Flattery and the History of Political Thought

Flattery is an often overlooked political phenomenon, even though it has interested thinkers from classical Athens to eighteenth-century America. Drawing a distinction between moralistic and strategic flattery, this book offers new interpretations of a range of texts from the history of political thought. Discussing Cicero, Pliny, Castiglione, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Mandeville, Smith, and the Federalist/Anti-Federalist debates, the book engages and enriches contemporary political theory debates about rhetoric, republicanism, and democratic theory, among other topics. Flattery and the History of Political Thought shows both the historical importance and continued relevance of flattery for political theory. Additionally, the study is interdisciplinary in both subject and approach, engaging classics, literature, rhetoric, and history scholarship; it aims to bring a range of disciplines into conversation with each other as it explores a neglected—and yet important—topic.

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This book was quite a while in the making, longer than I thought it would be. This has to do in no small part to the birth of my son in the fall of 2012 – not long after I had been awarded an advance contract for this book, in fact. My wife and I had no idea what we were getting into: how much time could a baby take, after all? Like all other new parents, we were radically unprepared, because whatever you read or hear is sure not to apply to your child (there are no normal sleepers). More than four and a half years later, the book is done – and it would not be done were it not for the loving support of my wife, Eunsook Jung, to whom I dedicated my first book with these words from Catullus 51: *Nam simul te aspexi, nihil est super mi*. These words are no less true today than they were then.

I’ve got many people to thank for their help over the years, first and foremost my editor at Cambridge University Press, Robert Dreesen, who has been both patient and kind in working with me, putting up with far more delays than he needed to. I’d also like to thank the two anonymous readers who provided valuable criticism on the project, criticism that made the book much stronger. Many people read part of the manuscript at one point or another, or provided me feedback in discussions, and I hope that I have remembered to acknowledge all of them: Al Martinich, Alexander Jech, Colin Bird, Cary Nederman, Liz Markovits, John McCormick, John Zumbrunnen, David Crawford, Hillary Haldane, Jocelyn Boryczka, Chris Brooke, Stephen Davies, Barry Burden, Arlene Saxonhouse, Rick Avramenko, Thornton Lockwood, Jimmy Klausen, Helen Kinsella, Rebecca Lemoine, Michael Kochin, Teresa Bejan, Ben Fontana, Turku Isiskel, Andreas Avgousti, Richard Boyd, Charles Butterworth, Jeffrey Lenowitz, Jonathan Zarecki, David Williams, Grant
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The core of Chapter 3 was published in the Journal of Politics in 2011, while Chapters 2 and 3 draw on a coauthored article published in the American Political Science Review in 2016. I’ve presented portions of this book at the UW Madison Political Theory Workshop, the UNC Chapel Hill Political Theory Workshop, the Columbia Political Theory Workshop, the UC-Davis Political Theory Workshop, Fordham University’s Political Science Department, Northern Illinois University’s Department of Political Science, the Midwest Political Science Association, the Rhetoric Society of America, and the American Political Science Association, and am grateful for feedback I’ve received at all of these events. Chapters 2 and 3 were presented at an Institute for Humane Studies research workshop, kindly organized by Nigel Ashford and Steven Davies, where I benefited from comments by Alexander Jech, Charles Butterworth, Colin Bird, Al Martinich, and Cary Nederman. Whatever good qualities it has are largely a result of the kindness of friends (too numerous to mention) and colleagues; its bad qualities are entirely my doing.

I dedicated my first book to my wife, and dedicate this one to her as well. She’s been listening to me talk about flattery for longer than someone with less loving patience would, but she’s always been happy to listen. I now dedicate it to my son, too: in his first four years he has made a point of practicing frank speech with me and teaching me much more than
I have taught him. And I also dedicate it to the memory of my dear teacher, mentor, and friend, Patrick Riley, who passed away suddenly while I was entering the final stages of this project. Taken from us too soon, he was a giant in his field who never acted as such, and who modeled to me and many others (in a way that one wishes to emulate) how to speak with love and kindness to those with less power and professional status.
Introduction

Introduction

I

Flattery is the subject of one of Aesop’s most famous fables, *The Raven and the Fox*. In this tale, a fox, observing a raven in a tree with a piece of meat, is unable to climb the tree to get the meat. He decides to use the only weapon he has, using speech strategically to get what he wants: the meat. His tactic is to engage in flattery:

Of all the birds you are by far the most beautiful. You have such elegant proportions, are so stately and sleek. You were ideally made to be the king of all the birds. And if you only had a voice you would surely be the king.¹

Not wanting to disappoint such an earnest admirer, the raven decided to show off his voice and, in doing so, dropped the meat to the ground, giving the fox what he wanted all along. After obtaining the object of his desire, the fox provides the raven with some counsel: “Oh, raven, if only you also had judgment [*phrenas*], you would want for nothing to be the king of the birds.” The fable itself provides a timely lesson to “all fools” (*andra anoeton*).

We often tell this story to children, and a child learns many lessons from this story, not the least of which is that a flatterer says things that he does not mean: he is insincere. Not only is the flatterer insincere; the flatterer says things that he does not believe to be true, but that those he flatters believe to be true because, presumably, they don’t just lack

self-knowledge, but they want the flatterer’s lies to be true. A child also learns why flatterers are so dangerous. Through flattery, they can manipulate us into doing what we would not otherwise do – and what we ought not to do. After all, the raven would not have dropped the meat had he not been flattered by the fox. The pathway for this manipulation is self-love, as it is with the raven, and it is abetted by a lack of self-knowledge – were the raven less deceived about his own capacities, he would know that he sings poorly, and would not believe to be true about himself what is in fact false. We encounter, in this story, what I will term the cunning flatterer, an image we will encounter at numerous points in this book. The cunning flatterer – the fox – speaks insincerely and with full knowledge of his insincerity, and the cunning flatterer says things that he does not believe to be true in order to get something particular. If the fox had been sincere – if there were a “congruence between avowal and actual feeling” – then this would be a situation of straightforward praise: the fox would have meant what he said, and what he said would have been true insofar as it revealed his beliefs (even if he were mistaken about beautiful singing). If you’ve got something that someone else wants, then, you should be careful not to be deceived by his praise lest he manipulate you into giving him what he wants through fraudulent appeals to your self-love.

