

WRITING THE NEW WORLD

THE POLITICS OF NATURAL HISTORY
IN THE EARLY SPANISH EMPIRE



MAURO JOSÉ CARACCIOLI

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Mauro José Caraccioli

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*For Vanessa, my greatest teacher
And for Celeste and Gustav, everyday joys of wonder*

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*Man, in sum, the greatest marvel
posed to human comprehension,
a synthesis composed
of qualities of angel, plant, and beast
whose elevated baseness
shows traits of each of these.
And why? Perhaps more blessed than other forms
it was designed that
Man, through loving Union,
should join with the Divine. A favor
never fully fathomed, and, were we
to judge by how it is
reciprocated,
insufficiently appreciated!*

—Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *First I Dream*

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OPENING

Of Nature and Other Demons

*And so, once idolatry was rooted out of the best and noblest part
of the world, the devil retired to the most remote places and reigned in that
other part of the world, which, although it is very inferior in nobility,
is not so in size and breadth.*

José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*¹

In 1572, the Jesuit father José de Acosta arrived at the port city of Lima in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Tasked with traveling inland to meet the viceroy Francisco Álvarez de Toledo—who was on a tour of the colony after the suppression of the Tupac Amaru uprising a few months earlier—Acosta and about a dozen fellow Jesuits crossed the province of Huarochirí, making their way through the Pariacaca mountain range to the east of Lima. Reaching upward of 4,000 feet in altitude, Acosta wrote how, “after all my preparations, when I climbed the Staircases, as they are called, the highest part of the range, almost in an instant I felt such mortal anguish that I thought I would have to throw myself off the mount onto the ground.”² He would go on to describe in excruciating detail how for almost 2,000 miles he and his companions suffered from the effects of common altitude sickness. Despite levels of anguish that seemed to push their bodies to the brink of death, the small cadre of travelers would soon feel normal, leading Acosta to conclude that: “the illness of the Indies of which I speak . . . stirs up the inner organs, and, what is even more remarkable, it happens even when there is pleasant sunshine and warmth in the same spot . . . that the harm is due to the quality of air that a person breathes, because it is very keen and sharp, and its cold is not so much perceptible by the senses

as it is penetrating.”³ Much the same can be said about the rest of his time in the Americas.

Although he was there to aid in the establishment of new Jesuit colleges, what Acosta encountered in Peru was a world the likes of which no other European chronicler or armchair philosopher had ever before seen. The experience was of such transformative power that the resulting book, his magnum opus the *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, bolstered Acosta’s prestige across the Spanish Empire as a learned man and commentator of the New World. Yet despite a notable background in humanist philosophy, Acosta’s observations were permeated by a fear of the demonic that cast a shadow over all his empirical judgments. Indeed, much of what he notes about Peru’s Indian inhabitants is concerned with deciphering how the Devil himself, “retired to the most remote places . . . in that other part of the world,” so ably captured the devotion of indigenous peoples, “[subjecting] them to things of no importance, many of which were very vile.”⁴

To that end there are many devils in this book. Chief among them is the challenge posed to political theorists to take seriously the intellectual contributions of early modern Spanish and Spanish American thinkers in their efforts to make sense of nature and other demons at the dawn of modernity. More the result of omission than commission, misleading narratives about Latin America produced by members of the early modern canon still retain a hold over the ways political concepts, debates, and exemplary names of the sixteenth century are defined. As someone highly indebted to that same corpus, I have written this book to broaden its horizons and rethink its political contours. Like countless postcolonial thinkers, I endeavor here to convey how historical domination is not only composed of epic conquests, but is also reproduced (even if inadvertently) via scholarly work. Specifically, the kind of inquiries I document here lie at the very heart of debates between the empirical and theoretical foundations of early modern political thought. That they happened at the other side of the known world, at a time when Europeans were only beginning to contemplate the existence of literally unknown utopian spaces, is a key part of the story.

Using Spain’s politics of natural history in the New World as my central object of analysis, this book argues that the study of nature in the New World was about the cultivation of wonder, more so than merely extractive, utilitarian interests. My aim is to show how the natural historical writings of chroniclers, explorers, and, most notably, missionaries helped to lay out a distinct set of empirical foundations for modern political thought, as these developed in the

New World. Natural history, I maintain, was a contentious field of narrative inquiry, and should be read today as a distinct genre of early modern political thinking.

The question of genre in the history of political thought has served to establish important boundaries around what political theorists do in their craft. As James Farr remarks, genre often serves as “an ideal-type, admitting of exceptions and differences,” that helps narrate the history of ideas as a lineup: “a linked chain of influence and attention . . . bound together as a tradition, engaged in a great dialogue, each later thinker speaking to or about each previous one.”⁵ To think of natural history as a genre of political thought, then, is to present for political philosophers the interfaces between politics, science, and faith as they developed in the early Spanish Empire. Natural history here serves as a vital link in demonstrating the empirical texture of moral wonder across the sixteenth century, both in the Americas and Europe.

Although the many implications of the European encounter with America have been increasingly documented, missing still is a closer look at how the natural environments of the New World fed into the broader intellectual transformations taking place across Spanish America. Though these objectives are not unwelcome within the field of Political Theory, there remains some reluctance to rethink the established lineup. The reasons for this, in my view, are sociological and ideological. For one, the academic division of labor under which today’s political theorists are trained has changed dramatically in the last two decades. Indeed, the cultures I take up in this text have garnered greater attention in recent years, particularly as the notions of rationalism, rights, and secularity that today’s political theorists predominantly wrestle with were only being sown in the Old World at the time of its encounter with the New.

The clear-eyed confidence articulated by Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke, among others, was allegedly still a few centuries behind in the Americas, where the natural and supernatural coexisted (and arguably still do) along multiple registers.⁶ And while the contemporary makeup of interdisciplinary scholarship has made it easier to take up a project that bridges literatures in Colonial Spanish American history, religious studies, and the history of science, with the developing program of the political theory of empire, the influence of a Great Books tradition remains strong. Is this work really political theory? Or is it Latin American Studies? The verdicts seem everywhere and nowhere, particularly as the burden of proof lies in demonstrating that political thinking on the margins of the European metropole can and *does* take place, positioned such as it is against an established canon. My point is not to

complain (or obfuscate), but rather situate the present text and the challenges raised therein. Vital for me is the question of whether the historical study of political theory can accommodate a broader conception of modernity than what it currently espouses. And if it cannot, at what cost?

Ideologically, there is a more salient issue to unpack. As Quentin Skinner long ago warned, “If we want a history of philosophy written in a genuinely historical spirit, we need to make it one of our principal tasks to situate the texts we study within such intellectual contexts as enable us to make sense of what their authors were doing in writing them.”⁷ To tell the story of the revival of natural history during Imperial Spain’s conquest of the New World therefore requires some attention to who its most notable practitioners were. As they happened to be primarily men of the cloth, additional difficulties emerge given their analytic vocabularies and evangelizing motives. More akin to eccentrics than savants, these chroniclers, missionaries, and scientists nonetheless often risked life, limb, and reputation to defend an emerging style of inquiry that was ethnographic and empirical in scope, as much as it was exegetical and demonological in character. Indeed, making sense of their politics demands reconciling how natural landscapes and indigenous people alike possessed unnatural powers and yet were also coveted as subjects of a distant crown.⁸

To think with demons, then, rather than against them, can say much about the way in which the most notable and dynamic explorers of the New World wrestled with their various intellectual commitments. As Stuart Clark has argued, belief in the workings of demons, witches, and other occult, unnatural characters was an essential ingredient of modern intellectual history for nearly 300 years. “In effect,” he writes, “demonology was a composite subject consisting of discussions about the workings of nature, the processes of history, the maintenance of religious purity, and the nature of political authority and order. Inevitably, its authors took up particular intellectual positions in relation to these four major topics of early modern thought. Quite simply, their views . . . depended on concepts and arguments drawn from the scientific, historical, religious, and political debates of their time.”⁹ Moreover, accounting for the demonological discourses operating in the New World also addresses the reluctance to think of works by Spanish naturalists as canonical to the history of ideas.

As these thinkers developed a vocabulary to speak about what they saw, both among themselves and among various audiences, so, too, did the concept of New World nature emerge. Though the Americas have always held

a special place in the modern imagination, much of the fantastic world that was first shared with eager audiences on the European continent remains alien to many of us today.¹⁰ What did early travelers find that lay beyond their dreams? How were these fantasies shared as desirable realities? What did imperial ambition first look like in the face of great moral and environmental challenges?¹¹

My approach in this book is to address that interplay between empire, faith, and the experience of New World environments, illustrating how different conceptions of nature shaped Imperial Spain's early efforts to cultivate a New World civilization. To do so, I focus on works attending to the distinctive ecological character of the Americas, lending greater attention to how early naturalist writings shaped the intellectual context of Spain's New World Empire, particularly its millenarian ethos. By extension, I also demonstrate how spiritual wonder played a central role in making sense of the New World's exotic landscapes and peoples. Tracing the influence of religious conviction on the study of natural history in the New World, my aim is to broaden the evidentiary basis for rooting the Scientific Revolution in matters of faith as much as politics. Moving through two themes only cursorily engaged in by political theorists—the history of conquest narratives and missionary nature writing—I seek to unravel a long-denounced, but tenacious, historiographical prejudice that portrays the Spanish Empire as a largely marginal feature of modernity.¹²

While political theorists such as Diego von Vacano and Juliet Hooker have recently sought to engage accounts of the early Spanish Conquest of the New World in innovative ways, their analyses border on offering a one-dimensional portrait of Spanish domination's role in the formation of racial hierarchy and exclusion.¹³ Alternatively, scholars in Imperial Studies, such as Orlando Ben-tancor and James Fuerst, have turned their attention toward more eclectic explorations of the continuities and ruptures between Spanish metropole thinkers and colonial practices.¹⁴ By their accounts, agents of Imperial Spain are problematic figures, but they are also intimately wrapped up in the creation of something distinctly new. Hence if political theorists are to gain greater insight into the logics of domination that inform early modern vocabularies, they need a more nuanced glimpse of the imperial imagination and its intellectual formation.

In light of these historiographical advances, this is the first work of political theory that accounts for New World exploration and evangelization as a dual science of domination.¹⁵ Rather than portraying imperialism as a project

forged from abroad, I offer instead a more complex genesis of the imperial ideals proffered by the study of nature within the Americas.

Natural history's deployment led to enduring literary motifs in the representation of New World nature, as well as contentious depictions of a future colonial society. The case of Spanish natural history is thus a critical juncture in the relationship between science and empire: driven by religious wonder, scientific inquiry thrived; yet as the empire grew unwieldy, the normative aspirations of naturalist thought were subsumed to instrumentalist economic growth. Spanish experiences of nature in the early modern period helped shape spiritual visions of the natural world, offered an adaptive discourse for empire, and called for a new map on which the future of civilization could be written. This vital period remains today a disputed space from which to convey the imperial politics of science, particularly as contemporary forms of environmental ethics rediscover indigenous ways of relating to nature that reject romanticism and capitalist cooptation.¹⁶

No doubt the history of Spain's "natural encounter" holds valuable lessons for theorists, historians, geographers, and conservationists of nature alike. Indeed, the conditions under which Imperial Spain's power evolved generated long-enduring themes within Enlightenment thought. Of particular salience was the proposition that humans could reconnect with their natural selves, if only they looked to the indigenous past.¹⁷ Today, as greater environmental challenges emerge from the unintended consequences of anthropogenic climate change, a curious revival of that past is developing in popular culture. At stake in media and political narratives alike is a radical, and almost paradoxical, ultimatum for the future of civilization: climate salvation, or a slow decline into self-induced extinction.¹⁸

Similarly caught between the extremes of global deliverance or destruction, the story of Imperial Spain's first century in the New World highlights the moral complexity of domination in the face of cultural and ecological incommensurability. While reliving these early moments may not solve the ongoing climate crisis, the natural histories I engage can give theorists of nature and the public alike a renewed sense of the different ways of thinking that made nature into a source of contemplation. More than this, it is my contention that the urgent times we currently inhabit are in need of stories that serve as springboards both to action *and* reflection. Long ago, natural history helped launch a cultural wave of discovery and invention, albeit one that was analogous to conquest. Though I do not know the extent to which our present crisis remains linked to those stories, this book shows how their restoration is a timely effort.

Why Natural History?

The last decade has found political theorists profoundly interested in the history of empire again. In a recent review of the field, Jennifer Pitts argues that empire is a pivotal focal point in the genealogy of modern political theory, particularly in tracing the extent to which liberalism has developed alongside British, French, and American imperial legacies.¹⁹ Drawing upon several areas of scholarly salience (for example, the history of political thought, postcolonialism, globalization studies, and international law), Pitts exhorts political theorists to engage with the imperial projects linked to contemporary ills and conflicts, specifically pointing to “the substantial responsibility on the part of the great powers for conditions such as extreme poverty, ecological crisis, civil conflict, and tyranny around the world.”²⁰

Yet despite sustained attention to the economic, military, and legal dynamics of imperialism, Pitts neglects to offer a resounding example of historical works engaging the relation between empire and ecology. The closest reference is to Anthony Pagden’s classic work, *The Fall of Natural Man*, a text more interested in the impact of New World anthropologies in European legal thought than on the uses of imperial nature. Reduced to a backdrop for resource extraction, then, Pitts’ account suggests that nature was merely an ancillary concern of empires, second to the larger objectives of territorial sovereignty. While providing an otherwise trailblazing review on the current state of the field, Pitts’ account also acknowledges how important early debates across the Spanish Empire were over the legitimacy of their rule in the Americas.²¹ Much of those debates occurred in Spain, however, and said very little about the New World as autochthonous legal spaces with their own voices.²²

Indeed, even the scholarly treatment of settler colonial logics in the Global South takes more of an interest in matters of legal ownership than what exactly is to be owned.²³ Upon further investigation, it becomes evident that the existing literature on the political theory of empire largely neglects the European encounter with nature as a formative experience, bounded almost overwhelmingly by a fascination with liberalism.²⁴

As recent anthologies of the subfield have unequivocally shown, political theory’s present—and arguably its future—is imbricated within the logic of global liberalism. In their introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (2006), John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips assert the troubling claim: “Liberalism has demonstrated an almost unprecedented capacity for absorbing its competitors, aided by the collapse of its rival, Marxism, but

also by its own virtuosity in reinventing itself and incorporating key elements from opposing traditions.”²⁵ While seemingly omniscient, the editors of the *Oxford Handbook* also offer a warning: liberalism’s ability to absorb its challenges is paralleled by “increasing anxiety about the way Western liberalism illegitimately centers itself,” with even prominent liberals ready to “acknowledge that there are significant traditions of thought beyond those that helped form Western liberalism.” Arguably, the contemporary turn toward empire can be read as symptomatic of this intellectual anxiety.²⁶

What role then, if any, does nature have in the turn to empire? More pointedly, where does natural history itself fit in the history of political thought? From Thucydides to Nietzsche, the meanings that men (and women) have made of their natural environments over time have been central to theories of politics.²⁷ Those conceptions are in turn vital to the kinds of imaginaries that peoples—and empires—deploy to fulfill their own aspirations. Equally important, however, is how might someone else’s environments, for instance, change those ambitions? While previous scholars have attempted to account for what was once termed the “impact” of the New World on the Old, few of their arguments had at their disposal the interdisciplinary registers available today.²⁸ Although a wide scope of inquiries around the concrete matter of nature can be found across modernity, it is the collective experiences of nature in the New World that are vital to the political transformations of the Old World.²⁹

I do not pretend to address all of the mechanisms at work in the intellectual struggle with the wonder and incommensurability of nature in the Americas. In my view, however, many of modern political thought’s assumptions about nature and society stem from the early representations of nature in the New World that emerged in the wake of the Spanish Conquests. Spaniards turned to natural history as part of a larger attempt to formalize the experience of wonder and offer typologies for the seeming incommensurability informing their earliest encounters. While visions of nature in the Americas were part of larger shifts in European migration and exploration, the distinct views of nature, wonder, and empirical inquiry held by Spanish naturalists possessed radical implications for modern science and political theory. That missionary orders were among the first to pursue the revival of natural history, adapting their biblical vocabulary to new times, adds an important interpretive horizon.³⁰

This, then, is a story about faith, as much as it is about nature in the first century of Spain’s New World Empire. It aims at nothing less than providing the theoretical scaffolding to study this interplay of forces in light of a greater

historiographical debate within the human sciences, what Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra calls: *writing the history of the New World*.³¹

In comparing the efforts of Spanish chroniclers, explorers, and missionaries to make sense of New World nature, I demonstrate that the natural histories they forged as part of their various efforts exerted a decisive influence on the intellectual climate of Spain, its colonies, and Europe. They also produced conflicts of interest between the Spanish Crown and its colonial representatives. As a historian of political thought, this juxtaposition helps me theorize Spain's Empire in more varied ways, jettisoning the notion that Spanish rule operated singularly across distinct territories. Going further, my analysis will also substantiate the effects of New World nature on different Spanish imperial imaginaries.

By showing that scientific activity in the New World was linked with a spiritual wonder that theorized the possibilities of a future colonial society, this book challenges established accounts of not only political thought within Imperial Spain, but also the intellectual, cultural, and religious climates of the Americas. Indeed, by reading imperial political thought in Spain as the product of a broader culture of inquiry, rather than a solely continental development, one can paint a richer portrait of imperial formation. Furthermore, I reconstruct a critical period in the New World's modern history: a period of innovation, dispossession, and accommodation, dubbed the Spiritual Conquest: a period in which European thinkers—and the colonized people of the Americas—struggled to resolve the emerging moral and political challenges of their new joint fate. Recognizing that Spanish imperial agents held more critical views of ancient and biblical historiography, as well as more complex appreciations of indigenous cultures, should prompt political theorists today to reconsider the oblivious tropes surrounding Spain and its political significance for modernity.

Yet I am not interested in reviving old debates and grand narratives of the Black or White Legends, nor of freeing Spanish colonizers from moral scrutiny. What I aspire to is to use the interpretive tools available to historians of political thought as a means of clarifying concepts, understanding distinctions, and appreciating the worldviews of these characters. In a few words, again with Skinner, I aim to “so far as possible . . . see things their way.”³² Where I differ from existing accounts of early Colonial Spanish America's place in the history of political thought is two-fold: first, that I read missionary writings as contributing to the emerging Enlightenment spirit being cultivated across European universities in the sixteenth century; and second, that it was men of various religious faiths who would sow the seeds of these new cultures in the New World.

Only by excluding the activities and stories of what historians have dubbed the Hispanic Enlightenment does the narrative of a monolithic Spanish backwardness hold sway, and by extension, the allegedly derivative character of New World intellectual production.³³ This is not to whitewash the violence and bloodshed of Spanish Conquest. Plenty of ink has been spilled over this very question and what little remaining value there is to grand narratives of what Lewis Hanke once called Spain's "civilizing" justice.³⁴ Yet if political theorists today engage with the individual actions of Spanish intellectuals in the New World, the sixteenth century garners a rather fascinating mirror through which we can perceive many of our own preconceptions—about nature, to be sure, but also about the boundaries between wonder, politics, and political thinking.

Indeed, Carlos Fuentes long ago captured this sense of historical reflexivity in his celebrated text, *The Buried Mirror*. Writing on the Latin American connections with Europe, he considered how "the Spain that arrived in the New World on the ships of the discoverers and conquerors gave us at least half our being. So it is not surprising that our debate with Spain should have been, and continues to be, so intense. For it is a debate with ourselves."³⁵ If, in effect, political theorists still have something to say about Imperial Spain's legacies on our present thinking—particularly about nature—this study continues the debate.

Finally, I would be remiss to not acknowledge that this is a history of conquerors more so than a history of the conquered. This may raise several dilemmas for scholars in the humanities and social sciences, as well as environmental activists, particularly at the risk of rendering my account into some kind of a hagiography. Yet as Bianca Premo notes, the Spanish Empire is at the core of the most critical intellectual transformations of modernity, with none more important than the very notion of the Enlightenment as an epistemology and historical event:

In what was once called the "Debate of the New World," creole intellectuals defended the region's past and their own ability to interpret it, skeptical of the eyewitness accounts of early Spanish chroniclers as well as of newer northern European alternatives that degraded Amerindians and American-born Spaniards. Spanish American historians created a new way of writing history based on their proximity to the New World and their mastery of native sources—in many ways, laying the foundation for our own way of writing history—in a dialectic with the rest of Europe.³⁶

I do not intend for these reflections to whitewash the violence of Spain's imperial past. However, not knowing the stories that conquerors themselves em-

ployed in justifying their violence—physical and intellectual—is also a venture full of risk. As Edward Said noted almost 30 years ago in *Culture and Imperialism*, “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.”³⁷ Understanding that process of narrative formation underlies my motivations, certainly more so than neglecting the history of Amerindian peoples who suffered—but also contributed in unacknowledged ways to—Spain’s rule for 300 years.³⁸ Any egregious omissions are my own fault.

The book develops across five chapters. In chapter 1, entitled “Narratives of Conquest and the Conquest of Narrative,” I show how literary forms and tropes inherited from the early formation of the Spanish state were central to the conceptualization of American nature by Spanish naturalists. By framing their efforts as an empirical typology of narrative inquiry across distinct works of natural history, I demonstrate the ways different types of stories employed by sixteenth-century naturalists can be traced and reconstructed.

Chapter 2, “Oviedo, Las Casas, and the Difference That Made Nature,” engages classical work in the political theory of empire, focusing on the history of nature writing. My substantive focus in this chapter is on the conflict between the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas and the official royal chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. Las Casas and Oviedo traveled to the New World while emerging from the cultural context of the Spanish *Reconquista*. In the two historians’ works one finds opposing visions of a utopian American landscape, where nature was not so much the setting, as it was the means through which a modern imperial project could be made possible. Whereas Las Casas is credited for inverting the story of territorial conquest originally deployed by Oviedo, he adapts this genre to the specific interests of an entire generation of missionary scientists: religious assimilation.

Chapter 3, “The Anthropolitics of Bernardino de Sahagún,” homes in on Book XI of the renowned polyvocal text, the *Florentine Codex*, specifically a chapter entitled “Earthly Things.” I argue that Sahagún inherited several narrative elements and themes from early travelers of the Americas, including the conception of colonization as part of a satanic epic. By attempting to dehumanize native peoples and demonize the natural world, the story of conquest in this period is transformed into an account of conflicting moral orders. Yet Sahagún’s journey also demonstrates the extent to which natural historians were indebted to indigenous beliefs and intellectual labor, despite the dangers this proximity would pose to notions of European

supremacy, as the problems of deciphering culture became indistinguishable from the interpretation of faith.

Chapter 4, “The Imperial Renaissance of Francisco Hernández,” paints a portrait of natural history’s fall from prominence as a lost episode in the early modern culture of scientific inquiry. The chapter focuses on reconstructing the contributions of the little-known imperial doctor (*protomedico*) Francisco Hernández de Toledo. In 1570, Hernández was appointed by King Philip II to lead the first scientific expedition aimed at collecting and cataloguing natural life in the New World. Although a massive wealth of information on the natural environment of New Spain emerged from Hernández’s mission, by 1577 Hernández had lost favor with King Philip II, with much of his work lost to fire and intrigue. Hernández’s story therefore captures the contentious role played by natural history as a handmaiden of empire, as well as source of ideological confrontation during the late Spanish Renaissance.

In chapter 5, “José de Acosta and the Ends of Empire,” I look at the Jesuit historian José de Acosta’s contributions to the theoretical development of natural history, reconstructing the normative goals and literary strategies behind his magnum opus, the *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*. As a philosophical exploration of the natural landscape of the New World, the *Historia Natural* is fraught with conflicting goals. Although the work’s zealousness has led to its modern-day marginalization, Acosta’s contributions to natural philosophy are central to the development of foundational political thinkers of the seventeenth century. To this end, he remains an indispensable interlocutor in the emergence of early modern political thought.

In the concluding epilogue, “Toward a Natural History of Colonial Domination,” I present the story of Spanish natural history as part of a larger journey of historiographical evolution, asserting how the stuff of nature has, over time, become the stuff of human civilization. This, at least, is how Western scholars have defined the development of the human sciences, where the documentation of collective memory is central to the movement from savagery and barbarism toward the more familiar plains of commercial society. The conclusion reiterates why the return to natural history retains a contemporary moral relevance. In turn, it points toward new directions in studying the relationship of mutual dependency between European power and indigenous American thought.

At the heart of the dynamic exchange that shaped the creation of the New World is the evolution of narrative modes of inquiry central to the political landscape of the Americas, past and present. This, indeed, is the normative

assumption of recent works across the humanities that seek to resist both the slander and misappropriation of Latin America's many voices; it also drives the political immediacy of my own efforts.³⁹ In closing, then, telling that history of resistance and adaptation to the project of natural history is a necessary task. Invariably, many of the sources I draw inspiration from have already begun that arduous process. My hope is that by telling the story of how would-be conquerors were transformed by the marvels of the New World, we can add another crucial piece in support of that larger struggle for self-expression across the Americas.

1

NARRATIVES OF CONQUEST AND THE CONQUEST OF NARRATIVE

These works do not describe events; they are events, and they transcend self-reference to refer to the world outside themselves.

Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession*¹

The central claim of this book is that Spanish natural historians of the sixteenth century created a new genre of inquiry in their representations of the New World's natural environments. In the process, they deployed a wide range of recurring narrative tropes found across modern political thought: premodern states of nature, progressive strategies for resource "improvement," and romantic epics dramatizing the plight of human life against environmental insecurity.² Central to this collective endeavor was the image of the New World as an untamed landscape that could serve the dual ends of imperial extraction: resource accumulation and knowledge appropriation.³

Yet what emerged from the efforts of these early explorers was the blurry portrait of a future world from which Europeans could assess their failings. For both Spaniards and their Creole successors, natural history served as a medium through which lived-experience, natural philosophy, and visual culture could inform a burgeoning narrative of civilization.⁴ This chapter focuses on how that vision came about, specifically the distinct elements from Spain's *Reconquista* that constitute a master narrative from which sixteenth-century missionaries could craft a historiography of New World nature.⁵

In the long sixteenth century, natural history was but one of the narratives shaping the emergence of European modernity and the Scientific Revolution.⁶ Alongside merchant capitalism and the centralization of juridical power, natural historians competed with other ideological trends to render their craft politically useful. They also had the added goal to line up their efforts with the

aims of “the Queen of the sciences”—theology. Key to the development of this missionary science was natural history’s concerns with genealogy (particularly in the absence of biblical or classical points of reference), comparative analysis (as an extension of exegetical interpretation), experimentation (as a feature of cultural extirpation), and practical philosophy (as a key disposition of their humanist training). Spanish naturalists were situated between state demands for survey data, on the one hand, and the experience of wonder eagerly sought by Europeans, on the other.

As I argue below, however, natural history evolved in this context along different narrative axes and disputes over the proper bases of empirical evidence. Closer examination of these differences shows not only the evolving conceptual formation of natural history, but more importantly its cohesion as a genre of political thought. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the narrative origins of Spanish descriptions of American nature and why narrative is the appropriate conceptual starting point for the intellectual reconstruction of sixteenth-century New World nature. Second, I examine the narrative styles employed by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Bernardino de Sahagún, Francisco Hernández, and José de Acosta in order to develop a typology of constitutive narratives in and about New World nature. Throughout the chapter, I note how the evolution of early modern natural history as a science of domination is inextricable from Spain’s grand narrative of imperial ascendance, illustrating the distinct blend of exegetical analysis and empirical observation characterizing its practice.

At the background level, the encounter, conquest, and naturalization of a Spanish imperial project was preceded by a series of epistemic shifts in the political imaginary of the European continent. Central across these shifts was the narrative of *La Reconquista*: a 700-year military and cultural campaign against the Moorish Caliphates of Southern Iberia that culminated in the joint reign of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile as *Reyes Católicos*. As Patricia Seed has shown, *La Reconquista* served the dual function of priming narrative accounts in the New World to justify the creation of an empire, while also legitimating the violence employed in its conquest.⁷ I go further here by showing how *La Reconquista* set up what I call distinct “constitutive narratives” across the long sixteenth century; that is to say, moral frames of reference that would guide the efforts of missionary naturalists as they moved from the conquest of nature to its colonial domestication.

By unpacking the respective tropes, sources of evidence, and alleged normative implications that Spanish naturalists saw emerging from their interaction with indigenous societies and nature, I also show that key to the aims

of their natural histories was to ground the political narrative of empire in the proper spiritual and philosophical terrain. Rather than merely extending the epic chronicles of religious conquest and manly virtue that characterized the Spanish *Reconquista*, natural history gave rise to a more complex master narrative, with parallel modes of scholarly inquiry to legitimate its goals.

I want to be careful at the outset to present a portrait of the multiple natural environments and beings depicted by natural historians that does not treat the Americas as an undifferentiated canvas. Indeed, this is one of the primary issues with how canonical political theorists from John Locke to Adam Smith tended to conceptualize precontact life in the New World.⁸ While the range of landscapes, animals, weather patterns, and rituals examined by the natural histories I interpret is limitless, my focus is on how distinct audiences were engaged.

Particularly in the cases of Oviedo and Las Casas, rhetorical description itself was “*the event*” to admire, not only the contents of their observations. To that end, I spend more time looking at specific depictions of New World nature in Sahagún’s, Hernández’s, and Acosta’s works than in Oviedo’s and Las Casas’s. This is by no means a rejection of the contents they each described, but rather a tactical choice to emphasize their form and its lasting effects. At stake in clarifying these different subgenres are the connective tissues between a narrative of conquest inherited from Spain’s rise to imperial prominence and the attempts by naturalists to shape their own narrative of empire throughout the early decades of colonization.

The Narrative Origins of American Nature

The concept of nature is not a new concern for political theorists. Yet naturalistic experience of the New World—not to mention its documentation—remains an ambivalent theme within the study of early modern thought.⁹ There are two prevailing views on the relationship between lived-experiences and their narrative representation, whether in textual or visual form. On one side, theorists and philosophers of narrative from Hayden White to Paul Ricoeur argue that all attempts at reconstruction or contextual clarification of concepts are culturally bound.¹⁰ More specifically, as Hayden White writes, “It is precisely because the narrative mode of representation is so natural to human consciousness, so much an aspect of everyday speech and ordinary discourse, that its use in any field of study aspiring to the status of a science must be suspect.”¹¹ In applying discursive frames to the past, we inevitably impose upon it our own assump-

tions and stories about the world. Another camp of theorists and philosophers of language, from Martin Heidegger to David Carr, see the role of stories in more structural terms, as features of human consciousness.¹² As Mark Thurner puts it, precisely about the colonial past, “historical knowledge works very much like a mythology: it is always written and read from and for a posterity that is ‘us’ ‘and ours’ . . . from a future that already is or was . . . the writing of history is always about what has been and is, but also about what should or will be.”¹³ For this camp of theorists, the history of the world itself would be impossible without our ability to tell stories.

The tension between experience and representation is perhaps all the more salient when it concerns accounts of nature. As William Cronon has shown, at the heart of nature-centric narratives lies a negotiation of human values. The kinds of stories humans have told and continue to tell about the natural world, he argues, show that “what we care the most about nature is its meaning for human beings. . . . Human interests and conflicts create *values* in nature that in turn provide the moral center of our stories.”¹⁴ In the sixteenth century, this moral center was constantly in flux, as the struggle over telling nature’s history was mirrored by the imperial struggle over nature itself. That control was first sought out as part of a moralizing mission grounded in stories, myths, and allegories, where colonial domination accompanied a renewed search for knowledge and millenarian convictions of salvation. To make military conquest endure, a spiritual conquest was necessary to provide meaning out of such otherworldly transformations.

For my purposes, linking the concept of narrative to the shifting moral centers of the sixteenth century conveys the innovative ways that Spanish chroniclers, explorers, and missionaries wrote about the New World. Following Leslie Paul Thiele’s description, narratives “serve as the banisters of ethical life,” where attempts to ground experience via “metaphor and mythology play a greater role than axioms and argument in the development of moral character.”¹⁵ The natural histories composed by Spanish missionaries and explorers sought to provide such a banister in a still-unknown New World. As I elaborate below, the implications of their contributions to history, science, and political ideology have been mostly overlooked, I suspect, as a result of their ties to religious ideals; yet their revival sheds light on many historical, even contemporary, challenges worth re-examining from our posterity.

Though Imperial Spain claimed possession over the largest known territorial expanse of its time, the culture of state secrecy that shaped its scientific endeavors remains an obstacle for historical interpretation.¹⁶ Although knowl-

edge accumulation was encouraged, knowledge dissemination proved far more politically risky. Yet there are broader institutional dynamics to account for as well. As John H. Elliot has documented, one of the most influential myths of our age of sovereign states is to overplay the extent to which territorial unity is the *de jure* governing principle of modernity. Instead, Elliot points to the history of “composite states” across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as an alternative, and at the time desirable, path of political aggrandizement. In this composite model, units with a strong administrative core, “[coexisted] with a myriad smaller territorial and jurisdictional units jealously guarding their independent status.”¹⁷ Hence the model of national histories is not only inadequate to study the cultures informing scientific exploration in the Americas, it can be downright misleading.

Given the composite status of the Spanish Empire—which included not only the imperial metropolis and viceroyalties in the New World, but also multiethnic territories across the Netherlands and Germany, alongside a wide array of corporate entities from missionary orders to commercial clearing houses—the links between its symbolic power and influence over its agents are far from straightforward.¹⁸ That diffusion of power is what allowed, on the one hand, for jurists and philosophers to actively debate imperial policy toward indigenous peoples in Spain, but also generated, on the other hand, the culture of bureaucratic rivalry that pit colonial municipalities, merchants, and missionary orders against each other for jurisdiction over indigenous labor and well-being. This partly explains the absence of conventional—or, in their case, Scholastic—Spanish political theorists, such as Luis de Molina or Juan de Miranda, among others, in my analysis.¹⁹ While some of these thinkers wrote treatises in urban capitals, others braved the elements to tell of the unknown and build altogether new analytic vocabularies. In sum, the “empire” was shaped by groups and individuals on the so-called geographical margins just as much as by the learned men in the courts.²⁰

Moreover, as historians of science have increasingly documented, the Spanish encounter with the lands, peoples, and creatures of the New World played a decisive role in the emergence of a modern, scientific worldview across Europe.²¹ The distinct environments of the Americas fueled a vital concern with perennial questions regarding the state, the boundaries of legality, national identity, and civilization, in addition to inquiries into the ecological origins of these landscapes. If nature was the catalyst, natural history was the means to arrive at a whole set of new questions. As Shawn Miller notes in his *An Environmental History of Latin America*, one such set of new concerns was rethinking what writing history was all about:

History without nature is not only self-serving, it is inaccurate, short-sighted, and potentially perilous to the human story line. For the drama to be complete, we must cast both nature and culture in the roles of protagonist, for each have dealt the other health and sickness, aid and harm, and life and death . . . All of our histories need not be environmental, but in some of our histories, nature and culture deserve equal billing.²²

Thus beyond the potential material benefits of seemingly boundless natural resources, the spirit of conquest was paralleled by a spirit of inquiry. Just as Charles V had sought to rebrand the Spanish nation under the Romanesque mantra of *Plus Ultra*, so too did natural historians aspire to become a “Pliny” of the New World.²³ Yet despite its prominent role in making the New World first known and familiar to European audiences, Imperial Spain and its various agents have since the sixteenth century retained a distinct notoriety.

As rival empires emerged in the seventeenth century, the violence and greed that characterized the early conquest of the Americas was used to denounce and diminish Spanish authority. Spain was increasingly deemed a backward, corruptive, and abusive power. Much of that negative image was especially fueled by the pen of the empire’s own missionaries, most notably Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566). In his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, published in 1552, Las Casas notes with unparalleled candor, if not hyperbole, the extent of Spanish atrocities.²⁴ Indeed, as the work was translated into multiple languages, it was adapted for other kinds of anti-Spanish endeavors. Not ironically, the first translation appeared in Antwerp in 1578, just two years after the city had been sacked by Spanish soldiers in a massacre known as the Spanish Fury. Translated by the Flemish author Jacques de Miggrode, the preface explains how Las Casas’s testimony should “serve as example and warning to the seventeen provinces of the Low Countries” of the extent to which Spaniards would go to subjugate a free people.²⁵

Deemed as incapable of civilized rule, and ill-suited to be the intellectual center in a shifting geopolitical landscape, Imperial Spain’s reputation was threatened long before its administrative or territorial control of the New World was challenged. Yet the historical arc of Spain’s triumph and decline is doubly instructive. As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has documented, North European thinkers from Francis Bacon to Alexander von Humboldt relied heavily on the empirical repository collected by agents of Imperial Spain.²⁶ The difference in how these two thinkers appropriated Spanish findings, however, is contextually important, for as Cañizares-Esguerra notes, “Increasing Dutch and English competition and the failure of Spain and Portugal to carry out

reforms to consolidate the centralizing power of the state as in France led to the relative 'decline' of the Iberians in the seventeenth century. Already during the Reformation and wars of Dutch independence," he goes on to illustrate, "northwestern European printers had created an image of the Iberians as superstitious and rapacious plunderers. 'Decline' not only hardened perceptions; criticism now came wrapped in the idioms of progress and the Iberians were cast as essentially non-Europeans: backward and ignorant."²⁷ Critiques of Spanish intellectual indolence were thus linked to a broader narrative deployed in defense of threatened Protestant interests and with the intent of curbing Catholic Spain's ideological power.

While scholars of global history such as Brian Owensby and Bianca Premo have recently made inroads to account for Imperial Spain's early political contributions to modernity—without sugarcoating the complex architecture of domination it maintained—much of that literature concentrates on the legal and institutional formation of the empire vis-à-vis its European competitors.²⁸ The empirical origins of that political infrastructure, to say nothing of how religious orders were at its intellectual center, are also a key part of the evolving scholarly discourses on the history of the Enlightenment.²⁹ As Spanish naturalists made sense of the New World's environmental riches, they blazed a trail that others would soon follow.

Writing the Natural History of the New World

News of Columbus's arrival in the Americas brought elaborate, fantastic descriptions of new lands and peoples. Many of the first chroniclers of American nature also spawned outrageous tales of monstrous creatures and uninhabitable landscapes.³⁰ As these images became widespread throughout Europe, growing numbers of humanists, scientists, theologians, jurists, and learned scholars were in the midst of returning to the writings of Greco-Roman thinkers, and in turn began searching for interpretive links between the so-called Old and New Worlds. According to Antonio Barrera-Osorio, the confluence of commercial and scholarly pursuits of the time incited great artistic and technological innovation, as "scientific practitioners began to leave aside traditional textual-medieval practices and to search for empirical methods of understanding nature."³¹ A growing sense of boldness and investigation informed writings from this period, challenging in great numbers the authority of the Ancients on the laws and secrets of nature.³²

For political theorists, as well as historians of Imperial Spain, the work of Anthony Pagden has been foundational in translating the many intellectual

and political changes that Spanish exploration brought forth to early modern thought. His now-classic text, *The Fall of Natural Man*, documents the debates over natural slavery and economic development that shaped colonial legislation, from the *Leyes de Burgos* of 1512 to the *Leyes Nuevas* of 1542. These bodies of law dictated the proper behavior of imperial agents in light of the conquest's worst excesses. As Pagden argues, the emergence of these laws would have been impossible without the observations of visionaries such as Las Casas, whose experience in the Americas challenged Aristotelian notions of natural slavery and the alleged incapacity of Amerindian peoples for mental and social development.³³ However, although Pagden is interested in recovering a philosophical attitude about the New World and its inhabitants, he is less attuned to how the natural environment of the Americas itself plays a formative role in the legal, social, and political discourses shaping imperial actions.

In their efforts to craft natural history as a coherent field of study, New World naturalists negotiated two ideological imperatives: on one hand, they served the material and political interests of Spanish imperial administration; on the other, natural historians saw their craft as part of a distinctively scientific worldview. According to María Portuondo, "Nowhere was the determination to create a new framework to explain the reality of the New World more steadfast than in sixteenth century Spain." However, she goes on to warn:

Practices that from our modern perspective might seem scientific and that we associate with post-Newtonian methodologies either did not exist during the early modern era or belong to wholly different approaches to explaining nature. Therefore, when early modern historians refer to *science* we are using the word anachronistically but also as an expedient way of referring to a group of quite distinct ways of producing knowledge about the natural world.³⁴

Storytelling in this context helped naturalize the imperial mission by taking the American landscape and its contents as the unit of analysis to explain social, political, and economic differences between indigenous peoples and Europeans.³⁵ The natural world was thus not the setting, but the means through which modern empire itself was first formalized. And while histories of Imperial Spain often begin with the dual legacies of state- and empire-formation, both are the result of two narrative tropes: an existential struggle with allegedly uncivilized others and the legitimization of wartime exploits through chivalric myths of manly virtue.³⁶

Chivalric epics became a central medium through which the battles, ballads, and romances were popularized—first in the *Reconquista*, then in the New

World's conquest. A veritable *Siglo de Oro* was inaugurated with the encounter and colonization of the Americas, as Spain's alleged cultural, religious, and historical superiority—first forged in just warfare against the Moors—was further bolstered by the formalization of the Castilian dialect.³⁷ Soldiers, jurists, and missionaries alike portrayed their struggles and stories in the vernacular of a so-called Spanish tongue. More than just offering stylized accounts of military prowess, however, the chivalric epic shaped a narrative style that emphasized both lived-experiences and providential cultural goals. Epic heroes told their stories as appeals to action, shaping cadres of sailors, soldiers, and men of faith to follow the bidding of both King and Church.³⁸ Natural historians were no different in this regard. More critically, their writings sought to blend the aims of military and spiritual conquest toward the subjugation of nature itself.

Natural History as Narrative of Conquest

Three different constitutive narratives about New World nature can be traced in the writings of sixteenth-century natural historians: first, the monstrous and paradisiacal narratives of Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1478–1557) and Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566); second, the ethnographic and anthropological theories of Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590); and third, the experimental models of data collection and practical philosophy developed by Francisco Hernández (1514–1587) and José de Acosta (1539–1600). Taken separately, these three frames focus on a respective political premise: for Oviedo and Las Casas, different ethical models of nature-society interaction debated by imperial authorities; for Sahagún, the value of intercultural knowledge for the management of colonial institutions; and for Hernández and Acosta, the central role of practical philosophy as a scientific strategy of domination.

Table 1 below lists the different narrative types employed by Spanish missionary naturalists and their respective works of natural history. In addition to tropes and evidentiary sources, I include the “Constitutive Narratives” that gave rise to distinct stylistic elements, as well as the “Narrative Effects” that would emerge from hypothesized interactions between future colonial societies and the natural world. Rather than offering a continuation of the epic narrative of religious conquest and manly virtue, natural history gave rise to a more complex, integrative, and experimental mode of scientific inquiry and political storytelling: a naturalist epic.

Each of the above literary tropes employed by Spanish natural historians—for example, nature as a timeless space, as a bifurcated realm of good and evil, or as a Great Book to learn from—represents a different style of empirical

Table 1. Constitutive narratives of natural history

| Constitutive Narratives | Narrative Style | Trope | Evidence | Narrative Effects |
|--|--|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| The narrative of conquest (1492–1552) | Chivalric; taxonomical (Oviedo/ Las Casas) | Nature as timeless | Analogical; eyewitness accounts | Nature as corruptive; nature as salutary |
| Demonology as anthropology (1552–1590) | Ethnographic; interlingual (Sahagún) | Nature as bifurcated | Scripts & codices; semiology | Nature as source of order and fear |
| Naturalist dissonance (1570–1590) | Experimental; philosophical (Hernández / Acosta) | Nature as Great Book | Exploration; observation | Nature and man as mutually interpretive |

Compiled by author.

inquiry, a set of theoretical presuppositions, and a range of political effects, which I explore in more detail in the following sections. Importantly, the normative dimensions of these inquiries were negotiated through the search for coherent, baseline evidence of the connections between American nature and Amerindian societies. Taken together, these three phases in the evolution of sixteenth-century natural history reveal the layered efforts to formalize the experience of nature: first in the name of cultural conquest and later as a self-conscious science. Though the *Reconquista* was not the only narrative at work in early modern Spain, it brought together elements that framed the encounter with the New World in a familiar light for droves of Spaniards. That familiarity served to legitimate a greater civilizational mission in the face of new challenges.

