the tensions between the taxonomies of human nature that were developed in ancient Greece by Plato and Aristotle. The Platonic division between the immaterial and material, between the immortal *nous* and the finite *anima*, will become the model on which early Christian, Cartesian, and scientific rhetorics of the human are constructed. The Aristotelian sense of an indivisible material/immaterial human will continue as a nondominant counter-narrative. This dominant theoretical resolution, however, should not be over-simplified and there remains a difference in how binaries are employed in ancient Greek and later theories that adopt a Platonic orientation. Binaries were theorized in ancient Greek conceptualizations of the human and the cosmos and ordered in hierarchies that reflected, for example, valuing an eternal realm over finite existence or the immaterial soul over the material body. And yet, in the Greek doctrines of the human I have discussed thus far, dualistic concepts coexist, and, compared to later theories, there is a capacity to conceptually hold both terms. Even Plato, who consistently theorizes the cosmos and human in dualistic terms that privilege the ideal and intelligible, does not exclude the centrality of the material. The human, material body and immaterial soul, participates in a world that is itself an immanent plane of material existence as well as a vibrant, immaterial transcendent soul. The cosmos is characterized by both immanence and transcendence that are imbricated dimensions subtending human existence. Aristotle highlights human rationality as the apex of animate existence, but he theorizes the human ability to transform self and community as necessarily involving a rational contemplation of the natural order, a bodily sympathetic

understanding of others, and an emotional commitment, a feeling of passion for justice. Soul, mind, and body engage in an openness, an orientation of desire and virtue, that nurtures collectivity. For both Plato and Aristotle, an ethical orientation to collectivity is unachievable by reflecting only on finite human life. Ethical capacity requires contemplation of eternity and the universal values that preexist any individual. Happy, flourishing finite life can only be oriented by an awareness of, and participation in, the eternal.

In ancient Greek doctrines of the human, theoretical dualities exist, but a consideration of human experience, of the complexity of lived experience on both immaterial and material planes, generates theories in which the human emerges in the interval between oppositions as a open site of possibility arising from an interplay between two poles, and what it is possible to know and be necessarily involves both terms. Human being as material and immaterial, as both body and soul, requires consideration of both planes of existence. In contrast, in Augustinian and Cartesian doctrines, human essence is reduced to the immaterial soul or mind. Materialist science operates on the duality in the opposite direction to erase immaterial aspects of the human and confine human being to a material body. Human experience, a dimension that is reflected in ancient Greek doctrines of the human as attention to both poles of a duality, is sacrificed for a theoretical consistency that is built on the exclusion of one term. Over time in Western thought, this theoretical compulsion to bracket off and characterize aspects of the human experience of self and the world as intellectually insupportable plays a key role in diminished theoretical depictions of human nature.

My analysis begins with a discussion of three interrelated themes in Augustinian and Cartesian theories that are reflected in contemporary views of human nature. The first theme is a theoretical orientation that replaces the Greek distinction between the immaterial and material, identified in rhetorics of the human as the difference between the soul and the body, with a conceptual opposition between the internal and the external, or the mind as distinct from material existence (Taylor 1989, 156). Augustine privileges internal mental processes over human physicality or a relation to the material world; Descartes radically divides the mental from the material and identifies human essence exclusively as mind. For both, an inward turn toward the intellect results in a sense of rationality that differs dramatically from that of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato and Aristotle, rationality is the ability to turn one's attention both inward and toward something external, for Plato the eternal Forms and for Aristotle the natural order. Rationality is key to bettering the self, for productive self-reflection, but it also involves an outward, intentional, contemplative, and immediate experience of the cosmos that engages the imagination and the emotions in addition to the intellect. In contrast, rationality for Augustine and Descartes is a human capacity that excludes the body and sensual experience of the external world to focus the intellect and will on self-reflexive thought geared toward gaining knowledge of God (Augustine) or the True (Descartes). Rationality in this sense is a willed form of intellectual self-exploration oriented toward nurturing a relationship with the divine or acquiring knowledge that enables human control over the material world. The concepts of rationality advanced by Augustine and Descartes diminish capacities for the

integration of the intellect, senses, and emotions that for the Greeks are essential to self-improvement and harmonious existence with others.

The second theme that guides my analysis is that of individuality which is a theoretical shift toward defining the human as an individual, autonomous soul or mind. The Greek sense of the humans as connected by a cosmic soul (Plato) or as a soul/body composite that shares attributes and capacities with all of animate existence (Aristotle) is displaced conceptually as human essence comes to be defined in terms of distinct souls or minds. Augustine theorizes an individual human soul that is properly oriented toward a transcendent relationship with the divine; ideally, each human soul during earthly existence engages in a solitary, mental effort to connect with God. Descartes theorizes an individual human mind that is oriented toward the ability to have clear and distinct ideas; what is privileged is the autonomous capacity to discriminate between the true and the false and so generate certain knowledge. In both theories, the individual human is positioned as a solitary essence, an individual entity that exists outside of what was for the Greeks an immanent plane of material and immaterial connectedness. This ancient Greek sense of connectedness is not only an ontological description of the overall unity and interdependence of the cosmos. Connectedness also characterizes the essential sociality of human existence such that happiness, the achievement of one's human potential, is possible only in community. The individualistic perspectives of the human in Augustine and Descartes's doctrines diminish recognition of the importance of human interdependence and contribute to what Jean-Luc Nancy refers to as the "Western metaphysics of the individual" or being-for-itself (2000,

30). Paradigms that define the human as an isolated soul or mind are in stark contrast to the being-in-common that was that basis for human flourishing in ancient Greece.

The third, related theme I discuss regarding Augustine and Descartes' rhetorics of the human is that of the disengagement of the human from the rest of existence. Disengagement has multiple theoretical implications, but my focus is on how removing the human from an interdependent relation to existence impacts how the source of human values is conceptualized (Martin and Baressi 2006, 24). For the ancient Greeks, the human is embedded in and intimately related to all of animate and inanimate existence. The human as body and soul participates in cosmic attributes, and the order and harmony that exist in the cosmos afford the human a model of goodness that can be emulated in human community. The values that motivate ethical human behavior are universal, preexist finite human life, and are acquired by studying the complicated web of existence in the external world. This changes with Augustine's conceptualization of the human that reflects the otherworldliness of Christianity. For Augustine, the human position in the cosmos is not based on commonality and community with other earthly creatures but is focused on the individual soul's relation to, and dependence on, the divine. Augustine advises against curiosity about or engagement with the world because he admits nothing of value that can be learned from what materially exists. Disengagement is necessary in order to focus on God who, as biblically revealed, is the only infallible source of motivating human values. In Cartesian philosophy, humans are the only animals who have, or more precisely who *are* minds, and all

other animate creatures, including human bodies, are mere automata that function according to the determinate laws that govern all matter. Being a human mind means being radically different from the rest of existence and separate from other human minds. Values for Descartes are the product of an individual, dispassionate human mind that disengages from the senses and the influence of other people—religions, traditions, and cultural conventions, for example—in order to reach a rational basis for behavior. Diminished in Augustinian and Cartesian theories is the communal, immanent, universal orienting moral compass that the Greeks considered the foundation for ethical human community.

In the narrative I pursue in this chapter, theoretical trends initiated by Augustine and Descartes continue to influence contemporary rhetorics of the human. As at any point in Western history, there are competing theories of the human in circulation in the contemporary moment, and I here analyze one that is of significance for its dominance in secular thought, that of materialist science. Materialist science rejects the dual-natured human that Augustine saw as body/soul and Descartes viewed as body/mind to consider the human as entirely material. The materialist view of the cosmos and the human is mechanical, a closed system of cause-and-effect relations. Materialist science perpetuates several of the themes that emerged centuries earlier in Augustinian and Cartesian doctrines of the human. A focus on the rational ability of the human over other immaterial capacities, human individuality and autonomy over human interconnectedness and interdependence, and a disengagement of the human from the rest of earthly existence continue to characterize a materialist scientific view of the human.

Like the rhetorics of human nature that I discussed in the preceding chapter, the theories I analyze here are more than descriptions of the human organism. Each doctrine also attempts to give meaning to the experience of being human as part of the cosmos and as a member of human community. These conceptualizations of the human theorize differently the origin and development of the cosmos and the social and ethical consequences of viewing the human a particular way. What they have in common is the diminishment of human capacities that were, for the Greeks, the basis of human ethical behavior and collectivity.

#### Humans as Souls in Augustine's Divine Creation

Augustine's (354-430 CE) theological and philosophical theories employ Greek philosophy, and Platonic philosophy in particular, in order to create Judeo-Christian beliefs (Mendelson 2016, 1).<sup>18</sup> Augustine was raised Christian and became attracted as an adolescent to Manichaeism, a sect that presented a scientific alternative to orthodox Christianity. Manicheans focused on the material world and taught that thinking was limited by sensory experience; one could think and know

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<sup>18</sup> In this genealogy of doctrines of the human, I treat Augustine's theory in the traditional academic vein as Neoplatonic and addressing religious rhetoric. A resurgence of Augustinian scholarship by continental philosophers breaks from this tradition to explore the relevance of his philosophy for contemporary politics. For extended treatments of continental engagement with Augustine by theorists including Hannah Arendt, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Albert Camus, Edmund Husserl, and Jacques Derrida, see *Augustine for Philosophers: The Rhetor of Hippo, the Confessions, and the Continentals* (Troup 2014) and *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (Caputo and Scanlon 2004).

only that which could be made into a sensory image (MacDonald 2014, 22).<sup>19</sup> In the *Confessions*, Augustine writes of leaving the Manichean sect upon his sudden conversion to Christianity and his discovery of Platonic philosophy. Augustine says that he embraced the Christian faith after hearing the sermons of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, and realizing through reading scripture that the Bible alone offers a secure path for a fulfilled life (Stump and Meconi 2014, 4). Augustine describes his conversion as an intellectual vision, a glimpse into the truth of God that left “no room for doubt” and caused him to embrace the scriptural exhortation to “love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (*Confessions* VII.10.16). Augustine also writes that his exposure to unnamed Neoplatonic works was his first introduction to the possibility of there being a non-physical substance, an insight that led him to reject Manichean beliefs and to adopt a view of the cosmos as divided between a sensible/physical world and an intelligible/spiritual realm (*Confessions* VII.x.16). He came to believe that, while the world is material, undergoes change, and is characterized by corruption, God is immaterial with the qualities of immutability and incorruptibility (MacDonald 2014, 29). Augustine accepted the dualistic metaphysics of Platonism, but he found the theory inadequate for human flourishing, an achievement that he believed possible only through adherence to biblical teachings (King 2010, *xiii*; Kolbert 2013, 99). The doctrine of the human and the cosmic, social, and ethical contexts Augustine offers reflect a

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<sup>19</sup> Manicheans held that the world consists of two substances, one light and one dark, and human souls are fragments of the light. Augustine objected to the materialization of darkness, of evil, as well as to human souls being part of the divine. As a Christian, in order to justify human responsibility for sin, and to fully absolve an all-knowing God of participating in sin, required recasting human souls to a creation of God’s that was separate from his divine nature.

commitment to developing a coherent Neoplatonic philosophy in the context of Christian scripture.

The cosmic dimension Augustine develops as a backdrop to his theory of the human conforms to the Bible's account of creation. Augustine asserts that the universe was created from nothing by God. Unlike Plato's Craftsman who from existing chaos fashioned an ordered, harmonious cosmos, Augustine maintains that nothing material, and not even time, existed before God's creation. He describes the mechanism of creation in the "Genesis on Creation" where he addresses God:

How did you make heaven and earth? . . . You did not like a human artisan reshape physical materials to give them the form seen within by the directing mind . . . you did not make heaven and earth out of their own materials . . . You used your Word to make them, and in your Word they were made . . . All things that begin to be or cease being do so when your eternal reason knows that it ought to begin or cease (*Confessions* 5-8).

Augustine's God creates all that exists materially and immaterially *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, according to the desire of his divine perfect will. Augustine's rejects Plato's Craftsman, but the two versions of creation have similarities. Both theories of creation posit an immaterial, transcendental plane of existence that subtends lived reality. For both Augustine and Plato, there exists a material-immaterial realm that negates a strict division of the two, and humans as bodies and souls participate in this reality. For Plato, creation is grounded in the transcendent realm of the ideal Forms, and material existence is comprised of lesser copies of those Forms. Plato's forms become for Augustine God's ideas (Taylor 1989, 93). There exists in God's mind the "original idea" and "eternal knowledge" of all things, and from these ideas come the existence of everything that is (MacDonald 2014, 38). God's ideas, which become causal words—Augustine admits that this biblical truth is difficult for

humans to comprehend—are the source of everything immaterial and material (Mendelson 2016, 8). Like the Platonic cosmos, Augustine’s universe is characterized ontologically as consisting of two substances, one physical and sensible and the other spiritual and intelligible (*Confessions* VII.x.16). Both theories are hierarchical and position the immaterial and ideal above material reality.

Like his ontological description of the created world, Augustine’s rhetoric of the human is also modeled on Plato’s dualistic account. Augustine theorizes the human as an immaterial, immortal soul housed in a material, mortal body. One notable difference from Plato is that the Augustinian soul *uses* a body; the body, created by God and so necessarily good, is not Plato’s prison but a tool that the soul employs to fulfill its will (Murphy 1998, 4). Augustine considers human physicality “something marvelous and beyond human comprehension” (Goetz and Taliaferro 2011, 33), a source of pleasure and pain and the way humans connect to the world (Elshtain 2005, 33). Humans bodies are part of the mortal material order, but because humans are given souls by God, they also participate in immaterial, eternal existence (Nightingale 2011, 5). As scripture describes, God fashioned dust to create the first human male body, Adam’s. The human body, like all animated bodies, is an animal body that God then makes into his own image by creating a human soul.<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup> Augustine proposes four hypotheses for the human soul: (1) an existing human soul is sent by God to administer a particular body; (2) the soul itself chooses to inhabit a certain body; (3) all souls derive from Adam’s soul which links all souls in a human family; and (4) God creates a new soul for each body. Augustine does not settle on one theory but, as he ponders theological questions like original sin and predestination, advances the likelihood of one hypothesis over another (Mendelson 2016, 11).

*City of God*, Augustine describes how God created Adam as “a kind of mean between angels and beasts”:

Thus God made man in his own image, by creating for him a soul of such a kind that because of it he surpassed all living creatures, on earth, and in the sea, and in the sky, in virtue of reason and intelligence; for no other creature had a mind like that . . . This he did either by implanting in him, by breathing on him, a soul which he had already made, or rather by willing that the actual breath which he produced when he breathed on him should be the soul of man (XII.26.24).

Augustine considers the soul, as did Homer and Plato, as the principle of life, which means that in addition to humans, plants and animals also have souls, but these are lesser souls that account only for being alive in the case of plants and for having sensations like touch, sight, taste, smell, and hearing for animals.<sup>21</sup> What distinguishes humans from other living entities and elevates the human to the top of the created hierarchy is a special soul through which God endows humans with the power of reason. Like Plato’s human soul, Augustine’s is tripartite. Plato models his version of the soul on the ideal city, but the Augustinian soul is modeled on the Holy Trinity that is three entities, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and is also One (Breyfogle 2013, 8). Augustine theorizes separate faculties for the different parts of the soul, but he claims that the human soul is nonetheless a unity which is important for the preservation of the individual soul after death. During life, the soul is the seat of mental processes like thought, memory, imagination, and the will; at death, the unified, incorporeal soul separates from the mortal body and is sustained by God

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine posits seven layers of soul that ascend from vegetative powers, sensible abilities, and on up to several layers that are specific to humans and concern rationality, an ability to pursue the vision of truth that is God, a desire for wisdom of what exists, and, at the apex, the capacity to contemplate God directly (Niederbacher 2014, 126-127).

until, as promised in scripture, body and soul are reunited. The mortal body dies, but “once called into existence, human life cannot turn into nothingness,” and the disembodied soul, a part of eternity, persists under God’s care while awaiting the resurrection of the body (Arendt 1996, 53).

That humans are both material and mortal as well as immaterial and immortal creates the central drama of human life. Born into an animal body, humans do not readily comprehend that life can only be perfected outside of sensual experience through a union with God (Mendelson 2016, 9). Augustine describes life without this union as unstable and a source of constant, unbearable insecurity, anxiety that is compounded by original sin which means that humans from birth are separated from God’s goodness and grace, a state that results in an overpowering feeling of loss and a longing for intimacy with God and other people (Nightingale 2011 3). Human life is characterized by fear of losing material possessions, a lack of intimacy, and the inescapable fact of death. Augustine describes the world as a desert and the self as an alien whose desire for worldly goods and other people is always frustrated (Arendt 1996, 19). Clinging to the finite and unstable world makes happiness and goodness impossible, and only by knowing and loving God ceaselessly can humans be content. The route to finding God is through the inner self, and nurturing the discipline to turn from the world and toward the self, engrossing oneself in self-exploration, allows the human to have a moment of insight regarding one’s utter dependence on the divine. Human life is meaningful, and happiness possible, only by turning inward toward one’s deepest self, the soul, where one reconnects with God.

For Augustine, the incorporeal substance of the soul, created in the image of God, is his essence and synonymous with himself. The soul, or the thinking, imagining, willing rational mind, is the basis for unique human identity both during and after life (Niederbacher 2014, 128). Although Augustine's theory is Neoplatonic, his theory marks two important conceptual shifts. First, Augustine's claim that he is his soul marks a change from the ancient Greeks who considered the body/soul composite the person. For Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, during life a person was both body and soul, materiality and an animating principle. In contrast, while Augustine admits that to be human is to be both material and immaterial, he considers the soul as the essence of the human. Second, Plato's dualism focused on the differences between the characteristics of matter and spirit in a cosmic sense, and the important distinction was between the immaterial and the material and the different capacities of the soul and the body. Augustine shifts focus to the difference between the human's sensual experience of the outer world and the inner, intelligible experiences of the spiritual self (Taylor 1989, 128). It is the immaterial, thinking, willing mind that constitutes the essence of personhood, and realizing that the mind is the essence of one's personhood is possible only by turning away from the world and delving deeply into rational self-knowledge (Taylor 1989, 131).

Augustine's doctrine of the human shifts the purpose of the soul's ultimate capacity, reason, from the Greek sense of an ability to contemplate the order and harmony of the cosmos to reason that, through self-examination, turns inward to know God (Taylor 1989, 136). Augustine models the human ability for rational thought on Plato's depiction, but incorporates a theological distinction regarding the

human's dependence on the divine. For Plato, exercising rationality requires turning attention from the material world to the realm of the eternal Forms or Ideas.

Knowledge of the eternal Forms on which the cosmos was designed enlightens the human about the order and harmony of existence. Since the human soul before it was embodied was part of the universal cosmic soul, knowledge of the underlying order and beauty of the cosmos is an act of recollection. By divorcing oneself from sensual material reality and intentionally contemplating the immaterial realm that subtends existence, the human soul remembers the perfection of the Forms. Like Plato's concept of the soul, the Augustinian soul, which was before birth part of the immaterial, divine realm, can, through rational recollection, also come to know and understand that which subtends human existence. (*Confessions* IX.10.23-25). Once turned inward, what the soul remembers is God, and the soul through memory returns to its own creation which was the only time it was happy and content in the past (Arendt 1996, 51). The self turned away from the sensual world and focused inward opens the possibility that God will grant a form of wisdom that is not organized through the senses or through ideas, but through an "incorporeal light" that illuminates the mind (Taylor 1989, 133; Breyfogle 2013, 15). This wisdom, however, is dependent upon God granting the human grace; human reason alone is not sufficient for knowledge of God. Reason is the highest capacity in God's creation, but a capacity for reason is not enough to turn the self away from the world and toward God; divine assistance is required (Kolbert 2013, 101).

The Augustinian doctrine of the human, with its emphasis on interiority and the otherworldliness of Christianity, begins a shift in Western intellectual thought

toward an individualized human. The ancient Greeks theorize the human as being in intimate relation with both the material cosmos and other people. Human connection is stressed, and without community individual human happiness and flourishing are impossible. Plato and Aristotle look to community as the basis of individual happiness; happiness is the reward for achieving a balanced, healthy soul and for living a virtuous life of humane, just actions toward other people. Like the ancient Greeks, Augustine considers a fulfilled human life to be one of achieving a type of happiness that is less a feeling of contentment than the fulfillment of human abilities. But for Augustine, human happiness depends on knowing that the “meaningfulness” of life lies outside of, and predates, human existence (Arendt 1996, 50). What makes a person happy cannot be found in community but only through an individual soul’s relationship with God (Marion 2010, 66-67). Augustine’s doctrine of the human, focused as it is on the inner self and an individual soul’s relation to God, departs from the Greek outer focus toward community and relations to others and begins a theoretical move toward individuality, but Augustine does not conceptualize the human as the autonomous entity that, centuries later, Descartes will. Descartes will posit a self that is essentially a mind that can, through independent capacities for thought and will, grant a person certainty about self, external existence, and values. In contrast, for Augustine, the self is not a form of “self ownership” that grounds either an independent capacity for knowing truth or an autonomous will (Milbank 2006, 405). The Augustinian human is profoundly dependent upon God for knowledge of self and an orientation to a virtuous, happy life. Only in an encounter with God, nurtured

by self-reflexive thought and divinely-bestowed grace, does the human know what it means to be a person.

Augustine's theoretical shifts toward the inner self and his focus on human dependence on the divine also mark a redirection in Western thinking toward conceptualizing the human as disengaged from the external world. Plato and Aristotle advocate for turning the attention away from a preoccupation with the body's desires for wealth and sensual pleasure and toward contemplation of the eternal Forms (Plato) or the natural order (Aristotle). The purpose of contemplating the Forms or nature is to obtain knowledge, wisdom, about the harmony and goodness that characterizes the cosmos so that these qualities can be emulated. Characteristics of the cosmos and nature are valued by the Greeks as a model for the inner self, as the basis for harmonious and balanced relations among bodily passions, emotions, and the mind, and also socially, as a basis for goodness and order in community. In contrast, Augustine is suspicious of efforts to know about the world, considers the study of nature a waste of time, and considers curiosity about external reality a sin that leads to desiring physical pleasure (Nightingale 2011, 7). As a Christian, Augustine advocates for employing the soul's capacity for reason toward one purpose only, to know God and so to be able to participate in God's goodness. Knowledge of, and engagement with, the world, cannot yield orienting values, and only connection with, and dependence on, God can lead to human virtue.