This is a moral lesson, of course; but children also learn more explicitly political lessons about flattery – that is, about flattery that has implications for the exercise of power over others – and this form of flattery differs in important ways from the manipulative behavior of the cunning fox. These differences are demonstrated in Andersen’s The Emperor’s New Clothes, which features an emperor who was exceedingly vain, caring about nothing unless “it gave him a chance to show off his new clothes.”\footnote{Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2.} When two swindlers – cunning and foxlike flatterers themselves – came to the emperor’s city, claiming not only to be able to weave the most beautiful fabrics, but also that their products “had the amazing ability of becoming invisible to those who were unfit for their posts or just hopelessly stupid,” the vain emperor immediately decided that he needed to have this clothing.\footnote{Hans Christian Andersen, The Emperor’s New Clothes, in The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen, ed. Maria Tatar (New York: Norton, 2008), 5.}
What unfolds is a fascinating story about vanity and insecurity on the part of superiors and subordinates. The emperor, wondering about the swindlers’ progress in weaving the cloth, sent his “honest old minister” to check on them, assuming that he would be best suited to do so because of his “good sense.” Seeing no cloth, the minister pretends to do so, lest he be thought unfit for, and hence lose, his position. A second minister fares no better, pretending to see and admire the cloth as well, lest he also be thought unfit. And when the emperor himself goes to inspect their work prior to parading through town wearing his new clothing, in the company of “a select group of people” and his two trusted ministers, he cannot see the cloth either. But he, too, pretends to be able to see it, lest he be thought foolish or unfit for office – as do his courtiers, who were similarly unable to see any cloth. Throughout the entire farce, of course, the swindlers have been pocketing the gold and silk that they had been pretending to weave into the invisible cloth. The emperor, his ministers, and his courtiers all pretend that he is actually wearing the clothing the swindlers pretend to have made, with his courtiers even pretending to carry the train of his garment during the parade; even the onlookers in the town, observing their emperor out in his new clothing, pretend to see his clothing, lest they, too, be thought foolish, or simply depart from expectations. Only “a little child” – one who has no concern for what others think and does not think about whether her speech will endanger her position or esteem – is able to say what everyone else is thinking: “he isn’t wearing anything at all.” Once the child has spoken the truth, the townspeople echo her observation, yet the emperor persists in his parade, thinking to himself, “I must go through with it now, parade and all.”

As opposed to Aesop’s fable, in which we are presented with a cunning flatterer in the figure of the fox, we are presented with something else in Andersen’s tale. To be sure, the two swindlers are, like the fox, cunning (they know what they’re doing, and we know that they know what they’re doing), and they engage in flattery. They prey on the vanity and ignorance of the emperor and the insecurity of his ministers in order to get what they want: gold and fine cloth. And the swindlers’ flattering play upon the emperor’s vanity causes the emperor to do what he ought not to do, all the while securing benefits to themselves. Yet when we turn from the swindlers to the counselors, whose dishonesty occupies far more of the narrative than the swindlers’ flattery does, it is not simply their greed

5 Ibid., 6. 6 Ibid., 9. 7 Ibid., 13. 8 Ibid., 16.
that causes them to behave as they do. Rather, they are afraid of losing their offices, as they are subordinates in positions of dependence on the emperor. Were they to admit that they see nothing, they would, in effect, be admitting that they were foolish and thus unqualified for office, admissions that would not sit well with their superior. They flatter the emperor, naked though he is, through fear of lost position: their dependence on the emperor’s favor makes them behave in a servile manner, altering their speech and behavior to maintain their positions due to their status. In doing so, they reinforce their superior’s tendencies, reflecting to him what he, in his ignorance, sees of himself.

The fox, to be sure, is in a situation of dependence of a sort – his satisfaction of his desires is dependent upon the raven giving him the meat. But it is not as if the raven will have much power over him once the fox has the raven’s meat; there is nothing about the circumstances of the fox that suggests that he will be constrained to flatter the raven outside of this instance, or one that is similar. By contrast, the flattering behavior of the counselors seeks to negotiate the hierarchical relationship in which they find themselves with the emperor, and thus to maintain their positions. The fox’s flattery of the raven is, most likely, not going to be repeated absent the right circumstances; the flattery of the emperor’s counselors is, by contrast, likely habitual and rooted in the precariousness of their social status. But this habit is less a function of greed or malevolence than of dependence. And whereas the flattery of the raven causes him to make a bad decision in this instance, the habitual flattery of the emperor might well cause him to develop poor habits of choice or to engage in vicious behavior over periods of time. If the fox was a cunning flatterer, we encounter here the dependent flatterer; for him flattery serves a different purpose.

I will often, in what follows, refer to the cunning flatterer, and cunning flattery, as moralistic images, while I will refer to the dependent sort of flattery as demoralized, or at times, strategic images. The prior tends to ascribe vicious motivations to those who flatter; the latter tends to see flattery as a response to conditions of subordination. Turning from these stories to political theory, though, the moralistic image of flattery has been dominant throughout much of the history of western political thought, a proposition evident through a cursory survey of canonic and non-canonic texts; I will, in what follows, revisit many, though not all, of these texts in detail, and my purpose here is simply to highlight the prominence of the theme in the history of political thought, rather than to engage in extended exegesis. Plato, in *Phaedrus*, contrasts the frank
speaker (and true lover) with the flatterer (and false lover), while in *Gorgias*, he develops a critique of conventional oratory centering on its status as a form of flattery, connecting it to democracy and tyranny in that work and *Republic*. Aristotle, in the *Politics*, linked flattery to tyranny and democracy as well, while in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he opposed it to friendship. Cicero, in *On Friendship*, and Plutarch, in his essay *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, opposed the flatterer to the frank-speaking friend, emphasizing the harms that go along with being flattered. The flattered monarch – and the ill-effects of flattery on monarchs and their subjects – was an important concern for Isocrates, as it was for Pliny and Tacitus, whether the issue was how to deal with flatterers, who abound at court, or the corrosive effect of despotic rule on frank speech. For John of Salisbury and Christine de Pizan, flattery corrupted monarchy, leading to disharmony and even tyranny. In Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, those delineating the courtly art are at pains to distinguish between it and flattery, even as they admit the necessity of praise. In Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, the ability to detect and prevent flattery is a sign of princely prudence, and Hobbes preferred monarchy to non-monarchy in part because it better resisted flattery. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke wanted even prerogative power to be limited, by contrast, in part because of the danger of flatterers. Monarchs’ susceptibility to flattery was an important point raised against monarchy by figures such as Milton and Sidney in the seventeenth century, and the political conditions that gave rise to flattery – along with flattering ministers – were common themes in eighteenth-century Britain and the American colonies, evident in works such as Cato’s *Letters*. Rousseau saw flattery as a manifestation of a false and corruptive politeness, in addition to being a sign of servitude, whether in the *First* or *Second Discourse*, while Burke, in his *Speech to the Electors of Bristol*, contrasted his behavior as the electorate’s trustee with the flattery of other representatives. Hamilton argued in the *Federalist* that while the republican principle required responsiveness, it stopped well short of the kind of flattery associated with demagoguery, honing in on the danger of the “adulator.”