Rather than reading each of these thinkers in isolation from each other, I approach them by emphasizing their role in the narrative conquest of nature in the Americas. By way of this original script, I also aim to examine the potential of their attempts to rewrite the story of empire. What sixteenth-century Spaniards found in the Americas was a landscape that challenged existing assumptions about nature, people, and the earth. While many of the marvels of the New World were met with the violence of conquest and colonization, an entire field of study was deployed to catalogue, test, and, in some instances, conserve the diversity of life found in America’s strange lands. Natural history,

a field of inquiry empowered by a burgeoning empire, was reinvented in light of empirical puzzles that challenged existing European systems of knowledge. Natural historians tasked themselves with explaining how the world should be, but also what made the Americas a suitable space for colonization.

Constitutive Narrative #1: The Narrative of Conquest

For one set of actors in the Americas, the narrative of conquest born in Spain was expanded to include a monstrous and unpredictable natural world, not just an allegedly uncivilized opponent. In this view, the unknown and exotic were used as proof of God's favored view of the Spaniards as bearers of the Christian faith, as well as Satan's exile from Heaven into a forgotten and dangerous world of seduction.³⁹ A cosmic battle was waged to defend both nation and faith. For another set of imperial agents, the drives behind conquest demanded moral and spiritual reform. Spaniards had been seduced by evil to wage war on the New World; if there was any hope for either, proper cultivation of the land and its inhabitants' souls had to take place. Therefore, reconquering the natural world in the Americas had to take place through a "conquest of narrative" itself.

As the first of three distinctive styles, the narrative of conquest displays the evolution of the *Reconquista* narrative between the publication of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias* (1526) and Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552). In this time, early natural historians emphasized two aspects of nature in the New World: its seemingly endless abundance and its constitutive role in the formation of indigenous polities. Natural history was conceived as a kind of "public mirror" to engage wider European audiences—at once confirming or deflecting European preconceptions around religion, psychological development, and the necessary elements of civilization in the Americas.

Like the writers of epic romances before him, for example, Oviedo wrote of an exotic, liminal land populated by eroticized pineapples and delicious iguanas.⁴⁰ As court historian, his attempt to collect and classify as much as possible of the New World's environments led him to posit American nature as an inviting space, where, in Kathleen Ann Myers's words, "the reader can praise the wonders of God's creation."⁴¹ Yet when writing of the arduous tasks he endured to produce his *General and Natural History of the Indies*, Oviedo nevertheless finds great uncertainty in the experience of New World nature, hoping that his readers will: "be satisfied with what I have seen and lived with many dangers . . . enjoy it and suffer none of them, and may he [*sic*] be able to

read it in his own country without undergoing such hunger and thirst, heat and cold, or innumerable other travails, without venturing into storms at sea, nor the misfortunes one suffers in those lands.”⁴²

Las Casas, as well, saw in the Americas a lost Edenic paradise.⁴³ In his mind, seemingly untouched lands and peoples were proof that God had once ruled over this allegedly new space and that Spanish Conquest threatened its pristine order. As he reports on the kingdoms of Naco and Honduras, for instance, before the arrival of conquering Spaniards they had “seemed a true paradise of delights and were more populous than the most frequented and populous land on earth. And now we have passed there and come that way, and we saw them in such devastation and so wanting in inhabitants that any person, however hard he might be, his heart would break in grief to see it.”⁴⁴

Both men therefore viewed the environments of the New World as spaces of great beauty, but also great uncertainty and instability. Though the sources of that volatility vary—for Oviedo they emerge from the native peoples, for Las Casas from the Spaniards—key in their rhetorical strategies is to place upon Imperial Spain a kind of providential charge to take responsibility over that for which they were now master narrators.

Las Casas, for instance, was awestruck by the great extent to which land, animals, and peoples seemed to emerge as if from nowhere. Having commented extensively on the epistemological expectations that early European travelers brought with them in the first stages of the encounter, Tzvetan Todorov describes Las Casas’s affection for American nature as a theoretical source for modern applications of natural law.⁴⁵ More specifically, for Las Casas, the Amerindian relation to nature represented a model of what life in the Edenic paradise most likely resembled.

While Las Casas did not complete his monumental account of the origins of the New World’s peoples, the *Apologética historia summaria de las gentes destas Indias*, he continued a practice of using eyewitness experience that helped frame his broader arguments regarding the moral dimensions of the New World’s environments, including the politics of race and the religious ends of empire. Compiled in 1560, the *Apologética historia* is regarded by contemporary observers as a “proto-ethnographic treatise,” the heart of which is Las Casas’s use (in Rolena Adorno’s words) of “classical and medieval environmental theories . . . [applying] them to the Antilles, demonstrating that the archipelago was a most propitious place to favor humanity and foster the development of a benign human nature.”⁴⁶

Las Casas’s contributions are generally contrasted to those of Oviedo, who as the official royal chronicler of the empire popularized a vision of the Americas

that was more in line with European desires to master the continent's novelty. As he writes in the Preface to his *General and Natural History*, "What mortal understanding can comprehend such diversity of languages, habits, [or] customs among the people of the Indies? Such variety of animals, from domestic to wild and savage? Such an unutterable multitude of trees, [some] laden with diverse kinds of fruit and others barren, both those which the Indians cultivate as those produced by Nature's own work without the aid of human hands?"⁴⁷ Though the two chroniclers differ in their portrayal of American nature as either epistemologically or spiritually incommensurable, they share a conceit common to Spanish natural history to see New World nature as timeless.

Like many of their contemporaries, both men were shocked to find that such a vast world could have existed unbeknownst to the "Old World" and its litany of learned men. The great desire for knowledge of the New World's mysteries therefore contributed to its representation as a space from which only the properly trained historian could garner temporally relevant, practical, and authoritative meaning (as in Oviedo's case), or, as a space untouched by the degradation and vices of modernity and capable of redeeming all its inhabitants (as with Las Casas).

As spaces seemingly frozen in time, the Americas offered contrapuntal models of regeneration for European travelers.⁴⁸ In Las Casas's vision, the Americas' temporal and moral superiority was reflected in lush and vibrant landscapes; in Oviedo's story, hybrid creatures, languid peoples, and seductive terrains populated the New World as a land of epistemological strife, a realm divorced from the domain of the knowable. Many of the sixteenth-century chronicles of nature are couched between these extremes. No consensus existed over the proper narrative terms that historians should use to witness, portray, and understand the events of the conquest. Yet as Spanish colonizers became more adept and immersed in the American environment, these narrative poles gave way to more comparative strategies and a greater concern with cultural appropriation.

Moral appropriation of the natural world, as a corruptive or salutary environment, is one of the implications stemming from the *Reconquista* as transplanted narrative to the New World. With the discovery of new lands and peoples, the chronicle of *La Reconquista* was ably deployed through the two mediums of travel narratives and epic poems. In particular, the travel narrative acted as an expression of distinct civilizational prejudices concerning masculinity, faith, and textual authority, as well as served to portray the Americas as a repository of licentious desires. What more patriotic a journey could subjects of a great empire partake in than the conquering of a New World?

One answer to this question comes from the epic poems written during the

Reconquista and later adapted to the circumstances of New World exploration. In the classical epic poems, the Iberian territory was portrayed as a feminine space in need of salvation from the corruptive Moorish caliphs. Coupled with a conception of manly virtue that championed virility (in battle, as well as subjugation), the *Reconquista* narrative deployed religious overtones that depicted priests as knights in pursuit of Satan and his allies.⁴⁹ During the conquest of the Americas, the same literary tropes found sustained expression. Campaigns were portrayed as expansions of Catholic Providence, where imperial agents were actively plotted against by Satan. Notable in these narratives was the conception of the natural environment itself as being allied to demonic forces. One finds examples of this narrative trope across all three of the puzzles I explore below, but none as polemical as in the earlier Edenic writings of Oviedo and Las Casas.

Oviedo and Las Casas drew conflicting lessons from the *Reconquista*. Oviedo saw conquest as an opportunity for projecting Spain's glory onto a corrupt colonial canvas; the oddities and monstrosities in the Americas served to legitimize the myth of a world perverted by Satan and the need for Spain to conquer it. In that light, conquest served the function of crafting a new portrait of empire and imperial history. Las Casas, on other hand, saw conquest as a mirror in which Spaniards could reflect on how far they had strayed from their professed faith. New World nature was proof that God had set indigenous peoples apart from the corrupt forces of modernity, so that Europeans may learn from them. Spanish violence against these prebiblical peoples and landscapes only brought Spaniards closer to Satan himself.

A closer look at nature and the ways indigenous peoples lived with the earth, Las Casas argued, would show Spaniards a better path and lifestyle toward salvation. New arts of reading and interpreting indigenous systems of knowledge would emerge here and begin to gather a solid scholarly standing. Early conquerors had emphasized the readings of signs and the production of literary scripts as markers of mental, social, and technological development in the Americas.⁵⁰ In the land itself, agriculture and urbanization became the visual cues highlighting *dominium* over nature. As debates ensued over the veracity and reliability of early Edenic writings on American nature, ethnography played a greater role in developing typologies of cultural difference.

Constitutive Narrative #2: Demonology as Anthropology

Modern theorists of history and social progress, such as those emerging from the Scottish and French Enlightenments, challenged Spanish writings from

the sixteenth century on developmental grounds.⁵¹ Central to their disagreements was finding the proper way of framing the Americas, and the phenomenon of historical writing more broadly, as part of a growing self-conscious science of man.⁵² Key to this science was the typology of historical stages that emerged to substantiate previous analogies between the Ancient and New Worlds.

As Enlightenment theorists castigated Spanish chroniclers for letting their prejudices get too much in the way of their documentation of the American world, Franciscan missionaries such as Bernardino de Sahagún had already developed great comparative systems that offered the raw material for Scottish stadial theories. In these systems, one finds representations of the Americas as a repository of cultural deviance that needed to be archived, coded, and withdrawn from circulation, so that proper cultivation of Catholic values could take place. The principal task of the ethnographer, as Sahagún saw it, was to “light all the words of this [Nahuatl] language with their literal and metaphoric meanings and all their manners of speech and the greater part of their antiquities, good and evil.”⁵³ Yet in his exposure to the land and people, the natural world was catalogued as a source of both order and fear.⁵⁴

A popular misconception of this period, known as the Spiritual Conquest, is to see Spanish missionaries as agents of destruction. Figures like Sahagún, however, established great repositories of cultural, political, and medicinal knowledge, thanks largely to the conscription of indigenous informants. Unlike Oviedo and Las Casas, Sahagún saw indigenous peoples as potential allies in Imperial Spain’s cosmic mission, but also susceptible underlings to a covert satanic past.

Las Casas had already gone to great lengths to invert the traditional conquest narrative into a “naturalist epic” documenting the spiritual treasures to be reaped from a greater understanding of the New World’s natural order. His work, alongside Sahagún’s collaboration with indigenous scribes, is an evident turning point in the conquest of narrative, as literary and ethnographic sensibilities converged with distinct civilizational objectives.⁵⁵ Sahagún, for example, arrived in the Americas committed to the Church’s evangelizing mission. Through his efforts at conversion in New Spain, however, he developed an unrivaled catalogue of cultural, religious, linguistic, and social practices in Aztec society that culminated in the renowned *Florentine Codex* (1545–1590), which aimed to counsel colonial authorities in the proper ways to indoctrinate indigenous peoples, but occasioned a more dynamic legacy.⁵⁶

As he strived to understand the world of the Nahuatl people, Sahagún developed one of the first systematic ethnographies aimed at differentiating between

practices that were amenable to the Christian faith and those inextricable from satanic influence. Yet paradoxically, the work was only possible through the shared knowledge of indigenous conscripts who, together with Sahagún, compiled one of the most comprehensive indigenous accounts of the New World's Conquest. In the *Codex*, Sahagún and his informants develop a natural history employing Aztec knowledge of the Valley of Mexico prior to the arrival of Spanish conquerors.⁵⁷ Much like his efforts to compare and reconcile existing Nahua religious practices with central rites of Christianity, Sahagún's natural history blends indigenous methods of collection with the growing emphasis on textual evidentiary standards emerging in Spanish natural history. His efforts, moreover, represent a surprisingly ambivalent appropriation of indigenous local knowledge and belief systems.

That these moments of cultural miscegenation occurred in the interest of religious conversion should not be understated. Similarly, the notorious Inquisitor Diego de Landa, known for the cataloguing and subsequent destruction of thousands of Mayan codices, books, and other documents, also plays an important role in the evolution of natural history. While it is difficult to situate de Landa in the naturalist tradition, his role in the Spiritual Conquest fulfills a contrapuntal position to Sahagún, similar to that discussed above between Las Casas and Oviedo. Charged with the task of uncovering and destroying heretical documents, de Landa wrote of Mayan society well after its collapse; these writings became one of the few remaining records left in the aftermath of the conquest. According to Anthony Pagden, what we find in de Landa is not just the zealous missionary eager to destroy indigenous culture, but also "an assiduous chronicler of Indian affairs"; his example portrayed "an important stage in the history of the relationships between the friars and their Indian charges, between the ancient Indian peoples of America and their European conquerors."⁵⁸ What we therefore see in de Landa is the darker side of natural history as an imperial strategy.

The participation of Spanish missionaries in the mutual destruction and conservation of naturalist data also points to larger inconsistencies in the early deployment of empire. Making sense of the political realities on the ground required taking stock of the great diversity of oral, written, and archival knowledge on the New World; doing so also meant identifying indigenous scholarly attitudes and practices to legitimate further expeditions.⁵⁹ Sahagún's work was thus an act of great creativity and boldness, as he found himself likely adopting more of the indigenous cosmology he was supposed to extirpate than what likely sat comfortably with imperial authorities.

The anthropological ethos born out of Sahagún's efforts, hence achieved

two lasting transformations in the study of natural history. First, it formalized the exotic character of Amerindian society and nature in a systematic effort to know how to control all sources of subversive knowledge. In his anthropological system, Sahagún separated Amerindian cultures from the natural world, contributing to a vision of nature itself as bifurcated. Herein is the second transformation: as nature came to represent a source of order (such as in the geographic knowledge the Nahuas offered Sahagún), it also became a source of fear, representing the seductive and degenerative qualities Spaniards inferred would destroy them.

In addition to the “Constitutive Narratives” from which these conceptions of the New World were born, how these narratives were juxtaposed by Spanish natural historians in the framing of an imperial project reveals natural history’s political nature. Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex*, for instance, is indispensable as it espouses both great contextual and ethnographic detail, as well as betrays a distinctly imperial normative agenda. Hence this second moment in the evolution of Spanish natural history saw the appropriation and transformation of indigenous empirical frameworks into objects to be destroyed, but also found insights deemed worthy of conserving. Sahagún’s observations increasingly formed part of a practice of demonology: the study of the supernatural by way of allegedly occult practices and rituals. While there is no doubt that Sahagún’s efforts were part of the broader goal of destroying idolatry and facilitating religious conversion, his efforts to conserve some kinds of indigenous sources benefits speculation. Indeed, the subsequent events following Sahagún’s encounter with indigenous conceptions of nature may reveal how the “Narrative Effects” of natural history were taken up politically.

For Sahagún (and later, the Jesuit José de Acosta), the collection of indigenous rituals was meant to craft field guides for what future generations of imperial agents might expect to find on the ground as colonization (and conversion) expanded.⁶⁰ Some practices were more tolerated than others and it took a particular ethnographic judgment to determine which were more suitable. For another set of explorers and surveyors, data collection was part of understanding how to survive in an entirely alien world.⁶¹ Beyond conversion, imperial agents were interested in managing people, ideas, and resources. With no anthropological data on how best to do this, chroniclers and colonizers would be left without any conceptual mooring. Worse yet, they would be free to blatantly pillage and destroy. New World nature may have been originally perceived as a source of turmoil, but Spaniards’ long-term survival depended on reconciling how indigenous peoples lived in the past with the emergence of a new political order.

Constitutive Narrative #3: Naturalist Dissonance

The last generation of natural historians I consider faced different political circumstances than their predecessors. Despite their proximity to the seats of imperial and colonial power, Francisco Hernández and José de Acosta each left behind disparate intellectual legacies. For both, exploration of the American landscape provided an unprecedented opportunity for the testing of philosophical assumptions prevalent in Europe since the Ancient Greeks. As natural history was a vehicle for intellectual exploration, it was also a formal venue to properly inform the theological ends of empire.⁶² But like Las Casas and Sahagún before them, Hernández and Acosta aimed to get a personal sense of the Amerindians and their environments.

The Jesuit natural historian José de Acosta, for example, is primarily known for having raised one of the most important challenges to the ideological dominance of Scholastic philosophy on purely empirical grounds. As the master discourse of Medieval Europe, Scholasticism's authority rested on St. Thomas Aquinas's synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology. While theology and philosophy are considered separate fields of inquiry today, Acosta's mastery of experiential, biblical, and philosophical knowledge pushed the limits of what Scholastic thought could achieve. His ambitious *Historia Natural y Moral de Las Indias* (1590) influenced explorers, theologians, and natural philosophers in the Americas and Europe alike. Yet as Cañizares-Esguerra points out, Acosta's writings are singled out today more as the work of an ethnographer and a geographer than of a natural philosopher interested in both the mechanics and purpose of things. The kind of work he inaugurated, however, was no less than an attempt at "modifying dominant narratives of marvels . . . constantly [seeking] to frame natural phenomena and the seeming inversion of physical laws in the Indies with a discourse of providential design and lawful regularities."⁶³

Acosta framed his criticism of dogmatic conceptions of natural law and cosmological order on the experiential basis of Spanish cosmographers, who in their exploration of the Americas' landscape pioneered a form of understanding both ethnographic and nationalistic. More specifically, Acosta was part of a line of scholars who shifted attention from studying nature as an object of unchanging laws subject to classical interpretations, to a realm that demanded thoughtful redescription and informed classification. Speaking of the scales used to weigh silver, for instance, Acosta writes how "it is a delicate job and requires great skill, which Divine Scripture also mentions in different places to indicate how God tests his chosen and to take note of the differences and

merits and worths of souls . . . which is the proper activity of the spirit of God, who weighs the souls of men.”⁶⁴

Among the naturalist predecessors Acosta admired was the Imperial doctor Francisco Hernández, who was appointed to lead a massive botanical expedition that would cost him much anguish, money, and hard-earned prestige. Although less prone to theological aspirations, perhaps no other Spanish naturalist of the sixteenth century could amass as many botanical catalogues as Hernández did, particularly having relied so heavily on indigenous sources and practices.⁶⁵ In the scant seven years it was officially sanctioned, the Hernández Expedition (1570–77) arguably collected more empirical and ethnographic data on the natural environments of New Spain than all previous attempts combined. In 1570, both men were sent to the New World under different auspices: Hernández was appointed as *protomedico* (physician-in-chief) by King Philip II to head an ambitious natural expedition in the wide valleys and mountains of New Spain; Acosta was sent as head of the Jesuit mission in Peru, and chair of theology at the University of Lima, to document the religious challenges that Jesuit missionaries faced in the conquered, but never truly subdued, Peruvian highlands. The two men’s expeditions were meant to compile very similar reports for the monarchy, yet their findings brought them unique empirical and political challenges.⁶⁶

Hernández’s work was never published in his lifetime due to many personal, political crises in New Spain as well as Europe. On the other hand, Acosta published his findings as a missionary field manual that, in its philosophical scope at least, far surpassed Hernández’s work. While Acosta has been increasingly regarded as an example of the Renaissance spirit of scientific inquiry—a natural philosopher interested in making sense of Amerindian culture, history, and the whole earth—Hernández’s credentials as a humanist and exemplary proponent of the Spanish Renaissance have long been celebrated, yet mostly as a botanist. Their work gained political prominence, however, in an imperial culture that relied on empirical information of the elements and properties of natural resources to supplement its material power. Hernández’s mission, though medical in nature, served to initiate the empire’s efforts at a systematized catalogue of indigenous pharmacological knowledge. Acosta’s writings on minerals and their distribution across the earth were also used by miners who sought to patent tools, gadgets, and testing practices.⁶⁷ This attention to utility was one of the dimensions that shaped their distinct political trajectories.

As Hernández noted in a poem to his friend the philologist Arias Montano, there were many in New Spain and across the empire who did not view his task with much approval. “There are those who snap at my heels,” he wrote, “and

spread the poison of envy, who try to damn my innocuous labors, which they will not see, or—if they read them—even understand.”⁶⁸ King Philip II’s waning interest in natural science can be attributed to the ability of Hernández’s enemies to successfully loosen natural history’s grasp on the empire’s political imagination.⁶⁹ Though Hernández never gave many clues as to the identity of his detractors, his confessions do reveal that he returned to Spain a hopeful, but broken man.

My own contention, which I will argue further in chapter 4, is that Hernández is a primary illustration of the complex relationship between scientific knowledge and state power emerging out of the early modern period. By Hernández’s time, natural historians had garnered significant ideological and political influence in the empire’s courts. Yet increasing disagreements over the future course of the empire—coupled with the growing costs of war against other European powers—saw the study of natural history fall out of favor as a political priority. Spain’s culture of state secrecy kept sensitive information on the New World’s resources locked away. Some argue that such secrecy is the source of Hernández’s relative obscurity outside of historians of Imperial Spain. His case documents a radical break in the empire’s political narrative, whereby natural history is transformed from a mounting intellectual force into an instrumental economic activity. The study of New World nature was thus not a mere scholarly pastime, but rather a debate over the premises on which the so-called Spanish Empire should be built.

As Barrera-Osorio points out, though men like Hernández, and particularly Acosta, were convinced that “the study of nature led to the understanding of the order of nature and, in turn, to the glorification of God,” their wider interpretive field included a larger network of officials, chroniclers, and merchants, all eager to make sense of the Great Book of Nature for their own interests.⁷⁰ Indeed, both Hernández and Acosta posited a picture of the New World that was sensitive to its distinct cultural and biological diversity, as well as espoused a kind of naturalist theology against the alleged presence of demonic forces in the landscape. Their writings lay the groundwork for an experimental conception of science based on observation and a kind of political ethnology, where greater observation of the New World’s people could serve to better accommodate future colonial expansion.

Yet this was not a fully conscious project. Written toward the ends of their lives, Hernández and Acosta’s works are the product of conflicting sentiments. A kind of naturalist dissonance emerges in their texts, between the potential cognitive and material riches the New World offered and the conceptual challenges it posed to the empire’s ideological objectives. Despite their different

positions, both men's works were picked up by political theorists and scientists across the continent, giving rise to numerous debates on the value of Spanish contributions to modern scientific inquiry.

Particularly important in Hernández and Acosta's accounts of New World nature were the effects of the natural environment on the faculty of judgment. The novelty of the New World not only generated great pleasure, but it appealed to the exquisite perceptions and judgments of Spaniards whom Hernández and Acosta deemed critical to the development of a broader imperial ethos. Thus the great empirical contributions of Spanish natural history offered a new, though contentious, narrative layer in the emergence of sixteenth-century imperial science. Ironically, the great intellectual and political glory that Spain sought carried within it the seeds of its future scientific demise.

Despite their radically different trajectories, both the Hernández Expedition and the *Historia Natural* arrived at an important conclusion: the New World's natural landscapes represented a Great Book from which Imperial Spain could learn. Hernández may have been politically positioned to take the study of natural history to greater heights. His failure, however, came as a result of changing geopolitical circumstances, not lack of sound reasoning. Study of the natural sciences took a secondary role to the greater need to document available resources. Acosta relied on a different kind of audience to communicate his findings. Tasked with cataloguing and devising the most effective ways of uprooting indigenous idolatry, the more Acosta explored the environments of the Americas, the less sanguine he became about the ability of classical and biblical sources to account for the New World's diversity. The *Historia Natural* captures this dissonance, as Acosta outlines a simultaneously empirical and theological framework for the study of natural philosophy. Full of observations on the myriad flora, fauna, and societies of the New World, the work explicitly promotes the interpretation of nature as a Great Book. The result is an incomplete, though revolutionary, call to bring faith into communion with science.

Reconstructing the World of Natural History

While histories of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment locate the maturation of natural history and natural philosophy under the purview of canonical figures such as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and Alexander von Humboldt, my goal so far has been to demonstrate that Spanish missionary naturalists hold an equally indispensable place at the crucible of modern science. Spanish natural historians had been some of the first European thinkers to compare the social and mental development of the New and Old Worlds. Yet

after having developed the narrative strategies to explain New World nature, their contributions were conquered by the preconceptions of Enlightenment progress. Yet as Karen Stolley has pointed out, “For Spanish America the past has often served as a discursive key to an identity that differentiates Spanish America from its European component. In that discursive process,” she maintains, the region “occupies an intermediate zone between making and denying difference, between America and Europe, and between the evocation of a past and an evolving future.”⁷¹

Although Stolley was writing about the eighteenth century—rife as it was with a revival of naturalistic inquiry of equally global proportions⁷²—the same story is often said about Spanish exploration in the sixteenth century. Thinkers outside of Spain, this narrative suggests, revolutionized scientific inquiry by overcoming the religious superstition and intellectual subservience to ecclesiastical authority characteristic of Spanish learned circles. Yet if we empirically consider Spain’s position in the burgeoning intellectual cultures of the early modern era, there are at least three legacies worth recounting to further contest this narrative.

First, as the unchallenged military power of the sixteenth century, Spain explored vast stretches of land and sea unknown to European eyes.⁷³ Many of the empire’s first geographic missions across the Americas accumulated numerous surveys of administrative and indigenous knowledge of the New World’s lands. These surveys, known as *relaciones geográficas*, generated a wealth of data that the empire used to distribute administrative, commercial, and strategic resources.⁷⁴

Second, as a highly diffused territorial empire, Spanish subjects in the New World often held competing material interests and political agendas. Merchants and missionaries traversed the same spaces in search of resources to exploit and souls to save. Yet one of the difficulties encountered by contemporary historians of the sixteenth century is the lack of published material illustrating these competing interests.⁷⁵ Royal missions were sanctioned to produce reports meant only for the monarchy’s eyes, limiting the circulation of the many findings and recommendations for encountering the New World. Even self-published works required royal approval, though these were also often censored by regulatory and conservative tribunals such as the Inquisition, as the cases of Sahagún and Hernández will illustrate below. In spite of such institutional constraints, Spanish chronicles were nevertheless highly coveted in early modern Europe. Indeed, new literary genres conveying the utopian character of the Americas—from travelogues, to conquest narratives, and especially reports of scientific expeditions—captured the imagina-

tion of learned *criollos* and *peninsulares* alike, all emerging from the efforts to document the multiple testimonies claiming New World experience.⁷⁶

Third, and finally, natural historians were the first to test the potential ramifications of science as a public endeavor in the New World. As Mauricio Nieto Olarte has noted, the field was fundamental in developing “a medium to build a domesticated nature and a colonized humanity.”⁷⁷ Although “science” was regarded as a handmaiden to Imperial Spain, early naturalistic concepts and practices such as ethnology, biogeography, apothecaries, and cosmology were upheld by their proponents as the empirical backbone on which the Spanish monarchy could strengthen its moral claims over the Americas.⁷⁸

Yet as I show in the following chapters, crisis and ideological dissonance color much of natural history’s political trajectory. The study of natural history was presented by the missionary writings I engage as a central tenet of imperial conquest, capable of shaping the geopolitical interests of the early Spanish Empire, as well as marking the future contours of European science. The field’s own trajectory is thus rife with accusations of intrigue, heresy, and controversy. In order to uncover the overlap between the multiple interpretive layers blurring natural history’s rise and fall, I propose a different focus: to treat its practitioners’ missionary ethos as the core of natural history’s philosophical aspirations.

A key feature of what I have sought to clarify in this chapter are the links between the spiritual experiences of wonder in early modern natural history and the concrete experiences of nature in the New World. On the one hand, developing proper conceptual frameworks for the study of the natural world in the Americas was part of an effort to naturalize the imperial project. In using the language of the supernatural to couch their findings, Spanish naturalists rendered the experience of wonder in the New World into an adaptive feature of naturalistic thinking. However, it was also a form of political thinking, for to hypothesize the history of an unknown world meant evaluating its character, in addition to cataloguing its component parts. This represented a wholesale effort to rationalize the New World’s place within a broader cosmology of European ascendance, a process I have described through the formation of distinct constitutive narratives.

Stories and chronicles emerging from these ventures can thus be read as attempts to formalize wonder into a concrete philosophical and political category. The subsequent experience of encountering, understanding, and domesticating nature was therefore a critical formative moment of the early Spanish Empire that continues to beg for interpretation. Through four contextual portraits of this larger methodological struggle, I aim to make a compelling

case that the sixteenth century in the Americas was replete with theoretical innovation—scientific and political. Each of the authors I profile adapted their findings to a dominant imperial narrative of cultural appropriation via the use of empirical evidence. In their efforts to recover something beyond the immediately visible, however, they also nominally shifted how that narrative would push the empire forward, putting their efforts into conflict with the competing interests of imperial conquest.

There are three implications to this reading of empire, faith, and nature: the first suggests that human experience in nature is always part of an effort to create values out of the unknown and unfamiliar. Spanish natural history captures both the spirit of modern scientific inquiry and the zealous search for a purpose to human society; it paved the way for an antigrand narrative of modernity and the possibility for greater, though contentious, inclusion of subaltern knowledge.

The second implication is that nature itself was regarded as a prominent actor in the history of the New World.⁷⁹ Spanish natural historians recognized the great influence that such radically new environments could have on human industry, learning, and particularly religious salvation. Their visions raised important political and ethical questions: How were such vast lands unknown for so long? What happened to human faculties of judgment in different environments? Where did indigenous people come from? Though many of their conclusions were limited by the political and cultural prejudices of their time, their efforts at social assimilation are nonetheless instructive of the mutual dissonance between nature and society in modernity.

Lastly, Spanish imperialism was no force for ecological harmony—far from it. Yet if we see the newness of the New World as a key component of the emergent forms of political, scientific, and religious governance panning out at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a more nuanced portrait of empire as an ideology of cultivation emerges.⁸⁰ Among these forms was the possibility of using the natural environment—as a site allegedly imbued with progressive and degenerative forces—to trace the destinies of human civilization. As I show in later chapters, millenarian beliefs therefore became strong catalysts for early scientific exploration and their popularity proved threatening to the empire's economic interests.

Making sense of the interpretive and political problems natural historians encountered requires not just a trans-Atlantic understanding of environmental history. It also demands an emphasis on the interplay of context, imagination, and experience in politics that narrative approaches to political theory can provide. By focusing on the ways that natural historians situated the study of

New World nature within a broader political narrative of conquest, one can illuminate the ideological motivations of different mendicant orders and fellow travelers. Such an approach requires overcoming historiographical biases that read early modern history as the secularization of thought away from spiritual concerns. They also require an attention to the power of stories and the difference they made in the making of an imperial nature.

2

OVIEDO, LAS CASAS, AND THE DIFFERENCE THAT MADE NATURE

*The blind man cannot distinguish colors, nor can one who is absent
bear witness to these matters like one who sees them.*

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *General and Natural History of the Indies*¹

*All the things that have taken place in the Indies, both since their marvelous
discovery and those first years when Spaniards first went out to them to remain
for some time, and then in the process thereafter down to these our own days,
have been so extraordinary and so in no wise to be believed by any person who
did not see them, that they seem to have been clouded and laid silence and
oblivion upon all those other deeds, however bold and dauntless they might be,
that in centuries past were ever seen and heard in this world.*

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*²

In a recent essay titled “The Difference That Made Spain, The Difference That Spain Made,” William Eamon argues that Enlightenment critics across Europe could all agree on one thing about Spain: it was different. Its disparities ranged from barbarism, sloth, and ignorance to despotism, depravity, and, ultimately, decline. The sources of its degradation all seemed to coalesce around contrasting notions of disease. But as Eamon puts it, “The difference that was Spain had nothing to do . . . with the character of its people or its supposedly degenerative environment, but instead had everything to do with the most obvious fact about its early modern situation: it possessed the largest empire the Western world had ever known . . . the first empire in world history over which the sun never set.”³ What, then, could Spain add to the

conversations around science, history, and morality that shaped the Enlightenment? In but a few words: the discovery of the New World and, with it, “the coming together of scholars and craftsmen, the renewed interest in natural history, the emphasis on collecting, and the development of institutions to organize empirical knowledge.”⁴

In this chapter, I look closer at the narrative origins of the Spanish culture of discovery by engaging the links between empire and nature in contemporary political theory. I argue how early natural histories of the New World provided critical insights on colonization, narratives of civilization, and the formation of modern empire that illustrate the difference that the experience of nature makes in the history of political thought. More than this, Spaniards involved in the craft of natural history created their own conceptions of nature to frame distinct normative agendas. Across the Spanish encounter with the New World, nature was not so much the setting, as it was the means through which modern imperial projects were made possible.

Yet despite sustained attention to the economic, military, and legal dynamics of imperialism, the “imperial turn” in political theory offers no examples of historical engagement with imperial explorations of natural environments. Nature, if at all depicted, is presented as a legal or resource problem. In other instances, nature is a symbolic space used to distinguish the modernizing process from backwardness or barbarism. Such stark distinctions between the early- and late-modern past leave the impression that the natural environment itself was a secondary concern of great powers such as Spain. Yet as the case of natural history shows, the discursive difference that the writings of early-modern Spanish naturalists make is critical for the history of political thought.

As I show below, the polemical debates over the boundaries of morality, society, and the formation of modern empire convey foundational normative assumptions of early modern political theory. Specifically, I turn to the exemplary rivalry between the royal historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and the renowned Dominican priest, bishop, and fiery “Protector of the Indians,” Bartolomé de Las Casas. Though the two chroniclers differ in their portrayal of American nature as a space of diabolical, or Edenic, qualities, they share a conceit common to Spanish natural history that portrays nature as timeless.

To illustrate these distinct visions, I juxtapose Oviedo’s *Sumario de historia natural de las Indias* (*Summary of the Natural History of the Indies*, published in 1526) and Las Casas’s famous polemic, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*,

published in 1552) as conflicting models of moral restoration.⁵ Within a space allegedly frozen in time, the two men turned to natural history as a means to communicate the great potential of the New World to Spanish audiences. For Oviedo, the New World presented an opportunity to relive the grand exploits of Spain's recent past. What Las Casas's writings reveal, however, is that although the development of European empire is tied to the material transformation of the New World's natural landscapes, the grounds for that change reflect a series of spiritual and empirical conflicts. The Spanish Empire, then, does not emerge from mere technological or juristic competition between civilizations; it is tied to the nascent cultural crises that weighed heavily on the ways nature shaped human consciousness.

I begin by returning to Jennifer Pitts's challenge for political theorists to "deal adequately with the imperial features of the current global order, including the substantial responsibility on the part of the great powers" for contemporary political crises.⁶ Striking among the calamities she presents is the challenge of ecological degradation. While Pitts acknowledges that early work on the history of empire began with Spanish debates concerning its imperial legitimacy, subsequent work in the field overlooks the role of nature in these debates.⁷

I go on to map the relation between empire and nature in contemporary work on the history of early Spanish naturalism. While most of this work is situated in the fields of environmental history and the history of science, there is much that political theorists can contribute, particularly in rethinking the role that New World natural experiences played on early European colonialisms.⁸ Turning to these fields broadens Enlightenment metanarratives on the origins of modernity, while carving out a space for firsthand accounts within early modern theories of nature-society interaction.

I close the chapter by reconstructing the polemical rivalry between Oviedo and Las Casas, both of whom are credited for producing the first descriptive systems of New World natural history.⁹ Pivotal for their interpretive frameworks was the experience of American nature as a site of redemptive, paradisiacal, and providential design. While such visions of nature seem alien to our time, particularly as the natural world is no longer deemed either sacred or autonomous, Oviedo and Las Casas's writings offered European audiences firsthand testimonial of the New World's moral potential. Their participation in the greater debate surrounding the formation of Spain's New World Empire establishes a distinctive literary trope I call the naturalist epic. As Anthony Pagden has pointed out, such accounts are crucial to re-evaluating

the effects of the “discovery” of America on Enlightenment thought. I would add that a clearer picture of how early modern metanarratives emerged also provides contemporary scholars with a stronger foothold in the polemics of historical writing.

The Imperial Moment in Political Theory

Although contemporary historians of political thought continue to draw inspiration from the past and present experiences of Spanish America, most of that attention has been focused on examinations of ideology, revolution, or radical democracy.¹⁰ As Jennifer Pitts puts it, when it comes to the question of empire: “Whether the subject is canonical political thinkers’ reflections on conquest, or the theorization of politics in the postcolonial present, much of the most innovative work, with which political scientists should engage far more than they do, takes place outside the confines of the discipline.”¹¹ To be sure, this emphasis stems from the field’s own discursive foundations, focusing on how words represent forms of political action.¹²

Pitts’s own intervention in framing the political theory of empire and imperialism comes at a time when several currents in contemporary theory seek to address the political impasse generated by liberalism’s global dominance and the rediscovery of opposing traditions. Comparative political theory, to give one example, presents itself as a rejoinder to “end of history”-style narratives proclaiming the imperial and intellectual dominance of Western Liberalism over the rest. The resurgence of empire as a field of inquiry not only raises questions about the diffusion of imperial norms and practices, but also about the understated commonalities between political vocabularies found across British and Spanish America.¹³ Having come late to this conversation, political theorists have yet to fully investigate the often-willing complicity of their ranks with imperial governance, as opposed to fields like Anthropology and History. Re-engagement with these disciplines, Pitts warns, is crucial to maintaining political theory’s vibrancy, as the field “has contributed less to the vigorous and significant scholarly conversation on empire than it might have been expected to do.”¹⁴ Such expectations, she holds, stem from the field’s long-held fascination with the sovereign nation-state.

As traditional definitions of the state bend and break through increased global interdependence, the turn toward empire also emerges against the backdrop of a long hiatus in international history. The drive to explain both economic and cultural differences, made more evident now in light of global capi-

talism's revolution in communications, has prompted a rethinking of where concepts such as difference, authority, and legitimacy come from. More than this, it has prompted intellectual historians to call into focus the entwined paths of globalization and political thought.¹⁵

Yet even more pertinent to political theory has been the revival of imperial history as a central feature of economic, as well as political and cultural, knowledge. Empire is a concept that straddles both national and international history; its primary orientation, however, is global in scope as European-led commerce and conquest have made the world an arguably smaller place. Though there is significant scholarly disagreement over how consolidated (or accurate) such global orders may be, there is an increasing realization that the history of political thought is itself wrapped up in the material dynamics of imperial order.¹⁶

Much of the field's current interest in empire stems from the realization that the links between "extra-European commerce and conquest to the development of European political thought [are] heightened . . . by the active involvement of key political theorists as legislators or as employees or associates of trading companies."¹⁷ Political theorists are not only complicit in the expression and defense of an economic or social status quo; they are also guilty of its perpetuation through practices of scholarly legitimation. The implications of such involvement have demanded greater attention to theorists' historical, linguistic, and imperial contexts:

[A] full understanding of these thinkers' ideas, as well as the broader traditions to which they contributed, requires attention to imperial and global contexts and concerns. . . . Just as we must understand modern Western constitutional democracy (and international law) as having emerged in an imperial context, so we must understand its exponents in the tradition of political thought, and those of other inherited political forms and concepts, in the same global and imperial context.¹⁸

Indeed, a turn to empire not only facilitates greater understanding of the origins and deployments of foundational concepts as the result of exchanges from imperial conquest and commerce, it also clarifies the boundaries and limits of such concepts for our own times. The history of Liberal Imperialism is an important case in point, for example, as historians of political thought have gone to great pains to articulate liberalism's mutual constitution alongside empire.¹⁹

Key assumptions and tropes of liberalism have been rendered questionable in light of their imperial liaisons. Yet despite political theorists having taken up the challenge of rethinking liberalism's relationship to empire, there is no consensus on whether or not this relationship is as universally negative as critics so often maintain. More specifically, there is a significant degree of ambivalence in current debates within political theory as liberalism's own complexity has given rise to far more nuanced defenses in its favor.²⁰

Such complexity is highlighted by Pitts as she frames liberalism's trajectory as "an always changing ideology whose commitments at any given time result from contingent conjunctures of discourses (for instance, of rights or liberty), interests (such as those of merchants in an emerging commercial society), and institutions (for example, the Bank of England, the East India Company)."²¹ For Pitts, at stake in the interrogation of liberalism is the emergence of questions about the structures of international law and the prevailing liberal order. The continued disenfranchisement of both native and noncitizen individuals in settler colonial societies points to vibrant debates by political theorists on the limits of Western sovereignty, the overcoming of liberal notions of freedom, and the possibility of coexistence within liberal constitutional structures.²² And while this work is important and critical to the development of certain forms of Euro-American imperialism, it neglects an alternate dimension to the unraveling of "imperial universalisms" made popular by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the spiritual cultivation of colonial society.

Since Anthony Pagden's early work almost single-handedly brought the Spanish sixteenth century into the discipline's imagination, few political theorists have taken up his challenge for a "much-needed re-evaluation" of the period.²³ The work of John Pocock may be a singular exception to this as his attempts to reconstruct Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* aimed at clarifying the literary and political implications of writing imperial histories.²⁴

For Pagden and Pocock, the Scottish Enlightenment theory of civilization would have been unthinkable without the legacies of Spain's Empire and the debates surrounding descriptions of the New World. Yet today the terrain remains idle as there is little work on empire concerned with the conflicts in cultures of knowledge production in the early modern period, most notably concerning Imperial Spain.²⁵ The problem, then, with political theory's turn toward empire does not lie in its stance toward excavating the origins of global inequality or domination. Rather, as Stanley Hoffman once argued about the

field of International Relations, the undisclosed anxiety perhaps lies in its being “too close to the fire.”²⁶

As historians of political thought increasingly locate the origins of modernity’s vices within the rise to prominence of liberal empires, a large part of the Americas’ past continues to be subsumed into a tale of rational progress and the instrumental transformation of nature. There is no space for wonder in that story. There is certainly little to say, moreover, about a concept of nature stripped of any normative and spiritual power. The fascination over New World nature embodied in Spanish natural history evolved along different discursive axes, contrasting epistemological visions, and political disputes over the proper bases of empirical evidence and moral propriety. This is a story yet to be well told.

In the field of Historical International Relations, for instance, the terrain on which empire, science, and nature have been studied is somewhat less ambivalent. Cultural and social historians have addressed the Spanish Empire’s place within the origins of international law, discourses of civilization, and even the long-revered state of nature.²⁷ Yet much of this work does not propose a historical re-evaluation of the empire’s trajectories. That is to say, there are attempts to sanitize individuals within the empire that stood out as a result of their resistance to Spanish abuse, or because of their efforts to universalize Spanish rule. Yet historical engagement with how imperial agents perceived and conveyed their missions remains undeveloped.