The ethical implications of Augustine's theory, how a human achieves goodness and a fulfilled life, revolve around his conceptualization of human agency,

a capacity that bring together both that aspect of the soul that is the will, the human organ of choice, and the necessity of grace as a gift from God that makes human flourishing possible. For Augustine, all of creation once brought into existence by God is then free, and humans are the most free because they are rational and have will (Cavadini 2014, 47).<sup>22</sup> God creates humans with a capacity for goodness, and with mind or spirit that can reason and is an organ of choice. Agency involves the proper use of reason and the will which allows people to live without fear by orienting themselves toward God:

Good people pursue this by turning their love away from things that cannot be possessed without the risk of losing them. Evil people, on the other hand, try to remove hindrances so that they may securely attach themselves to those things to be enjoyed. The end result is that they lead a life full of crime and wickedness, a life which is better called death (*On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.4.10.30).

Will is a movement of the soul toward goodness or sinfulness; free will in this sense is not freedom from a determined, causal chain of events but the human ability to turn away from the earthly, material world and toward the inner self in search of God (Rist 2014, 30).<sup>23</sup> The will is a human disposition that pulls in two directions—toward the world and toward the divine. The soul as the seat of the will is

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<sup>22</sup> Augustine's theory of will displays his commitment to emphasizing that humans, and not God, are responsible for sin (Mendelson 2016, 21). Through exercising the will, humans achieve either happy or unhappy lives, but, according to Augustine, the "end result is that people deserve what they get" (*Confessions* I.14.30.99).

<sup>23</sup> In Augustine's later works, when he adopts the theory of predestination, he alters his theory of will to say that it is impossible for the will not to be evil and sin and only God's grace, and not human choice, can allow the human to become virtuous and so achieve eternal salvation over eternal damnation (Mendelson 2016, 21). Humans are responsible for sin, and ignorance, even ignorance of God, is no excuse (Augustine *On Grace* 7-8).

immaterial but, unlike God, not immutable. The soul changes throughout life and, depending on the will's direction, becomes better or worse and so more or less deserving of eternal salvation (Mendelson 2016, 10). For Plato, desire of the Good is a function of rational insight into the transcendent Forms; once knowledge of the Forms is achieved, goodness necessarily follows and everyone is motivated to be good to the extent that they are not ignorant. Augustine does not see rationality as sufficient for a virtuous life; humans must actively make choices to be good instead of evil (Taylor 1989, 138-139). Human agency, however, is not only a matter of choosing goodness over evil but, like human knowledge of self, involves divine assistance.<sup>24</sup> Augustine says that the soul "holding fast" to the unchangeable good is necessary for virtue and happiness, but the decision to hold fast depends on God's grace. Without God's benevolence, despite having a free will, humans cannot achieve a virtuous and happy life.

Augustine does address human sociality, and he links human communication to the possibilities for human community. Communication for Augustine has one purpose—to move people closer to God and the truth regarding human dependence on the divine. Because the only route to happiness is God's wisdom as revealed in the Bible, which functions both as a "doctor and as medicine to heal the soul," humans should share biblical truths with one another (*On Christian Teaching* I.XIII.28). Augustine was trained as a rhetorician, and he considered classical rhetorical training central to Christian dialogue and teaching. As bishop of Hippo, he

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<sup>24</sup> Augustine's theory of human dependence upon God's grace is similar to Homer's depiction of the human as dependent upon the benevolence of gods and goddesses. In both cases, the human alone is incapable of virtuous behavior or human flourishing; a divine force is requisite for human success.

instructed the clergy under his care to study and employ rhetorical methods in order to more effectively move parishioners to adopt Christian teachings, without which Godly community is impossible. Like Plato and Aristotle, Augustine considers philosophy and, for him theology, more than a system of abstract propositions and beliefs; philosophy is a form of therapy that ideally motivates people to lead better lives and provides concrete tools for a healthy soul. Communication for a Christian, he advises, should be oriented toward encouraging others to join in divinely-inspired community.

In *City of God*, Augustine stresses that while God created man as an individual, he did not intend for him to be without human society. Woman was created from man, Eve from Adam, so that the whole “human race should spread out from the one original man” and people would not be bound together “merely by likeness but also by feelings of kinship” (XII.24.22). God’s plan for humanity was that a single ancestor would link generations and make it possible for everyone to meet the biblical requirement not only love God but to love neighbors as themselves. In the Augustinian belief system, one loves neighbors not for human fellowship but to love God, and a just and holy life must be ordered such that the right amount and quality of love is directed at the self, other people, and God (*On Christian Teaching* XXVI.27.59). Part of loving others is enjoying them as part of God’s creation but with the knowledge that what is being appreciated and honored is God in them and their potential for God’s goodness. All people as God’s creatures should be loved equally and all people should be considered neighbors, but since it is impossible to extend oneself to everyone, Augustine says that priority should be

given to those who are close to you in terms of “time, place, or any other circumstance,” with other Christians comprising the primary source of desirable community (Ibid. XXVI.27.62). Sociality depends on the quality of one’s will and a good will depends on being in right relation to God and acknowledging human dependence on the divine (Taylor 1989, 83). The ability to follow the scriptural command to love neighbors, then, is possible only for someone who is “seized by God” (Arendt 1996, 3). Justice toward others requires a disciplined will and a harmonious soul; a moral society is possible only for those who have first sought unity with God (Clark 2013, 7). This means that human connection and sociality is possible only through a shared love for the divine (Mendelson 2016, 8).

In her dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine*, Hannah Arendt addresses what she sees as the central social challenge in Augustine’s teaching: “if loving God requires turning from the world and even the self, then loving others in order to love God would also require this separation which seems to deny a connection among people” (1996, 111). On one hand, since God alone should be loved with one’s entire being, and people are loved only to help one another love God more, we never love others for themselves. On the other hand, Augustine is clear that loving neighbors is a practice, an orientation toward others that involves mutual respect, affection, and friendship, dynamics whereby humans form a “moral union” through which they can strive for a “shared good” based on a love of God (Elshtain 2005, 249). Simply because a group of people shares faith in God, however, does not necessarily result in community. Community depends explicitly on faith in the human potential to use the will for good, live a life of virtue, and engagement in

community as an act of mutual dependence on God (Arendt 19996, 111). The ideal community is a group of believers who are connected one to another through their love of God, and persons outside of this fellowship are not explicitly part of Augustine's social concern.

Notwithstanding Augustine's theory of communication and sociality, an Augustinian vision of human happiness and its dependence on the divine serves to denigrate the centrality of community for human flourishing. Communication in an Augustinian sense serves primarily as a mechanism for accessing and sharing the truth regarding the individual soul's lack of agency and the necessity for knowledge of God's absolute power over human life. This view of communication does echo that of Plato who also privileged rhetoric aimed at the dissemination of eternal truths, that is, of the ideal Forms and Ideas toward which human attention should be directed. More to the point for my investigation, Augustine, divorces human agency from affectability, from the sensible/feeling/emotional interactions and attachments that precondition ethical human interactions. He thus denies the link between affectability and human agency, and he shifts the power behind human agency to an external force, that is, to God. In doing so, he denies the rhetorical agency of the human spirit in engaging the world.

In Western intellectual thought, Augustine's theory of the human is significant in that he departs from the Greek sense of the human's position in the physical and moral universe. Augustine's intention is both philosophical and theological, a Platonic metaphysics combined with Christian biblical teachings. The Platonic dualism of body and soul is preserved in his theory, but Augustine's inward

turn with its focus on internal, intellectual and psychological dynamics transforms the Greek sense of rationality from an outward orientation toward the cosmos to a inner human capacity that is of value only to the extent that it achieves knowledge of, and connection to, the divine. Augustine's focus on the individual human soul's relation to God also initiates a theoretical turn away from the Greek importance of connectivity and community and toward individuality. Augustine's human is an individual entity that is purposeful and meaningful only in relation to God, and the Greek sense of the humans connected by a universal, cosmic spirit is displaced. Augustine's focus on the soul's divinity results in the human individual being oriented not in a material world of other human and nonhuman creatures but exclusively in a realm that is transcendent and outside of nature. Augustine's commitment to the otherworldliness of Christianity and his suspicion toward empirical knowledge also result in a theoretical disengagement of the human from the rest of the material cosmos. The cosmos itself, which the Greeks saw as a source of orienting human values is replaced by a set of values that are decreed by the God of Christian scripture. These changes—an orientation to the inner self as distinct from the external world, a tendency toward individualization, and a disengagement of the human from the rest of existence—continue to characterize later dominant Western conceptualizations of human nature.

#### Humans as Minds in Descartes' Dualistic Universe

Augustine's theoretical debt to Plato is well established; René Descartes' (1560-1650) to Augustine is less certain. Descartes read Augustine, and he

discussed Augustinian principles with contemporaries, but scholars are divided on whether the two should be considered as members of a direct lineage of thought. The stark difference between Augustine's Christian aspirations and Descartes' scientific goals has been cited traditionally as evidence that the two are in opposing intellectual camps (Menn 1998, *ix*). More recent scholarship exposes the multiple levels on which Augustinian and Cartesian theories intersect as evidence that Descartes relied in his own philosophy on his predecessor's solution to skepticism, depiction of human nature, and portrayal of rationalism (Martin and Barresi 2006, 127). Both thinkers confront skepticism by grounding their metaphysical systems in the certainty that a benevolent God is not only the foundation of all existence but makes possible the world's intelligibility to humans (Menn 1998, *xiv*). Augustine and Descartes advance a dualistic doctrine of the human as a material body and an immaterial soul/mind and posit the immaterial aspect as the self and the source of identity. They share a privileging of internal, mental processes over physicality and both insist that the mind must be drawn away from the senses in order to apprehend the true nature of the cosmos, for Augustine God, and for Descartes both God and the universal principles that order the material world. For Augustine and Descartes rationality is an activity that is directed by the will, a capacity of soul/mind that, like God, enjoys a degree of freedom in a cosmos otherwise governed by universal, deterministic laws of nature (Gilbert and Lennon 2005, 114). The debate concerning the relation between the two philosophers continues, but, for my purposes, Descartes' precise intellectual debt to Augustine is less important than the specific ways that Cartesian theory extends and amplifies the three themes

on which I pursue a dominant Western narrative of human nature, that is, internalization, individuality, and disengagement of the human from the rest of existence.

Augustine privileges internal, mental processes over engagement with or knowledge about the external world; self-reflexivity is the route to the one intellectual goal worth pursuing, knowing the divine. By delving deep into one's conscious thoughts, God can be apprehended, but this knowledge is dependent upon God's benevolent grace, and knowledge of the self remains illusive because only God comprehends what it is to be a human (Marion 2010, 66-67). Descartes, too, privileges the internal human self over sensual engagement with the external world and views self-reflexive, rational thought as the route to knowledge. Descartes preserves the Augustinian inward turn, but in the Cartesian theory of the human, the inner experience of "clear and distinct" thought, philosophically and logically rigorous knowledge, is itself an adequate foundation for knowledge of God, self, and the world. Knowledge of the world is no longer grounded in a transcendent beyond but in the human's ability to clearly represent the world through thought that strictly follows principles based in inductive and deductive reasoning (Holsclaw 2016, 1-2; Gilbert and Lennon 2005, 114-15)). Descartes' mind is autonomous, which marks the advent in Western thought of the human as a "sovereign, rational mind" (Braider 2012, 3). Augustine's soul is individual, but dependent on God and scriptural guidance; Descartes' mind, in contrast, is an atomistic entity liberated from a dependence relations with God, tradition, and communal forms of knowledge. Like Augustine, Descartes departs from a Greek sense of the dual nature

of reality, a view that did not disengage the human from the rest of material and immaterial existence. Descartes portrays reality as two substances, one material and another immaterial, and positions human essence as an immaterial mind. As mind, the human is severed from, and exists in a radically different form than, not only inanimate matter but all other living creatures. It is in the Cartesian doctrine of the human that rationality as human essence, atomism, and disengagement from the world take the theoretical forms that will persist in dominant contemporary Western thought.<sup>25</sup>

Descartes theorizes a cosmos that is composed of three types of things: God, matter, and minds, each with their own essence. God, as the Creator, exists as perfection. As in Christian doctrine, Descartes describes God as immaterial, omnipotent, the only independent substance, and as having fore-ordained all events that come to pass in the cosmos (*Principles* XL). Matter is the basic component of the physical universe which has the essence of extension in three dimensions and is governed by mechanical, deterministic laws of science. Minds resemble God, are immaterial, and are not bound by the same laws and so enjoy a degree of freedom. The essence of mind is thought with two faculties, intellect and will (Hatfield 2016,

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<sup>25</sup> In this discussion of Descartes, I focus on his metaphysics and theory of the human. These topics do not exhaust his contributions to science and philosophy which include numerous publications on mathematics, dioptrics, meteorology, and natural philosophy (Clarke 2003, xv). I also do not discuss one of Descartes' primary theoretical objectives, which was to advance a scientifically-based curriculum to replace the Aristotelian, scholastic education that was in vogue (Sorrell 1987, 33). A key thinker of this intellectual and social milieu, Descartes advances a comprehensive physics based on mathematical principles, a theory of knowledge grounded in the human ability to perceive the nature of reality through purely intellectual perception, and a rational, systematic method for establishing truth (Hatfield 2016, 8-11).

16). Descartes' cosmos displays strict substance dualism: God and minds are immaterial substance and matter is material substance. One implication of this version of dualism is that, while it extends Platonic theory, Descartes erases the hierarchy that dominated Greek thinking, a view that all of existence is ordered in a descending chain from God, to the mind or soul, to humans, animals, and, finally, inanimate matter. For Descartes, the two types of creation, mind and matter, are independent of one other, two substances with different attributes that are equally as real (Ben-Yami 2015, 105).

Descartes provides an account of creation that does not openly dispute the biblical account, but he offers a hypothesis, an evolutionary explanation, that counters the prevailing theological belief that God created the cosmos and its contents in the forms they now have:

But this is certain, and an opinion commonly received among theologians, that the action by which he now sustains it is the same with that by which he originally created it; so that even although he had from the beginning given it no other form than that of chaos, provided only that he had established certain laws of nature . . . it may be believed, without discredit to the miracle of creation, that, in this way alone, things purely material might, in course of time, have become such as we observe them at present . . . (*Principles* 52).

God might have set the cosmos in motion according to enduring, universal laws of physics which theoretically means that matter posited in the beginning has mechanistically produced matter in all of the forms that it exists. It was not necessary for God to create the variable forms of matter that exist but only for God to have set in motion mechanical principles of rest and motion that are, for Descartes, sufficient to explain how the cosmos evolved to become what is now observed. Into this world, at a certain stage of its evolutionary development, God

then created and placed humans that are comprised of an immaterial soul and a material body. Of the creation of humans, Descartes maintains, “I remain satisfied with the supposition that God formed the body of man wholly like to one of ours, as well in the external shape of the members as in the internal conformation of the organs” (*Principles* 53). The material cosmos may have evolved to its current form, but humans, as described in scripture, were endowed from the beginning with a certain set of attributes and capacities.<sup>26</sup>

Descartes’ rhetoric of human nature, which posits the human as both mind and matter, conforms to his dualistic order of creation. In the second meditation, after doubting a long list of what he once considered true, including the external world, his body, sense perceptions, and the products of his mind, Descartes decides that the one thing he cannot doubt is that he thinks. He can imagine that he does not have a body, but when he thinks, he knows, “I am, I exist. This is certain. . . . I am, therefore, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, soul, reason, intellect . . .” (*Meditations* 2:25). As did Augustine, Descartes equates the self, the “I,” with the immaterial soul or mind. Unless God is a deceiver, which due to God’s perfection cannot be true, to be human is to be a mind that doubts, understands, reasons, denies, wills, affirms, imagines, and feels (Goetz and Taliaferro 2011, 67). The self, the mind, is closely associated with a particular body, but the essential part of the

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<sup>26</sup> Descartes’ metaphysics are constructed with sensitivity to the religious tensions of the seventeenth century and the prosecution of proponents of a new approach to science (Clarke 2003, xv). In his correspondence, Descartes describes how, after Galileo’s arrest for a heliocentric conception of the solar system, he carefully managed his own relation with the church by claiming that some of his theories were hypothetical rather than factual (Hoyt-O’Connor 2008, xii). This strategy was not always successful, and during Descartes’ career both Protestants and Catholics charged him with being an atheist (Cress 1998, viii).

self is not dependent on the body; whether associated with a body or not, the soul is a substance whose essence and principal property is thought. The Cartesian soul is not, as it is for Homer, Plato, and Augustine, the principle of life for a body. Body and soul are not, as they are for Aristotle, the relation between matter and form. Descartes adopts a radical dualism in which body and soul are two distinct substances that exist independently of one another, and so posits a radical opposition between the human mind and material reality that extends to an opposition between the human internal experience of thought and self and the human experience of the external world (Thiel 2011, 37-38).

The human body, like all matter, is for Descartes a machine that functions according to universal, mathematical, deterministic physical laws. There is no need for a soul to explain the phenomenon of life because the body is a machine whose capacities can be explained entirely by the same principles that exist in inanimate nature (Ben-Yami 2015, 87). Descartes draws on the analogies of hydraulic machines like mechanical fountains or on clocks to describe how the body itself is its own explanation for life. Life connotes a working machine and death a machine that stops functioning:

“ . . . only because one of the principal parts of the body disintegrates . . . the body of a living man differs from that of a dead man as much as a watch or other automaton (that is, self-moving machine) when it is wound and contains the bodily principle of the movements for which it is constructed, along with everything required for its action, differs from the same watch or other machine when it is broken and the principle of its movements ceases to act” (*Passions of the Soul* 330:20-331:25).

Circulation, digestion, respiration, and muscular movements are, in other words, explainable entirely in mechanical terms. The cosmos is self-maintaining once God

imposes universal laws of nature; the human organism, likewise, is a self-maintaining machine once God “kindles in the heart” one of those “fires without light” (*Discourse on Method* 5: 53). When God creates the human, the heart’s heat becomes the engine that mechanically produces all of the processes that sustain life.

Descartes explains human physiology in mechanistic terms that correspond to the universal, deterministic laws of nature that govern all matter. Blood circulates because once it enters a chamber of the heart, heat causes the blood to expand and create pressure. This pressure forces the blood into others chambers and then into veins and arteries where “little membranes” are so placed to prevent backflow. The heart’s beat is a result of this movement of blood, and “this beating recurs as long as blood enters the heart afresh” (*Passions of the Soul* 333:15-334:1-10). From the heart emanate microscopic, corpuscular entities that move through nerve tubes, and the hottest blood particles go directly from the heart to the brain where they form “animal spirits” that then flow from the brain through the nerves to other parts of the body where they cause movement by opening and closing valves. In the other direction, animal spirits arise in the limbs as a result of external stimuli and travel back toward the brain through nerve tubes where they again open tiny entrances to nerves that are inside of the brain. The nerves are a mechanical system like the pipes in an automated water fountain; muscles are like the springs and joints that allow movements; and animal spirits are the circulating water (Ben-Yami 2015, 81). These movements depend on nothing extraneous, and expressly not on an animating spirit like a soul:

Thus all the movements we make without our will contributing (as often happens when we breathe, walk, eat, and in short do all the actions common

to us and beasts) depend only on the arrangement of our members, and on the course which the spirits excited by the heat of the heart follow naturally in the brain, nerves, and muscles—in the same way in which a watch's movements is produced by the sheer force of its spring and the shape of its wheels" (*Passions of the Soul* 341:25-342:6).

Descartes replaces the principle of life, the soul that was for the ancients the animating force of the human body, with a mechanistic view of life. The material, mechanical body no longer requires a soul to be alive, and the soul, distinct from life and the body, for Descartes becomes the mind.

Descartes is a substance dualist who distinguishes the body from the mind, but his description of the body, soul, and their relation to different thought processes and experiences is complex (Easton 2014, 19). Descartes does not, as did Plato, consider the relation of the soul to the body as a "pilot in a ship" but rather saw the body and mind as "intermingling" (*Passions of the Soul* 11:56). Descartes admits that things that occur in the body affect the mind and that thoughts affect the body, and he offers a mechanical explanation for this mutual relation that centers on the pineal gland at the base of the brain. When the soul wills the body to move, for example, this causes the pineal gland to make minute movements that cause animal spirits to flow through nerves that terminate in various muscles. Conscious thoughts in the soul, as when we consciously want to walk and take steps, thus cause bodily movements. In the opposite direction, external stimuli to nerves in the muscles cause animal spirits to move through the nerves toward the pineal gland. When the gland moves in a certain direction, this causes the soul to perceive or feel (*Passions of the Soul* 359:15025-360:1-5). Stimuli to the body, things that engage the senses like light or the sound of a bell, and sensations like hunger, thirst, and fear, thus

become conscious to the mind. The mechanical movements of the pineal gland in response to physical stimuli also account for memory and learning because the animal spirits entering the brain imprint on the soft material of the brain, leaving traces of physical experiences (Ben-Yami 2015, 9). Much of the soul's mental life, then, involves the body, and Descartes termed actions of the soul that terminate in the body and bodily sensations that terminate in the soul *passions*.

In his correspondence to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, Descartes admits that the union of the soul and body is difficult to understand (*21 May 1643*, 665). What everyone knows are three primitive notions—that we have a body, that we also have a soul, and that there is a union between them (*28 June 1643*, 691). The mistake that the ancients made, and that most people continue to make, is that in considering the union of body and soul and the effects they have on one another, the union of the two is conceived as “one single thing,” a material thing, a human (Ibid., 692). Knowing that a human is a single entity that has both a body and thoughts, the soul is erroneously seen as part of the body and as having the attributes of matter, that is, extension in space (Ibid., 695). The theoretical error is concentrating on the passions, on materiality, and neglecting the superior functions of the soul that prove not only its immateriality but its distinctiveness from the body. Physiology alone, says Descartes, cannot account for human experiences that involve the introspective, self-conscious communicative self. Flexible human intelligence and the ability to use language and convey ideas to others, the distinguishing features that separates humans from other animals, cannot be explained by the mechanical explanations that address the passions (Thomas 2009, 13-18). We fail to see, as

Descartes claims in the sixth meditation, that, “I really am distinct from my body and can exist without it” (*Meditations* 11:54). The soul does have interactions with the body, the passions, but the soul also has motions that are internal to itself, volition.