Yet there was – and is – a different way of understanding flattery, an understanding I will be very much interested in over the course of this book. This understanding is what we saw with Anderson: demoralized flattery, a sort of strategic use of flattery put into play by those who are

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subject to domination and that is particularly interesting from the perspective of non-ideal theory, a point I’ll make more fully in the conclusion. For now, though, I’ll suggest that it’s hard not to sympathize with the emperor’s courtiers, who, while they also engaged in flattery, did not do so through cunning or greed so much as through fear and dependence. Similarly, we might view individuals such as the arch-flatterer Sejanus, in Ben Jonson’s play of the same name or in Tacitus’ Annals, differently from someone who flatters autocrats through fear of death or imprisonment. We all say what we do not mean at least sometimes – especially if speaking to those with power over us.

Just as we might expect flattery in instances of power asymmetry, so too is it the case that we cannot always understand flattery in straightforward moralistic terminology. Rarely do we encounter an unambiguously cunning flatterer – that is, one who knows what he’s doing, and of whom we know that he knows what he’s doing. Roberts-Miller’s account of demagoguery is helpful here, for she suggests that “an ethical definition of demagoguery, emphasizing the morals and motives of the rhetor” – a definition by which the demagogue is not concerned with truth and is motivated by personal desires – falls short because “demagogues may be perfectly sincere, and may even pursue their political agenda at their own personal and political expense.”

Much of the time, we can no more know the true motives of apparent flatterers than we can demagogues. Take, for instance, one of the classic texts dealing with flattery – Plutarch’s essay How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend. Interestingly, this highly moralistic account of flattery (and demagoguery) also posits a very particular target for flattery (a powerful person), and hence a very particular audience of (elite) readers: “where renown and power attend, there do [flatterers] throng and thrive.” Plutarch’s flatterer – the kolax – preys upon the self-love of the flattered and produces very real harms in the flattered:

For the flatterer always takes a position over against the maxim “Know thyself,” by creating in every man deception towards himself and ignorance both of himself and of the good and evil that concerns himself; the good he renders defective and incomplete, and the evil wholly impossible to amend.

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12 Ibid., 49B.
The flatterer is a false-friend (*philos*), impersonating the friend (Plutarch uses the term *mimesis* to describe the flatterer’s enactment of friendship) with full knowledge of what he is doing. For instance, noticing the importance of the “bond of sympathy” to friendship,

the flatterer takes note of this fact, and adjusts and shapes himself, as though he were so much inert matter, endeavouring to adapt and mould himself to fit those whom he attacks through imitation.\(^\text{13}\)

Because the flatterer resembles the friend, though, deploying pleasure to worm his way into the confidence of the flattered, he deprives the friend of the greatest benefits of friendship associated with the practice of frank speech (*parrhesia*).

Plutarch’s account, like the ethical account of demagoguery that Roberts-Miller rejects, posits a clarity of intention (purposive imitation and appeal to self-love via pleasure) on the part of the flatterer *and* the ability for an external observer to know this intention. Indeed, Plutarch is clear in his use of the language of intent, likening the flatterer to the demagogue, especially Alcibiades, who made “himself like to” the Athenians, the Spartans, and the Persians, “conforming his way to theirs he tried to conciliate them and win their favor.”\(^\text{14}\) Alcibiades consciously changed his character to appeal to those with power in the regimes he faced; the flatterer, more broadly, consciously changes his character to appeal to those he seeks to manipulate. Plutarch’s account, striking as it is, posits an account of motive and agency that may be difficult, if not impossible, for external observers to ascertain. This is a clarity of knowledge, moreover, that is colored by the perspective of those who risk the most from flattery: the powerful. Those with power would surely look down on flatterers, but the importance of the flatterer’s dependence in understanding the flatterer’s position – let alone the flatterer being an object of sympathy – is less clear in Plutarch’s account.

The ambiguity of morality and motive makes much more complicated what might otherwise seem a straightforwardly immoral behavior. In this regard, we may note, albeit briefly, another flatterer who inhabits stories: Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit uses manipulative and overtly kind words to overcome and subvert differences in power and status. In *Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby*, for instance, Brer Rabbit flatters Brer Fox by emphasizing how much power the latter has over him, such that he is utterly at the mercy of Brer Fox, and wants only not to be thrown in the briar patch.

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, 51C. \(^{14}\) *Ibid.*, 52F.
Brer Rabbit also flatters Brer Wolf in *Brer Rabbit Gets Caught One More Time*, appealing to Brer Wolf’s vanity by urging him “to be polite” and say grace before eating him, which allows him to escape.¹⁵ And in *Brer Rabbit and the Little Girl*, he flatters Mr. Man’s daughter to persuade her to open the garden gate for him, telling her that her father “said he had a daughter who would let me in that field of lettuce over yonder, but I sho’ didn’t expect nobody as pretty as you.”¹⁶ In these stories, Brer Rabbit, who is physically weaker than Brer Wolf and Brer Fox, and is literally an outsider when dealing with Little Girl, uses flattery – exaggerating the degree to which Brer Fox has power over him, playing on Brer Wolf’s desire to be thought polite, and the little girl’s vanity over her physical appearance – in order to negate and overcome differences in power. Brer Rabbit uses flattery to manipulate the behavior of another whom he could not otherwise influence, but does so not simply to get some object of desire or to avoid harm. Instead, the flattery turns power relationships upside down, allowing the physically weak and marginal rabbit to trick and trap his more powerful adversaries.

We can hear an echo of this form of flattery in another work of literature with much more direct political overtones. In Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, there is a famous episode in which the narrator tells the story of what his grandfather told his father on his deathbed:

> Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ’em with yeses, undermine ’em with grins, agree ’em to death and destruction, let ’em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.¹⁷

Certainly the behavior described in this passage is flattery – disingenuous deference and praise. Yet this form of flattery is far less concerning than, say, the moralistic account we find in Plutarch. Indeed, our sympathy goes to the flatterer, not the flattered; overt deference, in this instance, creates a protective barrier that surrounds the dominated persons – in this instance, they are dominated as a result of being members of an oppressed racial group – who perform flattery, seeming to be straightforward displays of inferiority to those at the top, while serving as a form of agency. As James Scott remarks, given the asymmetries in coercive and appropriative power

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that characterize relationships of domination, subordinate groups will normally engage in public performances that are “shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful.”\textsuperscript{18} In private, however – and even in public, at times – subordinates will often speak quite differently than they do in the normal “performance of humility and deference.”\textsuperscript{19} When we encounter, then, members of subordinate groups, or those who are enmeshed in the lower end of power asymmetries, engaging in apparently deferential performances, we may infer that these acts are intended “to convey the outward impression of conformity with standards sustained by superiors.”\textsuperscript{20} What we cannot infer, however, is that they actually accept these standards – or that they reject them, per se. From the perspective of the dominant, deferential acts may seem to be straightforward performances of submission by humble subordinates; from the perspective of the dominated group, it can look “like the artful manipulation of deference and flattery to achieve its own ends.”\textsuperscript{21} As far as elites are concerned, these performances typically reinforce their understandings of their status; but it remains just as possible that subordinates are engaging in strategic behavior that “looks upward.”\textsuperscript{22}