The dearth in historical analysis is, in part, the product of a contemporary bias among political scientists that takes for granted historical changes in the meaning of the term “empire.”²⁸ The coordinated expansion of European power that characterized the Scramble for Africa, for example, is a far different project than what Spanish colonizers or British explorers encountered in the Americas. As Edward Keene has suggested, the encounter with the Americas “had such a profound impact on sixteenth-century geography and natural science that it is easy to overestimate the extent to which, in itself, it posed a novel problem for theologians and political theorists. . . . The real impact of the discovery—and, even more importantly, the conquest and colonization—of the Americas was to force this long-standing issue about how to conduct relations with non-Christians into the foreground of theological and political debate.”²⁹

The novelty of the New World brought into relief the inadequate extent to which theories of the state and natural law could account for non-Western peoples, as well as vast, unexplored natural landscapes. Many of these short-

comings have given rise across the centuries to greater degrees of specialization in the study of regional, structural, and global modes of governance. It is arguably that heightened degree of specialization that has generated a lack of interest in the trans-Atlantic history of international political thought.³⁰ Yet as a space of conquest and domination, the Spanish Atlantic was a testing ground for human and nonhuman conceptions of geopolitical power. As I illustrate below, the degree to which the natural world can be governed may not have been a new concern for early modern scholars, but how nature was conceived had a significant effect on how to rule future societies.

Missionary Science and the Wonder of New World Nature

In his 1982 book, *The Fall of Natural Man*, Anthony Pagden tells the story of indigenous peoples' place in European visions of the Americas. By "natural man" Pagden was not referring to Rousseau's picture of the noble savage, an ahistorical critic of European morality who in the Enlightenment played the critical function of flipping civil society on its head.³¹ Rather, Pagden wanted to focus on the ways indigenous peoples were excluded from the emergent narrative of civilization, often portrayed as beings living "outside" the boundaries of human community. Much of Pagden's account is a recovery of the ways that the idea of "natural man" was constructed, diffused, and later debunked in scholarly debates across the Iberian world. Yet the crux of Pagden's story is in the anthropological roots of "natural man" and his emergence as an object of scientific and philosophical inquiry.

Forced to remain at the margins of the sixteenth century's intellectual horizon, "natural man" was sought for as a *fact* by virtue of his construction in *theory*; he was not so much *found* in nature, as he was described as *deficient* in nature, allegedly lacking the mental faculties of civilized social beings. For Pagden, however, these normative assumptions only told half the story behind justifications of Spanish imperialism, demanding a wider inquiry into the empirical implications of colonizing the Americas. Turning to the early writings of Spanish chroniclers like Las Casas and the Jesuit José de Acosta, Pagden sought to highlight a "program for comparative ethnology" that, in his mind, offered the necessary framework for interpreting Amerindian history, culture, and conquest in an imperial context.³² That program is itself rooted in earlier polemics concerned with establishing the political stakes of Spanish rule, as seen in the writings of Oviedo and Las Casas.

Both Oviedo and Las Casas turned to descriptions of nature as part of a

larger attempt to formalize the experience of wonder they faced and offer typologies for the seeming incommensurability informing early Spanish experiences. Neither of the two men saw a systematic narrative as their intended goal, but rather expressed it as a reaction to the limits of the dominant ideology of Scholasticism in making sense of the myriad differences brought to light by Amerindian life.³³

Largely based on Aristotelian psychology, Scholastic philosophy was concerned with the order of things within a highly stratified Christian cosmology. The discovery of the New World threatened to destabilize that cosmology, prompting an important set of disputes that would consume the empire's learned circles. While visions of nature in the Americas were part of larger shifts in Spanish exploration, Oviedo's and Las Casas's distinct views of nature, wonder, and empirical inquiry brought forth radical implications for the modern understanding of science and civilization. In this last regard, my efforts build on a growing historiographical concern with the intersection of nature, empire, and nation.³⁴ What is different in my effort is the intention of clarifying how Oviedo and Las Casas linked the natural realm they encountered to the ideological landscape they were inextricably a part of.

No doubt exists that the jarring experience of the New World was itself key for the two men, for as Stephen Greenblatt observes, "the experience of wonder continually reminds us that our grasp of the world is incomplete."³⁵ Yet incompleteness is more an invitation than it is a sign to stay away, a striking desire shared by the early natural historians as men possessed by the larger objectives of their projects. Describing those intentions is not to assess the "objectivity" of their accounts; rather, as Pagden says, it means clarifying "the context of contemporary epistemological concerns with the operations of what the Jesuit Acosta would later call 'the machine of the world.'"³⁶

My account of the two men's works begins with outlining how they engage the writing of the natural landscape of the conquest: What do they say? Where are they situated? To whom do they speak? And why are their audiences relevant? The context of production in which these works emerged shows how each man inherited (and adapted) different aspects of the narrative of conquest for his own purposes. By comparing two of their most renowned works—Oviedo's *Sumario* and Las Casas's *Brevísima relación*—I lay out the broader framework of narrative description they respectively establish.

Precisely because of their widespread diffusion across the European continent, the highly charged visions of the natural world that both works portray deserve a closer analysis.³⁷ While scholars have singled out the two works as

examples of the broader shift away from a Scholastic worldview, I am more interested in what they have to say about the experience of the Americas' natural landscape and the writing of history more generally. Las Casas, specifically, plays a transformative role in his reactions against Oviedo, illustrating how, according to Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Iberians have come to represent the antithesis of modernity," despite their rich portrayal of New World ecologies.³⁸

Experience and Ethnography in Oviedo

Looking at the natural histories of Oviedo and Las Casas marks an important first step in the longer genealogy of the modern empire's narrative of civilization. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the written text was an important symbol of the experience of discovery, particularly as an expression of eyewitness authority.³⁹ While Todorov is interested in clarifying how textual referents are indicative of the larger dynamics of modernity, contemporary scholars of Spanish historiography have gone on to extend this logic to the experience of rising commercial and administrative classes in fundamentally alien landscapes.⁴⁰ The Americas were perceived as a laboratory for empirical learning, as much as they were considered a space of salvation, or a site of imperial management. Alongside conquistadors, priests, alchemists, collectors, astrologers, painters, and curious men of letters, Oviedo and Las Casas were among the first chroniclers of the Americas that brought with them old assumptions about natural hierarchies, yet developed a new vocabulary for experiential knowledge.

In spite of his reputation as an ideologue of conquest, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, known simply as Oviedo, is considered by literary historians as one of the luminaries of the Spanish Golden Age. Trained in the arts, letters, and sciences of Renaissance Italy while growing up in the peripatetic Castilian courts, Oviedo started his literary career as the composer of chivalric epics and dramas. One epic in particular, entitled *Don Claribalte*, has garnered some attention as the "first novel" of the Americas.⁴¹

The story is presented as the translation of a manuscript Oviedo found while traveling in a fictitious kingdom and recounts the romantic misadventures of a young knight-errant who embodied the political aspirations of Imperial Spain. Yet the work also conveyed Oviedo's first attempts to overcome the challenges of crafting accurate, historical representations. That *Don Claribalte* was composed during one of Oviedo's many sojourns in the New World is no biographical accident; nor are the similarities between his hero's trials and their place in Oviedo's petitions for an audience with Charles V mere facts of convenience. As Stephanie

Merrim remarks, the novel is “too provocative to simply abandon,” particularly if regarded as “an experiment in varied modes of representation, which with all their flaws and failures themselves constitute rich and telling developments.”⁴²

In 1532, Oviedo’s efforts tellingly prevailed, and he was appointed by the Emperor as the official royal chronicler of all matters concerning the flora, fauna, and peoples of the Indies. His administrative role granted him access to myriad documents flowing in from all over the empire, as well as placed him alongside prominent conquerors, missionaries, chroniclers, and other intellectuals; this included taking part in a public dispute with Bartolomé de Las Casas.⁴³ Indeed, in his role as the empire’s scribe, Oviedo produced what some consider as “the most comprehensive history of the discovery, conquest, and colonization of the Americas from 1492 to 1547 . . . the most authoritative text on the Americas from the first half of the sixteenth century,” a massive book he titled the *Historia general y natural de las Indias*.⁴⁴ Though this work, the first part of which was published in 1535, cemented Oviedo’s status as the leading natural historian of the early modern period, it was preceded by a smaller, more descriptive text that framed much of his later writings.

It was not stylistic innovation or breadth that caught the eye of Oviedo’s audiences. Rather, it was his self-professed “new and gallant style of speaking”—that is, the adoption of the Castilian language as a tool for the building of colonial memory—that gave Oviedo’s work an influential place in the history of New World narratives.⁴⁵ The *Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias*, commissioned by Charles V in 1526, is in part a framework for Oviedo’s more ambitious *Historia general*; however, the work also constitutes what Andrés Prieto calls “a reflection on the problems that arise when the observational and taxonomical conventions used to describe Old World species are imposed upon a new, and hitherto unknown, biological reality.”⁴⁶

In Oviedo’s reading of the New World’s natural landscapes, there is more than just a novel subject matter. Ever since the *Reconquista*, the intertwining of faith and territorial expansion served as the backdrop of much Spanish exploration, even while the newness of the Americas raised challenges to the historical and religious preconceptions of European colonizers.⁴⁷ Oviedo’s work emerged in this interplay of narrative forces as an attempt to bridge factual documentation with the need for an imperial program. In this regard, the writing of history played a prominent political role in making the royal chronicler a kind of master narrator.

What Oviedo offered in his *Sumario* was a rethinking of the relationship between history and empire through the medium of naturalistic observation.

The strategies Oviedo employed to achieve this transformation were a result of what Pagden calls the “problem of recognition,” whereby the lack of interchangeable categories to make sense of New World novelties led Spanish observers to “classify and describe what they recognized to be *unfamiliar* in what they saw.”⁴⁸ Oviedo had already spent many years in the New World traveling, surveying, and assessing the many uses of natural resources. Though he claims to have written the book from memory, his attention to geographic, navigational, and naturalist detail reflect assiduous training. Through his drawings of fantastic creatures, appeals to his own eyewitness experience, and the melding of both the monstrous and the natural through the construction of memory, Oviedo sought to cultivate a strange canvas for a new kind of audience. Many of the things Oviedo describes within the *Sumario*—from the iguana to the horseshoe shape of the American continent—reflect the earlier dilemmas of representation Oviedo first encountered in *Don Claribalte* when he attempted to convincingly describe things and events that seemed unreal.

Throughout the *Sumario*, where Oviedo lacks the words to describe what he sees, he offers visual sketches that help portray what he is encountering. In one famous example, he describes his perplexed position on the iguana, an animal both terrestrial and aquatic in its behavior, as “uncertain if they are animal or fish, because they go about in the water and in the trees and by land, and they have four feet, and they are larger than rabbits, and they have an alligator’s tail, and the skin is all painted . . . and by the spine they have pointed spikes and sharp teeth and fangs.”⁴⁹ The attention to detail aside (see figure 1), Oviedo attempts here to compare the iguana to all kinds of animals familiar to European taxonomies: fish, rabbits, and alligators are all used as examples to convey the various folk-taxonomies that Oviedo was surely familiar with through his training in Renaissance natural history.

Historians have interpreted the equivocal stance on the iguana, and several other examples that Oviedo describes, as expressions of his dissatisfaction with simply transposing those European taxonomical systems to the New World.⁵⁰ However, that Oviedo does not know how to place the iguana within a discrete taxonomy (that is, as reptile, mammal, or fish) is not what I find relevant. Rather, what is innovative is his attempt to overcome the limits of naturalistic description by way of what Kathleen Myers calls a “visual epistemology.” As Myers describes it, Oviedo’s illustrations of the New World’s exotic specimens “remind the reader that the author experiences the apprehension of the new and communicates that personal experience and process to the reader so that he may participate in it and understand it.”⁵¹

lagartos que he dicho erã cocodrilos. Pero en la vidad la y vana/ muy diferente animal es del cocodrilo: y en ninguna cosa a el semejate. Esta que aqui yo pinte quiere al



go semejar ala y vana/ y a la verdad esta forma tienen / cõ la ptefacion o auiso que al principio deste capitulo se toco: que aqeste animal es como neutral / r q̃ no se determinan los hombres si es terrestre o d'agua porq̃ en la vna y en la otra estimaciõ se puede sospechar que tiene mucha parte.

Figure 1. Iguana, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* (Seville, 1535). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

The self-assurance that colors both Oviedo's style and his approach to the *Sumario*, no matter how seemingly innocuous or incommensurate, is indicative of his vast documentation of the New World's plant and animal life, but also the vast spirit of inquiry that figures like Oviedo attempted to embody. As Antonello Gerbi describes him, however, Oviedo's motivations were not just to serve, but to have his works regarded as classics, like the Ancient Greek and Roman natural histories:

[Oviedo's] attitude to the physical nature of America is what we might expect from an unprejudiced but not ingenuous observer, from a gifted 'dilettante' enamored of his material, happy to rediscover nature, not only mentally, in tune with the general movement of the Renaissance, but concretely, in lands hitherto unknown; to be able to emulate Pliny and at the same time render him eternal homage in becoming himself, proudly and enthusiastically, the Pliny of the lands across the ocean.⁵²

Yet it was not Oviedo's strictly naturalistic descriptions that were polemical among his contemporaries. Rather, it was his approach to representing the New World's environments and indigenous peoples that raised objections among other communities of scholars documenting the New World's contents. Throughout many of his later works, Oviedo oscillated back and forth over his role as a historian: was he to merely collect samples of the New World's many wonders, or was the thing that warranted documentation the very experiences he claimed to have, hold, and narrate for others to enjoy?

Writing to Charles V in the dedicatory preface to the *Sumario*, Oviedo explains how: "The thing that best preserves and sustains the works of nature in the memory of mortals are the histories and books in which they are found written."⁵³ His initial claim of writing the *Sumario* from memory, given his escape from political events in Panama, therefore served two functions: first, of establishing an experiential basis for natural knowledge, but second, and more specifically, to differentiate the textual authority of Old World ways of knowing from New World ways of living. As Andrés Prieto outlines, there is nothing innocent or modest about that juxtaposition, especially as an objective of colonization:

Written for the benefit of the Empire by an Imperial agent, the *Sumario* changes the location of knowledge from Europe to America by constantly predicating that knowledge on the memory of colonial experience . . . the *Sumario* placed both knowledge and authority not in the Imperial metropolis, but in the Colonial periphery, claiming pre-

cedence over the works written in Spain by armchair scholars . . . its aim was not to present a collection of already known facts, but instead to present new facts and knowledge about a hitherto unexplored part of the world.⁵⁴

Such facts were needed to build a historical record from which future readers could retain the memory of conquest and establish a new society. By contrast to Oviedo, the Dominican Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas is famously known as the most vocal defender of Amerindians in the New World. He was also a ferocious critic of Spanish colonial violence, and his legacy on that front is best captured by the official title granted to him as “Protector of the Indians.” From that position, Las Casas endeavored to institute a different kind of colonial project.

Polemics and Possession in Las Casas

Las Casas had been a colonizer of the island of Hispaniola as the son of a Spanish *encomendero* (a work grant title, or official overseer of a cadre of indigenous laborers) and also took part in the “pacification” of the island’s Taino natives. He renounced his territorial holdings upon being ordained a Dominican priest in 1510 and took the Taino massacre as his moral point of departure. Though Las Casas’s work has been the subject of great scholarly and political debate, no doubt exists that he was, in Antonello Gerbi’s famous formulation, “a man possessed by an *idée fixe*”—the inherent moral superiority of the New World’s indigenous peoples.⁵⁵ The dispute between Las Casas and Oviedo therefore rested on more than just historiography or royal influence: it established rival traditions of interpretation concerning indigenous cultures and different responsibilities for the historical interpreter in the face of an alien natural context.

Las Casas’s *Brevísima relación*, a small manifesto and perhaps the most emblematic of his many texts, has been deemed the inaugurator of what is called the Black Legend and is considered one of the most widely translated texts in modern history. And while the *Brevísima relación* is regarded as a vivid denunciation of Spanish atrocities in the Americas, it is less known for its utopian descriptions of the natural landscape of the Americas.⁵⁶ More specifically, the *Brevísima relación* paints a portrait of the Americas that is both fantastic and prophetic, taking stock of the New World’s wonders, as well as outlining a role for the historian in terms of capturing its significance.⁵⁷ Las Casas frames the natural and human landscape of the New World as a kind of untouched Eden

through which Europeans can rediscover Christian natural right and exercise a new program of civilization. Many of his anecdotes and descriptions of the natural world are coupled with descriptions of the Amerindians in its midst. In his introduction to the text, for example, he describes Terra Firma and its peoples' celestial character:

Terra Firma, which lies at its nearest point two hundred fifty leagues distant . . . possesses a sea-coast of above ten thousand leagues discovered (and more is discovered everyday), all filled as though the land were a beehive of people. . . . And so it would appear that God did set down upon those lands the entire multitude, or greatest part, of the entire human lineage.

All these universal and infinite peoples *a toto genero*, God created to be a simple people, altogether without subtlety, malice, or duplicity, excellent in obedience, most loyal to their native lords and to the Christians whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, meekest and most pacific, slowest to take offence and most tranquil in demeanor, least quarrelous, least querulous [*sic*], most lacking in rancor or hatreds or desire for vengeance of all the peoples of the earth.⁵⁸

No doubt seems to exist in Las Casas's mind that whatever conflicts emerged from the encounter, the peoples of the Americas were the least responsible for them. It was simply not in their nature, or that of the landscape, to induce harm or quarrel. The Amerindian lifestyle and behavior contrasted so radically with the Spaniards (who had come to see the natural environment for its monetary and instrumental uses) that Las Casas at times even suggests that Spanish colonizers were unworthy of having discovered the New World at all. Writing on the conquest of Yucatán, he outlines the conquistadors' ravenous indifference to the healing character of the continent's verdant lands:

This kingdom of Yucatán was filled with infinite numbers of people, for it is land in great measure healthful and abundant with food and fruits (even more than the land of México) and particularly abounding in honey and wax above any other part of the Indies that has so far been seen. . . . The people of said kingdom were notable among all those of the Indies, both in prudence and policy and in their lack of vices and sins more than others, and very fit and worthy to be brought to the knowledge of the Spaniards' God, and their land a fit place where there could be made great cities of Spaniards and they might live in them as though in an earthly paradise, were they worthy of it—but they were not, because of their covetousness

and greed and insensibility and great sins, as they have been unworthy of the many other parts that God had shown them in those Indies.⁵⁹

Las Casas is appealing to several audiences here. First, the *Brevísima relación* was initially intended and dedicated to Charles V's son, the prince Philip II, aimed at convincing the monarchy of the violent and irresponsible behavior of Spanish colonizers. Las Casas's attempt is credited for the passing of the New Laws of 1542 (which led to the formal abolition of native slavery) and the infamous Debate at Valladolid (1550–1551) between Las Casas and the noted jurist Ginés de Sepúlveda. More on Las Casas and Sepúlveda's debate will be said below, particularly since at the heart of their disagreement lay a crucial difference in their interpretation of human nature and the character of the American environment.

Yet in advocating for the New Laws one can also see Las Casas's intent in describing the Americas as a fruitful place for the emperor to take tutelage of indigenous peoples, a kind of space of salvation where, as he noted above, "there could be made great cities of Spaniards and they might live in them as though in an earthly paradise."

While addressing the ramifications of the conquest's violence on Spanish souls, Las Casas also sought to curry favor to institute his own brand of pacification through conversion. As Santa Arias writes, Las Casas's rhetoric has a double character to it: "grounded in spatial interrelations where the methods of aggression in one place influenced other spaces as colonialism extended throughout in the hemisphere," he was able to generate "a polemical debate about the consequences of empire" while at the same time never denouncing the colonizing project.⁶⁰ Though he was schooled in Thomistic natural philosophy, Las Casas's vision of the Americas is more often framed in terms of his own experience of revelation, rather than his intellectual upbringing.

On this point, both Oviedo and Las Casas share the use of their own experiences as the foundation of a new way to interpret Amerindian practices and the New World's natural realities. Whereas Oviedo used the medium of eyewitness testimony to confirm Spanish prejudices, Las Casas began to break away from these traditions by emphasizing empirical observation as a vehicle of vindication. What Las Casas maintained over Oviedo was to link the world he encountered with the future, not the past, of the Spanish imperial imagination. What kind of a New World were Spanish colonizers interested in building? More specifically, through his translation of the narrative of conquest into a kind of naturalist epic, Las Casas took what seemed like an alien world and rendered its natural history as the foundation for a future human story.

The Naturalist Epic as New Horizon of Interpretation

In his *Brevísima relación*, Las Casas offers an account of the Americas rife with utopian references to the New World's "infinite lands" and "universal" peoples, while simultaneously advocating for an anti-imperial agenda against perpetrators he saw as less human than those they attacked. Las Casas, however, also saw colonization as an opportunity for regenerating Spanish moral sensibilities in the wake of the conquest's violence and the changing material culture of modernity. The power of Las Casas's account lay in its relational morality: in the context of building an empire, many feared that great violence and evil would eventually contaminate Spaniards themselves.

The perceived cultural, biological, and environmental incommensurability of the Americas, particularly in relation to anything previously experienced in Europe, came to reflect recurring myths of unstable realities.⁶¹ The stories ran a wide gamut: such a land of vast wonders could only be the result of weakened judgment and alienation from God on the part of European settlers; the alleged superiority of the Amerindians as a people "untouched" threatened the basis on which Spain's Empire had so far been enacted; Spain had been chosen to make sense of the New World, to understand and explain, so as to make sense of its own development; failure to change the terms under which conquest was enacted would alter the trajectory of the empire and create a world upside-down for both colonizer and colonized.

In such a transitional realm of narratives and counternarratives, Pagden tells us, "representation, the creation of mental images through language, could never be an adequate means of making the 'other' fully intelligible."⁶² The lack of lived-experience of the place was therefore thought to be the primary source of the Spaniard's representational dilemma, prompting the need for a radically experiential framework that could accurately account for what the New World contained and signified. For those rooted in the older, Scholastic tradition, the Americas presented a significant interpretive problem: there were no "texts" for interpretation to be found. Las Casas, by focusing on "the primacy of firsthand experience," became the second major exponent (after Oviedo) of a tradition of writing that saw representation as a "necessary relation between the cognitive status of text and experience."⁶³ Facts of experience could themselves be read as texts, making ethnographic exploration itself an expression of authority. The difference with Oviedo's approach lay in the cosmic moral order at stake, not the mere establishment of colonial memory; the result is a naturalist epic with ambitious spiritual goals and, as I will show in later chapters, dangerous political liaisons.

Las Casas's "conversion" from colonizer to priest best captures this new way of understanding text and experience constituting the naturalist epic. In 1510, he was denied communion by a group of Dominican friars who arrived in Hispaniola and denounced the atrocities attributed to the *encomienda* system. Las Casas's attention was particularly captured by the fiery sermons of Antonio de Montesinos, who dramatized the experience of Spanish injustice through his reading of Ecclesiasticus 34:21–22.⁶⁴ For Las Casas, the verses were a text that "made sense of what he had seen, but [also] what his blinded eyes had never allowed him to 'witness' for years," forcing him to reread his earlier acts as part of a larger interpretation of conquest and empire.⁶⁵

Las Casas was prompted to rethink the texts and logic of ancient authorities (particularly Aristotle's natural philosophy) as a means of advocating for the human status of the Amerindians. Las Casas's conception of natural law was born out of his immersion into the American experience, a process he deemed necessary to faithfully relate the facts on the ground (that is, provide a *relación*). The coupling of "natural laws" with "natural texts" offered a new approach to understanding the relationship between analogical interpretations of the New World (such as Oviedo's) and the moral wonders raised by the study of natural history.

Las Casas's work is therefore two-fold: he offers a basis for interpretation and engages in a reflection on the historian's task to "give clarity and certainty for readers of ancient things . . . the principles which have been discovered about the machine of this world."⁶⁶ Yet at work in the *Brevísima relación* is the same link between a subjective "I" and the physical eye through which documentation must happen. Las Casas, at least initially, suffers from the same epistemology of possession as Oviedo. Experience, particularly through its articulation as a form of authority, was not meant to replace hermeneutics. Rather, experience alone was touted as the appropriate basis of interpretation and only the presence of the historian in the natural landscape of the Americas could establish both textual and moral authority. There was not much room in this vision for those not versed in this new science of interpretation.

Most of the narrative transformation that the *Brevísima relación* heralds was a dramatic and polemical one, so much so that in order to cleanse his account of ulterior political intent, Las Casas framed his rhetorical flourishes through the caveat of "merely" being an eyewitness. His new vocabulary—one among many precursors to "new philosophies" sprouting across Europe⁶⁷—ran against the vocabulary of conquest employed by the likes of Cortés and Bernal Díaz de Castillo, through which Spanish conquistadors had positioned their actions as if against the "infidels" who had overrun

Christian lands in Europe.⁶⁸ It also challenged the way Oviedo established a new canvas for the empire to position itself. Las Casas had sought to bring the colonization of the Americas into accountability by opposing Spain's lexicon of natural and civilizational hierarchy. Rather than reading the Amerindians as the analogue of Europe's past—a backward land in need of moral, material, and intellectual development—Las Casas sought to familiarize the Amerindians to Europeans' modern (that is, temporal) sensibilities. In Las Casas's mind, the Americas came to represent the prehistory of European modernity, an opportunity for Spaniards to get the project of society right, both for the Amerindian's sake as well as theirs.

But what then does one make of Las Casas's approach to natural history? Scholars have long recognized that a central dilemma in Las Casas's work is his reliance on an authoritative and quasi-solipsistic notion of lived-experience. He offers no other voices than his own; he gives no sense of the temporal connections between indigenous society prior to the encounter, at the time of conquest, or during the emergence of the colony; he even fails to provide an outline from which his kind of inquiry could be re-enacted or reproduced to create the interpretive model (both at the level of writing history and empire) he employs. With Las Casas, one is left wondering how such a biased, personal, and yet systematically diligent vision was able to coexist in a context that was allegedly intolerant of dissent and a scholarly community that was purportedly backward and unscientific.

Not everyone reads Las Casas's contributions with a positive gloss. For political theorist Diego von Vacano, the friar's efforts are entirely rhetorical, questioning the *Brevísima relación*'s basis on any kind of ethnographic inquiry. Nevertheless, von Vacano writes, it is in the *Brevísima relación* where Las Casas's "transvaluation of values is most evident . . . where he inverts the subject of the civilized-barbarian dichotomy most clearly."⁶⁹ According to von Vacano, Las Casas is an aesthete, reading the Amerindians and their place in nature as instances of God's plan in making the world attractive.⁷⁰ Yet Las Casas's rhetorical style also subverts the meanings of words, using the term "barbarian" to describe Spanish actions, while simultaneously granting the Amerindians a near supernatural capacity to withstand suffering. The text's exaggeration is meant to prove the Amerindian's humanity, itself an object of analysis and skepticism at the time.

Cañizares-Esguerra, on the other hand, describes how Las Casas's defense of the Indians was couched in a description of the Americas as "one of the most salubrious environments on earth . . . that Amerindians were exceptional

human beings . . . that since the natives lived in extremely temperate climates, they therefore had exceptionally good mechanisms of perception and superior intelligence.”⁷¹ This position ran against a material context in search of labor to exploit the earth. The Amerindians’ bodies—which Las Casas had described as meek and reflective of a passive nature—were read by Spanish conquerors and *encomenderos* as phlegmatic and effeminate. In one instance of the *Brevísima relación*, he describes the “fertile” province of Nicaragua as “a thing of wonder . . . with admirable groves of fruit trees that caused the people to be immense.” The description not only conveys the utopian qualities of this space, but also doubly condemns Spanish violence. In seeking to exploit indigenous bodies, the conquistadors set them further back on the civilization scale, for fleeing the land that been so key to their growth meant returning to nature itself:

[Because] it was a land that is flat and without features, so that the people there could not abscond into the wilderness of forest or up into the mountain, and delightful, so that they were grieved and in anguish to think of leaving it, they thus did suffer terrible persecutions and all that it was possible for them to tolerate of bondage and acts of tyranny at the hands of the Christians (for by their nature they were a most meek and pacific people).⁷²

Again, as with Oviedo, Las Casas does not necessarily disagree with granting nature the power to determine social behavior, although he rejects any notion that their indigenous peoples’ “natural” docility entailed social inferiority. Indeed, he never completely rejected the notion, which would be made popular again in the eighteenth century, that the New World was literally a continent in maturation:

And those sins which are reserved for punishment by God alone, such as a desire for vengeance, or the hatred and rancor that those people might harbor against such capital enemies as the Christians were to them, into these I believe very few Indians ever fell, and they were little more impetuous and hard, by the great experience that I have of them, than children of ten or twelve years old. And I know too, as a sure and infallible truth, that the Indians always waged the most just and defensible war against the Christians, albeit the Christians never waged just war against the Indians, but rather were diabolical and infinitely unjust, and much more so than in that wise than might be held or said about any tyrant in the world at any time before.⁷³

Though admirable, this is no call for an imperial exit. The violence of the New World's conquest convinced Las Casas of the severe moral duty that God had imposed on Spain—and arguably himself—to paternalistically bring the Amerindians into history and modernity. Nature helped frame his argument by offering a site of wonder that would subvert the authority of the Scholastics and carve a space where natural law met its limits. Such arguments did not go unchallenged within the Royal Court. The Aristotelian humanist, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, argued against Las Casas's conception of natural patronage, advocating instead a model of natural slavery to justify what he considered was a "just war" against Indian infidels.⁷⁴ Their Debate at Valladolid—renowned for the eloquence and rhetorical flourish of the two men's arguments—culminated in a philosophical stalemate over what ultimately constituted the Amerindians' humanity (or lack thereof).⁷⁵ In terms of imperial policy and philosophical impact, the debate shifted the terms under which both the Spanish conceptions of empire and the naturalist conception of knowledge would develop from that point forward.

Debating the Nexus of Nature and Empire

The vision of nature depicted in the works of Oviedo and Las Casas is both holistic and Edenic. Oviedo, seeing in the Americas the opportunity to enact a new story of conquest for Imperial Spain, constructs a vision of the earth as a canvas onto which he can limn the development of a civilized society. Las Casas, while interested in defending the humanity of the Amerindians, creates a portrait of the Americas as a space being fought over by holy and unholy forces alike. In the face of the New World's wonder, one can assume that part of what shaped the two historians' minds was the sheer size and lushness of the American landscape.

Between Oviedo and Las Casas, however, the allegedly untouched, undeveloped, and uncivilized world of Amerindians raised among Europeans many arguments and disagreements about the relationship between language, morality, geography, climate, and ultimately, the place of human beings in the world. What I aim to start addressing here is how the description of the natural world began as a source of historical understanding, as well as an invitation to dig deeper into the mystery of the machine of the earth. This is an invitation with significant political ramifications that can greatly contribute to the work being currently done in the political theory of empire and imperialism. As Pitts herself observes, a measured move into other fields such as the history of science and environmental history may be a welcome development:

If all political theory has become cross-disciplinary, this is nowhere more true than in the study of empire. A proper understanding of the phenomenon of empire requires the contributions of social and cultural history and theory; literary criticism; feminist criticism and history; and anthropology.⁷⁶

According to Scholastic philosophers, what distinguished man from other beasts, and civilized man from barbarism, was his ability to employ his speculative intellect to the fullest. On one side of the New World experience of nature was the absence of cities; on the other, was a coexistence with natural life that (in the European vision of nature) violated the natural hierarchy of beings. Assuming there was a space to tolerate and engage with the existence of indigenous peoples, and that their connection with the natural world was something to be left behind, how was the Amerindian meant to escape nature in the future Spanish Empire? The imperial answer was univocal: by building cities, tilling the land, educating indigenous peoples (pedagogically and spatially) in an environment where their mind could thrive and the Amerindian could become human.

The humanist scholar Francisco de Vitoria, when he entered the end of the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda, offered a valuable synthesis of the two men's positions. Vitoria argued that the only way to recognize humanity within the Amerindians was to situate them alongside the Spaniards as beings in history, subject to the same laws of growth, maturity, decline, and death that characterized Europeans. The habituation of the Amerindian into humanity demanded a systematic transformation that only the empire could offer, but that by no means guaranteed success.

Prior to the material transformation brought about by Spanish colonizers and their new modes of commerce, exploration, and science, Vitoria envisioned religious re-education as the source of new customs and "natures" for Amerindians and Spaniards alike. It was easy, from this premise, for chroniclers like Oviedo to see the Amerindian's relation to nature as misguided, heretical even, in spite of offering an understanding of harmony that was far less conflictive than what was found in European systems of knowledge. As Las Casas's case shows, however, Spanish naturalism, as I sought to clarify here, was not the product of mystery and elegance, but rather of wonder, faith, and empire. From my perspective, further exploring this relationship reveals the political stakes in the exclusion of Spanish imperialism's role in the formation of modernity. While there was the possibility of an escape from nature in the minds of philosophers like Vitoria, and historians such

as Oviedo, their efforts (alongside Las Casas's) act as reminders that there is no escape from the questions that conquest and dominance over the earth have inaugurated. From their experience, the idea of civilization was yet to be properly understood, and the burden of civilizing nature, or creating the right narrative to cultivate New World nature, remained for Spanish naturalists a dilemma of timeless implications. In the next chapter, I look at one of the most systematic efforts to make sense of the links between nature and the narrative of civilization as approached by Bernardino de Sahagún.

3

THE ANTHROPOLOGICS OF BERNARDINO DE SAHAGÚN

Small and smooth, shiny. It has small, pointed ears, just like a small dog. It is black, like rubber; smooth, slippery, very smooth, long-tailed. And its tail is provided with a hand at the end; just like a human hand is the point of its tail. And its hands are like a raccoon's hands or like a monkey's hands. It lives, it is a dweller in watery caverns, in watery depths. And if anyone arrives there at its entrance, or there in the water where it is, it then grabs him there. It is said that it sinks him, it plunges him into the water; it carries him to its home, it introduces him to the depths; so its tail goes holding him, so it goes seizing him.

Bernardino de Sahagún, "The Ahuizotl," *Florentine Codex*¹

In this chapter, I engage with the work and ideas of the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, known primarily as a pioneer of cultural anthropology and one of the single most influential ethnographers of the Mexica peoples. Specifically, I argue that Sahagún's ethnographic work went far beyond cultural observation, developing instead an empirical disposition in the service of spiritual salvation against the New World's allegedly diabolical character. I show how he developed a linguistic model that allowed him to study Nahuatl (that is, Aztec) culture, but also made sense of indigenous peoples' relations to a natural environment allegedly full of deception and danger.

In his pursuit of the meanings of nature, however, Sahagún attempted to dehumanize indigenous cultures while simultaneously naturalizing his own millenarian fears of the demonic and inhuman. What his innovative approach to the study of human society intended was to extirpate evil forces from in-

indigenous society by locating the source of moral deviancy within nature itself. His findings, he reasoned, would determine the suitability of some indigenous customs and beliefs over others. This particular style of cultural anthropology thus functions as a kind of political demonology: the sustained study of the human, the natural, and the supernatural as an interpretive framework to govern an unstable, yet promising, polity. Sahagún arrived in the Americas in 1529 as part of what scholars have called the “Spiritual Conquest.”² Through his evangelizing efforts in New Spain, he developed an unrivaled catalogue of cultural, religious, linguistic, and social practices in Aztec society that culminated in the renowned *Florentine Codex*. Concerned with cultivating the proper conditions for conversion, Sahagún developed in this manuscript a series of systematic ethnographies aimed at differentiating between practices that were amenable to the Christian faith and others deemed idolatrous. As part of what he called a “General History of the Things of New Spain,” Sahagún’s work is regarded as a firsthand testimony of the conquest of the Americas. The work is also an early exemplar of the many transformations that Spanish missionaries underwent in the midst of great cultural, linguistic, and institutional paradoxes.

In what follows, I position Sahagún’s framework of scientific and ecclesiastic inquiry within the broader evolution of two trends: the cultures of conquest emerging from the Spanish *Reconquista* and the imperial revival of natural history. I then focus on the context of production of the *Florentine Codex* and particularly the paucity of research in the secondary literature on Book XI of the *Codex*, a volume entitled “Earthly Things.” In the third section of the chapter, I look at the anthropomorphized interactions between Mexica peoples and their natural environments described in Book XI, and how missionaries like Sahagún attempted to interpret indigenous rituals through an anthropological conception of diabolism, or, devil worship. In this anthropological model, what Peter Pels calls the “practical relationship between ethnographer and people described,” indigenous peoples were stripped of agency as victims of satanic influences.³ In a paradoxical move, however, Sahagún also renders them as having exemplary cultural qualities, particularly their innovative uses of the natural environment that missionaries would need to become familiar with in order to extirpate idolatry.

Cultures of Conquest and Imperial Revival of Natural History

Recovering Sahagún’s story and writings is essential to unpacking the origins of a long-held bias in the Western human sciences against indigenous beliefs.

For instance, Sahagún's example is crucial to understanding why political theorists today have such a contentious relation to indigenous peoples.⁴ In effect, Sahagún's work and method form part of a contested reconfiguration of Western intellectual historiography, one where the indigenous past can be included within contemporary accounts of cultural domination. The study of nature is a critical juncture in the development of that history. Sahagún's voice, and especially the muted experiences of his indigenous interlocutors, are misconstrued when depicted as mere curiosities, or, when missionaries like Sahagún are reduced to being fanatical agents of empire.⁵

Indeed, in the intertextual construction of an ethnographic voice, Sahagún is more than an arbiter between indigenous dispossession and recognition. The paradoxes his work conveys are essential to the genre of colonial writing and domination, yet have been less influential in histories of science and political theory.⁶ A problem emerges in how the history of political thought in Colonial Spanish America depends on the mediated silence of native informants. Unpacking this impasse is a monumental task that does not begin nor end with Sahagún. Yet his work forms part of a formative moment in the history of political thought that, as the Mexican historian Miguel León-Portilla has noted, "was replete with paradoxes."⁷ The *Florentine Codex* is a work of many inconsistencies, due to conflicting descriptions one finds in the Nahuatl- and Spanish-language texts. In particular, Sahagún's contrasting interpretations of animals, landscapes, and the stories Mexica peoples would tell about them reveal dissonant conclusions regarding his understanding of nature, religion, and the changing geopolitical context of New Spain's Spiritual Conquest. Juxtaposing his views confirms that narratives of dehumanization and demonization were instrumental to the study of nature in Colonial Spanish America.

Yet when reading Sahagún "with the grain"—through his own evolving experience with the Nahuatl language—one can see counterintuitive inconsistencies in the allegedly impervious logic of imperial domination that missionaries like him espoused. As Sahagún learns more about the peoples of New Spain, his zeal to condemn them wanes. My account of Sahagún's natural history of New Spain thus shows that Spanish chroniclers of the New World were involved in a far more normative project than mere material extraction.⁸ Indeed, for a brief period of time, statecraft in Colonial America could only be achieved as soulcraft, making the conquest of nature one step in a larger negotiation of spiritual values.

As I have established so far, natural historians played a wide range of roles in the conquest of the New World. The revolutionary implications of the en-

counter with the Americas rested on the need to account for what Europeans found on the new continents. Storytelling in this context helped to naturalize Spain's imperial mission by taking American nature as a unit of analysis to explain social, political, and economic differences between indigenous peoples and European explorers.⁹

As the first Spanish conquerors returned to Europe, their accounts of creatures and landscapes outside of existing conceptual and interpretive frameworks enticed settlers, merchants, and missionaries to relive and re-enact the chivalric epics recounted in the *Reconquista*. For one set of actors in the Americas, the narrative of imperial conquest included a monstrous and unpredictable natural world, not just an allegedly uncivilized opponent. In this scheme, the unknown and exotic were used as proof of God's favored view of the Spaniards as bearers of the Christian faith, as well as Satan's exile from Heaven into an unpredictable land.¹⁰ For another group, the drives behind conquest demanded reform: more than just a violent appropriation of territory, reconquering the natural world of the Americas demanded the conquest of narrative itself.

Bernardino de Sahagún—in conjunction with other predecessors of modern cultural anthropology, such as Diego Durán and Diego de Landa—saw in the Americas a repository of cultural deviance that needed to be archived and withdrawn from circulation, so that proper cultivation of Catholic values could take place.¹¹ Sahagún saw in the land and peoples of the Americas a world split in two: one a source of order and the other a site of fear. His preconceptions mirrored a longstanding belief in the bifurcation of time and history into a secular, worldly realm, and another heavenly, universal space.¹² Many naturalists initially employed the classical frameworks of Aristotle and Pliny to explain the nature of the New World. The sheer novelty of these spaces made the stretching and challenging of ancient sources pragmatically necessary, yet also politically controversial.

Myriad collections of flora and fauna—along with the tapestry of words used to describe them—testified that the New World, and indigenous peoples' knowledge of it, were truly advanced. These vast landscapes, however, provided ample opportunities for indigenous peoples to behave in allegedly devious and idolatrous ways. Early explorers had emphasized the superstitious reading of signs and lack of literary scripts as markers of the slow mental and technological development of Amerindian peoples. However, the first waves of missionaries to the New World encountered many similarities with Christian custom and ritual that challenged these readings. Their discoveries

generated great doubts over the reliability of earlier writings on American nature. Sahagún's own arrival in the New World coincided with a second wave of religious (and naturalist) inquiry. The men who came to conquer the environments and souls of the New World were trained not just to interpret native languages and customs, but also to find in the American landscape the source of great dangers.

In this endeavor Sahagún represents an intellectual conundrum. Historians have described Sahagún as “a declared enemy of the hybridization of cultures,” as well as a “mature and seasoned Franciscan . . . concerned with shaping the knowledge of a tradition to which he did not belong and had to deal with conflict between his own ethnic tradition and the one he was trying to understand.”¹³ Most commentators, however, have largely overlooked how central the study of nature was to Sahagún's project and the political implications surrounding his observations. Even fewer political theorists have studied how his naturalistic observations contributed to the development of Spain's imperial project.

I hone in on Book XI of the *Florentine Codex* to offer a more empirically grounded portrait of Sahagún's depictions of indigenous customs and their uses of New World nature. Book XI is a focal point for these observations, revealing a far more ambivalent relation to indigenous peoples than generally seen among Spanish missionaries. As Laura Ammon has noted, one of the dominant hypotheses held by missionaries in New Spain was “an Augustinian understanding of the world,” where humanity was defined along two sets of characteristics: first, as belonging to a world where, “God left traces of himself in nature and could therefore be known, at least nascently, by all living things”; and second, as was argued about Amerindian peoples, as exhibiting qualities that “were not rational, meaning . . . [they] were equivalent to beasts of burden and did not possess a soul.”¹⁴ That second conception rendered indigenous societies especially susceptible to the demonic. In this way the holy, mundane, and inhuman all come together to inform Sahagún's broader project. Moreover, his linguistic interpretation of the cultural, medicinal, and naturalist rituals found in Book XI renders the nature of the New World into a living artifact without equal in Old World taxonomies—a veritable “Forest, Garden and Orchard of the Mexican Language.”¹⁵

Scholars have paid little attention to Book XI of the *Codex*, despite that it is both the largest and most illustrated of the work's twelve volumes. In part, this is a result of the relative obscurity under which the best-preserved copy of the *Florentine Codex* was kept, under the auspices of the Medici-sponsored

se arrebata con la mano de
la cola, y le mete de baxo del
agua y le llena al profundo, y
luego turba el agua y la haze
beruyl y lleuantar olas: pare
ce que es tempestad del agua
y las olas que ebran en las ori
llas y hazen es prima: y luego
salen muchos peces y ranas del
profundo del agua y andan so
bre la faz del agua y hazen
grande alboroto en el agua: y
el que fue metido de baxo del
agua alli muere: dende apo
s dias, el agua echa fuera el
cuerpo del que fue ahogado: y
sale sin ojos, y sin dientes, y
sin vias todo se lo quito el
ahuzotl: el cuerpo nin guerra lla
va trave, sino todo lleno de
verdinales



el cuerpo nadie le asava

laquija, ic can tih iniquitapil
icquitsitsquish. Auh inico
ac quioalana: mjc aiac ipan
on vebiz, mjc motlamausiti
lia: njmā colinja matt, coco
xon timomana, motumpitioa,
poconj veta a haci, nonoquj
vi: inypoconallo, cha chapani,
mottatitlia inypoconallo. Auh
in: njmjstī: m xaxo vilti, in a
mjlome, in cecuecia: vel mjc
moalquija, tlapapatlaca m
njmjstī, tlathochali vi in
cecuecia, mte tucala: ic cen
iauh in chaquilo. Auh in que
manjan: panj quioalquetza
m avitotl, in anoco ttilco
oatl: in que laquija noctle in
ix tēlolo, njstlan, y oan njstī,
omothi quj cuyli que: auh nj
man acā que namj njnacaio,
in ma tlaxo levalli: canic uuh
qujn tlathaquistate qustī mo
thida in nacaio, uuh qujon
in ma acā oquj tēte vi, hio
quj quj pal tē. Auh aiac

Figure 2. "The Ahuizotl," Bernardino de Sahagún, Book XI: "Earthly Things," Florentine Codex (1577). Florence, Laurentian Medicean Library, Ms. Med. Palat. 220, f. 223r. Courtesy of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities. Any further reproduction by any means is forbidden.