Like Augustine, Descartes focuses on internal, intellectual dynamics and privileges these over experience of the external world. Internal, volitional aspects of the soul are of particular importance to Descartes’ rhetorical account of the human because they are the route to true knowledge. Volition is of two sorts, intellect and will, and encompasses actions of the soul that terminate in the soul, as when we will to contemplate and love God or think about and imagine objects that are not material (*Passions of the Soul* 343:1-5). Intellect is naturally oriented toward the truth and comes with a desire or will that is directed toward its proper object, knowledge of the true (Alanen 2013, 177). The senses are useful in determining what is harmful or beneficial to the body, but the senses cannot reveal the true nature of reality (Hatfield 2016, 11). Because God has endowed each soul with innate ideas and with the light of reason by which to distinguish truth from error, the mind alone has the capacity to perceive the essences of God, matter, and mind (*Discourse on Method* 33). The intellect has the ability to think about, or to imagine, objects of contemplation; the will affirms or denies the truth of that object (Hatfield 2016, 13-14) Intellectual thoughts confirmed as true by the are certain knowledge, beyond skepticism, because God benevolently puts the notion of truth into each human’s mind in order that through the intellect and will an individual, thinking mind can know what is true. Descartes calls this process of the intellect and will engaging with what is true *rationality*.

Rationality is the basis of Descartes' atomistic, autonomous, sovereign human. His conceptualization of rationality, founded as it is on the radical difference between the immaterial mind and the material world, disengages the human from the rest of existence. Rationality is not, as it was for Plato and Aristotle, a means of apprehending the cosmos itself; rationality for Descartes is a capacity to think in order to construct a chain of clear and distinct ideas, from the most simple to the complex, that meet standards of certainty (Taylor 1989, 147). This difference is significant because rational insight, which for Plato and Aristotle involves contemplative acts that yield thought corresponding to the order of the world, for Descartes is thought that creates and represents an ordered world. For Descartes, the external, material world is meaningless until the human mind intellectually imposes an expressly mathematical order that reflects universal laws onto nature. For Plato and Aristotle, to be irrational is to fail to comprehend the harmony and order of the cosmos. For Descartes, to be irrational is to make errors in a formula for reasoning.<sup>27</sup> Because God does not deceive humans, they can be assured that rationality employed correctly will lead to "clear and distinct" ideas that are true. Where Augustine advocates for a will that turns inward and knows the self in order to transcend the world and know God, Descartes advocates for an inward journey that is an autonomous means of knowing the truth and attaining self-sufficient certainty (Taylor 1989, 156). What matters is that the human exercise the will to

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<sup>27</sup> Rationality involves following a strict set of rules that include: (1) never accepting anything as true that isn't clearly known to be such; (2) dividing any examination into as many parts as possible; (3) starting with the most simple and, step by step, deducing truth; and (4) being complete and omitting nothing (Descartes *Discourse on Method*, 22-23).

affirm or deny the intellect's insights (Mihali 1995, 219). The goal of a rational self is not, as it was for the Greeks to be attuned to a cosmos that is itself both material and immaterial, but to employ the intellect and will in the construction of a mental representation of the world that allows humans to exert control over materiality.

Agency for Descartes is less an ability to act on the world than it is to achieve self-control in order to be rational. Descartes positions human agency as the ability to overcome passionate movements of the soul emanating from the body to gain control over one's thinking (Meyer 2000, 141). To reason well requires divorcing oneself intellectually from, and acquiring the ability to control, the passions. A weak soul is incapable of the effort required to control both bodily sensations like thirst or hunger and emotions that register consciously in the mind. A passion of the soul is a "moment of consciousness which is spontaneous and where things are not voluntary or constrained by the soul" (Meyer 2000, 144). The conscious thought that arises from a passion, in other words, is not a product of reflection and reason. Human freedom for Augustine is willing a turn of the soul toward or away from God; human freedom for Descartes involves exercising the will so that passions are noted and denied so that they no longer fuel the obsessions that stand in the way of reason. A weak will is conscious of passions without being able to control them, and a strong will notes passions while remaining unaffected.

This inner battle of the soul for rationality is the foundation for Descartes' ethical and communal theories. Like Plato and Aristotle, Descartes sees happiness as the goal and achievement of a life lived well. Unlike the ancient Greek thinkers, Descartes is less invested in how community is affected by the state of individual

souls and more focused on the happiness of the individual which he defines as the inner tranquility of a strong will that is unaffected by the body, events beyond one's control, and other people. Happiness for Aristotle is the product of a virtuous life as it manifests in habits and actions with regard to others. For Descartes, happiness is individual and a product of rationality:

. . . the difference between the greatest souls and those that are base and common consists primarily in the fact that common souls abandon themselves to their passions and are happy and unhappy only according as the things that happen to them are agreeable or unpleasant' the greatest souls, on the other hand, reason in a way so strong and cogent that, although they also have passions, and indeed passions which are often more violent than those of ordinary people, their reason nevertheless always remains mistress, and even makes their afflictions service them and contribute to the perfect happiness they enjoy in this life (*Letter to Princess Elizabeth 18 May 1645*, 202).

A firm will leads to virtue and the ability to make judgments about the relative goodness of different desires and actions. Reason allows examination without interfering passions so that decisions are clear-headed, and by employing the mind well what should be done in various circumstances becomes clear (Rutherford 2013, n.p.). Descartes does not often prescribe specific virtuous actions, rather he directs people to use their own judgment, to exercise their sovereign will to reach clear and distinct motivations. While he advocates for treating others well, Descartes writes to Princess Elizabeth, "I confess that it is difficult to measure exactly to what degree reason ordains that we be interested in the public good. But also this is not a matter in which it is necessary to be very exact" (*6 October 1645*, 316). The important human dynamic is to exercise reason; a byproduct is that rationality also leads to virtuous behavior toward others.

Descartes names the ideal that makes happiness possible *generosity*. He

refers to generosity as a “remedy for all the disorders of the passions,” an attitude of esteem toward the self that becomes possible through knowing that one is always free to employ the will to judge and contain the passions (*Passions of the Soul* 447:17-20). When cultivated, self-esteem leads one to esteem others and to treat them well by overlooking their imperfections and distinctions (class, social status, etc.) in order to focus on their intrinsic worth. Because all people have the same moral status and potential for perfection, everyone deserves respect. (*Passions of the Soul* 448:5-15.). I want to stress that, while Descartes theorizes generosity as that which leads a person to be good to others, the foundation of generosity is not a relationship to others but an ideal orientation toward the autonomous self. This orientation toward self is based on the skill of severing connections between connections to the world that cause passions of the body and thoughts, a skill that Descartes says is maintained by attending to other, more worthy and rational thoughts. Perfecting the use of the will, and so acquiring wisdom of the true, leads to the ability to remain tranquil. Tranquility, acquired through reason, involves accepting what is beyond one’s control and taking complete responsibility for one’s responses to life:

Generosity is the best remedy . . . because, making us esteem very little any goods that can be taken away, and on the other hand making us greatly esteem liberty, we achieve absolute dominion over ourselves (*Passions of the Soul*, 481:20-25).

The goal of generosity is the self-esteem that comes from being an autonomous, sovereign self. This shift, from the ancients who considered care of the individual soul necessary to for harmonious and just human relations to a view that defines a virtuous life entirely in terms of the individual, is a shift from a collective attitude to

an atomistic one. Descartes, like Augustine, privileges the individual over the community. The ability to think rationally, for Augustine to direct one's thoughts toward God and for Descartes a method of clear judgment, takes precedence over relationships with others.

Descartes' portrayal of the human as an individualized, sovereign, immaterial mind disengaged from material existence has profoundly influenced how the human continues to be theorized in Western intellectual history. While Descartes' physiology, his portrayal of the pineal gland as the site of connection between body and mind, has obviously not held up over time, his description of the human as thinking mind and material body has largely defined the parameters within which both religious and secular theorists since the seventeenth century have conceptualized human nature. Like Augustine, Descartes departs from a Platonic sense of the dual nature of reality, a view that did not result in the human being disengaged from the rest of material existence, to position the human intellectually, socially, and ethically as disconnected from the physical world. To be human for Descartes is to be an isolated, autonomous mind with the intellectual capacity to construct true representations of the natures of self, God, and the world. The self is the mind and the material universe, including human bodies, is mere matter, necessary for human life but without meaning until human minds construct a mechanical, mathematical, and rational schema that corresponds to the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology. In the evolution of the dominant Western narrative concerning human nature, Descartes' influence is lasting. Centuries later, rhetorics of the human will continue to reflect the Cartesian frame.

## Material Humans in a Scientific World

Widespread belief in the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology as a basis for knowledge, that the scientific paradigm is now dominant in the intellectual sphere, has led to an attempt by some materialist scientists to construct theories of the human that correspond to the cultural supremacy of the scientific paradigm by theorizing entirely within a secular perspective. A caveat is needed here, a reminder that many scientists are also religious and that the view I am discussing here is the radical edge of materialist science. Similarly, many theologians now also accommodate, through a number of strategies, the merging of scientific and theological beliefs.<sup>28</sup> My intention is not to carve a stark line between science and religion, a demarcation that does not exist for many theories, but rather to analyze the consequences of a doctrine of the human that ascribes entirely to materiality on conceptualizations of agency and sociality. Scientific materialism is the view that only the physical world is real and if there were to exist a mind or human spirit, then those aspects of the human would have to conform to the physical principles and deterministic laws that define all matter. Because an immaterial substance does not fit into the physical principles of a scientifically defined reality, minds and spirits

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<sup>28</sup> Among the contemporary doctrines of the human that merge a theological and scientific view of the human is non-reductive materialism, a theological strategy that preserves a human soul in a scientific paradigm by adopting the mechanistic physical paradigm of materialist science while asserting that mental properties are distinct from, but dependent upon, physical properties. In this doctrine of the human, the soul is not a separate, immaterial substance inhabiting body; rather the soul is a “functional capacity of a complex physical organism” that accounts for capacities like rationality, morality, freewill, and the ability to be in relationship with God (Brown, Murphy, and Maloney 1998, *xiii*). These capacities of the soul evolved when the human organism reached a certain degree of complexity.

cannot exist. For a strict materialist, the mind is identical with the brain and all mental functions are identical to and explainable by physical processes (Murphy 1998, 11).<sup>29</sup>

A scientific materialist account of human nature, then, does not address what is known as the “mind/body problem” or the body and spirit and the relations between the two. For the ancient Greeks, the distinction between the spirit and the body is not problematic; that to be human involves both material and immaterial substances and/or material and immaterial processes that interact with one another is assumed. For Augustine, God’s creation of a material body with capacities that follow universal, natural laws and a soul that is free from determinism erases the need for an explanation for how two different substances interact. Free to create in whatever form desired, God has created humans as souls and bodies that are different substances that affect one another. Descartes is the first theorist in Western intellectual history who posits a need to explain how two different substances, minds and bodies, interact. Descartes’ scientific explanation for the mutual responsiveness of immaterial and material human substances centered on the pineal gland has not held up over time, but the scientific dilemma he formulated, the necessity of explaining how immaterial and material substances interact, has

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<sup>29</sup> There are other approaches to the mind-body issue that I do not explore here. The first, idealism, holds that the mental, and not the physical, is the ultimate reality and that the physical world is, in effect, reducible to the mind’s construction (Nagel 2012, 37). The existence of material objects is dependent upon the existence and activities of minds (Robinson 2011, 190). Strict idealism as a philosophical view lost traction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is no longer a dominant view. A second resolution is monism, a theory that says that the universe itself is composed of both physical and mental or immaterial properties (Nagel 2012, 57). I discuss a version of monism as it pertains to human nature in the next chapter.

preoccupied most Western theorists of human nature since the seventeenth century. With scientific materialism, this problem ceases to exist; humans are entirely material.

The worldview that undergirds scientific materialism is that of naturalism (Papineau 2011, 51). This orientation began in the seventeenth century as modern scientific methods began to supplant other routes, such as religion or tradition, to knowledge. The scientific careers of Descartes and his contemporaries mark a critical conceptual turn toward a belief that physical science could provide a “mathematically precise quantitative description” of reality, a description limited to the physical qualities of matter like shape, size, and motion and to the universal laws that governed the relations among them (Nagel 2012, 35-36).<sup>30</sup> In this paradigm, the world is intelligible because it conforms to universal natural laws, and it is these laws that make it possible for humans to understand and have knowledge of the cosmos. The assumption is that the cosmos itself functions according to the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology and constitutes a closed system of physical causation such that every event in the cosmos conforms to timeless, mathematical, determinate laws. Phenomena that do not conform to these laws or cause physical events are excluded from consideration as *real*. This metaphysical outlook dictates that if phenomena were to exist that are non-physical and lack causal effects, we could not have knowledge of them or confirm their reality (Papineau 2011, 64).

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<sup>30</sup> Descartes’ engagement with a modern science that applied mechanistic principles to explain natural phenomena was an effort shared by many of his contemporaries. Like Descartes, Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton in physics and Robert Boyle in chemistry promoted a scientific view of the universe as governed by universal, mathematically-expressed laws (Nadler 2013, 31).

Among human phenomena commonly excluded from reality in a materialist scientific perspective are spirits and mental processes like consciousness and intentionality or freewill.

Scientific materialists do not deny that humans experience consciousness and intentionality or that humans value certain things and behaviors over others, but these are not observable nor measurable like those physical objects—from subatomic particles to mountain ranges—that constitute material reality. In the history of Western science, the exclusion of the mind and values from the natural order, viewing the cosmos as mindless, neutral matter that functions according to mechanistic laws, has made possible great advances in the physical and biological sciences (Nagel 2012, 8). Correspondingly, a belief that knowledge of the natural order is possible only through science has come to dominate intellectualism. Because the universe is highly complex, explanations for all physical events are not yet known, but scientific materialists believe with advances in technology and scientific methodology that explanations will develop. Theoretically, everything that exists is available to human observation and measurement and, through application of the laws that govern physics, chemistry, and the biological sciences, can be known.

The rhetorics of human nature that accept this view of the cosmos and of knowledge theorize human attributes and capacities in conformance with the laws and principles that govern all matter, the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology. One of the most well known proponents of a scientific materialist description of human attributes and capacities is Daniel Dennett. Dennett claims to have solved the

Cartesian mind-body problem (1991, xi), scorns dualism in conceptualizing human nature, and asserts that the “fundamentally antiscientific stance of dualism is . . . its most disqualifying feature” (1991, 37). Dennett offers this view of human nature and the relation between bodies and minds:

The prevailing wisdom, variously expressed and argued for, is *materialism*: there is only one sort of stuff, namely *matter*—the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology—and the mind is nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain. According to materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth (1991, 33).

Like Descartes, Dennett likens the human body to a machine; unlike Descartes, Dennett also theorizes the brain as a machine.

The model Dennett proposes for the brain is that of a computer program that continues to evolve and become more complex but nonetheless operates strictly within the cause-and-effect physical laws that govern all material events. The experience of mental phenomena results from mechanical brain activities:

How could the brain be the seat of consciousness? . . . My argument is straightforward . . . It turns out that the way to imagine this is to think of the brain as a computer of sorts . . . By thinking of our brains as information-processing systems . . . we can discover how it might be that our brains produce all the [mental] phenomena (1991, 433).

Dennett admits that thoughts and perceptions are common human experiences, but he considers all forms of consciousness, including what seems like free will and the sense of a unified self, illusions of theories that continue to advance the “Cartesian Theater” of an existing mind that mediates physical experience. For Dennett, all perception and thought are accomplished in the brain by “parallel, multi-track processes of interpretation and elaboration of sensory inputs” (1991, 111). The

brain's neuronal activity, with accompanying chemical and electrical processes, explains complex human experiences that were once, due to ignorance and superstition, attributed to a soul or mind. Dennett cites neuropsychological data on brain activity as evidence of the brain functioning as a machine, although he admits that scientists have not yet revealed precisely how the brain results in the range of phenomena that humans experience as consciousness. Nonetheless, Dennett's confidence in science's eventual explanation of mental phenomena is secure.

Materialist science is capable of advancing knowledge of all reality:

But why should consciousness be the only thing that can't be explained? Solids and liquids and gases can be explained in terms of things that aren't themselves solids or liquids or gases. Surely life can be explained in terms of things that aren't themselves alive—the explanation doesn't leave living things lifeless. The illusion that is consciousness is the exception comes about, I suspect, because of a failure to understand this general feature of successful explanation (1991, 455).

The experience of being alive, of being conscious and making decisions, of feeling strong emotions, and even the sense that one is a self, to Dennett are only narratives produced by a complex, functioning brain. In this paradigm, the self is not a real object, and certainly not a soul or mind, but only a useful fiction (Martin and Barresi 2006, 279).

Another scientific materialist, Owen Flanagan, confronts the image Dennett creates of human nature as lacking in the qualities that make human life meaningful.

Flanagan agrees with Dennett on the scientific materialist view of the human being:

The mind or soul is the brain. Or better: Consciousness, cognition, and volition are perfectly natural capacities of fully embodied creatures engaged in complex commerce with natural and social environments. Humans possess no special capacities, no extra ingredients, that could conceivably do the work of the mind, the soul, or free will that have been traditionally conceived (2002, *xii*).

Like Dennett, Flanagan insists on the nonexistence of the soul or mind, but Flanagan also acknowledges that what makes life meaningful are humanistic values like love, friendship, benevolence, morality, compassion, and feelings of “connection to all creatures” (2002, *xiii*). The problem, as he describes it, is how to accommodate these human values in a cosmos that is materially and so biologically mechanistic, a cosmos in which there is no God or human spirit and there are no immaterial events. Flanagan appeals to Darwinian evolution and claims that all it is to be a human animal, including consciousness and ethical behavior, is the result of complex developments of the human organism in environments in which consciousness and behaving one way instead of another have been genetically selected as advancing the human species. There is no free will, but there are genes that prescribe certain behaviors, including those we designate as moral, because they further the species. Compassion and morality, too, are genetically determined. The constraints of environments, both physical and social, operate as biological and cultural niches that make some responses adaptive (2002, 263). Even higher order human capacities, such as for inductive reasoning, fit into this mechanism as fitness for humans comes to be defined as not only biological but also as cultural:

It is plausible that some sort of inductive capacities were selected for because such capacities causally contributed to fitness, to success at hunting, foraging, and mating . . . being a whiz at applying the sophisticated canons of inductive reasoning or being an avid reader or writer, can be rightly understood as being adaptive in the sense the possessing the relevant trait or ability contributes to knowledge, flourishing, happiness, and the like, without being adaptive in the sense that it contributes to genetic fitness . . . there came a time [in human evolution] when flourishing, living well in the senses that involve living meaningfully and living morally, came to be an end in its own right (2002, 313-314).

Humans evolved with biological fitness as the primary aim, but, over time, fitness, once reserved for survival and reproduction of the species, came to include human flourishing on levels beyond the physical. Flanagan expands the overriding paradigm of the mechanistic, cause-and-effect nature of the universe to include all human functioning, including the mental, moral, and artistic.

The theoretical trends toward individualism, autonomy, and disengagement initiated by Augustine and Descartes continue in the scientific materialist rhetorics of human nature. Theorizing the human in accordance with the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology skirts a solution to the mind-body relation. Augustine and Descartes resolve this issue by maintaining the dualism of an immaterial soul/mind and a material body; scientific materialists resolve the dilemma of mind/body interaction by jettisoning any immaterial aspect of the human. Despite erasing the immaterial site of consciousness, thought, and will, that which was formerly the soul or mind, scientific materialism continues, and exaggerates, a focus on internalization and rationality as the primary attribute that defines the human. Rationality for Augustine and Descartes is a method of divorcing oneself from the senses and calming the passions and emotions in order to enhance the internal capacity of the thinking agent to know reality. Rationality for scientific materialists consists of applying a method in which an ideally neutral, calm, disengaged observer studies phenomena within the confines of the laws of physics, chemistry and biology. Knowledge is defined as the fruits of this effort and other ways of knowing, Aristotle's sympathetic understanding, for example, or Plato's soulful contemplation of the order and harmony of the cosmos, are excluded. In a scientific materialist

paradigm, the internal ability to reason about the world comes to define what is real, and immaterial human attributes and capacities are unrecognizable and so considered nonexistent. The dualism that characterizes scientific views of human reduce the human to matter without spirit, and ancient Greek capacities that were theorized as aspects of the immaterial soul—for creation, ethical intentionality, and the ability to nurture immaterial connections among people, for example—are erased.

Objectified by a scientific paradigm, reduced to mere matter, humans are theorized as separate physical entities, individual objects that function according to the cause-and-effect dynamics of material reality. The radical inclusion of the human in matter, the claim that the human is nothing more or less than the rest of material existence, has paradoxically also isolated the individual human from the rest of the cosmos. That the proposed human relation to the rest of the cosmos is posited as that of another object that mechanistically reacts to laws of motion and rest means that, paradoxically, the human is theorized as both confined to functioning according to the laws that govern all nature *and* as separate from nature. Theoretically placed outside of the cosmic spirit that enveloped the ancients in the natural world and related to fellow humans exclusively by the cause-and-effect dynamics that govern interactions between one physical object and another, the human is further individualized.

Disengagement from the rest of existence has ethical consequences. No longer part of what the Greeks saw as an immanent plane of common existence, the scientific materialist adopts an instrumental approach in which external phenomena

are quantified and mapped within a knowable framework. What does not fit into this framework is dismissed. Charles Taylor discusses this aspect of contemporary doctrines of human nature in terms of a loss of meaning and communal values. “Instrumentalism,” Taylor notes, “the completion of the Cartesian goal of mathematically quantifying the world, has destroyed the ‘matrices’ where meaning formerly flourished” (1989, 500). Not only is the sacred lost, Taylor claims, but there is no common, immaterial, spiritual sphere that binds people together. Orienting values that were for the Greeks either grounded in tradition or products of contemplating the universe become products of subjectivities and means of self-fulfillment rather than for fulfilling the needs of community. Disengaged from the surrounding world, the human loses the spiritual and moral compass that the ancient Greeks considered part of the order and harmony of existence itself. The universe, mere matter that generates material change according to universal, determinate laws, is meaningless.