When we encounter deferential or ingratiating behavior – and flattery, regardless of the variety, is overtly deferential and ingratiating – we must be alert to the possibility that those engaged in such behavior do so for reasons that might be quite different than they seem, and that do not fall easily into the moralistic category discussed above, a category that has dominated the history of political thought. Indeed, Scott suggests – in an admittedly “crude and global generalization” – that “the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast.”\textsuperscript{23} In certain contexts – especially contexts in which there are great power asymmetries and elites have the capacity to engage in arbitrary acts of coercion – flattery may be a strategy deployed by the weak to control the powerful, a deceptive and convincing performance behind which they try to achieve control they could not achieve overtly. It can be, to borrow a phrase from another of Scott’s works by the same title, a weapon of the weak.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{19} Ibid., 11.
\bibitem{20} Ibid., 24.
\bibitem{21} Ibid., 34.
\bibitem{22} Ibid., 93.
\bibitem{23} Ibid., 3.
\bibitem{24} \textit{Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance} (New Haven: Yale University Press, \textit{2008}).
\end{thebibliography}
Thus far I have suggested that flattery was an important moral and political problem in a variety of works from the history of political thought, that it was understood to be a phenomenon found in participatory and non-participatory regimes, and that it was a topic of both moral and political importance. That it was so, however, is rather puzzling in light of how little attention is given to the topic by political theorists today. An electronic search of the abstracts and titles of philosophy and political science journals through JSTOR for the term flattery produced only three strong results. And while two English-language books have been published on flattery in recent years, none of these works (which I turn to shortly) is centrally concerned with flattery as a political problem.

If flattery is no longer an important political concern, understanding why this is so is an interesting problem in itself, and much of my argument in this book seeks to show that it is and should be of interest. I will also argue, unlike most accounts of flattery in the history of political thought, that we should not label flattery as morally and politically bad, per se. Before getting to these claims, however, I should say a few things about what recent studies of flattery have had to say, what I take flattery to be, and how it differs from related phenomena, such as hypocrisy, lying, and bullshit.

While two English-language books have appeared since 2000 that center on flattery – Stengel’s You’re Too Kind: A Brief History of Flattery and Regier’s In Praise of Flattery – neither is centrally concerned with understanding the phenomenon of flattery politically. Stengel’s book – aptly described in its title as A Brief History of Flattery – is written for a popular audience. Covering an array of sources and periods, ranging from non-human primates to ancient Egypt, to the troubadours, to colonial, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, to twentieth-century

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25 The first article is Kevin Williams, “‘Only Flattery Is Safe’: Political Speech and the Defamation Act 1996,” *The Modern Law Review* 60, no. 3 (1997). The second is Yuval Eylon and David Heyd, “Flattery,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77, no. 3 (2008). The third was written by the author of this manuscript. Three additional pieces were discovered, but two were not scholarly articles, and the third – an Italian article – focused on the figure of the hyena in Renaissance philosophy. The search was carried out on April 21, 2016.

26 When I first wrote this sentence, Donald Trump was not a presidential candidate, but rather the centerpiece of a reality television show. I’ll say a bit more about Trump, flattery, and demagoguery in the last chapter.
New York, the book is not centrally concerned with political flattery. Regier’s book, though richly researched and an invaluable source for a wide array of reactions to and understandings of flattery, does not develop an overarching interpretive argument, per se, so much as it provides a survey of what Regier terms “real flattery in real situations.”

Miller’s 2003 *Faking It* features a chapter dealing with flattery and praise – titled “Flattery and Praise,” appropriately enough. Miller seems to doubt the possibility of distinguishing between flattery and praise, suggesting that “flattery can be sincere and true.” Not engaging in flattery requires that the one who is praising have nothing at all to gain, a possibility hinted at, in Miller’s example, by Hamlet’s words to Horatio, who he asks, “Why should the poor be flatter’d?” What this suggests is that it is awfully difficult for anyone with anything to gain not to engage in flattery when saying kind things to another. This is so because we desire to be flattered, whether through self-love or our natural sociability, and “praise is often rewarded by the person praised.” Miller’s account strikes me as overly broad; even if we grant that there is a basic similarity between praise and flattery – namely, both of them use positive language to encourage certain behaviors or attributes – this does not mean that they are inseparable, or that not being a flatterer requires that one have *nothing* to gain in speaking well of another. I might, after all, enjoy telling a musician after a performance that I enjoyed the performance by shouting or clapping; this does not seem to be flattery, since I am presumably not engaging in manipulating the performer to do what she otherwise would not do. Part of what it generally means to flatter someone else, I’ll suggest, is to manipulate that person to do something she would not otherwise do, and which she surely would not do if she knew she were being flattered. While we might praise someone for acting well, it seems that the praised individual (such as our musician in this example) ought to engage in that behavior regardless of praise, whereas the flattered person should not engage in the behavior she was flattered into doing.

I stated earlier that an electronic search of major political science and philosophy journals for the term *flattery* produces three key articles that mention flattery, in their titles or abstracts, two of which deal flattery as a

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31 These themes reemerge in my discussion of Mandeville and Smith in Chapter 4.
topic. In their article, simply titled “Flattery,” Heyd and Eylon describe flattery (in Shklar’s terminology) as an “ordinary vice.” It is ordinary in the sense that it is common to many different cultures, and it is ordinary in the sense that it is hardly the worst vice that can be imagined. In fact, it might not even register as a significant vice in many moral theories, though they suggest it is quite significant in the virtue ethics tradition, and especially the Platonic tradition. From a Platonic perspective, flattery highlights the “contrast between the real and the fake,” along with Plato’s “insistence on the moral importance of the interplay between the personal and the social.” They make a useful, and important, distinction between flattery and servility, in that the prior is an “overt communicative act,” and the latter a “psychological disposition;” moreover, they point out that flattery works only insofar as the one being flattered does not know she is being flattered. As opposed to the similar phenomenon of hypocrisy, flattery is “addressed to a particular person,” and “while flattery is concerned with the merits of another person, hypocrisy is primarily concerned with the image of oneself.” We can deceive ourselves, but we cannot flatter ourselves (notwithstanding the phrase “I flatter myself”) – nor can superiors normally “be said to flatter” inferiors. And whereas there is a manipulative flatterer, such as Aesop’s fox, there is also a kind of flatterer who does not have an ulterior motive – they label the prior a snake, and the latter a dog. The dog, which they locate in Plato’s Phaedrus, is marked by an “excessive need and weakness manifested in overabundant praise and insensitivity to its proper context.”

Drawing especially on Plato, Eylon and Heyd suggest that flattery corrupts both the flattered and the flatterer, though it is more harmful for the prior than the latter. Moreover, the flatterer can only succeed in her activity insofar as the victim is vicious – though not necessarily wicked. After all, a concern with the opinion of others is not wicked; the flattered is likely ignorant, lacking in self-knowledge. Either way, flattery is a vice, and its vicious character leads the authors to reject Mandeville’s account of flattery as constituting the foundation of the social order: “by treating the possibility of the whole social order as the function of the universally effective flattery of the whole citizenship, Mandeville seems to lose the very core of the concept of flattery.”