Laurentian Library. Secondly, however, that obscurity is also a testament to the *Codex's* labyrinthine history as a subject of royal controversy in the late sixteenth century. The larger story of the *Florentine Codex's* trajectory goes beyond the scope of the present text. Censured by the Council of the Indies for its potential vindication of indigenous beliefs, Sahagún's *Codex* was also the source of great debate within the Franciscan Order concerning their theological disposition.¹⁶ In Book XI of the *Codex*, Sahagún documents Aztec accounts of flora, fauna, insects, landscapes, and the religious uses around them. The narrative offers clues as to how the study of indigenous customs, religion, and politics demanded a more nuanced, adaptive, and flexible strategy for Spanish control. Especially critical in Sahagún's observations was the unique cosmological relationship to nature that Aztec peoples had and, in effect, conveyed through their language and social values.

The text of Book XI follows a bilingual format of Nahuatl- and Spanish-language columns, developed throughout the *Codex* by Sahagún and his conscripted indigenous interpreters to lay out the linguistic and cultural bases of Nahua society (see figure 2). The strategy also allowed Sahagún the space to offer interpretive commentary. Sahagún develops here a natural history of the Valley of Mexico, employing Aztec knowledge developed before the arrival of Spanish conquerors. Much like his efforts to compare and reconcile Aztec rituals with core Christian practices in other books of the *Codex*, Sahagún's natural history blended Aztec methods of collection with the growing emphasis on experiential, evidentiary standards found in Spanish naturalism more broadly.

As I will illustrate below, however, Sahagún's documentation of his encounters with New World nature and indigenous religious practices reveal several conceptual paradoxes about his method. Indeed, Book XI is arguably the most complex of the *Florentine Codex*, as it positions Sahagún the furthest away from what his stated objectives and anthropological sensibilities claim to pursue, but also makes him one of the leading lights of early modern scientific and political thought.

Pursuing Sahagún: The Spiritual Conquest and the Devil in the New World

The first Franciscan missionaries arrived in Colonial America in 1524 under the banner of the "Twelve Apostles of New Spain." Their initial efforts in the region ranged from establishing Nahuatl instruction for all missionaries, to

dividing the Mexican territory into administrative provinces. Their immersion into Mexica culture also set the stage for the order's long history of spiritual and institutional influence. In his celebrated text, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, Robert Ricard documents the ethnographic and organizational challenges that mendicant orders faced in developing religious missions in post-conquest Mexico. Highlighting the extent of linguistic training that Franciscan missionaries needed in order to properly preach the Gospel and fulfill the rites of conversion, Ricard writes of an enduring tension between theory and practice from one generation to the next. "The missionaries of Mexico" he writes, "were aware that they could be led into dangerous compromises, especially at the beginning, when their knowledge of the country and its religion was still scanty; that they might breed confusions and erroneous notions in the spirits of the natives."¹⁷ Drawing on training manuals and letters written by early missionary leaders, Ricard shows how the demands of mission life led to compromises in the ways Christian rites were interpreted and integrated into indigenous society.

The practical consequences of this initial uncertainty might have tempted overzealous missionaries "more or less consciously to sacrifice the integrity of the dogma to their desire to swell the number of their neophytes."¹⁸ Key in this milieu is the legacy of Sahagún, who spent most of his efforts in New Spain working against religious compromise, while crafting a history of the postconquest landscape for future missionaries and the Nahua themselves.¹⁹ Sahagún and others learned early on that Christianity had to be explained in terms that were familiar to Aztec culture and language. His willingness to experiment with heterodox forms of representation made Sahagún an exemplary figure of the immersion that was necessary to understand indigenous lifestyles and belief systems.²⁰ Yet Sahagún's example is also representative of the costs of that immersion.

Among the various obstacles faced by Franciscan missionaries, the figure of the Devil was perhaps the most prominent. Particularly important for early missionaries was tracing how representations of the Devil played an active role in shaping both indigenous attitudes toward Christianity and missionary perceptions of pre-Columbian religions. As Fernando Cervantes has argued, conceptions of idolatry and diabolism in the relations between missionaries and indigenous people were highly contested. The spectrum of equivocal indigenous practices that resembled Christian rites prompted great worry for the future of the Church. The prospects of a diabolical presence in the Americas—the root source of idolatry in the New World—demanded a resilient response

from evangelizers to identify, single out, and eradicate erroneous interpretations of God's traces in the world. As Cervantes explains:

The crumbling optimism of the second decade of Franciscan evangelization was a reflection of the growing conviction among the missionaries that Satanic intervention was at the heart of Indian cultures. It had become clear to the friars that the deities of the Indians were not merely false idols but, in the words of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, "lying and deceitful devils," whom he was careful to represent as such.²¹

It was imperative for missionaries like Sahagún to remove the presence of the Devil from indigenous appropriation of Christian rites. Many practices—from ritualistic ceremonies and baptisms, to sacrificial offerings—retained an alarming similarity to earlier idolatrous customs. Their recurrence took up significant energy from missionaries such as Sahagún, who attempted to evangelize native cultures much in the way a doctor would operate. The success of prescription, Sahagún maintained, depended on a broad set of lived-experiences encompassing both missionary and native, for the "physician cannot accurately prescribe remedies to his patient if he does not first know the humors and the causes from which the sickness proceeds . . . preachers and confessors are the physicians of the soul, and in order to cure certain spiritual sicknesses, they must know these remedies and these sicknesses."²² The physician's goals, in this sense, mirrored a process of moral rehabilitation.

Indigenous appropriation of diabolical imagery often acted as a means of preserving their cultural autonomy from the conquering Spaniards. Cervantes writes that one of the major paradoxes in the assumption that indigenous societies were merely passive recipients to religious indoctrination was the alien character of concepts such as "the good" or "divine": "In contrast with the typically Western conception of evil," he writes, "Mesoamerican notions of evil and the demonic were inextricably intertwined with the notions of good and the divine. Evil and the demonic were in fact intrinsic to the divinity itself."²³ The broad spectrum of cosmological beliefs found in the New World made any empirical or spiritual interpretation of indigenous uses of nature a mutually inclusive matter, rather than part of separate endeavors. Much of Cervantes's book focuses on the subtleties of Christian theology and their evolution through immersed experiences with indigenous cultures. Yet a key finding of his contribution is to locate the meaning of diabolism for missionaries within early modern debates over the links between the natural and supernatural, not merely in the presumed piety of their project.

Laura Ammon and Pete Sigal have wrestled with this alleged division between nature and the divine in Sahagún by paying attention to his context of production. Ammon points to the importance that classical works such as Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* and the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus had in missionary comparisons of indigenous culture. "In their use of a comparative method to understand indigenous religion," Ammon tell us, "[missionaries] engaged in two levels of comparison. The first level involved placing indigenous practices against their knowledge of the world of the Greeks and Romans. . . . The second level of comparison . . . was a much more straightforward Christian approach: the use of biblical texts to look for evidence of God's presence in the New World."²⁴ Similarly, Sigal has convincingly argued that greater attention to the cultural context of production behind texts such as the *Florentine Codex* reveals the great political imbalances at work in the narration (and translation) of indigenous belief systems.²⁵ Specifically, he refers to the *Florentine Codex* as an exemplary "post-conquest" text, "[containing] voices mediated by a wide variety of influences, which often act as filters to make the voices heard in a framework that makes sense to the colonizing authorities."²⁶

As Sigal goes on to argue, Sahagún's exposition of indigenous beliefs and practices is a pluralistic one, yet given what his role as evangelizer entailed, it is also paradoxical:

Sahagún's own filters came into play in organizing and translating the work as well as in preparing the questions. In the cases of the myths, gods, and traditional religious rituals, Sahagún made it clear in the prologues to the various books that his only goal was to destroy these practices. However, others have emphasized what the tone of the *Florentine Codex* makes clear: the Nahua intrigued Sahagún to such an extent that he began to identify closely with them, if not with all of their ceremonies.²⁷

It is in those ethnographic passages where a presumed toleration of indigenous beliefs occurs that some of Sahagún's most valuable observations can be located. Specifically, and as I show below, one of Sahagún's least-studied filters was his millenarian belief in the coming end of the world and the great danger that the Devil posed in accelerating this cataclysm. That conviction seems muted right at the moment when Sahagún's catalogue of natural beings, landscapes, and rituals depicts the larger cosmological encounter between Nahua and Christian spiritual worldviews.

Anthropology as Demonology: The Spiritual Geopolitics of American Nature

As noted above, the concept of diabolism was inextricably linked to the Franciscan evangelizing enterprise. Sahagún's treatment of diabolism is two-pronged: first, he focuses on the interaction of indigenous words and the natural environment to reveal particularly nuanced instances of idolatry; and second, his appreciation of that nuance reveals his own intellectual tolerance regarding the blurred lines between spiritual and naturalist ritual. Specifically, Sahagún sees in the indigenous connection with language an important anthropological marker that illustrated norms of religious custom, ritual spaces, and theological belief. However, it is in this linguistic model of studying New World nature that anthropology becomes for Sahagún an exercise in demonology, not as a spiritual apologetic, but as an empirical science of man employed in a global battle against the demonic.²⁸ Despite some scholarly impasse concerning the novelty of Sahagún's efforts, his anthropological demonology was more than just a tool of domination, acting instead as a means of cultural accommodation.²⁹

Several missionaries sought to accommodate the Americas into the canon of classical knowledge by using naturalist inquiry in the service of religious conversion. Their experience of the great diversity of peoples in the New World challenged the colonial demand to dispossess indigenous peoples from any claims to self-mastery. My call for acknowledging Sahagún's normative flexibility throughout these exchanges stems from a greater emphasis within emerging historiographical work on the trans-Atlantic character of knowledge production in sixteenth-century Spanish America. As Cañizares-Esguerra has argued, naturalist experiences were key to shaping the aims and future trajectories of imperial domination. Through systematic empirical observation, natural histories (including Sahagún's) formed part of "a larger scholarly mood concerned with the debilitating effects" of the New World.³⁰ Sahagún's inquiries showcased both the allegedly corruptible, but also vibrant, facets of indigenous religion.

Indeed, missionaries saw in natural history a vital medium through which indigenous cosmologies, properly understood, could be subsumed into Christian worldviews and rule. At stake in the Franciscan conception of New World nature was an eschatological interpretation of the Americas' place in world history. In their view, determining the origins and cosmological contradictions of the New World would have dramatic historical implications for the final judgment of all the world's peoples. Mendicant orders often described

indigenous peoples as the New World equivalent of the Tribes of Israel, that is, as a civilization lost on a cosmic exile.³¹ The Franciscans' encounter with the people and conditions of the New World signified the beginning of an apocalyptic countdown that added great urgency to the task of religious conversion and the necessary tools to achieve it.

Missionaries in New Spain, for instance, were expected to live with and emulate the Mexica's own conditions of poverty. Their exposure to indigenous customs was thought to be the crucial step to reviving a "Primitive Apostolic Church" that, unlike the one in Europe, was free of hubris and materialism. Culinary habits and taboos put Spanish naturalists in contact with indigenous herbariums and medicinal standards. Spanish commercial interests would eventually invest greatly in learning and reproducing indigenous medicines for an international market. As Cañizares-Esguerra points out, however, the same obsession with Amerindian peoples as the theological equivalent of the Israelites came with its own darker vision, one that transcended boundaries and generated distinct geopolitical cultures among missionaries:

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans were obsessed with demons, and they thought that the devil had made the New World his fiefdom. . . . Both northern Protestant and southern Catholic settlers felt threatened and surrounded by the devil, who allegedly attacked their polities by unleashing storms, earthquakes, and epidemics, and by losing heretics, tyrannical royal bureaucrats, foreign enemies, and Amerindians on them.³²

Franciscan millenarianism was therefore one aspect of the wider demonological discourses at play in early Colonial America. While some missionaries came to see indigenous peoples as the conceptual, if not actual, counterpart to a lost biblical people, there was a larger tendency to view them as a diabolical inversion put forth by Satan to sabotage ecclesiastical aims.

Sahagún himself believed that conversion was made far more difficult by the fact that the world of indigenous peoples had been infused by the diabolical for centuries. As he remarks in one of the prologues of the *Florentine Codex*, he was "certain that the Devil neither sleeps nor has forgotten the cult that these Indian natives offered him in the past, and that he is awaiting a suitable conjecture to return to his lordship."³³ Notoriously damning evidence of one such "cult" was the practice of sacrificial rituals around natural phenomena, such as the rain in the central highlands, which native peoples were surreptitiously drawn to worship: "deceived by the demons, enemies of humankind."³⁴

Moments of distrust and zealotry are common in Sahagún's writings. As Millie Gimmel highlights, many of these instances were also "notable . . . of how Sahagún was changed by both the land and the culture of the indigenous world in which he was living."³⁵ Sahagún's encounters with idolatry may point to his keen nose for traces of the demonic; for my purposes, however, they also show how he "had acquired the indigenous sensitivity to landscape and accepted the local explanation of meteorological events without losing his evangelical zeal for the extirpation of idolatry."³⁶ The lands and mountains themselves held vestiges of the Devil, for how else could one explain the indigenous veneration of the mountains as a sacred place, Sahagún reasoned, if not for their being "persuaded or admonished by the devil or his governors to visit those mountains."³⁷

Those same beliefs are at play in Sahagún's account of the Cult of St. Anne, which I engage below, but instead they offer a more generous, if not ambivalent, set of interpretations. In what follows, I provide an explanation for that ambivalence, positioning Book XI of the *Florentine Codex* as a naturalist mediation between Christian and indigenous religious values. More pertinently, I show how Sahagún's observations act as a model of *interlingual* relations where the *Codex's* bilingual representation is used as a form of political consolidation. While Sahagún's model was never completed, it remains methodologically instructive for studying the history of early modern imperial thought.

A Natural History of Soulcraft: Reading Book XI of the *Florentine Codex*

Book XI of the *Florentine Codex*, which is entitled "Earthly Things," is notable for its discussion of prominent flora and fauna, as well as herbal medicinal practices. The text, whose contents had been disclosed by native informants in response to Sahagún's questionnaires, is remarkable for providing a systematic understanding of indigenous peoples' uses of natural resources prior to Spanish contact. Indeed, as Henry Reeves points out, "Sahagún, while writing primarily to further the missionary effort, inadvertently but fortuitously helped establish the Aztecs as pioneering New World naturalists and the Spaniards as conveyors of that information."³⁸ In addition to ethnographic observations that borrow from native informants, who were conscripted to aid Sahagún's efforts, Book XI's narrative offers a second complex layer: documenting indigenous knowledge about nature that is both factual and mythical.

To illustrate the tensions between these interpretive layers, I look at two de-

scriptions within Book XI of the *Florentine Codex*: the “bird of the heart” (*yollotototl*) and the myth of *Toci*, a manifestation of the goddess Tzapotlatenan, also known as “our grandmother.” These illustrations are important as they present an ambivalence within Sahagún’s approach regarding their linguistic meaning and the religious customs they represent. According to Jill McKeever Furst, for example, the concept of “*yolia*” was used in indigenous cultures in much the same way that the concept of “soul” was used for European societies. More specifically, *yolia* “animated the body, and it also conferred a special and highly individual character consisting of personality, aptitudes, abilities, and desires. Native peoples also said the *yolia* survived after death and traveled to a postmortem existence.”³⁹ As Sahagún documents it, the embodiment of this concept by the “bird of the heart” (that is, *yollotototl*) vividly portrays an emergent missionary tolerance toward a syncretic ritual that espouses Christian and indigenous beliefs.

For Sahagún, *yollotototl* (a common Bananaquit; see figure 3) is a social curiosity. His description of the bird illustrates both its natural features and cultural relevance within the region of Teotlixco (a toponym, or place-name, meaning “to face the Gods”) in Southern Mexico:

It lives there in Teotlixco, toward the southern sea. . . . As for its being called *yollotototl*, the people there say thus: that when we die, our hearts turn into [these birds]. And when it speaks, when it sings, it makes its voice pleading; it indeed gladdens one’s heart, it consoles one. . . . It is edible.⁴⁰

Several characteristics stand out about the above description. For one, the idea of *yolia* (that is, the soul) being animated by a living natural analogue was both a boon and challenge for Franciscan missionaries. As Furst points out, “Belief in the *yolia* as a bird may have facilitated the adoption of European winged beings—angels and cherubs—into indigenous iconography. In [some Nahuatl-speaking communities] the soul animates the body and is punished after death, but a different entity, the spirit, is a guardian in the intangible form of a dove or pigeon that attempts to protect both soul and the body from misfortune and bad decisions.”⁴¹ To see God’s actions or agents manifested in the natural world would have been reassuring to a Franciscan missionary, because it confirmed the Augustinian conception of the divine in nature that animates much of the Franciscan millenarianism at work in New Spain.

Yet given what we know of the Spiritual Conquest, Sahagún’s description would have been troubling to his Spanish audience. He blends a naturalist



Figure 3. “The Bird of the Heart,” Bernardino de Sahagún, Book XI: “Earthly Things,” *Florentine Codex* (1577). Florence, Laurentian Medicean Library, Ms. Med. Palat. 220, f. 178r. Courtesy of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities. Any further reproduction by any means is forbidden.

description with a mythological narrative about *yollototl*'s place in Nahua beliefs, making no judgment regarding the story's veracity and (perhaps only implicitly) seems to willingly overlook a suggestion of cannibalism. If one's heart does, indeed, transform into an edible bird upon death, there is more than ample potential to find instances of heresy and hence grounds for ecclesiastic intervention.

The passage also reveals a further linguistic innovation. Scholars have often singled out a distinctive feature of Sahagún's style where claims made in one column of text (the Nahuatl-language portions, for instance) are later omitted

in the Spanish translations and commentary. While such omissions have been considered oversights and errors of the *Codex's* tortuous path toward publication, the omissions are in some cases systematic.⁴² In the case of the Nahuatl *yolia* and Sahagún's reading of *yollotototl*, for example, there is a straightforward interpretation that reconciles elements of the Christian soul with indigenous readings of nature's value. Not all of Sahagún's illustrations, however, are as easy to decipher. For instance, consider the case of the myth of *Toci* and its parallels with the Cult of St. Anne.

As part of Book XI's naturalist descriptions, Sahagún provides an account of different mountain ranges and sites where he has been told of the existence of idolatrous acts. In some cases, as noted below, he himself has been witness to the idolatry. As he writes of one mountain range in Tlaxcala (central Mexico) in particular, the reader encounters a certain ambivalence over the incommensurability of the Nahuatl- and Spanish-language terms. In this striking passage excerpted from the Spanish-language column, Sahagún's disapproving tone seems to acknowledge an act of native idolatry. But the equivocal character of the Nahuatl term "Toci"—as seen in the conceptual meaning Sahagún attributes to it, as well as the ritual practice around it—leaves Sahagún's reading rather open-ended:

The second place where previously there had been many sacrifices, to which people would come from far lands, is the range of Tlaxcala, where there was a temple called *Toci*, where a great multitude of people would congregate to celebrate this festivity *Toci*, which means "our grandmother;" and by another name is called Tzapotlatenan, which means "the goddess of mezcals and medicines." And later there they built a church to St. Anne, where now there is a monastery and religious of our father St. Francis, and the locals call it *Toci*, and from more than forty leagues people congregate for the festivity of *Toci*. Like this they call St. Anne, taking their cue from the preachers who call St. Anne the grandmother of all Christians, and like this they have called it and call the pulpit: *Toci*, which means our grandmother. And all the people who came like before to the festivity of *Toci*, come dressed in the colors of St. Anne, but since the name is equivocal and they respect the past, it stands to reason that they come for what is past and not for the modern.⁴³

In the original manuscript, Nahuatl portions of Sahagún's text are concerned with the naturalist descriptions of surrounding bodies of water and mountains. Descriptions in Spanish, however, from which the above passage is translated,

remain “culturally charged,” demonstrating Sahagún’s methodical silence over beliefs taken as ritualistic facts (for example, lands of “many sacrifices,” multiple pilgrimages “from far lands,” the building of churches) or even those that are potentially idolatrous practices (for example, worshipping the old gods in places where there are allegedly new ones, the suggested consumption of hallucinogens like *mezcal* to commemorate St. Anne). Especially salient in the passage’s closing lines is Sahagún’s invoking of two conflicting cosmological timelines. In the events he is describing, land, peoples, and their respective rituals oscillate from “what is past” to what he modestly qualifies as “the modern” (*lo moderno*).

The above tension in Sahagún’s approach to idolatry can be linked back to the cultural and practical meanings of the Nahuatl concept of “*altepetl*” (that is, town, or, city-state) and how it infuses Sahagún’s descriptions of the landscape.⁴⁴ The cultural meanings of *altepetl* made it problematic for Sahagún to come to terms with the emerging Cult of St. Anne, forcing him to recognize how toponyms allowed indigenous peoples to perform “old” rituals in sites where new ones were allegedly taking their place. It also affected his entire conception of the land, territory, and the space of ritual as categories that, at least when used in Nahuatl, had the potential of generating enduring social and political hierarchies (albeit idolatrous ones).

As Gimmel explains, “All indigenous communities were formed around or near sacred mountains and bodies of water,” where they “enacted specific rituals, often including sacrifice, for the gods of these geological formations in order to guarantee the arrival of rain.”⁴⁵ It was therefore no coincidence that a Christian cult to a significant biblical figure (the mother of the Virgin Mary) would be founded on the same hills and mountains where a rain goddess (that is, *Toci*) had been previously worshipped. The passage on the Cult of St. Anne, or myth of *Toci*, therefore confirms an important element of Sahagún’s anthropological work: its polyphonic, that is, *interlingual* and open-ended character. Despite a fervent missionary zeal to expose and extirpate allegedly diabolic influences, Sahagún’s attention to the shifting valence of Nahuatl language raises for him a political sensitivity that verges on toleration, if not syncretism.

Sahagún saw in New Spain many cosmic and cultural conflicts. Yet in his exposure to the land and people, the natural world (at least textually) becomes split into both a source of order and fear. His account of the *yollototl* seems to accept the winged nature of the human soul, while tolerating implicit animism and references to cannibalism; his description of the mountains of Tlaxcala and the Cult of St. Anne, though far more judgmental, leave open to inter-

pretation the potential dangers and pragmatic opportunities that interlingual translation could uncover. For his Spanish audience, Sahagún points out the ease with which certain idolatrous practices have continued under the guise of Christian rites. In the Nahuatl portions of his text, however, he allegedly overcomes—or perhaps disregards—the potential vindication of recounting the myth.

A sympathetic reading of Sahagún's encounter with New World nature might claim that he "hoped to show how the natural world and Nahua culture were connected but at the same time his goal was generally not to preserve most of this information, but rather to exterminate it, or at least control it."⁴⁶ That interpretation downplays the context of production informing Sahagún's logic of domination. Instead, as I have argued for above, Sahagún's anthropological ethos should be linked back to the assumptions and trends informing Franciscan missions in the sixteenth century. Both metaphoric and actual idolatry amounted to instances of diabolism, many of which perplexed Sahagún. Indeed, in his description of vast natural environments imbued with strange customs and forces, one gets the sense that Sahagún is witnessing the early instances of what Anthony Pagden has called "the fall of natural man": the irreversible move away from a cosmological relation between human beings and nature.⁴⁷ In some instances, nature represents the seductive and degenerative qualities that Spaniards feared would unravel their own cosmic mission. Yet in other important episodes, nature represents a source of order, such as in the geographic knowledge Aztecs offered Sahagún in his efforts to understand medicinal and social practices.

Sahagún's story therefore has multiple implications for the study of nature in the early Spanish Empire. His linguistic sensibilities and scientific creativity make Sahagún a formidable case for studying the ethos of the Spiritual Conquest in the New World, the political channels and interests espoused by his visions of nature, and the narrative dissonance at work in the marriage between scientific inquiry and imperial ideology. I therefore see Sahagún as an enduring example of the epistemological challenges behind writing the history of past peoples, places, and their intertextual representation by historians and political theorists more broadly.

Sahagún's Book XI sheds light on the historical origins of a shifting attitude toward nature, particularly regarding the interpretation of religious experiences in the New World. Two intersecting dispositions resonate throughout this work: first, the Franciscan Order's heightened sense of cultural assimilation that acts as the immediate backdrop of Sahagún's evangelizing mission.

The search for idolatry may have been the motivating force driving Sahagún's accounts of the landscape and contents of New Spain. It was, however, Sahagún's profound sense of curiosity for the sacred and the profane that fueled his ethnographic approach, revealing a productive, though divided, commitment to both science and religion. Second, Book XI conveys an important moment of naturalist innovation, using both Nahuatl- and Spanish-language sources to portray nature in contending lights. It is arguable whether imperial authorities ever intended scientific inquiry in the early conquests to be conducted for its own sake.⁴⁸ Sahagún's example, however, points to the complex interaction between indigenous and European systems of knowledge that early modern thinkers attempted to negotiate. It also embodies the interaction between politics and ideology in an apocalyptic time.

Sahagún's Model for an Interlingual Relations

The open-ended character of Sahagún's story, and of Book XI particularly, reaffirms the complexity of political and scientific thought in the early midst of Spain's New World Empire. This picture also points toward future avenues of research in the history of political thought and the anthropolitics of nature, past or present. Indeed, what this chapter documents is an alternative conception of ritual, faith, and scientific inquiry in the early modern period. As I argue above, the intersection of religion and nature in Sahagún's depiction of the New World can offer historians of empire a textual, yet also linguistically informed perspective that overcomes the reduction of faith to the realm of the nonscientific. By taking seriously Sahagún's deep cultural and linguistic awareness, particularly employed in his naturalist explorations, the politics of early modern Atlantic exchange can be further reconstructed and put on greater display.⁴⁹

I have made the case above that studying Bernardino de Sahagún as an exemplar of a larger set of ideals practiced by natural historians in the early modern period is historically and theoretically relevant. Sahagún also represents an instance of the larger interplay between religious experience, scientific inquiry, and colonial governance in the New World that historians of political thought continue to ignore. By revisiting Sahagún's attempts to study the naturalist values, as well as demonic influences, of native peoples, it is my contention that a broader historiographical dilemma concerning the study of New World intellectual production can be raised and challenged. The impasse concerns the exclusion of early modern Spanish thinkers as foundational fig-

ures of the Western canon. Having inherited a narrative tradition that can be traced back to the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula, Sahagún formed part of a generation of missionaries who set out initially on a Spiritual Conquest of the recently conquered New Spain. Yet these missionaries transformed this task, in their minds and by their hands, from a mission of conversion into a cosmic geopolitical battle to extirpate demonic forces from the Americas.

While both of these objectives were far larger than Sahagún himself, the influence of both natural history and diabolism upon his study of the Mexica peoples profoundly altered his epistemological assumptions and normative endeavors in the New World. I maintain that Sahagún's influence and notoriety is not a result of his collection, or destruction, of indigenous artifacts and norms. Rather, he produced an unrivaled catalogue of naturalist beliefs in the *Florentine Codex* and developed a systematic framework based on an anthropological demonology: that humanity, nature, the divine, and demonic could not be understood in isolation from each other; that the future of the New Church would be intimately tied to the assimilation of both indigenous ritual and Christian millenarianism; and that the study of language itself was the key through which both the Old and New Worlds could be kept from collapsing in disrepair.

Such a programmatic endeavor no doubt raised many critical questions for Sahagún, as it should for contemporary students of the history of political thought. To paraphrase Michel Foucault's famous claims on translation, Sahagún's mission and relevance can be captured under the weight of a single question: if humanity's nature can be found both in the environment and the heavens, is he one distinct being or two?⁵⁰ It stands to reason that a conscientious participant such as Sahagún could not escape unchanged from decades of study and observation in the Americas. Indeed, his legacy is embraced in Europe and Mexico alike, symbolizing his own complex colonizing experience. Although missionaries were tasked to uncover and decipher the practices that render the New World's peoples as idolatrous, this could only come after being exposed to the satanic itself, perhaps rendering it less powerful.

Despite the challenges and ultimate censure encountered by Sahagún in the development of his demonology, his insights were not without political value for future naturalist endeavors. Both the herbalist Francisco Hernández, who led a royal expedition to New Spain from 1570 to 1577, and the Jesuit father José de Acosta, whose writings influenced the works of Francis Bacon and John Locke, were shaped by Sahagún's legacy. In his exploration of the natural landscape of New Spain, however, Sahagún seems to have discovered a greater

level of cultural commensurability than previously acknowledged by Spanish missionaries or even those who followed him. Historians of political thought would benefit greatly from further study of these instances where the boundaries between secular, religious, and scientific institutions and practices were not as fervently demarcated from each other as they are today.

Indeed, this separation of scholarly realms is what has precisely contributed to the alternating senses of romanticism and dismay that afflict political theory's relationship to indigenous peoples and the early modern Catholic empires of Spain and Portugal. Yet to take seriously how the divine and demonic coexisted with the mundane and political at the everyday level might not only be a source of greater understanding of what came before the foundations of our own times. That engagement could also act as a space where our own assumptions over the boundaries between culture and nature could be put to a greater test. In closing, my challenge has been to consider carefully what Sahagún's experience tells us about early modern religious, naturalist, and anthropological encounters. It is of little use to suggest that an approach such as Sahagún's can be easily applied today when it comes to unpacking contemporary problems. Yet more than offering an opportunity to study the micropolitics of concept formation and knowledge production, Sahagún's model of interlingual relations puts on display how the "thickening of relations between polities" is also a result of the nuanced melding of words and not just violent confrontation. A pertinent reminder of how older political vocabularies always beg to take their place alongside the new, and how the seeming past competes with the modern. In the next chapter, I offer a historical portrait of that competition, turning to the most understated, yet no less significant, naturalist of the sixteenth century, Francisco Hernández de Toledo.

4

THE IMPERIAL RENAISSANCE OF FRANCISCO HERNÁNDEZ

Oliluhqui, which some call coaxihuítl, or snake plant, is a twining herb with thin, green cordate leaves, slender, green terete stems and long white flowers. The seed is round and very like coriander. . . . Formerly, when the priests wished to commune with their gods and to receive a message from them, they ate this plant to induce a delirium. A thousand visions and satanic hallucinations appeared to them.

Francisco Hernández, *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispaniae thesaurus*¹

A few years after returning from his sojourn in the Americas, the imperial physician-in-chief (*protomedico*) Francisco Hernández de Toledo composed a poem to his longtime friend, the philologist and theologian Benito Arias Montano. The *Epistle to Arias Montano* (herein *Epistle*), a lucid work of personal reflection, is instructive for historians of Imperial Spain since it conveys a cogent psychological portrait of the man who for many centuries was unknown in the Anglophonic world.² Through this brief poem, Hernández documents his intellectual and professional trajectory, frustrated and doubtful over the prospects of disseminating his findings in the Americas.

The story behind the *Epistle*—indeed, behind Hernández himself—reveals a complex tapestry of political intrigue that depicts the ideological challenges faced by Spanish natural historians in the second half of the sixteenth century. Hernández's story acts an illustrative episode of the great influence that the field of natural history had within imperial intellectual and political circles. Yet short of cementing the field's imperial credentials, the Hernández

Affair, as I come to call it, also highlights the beginning of natural history's transformation into an instrumental endeavor to buttress the empire's waning economy.

In this chapter, I locate Hernández's work on New World nature within the Spanish Renaissance's intellectual rise and ideological fall. His case forms the crux of my larger argument that natural history, as an attempt to guide imperial policy in both political and normative directions, ultimately fell short of the empire's overwhelming ideological and geopolitical demands. Despite early overtures of financial and political support, the stories that natural historians sought to deploy increasingly failed to compel imperial authorities.

The chapter focuses on reconstructing Hernández's linguistic training and scientific contributions. In the process, I situate my argument within a larger scholarly debate over the origins of Iberian science in a colonial context, honing in on one of the more obscure, yet prolific, characters of the naturalist movement. I argue that Hernández's trajectory represents a dynamic political narrative in the history of science, empire, and humanist scholarship. The doctor's story becomes all the more salient as one finds in his struggle between the practical needs of the empire and growing international competition a curious form of reflexivity. Through a portrait of Hernández's career, the philosophical motivations, personal conflicts, and bases of political autonomy negotiated by early modern scientists within the Spanish Empire can be further illustrated.

A renaissance of interest in Hernández's life and role as official natural historian of the empire has produced a substantial number of translations and interpretations.³ Indeed, Hernández's story is one that represents both the height of the empire's commitment to humanist inquiry and yet also an example of a political culture beginning to suffer from its own opulence. The multiple volumes that emerged from Hernández's pen never saw publication in his lifetime. For that matter, his works never appeared in their intended form.

As the historian Simon Varey has pointed out, Hernández's scope and trajectory is admirable. Hernández's work—by his own account, as well as according to his contemporary advocates—can be described as “a New World complement to Pliny.”⁴ Steeped in a humanist curriculum typical of the early Renaissance, Hernández blended his philological and anatomical preparation with a keen eye for context and pharmacological innovation. His exposure in New Spain to thousands of botanical exemplars never before documented, as well as the curious cultural practices through which indigenous peoples put these to use, challenged his training by exposing him to alternative systems of medical reference. Throughout his six-year mission, Hernández crafted a

new model of classification that challenged Eurocentric systems of knowledge. Scholars have noted that it was this negotiation between the New World context and the empire's instrumental objectives that makes Hernández such a fascinating man of his time. This same negotiation, however, allegedly dampened his relationship with the empire's scientific authorities.⁵ My goal in this chapter is therefore to use Hernández's story as a means of illustrating larger normative conflicts within early modern scientific thought.

Given his training and context, what did Hernández "see" in his inquiries? Why are his scarce writings, particularly the *Epistle*, so important for this portrait? How did Hernández's reports threaten and subsequently transform the role of science within the empire? I begin with current debates on the role of narratives in the history of science and technology in Latin America. Using a concept I call "narrative politics," one can see Hernández as a product of humanist philology and imperial science. Rather than being complementary sources of knowledge, these two currents pulled Hernández in opposing directions. Through a textual interpretation of key letters written by Hernández to King Philip II, as well as the dissection of his famous *Epistle to Arias Montano*, the competing interests, challenges, and influences behind the mission to New Spain can be reconstructed, disclosing Hernández's own understanding of his place in these political exchanges. The chapter uses these clues to evaluate Hernández's analytic style as a reflexive component to imperial science in the sixteenth century, illustrating natural history's conversion from a science to a kind of natural philosophy.

Grand Narratives and the Power of Example

In 1570, Hernández was appointed by King Philip II to lead the first scientific expedition aimed at collecting and cataloguing natural life in the New World. His instructions were simple: "We are informed," the king wrote, "that more plants, herbs, and medicinal seeds are to be found there than elsewhere."⁶ Indeed, from Hernández's mission, a massive wealth of information on the natural environment of New Spain emerged.⁷ Most of this work conveyed medicinal uses for New World fauna and flora, a seeming complement to the empire's quest for beneficial and profitable resources. Yet as historians María M. Portuondo and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra have argued, the technological and scientific exchanges characterizing this period were also fundamental to the emergence of an early Scientific Revolution.⁸

In a period of great technological innovation and contentious humanist fervor, Iberian scientists like Hernández were some of the first to establish

pragmatic modes of inquiry that challenged religious and cultural prejudice. Historians have actively debated how the early successes and failures of such expeditions laid the groundwork for new academic faculties, scholarly communities, and scientific practices across the Americas.⁹ These contributions have been neglected across the centuries by scholars outside the Iberian world. In their place, a “Grand Narrative” of scientific progress has overshadowed the negotiation between imperial interests, humanist science, and the inclusion of indigenous conscripts in Colonial America.

I intervene in this debate by following Portuondo’s call for an “antigrand narrative” of Western progress. She argues that this approach offers “an opportunity to consciously frame the history of science and technology in Latin America . . . and contribute an important corrective to the asymmetry of history of science and technology, where much too often, the focus has been on progress, discovery, innovation and invention.”¹⁰ For Portuondo and a new generation of historians of science, such correctives must instead be framed as microhistories, with a cohesive lens that is inclusive of disempowered indigenous peoples, but that also addresses the failures of scientific innovations and their colonial intentions.¹¹ Rather than attempting to paint broad strokes concerning the trajectory of colonial science in the Americas, a focus on the individual protagonists of early expeditions is therefore in order.

More specifically, the writing of microhistories entails acknowledging that Iberian travelers relied heavily, and often perilously, on indigenous experts, interpreters, and illustrators for their expeditions. Indeed, natural historians were no different than what other chroniclers of the New World encountered, particularly as colonization demanded more flexible forms of integration, assimilation, and mutual acculturation.¹² As Hernández’s trajectory suggests, the relative power imbalance and mutual distrust held by Spanish and indigenous members of the New Spain expedition often generated more failures than successes in the accumulation of knowledge. Failure, however, is also instructive, as notions of progress typically eliminate allegedly erroneous, distorting, and overzealous ideas. Indeed, scientific practices are defined by knowing what not to do in the field or the lab, just as much as what works theoretically. The landscape of New Spain, however, posed for Hernández a bitter reversal of this scientific order.

I address the above components by framing Hernández’s trajectory as part of what I call an episode of “narrative politics.” Narrative politics portrays the institutional and cultural conflicts that emerged from opposing interests in Renaissance Spain. More specifically, I use Hernández’s case to frame the struggles of Spanish naturalists in the face of changing priorities within the

Spanish Empire in the Americas. In an effort to establish boundaries and objectives for imperial science, natural historians participated in reconfiguring several assumptions about nature, the New World, and the potential of scientific discoveries. In their negotiation of political, ideological, and experimental challenges, natural historians such as Hernández attempted to not only make an argument for the value of science, but also to use naturalist inquiry as a mode of reconciliation between the Old and New World. As the only naturalist I consider who was not part of a monastic order, Hernández was the most successful in terms of achieving institutional support, if only at a rhetorical level. His scholarly obscurity, however, is also a sign of his great failure to achieve a justification for scientific inquiry on its own terms.

After documenting the narrative context of Hernández's university training and his mission, I offer an interpretive analysis of his reactions to early support and the subsequent cancellation of his expedition. Furthermore, as an illustration of an "antigrand narrative" to Western notions of progress, Hernández's story highlights how even monumental samples of specimens from New Spain were not enough to fully confirm natural history as the scientific arm of imperial conquest. By itself, naturalist observation was not a compelling enough narrative. Indeed, Hernández's "failure" illustrates the development and decline of Spanish natural history in early modern Spain more generally. Hernández's mission can be described as one of the closing chapters in natural historians' early attempts to engage in the cultivation of greater nature-society interdependence between Europe and the Americas. From that moment forward, the relation between naturalists and empire would only grow far more contentious.

Narrative Politics: Language, Empire, and Science in the Sixteenth Century

Sixteenth-century Spain was rife with layers of conflict. Ever since the year of wonders that was 1492, the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula witnessed a series of conflicting cultural and political narratives. As humanist principles trickled in from neighboring Italy and reports of new lands and peoples flooded royal offices, Spain was on the verge of more than one Renaissance. The heroic age of colonial exploits also paralleled a golden age of humanist science.¹³ At stake in the cultural changes ensuing from Spain's two fronts were complementary visions of what national grandeur consisted of and how Spaniards at home and abroad envisioned their place in these changes.¹⁴ By the time Francisco Hernández was born in Toledo in the year 1514, Spain's most prestigious in-

stitutes of higher learning had been radically transformed by the work of the noted humanist Antonio de Nebrija. The transformation did not arrive without controversy.

Famous for the celebrated *Grammatica Antonii Nebrissensis* (“*Grammar of the Castilian Language*”), which he had dedicated to Queen Isabella in the wake of Columbus’s departure to the Indies in August 1492, Nebrija left an indelible mark on classical and Renaissance thought in Spain. Among his contributions, the study of grammar and language stands out, not least because of Nebrija’s injunction to the Queen and his readers that language was “the companion of empire.”¹⁵ Nebrija’s work has been studied by Renaissance scholars as part of a broader political project aimed at unifying the vastly different cultures of Spain.¹⁶ Indeed, his prophetic calls for a national tongue and fixed rules of grammar have also been framed as a precursor to the pragmatic policies used by Spain to study and subdue the peoples of the Americas.¹⁷ Yet Nebrija’s most lasting legacy may be his transformation of the educational curriculum at one of Spain’s premier institutions, the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares.

Officially founded in 1499, Alcalá was a hub of humanist learning for sixteenth-century scholars. A 13-year-old Hernández arrived there in 1528, graduating from the Faculty of Medicine in 1536.¹⁸ The climate around Hernández’s education paralleled Alcalá’s transformation from a small university town into one of the most important cities in all of Spain. Hernández was an emblematic product of the university’s emphasis on the study of grammar and language as keys to all sources of learning.¹⁹ Biblical philology, Greek and Latin natural history, and medical anatomy each had a vital role in every student’s education, as did the collective ethos of scientific humanism modeled after Nebrija’s own efforts. No less important in Alcalá’s development was its role as a repository of philosophical and practical knowledge from across Europe, typified by its reception of Erasmian thought.²⁰ The combination of classical revisionism, as well as a Christian Humanist drive for social transformation, made Alcalá a formidable venue to train the nascent empire’s leading theorists, jurists, and practitioners. Yet perhaps the most interesting puzzle behind Alcalá’s influence on generations of Renaissance scholars was its negotiation between scientific inquiry and imperial politics.