This scientific view erases how reality is more than simple inert matter that interacts according to laws of motion and rest. A scientific focus on individual existences, existences reduced to material objects, ignores the ontological fact of all existence as a state of co-existence. A “single being,” says Nancy, “is a contradiction in terms” because to exist singularly would entail a being that is own foundation and origin (2000, 12). The scientific construction of reality also ignores that to be is to exist in a field of random and novel movements, the dynamic interplay of various forces that characterize matter, and the advance of time. By focusing on objects instead of these interactive dynamics, positivist science also brackets off affectivity

which has serious consequences for rhetorical theories aimed at collectivity. Lost in this view is the intimate field of sensible and spiritual interactions that are preconditions for rhetoricity, those “extra-symbolic” dynamics that are irreducible to empirical and epistemological frames (Davis 2010, 3).

### Conclusion

In the Western intellectual tradition, the transformations in rhetorics of the human articulated by Augustine, Descartes, and scientific materialism are often narrated as aspects of the disenchantment of the world and the construction of the modern subject. In the early twentieth century, Max Weber, noting the consequences on modern life of rising capitalism and systematized knowledge, coined the term *disenchantment* to describe the replacement of spirit by a belief that mastery of the world can be achieved through science, intellection, and bureaucracy (Bennett 2001, 58). A simplistic version of this process through time is that a belief in human dependence on and vulnerability to a pantheon was displaced by belief in a monolithic God who governs the world which, in turn, was displaced by a scientific outlook that views all of existence as functioning without divine intervention according to universal, mechanistic, rules of causation. In this evolution, a cosmos characterized by mysterious, invisible forces beyond human comprehension or control becomes a mechanical world that can be known, manipulated, and controlled by humans. Disenchantment also refers to a world that no longer is characterized by universal values that preexist and have meaning without humans, a world in which the natural order is seen as being ordered by, and made

meaningful only through, human mental activity. A consequence of disenchantment is that a cosmic hierarchy that once positioned the human world as within, and made possible by, a realm that exceeds the human loses traction, and the human replaces any other influence, such as God or nature, as the source of orienting ethical values.

In a related theory, that of the modern subject, a Western inheritance that begins with Descartes, the human is characterized as an individual, autonomous mind that is disengaged from the natural world and separated from other persons. The human is not intimately related to and part of a cosmic order, the outlook of the Greeks, but is an individual entity disengaged from external material reality. As the concept of *mind* replaces *soul*, rationality comes to dominate conceptualizations of what it means to be human, and reason is posited as the human attribute that has the power to objectify, quantify, and reveal the world. To the modern subject, physical matter, the world, is blind and inert; only the human mind has the power to construct with certainty a reality within which lives are shaped that has meaning. The human is elevated to the top of the cosmic hierarchy, with the ability, through reason, to dominate the material world (Taylor 1989, 161). Similar to the theory of disenchantment, the modern subject and not the collective (as for Homer) or the cosmos (as for Plato and Aristotle), becomes the basis for constructing an order of thought that governs how individual lives and collectives are to be valued, created, and maintained.

Theories of disenchantment and of the construction of the modern subject often take the form of what Charles Taylor calls “subtraction narratives,” that is,

explanatory tales structured by arcs that reveal how, for example, once outdated religious beliefs are out of the way science reigns, or once traditional superstitions about human nature are upended an explanation of the human as essentially a rational being comes to the fore (Smith 2014, 24). As Taylor points out, subtraction narratives often assume a linear progression without excess, thus veiling how conflicting beliefs have always coexisted and how prior beliefs continue a subterranean existence along with current ones (2007, 574-577). In sympathy with Taylor's view, my version of the transformation of dominant doctrines of the human nature highlights what has been diminished in conceptualizations of the human and the human relation to the rest of existence. My point is that diminishment, as compared to subtraction, implies that what has been attenuated continues to haunt or disrupt the margins of more contemporary theories.

The theories of disenchantment and the modern subject describe the consequences of the dominant Western narrative regarding human nature that I develop in this chapter. In this narrative, a material world that functions according to physical, mechanical causality and has no immanent meaning for humans is experienced in finite, human time as opposed to eternal, cosmic time. This narrative fails to account for the human experience of engaging with aspects of eternity, human knowledge beyond empiricism, and human capacities for freedom and the creation of novelty. Doctrines of the modern subject reduce human nature to rationality and a capacity for instrumental control over self and the world but do not adequately explain the immaterial human attributes and capacities that were, for the Greeks, encompassed in the doctrine of the soul. The conceptualizations of

human nature explored in this chapter contribute to doctrines of the human that, like theories of disenchantment and the modern subject, diminish aspects of human nature that bear significantly on, and diminish, the potential for humans to imagine, create, and maintain new forms of humane community. The continuing productivity of ancient thought for contemporary intellectual investigation entails reviving debate regarding those aspects of being human, individually and socially, that remain unsettled and open to conjecture. Bracketed off, but still existent, aspects of our theories about the human continue to have political potential on the levels of both theory and praxis for contemporary doctrines of human nature.

This chapter develops a dominant Western narrative regarding human nature that diminishes human potential for community; in the next, I explore challenges to this narrative that restore some of the political potential, grounded in immaterial aspects of the human, that are legacies of the ancient Greeks. The theorists I discuss, Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Jean-Luc Nancy posit sources of knowing beyond the rational/scientific, an immanent, immaterial/material plane of connection among all beings, an ethics that is known through contemplation of the cosmos, and the need to transform the self in order to contribute to sociality

CHAPTER 3  
RECLAIMING HUMAN SPIRIT:  
SPINOZA, BERGSON, AND NANCY

Introduction

My central claim in this project is that belief in the human ability to create and sustain ethical community becomes more possible with the revival of the human spirit in rhetorics of human nature. I began with Greek conceptualizations of human nature as portrayed by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle to demonstrate how the human spirit, conceptualized as the soul, was a means of investigating the origins of various types of insight and knowledge, the participation of finite beings in the infinite cosmos, and the ethical relation of the self to the rest of existence. I then explored the influence of religion, philosophy, and science on the degradation of the concept of the human spirit in Western thought. In this chapter, I analyze three philosophers—Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Jean-Luc Nancy—who posit theories of human nature and existence that include immaterial attributes and capacities. These philosophers acknowledge that to be human is to be both material and spiritual, and they view the spirit as foundational to ethical insights and actions (Spinoza 1992, 237; Bergson 2007, 103; Nancy 2008, 126). Their conceptualizations of human nature are not uniform, they write at different historical moments and reflect and constitute the worldviews of their times, and they have different

investments guiding their theoretical projects. What Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy have in common is a commitment to challenging Western philosophical thought by, in part, critiquing prevailing theories of the human and insisting that human nature can be explained fully only by invoking something immaterial, the human spirit. In so doing, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy create potential for rethinking the political possibilities of human agency in forming and maintaining community.

In the last chapter, I noted the prevailing tendency in Western philosophy to think in dualisms, formulations that rely on positing two opposing terms and negating one of them. While it is tempting to claim that Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy resolve dualisms or theorize outside of conceptualizations that rely on oppositions like material/immaterial, rational/irrational, and individual/collective, this is an over-simplification. More correct is to describe their theoretical efforts as denouncing the dualisms that characterize much of Western thinking by responding to existing theories and offering alternative conceptualizations of the cosmos, human nature, and ethical agency. The language of dualism in some cases remains—there are still minds and bodies, and immaterial and material planes of existence, for example—but their theories incorporate both terms in novel ways. For example, Spinoza responds to Descartes' metaphysical division of what exists into two substances, one material and another immaterial that are governed by different universal laws, by theorizing a monistic universe that consists of only one substance, God or Nature, that is expressed both materially and immaterially. In Spinoza's metaphysics, all aspects of the one substance are governed by the same universal principles (*Ethics* I P17). Bergson critiques the epistemological duality of,

on the one hand, knowledge based in intellectual rationality versus, on the other hand, ways of knowing that have been denigrated as irrational in Western philosophy. Bergson grants that rationality and discursive logic are necessary for acting on the world, but he maintains that only intuition, an immediate apprehension of the world, can generate knowledge of the reality of existence (2007, 103). Nancy engages in a reformulation of the individual/collective dichotomy by critiquing ontologies that begin with the individual and then posit a universe of self and others. Nancy asserts that we must think differently and begin instead with co-existence in order to appreciate that what exists is a *we* or a *with* that is not in addition to individual being but is the heart and foundation of all existence (2000, 30). By complicating dualisms, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy interrupt established ways of thinking about human nature and ethical human relations.

My decision to group these three philosophers goes beyond the ways in which they approach dualisms in Western thinking. Taken together, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy mark key historical moments that facilitate the composition of a counter history, a genealogy that has been largely latent in Western theory. While other philosophers could have been included, this group of thinkers offer insights toward a perspective that revitalizes the centrality of human spirit for human political agency. Their approaches to ontology, rhetorics of human nature, and ethics differ, sometimes markedly, but they all offer different ways of considering the themes I focused on in the last chapter that tend to dominate Western thinking about human nature. In response to a Western philosophical tendency to

conceptualize human nature in terms of a mind-body split with a privileging of mind and a focus on rationality as the essence of being human, these philosophers conceptualize the human as both matter and spirit and admit capacities for knowledge that exceed rationality as hitherto theorized. Bergson, for example, highlights not rationality, but the human capacity for a direct and unmediated experience of reality, as the source of knowledge of existence. Nancy rejects knowledge grounded in discursive logic and advocates for knowledge that is grounded in sense, a concrete physical and spiritual experience of existence. Challenging theories of the human that begin with a metaphysics focused on the individual, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy focus on collectivity, on humans as dependent on one another, and indeed on all of existence, for the well-being of self and other. Spinoza says that human happiness and joy are impossible without community, Bergson sees the human as radically and inescapably part of all that exists, and Nancy considers the notion of a single being a “contradiction in terms,” something impossible and absurd that would have to be its own origin. Finally, all three of these philosophers reject conceptualizing the human as detached from, and superior to, the rest of existence. Spinoza theorizes the human as part of an immanent, material and spiritual plane of existence. Bergson conceptualizes a radically interconnected world that includes all entities, living and nonliving. Nancy defines metaphysical reality as co-existence, as being-with all those entities and living beings who share space and time. These philosophers maintain that apprehending this interconnectivity is a basis for ethical communal action.

It is in these ways that, taken together, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy

contribute to the construction of a counter-narrative to those that emerge in dominant philosophical, scientific, and religious frames. This counter-narrative echoes many of the qualities of ancient Greek theories of human nature that stressed the spirit or soul in relation to collectivity, but in reconfigured modes that lend support to a conceptualization of rhetorical agency grounded in co-existence and affective responses. In Plato's conceptualization of *psyche*, the human soul shares immaterial characteristics with a spiritual realm that extends throughout the cosmos, linking all creatures, human and nonhuman. Spinoza, likewise, theorizes a radically interconnected universe in which everything, all living and nonliving entities, is expressed as both matter and spirit. For Aristotle, the soul as *nous* is the mind that engages not only rational knowledge but a sympathetic understanding of the essence of the world. Bergson similarly promotes intuition as the spiritual capacity to experience the underlying mobility and change that essentially characterize the universe. Homer theorizes *thumos* as an immaterial human capacity for righteous anger and an ethical orientation to the world. Nancy posits a human immaterial capacity he calls spirit as the ability to open up to and make commitments to a shared ethical existence. My claim is not that Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy repeat exactly the conceptualizations of human spirit that the Greeks constructed but that, in challenging dominant ways of theorizing human nature, they replicate some of the key characteristics of human spirit that the Greeks theorized as foundational to community. Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy agree with the Greeks that to have spirit, to be spirit as well as matter, is more than affectability on a plane of immaterial or transcendent existence; spirit is a metaphor

encompassing the human connection and interdependence with the rest of existence, a capacity for knowledge outside of the logics of discourse and science, and an understanding of oneself and one's place in the universe that fuels ethical relations with others.

### Spinoza's Monistic Human

Spinoza (1637-1677) begins the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* with an explanation for why he turned to philosophy as his life's work:

After experience had taught me the hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life, and I realized that all the things which were the source of my anxiety held nothing of good or evil in themselves save in so far as the mind was influenced by them, I resolved at length to enquire whether there existed a true good, one which was capable of communicating itself and could alone affect the mind to the exclusion of all else, whether, in fact, there was something whose discovery and acquisition would afford me a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity (1992, 233).

Spinoza realizes that the pursuit of "riches, honor, and sensual pleasure" causes anxiety and depression, and his insight is that true goodness and happiness require the effort to purify the intellect so that the mind can contemplate that which is foundational to a fulfilled human life. Purification of the mind requires intentionally turning thoughts away from knowledge originating in opinion, sensations, and inference and toward perceptions of a thing's essence or cause (1992, 237). This turning makes it possible to live a full life, and Spinoza proposes that humans who desire fulfillment of their potential must acquire knowledge of the essence of human nature and, echoing Plato and Aristotle, of the human place in and relation to the cosmos. "The more things the mind knows," he says, "the better it understands both its own powers and the order of Nature" (1992, 242). Understanding the nature of

the self nurtures self-responsibility and self-direction toward perfecting one's own nature; understanding the nature of the universe allows for restraint from useless pursuits and the ability to pursue happiness for both oneself and others. Spinoza's theories, in which he emphasizes the relations among metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, offer a view of the cosmos, a doctrine of human nature, descriptions of the human condition and human agency, and an ethical route to human freedom and happiness.<sup>31</sup>

Spinoza pursues an ontology that begins not with an account of creation but with a critique of how philosophy has posited God as transcendentally necessary for existence. Other philosophers have positioned God outside of the natural order as a precondition for explaining the creation and perpetuation of all that exists, but Spinoza considers the belief in God as the creator—and as the supreme law giver, judge, and source of comfort—as a superstition without foundation (Nadler 1999, 187). Humans have an inadequate idea of God due to an inadequate reading of scripture, and they have failed to understand that God is a human construction based on taking the best human qualities—power, compassion, and wisdom, for example—and ascribing them to a transcendent, fictional deity (Deleuze 1992, 56). Breaking with his predecessors, including Descartes, Spinoza declares: “I do not separate God from Nature as everyone known has done” (*Ethics* I P6). Spinoza insists that God exists *as* Nature, as the one substance from which all that exists

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<sup>31</sup> Spinoza's major work, the *Ethics*, is a critical response to and a reformulation of Cartesian philosophy in geometric form. Other major influences include Aristotle's conceptualization of the distinctions between substance and attributes and the political philosophies of Spinoza's contemporaries, Grotius and Hobbes (Scruton 2002, 23-24).

flows. There is no deity with the power to create order from chaos or to intervene in miraculous fashion in the world of humans. God is the only substance that can be or be conceived, in itself or all alone, Nature. God and Nature are for Spinoza interchangeable terms denoting that which is eternal and acts out of its essence (*Ethics* I P 14). Spinoza rejects the dualism of transcendence and immanence and replaces it with the assertion that there is no outside of God or Nature; everything that exists is part of the same immanent plane of existence.<sup>32</sup>

God or Nature *is* substance, real being, from which and in which all that is exists (Nadler 1999, 187). God is Nature unfolding in a myriad of forms over time, as bodies and as ideas, as mountains and streams, and as planets and stars. God is the events and thoughts that characterize a living being, the erosion of river banks, and the motion of the heavens. God, Nature, or Substance is the universe itself, a system of interrelated entities, forces, and events (Feldman 1992, 11). The essence of God *as* Nature, the one eternal and infinite substance, is to be expressed as what exists. This expression takes place on two levels: first, the one substance expresses its essence in an infinite number of attributes which are then expressed in modes, or the existences of particular things. The idea of expression in Spinoza's system explains both the unity of substance and the diversity of what exists (Deleuze 1992, 16). What exists is God or Nature expressed in a multiplicity of forms, each of which reflects the entirety of substance itself. Of the infinite attributes of substance, humans are able to comprehend two, those of extension and thought. Spinoza

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<sup>32</sup> Spinoza's monism is complex in that his *one* substance continues to reflect the different natures of the material and the immaterial as matter and ideas. Monism for Spinoza thus continues to reflect a duality.

critiques philosophies that make of mind and matter two substances and that consider ideas and bodies as inhabiting separate realms of existence. For Spinoza, ideas are not representations of matter; matter is not a construction of minds. Mind and matter, ideas and bodies, are both of and in substance, two orders of the same reality that always and everywhere exist together in God or Nature where “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of material causes” (*Ethics* II P7). Ideas and bodies are expressions of God/Nature that co-exist, two perspectives on the same reality. Humans may experience bodies that are extended and thoughts that are not extended as two different categories of reality, but from the perspective of God or Nature, Spinoza says, everything is “everywhere the same,” and existence is one unified system of interrelations that operates according to universal causal laws (*Ethics* I P15). Substance, God or Nature, is indivisible and self-perpetuating, and there is no need for a transcendent power to explain existence.

Spinoza’s universe is governed by one universal law, that of determinism. Spinoza considers God or Nature free because substance “exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone,” but everything else that comes into existence is “caused by something external that also has an external cause and so on, says Spinoza “to infinity” (*Ethics* I P28). This *to infinity* is a causal chain that includes God or Nature: Substance is free, but it acts as it must out of its essence. This means that God or Nature does not benevolently create and order existence for any ends, and in particular not for human ends, and God does not intervene in human or any other existence counter to natural law. There is no

teleology to existence, rather, substance acts according to the “laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen and change from one form to another” (*Ethics* I P15). From the infinite attribute of extension flows the determinate laws that govern the relations of all physical entities; from the infinite attribute of thought flows the laws that govern the relations of all ideas (Nadler 1999, 5). Physical entities and thoughts do not exist, as they do for Descartes, in two realms that function according to different laws, determined for bodies and free for minds. In Spinoza’s system, physical entities and thoughts, bodies and ideas, co-exist as two expressions of, or perspectives on, the same reality. This reality is determined by God or Nature’s infinite power and essence from which “all things have necessarily flowed, or always followed, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle, it follows, from eternity to eternity that its three angles are equal to two right angles” (*Ethics* I P17). God or Nature could not be other than it actually is or produce things that exist in forms other than they actually do. All modal existences, animals and humans, rocks and plants, amoebas and atoms, function according to one, universal, eternal law of determinism.

Descartes’ determinism as it applies to extended bodies portrays a mechanistic world that he likened to a clock or mechanical fountain, but Spinoza paints a deterministic world characterized by a mobile, complex, and energetic field of interrelations among different forces. Spinoza says that what exists is distinguishable, one entity from another, not on the basis of composition or appearance, but on the basis of motion, rest, speed, and slowness. Bodies and ideas are deterministically resting or moving according to their interactions with other

bodies and ideas (*Ethics* II P13). The interrelatedness of this interaction is further explained through Spinoza's conceptualization of *conatus* as a striving of everything that exists, living and nonliving, to persevere in relation to others existent entities. All modes—trees, badgers, and humans, for example—participate in the power of existing, which is God or Nature's power. Existing is a power, a force, a capacity to act and to be acted upon, to affect others and to be affected, that is the essence of all that is (Deleuze 1992, 90-91). Tree roots extend into the earth and in so doing displace dirt and detritus; badgers seeking food disrupt the roots of trees to forage grubs; humans desiring warmth cut tree limbs to build fires. Life itself is this interaction as each mode pursues an increase in *conatus*. Some bodies, an amoeba for example, are simple and interact with simple dynamics; other bodies, a human for example, are made up of many less complex bodies and are capable of being affected by, and affecting, many other entities at the same time. Spinoza sees the complexity of these interactions, of all of what exists moving and being moved as each entity strives to exist, as forming an "infinitely changeable universe," with an infinite number of co-existing forces affecting one another's states of rest or motion (Deleuze 1992, 205). The universe, God or Nature, is determined, but the one law of existence yields an ever-shifting field of forces acting, sometimes in concert and at times in competition, to bring about the composition and decomposition of all that exists.

Spinoza's rhetoric of human nature corresponds to his view of God or Nature in that bodies and minds are not parts of two different realms of reality but reflect the monism, the single substance, that characterizes all of existence. For Spinoza, a

human body is a mode that “in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence so far as he is considered an extended thing,” and a human mind is a mode that has thoughts that “are modes which express God’s nature in a certain and determinate way” (*Ethics* II d1, p1). A person consists of a mind and a body that exists; bodies and minds are inseparable. Bodies are part of God’s infinite attribute of extension and minds are part of God’s infinite attribute of thought, both aspects of the one substance. There is one being, a human, that can be conceived of either as a mode of extension, a body, or as a mode of thought, a soul. Unlike Descartes’ human, where the mind exercises reason to control the body’s passions, in Spinoza’s conceptualization of the human, neither the body nor the soul is dominant. A human acts and is acted, both physically and mentally, according to the one, universal, determined law of God or Nature. A human body and mind move or are at rest in ways determined by other modes—other bodies and thoughts. The human mind-body is very complex, composed Spinoza says, of a “great many individuals of other natures—some soft, some fluid, others hard” (*Ethics* II P1-1). The complexity of the human body results in an inability of the mind to have adequate knowledge of both its own body and other bodies. Although a human feels and perceives things in the natural world and knows that encounters with other bodies in the world affect the body, knowledge of the determinate ways that a human is affected by the world, both physically and mentally, is always inadequate. In most cases, Spinoza says, humans are “conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined” (*Ethics* II P35).