Eylon and Heyd, “Flattery,” 685.
Ibid., 686.
Ibid., 686, 688, 701. Cf. my discussion of Runciman below.
Ibid., 686.
Ibid., 689.
Ibid., 694.
Ibid., 703.
As will become clear in my subsequent discussion, and as I have already suggested, I think that it is important not to label flattery as a vice, *tout court*; there is an important distinction between a slave who flatters his master to avoid being whipped and a conman who flatters his mark to take advantage of him. Nor is it obvious that flattery always harms the character of the flatterer; it can leave their character more or less unchanged, and simply deprive them of relevant information, and may prevent them from doing something immoral. While many political theorists have dealt with flattery from a moralizing perspective, this is not – and should not be – the only way to think about flattery, as I’ve already suggested. Similarly, one can flatter a single person, or a large number of persons – one need only think of the paans paid to the wisdom or virtue of the American people (or the people of a particular state, city, county, or house district) by politicians and candidates. One can also imagine superiors flattering inferiors – sanctions and coercion will not always be useful, or necessary. We may think here, for instance, of Wolin’s wonderful term, “the economy of violence,” in *Politics and Vision*. Used to describe Machiavelli, Wolin notes that “The true test of whether violence had been rightly used was whether cruelties increased or decreased over time.” Given the destabilizing effects of violence, especially its tendency to produce hatred, elites would do well to look to means of control beyond straightforward coercion, and flattery would certainly fit the bill. Nor am I in sympathy with Heyd and Eylon’s critique of Mandeville, a writer who is highly attuned to the non-moralistic – that is, strategic – possibilities of flattery, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

I should, though, say a bit more at this point about how I understand flattery, looking back to my earlier discussion of Aesop and Andersen. My discussion of Aesop honed in on a moralistic account of flattery, which captures the dominant approach to thinking about flattery in much of the history of political thought: flattery is vicious (the flatterer knows what he is doing and we know he knows) and it makes the flattered worse. As we saw in discussing Aesop, the fox speaks insincerely, and what he says is straightforwardly false: the crow does not have a beautiful voice; he *crows*. Had he meant what he said – that is, had he been sincere – and if the crow

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had a beautiful voice – that is, had his utterance been true – we would have encountered praise, and not flattery. This is about as clear of a case of flattery as we can hope to see. A similar dynamic is at play in Andersen’s tale: the counselors, the swindlers, and even the townspeople say what they do not mean – namely, that the emperor’s clothing is beautiful – and they say what is straightforwardly false, and what they believe to be false. Why they say it varies, of course, just as our evaluation of their motivations would vary. What these stories highlight, I suggest, is a key dimension of the phenomenon of flattery: the flatterer speaks insincerely. That is, the flatterer generally says what she believes to be false, or at the very least exaggerated, and hence the flatterer does not believe what she says. Importantly, she says things that appeal to the self-love, or vanity, of those she addresses. This sketch of flattery, which is compatible with both the moralistic and demoralized accounts, finds support in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which lists among the senses of the verb “to flatter” the following: “to please or win the favour of (a person) by obsequious speech or conduct; to court, fawn upon,” or “To praise or compliment unduly or insincerely,” “To play upon the vanity or impressionableness of (a person); to beguile or persuade with artful blandishments; to coax, wheedle.”

Flattery, then, would seem to involve both the speaker’s intent and beliefs about truth: the speaker could have mistaken beliefs, utter statements about these beliefs, and mean them, being unaware of her error. If that is the case, then it doesn’t quite measure up to flattery. The flatterer intends to manipulate, and the flatterer (and the flattered) engage in communication, or miscommunication, with each other regarding the abilities, capacities, or qualities of the flattered. But flattery is also a relational concept: that is, it refers “simultaneously to two entities that stand in relation to one another.” Just as we cannot understand what it means to be a parent without understanding the concept “child,” we cannot understand what it means to be a flatterer without understanding what it means to be flattery’s object. Flattery is not defined solely by the intent of the speaker and the content of the utterance; it involves the relationship between the speaker and the addressee.


In the examples given above – Aesop’s fable and Andersen’s tale – the flatterer has something to gain from the person being flattered, and is an inferior of some sort – a social or political dependent, someone lacking a particular kind of good, or someone desiring a certain form of power. This is not to say that the categories are always clear-cut; the formally powerful can flatter, evident in the American version of the television program *The Office*. While Michael Scott was, at times, the object of flattery – especially at the hands of Andrew Bernard – he would, on occasion, engage in flattery himself. To be sure, he would seem to be the most powerful figure in the office, controlling resources, promotions, and professional status. Yet he depends on his subordinates for goods as well – their cooperation, of course, but especially for their affection, which he craves. Moreover (and leaving aside his humorous and discomforting desire for his employees’ love) those in positions of power may, for any number of reasons, not always wish to resort to coercion, as we saw above with Wolin’s account of the economy of violence. That this is plausible is reason enough to be skeptical of Heyd and Eylon’s account, encountered above.

We can, of course, imagine that someone may utter praise of someone else in all sincerity, but that she says things that are false in the process, despite believing them true – evident in the expression “a face only a mother could love.” For example, someone who does not know anything about basketball and is well-disposed toward me may observe me make a single shot from the free-throw line (at random, I can assure you) and say, “Wow, you’re very good at basketball!” Surely she is sincere in what she says – she does not intend to deceive or manipulate me, but sincerely intends to praise me, and she believes what she is saying to be true; she simply does not know what she is talking about. If she knew more about basketball, she would know that I was not particularly good. Though this seems similar to flattery, I would suggest that she is simply in error.

Similarly, we can with some difficulty imagine a (better) world in which I am actually quite good at basketball, and another person (who loathes me) observes me playing and utters the *true* statement, “You are good at basketball.” But this person so loathes me that she does not intend to

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42 While Dwight Schrute might seem to flatter Michael, he does not on a moralistic account, since he means what he says when he praises Michael and believes it to be true.