The concept of narrative politics proves useful here to understand the context in which Hernández matured intellectually and professionally. Spain’s complex tapestry of religious, nationalist, and imperial interests posed several challenges for humanist scholarship. While distinct narratives of millenarian, xenophobic, and expansionary character defined the Spanish colonial project, within Spain their relationship was less than complementary. What seemed like

interlocking agendas on the surface were in fact ideologies in constant competition. At Alcalá, theological and philological training were deemed equally necessary fields of study, whether they were used by monastic orders destined for the colonies, or learned physicians who would remain on the continent. Both settings were thought to pose distinct cultural dangers. Fantastic reports of demonic creatures inhabiting the West Indies were a staple of missionary training. Within Spain, the matter was further complicated by two enduring legacies: first, anti-Semitic and anti-Arabic sentiment in the country remained rampant; and second, a specter of heresy followed the appropriation of Renaissance practices, due particularly to their links with dissatisfied humanists and reformers in the rest of Europe. Spanish humanists, so the story goes, had to possess a precise scholarly language, lest they be accused by the Inquisition of being *Marranos* (converted Jews and Muslims), or worse, associated with Protestant reformers.²¹

In spite of these challenges, the curriculum at Alcalá sought to take both ancient and contemporary sources of knowledge on their own terms. The re-evaluation of classical texts was influenced as much by reports coming from the Americas, just as the sheer novelty of the New World was made manageable through the filters of Greek and Latin wisdom. Two layers of narrative politics begin to emerge here: Spanish intellectuals considered themselves the inheritors of ancient sources of political knowledge, capable of the greatest scholarly and imperial conquests; much of this conquering spirit was made real, however, by the military, material, and scientific advances that accompanied colonization of the Americas.²²

Ancient natural histories, as much as early reports from the New World, played an influential role in Hernández's formation. His interest in the natural world's uses and underlying parallels to the human realm were cultivated by close readings of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, a massive encyclopedia of ancient naturalist observations that Hernández spent eleven years translating from Latin into Spanish.²³ Similarly, Dioscorides's *De Materia Medica* (an ancient encyclopedic compendium of herbal medicine) shaped Hernández's empirical sensibilities as a physician.²⁴

Within Alcalá, both Pliny and Dioscorides were held up as examples to emulate and surpass. The court historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and the merchant herbalist Nicolas Monardes were two of the first prominent figures to attempt such an impersonation. Both Oviedo and Monardes were products of key events informing the Spanish Renaissance: the former was influenced by the military and cultural reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula; the latter, a contemporary of Hernández, was also a product of Alcalá, who pursued phar-

macology as an economic venture for a growing European market. The two men shaped naturalist observation in the Americas through accounts based on firsthand experience and attention to the possible medical, strategic, and economic uses of natural resources.²⁵

With this background in mind it is difficult to argue against the assertion that Renaissance thought in Spain—embodied in the development of Alcalá and similar academies—was driven by the increasing reports and accounts coming from the Americas. Ever since Nebrija’s quasi-prophetic injunction, however, what is less certain is whether Spanish humanists unquestioningly accepted being subservient to imperial ends. Given the depth of classical knowledge and the spirit of adventure cultivated at this institution, no self-proclaimed humanist scholar would have been neutral on the politics of their time. There is therefore a complex political struggle at work in the reception of Renaissance thought in Spain that can be traced to the encounter with the Americas, the culture of science informing agents of colonization, and perceived threats of growing geopolitical competition across Europe.²⁶

Hernández, perhaps like countless others, found himself caught between rival forces and interests. Molded in the image of Nebrija’s precocious and ambitious educational reforms, Hernández sought to bring about a New World equivalent to the classic works of Pliny and Dioscorides. In a letter to the king, dated December 1571, Hernández conveyed that classical erudition by exhorting Philip to envision with him the mission’s potential: “Let us suppose that you are Alexander, and name me Aristotle because of what you have commanded me to do in these parts.”²⁷ He despised the frivolous character of the expeditions led by Oviedo, and the superficial accounts of flora and fauna made by Monardes, hoping to one day lead his own expeditions and transform naturalist scholarship. Yet at the same time, Hernández was sent to New Spain as envoy of King Philip II for the express purpose, per his instructions, of sending back to Spain, “all the medicines or herbs and such like that you may see in those parts, provided that they are noteworthy in your judgment, and do not already grow in these realms.”²⁸ Rivalled only perhaps by the likes of Bartolomé de Las Casas or Bernardino de Sahagún, Hernández saw his mission as part of a greater civilizational project that he could help Spain embrace.²⁹

What Hernández lacked in millenarian fervor, however, he made up for in humanist optimism. As I will show below, Hernández’s vision of what the natural world of the Americas held within was perceived to be at odds with the strategic visions of the empire. Despite his great intellect and ambition, the conflict Hernández encountered between his two masters—science and empire—has left his legacy unknown in the English-speaking world. At stake

in recovering the narrative politics behind his mission is disclosing the spirit of inquiry that led Hernández to take up the banner of natural history and the ideological context that reined in this drive.

Searching for Nature's Secrets: Contexts and Contents of the Hernández Expedition

The botanical expedition to New Spain, led by Hernández from 1570 to 1577, was by his account a failure. Hernández's later writings, far more than his earlier accounts, reveal a man who by the end of his journey felt frail, frustrated, and politically stymied. In his *Epistle*, Hernández laments how the great aspirations he held prior to his departure had been foiled by a perfect storm of worldly obstacles. Scant resources, treacherous native interpreters, and the intrigues of court officials all have their place in his declaration. Yet the story of the Hernández Expedition had several other layers working in his favor. For one, while the original volumes containing thousands of exemplars from Hernández's natural history of New Spain are now lost—victim to a fire in the Imperial Library at El Escorial in 1671—they were visited and consulted for almost 100 years by natural historians in Spain and across Europe.³⁰

Additionally, despite Hernández's skepticism that his works would ever see the light of the day, manuscript copies made by Nardo Antonio Recchi (appointed by Philip II to this task upon Hernández's return) remain preserved to this day and were used in 1615 by the Dominican Fray Francisco Ximenez to publish in Mexico an abridged collection called *Quatro libros de la Naturaleza* ("Four Books on Nature").³¹ Over the centuries, this and several other editions have established Hernández as a foremost chronicler of medical knowledge in the New World and architect of distributing new plants—from flowers to crops—into the Old World.³²

Where Hernández's medical influence begins, however, his virtues as a natural historian and humanist seem to come to an end. Why is this? Why do scholars today know so much of Hernández the physician and so little of Hernández the Renaissance philosopher and "New World Pliny"? The question itself begs exploring hundreds of volumes and works far too numerous for this book. One route to begin unraveling this question can be found within Hernández's *Epistle to Arias Montano*, one of the last documents written upon his return from the Americas. The *Epistle* is a work of just over 100 lines, where in Latin prose Hernández confesses to his lifetime friend, Benito Arias Mon-

tano, the impotence he felt in the face of the monumental task given to him, the many pragmatic challenges he encountered on the ground, and the subsequent intrigues that pulled him from the king's allegedly good graces.³³

In the *Epistle*, Hernández presents the story of his decline in the guise of a tribute to Arias Montano's own travels. As an envoy of Philip II for the supervision of a new Polyglot Bible, Arias Montano had translated, compiled, and participated in the Bible's printing in Antwerp, then under Spanish occupation. Both men returned from abroad in apparent disrepute in the eyes of the Crown. Arias Montano had been subjected to a great controversy over the Protestant and Hebrew texts used for his translation, coming under the scrutiny of the Inquisition, but he was freed of all charges in 1580.³⁴ Hernández escaped any formal accusation or charge of wrongdoing while on his expedition, but historians have long suspected that part of Hernández's own misgivings over his place in the Imperial Court resulted from suspicions over his family's past as Jewish converts (*conversos*). Additionally, the increasing persecution of humanist scholars he was friends or associated with, like Arias Montano, seem to have made Hernández far more sensitive to rejection. Despite the relative autonomy Hernández retained upon his return to Spain—he was appointed as physician to the king's son, Philip III, withdrawing from court life shortly thereafter—the Renaissance spirit that had shaped his ambitions had been clearly cut short.

How exactly then did Hernández assess his mission in New Spain? Hernández had been appointed by Philip II with the title of *protomedico* or physician-in-chief. As a kind of public health official, Hernández was charged with, as he tells it in his second letter to the king, “the expedient description [*con toda brevedad*] of this land,” bringing to his office, “the restraint and moderation such a new land demands.”³⁵ The marvels he witnessed, however, drew far more excitement than what “restraint and moderation” would suggest. Indeed, the ideological import of his role is described by Hernández in his third letter to King Philip II, where in assessing the progress of his natural history of New Spain, he extols the “great virtues, and . . . incredible and immense usefulness” of the specimens and landscapes he is tirelessly documenting by way of surveys (see figure 4). Here, he proclaims the king to be as great as Alexander, and, for himself, he asks, “Name me Aristotle because of what you have commanded me to do in these parts.”³⁶ The enchantment of the natural historian as handmaiden to the empire, however, did not last long.

Turning to the *Epistle*, Hernández frames the development of his political and personal troubles in a far more eloquent way:



Figure 4. Anonymous drawing of Francisco Hernández as “El Preguntador” (n.d.). Courtesy of NIVOLA libros y ediciones, S.L., España.

[You] trod the frozen lands as you traveled toward the Arctic; while I, searching for the secrets of nature in distant regions, sailed—not slowly—to the West Indies, pledged to obey the clement mandate of Philip, ruler of the West, who lays claim to the lacerated earth, who institutes holy laws and renovates decaying ones, who destroys the unjust and the hostile in the name of Christ.

Thus after numerous adventures, after holding on to my cargo, which I treated with care as I traveled by land and by sea, I have been driven by so many misfortunes. . . .

There are those who snap at my heels and spread the poison of envy, who try to damn my innocuous labors, which they will not see, or—if

they read them—even understand: they do not deserve to know what the earth conceals, yet the mass of good people have to hear the venomous outpourings from their wretched mouths. . . .

I pass over the intense heat, and the extreme cold, barely tolerable in any way by the frail or sick, not to mention the forested hills and impassable mountains, rivers, swamps, vast lakes, and expansive lagoons.

I will not talk about the perverse Indian guides, nor will I speak of all their fraudulence, or terrible lies, which caught me off guard more than once; how they played tricks on me, which I took care to avoid with all the tact at my disposal; and how often did I get the properties and even the names of plants wrong because I depended on false information from an interpreter. . . .³⁷

The unpublished *Epistle*, meant solely for the eyes of Arias Montano it seems, contains explicit references to Hernández's physical and psychological travails across New Spain, as well as a deep sense of despair over his legacy. These sentiments are buttressed by veiled allusions to the uncertain fate of his "cargó" (his manuscripts, presumably), his commitment to "innocuous" (that is, herbalist) observations and projects (see figure 5), the deep mistrust he felt he was the victim of and which he equally felt toward his interpreters, and, rather cryptically, the ambitious conviction that he had discovered something world-changing—"what the earth conceals"—in his time abroad.

As Varey points out, "No one knows who [Hernández's] detractors were, or if they existed outside Hernández's anxieties. The dual fears of being misunderstood and being attacked . . . became something of a leitmotif in Hernández's letters."³⁸ Given what we know of Hernández's humanist upbringing, the political and ideological constraints of the Imperial Court and colonial life were surely a departure from the learned discourses that characterized the climate at Alcalá. Despite Philip II's professed interests in science, public health, and even the occult, the monarch's imperial obligations certainly demanded far more economic and logistic support than Hernández's missions to America.³⁹ Moreover, colonial life was notorious for its decentralized relation to dictates from the Imperial Court. Punishment for refusing a set of orders from the king—given the distance—could often take years of litigious exchanges. Colonial bureaucracies, as John Phelan has shown, were aptly described through the formula, "I obey but do not execute" ("*Obedezco pero no cumpro*").⁴⁰ If the political playing field within Spain was already stacked against Hernández, he would fare no better in the New World. Difficulties in both urban and rural settings, he tells us, equally delayed his progress and dampened his spirits:



OLILIVHQVI, quam *Coaxihuitl*, seu herbam *Serpentis* alij vocant, volubilis herba est, folia viridia ferens, tenuia, cordis figura. caules teretes, virides, tenuesq; . flores albos, & longiusculos . semen rotundum simile *Coriandro*, vnde nomen. radices fibris similes . calida quarto ordine planta est . luem Gallicam curat . dolores è frigore ortos sedat . flatum, ac præter naturam tumores discutit . pulvis resina mixtus pellit frigus . luxatis aut fractis ossibus, & lumbis fœminarum laxis, aucto robore mirum auxiliatur in modum. S e minis etiam, est vñs in medicina, quod tritum, ac deuoratum, illicumq; capiti, & fronti, cum lacte & *Chilli*, fertur morbis oculorum mederi . deuoratum verò, venerem excitat . Acri est sapore, & temperie, veluti & planta eius, impensè calida . Indorum sacrifici cum videri volebant versari cum Superis, ac respõsa accipere ab eis, ea vescebatur planta, vt desiperent, milleq; phantasmata, & dæmonũ obuersarium effigies circumspèctarent . qua in re Solano maniaco *Dioscoridis* similis fortasse alicui videri possit .

Figure 5. *Rivea corymbosa*, Francisco Hernández, *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispaniae thesaurus, seu plantarum, animalium, mineralium historia* (1648). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

I cannot begin to count the mistakes of the artists, who were to illustrate my work, and yet were the greatest part of my care, so that nothing, from the point of view of a fat thumb, would be different from what was being copied, but rather all would be as it was in reality.

And the delays of the officials, who, time after time, when I need to hurry, Interfered with my enterprises and frustrated my efforts!

What do I say? Why did it fall on me to test the medicinal plants on myself, And at the same time put my life at great risk? . . .

Oh, why talk of hunger and thirst? or of the thousands of nasty insects everywhere that lacerated my tender skin with their bloodsucking stings?

The sullen guides and the inept servants?

The ingenuity of the Indians in the wild, who could not be persuaded to reveal a single secret of nature, and who were so insincere?⁴¹

Having arrived in New Spain in 1571, Hernández found himself in a complex social environment. His letters detail both the byzantine bureaucracies set up by Spanish colonizers and the latent resentment that remained among indigenous peoples. Even the artists, geographers, and doctors commissioned by Hernández for his three-year field journey—both of native and Spanish origin—found themselves subject to the man’s difficulties. Given only a fraction of the resources he was promised, Hernández rarely had more to pay them with than the room and board offered by missions and hospitals the travelers would take refuge in. Despite great challenges, Hernández’s desperation does not betray any irreverence toward the Imperial Court. Far from it, he goes to great lengths to express his devotion above and beyond the court advisors and colonial administrators he fears are detaining him. As he begs to Philip II in his seventh (and by far longest) letter from March 1573, detailing the many needs of the expedition:

[Over] there [in Spain] no one understands the size and difficulty of this undertaking, going through a world as large as this with a fine-tooth comb. . . . For all this I do not ask for even a penny, unless you deem otherwise, for I have worked myself like an Indian day and night on nothing but this work. I would like to be given due credence for what I say is needed . . . in the proper remuneration of the Indians, for nothing in the world could persuade me not to speak the truth and speak with conviction, in order that this work not be unworthy of the foremost prince of the world. . . . If this is granted to me, I prefer, at the risk of losing Your Majesty’s grace, to finish it at the latest within two years from the time these resources might reach me . . . If Your Majesty is pleased that it is thus and takes effect, agree to order the same to the presidents of the other royal *audiencias* [appellate courts] so that I may be accommodated everywhere I may travel . . . without anyone’s imposing limitations on me or putting impediments in my way.⁴²

Hernández’s stay in New Spain was rife with disappointments, as well as threats to his health and life. Particularly deleterious was the shortage of indigenous herbalists to help Hernández assess the qualities of collected samples, often leaving him as the sole test subject of unpredictable substances. Notwithstanding the dangers, Hernández’s words portray a man possessed by the potential wisdom and value of his many sacrifices. Both his physical and monetary losses paled in comparison to the great story of the New World he was intent on producing. He poured his soul into pleasing the king back in Spain, al-

though whether his devotion was demanded out of interest, fear, or suspicion of heresy remains unknown.

In one of his final letters to Philip II (#11 from February 1576), Hernández tells of his desire to postpone his return to Spain, “so that I might experience all that which I have written about [the many volumes on herbal medicine], and have observed in the hospitals, which I have visited freely, with no personal interest at stake, other than what anybody walking around the city would experience, thus I could inquire and perfect everything, and clear off all that remained for me to do.”⁴³ Indeed, Hernández’s convictions amounted to thousands of pages of text, illustrations, charts, and ethnographic observations of New Spain’s natural environments, an unprecedented collection of natural and cultural knowledge. What remained at the end of Hernández journey, however, would prove far more consuming than all he had surmounted.

Through Imperial Eyes: Rescuing the Hernández Mission

The tortuous journey of the Hernández manuscripts, not to say of the man himself, shows that something about the kind of work produced by natural historians had been deemed irrelevant or threatening to the empire.⁴⁴ Moreover, Hernández’s own frustrations show that the man had not simply been forgotten during his time in New Spain. Rather, several interests came to play in cutting short the length of his mission, as well as making that mission far more difficult to conduct. Ironically, the increasing challenges Hernández faced seemed to have only strengthened his conviction that the value of the New World’s natural history was not simply monetary, but scientifically world-changing. What then were some of the effects of Hernández’s mission in the Americas for the study of natural history? How did his work stack up against previous efforts?

For starters, the Hernández expedition was neither the first nor the last scientific journey of the New World’s natural environment. It did represent, however, the first official mission sanctioned by the empire for, if only in part, scholarly ends. Earlier works of natural history, such as those compiled by Oviedo, Las Casas, or Sahagún, had different goals in mind. Oviedo had seen in the natural world a locus of exotic forces urgently in need of Spanish interpretation; Las Casas saw a paradisiacal space in need of ecclesiastic protection from rapacious Spaniards. Likewise, previous scientific endeavors—specifically those by Sahagún and Monardes—had anthropological or commercial aims behind them. Despite some proclivities and cultural synergy with his native informants and subjects, Sahagún’s goal had always been the eradication

of pagan rituals; Monardes, himself a stakeholder in commercial enterprises seeking New World botanical remedies, had never even set foot in the Americas.⁴⁵ If only for its ambition, the Hernández mission set the stage for a more contentious relationship between science and politics.

Hernández had the particular distinction of being the first politically sanctioned man of science and letters sent to explore the natural world in the Americas. His predecessors had been members of political and religious factions. Those who immediately followed him continued to reproduce a pattern of cultural hegemony or religious subversion. I should be careful to point out here that Hernández did not see himself as any kind of liberator or cultural moderate in terms of his stated assumptions and goals. He had no romantic notions of indigenous medicinal practices, or overzealous desire to destroy the sources of knowledge that preceded the arrival of Spanish colonizers. He was first and foremost a physician, a title that in his time entailed profound knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin writings, as well as the empirical innovations of Renaissance Europe. These tools allowed Hernández to see the great wealth of knowledge and experiences that the New World could proffer. He not only rejected the prevailing attitude of dismissing the centuries of botanical knowledge available to indigenous doctors and herbalists; he ultimately attempted to integrate that knowledge into a reconfigured natural classification.⁴⁶

Hernández truly was a Renaissance man, and his mission, so he thought, had the great potential of making the Renaissance a global project.⁴⁷ Yet given the narrative context and politics that gave birth to his mission, Hernández's philosophical and scientific sensibilities were subject to ulterior ideological forces within the imperial establishment. In his third letter to Philip II, he confesses that "all great and new things always provoke opposition and jealousy, and this work has not escaped either, and there is thus further work, which has robbed me of no little time in the service of your Majesty, which is my continuing concern."⁴⁸ His search for nature's secrets did not square neatly with the changing administrative challenges of the New World and the geopolitical circumstances the empire faced in Europe. Why then bother with this obscure figure? The political fate of Hernández's life and works is part of a critical piece in the larger puzzle of Spain's attempt to conquer the natural world of the Americas. For one, the relative paucity of work—both historical and theoretical—on his contributions is indicative of the larger set of grand narratives that historians like Portuondo and Cañizares-Esguerra have extolled scholars to overcome. As seen throughout his *Epistle*, Hernández was a man of many talents. His wish was that, upon his return, Spaniards would celebrate his great scientific findings, not encounter a broken spirit reined in by politics:

Indeed, I gave twenty living plants, many seeds, and innumerable medicines, to the viceroy to send to Philip Augustus so that they could be carried with the utmost care back to Spain where they will adorn the gardens and hillsides; and guided throughout New Spain by the brightest star in the sky, cities, and settlements, mountains, and rivers. It is a very desirable thing for our people, that there may be in the known world lands filled with such riches, called by so many names. . . .

Therefore, if these writings of mine are to earn the approbation of another man and cause others to consult them, who can be trusted to give the work all the care and scrutiny it requires?⁴⁹

Thus an antigrand narrative of scientific and technological development in the Americas must by all accounts take a somber pause at the Hernández Affair. The cohesive character of his project, blending European practices with indigenous classifications, points to a greater network of scientific and intellectual exchange. I see two lessons in these frustrated exchanges: first, the Hernández Affair conveys the dependent, not just independent, character of scientific practices and high politics. Hernández's interlocutors, so he tells us, often balked at his pleas and suggestions; yet others, particularly his cadre of illustrators, contributed to creating one of the greatest compilations of naturalist knowledge in the New and Old Worlds. Second, that Hernández actively documented, not just lamented, his great difficulties shows that scientific progress in the early Renaissance was not merely a matter of great discoveries and successes—many failures also informed the assumptions, reflections, and trajectories of European scientists. Hernández's ambitious goals were themselves subject to imperial approval, calling into question the extent to which economic interests shaped the empire's motivations for the expedition.

This portrait of Hernández's life, training, and the trajectory of his mission to New Spain shows that natural history in the sixteenth century was a highly coveted discipline. The type of preparation that naturalists like Hernández were exposed to at the dawn of the New World's colonization helped shape a mind that was as empirically thorough as it was philosophically resilient. The conflicting demands of cataloguing a land with infinite potential economic and scientific resources, however, placed Hernández under great ideological duress. We can speculate that the narrative politics Hernández encountered at the height of his professional career may have generated doubt behind his faith in Renaissance humanism and science. Yet what the available evidence shows is that this suspicion did not materialize into dejection. Hernández may have doubted the future of his work, or whether it would even be known outside

of the archives it was destined to be held in for over 100 years. What he had no hesitation about was how he himself had been shaped and perhaps even scarred by the experience. Just as the “scarred earth” he had documented was owned by Philip II, no political or ideological obstacle could take away from Hernández the knowledge that his work may have even surpassed the contributions of the ancients. Just as tragic, however, were the prospects of being surpassed himself, particularly by others he felt lacked the necessary vision and passion.

Discovering an American Natural Philosophy

Hernández’s trajectory is a story of multiple political implications for the Spanish Empire, as well as the future work employed by natural historians. His philosophical sensibilities and scientific resilience make Hernández a formidable case for studying the effects of the Renaissance’s encounter with the New World, the political channels and interests espoused by his visions of nature, and the narrative politics at work in the marriage between scientific inquiry and imperial ideology. I therefore see Hernández as an enduring example of the political, normative, and epistemological challenges behind the exploration of nature-society interaction.

More specifically, the Hernández episode sheds further light on the historical origins of a modernist attitude toward nature, particularly regarding the influence of lived-experiences in the New World. Within the history of political and environmental thought, several narrative layers resonate vividly through this episode: first, both humanism and colonization act as the immediate backdrop against which Hernández’s mission is sanctioned. His search for nature’s secrets may have been made possible through a certain subduing of the earth to human interests, but it generated a profound sense of responsibility for said secrets. Second, the Hernández Affair conveys a shift in imperial policy, from scientific and naturalist innovation, toward the strictly monetary and instrumental value of nature. It is arguable whether the empire ever intended scientific inquiry to be conducted for its own sake, but affirming such a one-sided definition would be to fall into the grand narrative of science as an enterprise independent from politics and ideology. The Hernández Affair offers quite the contrary picture. Finally, and perhaps most contentiously, Hernández’s mission can be described as one of the closing chapters in natural history’s attempts to engage in the cultivation of greater nature-society interdependence.

In the years that followed Hernández’s return to Spain, the study of natural

history in the Americas would take on new forms and advocates. The Jesuits José de Acosta and Bernabé Cobo, for example, would pursue a natural history of the New World in an evangelizing endeavor to cultivate Christianity as a natural philosophy. Acosta, in particular, drew heavily from Hernández's works, recommending these writings "to any of my readers who may wish to know in more detail, and more perfectly, about the plants of the Indies, especially for medicinal purposes."⁵⁰ Acosta's admiration betrays here that shift toward new mediums of expression. Hernández's work may have been able to capture the still unbroken links between the human and nonhuman worlds that made the Americas such a fascinating realm. Yet Hernández's goals, far from overcoming still-dominant indigenous worldviews, only made the task of a distinct natural philosophy more difficult. The goal for Acosta and other missionary scientists, as Andrés Prieto points out, was that "[being] in America was not a necessary condition to theorize about its nature . . . the information about specific American phenomena was only a point of departure for intellectual operations that could be carried out in any place at any time."⁵¹ The next generation of natural historians saw that mode of inquiry as far more useful for the salvation of humanity's souls than the medicinal properties that could be applied to both bodies and intellects.

It was not until the Bourbon Reforms of the eighteenth century that Hernández's work and analytic style would be rediscovered by theorists and scientists on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵² Creole scientists and philosophers alike, many inspired by Hernández's story, had taken up the mantra of a naturalist science that sought to "perfect everything, and clear off all that remained . . . to do." That temporal and spatial scope alone—palpable signs of the man's vibrancy and intellect—is worth exploring and sharing with audiences the world over. Therefore, in the next and final chapter, I look at one of the last natural historians of the sixteenth century, José de Acosta, and how his natural history served to establish a kind of liberation theology, leading the way forward into a new revolution in science and judgment.

5

JOSÉ DE ACOSTA AND THE ENDS OF EMPIRE

And what shall we say of the vast Magdalena River, which enters the sea between Santa Marta and Cartagena and is rightly called the Great River? When I sailed upon it I was amazed to see that its currents could be observed clearly as far as ten miles out to sea, and even the waves and immensity of the ocean could not obliterate them. But, speaking of rivers, that great river that some call the river of the Amazons, others the Marañón, others the River of Orellana, which our Spanish compatriots first discovered and navigated, silences them all; indeed, I do not know whether to call it a river or a sea.

José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*¹

At a seemingly innocuous moment of his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, the Jesuit father José de Acosta tells of the surprise he encountered during his first journey to the New World. Worried over the allegedly uninhabitable torrid zones of the earth lying across the equator, he was perplexed and delighted at what he found: “As I had read the exaggerations of the philosophers and poets, I was convinced that when I reached the equator I would not be able to bear the dreadful heat; but the reality was so different that at the very time I was crossing I felt such cold . . . I will confess here that I laughed and jeered at Aristotle’s meteorological theories and his philosophy, seeing that in the very place where, according to his rules, everything must be burning and on fire, I and all my companions were cold.”² Acosta wrote these meditations on the distinct character of the New World in the last decades of Spain’s sixteenth-century conquest of the Americas. At that time, a continent-wide campaign of cultural colonization, economic subjugation, and religious conversion was well

under way. His story, however, represents the closing stage of a more distinct process whereby Spanish thinkers made the New World's natural environment familiar to European sensibilities for various imperial ends.

This final chapter focuses on Acosta's empirical and intellectual contributions to the development of the early Spanish Empire. What I seek to reconstruct is the ethos of his magnum opus, the *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, as a philosophical and experimental exploration of the natural landscape of the New World. Acosta greatly valued his experience in the Americas, seeing the study of natural history as an analytic narrative informing both the Spanish imperial project and the scientific development of a natural philosophy. In recent years, his contributions to the early colonial literature of Latin America, as well as to what was a maturing form of missionary science, have been increasingly documented.³ Yet Acosta's work as a philosopher and theorist of political culture does not enjoy similar attention. The chapter therefore examines an often-overlooked dimension of Acosta's thought: the distinctly modernist conception of judgment he employs to differentiate between the cultural, scientific, and theological lenses Jesuit missionaries were to employ in their readings of the New World.

For Acosta, proper judgment—or what he describes as “discovering the true features of Nature”—is not defined by mere naturalistic or theological study; rather, judgment emerges from the reconciliation of Scripture and experience, a synthesis made possible by the world historical encounter between Europe and the Americas. For the development of this conception of judgment to emerge, however, one had to first endure the disorienting experiences of philosophical wonder. My argument here is that in challenging the theses of both classical and biblical sources, Acosta's natural history lays the groundwork for an experimental conception of judgment based on philosophical observation. As he maintains in chapter 3 of the text, “Persons who enjoy discovering the true features of this Nature, which is so varied and abundant, will receive the pleasure that history gives and history that is all the greater insofar as the events in it are made not by men but by the Creator. Anyone who goes further, and comes to understand the natural causes of effects, will be exercising good philosophy.”⁴ In the various vignettes he employs to “understand the natural causes of effects,” contemporary observers can also find in Acosta an interpretive sensibility that is far more advanced than in earlier Spanish missionaries (for example, Bartolomé de Las Casas and Bernardino de Sahagún), and that will later be echoed by proponents of the Scientific Revolution.

Although Acosta was committed to defending the spiritual objectives of the empire, the range of analytic tools he employs to make sense of what is on the ground surpasses what his predecessors were able to accomplish. To that end, the style and content of his narrative demand greater attention from political theorists concerned with excavating the imperial commitments and ideals of early modern European thought. Doing so, however, also entails broadening definitions of what is “canonical” in the history of political thought and how Acosta redefines the interpretive standards of the early modern period.

I begin the chapter by situating Acosta’s reception in early modern intellectual circles at the cusp of a wave of narratives exposing greater numbers of Europeans to American nature. Written for more than just missionary explorers, Acosta’s writings benefited from a growing voracity for information about the New World, as well as mounting disputes between Catholics and Protestants over the bases of the New World’s colonization. Natural history became for Acosta a vehicle to explain both the radical newness of the American landscape and its implicit moral potential for imperial theology. I follow this contextual background by discussing the narrative structure of Acosta’s *Historia Natural* and its approach to the interpretation of New World nature. Long regarded as a systematic defense of Catholic theology against indigenous idolatry, the book contains elements that simultaneously challenge and accommodate classical teachings with the seeming incommensurability of the Americas. In this process, Acosta exhibits a kind of narrative dissonance from the narrative elements I have so far discussed, weaving together indigenous and European explanations of natural events as his empirical evidence and developing an experimental science in the defense of Christian faith. The chapter ends with a discussion of the *Historia*’s merits for its inclusion in the canon of early modern political thought, specifically, its relation to the project of empire building. More than any of the other authors I have considered thus far, Acosta effectively bridges two critical traditions in the spectrum of early modern thinkers: the religious and the rational. In clarifying the links between these two realms, one can say more about the New World than either camp can in isolation.

Once upon a Time: A Narrative History of the Conquest of Nature

Toward the end of the long sixteenth century, Acosta’s conception of natural philosophy was disseminated across Europe through English-, Italian-, and French-language translations of the *Historia Natural*. His work was picked up

by early modern political theorists such as Francis Bacon and John Locke (in addition to chroniclers, missionaries, and naturalists from the continent such as Pierre d'Avity and Georges Louis-Leclerc, Comte de Buffon); both Bacon and Locke developed their theoretical projects in the early throes of British imperialism and used Acosta's observations to develop a vision of the Americas as backward and undeveloped.⁵ As competition between European powers coincided with the emergence of national literary cultures and a complex climate of religious rivalry, the work of Spanish naturalists such as Acosta was marginalized.⁶ Natural history was deemed antithetical to the pursuit of unencumbered knowledge. Despite the plurality of voices emerging from this period, the rebuttal and appropriation of Spain's New World knowledge by its European competitors left Acosta an afterthought in efforts to build a new natural philosophy.

To illustrate but one example of this trend, historians of political thought have generally regarded the question of America's place in world history to be a matter first taken up by John Locke. While Locke is a revolutionary thinker in his own right, the assertion that it is his conceptual appropriation of America that acts as one of the foundational moments of early modern thought, and not the empirical work that Acosta (among others) successfully disseminated, ignores the influence of Acosta's work as a natural historian and philosopher. Chiefly important for Locke and other early modern thinkers were Acosta's accounts of American nature and its range of effects on the faculty of judgment.⁷ Whether it was his observations on the changes in the human faculties according to height and climate, or the ethnographic observations on the civilizational development of Amerindian peoples, Acosta was a standard reference for seventeenth-century thinkers, particularly in the British Isles.

As Barbara Arneil writes, the empirical evidence early modern thinkers such as Locke used to develop their accounts of "natural man" and "the state of nature" is clearly acknowledged as coming from Acosta. Despite Locke's claim that knowing "how to make a judgment on the actions of men" is indispensable to gaining a useful prudence in the study of history,⁸ his application of Acosta's insights serves rather paradoxical (if not altogether ulterior) motives:

Locke's state of nature presupposes individual savages whose decision to enter into a state of war is contingent upon the protection of their individual lives and property. . . . One of the greatest flaws of the state-of-nature device, when it is used as a mirror to European civilization, is its complete obliteration of any specific characteristics of the individuals themselves. Thus natural man belongs to no nation and has no political or ethical codes

associated with that collectivity. Rather he is an individual amongst an undifferentiated and ahistorical mass of non-European, non-civil savages.⁹

Such a description clearly takes issue with Locke's theories of property, labor, and industry.¹⁰ As Acosta and others before first explored it, however, the social contexts of Amerindian peoples ranged from the highly diffused to the highly stratified. That much is clear when Acosta, describing the history of the Mexica peoples, writes: "There are no peoples so barbaric that they do not have something worthy of praise, nor are there any people so civilized and humane that they stand in no need of correction. And so, even if the account or history of the Indians were to have no other result than that of being an ordinary history and account of events that indeed took place, it deserves to be received as a useful thing."¹¹ Arneil never pushes the point concerning the misuse of Acosta's observations; she only concludes that "the notion that Amerindians did not properly use God's gifts . . . was a common belief amongst those English involved in settling the New World."¹² Why the scholarly impasse, then, on the misappropriation of Acosta's work?

Throughout the *Historia Natural*, Acosta navigates the jungles, waters, mountains, and deserts of the New World with a candor that perhaps explains some of his work's obscurity. Though the book was initially intended as a field guide for Jesuit missionaries—and was subsequently treated as such—it is more than just an academic treatise on the New World's natural history. Acosta begins Book II of the *Historia Natural*, for instance, by describing "such an abundance of natural waters that nowhere in the world are there more rivers, or larger ones, or more swamps and lakes."¹³ What at the outset is an empirical description of the uninhabitable character of the Americas, however, soon spurs philosophical admiration for its grandeur. The multiple "fountains, brooks, wells, pools, and lakes" strewn across the landscapes are juxtaposed first with the powerful Magdalena River, which "even the waves and immensity of the ocean could not obliterate"; and second, they are dwarfed by the "Emperor of Rivers," the Amazon, which, despite its plurality of names and voyagers, unfailingly manages to "[silence] them all."¹⁴

Early in his work Acosta thus makes it plain that the prospects of properly observing the New World should put any observer among the most learned company:

If it were possible to write fully about natural things in the Indies, and with the consideration required for such notable things, I do not doubt a work could be written equal to those of Pliny, Theophrastus, and Aristotle. But

I do not find that vein in myself, nor would it agree with my aim if I did, for I intend only to take note of some natural things I saw and contemplated while in the Indies . . . which I believe are not commonly known in Europe.¹⁵

Despite Acosta's deflection of any unwarranted adulation, the *Historia Natural* goes into great detail to document the biological, medicinal, and anthropological ways in which the New World challenged what Europeans knew about the world, at least up to this point. Acosta, then, seems to be making the opposite of a revolutionary argument. Beyond its informational value, however, the book quickly became an invitation for European audiences to discover the redemptive powers of the New World and embrace natural history's intellectually liberating potential.¹⁶

Acosta's experiences and insights came to serve as lasting lessons for modernizing the Spanish Empire. Yet many of these lessons came about through significant challenges, objections, and transformations in the form of physical gauntlets, indigenous revolts, and the threat of spiritual disenchantment. Indeed, Acosta's flexibility in negotiating these trials is partly what defines his experimental approach. Retrieving Acosta's labors, particularly at the dawn of the Scientific Revolution, is therefore crucial for re-evaluating the Spanish experiences of the sixteenth century and its intellectual significance for European modernity. Before the perverted conception of "torturing nature" was popularized across Europe, Acosta extolled explorers, merchants, and missionaries to "escape from the bonds placed on them by greed, and if they would abandon useless and irksome pretensions, they could undoubtedly live a very carefree and pleasant life in the Indies."¹⁷ Those perks would only come through greater attention to the interpretive challenges of a world unknown to European eyes. Acosta's goals may have started as part of a benign field guide; they gradually became, however, part of a more paradigm-shifting spiritual agenda that spans centuries and locales across the Western Hemisphere.

Indeed, in the decades following Acosta's work, Jesuits like Bernabé Cobo and Joseph-François Lafitau would push for a model of natural philosophy in the Americas that would, in the words of Anthony Pagden, make it possible "to be a cultural relativist without being a sceptic . . . to see that every explanation of alien cultures had to be securely grounded in [the] local and empirical study of behavior."¹⁸ This was the Jesuit Order's greatest contribution to imperial science: developing a narrative device to study the New World's environments and peoples, while teaching and stimulating wonder for distant audiences. According to recent evaluations of this narrative model, "far from reducing itself to a mere phi-

losophy of language, the oratorical culture of the fathers of the Company of Jesus also welcomed a kind of anthropological comparative method, where incessant parallels between the Ancients and the moderns, so central to the Jesuit imagination, promoted the exercise of a critical view based on comparison.¹⁹ The point then was not merely to establish the superiority of modern times and thinkers over the past, but rather relaunch Cicero's ideal form of political judgment, where the force of persuasion could supplant the violence of military domination:

As a theory, rhetoric has sought since ancient times to understand speech as a force that is affirmed through an energy capable of acting on others and the self, one having the ability to change ideals and acts, wishes and desires. Rhetoric, therefore, views the exercise of language as a civilizing force, that is, a power inviting recourse to persuasion, even seduction, in order to better contain excessive violence and abuses of physical restraint . . . if one cannot consider rhetoric a mere theory of language or doctrine, it is because it deploys as well a practice of discourse that places the enterprise of seduction at the heart of the exercise of speech. This more strict literary dimension of oratorical tradition determines a narrative regimen in which lived-experience, historical testimony, and travel accounts are related and re-related as both an epic rich in models to imitate and a story of adventure that recounts the conversion of hearts and the transformation of societies. To teach, to delight and to move . . . the essential component of all eloquence.²⁰

This noteworthy tradition of Jesuit natural philosophy spans the Order's history, as well as Acosta's magnum opus. The *Historia Natural* emerges in this context and embraces many of the concurrent trends within early works of natural history. The work posits a picture of the New World that is sensitive to its distinct cultural and biological diversity. At the same time, it espouses a kind of naturalist theology against the alleged presence of demonic forces within the very landscape.²¹ Acosta was part of a generation of scholars who shifted attention away from studying nature as an object of universal and unchanging laws, to a realm that demanded learned description and classification. Like Las Casas and other great missionaries of his time, Acosta was interested in getting a personal sense of Amerindian societies and especially their natural environment. "[Although] the New World is not new but old," he writes in the Prologue, "I believe that this history may be considered new in some ways because it is both history and in part philosophy and because it deals not only with the works of nature but with problems of free will, which are the

deeds and customs of men.”²² So Acosta takes the wedding of his empirical and philosophical objectives to be the distinct mark—the “useful knowledge”—of a project worthy of scholarly and popular consideration.

Acosta and the New Natural History

Intellectually, Acosta was a product of the humanistic curriculum of the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares. His scholarly upbringing, moreover, coincided with his initiation into the newly formed Society of Jesus, which was only established in 1540. Sent in 1569 as part of the third Jesuit mission to the Viceroyalty of Peru, Acosta’s first experience in the Americas was as chair of theology at the University of Lima. His academic duties, however, soon brought him to political office, and he was sent on expeditions across the Andes to compile ethnographic and naturalist records for the notorious viceroy Francisco Álvarez de Toledo. Having no qualms in the defense of religion as the foundation of civil society, Acosta nevertheless carefully distanced his work from the emblematic tenets of dominant schools of thought, aligning his efforts instead with the will of the crown. This shift, Sabine MacCormack argues, corresponded to the “method of accommodation,” a way of “expounding scripture by extending its meaning to topics the scriptural author did not mention and could not have known about . . . [increasing] the understanding and joy of those who were sincerely committed to the faith.”²³ An example of this can be found in the book’s title page and dedication to King Philip II’s daughter, Isabel Clara Eugenia (see figure 6), where Acosta outlines the work’s vast contents and complex social context: “In which are discussed the remarkable things concerning the sky, and elements, metals, plants and animals of [the Indies]; and the rites, and ceremonies, laws, and government, and wars of the Indians.”²⁴

Here Acosta presents his disagreements with Scholastic ideals in naturalistic and pragmatic terms:

[Because] knowledge and speculation concerning the works of Nature, especially if they are remarkable and rare, cause natural pleasure and delight in persons of exquisite perception, and because news of strange customs and events also pleases by way of its novelty, I believe that my book can serve your Highness as honorable and useful entertainment. . . . And my desire is that all I have written may serve to make known which of his treasures God Our Lord divided and deposited in those realms; may the peoples there be all the more aided and favored by the people of Spain, to whose charge divine and loft Providence has entrusted them.²⁵

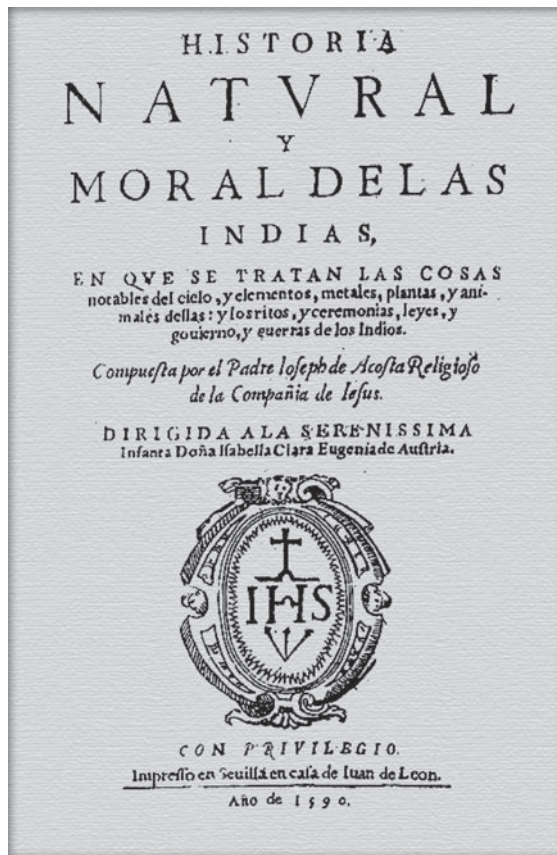


Figure 6. Frontispiece, José de Acosta, *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (Seville, 1590). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

Here Acosta seems to repeat some of the same tropes as Las Casas, focusing attention on the divine demands placed on the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Yet there is a pragmatic dimension behind his desire to classify the “remarkable and rare . . . treasures God Our Lord divided and deposited in those realms.” Acosta challenged earlier Church readings of the natural world by appealing to the written logs and records of Spanish cosmographers, pilots, and cartographers, as well as his own observations. In doing so, he arguably raised one of the most important challenges to the Church’s jurisdiction over scientific erudition, basing his insights on a humanist conception of knowledge against the dominant natural law tradition.²⁶ Through a kind of narrative dis-

sonance between what he knew and what he saw, Acosta rejected the privilege of *a priori* speculation over empirical observation, much like Oviedo and Las Casas's privileged eyewitness testimony. Early in the text, Acosta outlines the method he employs in collecting information, and how he adjudicated between the accounts of others, who had more experience:

Because I wanted to have more specialized knowledge . . . I resorted to experienced men who were very knowledgeable in these matters, and from their conversation and abundant written works I was able to extract material that I judged sufficient to write of the customs and deeds of those people and of the natural phenomena of those lands and their characteristics, with the experience of many years and my diligence in inquiring and discussing and conferring with learned and expert persons.²⁷

Acosta's contributions have historically been characterized as adding little beyond the accumulation of pre-Columbian anthropological data.²⁸ Read only as a chronicler of novelties, Acosta's place in the history of political thought is typically relegated to being a minor player in the modern (and imperial) conceptualization of nature. One way of remedying this neglect is by reading his natural philosophy within a longer intellectual arc, situated in the maturing field of natural history. Acosta was central to the development of key themes at the height of natural history's maturation, bringing vast amounts of empirical information and philosophical scrutiny to bear on existing visions of the Americas and the changing European imagination.