Spinoza’s conceptualization of human agency involves *conatus*, which for

humans is a power, an appetite, involving both the body and soul/mind. "This appetite," Spinoza says, "is the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation" (*Ethics* III P9). Preservation is promoted not only through fulfilling basic human needs for food, shelter, and companionship but through all of the activities, mental and physical, that increase the human ability to fully live out one's nature. *Conatus* involves seeking one's physical and mental advantage through purposeful interaction with other bodies and minds in order to increase one's power of acting in and on the world. *Conatus*, as an appetite or power that strives to express one's nature fully, is increased or decreased depending on encounters with other bodies and minds. As a force that can be energized or enervated depending on interactions, *conatus* implies the need to curtail those behaviors and appetites, and rejecting those ideas, that do not increase power. Spinoza distinguishes between *passions* that are caused by other bodies or ideas whose origins are misunderstood, and *actions*, or behaviors that stem from reasoned self-understanding and understanding one's relation to the rest of existence. A body and mind that responds passively when interacting with other bodies and minds, being moved by external forces alone, will engage in behaviors and thoughts that do not enhance *conatus*. Bodies and minds that responds actively increase in power and have the potential to fulfill one's nature.

In Books IV and V of the *Ethics*, Spinoza addresses human freedom as the power of reason over the affects of the body and mind. Humans are part of nature and so determined in body and mind by external forces that cause a range of thoughts and feelings. Although reason can never eliminate these affects, reason

does have the power to release humans from the bondage of a strictly affective existence (*Ethics V*, preface). Reason employed toward self-understanding releases the human from the necessity of acting on determined thoughts and feelings. This power to act independently of inevitable, determined thoughts and feelings is what Spinoza calls freedom. “Every action in which we are determined from an affect which is a passion,” says Spinoza, “can be determined by reason, without that affect” (*Ethics V* P59). This is to say that humans can use reason to consider an affect—love, envy, physical pain and discomfort, or any kind of emotion or feeling—from a reasoned, adequate state of mind. To do so requires knowledge of the affects themselves, separating affects from confused and inadequate ideas of external causes, and understanding oneself in relation to the rest of God or Nature (*Ethics V* P20). Note that human freedom here, unlike for Descartes, is not the power of the free mind over the determined body, but the power of reason to understand the bondage resulting from passively reacting to both thoughts and feelings. Human freedom is the capacity to orient the mind toward ever increasing reason, and the more that one can accomplish acting out of reason instead of on the basis of affects, the more one is free.

Acting from reason requires understanding one’s own nature and the state of Nature writ large as it pertains to being human, where bodies and minds are subject to determined laws, but also where understanding oneself in relation to the rest of existence enables the human to increase one’s *conatus* and so live more fully. Freeing the self from bad passions, becoming more reasonable, requires eliminating inadequate ideas and acquiring true ideas. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza outlines different

ways of knowing or perceiving things (*Ethics* II P40).<sup>33</sup> The least valid kind of knowledge is by report or sign, which includes all that one knows simply by being told that something is true; this knowledge, says Spinoza, is indirect, often false, and cannot be verified. A second way of knowing is through “random experience,” that is, experiences that are based in perceptions which are always multiple and to some degree confused. In this case, general inferences are often made on the basis of similar events, and inductive reasoning leads to a conclusion that may or may not be true. Another way of knowing is “from that fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things” (*Ethics* II P40). Adequate ideas are reasoned ideas that perceive the true nature of things. A final means of knowing is through intuition, the capacity of humans to have a direct perception of the essence of certain aspects of God or Nature. The human mind, as part of the mind of God or Nature, has access to direct knowledge of human nature and Nature. Understanding affects through reasoned thought makes it possible to know how affects function in Nature and to make sure that affects “constitute the smallest part of the mind” (*Ethics* V P 20). This type of intuitive knowledge, however, is achieved only rarely because for the most part humans persist in accepting only lesser forms of knowledge. Humans rarely understand their true nature, and they continue to act on the basis of passions and inadequate ideas thereby thwarting their own ability to increase *conatus* by failing to recognize that they need not act out of affective responses to others and have the capacity to act purely out of the necessities imposed the determined laws of God or Nature. In other words, a person cannot

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<sup>33</sup> In various writings, Spinoza offers different schemas for knowledge, sometimes distinguishing three types and, at other times, the four types I mention here.

avoid feeling angry any more than she can drain an ocean or make a mountain disappear, but a person *can* decide to minimize the attention she gives to her feeling, decide not to act out of anger toward another, and chose instead to pursue behavior that is based on reason. Actions based in reason lead to increased *conatus* and an enhanced ability to live out one's true nature.

Spinoza's theories of ethical communication and community are grounded in his notions of *conatus*, reason, and freedom. The degree to which Spinoza asserts that the primary aim of each individual is to increase her own *conatus*, however, seems at odds with ethical collectivity. Spinoza's view is clearly that what is good and right for each person to do is precisely that which fuels their own happiness and power:

Since reason demands nothing contrary to Nature, it demands that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, what will really lead a man to greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone strive to preserve his own being (*Ethics* IV P18).

Virtue, says Spinoza, is acting from one's nature and, and joy consists in wanting this sense of virtue over all other desires. No one "can desire to be blessed, to act well and to live well" unless at the center of life is the desire to increase one's own power, a desire that is not undertaken for the sake of anything else (*Ethics* IV P21, P25). Good and bad do not exist in God or Nature; encounters that increase individual power are good, and encounters that decrease individual power are bad or evil. Ethical collectivity, usually assumed to require that individuals sacrifice some of their own desires and curtail their own powers, thus seems to be in conflict with Spinoza's view of a good individual life. Spinoza points out that most collective forms, the city for example, are not associations motivated by reason; collectives

generally are motivated by a fear of human nature and Nature where people are forced to renounce their natural right to power and to give power to a sovereign who uses it against them. The collective, reasoned, ethical task, Spinoza maintains, is different. The collective ethical task is to employ reason in order to increase the *conatus* of everyone. Spinoza resolves the apparent contradiction between increasing the *conatus* of the individual and increasing the *conatus* of each member of a collective by stressing that all of life is interdependent and by asserting that what is good for the individual, the pursuit of increased rationality and power, also inevitably benefits the community.

Acting from one's nature is always beneficial to an individual; acting from one's nature requires acting from the knowledge of one's place in the universe, which is always one of radical interdependence. A free person, says Spinoza, is concerned with the well-being of others: "The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for others" because, to the degree that others are virtuous, interactions with others who are also acting from reason and free will increase one's own ability to be free. Caring for others increases one's own ability to be rational and free because the more others in one's social world who are striving also to increase their rationality and *conatus* translates into more opportunities to interact with people who "agree with one's nature" (*Ethics* IV P3). To the degree that one can interact with those who agree with their nature, the force of those interactions will increase one's *conatus*. Conversely, interacting with others who are not seeking a virtuous life increases the possibility that one will have one's *conatus* decreased. The more humans act out of their natures, the more society

benefits because “when each man seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to one another” (*Ethics* IV P35). People who are employing rationality will not only enjoy life more but will, by minimizing the effect of negative feelings and emotions in order to act only from adequate ideas treat each other ethically, repaying the “hate, anger, and disdain of others” with “love or nobility” (*Ethics* IV P45). The person of virtue who lives according to the guidance of reason is thus happy when others are benefitted and is generous, honest, just, courteous, and fair (*Ethics* IV *Appendix xv*). The human’s rational freedom is radically social, one in which a person who is guided by reason and strives to live fully also “desires to maintain the principle of common life and common advantage” (*Ethics* IV P73). Common advantage requires curbing appetites and passions to serve the common good and finding joy in those endeavors that bring people together in friendship and harmony.<sup>34</sup>

Spinoza does not privilege the human; humans are intimately and inescapably embedded in the whole of God or Nature as one more finite existence in an infinite reality. Only by understanding this radical interconnection can a human live a full, joyful, ethical life. Spinoza’s ethical philosophy echoes the views of Plato and Aristotle in his focus on the necessity of each person striving to be a better,

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<sup>34</sup> A number of more contemporary philosophers find in Spinoza’s philosophy a basis for optimism about human political agency and social change. Rosi Braidotti sees the collective and interdependent nature of *conatus* as a basis for “self and other serving rationality that nurtures ethical responsibility and action” (2012, 151). Antonio Negri reads the conceptualization of *conatus* as a powerful force capable of motivating collective resistance against repression (2013, *xiii*). Gilles Deleuze sees Spinoza offering a way to know human nature and a way to use that knowledge to combine our efforts with the efforts of those with whom we are compatible in order to increase *conatus* collectively (1992, 262).

more virtuous person in order to have ethical community. Spinoza, like these ancient Greeks, links knowledge of the nature of existence to an orientation to a good, fulfilled life (Lloyd 1996, 141). Understanding the interconnectivity and interdependence of all existence and comprehending the interplay of forces that nurture *conatus* enables humans to posit an objective “goodness” by which to guide life. Goodness here is that which benefits myself and so also others; virtue is the desire and effort to increase not only my own, but others people’s, power of acting. Understanding the nature of the self and the universe allows one to work toward perfecting one’s nature, which leads to joy. There is no need for a punishing deity to motivate a good life because it is through understanding the nature of existence that goodness becomes a quest. Knowing that one’s true nature is to be free, powerful, and joyful leads to an increase in ethical actions and a more free, powerful, and joyful collective.

### Bergson’s Intuitive Human

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) begins his engagement with Western philosophy with a critique of what he deems as a “lack of precision” that has hampered efforts to explain existence (2007, 1). This lack of precision has resulted in philosophies that create abstract, discursively logical systems that do not, and cannot, adequately reflect reality. Bergson insists that the only way to know reality is to study human experience, but philosophy demands that human experience be denied in order to construct unassailable abstract systems. In truth, most philosophers do begin with the experience of a concrete and simple sense of what is missing or wrong with

existing philosophical thought. Bergson points to Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza as examples of philosophers who reject prevailing philosophical doctrines because of an inner voice that insists that those doctrines are impossible. "Impossible," says Bergson, "because a certain experience, confused perhaps, but decisive," recognizes faulty facts or poor reasoning (2007, 91). This confused insight is always a breach of abstract thought that heralds the possibility of something novel being revealed but, inevitably, philosophers faced with accepted ideas distort and discard their own insights because they feel obliged to bring their own complicated and unsure thoughts into conformance with established forms of philosophical expression. To avoid this folding of the new into the old and the erasure of the possibility of thinking differently, Bergson advocates a radical solution: philosophy should replace the method of abstraction with the method of intuition and replace the common object of its endeavors, matter, with spirit. A focus on spirit guided by intuition will, Bergson believes, ground philosophy in concrete human experience. In his philosophical efforts, Bergson employs this strategy to conceptualize a universe characterized by continual flow and innovation, a human who is both matter and spirit capable of a degree of agential freedom, and an ethical future that admits the potential for humans to respond in novel and humane ways to the demands of collectivity.

Bergson's theory of reality and his rhetoric of human nature revolve around his conceptualization of *duration*. The universe has been theorized inadequately, he charges, due to a lack of attention to lived experience, resulting in philosophy that has faulty notions of space and time. Philosophy errs in treating space and time as if

they are the same and confusing real, lived time—duration—with scientific or philosophical time. Reality is characterized by an uninterrupted flow of time, that is, by duration; philosophy, in contrast, deals only with discrete slices of time that are made static. The failure to understand the nature of reality has occurred largely because philosophy has failed to comprehend the evolutionary function of intelligence, which is not to produce knowledge but to select what is of particular interest to a being who must act on the world in order to survive and thrive. Human intelligence has evolved in response to practical necessary activities oriented toward, for example, finding food, erecting shelter, or fashioning tools. Philosophy has failed to discern that discursive thought, including analytical thought, is a biological adaptation oriented toward action in and on a world in which humans must meet the requirements of existence. Because reality is too vast and complex to be considered in its entirety, the intellect focuses attention on only that part of reality that must be acted on and by so doing constructs representations of a diminished, manageable world.

Philosophy, science, and even common sense engage in this process, and because action is easiest in an ordered, recognizable world, the intellect pursues fixity and immobility to construct a calculable, predictable world (Bergson 1998, 153). It is this cognitive process that leads to a confusion between space and time, a confusion Bergson illustrates with the examples of counting sheep and observing a flying arrow. It is not cognition that is the problem, but its reductive use. When attention is focused on a flock of sheep—in reality or in the imagination— individual animals can be localized as occupying different points in space and so can be

counted. Confusion between time and space occurs when the same process is applied to a moving object like an arrow in flight. When a human observes this flight, the intellect translates what in reality is continuous motion into static symbols such as points and lines. Intelligence, intent on the utility of the object for efficacious action, constructs calculable immobilites like the point at which the arrow left the bow, hit the target, or some point along its trajectory. In making time a series of static positions immediately adjacent to one another in a space that is imagined to be set out in a line of past, present, and future, the actual movement of the arrow, a continuous motion, is edited out. The knowledge generated by both philosophy and science is pursued in this manner, and by focusing on things in space, on matter, intelligence substitutes for events for which there are no discrete states—the evolution of the universe, for example, or the life of any living thing—a series of static states. Intelligence functions by substituting for the endless movements that characterize all of existence, for duration, a “practical equivalent” that allows for the prediction, repetition, and calculation needed for mastery of an extended, specialized world (Bergson 1998, 148).

Intelligence distorts reality, it has to for practical and necessary purposes such as survival, but it is possible to experience the reality of lived existence, duration, because humans have the capacity to be intuitive. Intelligence carves up the world and manufactures artificially discrete objects that can be acted upon, but intelligence is not the only human faculty. Humans also have instincts and intuition. Instinct for Bergson is sympathy, an ability to feel an action and to know how to act without thinking. Instinct that has become conscious and self reflective Bergson

calls *intuition*, and while intelligence always turns toward inert matter, intuition turns toward life itself, toward duration (1998, 176). Intuition is a specific act of internal reflection where, in attending to the self in time, one also experiences the reality of existence. Intuition thus restores to human knowledge what has been carved out and obscured by common sense, intellectual understanding, and language. To be intuitive is to be immediately aware of the self before the imposition of intellect or language; intuition grants a unique experience of the self, not as a static object, but as an ever-changing process. This requires an intentional shift of attention away from the external world toward one's core where, says Bergson, "because the matter and life which fill the world are equally within us; the forces which work in all things, we feel within ourselves," which allows us to know the nature of the universe itself (2007, 103). Intuition "throws a light" and pierces the "darkness of the night into which the intellect leaves us" concerning knowledge of reality (1998, 269). To be consciously intuitive is to feel beyond the immobility of the intellect, and to apprehend the movement, change, and novelty that are the essence of existence.

Bergson constructs a metaphysics grounded in duration that is experienced intuitively to reveal existence as continuous and the future as always novel. In so doing, he rejects the notion of predictable causes and effects that characterize Cartesian determinism. The reality of all existence *is* duration, a state characterized by continuous intervals of motion and change that involve all of matter and all life. Duration is unending, a present that has no given duration from which one can access the past through memory or think about the future. We are accustomed, says

Bergson, of thinking that only the present exists, as if the present were a mathematical point on a line, but this conceptualization makes time itself impossible. If the present were a point on a line, what could exist would be only a collection of ever-divisible units without movement and so without time (Bergson 2007, 126).<sup>35</sup> The continuity that characterizes existence means that the past survives into the present as memory and the future is always open, always something new and unrepeatable. Duration moves only in the direction of the future, and the coming moment of the future realized cannot be the mere rearrangement of past. Only if duration, time itself, were to move in the opposite direction could events be duplicated and repeated, whether as causes or effects. Because duration moves ever forward into the future, events in the present are always new, something that never before occurred. Unrepeatable present events become the past, which swells with that which has already occurred as a virtual reality. Duration moves without pause, but the intellect disrupts this continuum to make static what is always mobile in order to create a predictable world. Humans create a fictitious universe in which “the same causes produce the same effects,” but in reality the same causes never exist to produce the same effect (Bergson 1998, 57). Indeed, there is never a single cause of any event, and all events are produced by a convergence of multiple prior events. Given the complexity of duration,

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<sup>35</sup> Spinoza, in a discussion about inadequate ideas, pursues a similar conceptualization of duration: “If someone conceives Duration in this abstract way and, confusing it with Time, begins dividing it into parts, he can never understand how, for instance, a hour can pass by. For in order that an hour should pass by, a half-hour must first have passed by, and then half of the remainder; and if you go on subtracting half of the remainder to infinity, you can never reach the end of the hour . . . To say that Duration is made up of moments is the same as to say the Number is made up by adding noughts together” (Selected Letters 1992, 269-270).

predicting the future is as impossible as reconstructing the past. We create histories, scientific or other, that fix attention on an illusion of mechanistic causality without being conscious that we are retrospectively isolating and linking discrete events that in reality were continuous change without definable borders. Reality, says Bergson, *is change*:

It is not the “states,” simple snapshots that we have taken once again along the course of change, that are real; on the contrary, it is flux, the continuity of transition, it is change itself that is real. This change is indivisible . . . What we have is merely an uninterrupted thrust of change—of a change always adhering to itself in a duration which extends indefinitely (2007, 6).

All of existence, then, is characterized by the interpenetration of life and matter in duration and by unceasing interactions that bring about change.

Bergson’s rhetoric of human nature, in which he describes the human as both matter and spirit, conforms to his view of reality as duration and change. For Bergson, the human body is a site of action in the world; the human spirit is memory. He begins his discussion of human nature by advising us to orient ourselves not as realists or idealists, but from the “point of view of a mind unaware of the disputes between philosophers.” This point of view believes naturally that matter exists, and that it exists “just as it is perceived” (2010, 5-6). The human body, like all matter, is perceived through the organs of perception, the eyes, ears, skin, and so forth. Any particular human body is distinct from all other forms of matter because a person knows her own body not only from without, through perception, but from within, through affects that are sometimes conscious. The body for Bergson is a “center of action” that receives and returns movements (2010, 11). The body is moved by other bodies and experiences the world through affects that are

transmitted by inner movement along nerves to the brain and then back again along nerves to the periphery of the body to initiate movements. Matter acts on matter as the initiator of affects and movements, and while these movements do occur deterministically, this does not result in processes of causes initiating predictable effects. Due to the one-directional flow of duration toward the future, a body never experiences the same exact affect twice, nor does a body ever repeat precisely a given motion. Given that the human is radically part of and connected to all of existence, to be human is to be affected on multiple levels simultaneously, and the body is always experiencing “countless impressions,” sights, smells, and sounds that are fleeting and never identical to one another (Bergson 2001, 131). Duration for a living being involves a qualitative multiplicity of different sensations and internal states, an unending flow of experience. There is no substrate, no stable ego that experiences distinct states “passing over it like actors on a stage” (Bergson 2007, 124). There is only the continually changing self, and duration is what one lives and feels as a living being, the actual time of life itself.

Bergson begins his discussion of human spirit by pointing out that we are accustomed to thinking only the present exists. The experienced present, however, is actually a given interval of duration defined by the length of one’s attention. The present expands or contracts according to this attention, becoming small enough to focus an action or large enough to extend indefinitely. In a brief present, a raise my hand to scratch my chin; in an extended reverie, I bring my mother into a present that extends over decades. Instead of viewing the past as gone and retrievable through consciousness, Bergson asks that we see how the past exists with the

present, how at every moment of lived time all of the past really exists, inactive and virtual, in the *now*. Memory, then, is not a special faculty whose role is to retain quantities of the past that can be poured into the present. The past is preserved automatically, and memory is the mode of access to the past (Bergson 2007, 128). This process does not occur in the brain; brains, like all matter, do not have concealed mysterious properties or hidden powers. The brain's function is to receive perceptive motions, to select some, and to conduct them toward appropriate action. The significance of the brain for a complex organism like the human is that the brain allows for a hesitation between incoming and outgoing impulses. In this interval, duration is the medium wherein a continual flow of perception is linked to past experiences that become a resource for action. The present is "that which acts upon us and makes us act," a sensory and motor condition of the body. The past is that which is no longer acting but has the potential to contribute to action by penetrating the present (Bergson 2010, 129). Look as deeply as you can, Bergson invites, poke around in the gray matter of the brain forever, and memories will never be found because memories are not matter, but spirit (2010, 127). Matter and spirit are both real, and they are interdependent and interpenetrate one another.

Where is the human past? In the past, outside of the self, preserved as an ever-expanding virtual realm that exists simultaneously with the present. The real past persists in time, in duration, and every present is a greater accumulation of a past that can be accessed through memory (Bergson 1998, 5). Part of memory entering the present is habitual as perception links automatically to bodily memories to facilitate action. Another part of memory, memory proper, consists of

all the experiences that constitute a life, experiences that can be consciously reached during the interval between incoming and outgoing neural impulses in the brain only through what Bergson calls a *leap*, an effort to intuitively disconnect attention from the present and direct it toward the past. In such a leap, matter and spirit meet in the present as a synthesis of perception and memory experienced as consciousness. Intuitive consciousness always involves memory, and inner duration, the experience of one's life unfolding, involves the "continuous life of memory which prolongs the past into the present" without which there would be no duration, no sustained life (Bergson 2007, 151). Without memory, only instantaneity could exist, and we would experience life as a series of disconnected events without continuity. Human memory is spirit, and intuition is the means by which spirit becomes conscious.

Duration, intuition, and memory figure centrally in Bergson's conceptualization of human agency. Bergson points out a lived paradox, that on the one hand from experience we feel ourselves free, while on the other hand we observe causal, deterministic relations in the world around us as bodies act on other bodies (2001, 217). Because cause-and-effect relations satisfy both the intellect and common sense, we apply the same mechanistic paradigm to explain human action. In other words, we impose the abstract relations of space that serve to exclude lived duration. To correct this misconception, Bergson directs us to think carefully about how we conceptualize the will making a choice by focusing on two actions, X and Y. We can assume that perception is involved and that the mobility of the nervous system and brain have resulted in an neural hesitation, an interval during which the

human condition continues to be that of pure duration, of different multiple states undergoing continual changes that could never be designated as two contrary states, X and Y. The *imagined* difference between X and Y is an intellectual construction, a static representation that cannot reflect the self changing both through an interval of hesitation and through a subsequent action. Because this sense of the acting self does not satisfy the common sense or intellectual need for a sharply defined mechanism of choice, we tend to retroactively posit an imaginary static time prior to an action where two possible future actions, two real things in space that would yield two different outcomes, exist. A determinist would say that these prior events made inevitable the choice of X or Y; a free-will advocate would say that hesitation made possible a choice between two existing paths. Both rely on a conceptualization of spatial objects, X and Y, to represent what is really an evolving psychic process that never separates into anything amendable to symbolization (Bergson 2001, 180-181). We treat psychic processes as if they could be mapped as routes along which one travels and can reverse directions. But the time of life flows only in one direction, toward the future, and in the time preceding action there are no paths or directional orientations. There are only progressions of multiple mobile states changing until and beyond when an action occurs.