43 I have engaged in similar behavior when watching my alma mater, the University of Maryland, play against – and lose to – Duke with Duke fans, especially Duke fans with power over me.
praise me at all, and is entirely insincere; rather, she is doing so because
she is in a crowd of onlookers who also know that I am quite a good
basketball player, and states the fact for the sake of fitting in. To return to
the language of Trilling, “there is no congruence between avowal and
actual feeling.”
Though this person speaks insincerely, she is not quite
engaging in flattery. Flattery is, to be sure, a kind of deception, akin to
lying or hypocrisy. The person giving grudging praise isn’t really lying –
after all, she knows that I am, in fact, good at basketball. And she isn’t
quite doing what the fox or the weavers were doing – she isn’t saying
something that she knows to be false because it appeals to my over-inflated
sense of self-worth. In this instance, I suggest that she is engaging in
something closer to hypocrisy. As Runciman suggests, “hypocrisy involves
the construction of a persona . . . that generates some kind of false impres-
sion,” an impression that, if created properly, “extends beyond the instant
of the lie itself.”
Her concern could be me (perhaps I am worthy of being deceived in such a way), or the audience, in whose good graces she wishes
to remain and not be thought a poor sport.
Finally, we can imagine that best of worlds (and hopefully not Pan-
glossian), in which I am not only good at basketball, but the person
praising me does not loathe me, knows a bit about basketball, has nothing
to gain from me, and simply wants to compliment me on my excellence.
This, presumably, is a situation of straightforward praise. Yet we can also
imagine that I am good at basketball, the person praising me does not
loathe me, and knows about basketball, yet I am (in this scenario) not just
good at basketball, but a highly paid professional basketball player. If her
aim was not simply to praise me, but to gain favor by praising me – favor
I would not give were it not for the praise – then we might describe her
behavior as akin to flattery. Though she believes what she says to be true,
and seems to mean it as a compliment, we might nonetheless describe her
as insincere, in the sense that her praise dissembles her intentions. Yet the
action might fall short of fitting into a strict moralistic account of flattery,
in the sense that the praise she utters may not appeal to a false sense of
my own abilities, so much as, perhaps, my gullibility about the intentions
of others.
None of these phenomena is what a moralistic view of flattery would
suggest. A flatterer speaks insincerely to please and manipulate an audience,
and in speaking insincerely, she says what she believes to be false. A moralistic view of flattery could, perhaps, accommodate the example of the flatterer who says what she believes to be true and seeks both to praise and ingratiate, though insofar as it does not rely on a false sense of my own abilities rooted in self-love and abetted by a lack of self-knowledge, it falls short of what we saw in Aesop. Generally, the moralistic view would draw starker distinctions between flattery and praise, and the possibility of clearly ascertaining the mental state and intent of the agent. To stay with the current example, a flatterer would say, on seeing me make a free-throw at random (in the non-ideal world and in the parlance of our time), “Wow, you can ball!” She would give no overt signs of sarcasm, at least if she was good at flattery, though she would know that I was not, in fact, good at basketball. But she would imagine that I would believe her, pushed to credulity by my self-love, and regard her in a favorable light. And if we asked why she did this, we would imagine that she had something to gain from me – perhaps I am wealthy, yet not a very good basketball player.

The problem with the scenario (apart from the difficulty of readers suspending their disbelief) I’ve just provided, though, is this: we need to know an awful lot to describe someone as a flatterer in the moralistic sense. She could or could not be sincere, and we can often gauge the sincerity of others only with difficulty. Similarly, she could or could not be acting from morally culpable motives, and we rarely know others’ motives. Indeed, this is precisely the shortcoming of what we saw with Roberts-Miller: we cannot be sure that the demagogue, in her example, is dishonest, and “demagogues may be perfectly sincere.”\footnote{Roberts-Miller, “Democracy, Demagoguery, and Critical Rhetoric,” 460.} If, then, we add to the scenario under consideration that the agent is dependent on me in some way – an employee, a student – we would quickly move to a demoralized account, understanding her action less as the result of her moral shortcomings than her subordinate status and relationship of dependence. Yet we still wouldn’t quite know whether she is sincere or not. Though many of the sources I’ll be engaging over the course of this book will write quite a lot about motives and intentions, I prefer to leave aside intentions, motives, and the thorny issue of the agent’s knowledge, and focus more on what sort of behaviors we see when we describe someone as engaging in flattery. Provisionally, then, I’ll suggest that flatterers use deferential or laudatory speech (or action), the content of
which may be believed true or false (though normally believed false), to achieve a goal (or goals), the benefits of which accrue more to the speaker or actor than the audience or recipient, benefits that would not have accrued were it not for manipulation.

Flattery, it is worth noting, is not identical to hypocrisy or lying, though flatterers may be hypocrites and are liars. What makes someone a hypocrite, again, is constructing a persona aimed at creating a false impression about one’s character, but what really makes someone a hypocrite is a “prior commitment not to be inconsistent, rather than the fact of inconsistency.” While all flatterers are liars, presumably, not all liars are flatterers. A liar pretends to be representing the truth in speech while saying what she believes to be untrue, and seeks to create a false impression in the mind of her auditor; but she may not be deploying flattery in doing so, and in fact may be quite cruel in her lies. What she relies on is not the self-love of her auditor so much as his gullibility or ignorance. And, to turn to a third category of worrisome speech – namely, bullshit – while flatterers often engage in something much like bullshitting, not all bullshitters are flatterers, and not all flatterers are bullshitters; what “the bullshitter hides . . . is that the truth-values of his statements are of no central interest to him . . . his intention is neither to report the truth nor to conceal it.” He bullshits because he is expected to say something, and especially “to provide honest representations of himself.”

IV

Having given a brief account of flattery (moralistic and strategic) and what I take it to be, and how it differs from hypocrisy, lying, and bullshit, I’ll say a bit more about its relationship to political thought. I suggested above that while flattery was an important concern in the history of political thought, it does not seem to matter all that much for contemporary political inquiry. Yet the concerns that emerge in exploring flattery in the history of political thought are echoed by three strains of contemporary political inquiry: scholarship on republicanism, rhetoric, and representation.

Scholars exploring the republican tradition, whether in a historical vein (e.g. Skinner) or a more normative vein (e.g. Pettit), describe a way

47 Runciman, Political Hypocrisy, 9.
49 Ibid., 65.
of thinking about political life that centers on a distinct notion of what it means to be free: namely, non-domination (Pettit’s formulation) or independence (Skinner’s frequent formulation). To be dominated is to be in a situation analogous to that of a slave’s relationship to her master. A slave may be interfered with – or not interfered with – according to her master’s whims, and not according to a known standing rule to which she may have recourse in challenging her master’s authority, let alone having the certainty that her interests will be considered by her master.50

Because of the slave’s tenuous position – or, more generally, because of the tenuous position of dominated persons – she may engage in strategic behavior, such as flattery, to achieve a modicum of security. Indeed, this was one of the undesirable features of tyranny in the republican tradition, and one of the ways in which those subject to tyrannical rule were like slaves – a common theme in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English and American criticisms of monarchical rule and courtly life. As Skinner notes, “No one can hope to speak truth to power if everyone is obliged to cultivate the flattering arts required to appease a ruler on whose favor everyone depends.”51 Charles I in particular was subject to such criticisms, as we shall see in Chapter 4, but the theme was widely featured in republican political thought from Roman times, as we will see in Chapter 1.