In my reading, Acosta forms part of a third moment in the development of natural history. Encompassing both anthropological and soteriological concerns, his *Historia Natural* employs an ethnographic sensibility that helped move the study of natural history toward a kind of natural philosophy. In the following section, I discuss Acosta's development as a natural philosopher, specifically focusing on the narrative structure and exemplary representations of nature developed in the *Historia Natural*. According to Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Acosta was interested "both in explaining the conquest as a pre-ordained event and in identifying signs of providential design in the many natural wonders of the American continent."²⁹ The tension between these two goals is evident in the book, as Acosta discusses matters of both scientific interest and theological debate. Yet in doing so, Cañizares-Esguerra goes on, Acosta frames his goals from the outset as "a pragmatist interested in how things work and how colonial peoples thought, so as to use and manipulate the former to convert and govern the latter."³⁰ The *Historia Natural* is in effect an attempt to shift the social and moral ethos of European thought away from the demonic

conception of New World nature that had prevailed since the Franciscan ethnographers (of which Sahagún was an exemplar) began archiving Amerindian customs. Acosta's evidence in these arguments are his own observations, reasoned debate against the wisdom of the Ancients, and an unshaking curiosity over the nature of things that demanded the careful exercise of his judgment.

In this regard, as Andrés Prieto writes, "The importance of philosophical reflection on the nature of America transcended its immediate use as a source of ammunition against those who believed the Amerindians to be intellectually inferior. . . . Acosta aimed to define a clearly delimited field for Jesuit science—a field in which philosophical and scientific research was firmly subordinated to the pastoral and spiritual goals of the Society of Jesus."³¹ Thus the interpretive methodology employed in the *Historia Natural* served a specific political objective: a more effective mode of spiritual cultivation. That path, however, underwent an alternate, seemingly dissonant, narrative transformation. In the process of defining the limits of a missionary science, Acosta also expanded the relation between naturalist knowledge and empire.

Narrative Dissonance, Empire, and Natural Philosophy

Long read as a mere manual for religious conversion, the *Historia Natural* advocates for a syncretic interpretation of nature that emerges through what I consider to be a kind of narrative dissonance. Unlike those of his Spanish contemporaries, Acosta's accounts of the New World were received with glowing admiration, curiosity, and passion across the Americas and Europe. The esteem for and reliance on his work are evident in the many translations and appeals to his authority made across the history of political and scientific thought. Thinkers as distinct as Locke and Alexander von Humboldt, for example, drew on his work in order to lay claim to the historical uniqueness of the New World's natural environment. In its own time, however, the *Historia Natural* also generated critical and unsympathetic imitation. Having developed a systematic structure for the writing of natural histories, Acosta's work spawned competing accounts of the effects of nature on New World societies. Central to the work's appeal was Acosta's narrative approach which, as I mention above, was committed to a pastoral ethos.

The *Historia Natural* was published after almost two decades of exploration. It also emerged at the crossroads of two prominent cycles: the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Americas and the recovery of the Greco-Roman tradition in Renaissance Europe. The two periods brought significant challenges and opportunities to intellectual traditions on both continents. While

the realms of science and faith are considered separate fields of inquiry in our contemporary horizon, Spaniards and many early moderns did not draw the kinds of distinctions between experience, knowledge, and philosophical thought that we do today. For example, Acosta is singled out today more as an ethnographer and a geographer, than a natural philosopher interested in the purpose of things. The kind of work he inaugurated, however, as Cañizares-Esguerra maintains, was no less than an attempt at “modifying dominant narratives of marvels . . . constantly [seeking] to frame natural phenomena and the seeming inversion of physical laws in the Indies with a discourse of providential design and lawful regularities.”³² As I will discuss below, Acosta’s sense for divine order, tied to his proclivities for empirical deduction, were vividly on display through his deliberations over the “origins” of the New World.

In their journeys across the American landscape, imperial agents pioneered a wide range of innovative (though no less political) empirical practices in their study of nature. These included highly specialized activities that were seen as part of defending Spain’s patriotic glory and the empire’s intellectual achievements: the systematic observation of changing meteorological patterns; thorough geographic surveys; the cataloguing and classifying of social differences; and the observation of changes in the natural landscape.³³ Visions of early modern Spanish “science” took on a patriotic character as descriptions of the natural world of the Americas were increasingly framed against Black Legend narratives. For example, cosmographers were represented in Spanish paintings as knights, illustrating that “the Iberians saw knowledge gathering as an expansion of chivalric virtues.”³⁴ Depictions of imperial agents were themselves even inverted, as knights and warriors were represented as cosmographers equipped with both sword and compass, a “markedly aggressive notion of the role of knowledge in the expansion of empire.”³⁵

By integrating these distinct enterprises into a natural and moral framework, Acosta’s efforts, according to Walter Mignolo, “represented the intersection of philosophy and theology: philosophy because understanding nature, for Acosta, was not just a question of describing minerals, plants, and animals, but of understanding the order of the universe and the chain of being, of which the human being was the point of arrival of God’s creation; and theology, because understanding nature was a way of knowing and revering God, its creator.”³⁶ The *Historia Natural* itself, therefore, follows a progressive division that begins with descriptions of the physical heavens and ends by telling the history of Christianity’s arrival into a declining Mexican society.³⁷ The trope here is that the study of New World nature followed an inverted “chain of being”; beginning with the *natural* heavens, especially through the inventories of

natural history, the European observer could trace a path toward the *spiritual* heavens. This is unsurprising since the *Historia Natural* is also a work a *moral* history. Therefore, the book's title captures both the structure of the narrative—via naturalist and theological observations—and, arguably, what Mexican philosopher Edmundo O'Gorman would describe as “the dominant mental frame at the end of the sixteenth century.”³⁸ That clarity of vision and purpose made Acosta a prominent religious authority throughout his activities in Peru; it also prompted a more critical philosophical exploration of indigenous myths and rituals—as compared to their European analogues—than what previous interpreters of the Americas had achieved.

A large part of Acosta's popularity can be attributed to his ability—analytic and rhetorical—to weave a narrative where science, faith, and the politics of moral authority were deemed essential to European experience in the Americas. Indeed, the wonder over the New World's context and contents was a result of these intertwined ideals. During the first 100 years of Spain's conquest and colonization of the Americas, the experience of wonder over the status and character of the New World underwent several stages. Particularly in the many works of natural history, one finds sustained efforts to formalize the newness of the natural world into distinct opportunities for the production of historiographical knowledge. Arguably, these same attempts have been considered as the origins of the development of a self-conscious science of man.³⁹ While the question of the New World's novelty has been treated by political and literary theorists as justifying an ideology of domination, I am more interested in how Acosta interpreted said novelty in naturalistic terms. That is to say, if one reads natural history as a field of narrative inquiry, what stories did Acosta privilege in his account of the New World's “remarkable and rare” treasures? Moreover, what did Acosta have in mind in his appeal to the “natural pleasure and delight” that the objects of nature were capable of generating, especially in “persons of exquisite perception”? Finally, how did this narrative appeal to pleasure fit into the division of “God's treasures” that Acosta hoped would aid people in Spain and the Americas?

For Acosta, the salient narrative tropes and themes of his work are framed by three distinct political developments: the foundation of the Society of Jesus in 1540; the investiture of Francisco Álvarez de Toledo as Viceroy of Peru in 1569; and the arrival of the Inquisition in 1570. Each of these respective moments shaped Acosta's conception of a missionary science: first, the Jesuit Order blended humanistic study and experiential analysis of the New World with unsurpassed rigor; second, the new Viceroy arrived in a time where infighting between rival Spanish factions had come to an end and the work of governing

the Peruvian highlands had begun; and third, by targeting his scientific inquiries at the extirpating of indigenous idolatry, Acosta was able to employ his analytical skills in a political context where judicious observation of the native population was deemed essential. This last objective was especially suited for the Jesuits, who in addition to being concerned with developing the proper means of spiritual cultivation for the new kingdom's governance, were also trained as independent scholars. Acosta was not seeking to persuade any royal authorities on the value of his mission, nor was he interested in using indigenous knowledge to buttress his anthropological observations.

In terms of his narrative framework, one finds in Acosta the inheritance and transformation of traditional demonological tropes into a language more akin to the nascent scientific spirit of the age. If we place Acosta's analytic scheme within the typology I developed in chapter 1, the interpretation of nature (and the role of the natural historian) takes on the following distinct trajectory: natural history begins as a science of description (as in Oviedo), it follows certain paradisiacal and exotic analogues (as popularized by Las Casas), but it matures into an anthropological exercise in the extirpation of evil (for example, as in Sahagún's demonology). Ultimately, the study of natural history culminates in the presupposition that nature itself, as a bearer of secrets (as Hernández had conceived of it) could be read as a Great Book that led its readers to the greatness of God's creations.

Yet there is also a curious inversion underlying much of the *Historia Natural*, at least from what one may find in the visions employed by other natural historians: according to Acosta, nature needs human observers for its greatness to be conveyed. The "moral" component of his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* may be the exhortation to overcome satanic visions of the Americas and spread the Gospel to its farthest reaches. Such daring exploration, however, required great naturalistic knowledge of biogeographical and social landscapes. It also required a kind of practical wisdom made possible through the comparative method. My point here is that the "remarkable and rare" treasures of the New World are only deemed remarkable for those who are willing to experience the dissonance of nature's wonders. Acosta's loyalty to the crown, for example, should therefore be read as a testament of his willingness to strategically question Church dogma and appeal to the "exquisite perception" of those who share (or whom he thinks may be willing to share) his pragmatic conception of naturalist exploration for the greatness of the empire and faith.

To illustrate this last point, many of Acosta's analyses of natural phenomena in the Americas are curiously framed in the typical Scholastic style of opinions and summaries, prefaced in the name of some of the Church's established tex-

tual authorities. Yet his own entanglement with narrative dissonance becomes evident, for example, as he considers why anyone would deny the now-conventional observation that the earth was round. In his striking introduction to the issue concerning the extension of the heavens to the New World, he writes how the Church Fathers resisted and mocked the astronomical theories of the earliest natural philosophers, even as scientific observation increasingly confirmed their insights:

For, although it is true that most of the philosophers, the best of them, believed that heaven was all round, as in fact it is, and that hence it surrounded the earth everywhere and enclosed it within itself, despite all this some of them—and no small number, or those of least authority among the holy doctors—had a different opinion, imagining the fabric of this world like that of a house in which the roof that covers it encircles only the upper part and does not surround it everywhere. They offered as a justification for this that otherwise the earth would be hanging in the midst of the air, which seems a thing devoid of all reason, and also that in every building we see that the foundations are in one place and the roof opposite of them; and thus logically in this great edifice of the world, all the heavens must be in one place above and all the earth in a different place. . . . But we need not be astonished that the aforesaid authors [that is, Chrysostom, Procopius, and St. Augustine] believe and say things like these, for it is well known that they did not pay great heed to the sciences and demonstrations of philosophy, being engaged in more important studies.⁴⁰

It is difficult to say how genuine Acosta's position is against the "more important studies" of the empire's most revered intellectual figures. After all, he goes on in this same chapter to castigate natural philosophers for what he considers their vain obsession with the baser things of the world, neglecting the greatness of God. His sentiments toward a one-sided approach to either enterprise, therefore, seem to coalesce into a key methodological distinction for the production of natural history.

The shape of the heavens and the earth, the existence of America as a separate continent, and even the possibility of life in the torrid zones were all subjects whose status was taken for granted by Church doctrine as it evolved alongside the conquest. Not surprisingly, however, Acosta was able to offer sustained support of scientific observations, while couching his narratives in the interpretation of articles of faith. While discussing meteorological phenomena, Acosta refutes classical interpretations that envision the earth as suspended by

“pillars,” framing the balance between heaven and earth as mediated by water. In an impressive passage blending naturalist observation within a scriptural framework, he makes the following syncretic claim:

But elsewhere that same Divine Scripture, to show us that the earth is joined to and in large part encompassed by the element of water, says elegantly that God founded the earth upon the seas and in another place that he established the earth above the waters. And, although St. Augustine does not wish to have this passage interpreted as an article of faith, that earth and sea form a globe in the midst of the universe, and hence tries to give another explanation of the words of the Psalm, their plain meaning is doubtless what I have stated and that is to give us to understand that we need to imagine no other foundations or supports of the earth but water, which, because it is so ductile and changeable, is caused by the wisdom of the Supreme Maker to uphold and enclose this immense machine of the earth.⁴¹

A second element of Acosta's representations of nature becomes evident here: while he has no qualms arguing against the prejudiced positions of Catholic faith in favor of describing the world in terms of rational causes, his goal is also to reorient the status of the sciences from a realm of textual interpretation to one that includes empirical observation. The vision of a world encompassed by water can be read here as fulfilling both biblical and navigational expectations. But it is the doubtless “plain meaning” of the earth as a giant machine at the center of the universe that helps Acosta prompt a vision of New World nature as always hiding more than is self-evidently given, something in need of interpretive experience. Indeed, as he points out within the same chapter:

And we say that the earth is established and held above the waters and above the sea, although it is true that the earth is rather more under the water than above it; for in our imagination and thoughts what is on the other side of the earth where we dwell seems to us to be under the earth, and thus we imagine that the sea and the waters that bind the earth on the other side are below the earth and above them. But the truth is that what is actually below is always that which is more nearly in the middle of the universe.⁴²

The newness and pleasure of observing and interpreting nature always points to a greater object of contemplation. In the context of sixteenth-century exploration and imperial expansion, Acosta's syncretic visions of the natural world

served as key justifications in the development of more efficient commercial and scientific practices. Acosta's writings on minerals and their distribution across the earth, specifically mercury, were used by miners at Potosí and inventors who sought to patent tools, gadgets, and testing practices. In Antonio Barrera-Osorio's account, "Acosta translated empirical information into theory," as the amalgamation process of using mercury to extract finer metals served to render the chemical into "a marvel of nature that responded to God's laws and thus glorified the creator of the world."⁴³ The link between naturalistic observation and the political economy of the empire becomes evident with this and many other examples. At the end of the sixteenth century, though, the empire thrived just as natural history matured into a science of biogeographical, ethnological, and narrative innovation.

The Case for a Canonical Reading of the *Historia Natural y Moral*

The goal of this chapter has been to bring together various themes in a narrative that traces the work of a handful of Spanish naturalists and their attempts to understand the New World and its peoples. Throughout this portrait of Acosta, and within the larger story, I have maintained that there are political reasons behind the curious exclusion of Spanish naturalist writings, and the study of natural history, more broadly, from the metanarratives of the Scientific Revolution and European Enlightenment. By unpacking the actual context and writings of prominent figures from sixteenth-century Colonial America, a different picture emerges concerning the origins of the metadebates and disputes that early modern political theory is known for.

Despite the efforts of Anthony Pagden in the 1980s and 1990s to document their centrality, political theorists today seem to find very little that is interesting in the sixteenth-century writings of Spanish thinkers wrestling with the past, and future, of what was then a New World. However, especially for political theorists interested in the links between empire and the history of ideas, Spanish efforts to naturalize their experiences in the Americas via different narratives and tropes can be quite revealing. This is important because the portrait we currently have of sixteenth-century Spanish America is one of brutal conquest, where little seemed to be happening in terms of scientific thought, political ideology, and intellectual transformation. As I have shown, there was far more intellectual adaptation and innovation than those myths of conquest may initially suggest. The point is not to vindicate Pagden or any of the scholars from whom I borrow to make a case for a canonical reading of Spanish natural history. Rather, the point is to consider the accrued value of Spanish experi-

ences in the New World in an age of greater social, ecological, and spiritual interdependence.

More pertinent to what I have described in relation to José de Acosta, the entire natural landscape where the New World's conquest took place seems to be missing from the conversations of early modernists excavating the origins of empire. In fact, however, that natural world was regarded as an ever-present foil to Spain's imperial endeavors. Acosta's theoretical work gained prominence in a political context that needed empirical information concerning the elements and diverse properties of natural resources. Turning to the spiritual and scientific historiography on early Colonial America seems critical here, at least if one is to understand how different visions of empire coexisted with the larger set of normative, and more familiar, questions brewing in the aftermath of the Americas' military conquest. Spanish Empire—a misnomer for a large swath of decentralized outposts—was the banner under which significant innovations in the fields of map making, geography, history, hermeneutics, ethnographic observation, medicine, and navigation were made. I want to argue that the same can be said for the study of political philosophy, by way of a distinct civilizational narrative that was deployed not just against people, but also against the strangeness of the natural world.

For Acosta, natural philosophy may have served to better train missionaries for the challenges of converting a radically diverse continent; but faith, science, and empire were to be understood as joint enterprises. Nature was made attractive through a pragmatic lens that did not dismiss Church doctrine, but carefully distanced itself from its reluctance to empirical experimentation. By failing to acknowledge the contributions of Acosta's writings to early modern conceptions of judgment—indeed, those “great and useful instructions of prudence” that Locke so imaginatively portrayed—the links between early modern empire and political theory therefore remain distorted. Notable in the reconstruction of these links is how sixteenth-century natural philosophy gave rise to seminal debates between Ancient and Modern sources of knowledge, as well as heated disagreements over the boundaries of nature, society, and religion.

Acosta's greatest contribution to these early conversations is the synthesis between theological and experimental descriptions of nature found in his writings on Colonial America. His *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* was written to redirect the efforts of Spanish natural history and colonization toward a greater engagement with the New World's human and biological diversity. The engagement itself, however, was tensely negotiated between the political

demands of empire and the theological demands of religious salvation. Acosta's legacy, I conclude, can therefore be read as part of the longer intellectual history of political judgment, where a civilizational ideal was forged in the Spanish encounter with New World nature. The work's greatest strength lay in Acosta's ability to weave an incisive and experimental narrative, in the service of both a natural philosophy and a Universal Empire. Also notable is the enduring emphasis on good judgment as the product of exposing the mind to conditions that help individuals distinguish between what is new, true, or deceptive.

Indeed, contemporary political theorists have continued to wrestle with how to develop the right skills and words to practice good judgment. Far from being mere ideologues of the empire, Spanish natural historians like Acosta struggled with questions that set the stage for what today might be called the dilemmas of reason. As Leslie Paul Thiele points out, judgment is never only about output, for the point of exercising good judgment is to employ multifaceted and reflective forms of learning. He goes on to highlight how "every good judgment has its reasons. But a judgment does not have and cannot give *all* the reasons that brought it into being. . . . The termination to the rationalizing process is, among other things, a matter of practicality. . . . Eventually an appeal to an authority is heard. . . . Alternatively, one might simply appeal to a habit or decision rule that has been developed over time. One might adopt the heuristic: once fatigued to the point of irritation in the search for sufficient reasons, choose the most appealing alternative produced thus far. In any case, something other than reason must be called upon to end the interrogation."⁴⁴ What made the efforts of Spanish missionaries like Acosta unique was an environment that demanded both strength of spirit and mind, in order to convey never-imagined possibilities.

While Acosta himself was convinced, as Barrera-Osorio explains, that "the study of nature led to the understanding of the order of nature and, in turn, to the glorification of God," his wider interpretive context was part of a larger network of official chroniclers and merchants eager to make sense of the Book of Nature for a new, modern age.⁴⁵ At this point, while I feel confident to acknowledge that Acosta used his own experiences as the foundation of a new way to interpret the practices and realities in the New World, many questions nevertheless remain. For example, while earlier generations of Spanish natural historians used ancient texts and novel ideals to undermine Spanish prejudices, Acosta broke away from these traditions altogether by emphasizing empirical observation over pure speculation. That his writings were sanctioned by imperial authorities and published widely across Europe adds to his significance in

emerging cultures and imaginaries of the Atlantic world, particularly beyond Spain. What then does Acosta's impression of the New World say about the coming history of imperial science?

To gain a clearer portrait of those future liaisons, one would need to take seriously Acosta's place within the canon of early modern political thought and read his *Historia Natural y Moral* as part of a larger conversation over the changing bases of scientific thought and political theology. The interpretive horizons generated via the study of nature pushed Spanish thinkers to adapt religious, political, and interpretive ideals onto rather outlandish circumstances. Events in Europe may have led to the emergence of new administrative mechanisms and philosophical systems that reflect the changing political landscape of the continent. The colonies did not reflect the same rate of change. Not knowing the scope of change in the Americas, however, should not be grounds for its exclusion; rather, as I have argued, the proper terms and limits of historical writing, sovereignty, development, and civilization were all actively debated from within the New World. Those occurrences alone should make the study of the New World's natural history a ready-made venture. Instead, it remains a marginalized curiosity.

While on the surface this may seem spurious, academic scholarship is far more divided in this last regard than one may imagine. In a recent survey on the link between natural science and the origins of British imperialism, for example, Sarah Irving has documented the ways English thinkers reacted to writings emerging from the New World. She specifically points to Francis Bacon's condemnation of Spanish colonial policy and the better alternatives he and others allegedly developed to overcome the "natural limits" of the American context:

Bacon deliberately encouraged the English to rule their colonies justly in order to raise themselves above the barbarism of the Spanish conquistadors. The violent Spanish *encomiendas* and dispossession of the Amerindians met with dissent even among their own scholars, including Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de Las Casas. It is entirely possible that knowledge of these men's writings reached England. Regardless of whether Bacon had read Vitoria and Las Casas, he was certainly aware of the violence of the Spanish, which was at odds with his own classical ideal of government through the laws, and over men who were taught to reason and use knowledge. The intended contrast between the English and the Spanish is clear: the Spanish colonial policy of *encomiendas* relied upon the idea that the American Indians were barbarous slaves

rather than reasonable men. I would suggest, therefore, that the best context for understanding Bacon's views on colonization is the context of Spanish violence in the New World. Where the Spanish used violence and dispossession, the English were to adopt a policy of granting civic laws to their colonies, and incorporating the indigenous people into the English Commonwealth.⁴⁶

What Irving reproduces here, perhaps unintentionally, is the Black Legend narrative of conquest, whereby Spanish colonization rested entirely on material domination. As I have shown above, however, the context to which she refers was not so one-sided. Moreover, of the Spanish writings that did make it out of state archives, Bacon relied heavily on the prominent work of Acosta.⁴⁷ The conclusions Bacon reached over the New World, according to Irving, "indicate that Bacon relied upon information sourced in the Atlantic. He knew well that there was an intimate connection between knowledge and the New World, but he did not conceive of any relationship between colonies and the collection of knowledge."⁴⁸ Yet if one looks carefully at Acosta's work, its context, and particularly how his writings on the colonization of Peru influenced both Jesuit and imperial policy, that relationship is more than evident.

Indeed, as Stephen Gaukroger argues, accounts such as Irving's, "[show] convincingly that Bacon's understanding of the notion of restoration of man's empire [over the natural world] involved no connotations of territorial pursuit: rather, the exercise is a purely cognitive one—namely, the building up of a more comprehensive body of knowledge about the world by taking full advantage of the discoveries in the New World."⁴⁹ What Irving does not show is how Bacon regarded, or borrowed from, the various experiential accounts of natural history, ethnography, and missionary theology that framed those discoveries. Missing from the conversation, therefore, are the deeper connective tissues informing early Spanish chronicles.

Legacies of Empire: Closing the Long Sixteenth Century

Less ambivalent than Las Casas, Sahagún, and Hernández over the possible links between nature and local forms of knowledge, natural historians like Acosta defended the Spanish imperial project as a modernizing force. The *Book of Nature* may require sympathetic interpreters, but the lessons drawn from its volumes should all confirm the greatness of God and the Christian faith. In the development of this interpretive framework, however, Acosta also

exhibited a kind of narrative dissonance. The more he explored the natural worlds of the Americas, the less sanguine he became about the ability of classical and biblical sources to offer explanations for the New World's cultural and biological diversity. Acosta henceforth questioned and interrogated the extent to which Old World ideas could account for New World realities. The result is a revolutionary call for greater engagement with empirical and experimental principles, in the name of bringing Imperial Spain's faith into greater communion with science.

Acosta's legacy is enlightening here in order to interpret the changing character of the Spanish Empire in the late sixteenth century. Although he was far less oppositional than Las Casas when it came to implementing an imperial order (Acosta had no problems classifying the Amerindians as barbarians to be dominated and disciplined [see figure 7]), his work carried significant implications for the development of science and empire as liberatory ideals.⁵⁰ To explain why Acosta's legacy has evaded the attention of historians of empire would go far beyond the task I have set up here. As Cañizares-Esguerra and others have pointed out, however, much of Acosta's philosophical legacy has been left behind due to the ways Spanish imperialism was portrayed across Europe. Unpacking the history of that imperialism requires a closer look at the intersection of faith and empire, and how these two processes were bridged in the works of Spanish naturalism.

Within Acosta's accommodation of conquest, newness, and experimentation, he posits a picture of the New World that is both sensitive to its distinct cultural and biological diversity, and espousing a kind of naturalist theology for the alleged improvement of both colonizer and colonized. Acosta's natural history thus lays the groundwork for an experimental conception of natural science, though not as a fully conscious project of *dominium* over the natural world. Written toward the end of his life, Acosta's *Historia Natural* is the product of conflicting sentiments.

The potential cognitive and material riches that the New World offered, coupled with the conceptual challenges it posed to a man who saw spiritual salvation as his primary objective, proved difficult to reconcile in a single volume. That dissonance did not stop the dissemination of the *Historia Natural* across multiple translations and revised editions. Acosta's work was picked up by early modern political theorists on the continent, giving rise to numerous debates over empire, empiricism, and the philosophical value of experiential knowledge. Particularly important in the appropriation of Acosta's accounts was the New World's novelty, not only as a source



Figure 7. Indian miners at Potosí, Teodoro de Bry, *Americae Pars IX* (Frankfurt, 1590). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

of great pleasure, but as an object that appealed to exquisite perceptions and judgments. His insights and their accompanying narrative tropes were critical to natural history's development as part of a larger imperial ethos, and Spanish imperialism's relevance to historical readings of the New World's natural environments.

EPILOGUE

Toward a Natural History of Colonial Domination

Human imagination is deceived if it seeks other foundations for the earth and commits the error of measuring divine works by human standards. Thus, there is nothing to fear, no matter how much it appears that this great machine is hanging in the air or that it may fall or be shaken, for it will not be shaken, as the Psalm says, forever and ever.

José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*¹

As with most journeys across seemingly treacherous spaces, a savvy field guide can make all the difference. This book begins and ends with José de Acosta, an auspicious Virgil through this excursion documenting the New World virtues of nature and other demons. Acosta's narrative style captures both the great awe at things for which there are not enough words, but also the dangerous certainty that comes from the strength of our intellectual convictions. Indeed, that paradox between wonder and domination is at the heart of all imperial encounters, not least the ones situated against the restrictions of nature. Nevertheless, as I have attempted to show above, from the stories of natural historians across the centuries we can discover vital connections between the ruins of empires past and the challenges of a future natural world also in ruins. Despite the marginalization of natural history as an imperial science, Acosta's legacy would pave the way for many other learned thinkers of good judgment in the New World to challenge the minds of European intellectuals.

One in particular, this time a woman, would capture the imaginations of generations of Spanish Americans, well past the cultural breaks of independence. As one of the many lights emerging at the other side of the gateway

forged by natural history, the renowned seventeenth-century philosopher and poet, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, also brings indispensable insight into the story of natural history as a genre of political thought in the service of empire.² As a *criolla* with deep roots in Nahua culture, Sor Juana has achieved unrivaled heights over the centuries. Dubbed the “Phoenix of América,” her eloquent prose, lyrics, and analytic acumen have long been recognized among writers and scholars.³ Yet like her predecessors and contemporaries who were religious intellectuals, her insights are conspicuously absent from histories of political thought.

In the excerpt from her epic poem, *Primero Sueño*, which adorns the epigraph to this book, we see yet another indication of the value of natural history as a genre of political thought, albeit in a vernacular far more ornate than what sixteenth-century practitioners used. “Man, in sum,” she writes, “the greatest marvel posed to human comprehension, a synthesis composed of qualities of angel, plant, and beast whose elevated baseness shows traits of each of these. And why? Perhaps more blessed than other forms it was designed that Man, through loving Union, should join with the Divine. A favor never fully fathomed, and, were we to judge by how it is reciprocated, insufficiently appreciated!”⁴ The transformation of natural history into natural philosophy may have shifted the empirical bases on which naturalists pursued knowledge about the New World, particularly as the ends of empire shifted from colonization to domestication. In that same transformation, however, colonial intellectuals also shifted their endeavors to the broader philosophical questions more characteristic of the European Enlightenment as these are conventionally understood.

Writing the New World demonstrates, however, that naturalist writings were always positioned between the empirical and the normative. They were neither a precursor to contemporary conservation practices, nor merely a field composed of instrumentalist surveyors. Rather, I have argued that natural historians envisioned the possibility of a social order based on contemplation and cultivation. There is no proper nature without society, they reasoned, just as there would be no colonial society without the proper cultivation of nature. Whether or not practitioners of natural history were correct in their assessments of New World nature is an ancillary concern of this work; it is how they chose to ask important questions concerning human intervention into nature that drives my inquiry.

Natural historians were primarily interested in collecting as much information as they could in order to offer a portrait that was politically and normatively compelling. In this endeavor, they relied on the conviction that the

lands on which they toiled were new and unseen in the history of humanity. I too have approached this story with a sense of curiosity and trepidation: my purpose is not to reconstruct the entire sixteenth century, or reify the practice of natural history as an abstract, universalist enterprise; rather, I tell the story of an experiment that thrived through the spirit of discovery.

Making Natural History Public

Returning to Spanish natural history therefore offers two significant contributions in today's study of political theory and the New World's intellectual history.

First, historians of political thought have long recognized the symbolic role of America in the emergence of the early modern period. The Americas challenged most of what Europeans had known about the world; yet in addition to offering an anthropological referent on which to develop theories about the nature of humanity and its polities, the New World acted as a foil against which the material transformation of the earth could be measured. Debates over a real or imaginary state of nature coincided with worries about the proper cultivation of natural resources. As lands were plowed and rivers were dredged, so too were Christian souls meant to be tended with thoughtful intervention. Most of these debates occurred in the intellectual centers of both Spain and its American colonies, making the Spanish chroniclers I survey among the first European observers to wrestle with the formative questions of a new era.

Indeed, by developing a comparative account of imperial visions of nature that focuses on experiential records, the shift from a world of faith to one of reason may be rendered far less oppositional. As Anthony Pagden once exhorted, uncovering the roots of the nature-faith-empire dynamic may further expose the discursive layers at work in modern political theory's vision of "civilized" man.⁵ A flourishing of interest among historians of political thought in the prophetic, apocalyptic, and the spiritual certainly reflects that normative excavation.⁶

Similarly, critical contributions to early modern science were made through firsthand observation, testing, and documentation by Spanish natural historians. Notable in all these endeavors were the ways imperial naturalists diverged in their goals from the purview of colonial authorities. Indeed, many works of natural history emerging from the sixteenth century attempted to sway the moral visions of the imperial monarchy away from the instrumentalist goals of colonial administrators. At stake in their negotiation was a greater aware-

ness of the complex interaction between nature and society, a long-central feature of early modern political thought that was also essential to the colonizing mission.

Second, the study of nature-society dynamics in the history of Latin America continues to depend on many tropes, visions, and legacies first developed by sixteenth-century natural historians.⁷ The Americas today are a site of contention regarding the onset of climate change, the demands of economic development, and the challenges of ongoing ecological degradation. Such prospects pose several dilemmas for the increasing global, regional, and national exchanges taking place since the European encounter. For instance, growing international pressure to exploit natural resources for fuel, food, and water stand in conflict with multiple global conservation efforts.⁸ Moreover, efforts toward regional economic integration are hard-pressed to reconcile conflicting policy agendas, as states today oscillate between extractive and conservationist models of development.⁹ These tensions are further strained as national governments negotiate the interests of their elites alongside the demands of indigenous communities.

As the destruction of natural environments reaches apocalyptic and dystopian levels, many of the questions natural historians raised regarding the flora, fauna, and people inhabiting such spaces have re-emerged for contemporary scholars of the environment—particularly of the transdisciplinary persuasion—to consider.¹⁰ Indeed, at stake across these debates is the granting of greater political and legal autonomy for the natural world. In this second sense, especially, my work speaks to political concerns that activists and legal theorists alike have committed themselves to recovering.¹¹ And while many of these scenarios go beyond the purview of this book, clarifying the naturalist legacies of the early Spanish Empire offers a critical lens for future interpretation.

Beyond these two contributions, the recovery of natural history is for me an intervention into one of the greatest ideological and environmental challenges that critical scholars and advocates face today: striking a balance between planet, people, and profit. In the sixteenth century, scientific inquiry was wed to distinct religious values, administrative practices, and political beliefs. This alliance acted as an important ideological banner under which the material transformation of New World nature, and the empire's moral well-being, could effectively take shape. The increasing popularity of interdisciplinary approaches to study nature-society interaction, as well as greater consciousness of the dilemmas faced by today's advocates for planetary resilience, retain many curious parallels to the accounts of Spanish natural historians. Both in the past

and today, we see proposals of normative and holistic visions of people, the planet, and economic growth as desirable political goals. Yet in both periods we struggle to articulate how such a balance can be effectively maintained.

As Michel Foucault once noted, past systems of exploration, encoding, and experimentation represent formative moments for today's modernist ideals. "[In] every culture," he argued compellingly, "between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and of its modes of being."¹² Such experiences act as the conditions of possibility for modern scientific knowledge. New World natural landscapes in the sixteenth century point to one such middle ground of experience, where natural historians actively negotiated between several registers of worldly knowledge to establish the conditions for new scientific principles.

A strong current within the historical and contemporary experience of nature links the future of civilization to practices of adaptive change. Turning today to early modern reports conveying the balance between nature and society may be instructive in establishing a sustainable polity, since the Spanish colonial project sought to enact an equally ambitious set of spiritual, economic, and political ideals. Indeed, at stake for these missionary scientists was not the destructive aim of "squeezing and molding" out of nature timeless secrets for merely instrumental ends; rather, in their search to find in nature the timeless signs of God's grace, natural historians also sought to invent the most compelling ways of explaining the moral composition of the earth itself.¹³

The success of the empire, natural historians held, could only be secured through an imaginative civilizational storyline in which nature and society could interact. As Acosta notes, "Human imagination is deceived if it seeks other foundations for the earth and commits the error of measuring divine works by human standards."¹⁴ Read today, this may seem like calling for a return to religion; not so in my view. What it should convey, however, is that whatever storyline we manage to create for our times, it is always at risk of becoming hubris.

Natural History and the Politics of Historiography

What is narrative if not a way we understand the past and the future? Early modern naturalist writings were concerned with how our relationship to nature can create human values. Many of their reports sought to make sense of past societies; others were concerned with where a future society should invest its energies. *Writing the New World* diverges from existing approaches

in the political theory of empire with the central claim that there is a contemporary urgency at stake in the scholarly interpretation of naturalistic chronicles.

My approach to reconstructing the trajectory of natural history addressed two methodological questions: the first consists of the standing of Catholic contributions to the Scientific Revolution that remains pervasive in histories of political and scientific thought. I considered throughout this work the effects of chivalric, royalist, and religious writings on the means of reporting naturalistic observations. Whether the contents of the New World were conveyed by writers as inherently corruptive, bifurcated, or enriching, their narratives played a normative role in the crafting of natural history and its intended audiences. As different naturalists held distinct interests, their means of communicating their findings shaped natural history's broader scholarly positioning. Science, much like today, was done in groups, where distinct forms of expertise—including the ways naturalistic observation was talked about—were vital to creating a holistic framework of moral experience. Natural historians needed to be versed in the skills of biblical interpretation, as well as the navigational, geographical, and botanical knowledge of their time. Such knowledge, however, was by itself not enough to guarantee any kind of scholarly independence from an overzealous Crown.

The second methodological assumption my argument thus tackles is the role of interpretation in historical analysis. Since the marriage of history and political theory represented by the rise of the Cambridge School, the boundaries of admissible content in historical inquiry have oscillated between elite and popular forms of communication. There is a long-standing disagreement whether political theory is to be studied as a series of intellectual ruptures, continuities, or as ideological justifications.¹⁵ While my interest is not in resolving this debate, the politics of historiography has itself garnered increasing attention from political theorists, forming an important dividing line in the historical study of nature.¹⁶

Natural history straddled this line as works commissioned by royal authorities alternated between state-kept reports, guidelines for missionary immersion, and popular accounts meant to convey the transformative powers of New World medicines. Whether these histories were compiled with a popular, theological, royal, or administrative audience in mind has an important normative implication. The constitutive effects of these stories prompted conceptions of nature that ranged from imminent collapse to limitless paradise; what these narratives have in common is their attempt to envision a new kind of society.

As questions concerning the proper use of interdisciplinary approaches in the study of nature continue to reach greater audiences, returning to a foundational moment of early modern thought offers an opportunity to re-examine the historical role of nature in scientific and political life. More specifically, what difference does Spanish natural history make to early modern political thought? How are debates within early modern science re-evaluated as a result of Spanish contributions? How is the nexus between science and state power transformed when one considers the different missions Spanish natural historians embarked on? Finally, how were indigenous sources of myth, metaphor, and knowledge included into the records of natural history? These and other questions frame the larger interpretive context in which this book intervenes.

Natural history was a field of scientific storytelling: it not only tried to make sense of the biological origins of flora, fauna, and people, but it sought to do so in ways that were compelling to imperial authorities. By retelling the story of natural history, I singled out a narrative construction of nature's autonomy and indigenous ethnology that retains a curious reproduction in contemporary environmental politics. Natural disasters and crises are often portrayed as betrayals and affronts by this one thing called "nature" against this second thing called "society"; the latter is somehow supposed to live and develop apart from the first, and the first remains (and is increasingly portrayed as) an entity that human beings should constantly be afraid of.

Naomi Klein captures this oppositional rendering in the antagonism between climate and capitalism, noting how today "each supercharged natural disaster produces new irony-laden snapshots of a climate increasingly inhospitable to the very industries most responsible for its warming."¹⁷ For Klein, the challenge is not merely acknowledging human-made acceleration of climate change, but rather making its amoral depiction a target of our political endeavors. It is not enough to call for greater planning or technology to temper nature's onslaught; our very moral character must be tested and brought into question. The inherent autonomy attributed to nature in such disaster narratives finds an auspicious precedent in natural history's sixteenth-century rise to prominence.

Additionally, the reconfiguring and return of society to nature also suffers from ethnological overtones. Our capacity to change the planet's fate has come to depend on our recovering some kind of secret relationship to the natural world that modern society has purposefully avoided, or rejected and must imminently recover from. According to Kenny Ausubel, for example, "The awful truth is that global warming is just the tip of the melting iceberg. We are run-

ning evolution in reverse, shattering the very mirror of nature that can show us who we are and how to live in this place in a way that lasts.”¹⁸ For him, among many other climate prophets, the moral exigency of climate change is tantamount to a clash of civilizations: one path is disposable, the other is sustainable. The challenge is coming face-to-face with the immediacy of humanity’s wayward transformation of nature, for the only way to rectify this evolutionary reversal is to turn denial and neglect into responsible action. Such a portrait echoes the millenarian urgency to colonize the New World’s environments in order to save humanity.

I see the “truth” of these enduring tensions with the natural world as lying somewhere in the middle. A clarification of the New World’s conquest, and the naturalist medium through which some of these tropes were first developed, could potentially help modern environmental scholarship have more compelling narratives with political traction. It certainly seems that a more reasonable, secularist discourse has not.

For sixteenth-century naturalists, the newness and pleasure of nature always pointed to greater sources of contemplation. Many of these syncretic visions of the natural world served to justify the development of efficient commercial, religious, and scientific practices. For twenty-first century observers, a more adaptive understanding of the moral balance between nature and society could also achieve these goals, while overcoming the instrumentalist mentality that continues to treat nature as a site of domination. Indeed, as the idea of a Spanish Empire thrived, natural history matured into a science of narrative innovation. That innovation sought to uphold higher ideals, albeit often pointing toward the singular destination of a Eurocentric conception of Heaven and a Christian God. Today, we have no such certainty waiting for us on the other side.

Though representing different facets of the Spanish imperial ethos—Oviedo and Las Casas as historians, Sahagún as an ethnographer, Hernández as a would-be medical alchemist, and Acosta as the learned man of good judgment that most confidently navigated the project of empire—read together, the thinkers I have profiled offer a distinctive portrayal of the kinds of ideals that scholars of the empire upheld in the establishment of a New World civilizational narrative. Indeed, if I am correct in my interpretation that natural history was a form of storytelling, their disputes gave birth to one of the first civilizational narratives at the so-called dawn of modernity and the larger conquest of American nature.

To clarify what I think civilizational narrative is about, some intellectual context is necessary. What initially drew my interest toward the Spanish revival of natural history is two-fold: on the one hand, the works of natural history I

consider above reflect a sensibility toward the reconstruction of human perception that would surely inspire the most militant natural scientists. On the other hand, that reconstruction rests on a much more radical consideration of the imagination that I think is the vibrant, political undercurrent of this work.

Indeed, my sense throughout the completion of this book has been to think of nature's order, meanings, and future as akin to a phenomenology of the imagination, or of natural wonder. In order to understand the revival of subaltern modes of thinking developing today, particularly in Latin America, there should be some clarity about the means of domination employed over time to marginalize alternative points of view to begin with. It is those politics of historical writing that I find contemporary political theorists of empire, at least concerning the history of empire in the Americas, have only cursorily glossed upon.¹⁹ If considered at all, the Americas were more often a laboratory for full-fledged intellectual and political standards, rather than the fertile ground from which new ways of thinking emerged.

The larger lesson I therefore want to draw from my story focuses on those acts of scholarly exclusion. To give one example, much of the banality with which the history of Imperial Spain's chroniclers, explorers, and especially missionaries is regarded reflects poorly on our ability to embody ideals that might render our relationship to nature more benign, or at least different. While this is an unapologetically normative goal, laden with assumptions about the extent to which humankind can reconcile itself with the natural world, it is an objective that also informed the most rationalist ideals of the early modern period. Losing the Spanish chapter in the scientific, cultural, and political development of modernity renders the entire intellectual repertoire of the Americas a derivative copy of an allegedly more original European core.

Further inquiry into the joint history of European and American thought should reveal the opposite to be the case. Indeed, European ideals central to the continent's history—including the exchange and preservation of scholarly materials that make arguments such as mine possible—were born, dissected, and transformed in exploration of the New World. The outcomes of these findings should therefore establish more links between the New and Old Worlds, not continue assuming a historical relation that says nothing about what is to be done in response to contemporary ecological crises.²⁰

A Moral History of Spanish Naturalism

Before saying more about the politics of natural history and how the missionary study of nature was marginalized from debates over the history of the New

World, a few words should be said on the “good and evil” of empire, at least as perceived by the authors I have considered. I began my portrait of Spanish natural history in chapter 2 with the polarizing figures of Oviedo and Las Casas, who though they differed in their approach to documenting the landscapes of the New World, only slightly disagreed about the morality of conquest itself. Las Casas may have been an opponent of Spanish violence and pillage; he had no doubts, however, that some form of cultural subjugation—or as later Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries would consider it, satanic extirpation—was necessary to settle the New World peacefully. In both his and Oviedo’s accounts, the historian took center stage over her subject, inaugurating a literary genre that I called the naturalist epic and that posits the narration of nature as central to its domination.