“Freedom,” Bergson offers, “is the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs” (2001, 219). Freedom is not a choice made between two imagined paths, but a relation of the enduring being to changing states of duration, a self who continues to live and develop through an interval of hesitation until action occurs as Bergson says, “like an over-ripe fruit dropping from

a tree" (2001, 176). This image of falling fruit, like many of Bergson's metaphorical images, gives one pause and requires explanation. Bergson posits two kinds of thought: intellectual and intuitive. These two ways of thinking mean that, at any given moment, a human can be considered in two modes, as an externally projected self that is created intellectually as a social representation, and as a self of internal duration that can be apprehended only by the deep introspection that is intuition. The intellectual self, a site of action that is oriented toward objects in the world, Bergson refers to as a ghostly representation. The other self, that through a great effort to block out forms of representation can apprehend its own ever-evolving core, is capable of freedom. This apprehension of inner duration, through which one experiences not only the duration of the world but also the duration of all existence, Bergson suggests, *is freedom*.

This freedom engages both intuition and memory. As a human who endures through time, a self is never static; feelings, sensations, intensities, and relations with the external world continually change the inner landscape so that a person is a process rather than a being, an unfolding rather than an object. Grasping this reality through intuition, being conscious of duration, affirms what is thought the moment one thinks it and expresses the "unshakable confidence that consciousness feels in itself, to the extent that, faithful to its role, it limits itself to affirming the actual state" it is experiencing (Bergson 2001, 156). What makes this experience free is that intuitive apprehension does not link the future to the present as a law of causality dictates, but instead sensibly links the past as memory to the present as action. The free moment is one in which habitual actions are disrupted and memories that are a

resource for new actions become conscious. This consciousness of the “radically singular quality of each lived moment” allows consciousness that all moments are new, unrepeatable, and creative. This gives one the confidence that the self unfolding is, like a ripened fruit, ready for the action that one finds oneself undertaking. In other words, the self acting can intuit the force of time as memory interpenetrating sensibility as a self connected to the past but also becoming something new.

The moments in which this amalgamation of memory, intuition, and sensation takes place are very rare, which means that humans are rarely free. Like Spinoza, who notes that we usually act from passions and not reason, Bergson notes that most of the time we are oriented toward acting on the external world. We employ intellect for acting rather than turning inward, and we are acted on rather than acting freely (2001, 231). To be free means to consciously break the habits of the intellect and common sense to approach the spiritual realm of duration which is never static or oriented toward one path or another but rather is ever unfolding to differentiate both the world and the self in novel and unpredictable becoming. As conscious awareness increases, as more habitual modes of thinking are broken, the living being becomes more capable of creating acts borne not out of determinism but out of inner *indeterminism* as “spirit borrows from matter the perception on which it feeds, and restores them to matter in the form of movement which spirit stamps with its own freedom” (Bergson 2010, 134). Pure change and real duration are spiritual, and intuition, grasping the spirit of the self and in things makes possible actions that express freedom. Freedom occurs in rare moments when we

acknowledge that we don't know why we are doing one thing over another, we are simply responding to the present with full attentiveness. Intuitively aware of our sensations and memories, we resist habitual action and allow novelty to be expressed. This process, Bergson admits, is episodic, intermittent, and extremely hard to sustain, but it also offers hope that the self and the world can change.

Duration is a spiritual dimension of life that speaks to an immanent interconnectivity that is for Bergson a condition for ethical collectivity. As for Spinoza, the spiritual capacity of the human is the ability to reveal and understand this condition. Bergson admits that this human spirit, usually translated into soul by philosophy, is a problem that philosophers have only compounded. Bergson is particularly critical of the Platonic conceptualization of the soul which, as he says, has been "meditated upon for two thousand years without movement" because knowledge of this soul was always as complete and final as "that of the triangle" (Jankéliévitch 2015, 71). The Platonic soul, and the religious soul, is an abstraction that, like all intellectual constructions, makes static and manageable what is in reality a mobile, changing entity. To understand the human spirit it is necessary to dwell in experience in order to generate not an arbitrary and artificial definition but a genuine experience in real time, an experience of the mobility and change that characterize the vital impulse of life itself. With duration, Bergson gives us a world that is characterized by change and novelty. The capacity of humans to intuitively know these dynamics opens the possibility of thinking politics and acting in new ways, in terms of the future instead of the past and in terms of the human ability to employ spirit to transform the world.

In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson's most politically explicit text, he draws distinctions between open and closed societies, religions, moralities, and human spirits. A closed society is one that ends at borders, national or otherwise, and extends concern only to its own members; a closed, or static, religion is one based on shared dogma and a code of obligations that binds members; a closed morality is one focused on the preservations of individuals of a certain society. These three closures function both individually and collectively like a biological cell that lives for itself and also for the organism of which it is a part or like a single ant in an anthill, and they describe not a state of no ethics of communitarian behavior, but a state of utilitarian ethics and behavior (Bergson 1977, 37). In terms of humans, this utilitarian state is brought about by closed spirits, that are concentrated not on the reality of the interconnectedness of all living beings in duration but instead on themselves and the well-being of their immediate collective. Bergson contrasts the closed human spirit with an open one that embraces all of humanity and conforms not to a code of external morality but to an inner call to embrace an increasing number of people, even all people, in a attitude of love (1977, 38). Love in this sense is a psychic motion or attitude that stems from an emotional or affective stirring of the spirit.

Bergson describes two types of emotion, one that is the consequence of an intellectual cause that provokes a stirring of sensibility by the representation of an object or idea. An example is the patriotic fervor stirred by the sight of a national flag or emblem. The other kind of emotion is not produced by intellectual states or representations but by intuition; this type of emotion has the power to be the source

of new ideas (Bergson 1977, 44). The second type of emotion goes far beyond mere feeling; it is a type of psychic emotion that is creative and dynamic, both artistically and morally. Such emotion is typically found fully developed only in mystics or geniuses who draw their motivation and passion from contact with the principle of life, but all people have the capacity to develop an openness to being the source of novel ideas that are infused with the emotion that creates desire for realization. Bergson is not speaking of affect in a contemporary sense of focus on an emotive, individual body, but as an aesthetic, intuitive experience that opens to intimate knowledge of the inter-connectedness of all life that opens another, higher level of morality that goes beyond social norms. Such intuition turned toward the world infuses the human spirit with the feeling that it is not isolated in humanity and that all of humanity is intimately bound up not only with each other but with the “smallest grain of dust as well as the entire solar system” in a world of ever changing and evolving newness (Bergson 2001, 14-15).

Bergson focuses on the human capacity to know duration as the true essence of all existence as a foundation for collectivity. There is more to the world and to our interrelatedness with all living and nonliving entities than we normally apprehend; indeed, the knowledge with which we are habituated to be content masks the world. Freeing ourselves from specialized, mechanistic time and from perception that reduces the world to mere utility allows us to intuitively experience the world as an interconnected field of movement and becoming. Habits of intelligence and language draw us away from knowledge of and connection with others, but an intuitive openness toward duration can reveal to us our commonality with others.

Contemplating the reality of duration through an intentional, intuitive focus on the unbroken stream of inner life where there is not an already-composed self but rather a continually changing self, allows us to also glimpse the unbroken stream of outer life as an ever-changing, dynamic environment of entities and beings who are never static or separate, but are aspects of a unified field of change and becoming. Bergson suggests that we can have community only if we stop affirming our rational constructions and privileging our own lives in order to expose ourselves to an unpredictable, collective fate by opening to intuitive experiences. The experience of intuition is spiritual, an intentional turning inward toward the deepest self where one can experience the nature of the world. The possibility of a better human future is opened by accepting and acting on the ethical demand that knowledge of duration—the mobile connectedness and interdependence of all existence—imposes in our relations with others.

### Nancy's Sensing Human

Like Spinoza and Bergson, Nancy critiques Western philosophy's conceptualizations of the cosmos, human nature, and the human place in existence as inadequate. This inadequacy can be explained, Nancy asserts, by philosophy's dependence on language and a metaphysics that begins always with an individual ego and grounds knowledge in the ego's ability to engender a reality. Nancy notes that twenty-five centuries of philosophy guided by *logos* have not revealed the world because signification, the logic of the discursive, does not refer to what exists but only cycles back on itself endlessly (1997, 7). Language takes us out of the world

and orients us at a distance from reality, a distance that, paradoxically, we attempt to diminish through more and more linguistic interpretations of the world. The ego approaches reality through representation and accumulates representations to portray a world that is not *the* world but is merely “a cut out form” of what exists (Nancy 1993, 2). Knowledge, assembled as an interpretation of a constructed representation of a diminished, made-up world, remains detached from what is there, that which exists as *something* and requires no interpretation for its reality (Nancy 1997, 7). Nancy says that philosophy needs to start with the bare fact of existence, the basic knowledge that all that is does exist, and then ask: How can we know the world for what it is and open ourselves to heeding the ethical demands this knowledge imposes? Nancy develops a response to this question that focuses on exposure—the exposure of one finite being to another through which beings share and acknowledge their interconnectedness and interdependence (1991, 41). Like Bergson, Nancy offers a new method to philosophy for knowing reality—Sense. Sense here is not only experiencing the world through senses of sight, hearing, touch, and so forth, but sense also as ‘making sense’ of what is, of arriving at a meaning that will have to be communicated through language but that signification will never be capable of generating. Nancy relies on the method of sensing the world to conceptualize his view of the universe, doctrines of human nature and human agency, and to offer an ethical perspective on communication and community.

Sense as a philosophical method opens to the basic condition of existence, a sharing of space and time that involves everyone and everything, whether they are “inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on” (Nancy

2000, 20). Sense as a method is adopting an attitude of “there is something, and that alone makes sense,” and attempting, through a concrete immediate relationship with what exists, to understand it. Sense is a human spiritual capacity through which we acknowledge all that exists and open ourselves to the reality of touching and being touched by the world (Nancy 1997, 8-10). Nancy views the material world as an interacting, sensing singularity, a singularity that is collective which makes of sense an opening up to all that exists. Sense is not simply a human capacity but a concrete aspect of the single world of shared existence:

Sense belongs to the structure of the world, hollows out therein what it would be necessary to name better by calling it the ‘transcendence’ of its ‘immanence.’ The out of place term of sense is neither a property brought from elsewhere into relation with the world or a supplementary predicate, not an evanescent character but . . . [is] the constitutive *sense* of the fact that there is world (Nancy 1997, 55-56).

The sense of the world does not transcend the immanent world because sense is not dependent on a creator, and sense is not some kind of invisible, mystical force.

Nancy returns to this somewhat paradoxical notion of the ‘transcendence of immanence’ in his discussion of the conditions for communication and in his explanation for sense as the ground for ethics. Sense is both a what connects the world as world, the interdependence and interactions among all that exists, and sense is an aspect of existence that is immanently part of existence that is not normally apprehended. Sense is knowing based on acknowledging that matter is not closed on itself, and there are no individual, autonomous entities in the singularity that is world. World is precisely the interrelation of all that exists, and sense involves “holding the step of thought suspended over this sense” that touches us, that can only be known by opening to being touched by what exists in our

interrelatedness (Nancy 1997, 11). Sense is not a mystical experience, but an experience that precedes signification, a heightened awareness of the concreteness of being part of the world.

One of Nancy's intentions is to challenge those ontologies in Western thought that begin with the individual and then posit a world of self and others. Nancy names, for example, Heidegger's schema where *Dasein* precedes *Mitsein* and Descartes' autonomous thinking mind that then contemplates others. Nancy asserts that we must think differently and begin with co-existence, we must acknowledge that what exists is a *we* or a *with* that is not in addition to being but is the heart and foundation of being (2000, 30). There is no transcendent creator or organizing principle external to existence, and there is no authentic reality hovering under or over existence. Existing is the basic reality of being-with, of sharing the world. World, in fact, is not a state of individuals being together, but is precisely this sharing of space and time, the simultaneity of existing along with all that is. *World* in this sense refers to relation, to a collective existence that is itself structured by sense, by the interrelations of all that is (Nancy 1997, 8). The philosophical task, then, is not to interpret existence but rather to sense the reality of existence as co-existence.

A universe of co-existence means that nothing exists as a singular being. A single being is for Nancy a "contradiction in terms," something that would have to be its own foundation and origin, which is absurd because there can be no singularity except in a plurality (2000, 12). To appear as a singularity requires multiplicity; a one among the many. The world, where beings come into and depart from existence,

is nothing other than this co-existence. This does not mean that the material world dissolves into an indefinable unity where nothing definable or recognizable exists. Everyone is born, lives, and dies as a one among many; every thing in the world is generated and enters existence, persists for a time, and decomposes out of existence as one among many. But beings and things are not autonomous nor individually contained (Nancy 1997, 72). What exists locally—here in downtown Denver, for example, or along a riparian strip of Alaska—is a spacing that is not “subjects” in relation to “objects,” but a spacing of all that exists in relation to each other. “Space,” says Nancy, “is not the same as a thing, but is the outside of things thanks to which their distinctiveness is granted them” (2008, 158). What exists is intimately close or proximate or distant from everything else that exists. A being *here* exists only in relation to other beings that are *there* and *there*, a being is an opening in space, and the world is the density of the spacing of different distinct bodies, sensing one another (Nancy 1997,78). The world, a singularity, is structured by the radical interrelatedness of a multiplicity of beings.

Distinct bodies, spaced at intervals, form the unity of the world. The world is “woven from the contiguity of all of the bodies,” and the lights, movements, scents, and sounds that emanate from bodies. Everything that is opens to the world, exists *toward* the world, and this *toward* is the essence of existence. The world is not a substratum that exists beyond or behind materiality and spirituality, the world itself it is mobile site of matter and spirit interacting:

Leaf against leaf and grain among grains, streams of water divided by a few mounds of earth, twins born of a single divided egg, masses of rocks and the flights of vultures, right hand and left hand, smoke reflected on the lake, the lantern fish in the great depths of the ocean, the worn-out back of the rice

picker, and you, and you again, or me, you who say “me” and I who say “you” (Nancy 2013, 86).

Like Spinoza, Nancy describes a mobile world of interacting forces. These forces are at once material and immaterial living beings that brush up against one another or avoid each other. “Body” and “spirit” are two modes of considering reality, and any given entity, a human for example, acts both materially and immaterially to “conform” or “deform” other entities. Nancy references the similarity of the universe he proposes to Spinoza’s conceptualization of monism, of a world that requires nothing outside to create and persist, and of a world of forces that interact to benefit or harm each other. Nancy employs Spinoza’s term, *conatus*, for the mobility and interaction of existence and for the ability of material and spiritual entities to affect and be affected by one another (1997, 28). The universe is constituted by interdependent bodies and spirits spaced at intervals, *here* and *there*, bodies and spirits that cannot avoid touching and being touched by all that simultaneously exists in space and time. There is no indivisible force of adhesion; reality *is* the co-existence and interactions of what exists (Nancy 2013, 44).

Nancy’s rhetoric of human nature posits a human that is both matter and spirit, body and soul. Nancy says that Western science and philosophy have created the human body and, while the modern project was to know and describe the actual body, the failure of signification to reveal the body has brought us to another project—to touch upon the body experientially. Because we realize that signification, whether philosophical or scientific, tends to screen off the body, we strive now to treat the body as neither a signifier or a signified, and we want to understand what it means to be a body (Nancy 2008, 21). We focus therefore on the

body as a sensing organ and on affects, we understand that sense is important, but sense alone does not reveal the body as an understandable entity. Nancy asserts that we need first to understand that all bodies, our own and those of others, are always foreign to us. This foreignness exists because living as a body, like learning about a body through language, does not necessarily enable one to know what being a body entails. This foreignness is a byproduct of the process of acquiring knowledge, and Nancy believes that to know anything, even one's own body, requires separation, a distancing in which the body can be ob-jected as a site of study from the outside, by ourselves or by someone else. To know the body requires this separation and intentional conscious attention, a focus that Nancy says is spiritual. In terms of a self, what has the capacity to know the body is the spirit, what Nancy refers to as *soul*.

For Nancy, the body is the soul and the soul is the body. He collapses the Cartesian dualism of soul/body to claim that there is no body without spirit and no spirit without body. The body, that which is extended and occupies space and time at intervals from other bodies, is a moving, sensing organ. The body is nothing but a touching and being touched upon as it moves through the world. The soul is the body sensing itself and knowing itself; movement of the soul is emotion and thought, a relation of self-to-self (Nancy 2008, 141). As an example of this process, Nancy says that when we breathe, we know we are a breathing being. The knower is that which is known, and there are two distinct things, a body and a knower, existing in a relation of difference. There is no third thing, not an assumption of one thing, body or soul, by the other, but rather a susceptibility of one aspect of self to another aspect. The soul is not an "ineffable interiority, a sublime or vaporous entity

escaping from the prison of the body,” it is nothing like a Platonic or Christian soul. For Nancy, “of the soul” means “of the body outside itself” (2008, 125). The unity of the body is the unity of all the touches and touching of a body, and the soul is a name for the unified experience of what a body is, the experience of self-sensing and touching upon the self. The body is a place, a spatial *here* of existence, and the soul is the ability of a multiply sensing body to constitute an “I.”

The Cartesian-trained mind wants to translate this into: “My body senses and then I think and become conscious of what has been sensed,” as if there exists an interiority that thinks something else, the body. Nancy rereads Descartes’ dilemma of how bodies and soul might interact to arrive at a different conclusion. Descartes imagined body and soul, corporeal flesh and non-corporeal spirit, meeting and communicating at the pineal gland, but Nancy asserts that humans are bodies/souls such that the whole of the corporeal *is* the incorporeal. There is no need for a point of connection because the body and soul are not two different substances; rather, echoing Spinoza, they are two different modes of the same thing, two perspectives under which a human can be considered. There is no interiority, no pilot on the ship, there is only a corporeal/incorporeal entity, a union formed by self-touching, by the movements of the body and the emotions and thought of spirit. One implication of this configuration of the human is that souls are not merely minds or brains but extend throughout the body’s internal and external surfaces. Another implication is that bodies are not closed, extended masses; bodies are potentially open, turned to the outside by souls that extend along the body’s surfaces.

The human condition, Nancy says, is defined by this combination of being a

body and a soul. A world of bodies is a world of extension and openness, of bodies whose souls are always already outside, potentially opening selves to world. This outside of bodies is the inside of the world, in world in which we are always exposed to other bodies and other souls. A human world is a totality of bodies spaced at intervals that create the conditions for relations, for looking, listening, and being attracted or repulsed (Nancy 2013, 84). Inside the world, human souls, the outsides that bodies are for themselves, “turn to one another to touch one another, side by side or face to face . . . forms that brush up against one another and avoid one another . . . marry one another and break up” (Nancy 2013, 86). Using Aristotelian terms, Nancy says that the soul is the form, the organization, of a body; the body in turn is the *form of form*, the consistency and fortification of a soul that otherwise would float away into non-existence. A body senses everything corporeal, it never stops sensing, but it is the soul that senses the body. Bodies touch, collide, and send and receive signals, and in these movements, bodies are the stirring of souls, of thoughts and emotions. The soul in Nancy’s doctrine of the human is a capacity for sensing self that, in concert with the body’s rhythms, thinks, suffers, delights, gets hungry, and grows old.

The soul is the self sensing a world that consists of both self and other beings. There are two movements of soul, one toward the self as concentrated thought, including the type of abstract thought that makes the mind imagine that it exists in isolation and keeps attention restricted to the self. The other movement is outward, toward the body’s surface and beyond to sense the touches, sounds, tastes, motions, and appearances of other bodies. A soul concentrated on itself withdraws from the

body's extension; a soul open to the outside along the body's surface is receptive to other bodies and souls (Birnbaum 2008, 149). It is my soul that senses you and allows you to appear to me. It is your soul that allows me to appear to you. To be *with*, then, is to co-appear according to this structure of sensing. Nancy says that this sensing of bodies by selves is other than knowledge or, if it is knowledge, it is knowledge of the certitude of co-existence: You are here. I am here. We are here.

Human agency as it pertains to transformational politics is for Nancy this opening of the soul toward the world. Opening to the world requires a spiritual attitude Nancy calls *adoration*. Like Bergson speaks of the human capacity for intuition, Nancy speaks of adoration as an intermittent, intentional, and immediate experience of the world. In this experience, "phenomenological intentionality is replaced by extension toward the outside," an extension or dilation of the inside to the point where the "I" disappears into pure duration (2013, 2). Adoration requires deep attention to the sensing self which, like Bergson's intuition, brings about a new kind of knowledge. Adoration allows human infinitude to glimpse infinity or, in other words, to apprehend the essence of existence as being-with. Adoration allows one to become aware and awoken to what the world lacks, or the excess that the world presents to itself, an excess of possibility that opens an indeterminate future. Adoration is a turning toward an opening, a breach, a breaking out of the "here" in order to open a future. What turns is the soul as thinking and sensing body, thinking that is not an intellectual activity that generates concepts, reasons, or judges, but thinking as a movement of the spiritual body that produces a gap, a rupture in the fabric of the world. Adoration is an outward movement of the soul that suspends

what is—which Nancy says is the dreadful state of the world—in order to appreciate and sense what might become (2013, 15). Adoration as the intentional turning toward the shared world aligns the self with an ethical demand to be an agent of bringing new possibilities of sociality into the world. Agency as freedom, then, is the experience of the real, it is an opening in thought and action to the fact of being-in-common (Fynsk 2012, xiii). This turning toward and opening of thought, a spiritual capacity, is the condition for communication and community.

Part of our legacy from the Greeks, says Nancy, is that we assume that *logos*, as consensus achieved through communication, is the basis of community. The error in this view is that we have failed to adequately theorize communication itself. Communication Nancy asserts, is not a linguistic bridge between subjectivities (2000, 14). For Nancy, communication is content-less; communication actually is the web of interrelations that exists in the shared world. Communication in this sense does not follow the logic of discourse, but rather the logic of relation, an affectively-laden relation that takes place between beings (Nancy 2013, 6). Language, and indeed all systems of the symbolic, create an image that is not reality. Language is not the meaning of the world and does not give meaning to the world, and meaning does not consist in the transmission of verbal symbols that travel from sender to receiver:

Language is not an instrument of communication, and communication is not an instrument of Being; communication *is* Being and Being *is*, as a consequence, nothing but the incorporeal by which bodies express themselves to one another *as such* (Nancy 2000, 93).