The distortive effects of domination, and power asymmetry writ large, on speech are not simply a historical concern. If we approach republicanism as a theory that speaks to contemporary social and political concerns, we can imagine any number of relationships of domination in which the subordinate engages in flattery – the employee, wife, student, prisoner. As Pettit puts it,

The self-censorship or self-inhibition that the person practices need not involve actively thwarting desire; it will occur just so far as there are any options, otherwise desired or undesired, that a wish to keep the dominating party sweet would stop them taking.52

Individuals in such a position are worse off than they would be if they were not dominated: “They find themselves in a position where they are

demeaned by their vulnerability, being unable to look the other in the eye, and where they may even be forced to fawn or toady or flatter in the attempt to ingratiate themselves.”

To be free and to have dignity is not to be constrained to flatter. One is reminded, in this respect, of Wollstonecraft’s phrase, “the great art of pleasing,” an art deployed, in her account, by women who are in positions of dependence. While I have been critical of republicanism elsewhere, it strikes me that the attention paid by republicans to the distortive effects of power on discourse is of immense value, as it draws our attention to the centrality and relevance of the non-ideal in appreciating the meaning of liberty.

This is not the only theme in contemporary political theory that an exploration of flattery speaks to. Stepping back to my earlier discussion of flattery, a key point that emerged was that the flatterer speaks insincerely, seeking to create a false impression about her own mental state, and, in so doing, she says things that she does not believe to be true. Such behavior is highly strategic, and as such, it goes against the presuppositions (or aspirations) of deliberative theories of democracy, be they Rawlsian or Habermasian. This is due to these theories relying, in part, on the quality of discourse in order to secure political legitimacy. The flatterer, in effect, violates all of the important features of the mode of communication appropriate to deliberation – “claims to truth, normative rightness, and sincerity.”

Whether we are thinking of deliberative democracy in a Rawlsian or Habermasian vein, flatterers do not tell the truth and they do not even believe that their lies are true. If a deliberative democracy is, as Markovits puts it, “a logocentric polity,” flattery would have no place, and would be inimical to the speech-centered qualities of democratic legitimacy.

As Markovits explains in summarizing Habermasian theory, “If the goal of discussion is not consensus, then the endeavor is not ‘communicative,’

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55 I have in mind, in using the term *non-ideal*, the argument Levy makes in “There is no such Thing as Ideal Theory,” especially his claim that “The principles appropriate to political and legal life are partly constituted by the problems and limitations of human social life; they are not imported from the realm of moral truth and then applied to a more or less recalcitrant world.” Jacob T. Levy, “There Is No Such Thing as Ideal Theory,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 36, no. 1 (2016).
57 Ibid., 21.
but ‘strategic,’ meaning that participants are not treating one another as equals, but as objects to be defeated or won over.” 58 Since the primary aim of flattery is to win people over by deceiving them about both an array of facts and the mental state of the speaker, getting them to do what they would not otherwise do, one would be hard pressed to think of a mode of discourse that is more strategic – and hence non-communicative – than flattery. We may think of Austin’s account of perlocution:

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them. 59

In this instance, the entire perlocutionary point of flattery – that is, the successful practice of flattery – is to persuade its object to do things that he, she, or they would not otherwise do through its conscious arousal of reason-trumping affect.

But it is especially the insincerity of the flatterer that poses a problem for deliberative theories of democracy. If what someone says is insincere, it is hard to see how “the discourse can develop in an open and honest manner.” 60 When someone lies – and flatterers, on both the moralistic and demoralized accounts, are liars of a sort (though not all liars are flatterers) – we are far from “good deliberative practice.” 61 Habermas is quite explicit about this: “agreement in the communicative practice of everyday life rests simultaneously on intersubjectively shared propositional knowledge, on normative accord, and on mutual trust.” 62 Rawls, too, emphasizes the importance of sincerity in his account of public reason, stating that “A vote can be held on a fundamental question as on any other; and if the question is debated by appeal to political values and citizens vote their sincere opinion, the ideal [of public reason] is sustained.” 63 The goal of speaking is not

58 Ibid., 29.
winning, and the aim is a “rationally motivated consensus,” which rules out the need for rhetoric in the first place.

The irony, however, is that flattery is a kind of communicative practice that we might expect to occur quite frequently in democratic politics – as Shklar remarks,

one might well argue that liberal democracy cannot afford public sincerity. Honesty that humiliates and a stiff-necked refusal to compromise would ruin democratic civility in a political society in which people have many serious differences of belief and interest. Our sense of public ends is so wavering and elusive because we often do not even see the same social scene before us. We do not agree on the facts or figures of social life, and we heartily dislike one another’s religious, sexual, intellectual, and political commitments – not to mention one another’s ethnic, racial, and class character.

Attention to the ways that the non-ideal conditions in which we live shapes our behavior suggests that we should be attuned to the ways in which agents, faced with differentials in power, respond in their communication.

This brings me to the third theme: representation. Elites competing for office need, in the end, the votes of citizens, and they use language strategically to get them to do so. This use may take the form of trying to get voters to dislike or distrust one’s opponents, and in candidates – and incumbents – trying to get voters to like them. Thus Fenno, in his classic work Home Style, describes the “congressman’s presentation of self to others,” focusing in particular on the way in which they try to “engender political support” through the verbal and “nonverbal, ‘contextual’ aspects of their presentation.” A key priority is to enhance the sense of trust that constituents have in their representatives, and “to convey one’s honesty to constituents” through “competence, identification, and empathy.”

According to Fenno,

every House member conveys a sense of empathy with his constituents. Contextually and verbally, he gives them the impression that “I understand your situation and I care about it”; “I can put myself in your shoes”; and “I can see the world the way you do.”

67 Ibid., 58.
68 Ibid., 59.
There are many ways of doing this, and these ways have a good deal to do with one’s constituency – one congressman in particular does this by displaying his love for his female constituents “He greets women with, ‘Hi, Hon.’ When he shakes hands with them, he asks, ‘Can I hold your hand?’ By turns, he flatters and titillates.”

Fenno does not hesitate to use the language of manipulation to describe the process.

Jeffrey Tulis describes a similar phenomenon in *The Rhetorical Presidency*. Indeed, part of his thesis – namely, that the “second constitution, which puts a premium on active and continuous presidential leadership of popular opinion,” is at odds with the understanding of the presidency and presidential leadership embodied in the Constitution – involves the danger of demagogues who flatter their audiences. Through the transformation and narrowing of politics by instituting administration, the writers of the Constitution hoped to check the demagogue of both the “soft” and “hard” variety: the prior “tends to flatter his constituents,” while the latter appeals to envy or fear to create divisions. The implementation of the Constitution would help to ensure that “demagogues would be deprived of part of their once-powerful arsenal of rhetorical weapons because certain topics would be rendered illegitimate for public discussion.”