The justness of his cause notwithstanding, Las Casas’s polemics surely raised concerns (both moral and methodological) among other Spanish writers. As I showed in chapter 3, Sahagún overcame many of these concerns through his adaptation to a mode of inquiry that relied less on the presumed authority of the historian and more on the translation of naturalist and spiritual knowledge via ethnographic immersion. The massive scale of Sahagún’s project, however, along with the active participation of native informants, raised different concerns from colonial authorities. Soon, the danger of religious subversion and satanic influence paled in comparison to the risks of “going native.” Although the work was never published, multiple copies and excerpts of the *Florentine Codex* circulated among colonial and imperial circles, making the many volumes an intellectual heritage for both Europe and the Americas. Indeed, as a pioneering effort of cultural anthropology, many of its observations and analytic techniques pushed the study of natural history into the forefront of imperial science. The greatness of empire, Sahagún held, depended on its ability to counteract the most dangerous cosmic forces in communion with the most mundane.

In spite of the progress made by missionaries like Sahagún, natural history’s development was stymied as figures more beholden to the Crown attempted to reproduce the scientific findings of the Franciscan missions. As I discussed in chapter 4, natural history should be read as a contentious field of narrative inquiry, particularly as its practitioners were increasingly marginalized for their efforts to give wings to the New World’s natural wonders. When Francisco Hernández embarked on his expedition of New Spain, even his medical standpoint was regarded with distrust in the face of the Crown’s growing economic demands and cultural anxieties. Hernández’s study thrived despite numerous obstacles, and its survival through obfuscation, intrigue, and even fire, show-

cases the hallmark quality of his work as an exemplar of Renaissance versatility and the potential of imperial science. Yet Hernández's failure coincided with the beginning of Imperial Spain's slow decline. Despite some interest in commercial pursuits, colonial administrators were more concerned with policing the spiritual well-being of the New World than what medicines they could put to market. Though Hernández could speak with gallantry on the interdependence of faith and medicine, his obsession with learning the means of melding, mixing, and experimenting with nature itself (even through traditional indigenous practices) made him a restless subordinate who needed disciplining.

The case of Hernández, however, was by no means the end of the practice of natural history. In more ways than one, it marked a turning point in the study of indigenous knowledge and the ways that Imperial Spain would nevertheless continue to cultivate a scientific understanding of the natural world. Based on that final transformation, I spent considerable attention in chapter 5 on José de Acosta's adaptation of the naturalist mission, reflecting both the demand for greater spiritual acumen and the need for an empirical philosophy. Acosta brought the analytic rigor and missionary ethos that could please both humanist scholars and colonial administrators alike. Despite his legacy being tarnished, or at least dismissed, by a growing anti-Catholic bias in the learned circles of Northern Europe, Acosta's work challenged his readers to think thoughtfully about the New World. That he was committed to military, spiritual, and natural conquest of that world, however, should not be forgotten. Though he radicalized the ways European observers should think about nature, Acosta never lost faith in the objective of dominating the New World's natural wonders in order to fulfill the liberatory potential of the Catholic faith.

I can say with certainty that each of authors I discussed above intended to defend an outright form of cultural, or natural, imperialism in their works. Nevertheless, I regard with skepticism the claim that all chroniclers of the New World had evil intentions in mind. Put another way, the goal of naturalizing empire was as much about letting the wonders of the earth shine through as it was about religious, cultural, and military domination. These objectives were not always in sync with each other in the writings of Spanish chroniclers. Indeed, one could just as well argue, as many have, that their efforts were aimed at eliminating rival worldviews, just as they were about "spiritualizing" empire by way of natural wonder. The fruit they reaped, however, is the same: their experience as naturalists altered their preconceptions and refined the way future generations would think about nature.

I chose the figures in question, moreover, particularly because of the political ambiguity of their trajectories. They were each firm believers in the spiri-

tual objectives of their mission, but they each also chose to express in writing a higher degree of reflexivity than other imperial advocates had done before. They did not design policy, but in their individual ways had to decide how to act upon political demands not of their making. In their narrative innovations, one finds the transformation of European intellectual currents in order to better reflect the New World's radical differences. Also present are the distinct attitudes that showcase the resilience (for better or worse) of indigenous ways of knowledge as they coalesced into new ways of thinking. A future project based on these findings would document these novel intellectual currents, tracing their evolution from the sixteenth century well into the Wars of Independence. The political genre of natural history that these participants of the New World's spiritual conquest inaugurated therefore merits further interrogation.

Natural History as Genre of Political Thought

Lastly, it has been my contention throughout that a return to natural history retains a contemporary moral and political relevance. Morally, the experiential sensibility employed by the thinkers I study reflects a deep concern with the values behind historical documentation and interpretation. More specifically, for each of the above figures, the genre of history suggests more than the mere collection of curiosities. History is brought to life in the words of the chronicler. The challenge, then and now, is sifting what interests, beyond her own, the historian should commit to defend. That test remains alive and well in contemporary applications of natural history. As Thomas Fleischner notes, "Natural history helps us see the world, and thus ourselves, more accurately."²¹ Though experiential knowledge is valuable for its own sake, it also has a scholarly and political history worth excavating. Like the Spanish naturalists of the sixteenth century, the civilizational drive of natural history today—as Fuentes's buried mirror should remind us—is central to debating who we are as people. As Fleischner warns, dismissing the work of natural history is akin to ecological suicide:

Every worthy science arises from a sturdy foundation in the careful observation and description of natural history. Bottom line: natural history makes us healthier as individuals and, collectively, as societies. It provides the foundation for scientific inquiry, and for conservation. It honors the creation, and informs and promotes sustainability practices.²²

Politically, then, Spanish natural history's diverse forms of moral articulation raised various challenges to monolithic conceptions of imperial society. As

the imperial core was defined, the peripheral nodes of its own undoing were slowly being sowed. The present effort to document those challenges (if only to articulate their failures) therefore points toward new directions in studying the relationship between European power and still-vibrant indigenous American traditions. The profiles I develop here, however, are really only a small part of a much larger tapestry that needs reconstruction. As Neil Whitehead puts it, what we find in the sixteenth century is “the advent of a modernity whose ruins we still inhabit.”²³ Accessing the ways that Spanish natural historians composed, disseminated, and ultimately experienced their chronicles can surely reveal the normative assumptions behind that birth. It also shows how the histories of indigenous peoples, women, Africans, and animals themselves need greater documentation in the history of political thought. What better means to begin documenting these histories is there than the critical examination of the men who chose to include and exclude them from the narrative of civilization altogether?

As each of my cases show, explicitly challenging the omission of Spanish intellectuals in the New World points toward the reconstruction of natural history as a genre of political thought. Oviedo and Las Casas represent the transformation of the conquest narrative into a naturalist epic; Sahagún’s attempt to capture the many meanings of nature culminated in the capturing of the New World’s natural history itself, as there is a marked effort to deem the study of nature, and the human activity surrounding it, a focal point of imperial conquest; and lastly, Hernández and Acosta represent two sides of the effort to develop natural history into a form of natural philosophy. Hernández’s objectives, trials, and tribulations are illustrative of how the study of natural history was no apolitical scholarly endeavor, but rather an ideologically charged inventory of nature’s uses. What differentiates Acosta’s success from Hernández’s failure is the language of conversion that the Jesuit missionary placed at the forefront of his systematic defense of empirically based theological analysis. In this last regard, Acosta represents what Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra describes as the “colonial Iberian roots of the Scientific Revolution,” making him a canonical figure to consider in the changing intellectual landscape of early modern political and scientific thought.²⁴

A final word on what it means to take natural history as an exemplary genre in the politics of historical writing. The first Spanish chroniclers of the New World inaugurated a series of expansive scholarly debates over the wonder, testimony, and authority of early exploration in the Americas. These disputes over the New World began in Spain and developed into trans-Atlantic

disagreements between *creole* and *peninsular* scholars that encompassed an even wider expanse of anthropological, biological, and cultural concerns.

By the eighteenth century, many of these Spanish writers had fallen into disrepute, if not altogether obscurity, given the nationalistic conceits that accompanied the writing of history as a science of man. Reaching the material conditions to document a people's past was the highest sign of a society's intellectual development. If Spanish accounts were unreliable, then surely this reflected the nation's lack of shrewdness. Monolithic accounts of "the Enlightenment" captured the ideological character of these verdicts, as Spanish historians went from being regarded as innovators to mediocre charlatans. While the intensity of those caricatures has oscillated over time, Spain today is no great mystery in the minds of historians of political thought. By extension, Latin America, too, probably has very little to say to political theorists, especially about the history of empire. This is a rather convenient position to hold from within the scholarly, cultural, and economic dominance of Anglophonic hegemony. My account is a contribution to the crafting of alternative Enlightenment narratives, capable of helping us think in other words and worldviews.

Several works of scholarship have surely done a better job than this one in tracing, cataloguing, and rebutting the normative assumptions behind Spain and Latin America's exclusion from the canon of political thought. But this book nevertheless seeks a modest addendum: to bring to light the ways in which the natural world helped shape the Spanish imperial imagination—if only through its religious and scientific agents—laying the groundwork for a stronger case concerning the emergence of the modern civilizational narrative at its most embryonic stage. The goal, therefore, of including natural history in the politics of historical writing is to showcase the emergence of modern historical tools and practices in the midst of the New World's natural wonders. That marriage, I have been careful to point out, did not arise ready-made as a value-free, stadiar narrative with an empirical and objective framework at its foundation. Indeed, faith and fear in the occult held just as much of a place in evolving definitions of the empirical and rational. Therefore, any sound historical assessment of the political conditions surrounding that evolution should take Spanish natural history as a point of departure, not divergence.

Natural History's Future Past

Central to natural history's evolution is the role played by distinct empirical narratives from which to guide imperial governance and the evidentiary stan-

dards of indigenous conceptions of nature that informed them. In this spirit, natural history plays a dual role in the story of Imperial Spain: it inaugurates an empirical and narrative sensibility central to future scientific revolutions in modern thought, while linking its inquiries to imperial narratives of cultural, political, and intellectual appropriation. It serves as a genre bringing empire, faith, and nature under a singular banner.

Naturalist inquiry offered both a useful and enlightening tool for cultural interpretation, but it was still the product of imperial ideologies, and hence its relation to the empire overshadows its development. The long-term value and importance of this narrative evolution is three-fold: first, the reconstruction of natural history as an intellectual and political field of inquiry broadens contemporary scholarship on Imperial Spain's strategies to manage nature in the sixteenth century, framing this period as an important link in the emergence of the broader Scientific Revolution. Second, the story of natural history plays a critical role in the broader metahistories of European Enlightenment, undermining the assumption that Spain and the Americas have no place in definitions of modernity and, for that matter, early modern political thought. Third, and lastly, the conceptualization of early modern natural history has critical links to contemporary debates over nature in the Americas.

Today in Latin America, increasing global attention to fresh water, forest governance, sustainable agriculture, conserving biodiversity, and environmental justice have generated conversations very similar to those had by sixteenth-century natural historians. Though present iterations may be different, the ethos, problems, and questions raised by human presence in the natural world remain resoundingly familiar. Recovering the spirit of humanist inquiry that drove sixteenth-century natural historians may yet prove valuable for contemporary audiences, no less in a time where the moral costs generated by climate change have led to a tenuous rapprochement with subaltern forms of natural knowledge. The ways in which Spanish naturalists apprehended the natural world—through innovation and usurpation alike—represent a shrewd allegory to the contemporary struggles between science, market forces, and the livelihoods of marginalized peoples all over the world. The political outcomes resulting from today's re-evaluation of nature, however, need not be the same.

Specifically, this book asserts that the larger question behind contemporary nature-society dynamics is no longer the extent to which an ecological balance can be achieved and maintained. Ultimately, at stake is how individuals will address and publicly mobilize in response to drastic changes resulting from large-scale climate change.²⁵ Much of the history of early modern thought is

rooted in a metaphorical (though often concrete) escape from nature. Spanish natural history, albeit as an imperial project, attempted a reconciliation of these realms, reminding European audiences that a full separation from nature was both impossible and undesirable. As contemporary imperial geopolitics makes such an escape even less likely, the study of “nature’s logic” is both more unpredictable and far more necessary than ever before.²⁶

The saga of Spanish Empire in the New World can thus be read as the first of a series of modern environmental conflicts between humans and nature. A historical reading of how these conflicts were first conceptualized speaks to one of the foremost challenges for sustainable development practices today. As greater political and ecological ramifications emerge from anthropogenic climate change, the contest between state-led conservation and indigenous advocacy for nature has redrawn the lines of twenty-first century environmental politics across the Americas. Perhaps thinkers like Arturo Escobar and Fernando Coronil have put it best: at stake in this crossroads are two visions of the future—on the one hand, there is the attempt to reconcile past mistakes with proposals for a sounder future; on the other, there is an unapologetic pledge to “business-as-usual” economics that only further threatens our planet.²⁷ The extent of these visions may be unknown, but the tropes, themes, and stories at work have never been clearer.

What I therefore offer in this work is a version of how these dilemmas may have emerged. How and why did nature become such a problem to fear? When was nature developed into a well of riches to strive after? What role did nature play as part of a story that historians and philosophers have obsessively cultivated? Natural historians asked similar questions concerning the experience, management, and ideological place of nature in the early modern era, struggling with the best ways to learn and convey their answers. It is in their records and trajectories that some lessons may still be found. While their contributions to early modern science continue being documented, the lonely sensations of uncertainty and redemption that shaped their inquiries in the face of great adversity remain hidden.

In closing, natural history plays a dual role in the history of empire: it inaugurates an empirical and narrative sensibility central to future scientific revolutions in modern thought, while remaining fundamentally linked to imperial chronicles of cultural, political, and intellectual appropriation. While the contexts between the colonial past and our present are radically different, the problems raised by the human presence in nature remain in need of innovative responses.

Hence, underlying my efforts is the assumption that telling a story should be something that is informative, but also imaginative. What I sought to achieve in this work was to invite my readers into the wonder and intellectual ethos that characterized agents of empire in the sixteenth century. In my reconstruction and retelling of this story, a recurring demonology continues to keep societies conceptually divorced from nature, to the benefit of imperialistic capitalist interests. The political implications of this arc were first crystallized in natural history's rise and fall from prominence. For sixteenth-century naturalists, the newness and pleasure of nature always pointed to both greater sources and objects of contemplation. It is high time we, as contemporary chroniclers, missionaries, and examiners of progress, rediscovered the difference that nature makes in our own acts of everyday contemplation, and the difference that makes nature valuable.

NOTES

Opening. Of Nature and Other Demons

1. José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, trans. Frances López-Morillas (2002), p. 254.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

5. James Farr, “The History of Political Thought as Disciplinary Genre,” in John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (2006), p. 230.

6. Arturo Escobar, “Latin America at a Crossroads: Alternative Modernizations, Post-Liberalism, or Post-Development?,” in *Cultural Studies* 24(1) (2010), pp. 1–65; Zeb Tortorici (ed.), *Sexuality and the Unnatural in Colonial Latin America* (2016); Mauro J. Caraccioli, “The Earth’s Dying Body: On the Necroeconomy of Planetary Collapse,” in Caroline Alphin and François Debrix (eds.), *Necrogeopolitics: On Death and Death-Making in Global Politics* (2019), pp. 183–202.

7. Quentin Skinner, “Seeing Things Their Way,” in *Visions of Politics, Volume I: Regarding Method* (2002), p. 3.

8. See: Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (2015).

9. Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (1997), p. viii.

10. While significant advances have been made in the last decade to reconstruct the environmental history of preconquest Latin America—particularly under the critical themes of colonialism, capitalism, and conservation—much of the field espouses what Mark Carey has called a “pervasive declensionist narrative, which is to say, stories of imperialist extraction and environmental degradation except when conservationists could successfully prevent destruction.” Indeed, Carey goes on, the urgency of the contemporary environmental crisis is such that it seems to have become impossible to imagine other forms of human interaction with nature beyond destruction, thereby “overlooking other histories and historical processes . . . [writing] Latin Americans out of their history by putting all the power behind outside forces.” See: Mark Carey, “Latin American Environmental History: Current Trends, Interdisciplinary Insights, and Future Directions,” in *Environmental History* 14(2) (2009), p. 222.

11. As an analogue case from the other side of the world (and modernity), see Valerie

Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom: The Land and Its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (2006).

12. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “How Derivative Was Humboldt? Microcosmic Narratives in Early Modern Spanish America and the (Other) Origins of Humboldt’s Ecological Sensibilities,” in *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*, ed. Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan (2005), pp. 148–168.

13. For instance, von Vacano sees the writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas as examples of rhetorical, not scientific, mastery. In his view, Las Casas was not an empiricist, but rather had a humanist sensibility that allowed him “to argue for a synthetic or inclusive approach to [ruling] the natives. . . . A synthesis of civilizational and moral virtues,” that would “make the empire even more glorious.” See Diego von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity, and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought* (2011), p. 55. Yet missing in von Vacano’s analysis—indeed, he at times claims Las Casas wrote “without empirical basis” (56)—is how naturalist wonder served as the constitutive ground for Las Casas’s rhetorical tropes. See Lewis Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas: An Interpretation of His Life and Writings* (1951), pp. 61–89. Conversely, Juliet Hooker’s proposal for a historical-interpretive method based on “juxtaposition” instead of mere comparison reveals a critical dimension for political theorists to consider as they work to trace genealogies of domination: “What happens when thinkers and traditions that are viewed as disparate are staged as proximate, what insights are revealed?” See Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (2017), p. 13.

14. Orlando Bantancor, *The Matter of Empire: Metaphysics and Mining in Colonial Peru* (2017); James W. Fuerst, *New World Postcolonial: The Political Thought of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega* (2018).

15. For similar accounts of hybrid forms of domination in the study of legal pluralism and colonial art history, see Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (2017); see also Ananda Cohen Suarez, *Heaven, Hell, and Everything in Between: Murals of the Colonial Andes* (2016); and Susan Verdi Webster, *Lettered Artists and the Languages of Empire Painters and the Profession in Early Colonial Quito* (2017).

16. Too broad to fully convey here, recent scholarly interventions that critically engage with the boundaries of human-nature relations, and particularly through indigenous political thought and other subaltern positionalities, include: Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015); Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (2018); Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016); and Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (2019).

17. See: Anthony Pagden, “The Savage Critic: Some European Images of the Primitive,” in *The Yearbook of English Studies* 13: *Colonial and Imperial Themes Special Issue* (1983), pp. 32–45; see also Emma Planinc, “Regenerating Humanism,” in *History of European Ideas* (2019), pp. 1–15. Online First: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2019.1697942>.

18. While there is much to debate concerning the great diversity of views on climate change and the interdependence of nature and humanity available to the broader public, there is also much to lament regarding the inability of scientific discourses to dislodge the political gridlock that characterizes the climate wars. Thus a burgeoning scholarly literature on the coming ends of the world—rhetorical and otherwise—is gaining a foothold, including: Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (2017);

Cara Daggett, "Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire," in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47(1) (2018), pp. 25–44; Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann, *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future* (2018); Stefanie R. Fishel, "Of Other Movements: Nonhuman Mobility in the Anthropocene," in *Mobilities* 14(3) (2019), pp. 351–362; Naomi Klein, *On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal* (2019); and Mauro J. Caraccioli, "A Sorrowful Storm: Between Penitence and Anthropolitics in the Anthropocene," in Daniel Bertrand Monk and Michael Sorkin, *Catastrophe and Revolution: Essays in Honor of Mike Davis* (2020).

19. Jennifer Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," in *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010), pp. 221–235.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

22. Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial*, pp. 31–63; Jeremy Ravi Mumford, *Vertical Empire: The General Resettlement of Indians in the Colonial Andes* (2012).

23. Bikrum Gill, "Can the River Speak? Epistemological Confrontation in the Rise and Fall of the Land Grab in Gambella, Ethiopia," in *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 48(4) (2016), pp. 699–717.

24. This is remarkably different concerning British and French imperialism, where there is ample work on the history of science, empire, and naturalistic observation. See: Michael A. Osborne, "Science and the French Empire," in *Isis* 96(1) (2005), pp. 80–87; Sarah Irving, *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire* (2008); Zev Trachtenberg, "John Locke: This Habitable Earth of Ours," in Peter E. Cannavò and Joseph H. Lane, Jr. (eds.), *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon* (2014), pp. 99–116; and Loïc Charles and Paul Cheney, "The Colonial Machine Dismantled: Knowledge and Empire in the French Atlantic," in *Past and Present* 219(1) (2013), pp. 127–163.

25. Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips, *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, pp. 23–24.

26. For two perspectives that challenge the one-size-fits-all depiction of liberalism, specifically from the experiences of postempire Spain, see Alec Dinnin; "Disoriented Liberalism: Ortega y Gasset in the Ruins of Empire," in *Political Theory* 47(5) (2019), pp. 619–645; see also Brendon Westler, "Between Tradition and Revolution: The Curious Case of Francisco Martínez Marina, the Cádiz Constitution, and Spanish Liberalism," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76(3) (2015), pp. 393–416.

27. For classical and late modern examples, see Trevor Murphy, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopedia* (2004); and Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being* (2009).

28. Anthony Pagden, "'The Impact of the New World On the Old': The History of an Idea," in *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 30(1) (1986), pp. 1–11. See also Charles Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (2005).

29. Surekha Davies, for example, presents highly compelling evidence for the way cartographic practices were shaped by the demands of allegedly incommensurable landscapes. See: Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (2016).

30. Harald E. Braun, *Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought* (2007); Andrés I. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists: Jesuit Science in Spanish South America, 1570–1810* (2011).

31. Jorge Cañazares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2001).

32. Skinner, "Seeing Things Their Way," *Visions of Politics, Volume I* (2002), p. 3.

33. Although the debates concerning Spain's intellectual apathy have their origin over five decades ago, some of the most exemplary statements merit consideration by historians of political thought, not least over the lasting influence of the "Black Legend" in the interpretation of sixteenth-century texts. See: Benjamin Keen, "The Black Legend Revisited: Assumptions and Realities," in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 49(4) (1969), pp. 703–719; Lewis Hanke, "A Modest Proposal for a Moratorium on Grand Generalizations: Some Thoughts on the Black Legend," in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 51(1) (1971), pp. 112–127; Benjamin Keen, "The White Legend Revisited: A Reply to Professor Hanke's 'Modest Proposal,'" in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 51(2) (1971), pp. 336–355; Steve J. Stern, "Paradigms of Conquest: History, Historiography, and Politics," in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (1992), pp. 1–34; and Richard L. Kagan, "Prescott's Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain," in *American Historical Review* 101(2) (1996), pp. 423–446.

34. Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (1949).

35. Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World* (1992), p. 15.

36. Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial*, p. 9.

37. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), p. xiii.

38. Scholars situated in the study of legal pluralism, for instance, have made significant inroads in unpacking the ways indigenous peoples in Colonial Spanish America contributed to their own domination. See: Brian P. Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico* (2011); see also Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial*. In political theory, scholars at the intersection of settler colonial studies and the history of political thought have increasingly taken on foundational concepts—such as democracy, inclusivity, and abolitionism—to offer alternative political narratives about black and indigenous subalterns, as well as a broader intellectual canon. See: Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (2018); David Myer Temin, "Custer's Sins: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Settler-Colonial Politics of Civic Inclusion," in *Political Theory* 46(3) (2018), pp. 357–379; and Tacuma Peters, "The Anti-Imperialism of Ottobah Cugoano: Slavery, Abolition, and Colonialism in Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery," in *CLR James Journal* 23(1/2) (2017), pp. 61–82.

39. Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (2007); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Entangled Histories: Borderland Historiographies in New Clothes?," in *American Historical Review* 112(3) (2007), pp. 787–799; Joshua Simon, "The Americas' More Perfect Unions: New Institutional Insights from Comparative Political Theory," in *Perspectives on Politics* 12(4) (2014), pp. 808–828.

Chapter 1. Narratives of Conquest and the Conquest of Narrative

1. Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (2007), p. 4. Courtesy of Yale University Press.

2. The most famous scholarly account of this history is Antonello Gerbi's *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900* (1973). However, as the subject of many polemics over the decades, analysis of the representations of the Americas have been taken across multiple scholarly fields, from Literary Theory through Ethnohistory. For foundational exemplars, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991); Miguel Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (1992); Mark Thurner, *History's Peru: The Poetics of Colonial and Postcolonial Historiography*;

and José Rabasa, *Tell Me The Story of How I Conquered You: Elsewheres and Ethnocide in the Colonial Mesoamerican World* (2011).

3. As Anthony Pagden has noted, New World travelers actively sought opportunities to encounter untamed landscapes, particularly as growing numbers of eyewitness reports helped mediate the projection of cultural values and desires as signs of patriotic greatness. These early accounts forged an important link between the subjective “I” and the physical eye, articulating what he calls an epistemology of possession. Experience, particularly as a form of intellectual authority, was not meant to replace the hermeneutics of texts or events, but rather, “it alone made true prudential interpretation possible.” Indeed, the obsession with crafting one’s own story was so great, that chroniclers of all walks rushed to experience the New World so that they might understand it. What they assumed about the Americas, however, was largely derivative from Iberian experiences. Anthony Pagden, “Ius et Factum: Text and Experience in the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas,” in *Representations* 33 (1991), pp. 147–162.

4. There is arguably no other empire that makes as much of an intellectual mark on the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment than Imperial Spain. The reasons for this are multiple and include: the use of conjectural history as an analytic strategy; comparative political economy in studying the decline of empires; political administrative reforms in the economic modernization of Europe; and the advent of patriotic epistemologies in the Age of Revolutions. See: Gabriel B. Paquette, “The Image of Imperial Spain in British Political Thought, 1750–1800,” in *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 81(2) (2004), pp. 187–214; Alex Du Toit, “Cosmopolitanism, Despotism and Patriotic Resistance: William Robertson on the Spanish Revolts against Charles V,” in *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 86(1) (2009), pp. 19–43; Frederick G. Whelan, “Eighteenth-Century Scottish Political Economy and the Decline of Imperial Spain,” in *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 38(1) (2018), pp. 55–72; and Lina Del Castillo, *Crafting a Republic for the World: Scientific, Geographic, and Historiographic Inventions of Colombia* (2018).

5. Narrative is a theoretical frame that overlaps with several disciplinary fields, albeit not altogether self-consciously within different paradigms. For my purposes, I have relied on the following exemplary texts—in political theory, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 10–14, where narration of the European encounter with the New World is framed as a “problem of recognition” between the fantastic and the familiar; in the history of science, see Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, pp. 11–21, where narration of the New World’s past is transformed by the rise of the “philosophical travelers” and their concern with adjudicating between historical accounts based on unreliable lived-experiences versus a new “art of reading” privileging the internal consistency of evidentiary sources; and lastly, in environmental history, see William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” in *Journal of American History* 78(4) (1992), pp. 1347–1376. As I discuss below, Cronon’s reflections of the role of narrative form in historical inquiry brought together distinct views from the traditional social sciences and what then was called “postmodernist critical theory,” a less-than-satisfying amalgamation today. Nevertheless, Cronon’s judgment here is provocative: “Because narrative is the chief literary form that tries to find meaning in an overwhelmingly crowded and disordered chronological reality,” he writes, “[when] we choose a plot to order our environmental histories, we give them a unity that neither nature nor the past possesses so clearly. In so doing, we move well beyond nature into the intensely human realm of value. There, we cannot avoid encountering the postmodernist assault on narrative, which calls into question not just the stories we tell but the deeper purpose that motivated us in the first place: trying to make sense of nature’s place in the human past.” *Ibid.*, p. 1349.

6. In addition to the History of Science, other fields associated with the “spatial” turn

(e.g., Geography, Art History, Cultural Studies) have seen a growing interest in Spanish and Portuguese natural history. See: Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (2006); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (2006); Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (2000); Daniela Bleichmar, Paula de Vos, Kristin Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan (eds.), *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500–1800* (2009); Ananda Cohen Suarez, *Heaven, Hell, and Everything in Between: Murals of the Colonial Andes* (2016); and Jaime Marroquín Arredondo and Ralph Bauer (eds.), *Translating Nature: Cross-Cultural Histories of Early Modern Science* (2019). In political theory, much of the work on the Spanish Empire remains under the purview of Anthony Pagden, who already, in his *The Fall of Natural Man*, highlighted the centrality of the sixteenth-century encounter and classification of nature in the development of early modern thought.

7. Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World*, pp. 69–99.

8. Political theorists have looked at this particular question through the intellectual development of international law and related justifications of Spanish imperial governance over its colonial territories. At stake in their readings is how indigenous peoples were dispossessed of any sovereign claim to the New World's natural environments by virtue of the proto-Lockean notion of mixing one's labor with the land. Although many thinkers before Locke—including prominent figures from the School of Salamanca like Francisco de Vitoria—saw agriculture as the defining feature of a civilized polity, the concept is articulated most famously in: John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (1988), p. 301 (§49). See also Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 57–108; and Beate Jahn, *The Cultural Construction of International Relations: The Invention of the State of Nature* (2000).

9. For a broad survey of the ways nature is discussed by canonical political theorists, see the essays in: Cannavò and Lane, Jr., *Engaging Nature*. See also Barbara A. Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (eds.), *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2008).

10. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1985); see also Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume I (1990).

11. Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), p. 26.

12. See: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (1962); see also David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," in *History and Theory* 25(2) (1986), pp. 117–131.

13. Thurner, *History's Peru*, p. 2.

14. William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," in *Journal of American History* 78(4) (1992), p. 1369.

15. Leslie Paul Thiele, "Evolutionary Narratives and Ecological Ethics," in *Political Theory* 27(1) (1999), pp. 6–38.

16. David Goodman, *Power and Penury: Government, Technology and Science in Philip II's Spain* (2002); see also Maria M. Portuondo, *Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World*, (2009) pp. 103–108.

17. J. H. Elliot, *Spain, Europe, and the Wider World, 1500–1800* (2009), p. 6.

18. John L. Phelan, "Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy," in *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5(1) (1960), pp. 47–65.

19. Broadly encompassed under the umbrella of the so-called School of Salamanca, or Sec-

ond Scholastic, Jesuit priests such as Molina and Miranda were not just theologians. Deeply invested in the practical implications of a changing Spanish landscape, they were also responsible for translating the metaphysical and normative ideals of Francisco de Vitoria into political matters concerning economics and the rule of law. See: Bernice Hamilton, *Political Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (1963); see also Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 60–61; and Braun, *Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought*, pp. 21–25.

20. Recent work in Imperial Studies has taken on these very themes, establishing different analytic positions concerning the empire's political flexibility. On the metropolis side, Orlando Bentancor's *The Matter of Empire: Metaphysics and Mining in Colonial Peru* (2017) considers the epistemological assumptions of Scholastic political thought as an ideology of material domination, particularly as it shaped attitudes about silver extraction in Colonial Peru and arguably today. According to Bentancor, "[examining] the interactions between early political writings and writings on mining will show that the particular confluence of Iberian imperial practices and philosophical ideas in the Americas frames technological and capitalist modernity as both an imperial and metaphysical project. . . . A systematic examination of metaphysical language employed in distinct disciplines allows us to narrate how the view of both nature and humans as malleable material is the result of the instrumentalist propositions inherent in imperial ideology." See: pp. 1–2. Similarly, yet from the perspective of indigenous political thought and the writing of history, James W. Fuerst's *New World Postcolonial: The Political Thought of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega* (2018) recovers the work of El Inca Garcilaso as a political theorist examining the cyclical decline and regeneration of postconquest Peru. For Fuerst, the "imperial turn" heralded by Pitts "may finally be creating space for new critical perspectives on the history of political thought as well as the inclusion of traditionally excluded or marginalized figures in a field that has predominantly focused on European writers and thinkers. As advances in colonial and postcolonial studies have shown us, however, the various forms of European imperialism and colonialism were not simply about what Europeans thought, wrote, or did; they were also, and continue to be, about the complex, constrained, and creative ways those whom Europeans sought to dominate or even vanquish struggled to survive, adapt, resist, and respond" (see p. 2). Both texts diligently translate the peculiarities of Spanish Empire in order to build new directions in contemporary political theory; in that spirit, I see my own argument in dialogue with theirs.

21. Antonello Gerbi, *Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo* (1985); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Chivalric Epistemology and Patriotic Narratives: Iberian Colonial Science," in *Nature, Empire, and Nation* (2006), pp. 7–13; Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, pp. 81–100.

22. Shawn Miller, *An Environmental History of Latin America* (2007), p. 2.

23. Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France* (1995), pp. 40–46. See also Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "The Colonial Iberian Roots of the Scientific Revolution," in *Nature, Empire, and Nation* (2006), pp. 14–45.

24. Franklin W. Knight, "Las Casas and the Utopian View of the Americas," in Bartolomé de Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies with Related Texts* (2003), pp. xlvi–l.

25. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan (eds.), *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (2007), p. 6.

26. Cañizares-Esguerra, "The Colonial Iberian Roots of the Scientific Revolution," pp. 17–20; see also Cañizares-Esguerra, "How Derivative Was Humboldt?," pp. 112–128.
27. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Iberian Science in the Renaissance: Ignored How Much Longer?" in *Perspectives on Science* 12(1) (2004), p. 95.
28. Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (2002); see also Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial*, pp. 1–30.
29. Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination*, pp. 91–116; Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, pp. 266–345; Karen Stolley, *Domesticating Empire: Enlightenment in Spanish America* (2013), pp. 84–113; Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial*, pp. 1–30.
30. Rolena Adorno, *Colonial Latin American Literature* (2011), pp. 12–20.
31. Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, p. 3.
32. While growing in numbers, for a classic statement on the shifting attitudes within scientific inquiry in the early modern era, see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (1994). See also María Portuondo, "Constructing a Narrative: The History of Science and Technology in Latin America," in *History Compass* 7(2) (2009), pp. 500–522. The literature on how these changes affected colonial practices in the New World is equally vast, ranging from Todorov's description of the encounter as a meeting of two cultures with different systems of epistemic and cultural authority (i.e., written versus oral traditions), to contemporary anthropological accounts, such as Charles Mann's *1491*, which account for greater levels of diversity (and transformation of the environment) among indigenous populations than had been previously attributed by contemporary scholarship. See: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (1999), pp. 175–182; Mann, *1491*, pp. 12–15. See also Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, pp. 14–16; and Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (1993), pp. 51–86.
33. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 6.
34. Portuondo, *Secret Science*, pp. 2–3. See also Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*, pp. 91–134.
35. Debates over the origins and historical age of the Americas have taken place over centuries. For extensive documentation of their origins, contexts, and protagonists, see Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, pp. 3–11; Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World*, pp. 3–34; and Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, pp. 49–59.
36. Federico G. Carvajal, *Butterflies Will Burn: Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico* (2003).
37. Zhenja La Rosa, "Language and Empire: The Vision of Nebrija," in *Loyola University Student Historical Journal* 27 (1995–96). Online: <http://www.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1995-6/rosa.htm>.
38. Carvajal, pp. 15–38.
39. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (2006), pp. 34–55.
40. Alexandre Coello de la Rosa, "Representing the New World's Nature: Wonder and Exoticism in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdes Historical Reflections," in *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 28(1) (2002), pp. 73–92; Jeremy Paden, "The Iguana and the Barrel of Mud: Memory, Natural History, and Hermeneutics in Oviedo's Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias," in *Colonial Latin American Review* 16(2) (2007), pp. 203–226.

41. Kathleen Ann Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America: A New History for a New World* (2007), p. 80.
42. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias*, *ibid.*, p. 150.
43. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies* (2003), pp. 4–8, 12–13, 38; see also Katherine Anne Thompson, (2010) “Monsters in Paradise: The Representation of the Natural World in the *Historias* of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo,” unpublished doctoral dissertation (2010), University of Maryland.
44. Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, p. 38.
45. Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, pp. 152–177.
46. Rolena Adorno, *Colonial Latin American Literature*, pp. 30–31. See also Thompson, “Monsters in Paradise,” pp. 35–67; and Diego A. von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity, and Latin America/Hispanic Political Thought* (2012), pp. 26–55.
47. Quoted in Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America*, p. 34. See also Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la natural historia*, ed. Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois (2002).
48. Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America*, pp. 63–68.
49. In studying the trans-Atlantic character of the chivalric genre, Cañizares-Esguerra describes the transformation of the chivalric epic into a satanic epic as a common heritage of both Spanish and English Creoles in the Americas. See: Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, pp. 83–119.
50. Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, pp. 79–81; see also Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (2003).
51. Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, pp. 44–48.
52. H. M. Höpfl, “From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *Journal of British Studies* 17(2) (1978), pp. 19–40.
53. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* (1985), Volume I, p. 33.
54. Laura Ammon, “Bernardino de Sahagún, José de Acosta and the Sixteenth-Century Theology of Sacrifice in New Spain,” in *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 12(2) (2000). Online: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v012/12.2.ammon.html; see also Anthony Pagden, “Diego de Landa in Mexico,” in *History Today* 25(7) (1975). Online: <http://www.historytoday.com/anthony-pagden/diego-de-landa-mexico>
55. Daniel Defert, “The Collection of the World: Accounts of Voyages from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Dialectical Anthropology* 7(1) (1982), pp. 11–20.
56. Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears* (1992); Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. from the Aztec into English, with notes and illus., by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (1950–1982).
57. Henry M. Reeves, “Sahagún's ‘Florentine Codex,’ A Little Known Aztec Natural History of the Valley of Mexico,” in *Archives of Natural History* 33 (2006), pp. 302–321.
58. Diego de Landa, *Yucatan: Before and After the Conquest* (1978).
59. For a broad range of accounts documenting the indispensable role of indigenous intellectuals, see Gabriela Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis (eds.), *Indigenous Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, and Colonial Culture in Mexico and the Andes* (2014).
60. Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (1991), pp. 249–280; “Ammon, “Bernardino de Sahagún, José de Acosta and the Sixteenth-Century Theology of Sacrifice in New Spain.”
61. Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*.

62. MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes*, pp. 249–280.
63. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, pp. 25–26.
64. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (2002), p. 193. For a critical genealogy of what silver mining ideologically represented for Scholastic-minded thinkers like Acosta, see Bentancor, *The Matter of Empire*, pp. 151–216.
65. Cañizares-Esguerra, “Chivalric Epistemology and Patriotic Narratives,” p. 8; Prieto, *Missionary Scientists*, p. 106.
66. Despite a lack of work on the political objectives of their expeditions, there is a growing secondary literature focusing on the role that Hernández and Acosta’s work played in the emergence of a scientific visual culture in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish Empire. Much of this work focuses on the use of indigenous artists and the role that natural philosophy could play as a commercial, hence modernizing, enterprise. See: Bleichmar, *Visible Empire*, pp. 17–42.
67. Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, pp. 17–18 and 77–78; see also Bentancor, pp. 158–175.
68. Simon Varey (ed.), *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernández* (2000), p. 262, lines 21–23.
69. Carmen Benito-Vessels, “Hernández in Mexico: Exile and Censorship?” in Simon Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature: The Life and Works of Dr. Francisco Hernández* (2000), pp. 41–54.
70. Barrera-Osorio, *Experience Nature*, p. 8.
71. Stolley, *Domesticating Empire*, p. 8.
72. Larrie D. Ferreiro, *Measure of the Earth: The Enlightenment Expedition That Reshaped Our World* (2011); Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (2012).
73. Nicolás Wey-Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (2008).
74. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*, pp. 29–60.
75. One recent scholarly exception has been the diaries of nuns. See: Sarah E. Owens, *Nuns Navigating the Spanish Empire* (2017).
76. Adorno, *Colonial Latin American Literature*, pp. 63–94. For an eighteenth-century analogue, see Emily Berquist Soule, *The Bishop’s Utopia: Envisioning Improvement in Colonial Peru* (2014).
77. Mauricio Nieto Olarte, *Remedios para el imperio: historia natural y la apropiación del Nuevo Mundo* (2000), p. 13 [my translation].
78. Barrera-Osorio, *Experience Nature*, pp. 79–80.
79. For one recent example of this conceptualization, see Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici (eds.), *Centering Animals in Latin American History* (2013).
80. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, pp. 178–214.

Chapter 2. Oviedo, Las Casas, and the Difference That Made Nature

1. From Fernández de Oviedo’s *Chronicle of America: A New History for a New World* by Kathleen Ann Myers, trans. Nina M. Scott, Copyright ©2007. By Permission of the University of Texas Press.
2. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies with Related Texts* (2003), p. 1.
3. William Eamon, “The Difference That Made Spain, The Difference That Spain Made,”

in John Slater, Maríaluz López-Terrada, and José Pardo-Tomás (eds.), *Medical Cultures of the Early Modern Spanish Empire* (2014), p. 233.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

5. Though no complete translation exists of Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias*, Kathleen Ann Myers has compiled a substantive history of the man and companion to his work in: *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America: A New History for a New World* (2007). For Las Casas, I will refer to his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (Madrid: Sarpe, 1985), as well as Andrew Hurley's translation, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies with Related Texts* (2003).

6. Jennifer Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," p. 211

7. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 27–56; see also Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, pp. 52–85.

8. Especially important to point out here are Special Issues in the journal *History and Theory*—one by Brian Fay et al. concerning "Environment and History" (42: 4) (Dec. 2003) and another by Philip Pomper et al., "Theorizing Empire" (44: 4) (Dec. 2005). Both of these collections refer to the questions I raise in isolation of each other. Interestingly, it is Pagden's essay within the second issue that addresses some of the paradoxes at stake in the question of empire and the natural environment. "Because of the European belief in the interdependence of tribe and place," he points out, "which is also taken to imply that each people has an inalienable right, grounded in nature rather than in the political or civil order, to be ruled only by a member of their own tribe or clan, 'empire,' understood as rulership over others, has always presented particular theoretical difficulties for Europeans, which most other imperial peoples have not had to face." The experiences I will document below are illustrative of these difficulties. See Anthony Pagden, "Fellow Citizens and Imperial Subjects: Conquest and Sovereignty in Europe's Overseas Empire," in *Theory and History* 44(4) (2005), p. 29. See also Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, pp. 204–265.

9. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 119–197.

10. Katherine A. Gordy, *Living Ideology in Cuba: Socialism in Principle and Practice* (2015); Joshua Simon, *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin American Political Thought* (2017); Thea Riofrancos, "Scaling Democracy: Participation and Resource Extraction in Latin America," in *Perspectives on Politics* 15(3) (September 2017), pp. 678–696.

11. Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," p. 213.

12. For three recent exemplars, see Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire* (2004); Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (2010); and Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (2016).

13. Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory" in *Perspectives on Politics* 2(2) (2004), pp. 249–257; see also Joshua Simon, "Simon Bolivar's Republican Imperialism: Another Ideology of American Revolution," in *History of Political Thought* 33(2) (2012), pp. 280–304.

14. Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," p. 213.

15. David Armitage, "The Fifty Years' Rift: Intellectual History and International Relations," in *Modern Intellectual History* 1(1) (2004), pp. 97–109; see also David Armitage, "The International Turn in Intellectual History," in Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (eds.), *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (2014), pp. 232–252; Mark Shirk, "Bringing the State Back In' to the Empire Turn: Piracy and the Layered Sovereignty of the Eighteenth Century Atlantic," in *International Studies Review* 19(2) (2017), pp. 143–165; and Jeppe Mulich,

“Transformation at the Margins: Imperial Expansion and Systemic Change in World Politics,” in *Review of International Studies* 44(4) (2018), pp. 694–716.

16. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri frame that global order as part and parcel of an encroaching neoliberal model of governance, a “logic of rule” with a global scope. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000). Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, however, are less sanguine about such a uniform definition, as they recognize the Eurocentric character of imperial histories. In their words, “lack of attention to the practical political, economic and military business of imperial governance, historical or contemporary,” makes any generalized analysis of empire “ultimately crippling” to the objectives of international history. See Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, “Retrieving the Imperial: Empire and International Relations,” in *Millennium* 31(1) (2002), p. 111. See also Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Political Thought* (1999); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (2005); and more recently, Onur Ulas Ince, *Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism* (2018).

17. Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism,” p. 215.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Pitts spends a great deal of her review essay cataloguing these efforts far more efficiently than I can here. Salient among these endeavors, however, is the increasing attention exhibited by theorists to the “internal tensions” within liberalism and the broader “family resemblances” between projects of cultural, i.e., colonial, transformation, and political exclusion. See Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism,” pp. 216–218. See also Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (2005). More recently, see Jeanne Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (2014); and Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (2019).

20. Much of contemporary political theory today can be characterized as an unstable overlapping consensus, as theorists have arguably embraced the language of rights and justice as the dominant discourses of any possible international legal framework, while simultaneously failing to see liberalism’s paradoxes as sources of contradiction. See the essays by Jack Donnelly, “Human Rights,” pp. 601–620, and Chris Brown, “From International to Global Justice?,” pp. 621–635, in John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*.

21. Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism,” p. 217.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 218–219.

23. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 8.

24. Pocock, in particular, has highlighted Spain’s place in the broader Scottish Enlightenment story of European progress. See J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume 4: Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (2005), pp. 181–191.

25. For example, in a recent edited volume on empire and modern political thought, two contributors engage with Spain’s place in the modern history of empire. On the one hand, Anthony Pagden’s essay elaborates on the ideological difficulties Imperial Spain encountered while incorporating New World territories into its legal codes. Michael Mosher, on the other hand, reads Montesquieu’s anticolonial reading of empire to reproduce the kind of logic that portrays Dutch and English colonialisms as economically progressive, while Spain and Portugal are seen as aggressively decadent. The conflicting conclusions are by no means discussed as an asset or limitation of the field. That there are dissenting opinions seems to be regarded as par for the course, rather than central to the historiography. See Anthony Pagden, “Conquest

and the Just War: The 'School of Salamanca' and the 'Affair of the Indies,'" pp. 30–60; and Michael Mosher, "Montesquieu on Empire and Enlightenment," pp. 112–154, in Sankar Muthu (ed.), *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (2012).

26. Stanley Hoffman, "An American Social Science: International Relations," in *Daedalus* 106(3) (1977), p. 59.

27. Martin C. Ortega, "Vitoria and the Universalist Conception of International Relations," in Ian Clark and Iver B. Neumann (eds.), *Classical Theories of International Relations* (1999), pp. 99–119; Adrien Jahier, "Francisco de Vitoria and On the American Indians: A Modern Contribution to International Relations," in *e-International Relations*, Sept. 24, 2009. Online: <http://www.e-ir.info/2009/09/24/francisco-de-vitoria-and-on-the-american-indians-a-modern-contribution-to-international-relations/>; Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (2004); Jahn, *The Cultural Construction of International Relations* (2000).

28. Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, "Retrieving the Imperial: Empire and International Relations," in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31(1), pp. 109–127.

29. Edward Keene, *International Political Thought: A Historical Introduction* (2005), p. 118.

30. As David Armitage has noted, the long-awaited return of history into the study of International Relations highlights "the maturity of the history of international thought as a subfield of intellectual history," and in the process has opened "new conversations between historians, political theorists, International Relations scholars and international lawyers which would be continuous with those before the modern contest of the faculties drove them so forcefully, though not irreversibly, apart." See David Armitage, "The Fifty Years' Rift: Intellectual History and International Relations," in *Modern Intellectual History* 1(1) (2004), p. 109.

31. According to Pagden, the Amerindian "savage," "was believed to live in a world of his own making, a world of extremes, of inexplicable and frequently repellent ritual behaviour, a world controlled by passion rather than reason." The idea of the "savage critic" came to replace "natural man" as an inversion of previously held stereotypes about Amerindians. Through fictional accounts of natives' encounters with the European world—most notably Denis Diderot's Tahitian sage Orou, seen in his *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville*—the "savage critic" attacks "civil man" as the one "who [has] failed to see what is written in the book of nature: that in the end it is we who have failed to grasp what it means to be human." See Anthony Pagden, "The Savage Critic: Some European Images of the Primitive," in *The Yearbook of English Studies* 13: *Colonial and Imperial Themes Special Issue* (1983), p. 33.

32. Somewhat beyond the scope of this project, Pagden focuses on changing notions of the "barbarian" as a figure who is distinguishable as an *individual* and not merely a philosophical category. According to Las Casas, so-called barbarians—who were able to use language, practice civil friendship and community, and possess the capacity for creating "active happiness" as the source of spiritual purposes—had an intrinsic value to their existence, particularly in light of their ability to embrace Christianity. See Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 119–145. Pagden contrasts Las Casas's program, however, with the historical work of José de Acosta, who argued that it was necessary to take the world of the Amerindians as a factual historical subject, where "the history of the 'real' but remote Indian world could illuminate the historical process itself and that by studying such a seemingly alien society [Acosta's] European readers might come to understand something about the natural behavior of all human communities including their own." *Ibid.*, p. 150. In the end, Pagden sees both men as part of a complementary framework for a larger historiographical project, a view underlying the present work.

33. Bentancor, *The Matter of Empire*, pp. 40–94.

34. Both Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Antonio Barrera-Osorio, e.g., have lamented the lack of attention on the part of historians (much like Pagden has done for political theorists) on the crucial role that Iberian travelers, cosmographers, clergy, and members of the colonial bureaucracy played in the instituting of empire and the early modern scientific revolution in European thought. According to one recent dissertation on the subject, “The inability of established systems of knowledge and classification to account for the new reality called into question the foundations upon which those systems were built, threatening to undermine their legitimacy and ultimately opening the way for epistemological changes which would enable the flowering of natural history as a discipline and later serve as a cornerstone for the Scientific Revolution.” There is thus a great paradox in Enlightenment historiography, a larger anti-Iberian bias that colors the history of science and empire as strictly Protestant possessions, despite their Catholic origins. See Katherine Anne Thompson, “Monsters in Paradise: The Representation of the Natural World in the *Historias* of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2010, University of Maryland, pp. 3–6; see also Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*; and Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*.

35. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, p. 24.

36. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 6.

37. In Las Casas’s case, especially, the *Brevísima relación* (*Abbreviated Account*) is a condensed version of the many volumes of ethnographic observation—both personal and anecdotal—that informed his impassioned “defense” of the Indians delivered at the Debate at Valladolid. More specifically, it was Las Casas’s *Apologética Historia Sumaria de las Gentes destas Indias* (*Apologetic History of the Indies*, completed around 1560, but never published) that served as the empirical basis of the more well-known *Apología* (translated as *In Defense of the Indians*) first published in 1550. The *Abbreviated Account* intervened in the larger debate as a utopian narrative that portrayed the New World environment as the antithesis to so-called European modernity. See Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*, pp. 61–98.

38. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 24.

39. For Todorov, writing is what ultimately marks the “triumph” of Europeans over the Amerindians. The symbolism of the written word, while favoring “improvisation over ritual,” divorces human contact and communication from the world, generating the self-doubt that is essential to the imposition of hierarchy over relativity. See Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, pp. 251–252. Walter Mignolo singles out this attitude as part of the “remarkable tendency [in the West] to link history with rhetoric instead of philosophy,” interpreting the absence of a literary language as a sign of a people’s barbarism. See Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 136. According to this perspective, it was from a particular standpoint on the writing of history that “Spanish men of letters appointed themselves to write the history that Amerindians could not properly write because of their lack of letters.” *Ibid.*, p. 129.

40. Barrera-Osorio, for instance, discusses at length how “rules and practices for the collection, organization, and dissemination of information regarding the natural world of the Indies” emerged from complex imperial networks and institutions. Moreover, Spain’s Atlantic experience had an important effect on “the ways in which empirical information was used for the production of new knowledge,” in particular “the institutionalization of empirical practices at the House of Trade and Council of Indies, together with the books that were then written about these practices.” See Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, pp. 1–2.

41. Originally published in 1519, the *Libro del muy esforzado e invencible caballero de la For-*

tuna propiamente llamado Don Claribalte was written while Oviedo acted as a mine overseer in Hispaniola and Panama in the years between 1519 and 1523. For more on *Don Claribalte*'s place in Oviedo's style, see Stephanie Merrim, "The Castle of Discourse: Fernández de Oviedo's *Don Claribalte* (1519) or 'Los correos andan más que los caballeros,'" in *Modern Language Notes* 97(2) (1982), pp. 329–346.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 330–331.

43. As Antonello Gerbi tells it, "There were deeper reasons for the quarrel" between Oviedo and Las Casas. Beyond contrasting perceptions of the New World's inherent value, many of these differences rested on the normative assumptions of what the New World's history was for. See Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, pp. 353–360.

44. Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America*, p. 1.

45. The phrase is attributed to the historian Pascual de Gayangos, "Discurso preliminar y Catálogo razonado de los libros de caballerías que hay en lengua castellana o portuguesa, hasta el año de 1800," in *Libros de Caballerías* (1857), p. xlvii.

46. Andrés I. Prieto, "Classification, Memory, and Subjectivity in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia* (1526)," in *Modern Language Notes* 124(2) (2009), p. 330.

47. Consider Barbara Fuchs's claim that, "when researchers in our own time uncritically rehearse the supposed repetition of the Reconquista in the Conquista, and celebrate the 'authentic' Spanishness of both, they participate in a construction of Spain as single-mindedly Christian, free of the Semitic 'taint.' This negates not only the rich multicultural experience of the medieval al-Andalus . . . but also the deliberate, calculated mimetization of one conquest into the other as a sixteenth-century strategy to encourage Spanish efforts at expansion and cultural homogenization on both the American and the Mediterranean fronts." See Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (2001), p. 8. See also Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (1995).

48. My emphasis. See Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 12.

49. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias*, ed. Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois (2002), p. 73. My translation of the following original text: "[No] está averiguado si son animal o pescado, porque ellas andan en el agua y en los árboles y por tierra, y tienen cuatro pies, y son mayores que conejos, y tienen cola de lagarto, y la piel toda pintada, y de aquella manera de pellejo, aunque diverso y apartado en la pintura, y por el cerro o espinazo unas espinas levantadas y agudos dientes y colmillos."

50. Prieto, "Classification, Memory, and Subjectivity in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia* (1526)," pp. 336–342; see also Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, pp. 280–286; and Stephanie Merrim, "The Apprehension of the New in Nature and Culture: Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario*," in René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini (eds.), *Re/Discovering Colonial Writing* (1991), pp. 165–199.

51. Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America*, p. 77.

52. Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, p. 139.

53. Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias*, p. 55. My translation of the following original text: "[La] cosa que más conserva y sostiene las obras de natura en la memoria de los mortales, son las historias y los libros en que se hallan escritas."

54. Prieto, "Classification, Memory, and Subjectivity in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia* (1526)," pp. 345–346.

55. Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, p. 353.

56. Little has been written about Las Casas's role in the utopian literary tradition of the early Renaissance. In his lifetime, Las Casas attempted to enact a utopian community on the margins of Spanish rule (on the coast of Venezuela), blurring the lines of so-called civilization and barbarism by putting Indians to work side-by-side with Spaniards. Though the project known as *La Vera Paz* (1520–1521) failed, Las Casas's efforts were captured in his book *Memorial of Remedies for the Indies* (1990). The text was published in Holland months before the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*, though how strong the links were between the two men and other utopian texts has not been a subject of much scholarly inquiry. For an exception, see Victor N. Baptiste, *Bartolomé de Las Casas and Thomas More's "Utopia": Connections and Similarities. A Translation and Study* (1990).

57. Much of the attention surrounding the *Brevísima relación* and its depiction of Spanish violence overshadows Las Casas's own commitments to a Spanish imperial project, albeit under less noxious parameters. More specifically, Las Casas has been singled out in contemporary scholarship as representing "another face of empire" in two ways: first, through his advocacy for importing Africans to replace Indians as slaves; second was his calling for a kind of "ecclesiastical imperialism" under Spanish rule, where the monarchy was encouraged to take up their role as sovereigns of the Christian world in protecting and converting Amerindians. For more on these two legacies, see Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights, and Ecclesiastical Imperialism* (2007), pp. 1–16; 63–104.

58. Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, p. 5

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

60. Santa Arias, "The Geopolitics of Historiography from Europe to the Americas," in Barney Wharf and Santa Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2009), p. 126.

61. Discussions of monsters, demons, and other creatures that inhabited the early universe of the Americas takes one back to the experience of wonder that was so characteristic of New World encounters. According to an alternative reading, for Las Casas it is the sacred and demonic, not the culturally different, that pervades the unknown causes of monstrosities and strangeness in the New World. See Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, pp. 120–177.

62. Anthony Pagden, "Ius et Factum: Text and Experience in the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas," p. 149.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

64. The verses read as follows: "[21] The bread of the needy is their life: he that defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood. [22] He that taketh away his neighbour's living slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the labourer of his hire is a bloodshedder." Old Testament, King James Version.

65. Pagden, "Ius et Factum," p. 152.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

67. Despite being a philosophical, juridical, and arguably scientific leader in the 100 years after the encounter, the Spanish Crown was no friend to the principles, figures, and arguments that shaped the scientific revolution taking place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The "new philosophies," as Pagden points out, were considered heretical as a result of their close affinities with Cartesian thought, and particularly their rejection of transubstantiation and association with heretical sects. The focus of the accusations, however, would eventually be deviated by "[shifting] attention from the substance of the arguments to the status of the person holding them." The figure of Descartes was in effect secularized; his writings were thought to "be orthodox since the man who created them had himself led such an exemplary

life.” This textual and experiential tactic led what is known as the *Regia Sociedad* to thrive and eventually become the *Real Academia de Medicina*, a central pillar in secularizing the Spanish education system. See Anthony Pagden, “The Reception of the ‘New Philosophy’ in Eighteenth-Century Spain,” in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988), p. 133.

68. As Federico Carvajal points out, “Far from being a generalized colonial condition,” visions of gender, masculinity, deviance, and cultural competition born out of the period of the *Reconquista*, “emerged as a specific practice of Spanish imperial rule in its attempt to textualize ‘just causes’ of cultural domination.” See Carvajal, *Butterflies Will Burn*, p. 6.

69. von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship*, p. 36.

70. According to von Vacano, at stake in Las Casas’s juxtaposition of the Amerindians’ beauty (“handsome and easy on the eye”) with the Spaniard’s animal-like behavior (as “inhuman and unjust barbarians”) is “not the idea of how different cultures can be seen as similar in some way; rather, it is about the categorical definitions about what counts as human,” at some level a naturalist claim. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

71. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 83.

72. Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, p. 26.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

74. At one point in his defense of the natural slavery thesis, Sepúlveda frames the relation between Europeans and Indians in absolute terms: “Compare the gifts of magnanimity, temperance, humanity and religion of these men [the Spaniards] . . . with those *homunculi* [i.e., the Indians] in whom hardly a vestige of humanity remains.” See Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 117. See also Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, “A Treatise on the Just Causes for War Against the Indians,” in Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, pp. 103–105.

75. For comparative analysis of the debate, see Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé De Las Casas and Juan Ginés De Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (1994).

76. Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism,” p. 213.

Chapter 3. The Anthropolitics of Bernardino de Sahagún

1. Bernardino de Sahagún, “The Ahuizotl,” in *Florentine Codex*, trans. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson (1963), Book XI, p. 55. Courtesy of the University of Utah Press. Translation of the following original text: “Es tamaño como un perrillo, tiene el pelo muy lezne y pequeño, tiene las orejitas pequeñas y puntiagudas, tiene en cuerpo negro y muy liso, tiene la cola larga y en el cabo de la cola una como mano de persona; tiene pies y manos, y las manos y pies como de mona; habita este animal en los profundos manantiales de las aguas; y si alguna persona llega a la orilla del agua donde él habita, luego le arrebatara con la mano de la cola, y le mete debajo del agua, y lleva al profundo, y luego turba el agua y le hace vertir y levantar olas.” See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* (1985), Volume 2, p. 648.

2. Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (1966).

3. Peter Pels, *Colonial Subjects. Essays in the Practical History of Anthropology* (2000), p. 35.

4. Kennan Ferguson, “Why Does Political Science Hate American Indians?,” in *Perspectives on Politics* 14(4) (2016), pp. 1029–1038.

5. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003), pp. 187–202.

6. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, pp. 60–129; James

Tully, "Rediscovering America," in *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (1993), pp. 137–178.

7. Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist* (2002), p. 9.

8. For an alternate perspective, see Orlando Bentancor, *The Matter of Empire*, pp. 1–39.

9. As Anthony Pagden has noted, many of these early accounts forged an epistemology of possession. Experience, as a form of intellectual authority, was not meant to replace the hermeneutics of texts or events, but rather, "it alone made true prudential interpretation possible." See Anthony Pagden, "Ius et Factum: Text and Experience in the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas," in *Representations* 33 (1991), p. 154. See also Antonello Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*; and Cañizares-Esguerra, *How To Write the History of the New World*.

10. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, pp. 35–82.

11. Pagden, "Diego de Landa in Mexico," in *History Today* 25(7) (1975). Online: <http://www.historytoday.com/anthony-pagden/diego-de-landa-mexico>.

12. Ammon, "Bernardino de Sahagún, José de Acosta and the Sixteenth-Century Theology of Sacrifice in New Spain."

13. Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, p. 241; see also Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 187.

14. Ammon, "Bernardino de Sahagún, José de Acosta and the Sixteenth-Century Theology of Sacrifice in New Spain."

15. Bernardino de Sahagún, "Prologue to Book XI," in *Florentine Codex*, Book I, p. 88.

16. John Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (1970).

17. Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, p. 34.

18. *Ibid.*

19. The controversial question of how Sahagún conquered his own interpreters to write a kind of history that stripped them of their place as victims has generated new interest by ethnohistorians. The issue is particularly salient for this project as one of the questions I explore is the extent to which Sahagún's silence on certain concepts discussed in Book XI can be interpreted as instances of sympathy, or censure. See Rabasa, *Tell Me The Story of How I Conquered You*, pp. 106–129.

20. As Todorov has pointed out, in writing a history of conquest by and for indigenous peoples, Sahagún was "putting his own knowledge in the service of the preservation of the native culture," acknowledging a greater potential for intercultural dialogue than others. See Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, p. 237.

21. Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (1994), p. 15.

22. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book I, p. 45.

23. Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World*, p. 40.

24. Ammon, "Bernardino de Sahagún, Jose de Acosta and the Sixteenth-Century Theology of Sacrifice in New Spain."

25. Pete Sigal, "Queer Nahuatl: Sahagún's Faggots and Sodomites, Lesbians and Hermaphrodites," in *Ethnohistory* 54(1) (2007), pp. 9–34; see also Kelly McDonough, *The Learned Ones: Nahuatl Intellectuals in Postconquest Mexico* (2014); Amy Huras, "Communicating Faith: Language and Extirpation in the Seventeenth-Century Archdiocese of Lima," in *Colonial Latin American Review* 28(2) (2019), pp. 197–228; and Allison Margaret Bigelow, *Mining Language: Racial Thinking, Indigenous Knowledge, and Colonial Metallurgy in the Early Modern Iberian World* (2020).

26. Sigal, "Queer Nahuatl," p. 14.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

28. While one of Imperial Spain's most long-standing contributions to the canon of Western political thought is the concept of a state of nature, contemporary accounts of its origins largely circumvent the scientific, anthropological, and naturalist work of Spanish missionaries that inform it. A broader understanding of that empirical foundation would contribute greatly to clarifying the concept's political implications and its divergent trajectories within early modern thought. Beate Jahn, for example, traces the concept of the state of nature—and particularly its centrality to International Relations (IR) theorizing—to the legal debates between Spaniards over the humanity of Amerindians. Neither Spain's imperial objectives nor the Amerindians' pagan practices represented enough reason to have this debate. Indeed, Jahn argues, it was the very challenge of New World environments to “the cultural meaning of the world—established through European historical experiences and interpreted through the prism of the Christian faith” that justified having the argument. Yet while Jahn's text captures a formative moment in the break with the medieval world and the construction of a conceptual state of nature, it is perhaps also an illustrative example of the types of readings that histories of international relations must be careful to engage with and unpack. It is interesting to note, for example, that Jahn's argument cuts itself from its historical referent at the moment where perhaps the culture-nature dynamic it deploys is at its most tense and profound: at the cusp of the Spiritual Conquest and its demand for greater ethnographic and naturalist knowledge. See Jahn, *The Cultural Construction of International Relations*, pp. 113–131.

29. J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún* (1988); Walden Browne, *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity* (2000).

30. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 74.

31. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, pp. 44–68; see also Andrés I. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists: Jesuit Science in Spanish South America, 1570–1810* (2011).

32. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, p. 31.

33. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1985), Volume 2, pp. 704–705.

34. *Ibid.*, Volume 1, p. 33.

35. Millie Gimmel, “An Ecocritical Evaluation of Book XI of the Florentine Codex,” in Thomas Hallock, Ivo Kamps, and Karen L. Raber (eds.), *Early Modern Ecostudies* (2008), p. 176.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

37. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España*, Volume 2, p. 235.

38. Henry M. Reeves, “Sahagún's ‘Florentine Codex,’ A Little Known Aztec Natural History of the Valley of Mexico,” in *Archives of Natural History* 33 (2006), p. 317.

39. Jill Leslie McKeever Furst, *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico* (1995), p. 17.

40. Bernardino de Sahagún, Book XI: *Earthly Things*, in *Florentine Codex*, p. 25.

41. Furst, *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico*, p. 31.

42. Gimmel, “An Ecocritical Evaluation of Book XI of the Florentine Codex,” pp. 171–175.

43. My translation of the following original text: “El segundo lugar donde había antiguamente muchos sacrificios, a los cuales venían de lejas tierras, es cabe la sierra de Tlaxcala, donde había un templo que se llamaba *Toci*, donde concurrían gran multitud de gente a la celebridad de esta fiesta *Toci*, que quiere decir ‘nuestra abuela,’ y por otro nombre se llama

Tzapotlatenan, que quiere decir ‘la diosa de los temazcales y de las medicinas.’ Y después acá edificaron allí una iglesia de Sancta Ana, donde agora hay monesterios y religiosos de nuestro padre San Francisco, y los naturales llámanla *Toci*, y concurren a esta fiesta de más de cuarenta leguas gente a la fiesta de *Toci*. Y llaman así a Sancta Ana, tomado ocasión de los predicadores que dizen porque Sancta Ana es abuela de todos los cristianos, y así lo han llamado y llaman en el púlpito: *Toci*, que quiere decir ‘nuestra abuela.’ Y todas las gentes que vienen como antiguamente a la fiesta de *Toci*, vienen so color de Sancta Ana, pero como el vocablo es equívoco y tienen respecto a lo antiguo, más se cree que vienen por lo antiguo no por lo moderno [*sic*].” See Sahagún, Book XI: *Earthly Things*, in *Florentine Codex*, pp. 1050–1051.

44. James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest* (1996).

45. Gimmel, “An Ecocritical Evaluation of Book XI of the Florentine Codex,” p. 176.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

47. Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (1981).

48. Goodman, *Power and Penury*; see also Eamon, “The Difference That Made Spain, The Difference That Spain Made.”

49. Einar Wigen defines the study of “interlingual relations” as: “the processes that enable meaningful social interaction across linguistic and hence also political borders.” See Einar Wigen, “Two-Level Language Games: International Relations as Inter-Lingual Relations,” in *European Journal of International Relations* 21(2) (2015), pp. 427–450. See also Einar Wigen, *State of Translation: Turkey in Interlingual Relations* (2018).

50. The original statement is: “[If a] sentence is faithfully translated into a foreign language: [is it] two distinct statements or one?” See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language* (1972).

Chapter 4. The Imperial Renaissance of Francisco Hernández

1. Francisco Hernández, *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispaniae thesaurus, seu plantarum, animalium, mineralium mexicanorum historia* (Rome, 1651), p. 145. Quoted in Richard Evans Schultes, *A Contribution to Our Knowledge of Rivea Corymbosa: The Narcotic Ololiuqui of the Aztecs* (1941). Courtesy of the Economic Botany Library of Oakes Ames, Harvard University.

2. The poem, as was much of Hernández’s work, was first translated into English in the early 1990s. See Francisco Hernández, Rafael Chabrán, and Simon Varey, “An Epistle to Arias Montano: An English Translation of a Poem by Francisco Hernández,” in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55(4) (1992), pp. 620–634. See also Simon Varey and Rafael Chabrán, “Medical Natural History in the Renaissance: The Strange Case of Francisco Hernández,” in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 57(2) (1994), pp. 124–151.

3. Simon Varey (ed.), *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernández* (2000).

4. Simon Varey, “Francisco Hernández, Renaissance Man,” in Simon Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature: The Life and Works of Francisco Hernández* (2000), p. 39.

5. Carmen Benito-Vessels, “Hernández in México: Exile and Censorship?,” in Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature: The Life and Works of Francisco Hernández*, pp. 41–54.

6. Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, p. 46.

7. As I will address further below, it has taken over 400 years for Hernández's collected works to be published. The compilation can be attributed almost single-handedly to the noted Mexican historian Germán Somolinos d'Artois, who oversaw the project at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, between 1959 and 1984. See Francisco Hernández, *Obras Completas*, 7 Volumes, ed. Germán Somolinos d'Artois (1959–1984).

8. Portuondo, "Constructing a Narrative: The History of Science and Technology in Latin America"; Cañizares-Esguerra, "The Colonial Iberian Roots of the Scientific Revolution."

9. George Basalla, "The Spread of Western Science," in *Science* 156 (1967), pp. 611–622. For critiques of the center-periphery diffusion model, see also David Wade Chambers and Richard Gillespie, "Locality in the History of Science: Colonial Science, Technoscience, and Indigenous Knowledge," in *Osiris* 15 (2000), pp. 221–240.

10. Portuondo, "Constructing a Narrative," p. 503.

11. Danna Agmon, *A Colonial Affair: Commerce, Conversion, and Scandal in French India* (2017).

12. José Rabasa, *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You*.

13. Cañizares-Esguerra, "The Colonial Iberian Roots of the Scientific Revolution"; see also Helen Nader, *The Mendoza Family in the Spanish Renaissance, 1350–1550* (1979).

14. David Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (1993).

15. Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática Castellana*, ed. Pascual Galindo Romeno and Luis Ortiz Munoz (1946), p. 5.

16. When asked by Queen Isabella to what use could she, already knowing Castilian, put the grammar, Nebrija's work was defended with an exhortation to "bring under her yoke many barbarian peoples and nations with strange languages, who, having been defeated, will have to receive the laws that the victor imposes on the vanquished, and with them, our language; it is then that they will use this art to learn it." *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11. See also Claudio Véliz, *The New World of the Gothic Fox: Culture and Economy in English and Spanish America* (1994).

17. Patricia Seed, "Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires," in *William and Mary Quarterly* 49(2) (1992), pp. 183–209; La Rosa, "Language and Empire: The Vision of Nebrija."

18. Rafael Chabrán, "The Classical Tradition in Renaissance Spain and New Trends in Philology, Medicine, and Materia Medica," in *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, pp. 21–32.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–27; see also Ottavio Di Camillo, "Interpretations of the Renaissance in Spanish Historical Thought," in *Renaissance Quarterly* 48(2) (1995), pp. 352–365.

20. Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y España: Estudios Sobre la Historia Espiritual del Siglo XVI* (1966). See also Rudolph Schevill, "Erasmus and Spain," in *Hispanic Review* 7(2) (1939), pp. 93–116.

21. Hernández was suspected of at least one of these counts—possibly being born of Jewish descent—and historians speculate he may have been suspected of sympathy for Jewish orthodoxes during his time at the Monastery of Guadalupe in Southern Spain. See Benito-Vessels, "Hernández in México," pp. 45–47; see also John E. Longhurst, "Luther in Spain: 1520–1540," in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103(1) (1959), pp. 66–93.

22. Juan Pimentel, "The Iberian Vision: Science and Empire in the Framework of a Universal Monarchy, 1500–1800," in Roy McLeod (ed.), *Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise*, Special Issue of *Osiris* 15 (2000), pp. 17–30.

23. Hernández, *Obras Completas, Volume 5: Historia Natural de Cayo Plinio Segundo*. Along with his translation, Hernández offered a substantial commentary on the scientific

relevance of the work, showcasing his broad literary and medical training at Alcalá, as well as anthropological ambitions in the Americas. See also David A. Goruchoff, "Anthropology, Reason, and the Dictates of Faith in the Antiquities of Francisco Hernández," in Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, pp. 90–103.

24. José M. Lopez Piñero and José Pardo-Tomás, "The Contribution of Hernández to European Botany and Materia Medica," in Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, pp. 122–137.

25. Kathleen Ann Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America*, pp. 41–62; Miguel de Asúa and Roger Kenneth French, *A New World of Animals: Early Modern Europeans on the Creatures of Iberian America* (2005), pp. 62–73; Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, pp. 13–28.

26. Goodman, *Power and Penury*, pp. 53–62.

27. Francisco Hernández, "Letter #3 to King Philip II, November/December 1571." See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, p. 48.

28. Francisco Hernández, "The Instructions of Philip II to Dr. Francisco Hernández," in Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, p. 46.

29. For analysis of the civilizational narrative within Las Casas and Sahagún, see Todorov, *The Conquest of America*.

30. María M. Portuondo, "The Study of Nature, Philosophy, and the Royal Library of San Lorenzo of the Escorial," in *Renaissance Quarterly* 63(4) (2010), pp. 1106–1150.

31. Francisco Hernández, *Quatro libros de la Naturaleza, y virtudes de las plantas y animales que están reunidos en el uso de Medicina en la Nueva España, y el Método, y corrección, y preparación, que para administrallas se requiere con lo que el Doctor Francisco Hernández escribió en lengua latina*, 1615. Housed in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, Providence, RI.

32. J. Worth Estes, "The Reception of American Drugs in Europe, 1500–1650," in Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, pp. 111–121.

33. Francisco Hernández, Rafael Chabrán and Simon Varey, "An Epistle to Arias Montano: An English Translation of a Poem by Francisco Hernández," in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 55(4) (1992), pp. 620–634.

34. J. A. Jones, "Pedro de Valenci's Defence of Arias Montano: The Expurgatory Indexes of 1607 (Rome) and 1612 (Madrid)," in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 40(1) (1978), pp. 121–136.

35. Francisco Hernández, "Letter #2 to King Philip II, May 1571." See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, p. 47.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

37. Francisco Hernández, "An Epistle to Arias Montano." See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, pp. 261–262, lines 14–23, 26–30, 52–61.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 262, n. 5.

39. Peter O'Malley Pierson, "Philip II: Imperial Obligations and Scientific Vision," in Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, pp. 16–17.

40. Phelan, "Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy," pp. 57–60.

41. Hernández, "An Epistle to Arias Montano." See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, pp. 262–263, lines 64–71, 77–81.

42. Francisco Hernández, "Letter #7 to King Philip II, March 1573." See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, pp. 52–53.

43. Francisco Hernández, “Letter #11 to King Philip II, February 1576.” See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, p. 57.

44. Both earlier and later works of natural history, for example, did not encounter the practical challenges and difficulties in dissemination that Hernández’s work did. See María de la Luz Ayala, “La Historia Natural en el Siglo XVI: Oviedo, Acosta y Hernández,” in *Estudios del Hombre* 20 (2005), pp. 19–37.

45. For more on the relationship between Oviedo, Monardes, and Hernández as pioneers in the study of the New World’s natural history, see José Pardo-Tomás, *El Tesoro Natural de América: Colonialismo y Ciencia en el Siglo XVI* (2002).

46. No doubt much of the radical thrust behind Hernández’s efforts has been lost along with the missing works. As Jaime Vilchis argues, however, the sporadic, yet far-reaching impact of Hernández’s writings nevertheless “[allowed] an understanding of the New World, in which microcosm and macrocosm come together in a nutshell, in whose kernel man was the unifying umbilical cord, the point of convergence of the natural and the supernatural.” See Jaime Vilchis, “Globalizing the Natural History,” in Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner (eds.), *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, p. 174.

47. Pardo-Tomás, *El Tesoro Natural de América*, pp. 151–56.

48. Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, p. 48.

49. Hernández, “An Epistle to Arias Montano.” See Varey, *The Mexican Treasury*, pp. 263–64, lines 100–107, 120–122.

50. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (2002), p. 223.

51. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists*, p. 170.

52. Antonio Lafuente, “Enlightenment in an Imperial Context: Local Science in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Hispanic World,” in *Osiris* 15 (2000), pp. 155–173.

Chapter 5. José de Acosta and the Ends of Empire

1. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 82.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

3. Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*, pp. 205–214; Prieto, *Missionary Scientists*, pp. 143–168.

4. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 99.

5. Surprisingly, there is an inadequate amount of secondary literature by political theorists that has attempted to trace the appropriation of Acosta’s writings by early modern thinkers. Particularly curious is the lack of comparisons between Acosta and the British philosophers that dedicated the most time to his observations—Locke and Bacon. Locke’s famous invention of the “state of nature” has been previously shown to have relied heavily on Acosta’s ethnographic observations. See William G. Batz, “The Historical Anthropology of John Locke,” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35(4) (1974), pp. 663–670. Bacon’s reliance on Acosta, moreover, has only cursorily been studied, despite resounding parallels and stylistic similarities. See Silvia Manzo, “Utopian Science and Empire: Notes on the Iberian Background of Francis Bacon’s Project,” in *Studii de Știință și Cultură*, Anul VI, 64 (23) (2010), pp. 111–129.

6. Research in natural history was an indispensable stimulus in the development of vernacular literary cultures. Indeed, recent work in the history of the field has shown it to be a central feature of the transitions between medieval and early modern scholarship, as well as the gateway to development in the physical sciences. See Nicholas Jardine, Anne Secord, and Emma Spary (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (1996).

7. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (1988), pp. 334–335 (§102).
8. The full quotation is as follows: “One who hath well settled in his mind the principles of morality and knows how to make a judgment on the actions of men . . . may learn great and useful instructions of prudence from a study of history.” See John Locke, *Journal*, 6–10 April 1677, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS f.2. Quoted in Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defense of English Colonialism* (1996), p. 23.
9. Arneil, *John Locke and America*, p. 38.
10. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 301 (§49).
11. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 379.
12. Arneil, *John Locke and America*, p. 41.
13. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, pp. 81–82.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.
16. Claudio M. Burgaleta, *José de Acosta (1540–1600): His Life and Thought* (1999), pp. 107–109; see also Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (2006), pp. 120–121.
17. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 98. The expression “torturing nature’s secrets out of her,” itself an extrapolation of Gottfried Leibniz’s phrase “putting nature on the rack,” is often misattributed to Francis Bacon and has been the subject of much historiographical debate. Bacon, in fact, held far more scientific affinities with the Spaniards than is often acknowledged. See Peter Pesic, “Wrestling with Proteus: Francis Bacon and the ‘Torture’ of Nature,” in *Isis* 90(1) (March 1999), pp. 81–94. See also Manzo, “Utopian Science and Empire,” pp. 114–116.
18. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 209.
19. Marc André Bernier, Clorinda Donato, and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (eds.), *Jesuit Accounts of the Colonial Americas: Intellectual Transfers, Intellectual Disputes, and Textualities* (2014), p. 12.
20. *Ibid.*
21. There is an impressive secondary literature focusing on the role of the demonic and the monstrous in early natural history and how its evolution led to the emergence of visual and artistic cultures between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (1998).
22. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, pp. 9–10.
23. Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (1991), pp. 261–263.
24. Translation of the following original text: “En que se tratan las cosas notable del cielo, y elementos, metales, plantas y animales de ellas [las Indias]; y los ritos, y ceremonias, leyes, y gobierno, y guerras de los Indios.” See José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Sevilla: Juan de León, 1590). Heir to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Philip II was responsible for commissioning the first cartographic *relaciones* (surveys) of the New World, opening a space for commercial, scientific, and theological pursuits, most of which were reliant on field manuals like Acosta’s *Historia Natural*. See Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*, pp. 1–10. Isabel herself would go on to become sovereign of the Spanish Netherlands from 1598 to 1633, heralding a so-called Golden Age of the Spanish Netherlands until the liberation of the Low Countries in 1648. See Cordula Van Wyhe (ed.), *Isabel Clara Eugenia: Female Sovereignty in the Courts of Madrid and Brussels* (2011).
25. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, pp. 5–6.

26. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 26.
27. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 9; see also Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, pp. 24–26; and Burgaleta, *José de Acosta, S.J.*, pp. 103–116.
28. Saul Jarcho, “Origin of the American Indian as Suggested by Fray Joseph de Acosta (1589),” in *Isis* 50(4) (1959), pp. 430–438.
29. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 25.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists*, pp. 145–146.
32. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 25.
33. Antonio Barrera-Osorio, “Empire and Knowledge: Reporting from the New World,” in *Colonial Latin American Review* 15(1) (2006), pp. 39–54.
34. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 10. See also Bleichmar, *Visible Empire*, pp. 3–16.
35. Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, p. 11.
36. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. xvii.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 436–449.
38. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.
39. Pagden, for example, sees Acosta as an originator of the framework now commonly understood as part of the Scottish Enlightenment. See Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 198–200.
40. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, pp. 13–15.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21. The scripture Acosta refers to is Psalm 135, Verse 6, which reads: “The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.”
42. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
43. Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature* (2006), pp. 77–78.
44. Leslie Paul Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment: Practical Wisdom, Neuroscience, and Narrative* (2006), pp. 144–145.
45. Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, p. 79.
46. Sarah Irving, *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire* (2008), p. 40.
47. Silvia Manzo has made a compelling case for reading Bacon’s use of the Spanish Empire, and Acosta’s writings in particular, far more sympathetically than what Irving presents. She notes, for example, how “early modern imperial Spain seems to have been assessed by Bacon as a model of growing empire in contrast to the imperfect and timid British attempts to gain the world overseas. On his evaluation, the leading educational system and the learning of the Jesuits was one of the grounds of Spain’s greatness. To this ground, he added the economic wealth achieved thanks to the treasures obtained from the Spanish colonies. The financial, political and institutional support of the navigational expeditions was thought to be a fundamental issue in this regard. So was the administration of political power through specific commissions subordinated to a central council. Spain could be seen as a fortunate instance of the application of science to the construction and expansion of empire.” See Silvia Manzo, “Utopian Science and Empire: Notes on the Iberian Background of Francis Bacon’s Project,” in *Studii de Știință și Cultură*, Anul VI, 64 (23) (2010), p. 122.
48. Irving, *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire*, p. 43.
49. Stephen Gaukroger, Review of Sarah Irving, *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire* in *Isis* 100(2) (2009), pp. 404–405.
50. According to Walter Mignolo, for example, Acosta was responsible for inaugurating a

scientific search for the mechanics of nature that would contribute to human freedom. Acosta himself may have proclaimed that “knowing the natural world was knowing and admiring its creator,” but the emerging work of Francis Bacon and other natural philosophers instead advocated a method that “[replaced] the search for causes with the search for laws.” Man’s relationship to nature was thus transformed from one of mutual elucidation to one of confrontation. See Walter D. Mignolo, “Commentary: José de Acosta’s *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*: Occidentalism, the Modern/Colonial World, and the Colonial Difference,” in Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 475.

Epilogue. Toward a Natural History of Colonial Domination

1. José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 22.
2. George Antony Thomas, *The Politics and Poetics of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (2012), pp. 37–56; see also Stephanie Kirk, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the Gender Politics of Knowledge in Colonial Mexico* (2016).
3. Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995).
4. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems, Protests, and a Dream* (1997), p. 8.
5. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, p. 8.
6. Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (2017); Brian Harding, *Not Even a God Can Save Us Now: Reading Machiavelli after Heidegger* (2017); Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism’s Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (2018).
7. Carey, “Latin American Environmental History,” pp. 224–229.
8. Nicholas Copeland, “Meeting Peasants Where They Are: Cultivating Agroecological Alternatives in Neoliberal Guatemala,” in *Journal of Peasant Studies* 46(4), pp. 831–852.
9. Thea Riofrancos, “Scaling Democracy: Participation and Resource Extraction in Latin America,” in *Perspectives on Politics* 15(3) (September 2017), pp. 678–696; see also Mauro J. Caraccioli, “Of Cursed States: Contentious Energy Narratives in Contemporary Bolivia,” in Ryan Kiggins (ed.), *The Political Economy of Rare Earths: Rising Powers and Technological Change* (2015), pp. 197–217; and Cara Daggett, *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work* (2019).
10. Of particular note are the burgeoning dialogues between historians, geographers, and social theorists around the burning questions of climate change and catastrophe. See Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici (eds.), *Centering Animals in Latin American History* (2013); see also Laura Ephraim, *Who Speaks for Nature? On the Politics of Science* (2017); and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (eds.), *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (2017).
11. Robyn Eckersly, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (2004); Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (2017).
12. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1989), p. xxiii.
13. Juan Pimentel, “Baroque Natures: Juan E. Nieremberg, American Wonders, and Pre-erimperial Natural History,” in Daniela Bleichmar, Paula De Vos, Kristine Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan (eds.), *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500–1800* (2009), pp. 93–114.
14. Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, p. 22.
15. Though many of these positions have evolved over the last decades, representative examples include: Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in

James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (1988), pp. 29–67; J.G.A. Pocock, “The Concept of a Language and the Métier d’Historien: Some Consideration on Practice,” in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (1987); and Richard A. Ashcraft, “Political Theory and the Problem of Ideology,” in *Journal of Politics* 42 (1980), pp. 687–721. For more recent interventions, see Jeffrey Edward Green, “Political Theory as Both Philosophy and History: A Defense against Methodological Militancy,” in *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015), pp. 425–441; Adrian Blau, “History of Political Thought as Detective-Work,” in *History of European Ideas* 41(8) (2015), pp. 1178–1194; and Joshua Simon, “Institutions, Ideologies, and Comparative Political Theory,” in *Perspectives on Politics* (2019), Online First: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719001178>.

16. Onur Ulas Ince, “Primitive Accumulation, New Enclosures, and Global Land Grabs: A Theoretical Intervention,” in *Rural Sociology* 79(1) (2014), pp. 104–131; Sarah Johnson, “The Early Life of Marx’s ‘Mode of Production,’” in *Modern Intellectual History* (2019), Online First: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244319000374>.

17. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2014), p. 2.

18. Kenny Ausubel, *Dreaming the Future: Reimagining Civilization in the Age of Nature* (2012), p. 16.

19. Some recent exceptions include: Jeanne Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism* (2014); Joshua Simon, *The Ideology of Creole Revolution*; Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (2019); and Yomaira C. Figueroa, *Decolonizing Diasporas: Radical Mappings of Afro-Atlantic Literature* (2020).

20. Consider, for example, the critical discussion raised by Cara Daggett concerning the links between a radical politics of work in the Anthropocene and what a genealogy of energy, production, waste, and exploitation can clarify about our ability to imagine ecological alternatives to capitalist-dependent forms of labor. See Cara Daggett, *The Birth of Energy*, pp. 187–206.

21. Thomas L. Fleischner, “Why Natural History Matters,” in *The Journal of Natural History Education and Experience* 5 (2011), p. 21.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

23. Neil L. Whitehead, *Of Cannibals and Kings: Primal Anthropology in the Americas* (2011), p. 3.

24. Cañizares-Esguerra, “The Colonial Iberian Roots of the Scientific Revolution,” pp. 24–26.

25. Leslie Paul Thiele, *Indra’s Net and the Midas Touch: Living Sustainably in a Connected World* (2013).

26. Simon Dalby, “Recontextualising Violence, Power and Nature: The Next Twenty Years of Critical Geopolitics?,” in *Political Geography* 29 (2010), pp. 280–288.

27. Arturo Escobar, “Latin America at a Crossroads”; Fernando Coronil, “The Future in Question: History and Utopia in Latin America (1989–2010),” in Craig Calhoun and Georgi Derluigan (eds.), *Business as Usual: The Roots of the Global Financial Meltdown* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), pp. 231–292.

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