Speaking to one another is corporeal; sounds and gestures are material. Meaning,

however, is incorporeal (Nancy 2013, 7).<sup>36</sup> Humans themselves are sites of meaning, the element in which significations can be produced and circulated (Nancy 2000, 2). There is no meaning if meaning is not shared; meaning is the passing back and forth of the awareness of being-with, of sharing existence. Speaking, and even writing, involves touching others by sending the self outside, which makes communication itself a shared understanding of our co-existence, of our existing as a *with* (Nancy 2008, 25). This *with* is not representable, it cannot be expressed through language. Communicating our being-with is not an idea, notion, or concept but is a *praxis* and an *ethos* that is made anew at each event of relationality (Nancy 2000, 71). Communication does play a role in nurturing humane community in that communication involves the opening of souls to awareness of shared coexistence. Communication is the appearance of the *inbetween* or the *intervals* that exist in coexisting persons; communication, in fact, is the openness that makes us appear to one another *as* community.

Nancy's theory of communication significantly implicates affectivity.

Communication here entails unworking habitual methods of expression in order to undergo the passionate affective experience of sharing existence (Nancy 1991, 40). Communication is the basis for community on a level that goes beyond relations of identification like "mother, son . . . producer, consumer"; community requires unworking these categorizations in order to experience, to *communicate* through

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<sup>36</sup> In his explanation of the incorporeality of language, Nancy refers to the Stoics and their four instances of the incorporeal: space, time, the void, and the *lekton*, the said. Nancy interprets these instances of the incorporeal as being conditions of relations that require not only a distinction between places but, significantly, an interval that is the possibility of the emission and reception of what is said (*Corpus II* 2013, 7).

openness and exposure to one another, the existence of community (Nancy 1991, 41). This communication of community occurs on multiple levels, most significantly on the levels of events like births and deaths which have the potency to reveal human coexistence; it is through the repetition of these events that community *is* communicated as a field of unbroken, existing relations. The basis of communication here is not speech, not discursive interactions, but the exposure of one existing singularity to another (Nancy 1991, 60-61). Communication is sharing existence, sharing what it is to *be* in common with one another, a sharing that cannot be narrated but must be affectively lived:

Communication, in truth, is without limits, and the being that is in common communicates itself to the infinity of singularities . . . communication 'itself' is infinite between finite beings. Provided these beings do not try to communicate to one another myths about their own infinity, for in such case they instantly disconnect the communication. But communication takes place on the limits, or on the common limits where we are exposed and where it exposes us (Nancy 1991, 67).

In referring to "myths," Nancy is admitting that there is no common discursive understanding of community and that we cannot rely on representations to constitute us *as* community. Rather, we have to communicate to one another that we *are* community through affective exposure to one another.

The various ways that community has been conceptualized, Nancy asserts, err in that they begin with the metaphysics of the individual. Community, then, is theorized as a fusion of individuals, a work to be accomplished, or a lost ideal state. Community has been presented as a fusion of individuals that are melded together by political or economic doctrines. There is no doctrine, says Nancy, that can begin with individual egos and form them into a *We*, community cannot be accomplished

through amassing and binding individuals in order to become a collective (2000, 15-17). There can be no community of atoms; community requires at the minimum a field of relationality as a condition, what Nancy terms a *clinaman*, a capacity for opening to and toward others (2012, 304). Community also can not be accomplished through work. Projects such as buildings, discourses, institutions, and symbolic systems cannot undergird a community; community, in fact, is the unworking of all of the social structures that attempt to bind individuals into imposed identity groups. The lost community—the natural family, Athenian city, early Christian assemblies, or communes, for example—Nancy considers a mythological ideal. Nancy understands the desire for something that never existed, the invention of a fantasy, as a human response to the “harsh reality of the modern experience,” but the truth is that perfect human community has never existed (2012, 11).

Community as a state of co-existence remains, says Nancy, to be thought, and the truth of this shared existence has yet to be recognized. To recognize the reality of co-existence requires shifting from a metaphysics of the individual subject to realizing that it is *that which is not a subject* that has the capacity to open up onto a community (Nancy 1991, 14). Community is not a project but an experience, an experience of exposure to one another, and an experience of communicating with one another our inter-relatedness. What is needed is not more and more models of community that we then attempt to realize, but rather a matter of “thinking community, of thinking its insistent and possibly still *unheard* demand” (Nancy 1991, 22). Individuals are closed off from community; community requires recognizing coexistence and communicating this recognition to one another.

Community, then, is a given, but one that requires awareness and spiritual opening to others. Nancy tells us that community is given to us as a gift that must be renewed and communicated in order to be sustained.

Nancy offers a way to imagine community differently, as an unheard demand that is waiting to be discovered and thought (2013, 22). For Nancy, community is given before subjects, desires, and social structures by the shared fact of coexistence as finite beings. Community is being-with, the necessary and immanent condition for becoming an individual and for creating relations with others. Like Bergson, Nancy considers discourse and its products—identities, nationalities, and social institutions, for example—as oriented toward organizing a material world for manipulation and control. The possibility of community thus requires a withdrawal from presupposed entities that make of persons and communities things and collections of things. Community for Nancy is not *something* but an experience of relationality that can only be accomplished by suspending, dislocating, and interrupting the presupposed in order to become exposed to others:

We have to decide to—and decide how to—be in common, to allow our existence to exist. This is not only at each moment a political decision; it is a decision about politics, about if and how we allow our otherness to exist, to inscribe itself as community and history (Nancy 1993, 166).

Community is given in advance, but it is also a political task that requires the risk of opening to the possibility of relations with others. Achieving this political task requires suspending representation in order to lean toward, to open to, the beings with whom we share the world. In this opening is the possibility of creating anew our relations with each other, relations built not on fantasies of reclaiming lost community or on conceptualizing new forms of collectivity, but on the desire to

make the most basic state of existence, our co-existence, more humane and livable.

### Conclusion

In pursuing a selective genealogy of rhetorics of human nature in Western thought in this chapter, my intention is to offer a counter-narrative of human existence that opens new possibilities for collectivity. This counter-narrative recovers a Greek sense of human nature as both spirit and materiality and develops from this dual nature a sense of ethical community. In particular, this counter-narrative recovers the Aristotelian sense of *anima*, physicality, as a force that is not a subsidiary of or inferior to mind, but is in fact a primordial condition for the affectivity necessary for the attachments that constitute community. Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy, despite their different investments and philosophical systems, converge theoretically on a number of significant points that support thinking about being human in ways that contrast with the philosophical, scientific, and religious theories I discussed in the last chapter. In contrast to a human conceptualized as autonomous and distinct from the rest of existence, the philosophers I address in this chapter situate the human as embedded in and dependent on existence writ large. Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy stress the radical interconnectedness of all of existence, materially and spiritually. Instead of highlighting the human ability for discursive, philosophical, scientific, or any kind of abstract thought, these three theorists stress the human ability to hone certain mental, spiritual, and relational skills—intuition for Spinoza and Bergson, sense for Nancy—that provide a means of having an intimate and unmediated understanding of the interconnectedness that

characterizes existence. All three consider an understanding of the nature of the self and the nature of existence as a disruption of habitual ways of relating to the world, and they posit this insight into existence as a condition for ethical relations.

Their theories of human spirit differ—Spinoza concentrates on thought and ideas, Bergson on intuition and memory, and Nancy on spirit as consciousness of self and others—but spirit for all three is centrally important in ordering and motivating an ethical life in community. Spirit here is not transcendent; spirit is intimately connected to and cannot be separated from materiality. Spirit is the human capacity for opening to the world, a capacity for an immediate and affective experience of the self and world. The conceptualizations of human nature that Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy offer provide routes into rethinking the role of humans in both communication and community. Reviving the human spirit, an immaterial attribute and capacity for knowledge beyond linguistic and scientific rationality and a basis for connecting with other humans and the rest of existence opens opportunities to rethink and reconceptualize the mechanisms and purposes of communication and the bases for human community.

## CONCLUSION:

### COMMUNICATING COMMUNITY

*... how do we communicate? This question can be asked seriously only if we dismiss all "theories of communication," which begin by positing the necessity or desire for a consensus, a continuity and a transfer of messages. It is not a question of establishing rules for communication, it is a question of understanding before all else that in "communication" what takes place is an exposition: finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it.*

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Inoperable Community*

To conclude this project, I return to my initial claims regarding the importance of restoring spirit, immaterial attributes and capacities, to rhetorics of human nature. My first claim is that such a restoration has the potential to reinvigorate belief in human political agency and in a passionate commitment to creating and maintaining ethical community. My second claim is that the inclusion of human immaterial capacities for extra-empirical knowledge and for communication based not on rational discourse but on passionate affective responses to others allows us to reconfigure the theoretical relationship between communication and community. In the preceding chapters, I conducted a study of the history of Western thought about human nature by analyzing three clusters of theories for how

rhetorics of human nature influence how we think about our capacities for sociality. Through the means of a rhetorical genealogy from ancient Greece to the contemporary moment, I illustrated how circulating theories of human nature are historically situated and not only comment on, but constitute, human reality. By rejecting a paradigm that views successive doctrines as more sophisticated, more scientifically exact or truthful, than earlier versions, I employed this genealogy to depict the ways in which, in the evolution of doctrines of the human since ancient Greece, we have displaced or erased a human spirit. I emphasized how adopting the dominant secular view of the human as without spirit has led to viewing the human as individualized, essentially a rational being, and divorced from the rest of existence. This framing of human nature has distanced us from our capacity to understand our interdependence on one another, our extra-rational capacities for knowledge and insight, and our interconnectedness with others. In turn, this doctrine of the human has led to a restricted view of the potential political role of communication with regards to community.

The politics I pursue as the basis of community is one of individuation, of spiritual self-transformation in preparation for political engagement. This is spirit not as a transcendent or mystical aspect of human being, but spirit as those immaterial, immanent features of being human that are experienced as intellectual, sensible, moral, ethical, and imaginative capacities (Hadot 1985, 81). Spirit so conceptualized is capable of turning toward existence writ large and toward the inner self to achieve insights in excess of representation and empirical data, knowledge that can then be employed to enhance ethical abilities, imagine new

forms of sociality, and articulate new possibilities for community. Attention to human spirit, I maintain, can shift attention from politics grounded in discourse and truth toward a politics of communicative action aimed not at information sharing, consensus, or persuasion but communication as a spiritual opening of self to others in acts of mutual recognition and regard.

In this conclusion, I draw on the conceptualizations of human spirit theorized by Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy to more fully draw out the implications of a double spiritual turn, toward existence and toward the self, in developing ethical political communicative potential.<sup>37</sup> I first discuss how a spiritual turn outward toward the world contributes to a motivating order of human value. Each of these philosophers considers existence itself, apprehended spiritually, as a source of human values that provides an ethical horizon for human life. I then explore the processes involved in a spiritual turn inward that leads to a transformation of self. Adding Michel Foucault's work on care of the self to the above philosophers, I discuss the process involved in becoming aware of oneself and disrupting habits of thought, feeling, and behavior in order to prepare oneself for ethical political action. Finally, I develop a theory of ethical communicative action

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<sup>37</sup> While I draw sparingly on Homer's doctrine of human nature in this conclusion because he did not theorize a human spirit as part of a living human being, I want to acknowledge that his psychosomatic model of the human, a human that not only acts on the world physically but also thinks, feels, deliberates morally, and is passionately motivated in bodily modes, is a provocative portrait of human nature that resists compartmentalizing human attributes and capacities. Homer's depiction of human being as mortal *soma* and immortal *psyche* with certain psychological processes was a precursor to all early Greek conceptualizations of the human. Despite Homer's unified, psychosomatic view of human nature, his portrayal was the catalyst for the dualist notion of the human as an immaterial mind and a material body that came to be dominant in Western thinking (Long 2015, 21).

based on spiritual awareness and growth. Through Ernesto Grassi's theory of rhetoric as originary language, I expand on how extra-empirical insights can be articulated; I then draw on ancient Greek and more contemporary philosophers to develop a praxis of ethical political communication.

### Spirit Turned Outward: The Horizon of Human Value

The portrait of the universe that emerges in philosophical accounts that include spirit is complex and dynamic, characterized by radical interconnectedness, an interdependent field of interacting forces, and by the potential for change and novelty. Plato theorizes a universe permeated by a cosmic soul that links all of existence into one unified, living body (*Timeaus* 29a6-b1). "Soul," Aristotle says, "is in all beings," giving shape to and defining what is shared by, and what is unique to, all classes of living things (*De Anima* 431b21). Spinoza proposes that all that exists is part of the same substance, God or Nature, that has the attributes of both spirit and matter. Spirit and matter are two perspectives on one reality in which existence itself is a force, a capacity to act and be acted upon in a unified reality of interacting forces that bring about the composition and decomposition of everything that is (*Ethics* III b9). Bergson characterizes the universe as duration, as a field of ever-changing process that flow continuously to bring about change and novelty making an event in the present always new, something that never before existed and never will again (2007, 6). Nancy, like Spinoza, theorizes a universe of interacting forces, bodies and spirits that "conform" or "deform" one another in an indefinite field of continuous flux (2013, 44). While there are differences in how these philosophers

conceptualize reality, a composite of their theories depicts a unified cosmos that is both spirit and matter, a single, interconnected and dynamic field of interactions and changes. This is a universe in which all entities continually affect one another, sometimes in harmful ways, other times in ways that are beneficial. Humans are one element of this interconnected, interdependent universe.

For each of the philosophers mentioned above, not only knowledge of, but an immediate and passionate affective insight into, the true nature of the universe is possible for humans who are body and spirit, both material and immaterial. Plato tells us that because the soul before the birth of a human was part of the eternal cosmic soul, the soul has the capacity to recall eternal forms upon which the world is modeled, including the Oneness and Goodness of all existence. Spinoza theorizes the human body as part of Nature's infinite attribute of extension and the human mind as part of Nature's infinite attribute of thought. As part of the one substance from which these attributes flow, the human mind has the capacity for direct, intuited knowledge of the radical interconnectedness of all being. Similarly, Bergson theorizes a human ability to intuit knowledge about external reality that has been obscured by the intellect and knowledge, that is, the true nature of existence as change and creation. Nancy attributes to the human spirit a capacity for heightened sensual awareness of and insight into the interconnected nature of all of existence. In each of these accounts of the human, the human spirit as consciousness capable of insights regarding the nature of reality is possible because spirit is not an epiphenomenon of existence but is an integral part of the cosmos itself (Nagel 2012, 115). An immanent human spirit includes the ability not only to know oneself as

part of interdependent existence but to affectively experience this co-existence in ways that lead to an understanding that one is responsible for the quality of interconnected lives.

This is to say that the cosmos is meaningful, and spiritual experiences of reality are foundational to meaningful and ethical human life. The philosophers that are the subjects of my genealogy who include spirit in their conceptualizations of the human share a belief that an ethical, fulfilled human life is facilitated by having the ability to directly apprehend the nature of the cosmic order. For Plato, this understanding of the cosmos is gained through meditating on eternal, transcendent Forms and Ideas. This effort affords knowledge of the order and beauty that characterize the cosmos; a human soul is then able to model itself on these universal qualities. Aristotle proposes that sustained contemplation of the natural world gives humans insight into the balance and harmony of existence which, in turn, gives humans an understanding of their place at the apex of existence. This understanding motivates humans to strive for the highest human existence, that of a harmonious, balanced, and virtuous life. Spinoza maintains that the more the mind knows about the human relation to the rest of the cosmos, the better able a human is to nurture *conatus*, the ability to act in and on the world, for self and others. Understanding the interconnected forces that characterize all of existence, some harmful and some beneficial to the self and others, makes it possible to restrain from useless pursuits and to undertake activities toward ethical human fulfillment. For Bergson, an intuitive knowledge of the true nature of existence as duration, as change and novelty, provides an understanding of the openness of, and the possibilities for, a

future unfettered by the past which fuels ethical commitments for working for peaceful coexistence. Finally, Nancy considers knowledge of the underlying nature of existence as *being-with*, as interconnectedness and interdependence, as necessary for understanding the ethical demand that shared life imposes. Each of these philosophers responds to the human need for a guiding ethical orientation by proposing that qualities that characterize existence itself provide an ethical human horizon.

This ethical horizon provides answers to the questions, *What is a good person?* and *How can a person contribute to good community?*, answers that are found in a relationship between individual humans and existence writ large. This is to say that guiding values are not subjective and autonomous but necessarily reflect the collective existences of diverse beings. These philosophers direct us to look for an orienting principle, we could say for goodness itself, through intentional spiritual attention to the fabric of existence that is characterized by a given order, harmony, continuity in time, and possibilities for change. Goodness—what Aristotle considers imperative for human happiness, for example, or Bergson sees as a condition for openness socially—is an orientation to life, a horizon that is both “indefinable and unrepresentable,” not a set of normative standards but rather an aspirational goal that each person must define and realize in concrete acts (Murdoch 1970, 72). There are at least two ways of thinking a human relationship to a meaning, a horizon for human ethical existence, that pre-exists any individual being. The first way is to say that Goodness exists in reality and can be apprehended, a strategy employed by Plato who posits goodness as an eternal and transcendent Form. A second approach,

the approach I take, is to think of Goodness as immanent, as a quality that characterizes the interconnectedness, interdependence, and processes of becoming that are features of reality itself, but are all too rarely materialized in human dynamics.

This is the approach Lyotard develops in his theory of community. Lyotard addresses the failure of community by quoting Plutarch: “Heraclitus says that the universe for those who are awake is single and common, while in sleep each person turns aside into a private universe” (2013, 50). The unity of existence is not hidden; unity is the rule and meaning of existence, but this interconnectedness is forgotten as we “sleep” through our lives unaware of our ontological connections. This unity is a meaning, a togetherness, that exists before human thoughts, words, and actions, but we need to hear this meaning before we can speak of it or act from it. Lyotard warns that we must not, if we want to know the truth of unity, shift its domain into the metaphysical, thus sublimating and making unconsciousness, “what belongs to the world” (2013, 106). To understand the world, we have to pay attention by closely observing nature (Aristotle), intuiting the flow of time itself (Bergson), or by sensually opening ourselves to others (Nancy). Lyotard says we have to “stop dreaming” our individual realities and open our eyes in “broad daylight” to the world we have in common:

... there is meaning there, hanging round in things, in the relations between human beings, and really transforming the world means setting free this meaning, giving it full power ... [we must ask the question:] what is the latent meaning of reality, what is the aspiration, what the desire, and how can it be expressed so that it may act, in other words, so that it might have power? (2013, 113).

This meaning, this horizon for human ethical activity, is part of material and spiritual existence, a meaning that is extra-discursive and not empirically observable, but is apprehended by exercising capacities for intuiting, sensing, and imagining connections and possibilities that have not yet been realized. Exercising these capacities affords an affectively compelling insight into shared existence. What is apprehended in such an experience, a disruption of what is known that goes beyond describing or critiquing the world to attempting to discern what is there but unrealized, Lyotard calls an *absent presence*, something desired and missing, a unity that time and again in human history has failed to materialize (2013, 107). Lyotard, like the philosophers included in my genealogy, provides a way to think about a meaning existing in reality that is a horizon for human ethical being, a meaning that reflects an immanent plane of connection, interdependence, and change.

There are theoretical problems that emerge with the claim of an immanent plane of pre-existing connection, first, the master narrative that often emerges and second, the response that is required. Narratives of immanent connections often become Garden of Eden stories where a natural, primal unity exists and difference and discord are illusions. The human has fallen from this natural state, separated by ever more complex structures of intelligence and technology, and the goal becomes finding a method of return, fostering an ethics of compliance to a natural state that obscures the labor of politics (Taylor 2007, 137-138). A second, related problem is that an immanent plane of unity tends to script a human response that relies on extraordinary and pleasurable dynamics. For example, Jane Bennett, whose project I respect, calls for an ecological political ethic in which interdependence is

acknowledged through experiences of enchantment, states of wonder toward other forms of being, in which thoughts are suspended so that a mood of pleasurable “fullness, plenitude, or liveliness” will inspire generosity toward other humans, animals, and inanimate matter (2001, 157-158). The problem with these views is that immanent unity readily becomes a myth of idea communion that obscures how the capacity to apprehend a shared plane of existence exposes not only the possibility of connectedness and harmony but also a vast field of vulnerability and competing forces that require not a return to Eden or extraordinary, wonderful encounters but an intentional and sustained ethical orientation toward co-existence.

I suggest that turning one’s attention toward the nature of existence—whether this is Spinoza’s intuitive encounter with a field of interacting forces, Bergson’s intuitive apprehension of the flow of duration, or Nancy’s sensing of the concrete existences of co-existing others—reveals not only the possibility of ethical unity but the reality of its failure to materialize. Spinoza says that we each are a force, a force that can and will interact with others either in modes that benefit or harm existences. Life in general is characterized by unmindful interactions that stem from negative passions, inadequate ideas, or from illusions inevitably harm both ourselves and those around us. Bergson directs us to focus on the state of our souls as closed or open; only open souls who consider every being as part of one’s ethical circle are capable of behaviors that do not further violence and separation, but most souls are closed. Nancy views the world as it exists as filled with beings who are sensually cut off from one another, unable to apprehend the fragility of fellow creatures and incapable of communicating or realizing a desire for harmonious co-

existence. For each of these theorists, ethical co-existence is not grounded in fantasy of a harmonious connection with others that feels satisfying and comforting, but in the intentional effort to experience deeply something that is beyond the self, that is, the “imaginative totality we call the Universe” (Dewey 1962, 19). The goal, as philosophers from Plato to Spinoza to Nancy suggest, is to experience the self as part of the All, and through this experience to comprehend what is missing in human relations. The goal is to bring human relations into consonance with qualities that the universe presents, that of creative becoming, connectedness, and interdependence among existences that exist concretely as a field of tensions and competition among diverse energies and forces. In other words, the ability to apprehend the nature of reality reveals not effortless communion but the need for political labor toward realizing community.

The ideal ends that the universe, apprehended spiritually, presents to us are neither completely embodied or rootless utopian fantasies (Dewey 1962, 51). What contemplation of the universe, of the actual and potential relations that exist, affords are possibilities, imaginative possibilities of new relations with one another:

The ideal ends to which we attach our faith are not shadowy and wavering. They assume concrete form in our understanding of our relations to one another and the values contained in these relations. We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past . . . the things in civilization that we prize most are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and the sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link (Dewey 1962, 87).

Goodness, fellowship, justice, even love, do exist in relations among people; the goal is to extend them, in actual conditions, to more persons, to all of existence. In other words, the point of contemplating or meditating on shared existence, on the

interconnectedness and interdependence that characterize the All, is to motivate a sense of opening possibilities for and with those with whom we share existence (Rorty 2011, 13). This involves a process of employing spirit as imagination to enlarge the “we” of our own existence, to include more and more people, or *all* people as Nancy and Bergson would say, in the group that we consider deserving of our ethical care (Rorty 2011, 15). The purpose is to transcend the self and achieve a universal and objective perspective on life in order to nurture and accept responsibility for co-existence.

### Spirit Turned Inward: Care of the Self

The universe offers values that can motivate and sustain ethical action, if and only if we are able to spiritually open ourselves to insights regarding what exists and respond ethically to that knowledge. Such a spiritually open posture is rare, and philosophers give various explanations for why this is so. Plato and Aristotle point out that humans are usually preoccupied with sensual pleasures, amassing wealth, and the opinions of others, all which deflect attention from the soul. Spinoza credits inadequately-formed ideas that are based on religious illusions, confused logic, negative passions, and experiences based in perceptions that are always multiple and unclear for the soul’s neglect. Bergson directly implicates the intellect and language for carving up and distorting reality and for confusing philosophical time with the actually existing time of duration. Nancy, too, faulty language, and especially philosophical language, for obscuring and diminishing human spirit. Bernard Stiegler brings these critiques into the present moment with his assertion

that it is industrial populism, capitalism itself, that has resulted in a burgeoning consumerism of goods and inferior information that has critically dampened human spirit (2014, 5-7). Personal, cultural, and philosophical barriers to understanding the true nature of reality and the role the human spirit has in responding to that reality prevent us from benefitting personally and socially from this knowledge.

Each of these philosophers suggest that intentionality is the first step toward spiritual awareness. The capacity for spiritual experiences of the interconnectedness and interdependence of existence has to be pursued. In his late work, Michel Foucault turned to this subject and, drawing on ancient practices of spiritual growth, he developed the notion of “care of the self” as a means of spiritual growth necessary for ethical social behavior, for politics itself. In contrast to purely intellectual development, Foucault provides three characteristics of spiritual growth. First, as opposed to knowledge that requires nothing of a subject, access to spiritual truth about the self requires that the self change and be transformed, even that the self become something other than the known self. Spiritual knowledge, in other words, always involves a movement that removes the subject from a current known position. Second, spiritual progress is work, work on the self by the self, a labor, Foucault says, of love (2005, 16). Third, once the truth of the spiritual self is achieved, this truth produces effects on the subject by enlightening, transfiguring, and even saving the self (2005, 17-19). Foucault explicitly ties this growth to a capacity for politics and says that, if spiritually prepared, the person will spontaneously act ethically, as if the “truth has become the person,” as the truth of the self through radical self-awareness is translated into principles of ethical

behavior (2005, 322).

Such a practice of self-change originated in ancient Greece where philosophy was employed as the means through which such a transformation took place. Increased insight into reality was considered the result of the effort to be rational—rationality involving emotion, sensations, as well as the intellect. The desire to transform the self, to think more clearly and to emotionally attach to higher values, to want to enter into the universal condition of interconnection and interdependence, was considered prerequisite to becoming an ethical political actor. Philosophical schools in ancient Greece were organized to engage students in ethical self-development by teaching the art of living well. Part of this practice involved asceticism and learning to moderate one's desires and passions. Part of the practice involved acquiring new knowledge to correct inadequate and confused ideas. Meditation, on death and on the cosmos, for example, as well as deep self-questioning were also considered key to the transformation of self. Self-awareness of the entire thinking, desiring, feeling self was pursued in order to transform the individual's "mode of seeing and being" (Hadot 1995, 83). The goal was to achieve a "complete reversal of the usual way of looking at things," and a change from a 'human' vision of reality based on passions to a 'natural' vision that considered all events from the perspective of universal nature (Hadot 1995, 83). The intention was to disrupt existing perceptions and feelings in order to live freely and consciously, unfettered by events out of one's control or by negative passions and misconceptions. Philosophical training was a rhetorical art meant as a process of self-liberation from a partial point of view linked to the body and senses so as to be

able to achieve a rational, universal perspective on life (Hadot 1995, 94).

These process of self transformation, practices of the care of the self, were radically communal, both in terms of pedagogical approach and intentions.<sup>38</sup> Philosophical education was oral and conducted by teachers who were also spiritual advisors. Rhetorics of philosophy were searches for truth carried out through dialogue, question and answer sessions, between instructors and students. Learning the principles of self-liberation involved not only listening to and obeying a spiritual master but also behaving in ethical ways in all relations with others. Care of the self implied knowing one's proper role in all relationships, being always fair and just, and never abusing one's power over others (Foucault 1987, 8). It is self-transformation through spiritual mastery that has the potential to awaken the recognition that one must also care for others in order to nurture their spiritual growth as well as to fulfill one's own ethical principles. Care of the self is a practice of freedom, an exercise of "self upon self" in which one learns to practice freedom ethically and understands one's ethical position in community (Foucault 1987, 3-4). Spiritual care of the self is the route to knowing who you are and of what you are capable.

I am making the case for an ethical politics that begins with the intentional transformation of the self. This transformation, Foucault advises, begins not with questions like "What can I know?" or even "What ought I to do?", but with "How have I been situated to experience the real?" (Bernauer 1987, 46). Transformation

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<sup>38</sup> Foucault points out that these ancient practices of self-transformation should not be confused with practices of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice that came to characterize later religious and pedagogical institutional teachings, nor with contemporary practices of self-centered and self-serving individualism (1987, 2).

of the self requires a renunciation of historically and culturally constructed notions of the self, classifications that focus on identity, individuality, and normative codes of moral behavior in order to free the self to become an ethical actor (Bernauer 1987, 54-55). Spiritual progress, says Foucault, is

... a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precepts he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself (1987, 78).

James Bernauer describes Foucault's practice of intellectual freedom and spiritual development as an "ecstatic thinking or a worldly mysticism," and he likens care of the self to the ways that religious mystics rely on revelation to free themselves from theologically-sanctioned ideas (1987, 67). Revelation in this sense, as a direct passionate experience of existence that fuels ethical growth, echoes Nancy's *adoration* as the intentional turning toward the shared world that aligns the self with an ethical demand to be an agent of bringing new possibilities of sociality into the world (Nancy 2013, 15). Revelation in Foucault's sense is not self-absorption but an experience of the real that "deprives the self of any illusion that it can become a sanctuary separated from the world." Revelation confirms the interdependence and interconnectedness of existence and compels a passionate sense of ethical responsibility. Echoing Nancy, Foucault maintains that such experiences expand "the embrace of otherness, an expansion that is the condition for a community of moral action" (Bernauer 1987, 71). This affective embrace of others, of the commonality of existence, fuels ethical self-transformation.

The question of an ethical subject is not a central concern in current political

thought; politics seems now to be more concerned with a certain formulation of truth, truth that all too often is employed as a means of domination and exploitation. Philosophy, too is concerned primarily with truth and the human ability to access different forms of truth (Foucault 1987, 13). Spiritual knowledge, however, is not a search for true knowledge outside of the self or a concern with the limits of this knowledge, but a search for a true relationship with the self that allows one to refashion the self into an ethical actor. This necessitates escaping inadequate modes of thinking about the self, politics, ethics, and relations with others in order to “open a field of contingencies toward an open future that can be imagined and realized” (Bernauer 1987, 70-71). The route to this self-transformation is a relationship with the self built on the willingness to turn one’s intuition and imagination inward in order to attend to one’s virtue and so become responsible for the self and for others (Foucault 2005, 5-7). Individuation in a spiritual sense is self-change toward goodness and toward a fulfillment of those spiritual capacities—sensitivity toward others, intuitive knowledge of the self, an awareness of the interconnectedness of shared existence, and awareness of the openness of the future—that conveys a responsibility for ethical behavior that can be mobilized toward creating ethical community.

Plato addresses this spiritual effect on community in advising us to care about self-awareness and self-improvement over earthly concerns. The route to this awareness and improvement is the disruption of habitual ways of thinking to engage cognition that employs imagery, imagination, and emotions like love in order to move beyond describing what is to participating in the goodness and beauty that

characterize existence (Taylor 1989, 20). Aristotle proposes that the purpose behind studying the natural order is not to gain theoretical knowledge but to become good. Philosophy for Aristotle is a method of transformation, a way to live in the world in the best possible way (*Nichomachean Ethics* II 1. 27-29). Spinoza says that purification of the self requires turning away from opinions, sensations, and inferences and turning toward the essence of the spirit. Once knowledge of one's spiritual capacities is known, one gains the ability to act out of virtue, which is acting from one's true nature (*Ethics* IV 21-15). Bergson describes spiritual development as necessary for the ability to open oneself to others in an attitude of love (*Two Sources* 38). Nancy directs us to sense both the self and others in a spiritual opening of the soul that allows us to experience what the world lacks and take responsibility for an indeterminate future (*Corpus II* 57). In all of these accounts, it is a spiritual relationship with the self and the universe that makes possible ethical actions toward a better human future.

### Communicating the Reality of Coexistence

What do we do with spiritual experiences and insights about ourselves and the universe? How do we take action in the world, in speech and behavior, that responds ethically to dimensions of shared life that are apprehended spiritually? Each of the philosophers who have been the subjects of this discussion—Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy—describe two different ways of being in the world. The first involves habitual modes of acting that are motivated by self-centered feelings and concerns and are facilitated through language and forms of

knowledge that make it possible to reduce the complexities of the world to manageable levels. This approach to being in the world, an approach based on the repetition of known sequences of events, is efficient and necessary for instrumental action. The alternate, second approach to being in the world is mindful and spiritual, a mode of being based on direct and immediate experiences of the interconnected and ever-changing nature of reality. This mode of being in the world conveys a responsibility on the self to imagine new possibilities for the human future and for human community, to articulate these possibilities, and to work toward their realization. These two modes of being and acting correspond to two discursive modes, one that is abstract and required for efficient action in and the world, and another that attempts, through creative invention, the expression of concrete and immediate experience.

These two discursive modes are the subject of Ernesto Grassi's work on the humanist rhetorical tradition. Language employed to act on a world in the myriad ways that are necessary for human survival is, Grassi notes, grounded in rationality. Rational language is the formal mode of expression for positivist philosophy and for science, where the goal is providing proofs, legitimizing statements, clarifying, and giving reasons for one's position (2001, 1). Mathematical in nature, this type of expression strives to express cause-and-effect relations that have predictive capacities; it is limited by the assumptions, the axioms and propositions, on which expressed knowledge is built. Discourse in this sense is assumed to be objective and unclouded by subjectivities, to conform to normative standards for coherence and logical progression, and to be ahistorical and to apply to all times and places.

Excluded from this system of discourse are imaginative, poetic, and rhetorical forms of expression that attempt to give voice to concrete and direct experiences:

The logical process is essentially an abstract one; it disregards the here and now seen as relative elements and thus reaches a universal which is considered valid anywhere anytime . . . The logical process, by means of logical definitions, programmatically *abstracts* the here and now of beings, while we, in fact, passionately experience the here and now in concrete situations (Grassi 1994, 16).

Grassi maintains that rational speech, limited to what is already contained in established premises, has no inventive potential and cannot represent an originary experience of being such as spiritually apprehending existence. Rationality in its restrictive mode is incapable of generating expressiveness that characterizes experiences of the true nature of reality. Rationality is thus the language of illusions, expressiveness that configures a world divorced from reality (Grassi 1994, 80).

Grassi proposes another mode of discourse for expressing direct, spiritual experiences of reality, of what he terms the *abyss*. Grassi's abyss corresponds to the spiritually-experienced universe portrayed by Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Bergson, and Nancy. The abyss is the world experienced intuitively, passionately, and directly in the here-and-now, a primordial reality that is usually concealed and unheard that becomes manifest only through a disruption of secure being and an openness to an immediate experience of shared life. During such experiences, Grassi says, we are not called to rationally explain or demonstrate stable identities and events but rather to confront the "dignity of the unknown" in order to gain a deeper understanding of the shared conditions of everyday life (2001, 83). Like Bergson's *intuition* and Nancy's *immediacy*, this experience involves the suspension of abstract knowledge and the adoption of an attitude of openness. It is this attitude of

openness to shared human life that brings about a subordination of self and a sense of responsibility toward community that can be communicated. This attitude, a spiritual orientation toward the world and others, creates a dilemma:

Our task is to stress the need for a distinction between two different paradigms concerned with the revelation of the being of individual beings: one based on rational, abstract, ahistorical presuppositions, and another one based on the story, the *fabula*, the narrated account of our experiences which forces us to seek out the commitments we must live up to in order to realize our existence (1994, 137).

The immediacy of an experience of the abyss, of the mystery of organic reality, generates ethical considerations concerning human lives, but these considerations, Grassi insists, cannot be adequately expressed in rational language (1994, 133). What is required is imagistic, creative language that can convey new insights.

Grassi proposes that the discursive mode capable of such expression is rhetoric, an inventive form of expression that, along with poetry, has long been considered to not have to do with the nature of things but only with subjectivities and arbitrariness (2001, 70). Yet, it is precisely the individual experience of the abyss, a direct and emotionally moving experience in space and time of the nature of common reality, that requires creativity for articulation. Communicating such an experience does not require grounding in premises that can be proven; the aim of such expression is not to demonstrate or persuade. Rather, what is required is language that can “manifest,” language that is imagistic and capable of expressing the relationship between reality and human material and spiritual needs (Grassi 2001, 99). Human problems, Grassi explains, are not abstract; they are concretely real in space and time, and what we need is language that can uncover the meaning of phenomena with regard to human needs for ethical development and relations.

We need language that can further our spiritual work, that is, language that can convey the underlying potential for harmonious and ethical social relations, a potential that is never expressed once but changes over space and time (Grassi 2001, 98). The truths that are revealed in unmediated experiences of the abyss have spiritual meanings that are possible to “extract” and share (Grassi 1994, 81). The ways that these meanings are shared are essential to “humanizing reality,” that is, to awakening an urgency and passionate commitment to reordering human relations (Grassi 2001, 100). Such language is necessarily imagistic, and the metaphor is the principle mode of expression. Grassi reminds us that, for the Greeks, the term *metaphor* conveyed an activity, that of carrying something from one place to another. In language regarding experiences of the nature of reality, metaphors carry meaning from the physical to the mental sphere. Metaphors take something from one realm and employ it to manifest another, and so they clarify and reveal something new and unexpected (Grassi 2001, 95). I suggest that this inventive process prepares us to politically pursue ethical community by offering new ways of expressing our ontological interconnectedness and interdependency. My reconceptualizations of human nature, communication, and community are metaphors directed at this purpose.

### Communicating Community

Communication is at the center of reviving possibilities for ethical human community, but such communication is not aimed at information sharing, consensus, or persuasion. To communicate, in the concrete ways we interact with

others, knowledge of the underlying ontological reality of our shared existence, that is, our radical interconnectedness and interdependence, requires new forms of expression aimed at revealing what is present, but missing in the world. Lyotard says we need language that imaginatively articulates transformative politics acts (2012, 113). John Berger says we need new ways of expressing the meaning of human ethical existence to give meaning to values we commit to and actions taken in the name of those values; we need to imagine anew the bases for our political lives (2201, 572). Nancy suggests that communication aimed at establishing ethical community must express our ontological condition of *being-with*, a web of intimate relations that exists already and cannot be created by rational discourse (1991, 31). Community in this sense is not a work to be done or something that we can create discursively, and communication in this sense is not what links one subjectivity to another. Communication is rather a process that takes place between beings in recognition of our commonality, which makes the political task not a discursively rational one, but rather one of risking exposure to one another so that we recognize and take responsibility for the relations that do exist.

Community exists, and the task is to articulate this existence to one another, to hold at the center of our interactions the bare truth of our co-existence. What are the metaphors that express this state of being? *Unity, interdependence, and co-existence* are among the metaphors that approach the reality of existence. These metaphors, as inadequate as they may be, as in need of revision and expansion as they are, imply that people do not have to look like one another, hold the same beliefs, or share common myths in order to be in community. They fact that we

share existence establishes our commonality and our responsibility for one another. Our co-existence makes each of us worthy of regard, even love. What needs to be expressed, one to the other of us, is our co-existence. In order to do so requires, Nancy insists, *unworking* social, economic, technical, and institutional modes of being together, modes that reinforce divisions and tensions (1991, 31). To express our co-existence and interdependence requires a “passionate insistence” that places co-existence prior to all illusions of autonomy and to all efforts at rational discourse (Nancy 1991, 35). This is not to say that rational discourse, persuasion, and consensus have no place in politics, there are many divisions that require us to work through differences, but it does mean that acknowledgement of our co-existence comes first and takes ethical primacy. Ontologically, we are community with all of those who exist, but this fact of being is not widely acknowledged or understood. Comprehending and passionately feeling our shared existence is the basis, I suggest, for a new form of political commitment. Grounded in faith in ourselves as agents capable of giving expression to this reality, and secure in the knowledge that change is possible, we can work to realize what already exists, that is, our coexistence.

There are many registers in which a basis for transformational politics can be expressed, in a legal frame of rights and equality, for example, in terms of transcendental values like liberty and justice, or through religious concepts like justice and mercy. These registers overlap to inform a sense of personal and social responsibility for one another. The human spirit is another register, one that opens up new avenues for thinking the political process. Interrupting habitual ways of being in the world in order to nurture capacities to be in community involves

opening the self to the bare fact of co-existence and the mobility and change and opportunity for newness that characterize existence. Doing so can open a politics not of identity or self-preservation, but a politics of humility and generosity, of accepting the responsibility for nurturing other spirits, a politics not of calculation and rational debate, but of acknowledging the fragile existences of others and being motivated to, in whatever ways life presents, be an agent of goodness. A politics of the human spirit would be a politics of self-and-other responsibility for the conditions of the human world as well as the attempt to realize, in concrete human acts, the human potential to make the world more livable. community. This involves a departure from theories based on human individualism and rational discourse that view community as constituted by intersubjective message sharing aimed at persuasion and consensus in order to reimagine the preconditions for community as the intentional spiritual opening of self in recognition of our interconnectedness with and interdependence on others. In this paradigm, communication itself is this opening in acts both discursive and nondiscursive that display sympathetic understanding of shared existence, risk exposure of self to others, and express a willingness to be responsible not only for ourselves but for the fragile finite beings with whom we share existence.

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Foucault ends *The Order of Things* with a disturbing image of the vulnerability of human being in Western thought:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge . . . Man is an invention of recent date. And perhaps one nearing its end . . . [facing its erasure] like a face drawn at the edge of the sea (1974, 386).

Foucault posits the human here as a representation, a human invention that is merely a name ascribed to a fictive product, a myth, that is derived from fragments of knowledge accumulated through science, philosophy, and experience (Webster 220). The destruction of humanism that Foucault speaks to in this passage he later rejects, or provides a partial solution for, in his work on the care of the self as practices aimed toward ethical freedom. It has been in this Foucaultian spirit of ethical freedom that I, too, have addressed human political agency through an analogical interpretation of rhetorics of human nature from the ancient Greeks to the contemporary moment. My pursuit of human spirit exceeds a history of ideational and symbolic interpretations of the constitutive forces of commonality to propose a basis for community that is not reducible to ideas or to processes of human rationality. Instead, my history reveals that it is the sensing body, human capacities for imagination, and intuitive abilities to experience the world as interconnected and interdependent that makes possible the affective bonds that subtend community. It is the ability to participate in a flow of time that continually expresses novelty and creative possibilities that makes possible a response to what is missing in the world—ethical and humane unity—and the creation of new forms of human interaction.

My intention has been to shift a theoretical focus of the mechanisms of community from an ideational, discursively expressed rationality to rituals of communication action like sympathetic understanding of others, a risk of exposure to our shared vulnerabilities, and an expansion of the “we” that is included in our sense of commonality. Recuperating a sense of the human as material and

immaterial and as affectively connected to existence writ large can, I maintain, help fuel belief in the human ability to apprehend what the world needs, and to imagine, articulate, and realize new forms of collectivity. In restoring human spirit to human nature there is basis for reconceptualizing rhetoric as it pertains to constituting community, rhetoric seen not as processes of symbolic exchange but as an ethics, a praxis, that fuels community through passionate insights and attachments. Rhetoric so framed positions a material-immaterial human actor that cannot be reduced to matter or to deterministic dynamics and interactions. To be human is to be capable of responding to contingent human conditions through capacities for sensible and emotional recognition of others and imaginatively creating conditions of relations that are not reducible to symbolic constructions.

I have engaged in an anagogical interpretation of the clusters of my genealogy in order to achieve a recovery of human spirit that serves as a complement to, and an extension of, Western modes of understanding human nature. My strategy has been to read the history of rhetorics of the human not to merely report or repeat past insights, but in order to unearth what has been implicit and implied, that is, an immanent human spirit that is a set of attributes and capacities that have potent communal potential. My anagogical approach to past theories has been undertaken to uncover and revive a secular spiritual agency on which I have constructed a politics of community that is irreducible to symbolic mechanisms, one that is based in the capacities of human to sense and respond to the fragile existence of other beings and to form sensible and spiritual attachments with one another. This configuration of both human being and community is based

on powerful experiences of the nature of the world and of others, experiences that impose a sense of responsibility for community and compel ethical interactions. It is my belief that recognition of these capacities could allow us to know ourselves, in these perilous political times, as capable of the potent political agency and ethical freedom required to transform the world.

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