The presidency, then, was indirectly representative of the people, but “was to be free enough from the daily shifts in public opinion so that he could refine it.” There was much continuity in the practice of presidential rhetoric through Roosevelt; the true change occurred in the Wilson Presidency, during which Wilson’s distinct view of the presidency and the constitution worked in tandem with his understanding of presidential rhetoric, bringing about “a fundamental transformation of American politics.” The end result is that the rhetorical presidency undermines the aspirations of the crafters of the Constitution: “This surfeit of speech by politicians [today] constitutes a decay of political discourse. It replaces discussion structured by the contestability of opinion inherent to issues with a competition to please or manipulate the public.”

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69 Ibid., 75.
71 Ibid., 28.  72 Ibid., 31.  73 Ibid., 39.  74 Ibid., 173.
75 Ibid., 178–79. Though the literature emphasizing the normative importance of political rhetoric has increased over the years, Garsten’s study still stands out as one of the best. He makes a strong case for the importance of political rhetoric. See Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
Though I am not sanguine about contemporary political speech, I am also not entirely convinced that the proliferation of speech – and its venues – by politicians is so bad. Power needs to give an account of itself, however imperfect this account may be. And if power can ignore speaking to you – and if your interests aren’t worth speaking to in a flattering way – then you are part of a constituency that has very little standing indeed. One person’s irritation with political correctness, whatever that term actually means, is another person’s assertion that they cannot be demeaned casually. It’s hard not to sympathize with the latter.

V
With this in mind, I’d like to recapitulate by asking the question: why is flattery a worrisome political phenomenon from a moralistic perspective? A successful flatterer is morally and politically problematic, at a minimum, because the false and insincere praise may cause others to act in ways that they would otherwise not act. And such false and insincere praise may harm those to whom it is applied; at the very least, it will manipulate them into doing what they would not otherwise do. And if we think specifically about the two regimes that, since classical antiquity, have been particularly worrisome for theorists concerned with flattery – democracy and monarchy (or autocracy, more broadly) – we may notice two distinct political concerns. With respect to democracy, flattery poses a threat because, as Shklar remarked in discussing hypocrisy, “those engaged in governing must assume at the very least two roles, one of pursuing policies and another of edifying the governed in order to legitimize these plans.” Part and parcel of democracy as a “logocentric polity” is persuasive speech, and flattery is one mode of dissimulation – among many others – that speakers may use to achieve their purposes, a mode of dissimulation that may be of particular use in democracies, given their ideology of egalitarianism. But flattery may, in a way, be acutely democratic: it’s not hard to see why a speaker might try to butter up her audience, appealing to their vanities, or their sense of self; a common motif in recent American politics is, after all, assuring one’s audience that


76 I wrote this sentence without anticipating the abundant use of Twitter by a president.

77 Shklar, Ordinary Vices, 69.
one is a Washington outsider, even when one most surely is not.\textsuperscript{78} The
danger for many political theorists when it comes to a democracy –
especially those who are skeptical of democracy – is that sweet-talking
flatterers will emerge to seduce the people – this is a theme we will
encounter in discussing eighteenth-century American political thought
in Chapter 5.

Autocracy, on the other hand, poses a different problem. Rather than
the manipulation of the many by the few, the worry with autocracy
centers on the manipulation of the one (or the few). Given the sheer
amount of power that autocrats possess, it’s easy to see why we might
worry about them being manipulated by flatterers; indeed, this was a
common theme in reflections on monarchy in the sixteenth and seven-
teenth centuries, as we will see in discussing Machiavelli and Hobbes. But
autocrats themselves have good reason to worry about the flatterers that
may be – and likely are – in their midst. A monarch fears flatterers for
the same reason he fears hypocrites: “The reason for his mortal fear of
being taken in by pretense is that it might threaten his domination over
those around him.”\textsuperscript{79}

This is not to say that I will be hewing closely to the moralistic account
throughout this book: given the sources that I will be exploring, this
would be impossible, and given my own thinking, undesirable. But it is
to suggest that despite the fact that the vast majority of political theory
views flattery as a bad thing – bad for the flatterer, the flattered, or both,
and a distortion of truth – matters are much more complicated, and much
of what I’ll have to say within the book will go toward complicating this
account and showing the distinctive utility of certain approaches to
flattery. Setting aside the evaluative problems I’ve already noted – namely,
how we are to know whether praise is insincere, or whether the speaker
believes what she says to be true or false – we also need to be alert to
when, how, to what end, and by whom flattery is deployed. One person’s
detestable flatterer may be another person’s wily trickster, and the prac-
tice (and evaluation) of flattery will always be shaped by power relations.
But what all flatterers share, I suggest by way of revisiting my earlier

\textsuperscript{78} Michelle Bachmann once told an audience of Iowans outside of Jubilee Family Church, “I
am not a politician. I am not an establishment person. I am a real, authentic Iowan.” The
author of the article notes (dispassionately, of course) that Bachman had “held the House
seat for the Sixth District of Minnesota since 2007.” Susan Saulny, “Embattled but
Confident, Bachmann Says She Is the Complete Package,” \textit{New York Times}, January 1,
2012. One might also note that she in fact represented a district in Minnesota, not Iowa.

\textsuperscript{79} Shklar, \textit{Ordinary Vices}, 53.
account of flattery and how it differs from related phenomena, is the use of deferential or laudatory speech (or action), the content of which is believed true or false (though normally false), to achieve a goal (or goals), the benefits of which accrue more to the speaker or actor than the audience or recipient, benefits that would not have accrued were it not for manipulation. As to whether this speech is morally blameworthy or not, that, I suggest, has to do with what it does, who is doing it, and why.

VI

I close this introductory chapter with a brief outline of the book as a whole. Chapter 1, “‘Suffer No Man to Be King’: Friendship, Liberty, and Status in Roman Political Thought,” begins with a short introductory discussion of flattery in Plato and Aristotle’s thought, paving the way for a sustained discussion of Cicero’s Laelius On Friendship, with a particular focus on Cicero’s association of flattery with tyranny. For Cicero, tyrants – a particularly worrying example of the exceptionally powerful – posed dangers to being a free person along two dimensions: their sheer power and their vicious characters. Drawing on Cicero’s On Duties and his speech On Behalf of Marcellus, I argue that the power difference could be negotiated by the voluntary moderation of the powerful, while their vice required that the powerful embody qualities that could make them the objects of affection. Exploring next the distinction between tyrants and kings in Cicero’s On the Republic and On Duties, I turn for the remainder of the chapter to a discussion of Pliny’s Panegyric. I argue that being able to befriend the emperor – in the case of Pliny, the emperor Trajan – was essential to resolving the tension between monarchy and tyranny, along with navigating the murky social hierarchies that emerged with the transition from Republic to Principate.

Chapter 2 – “Without ‘Superfluous Ornament’: Castiglione, Machiavelli, and the Performance of Counsel” – begins with a brief discussion of the topic of flattery in humanistic and Renaissance political thought. I then turn to classical discussions of rhetorical style and ornament, focusing especially on Cicero and Quintilian, after which I argue that the style of Castiglione’s courtier deploys ornament in order to ensnare his prince. That is to say, the courtier is so effective in using richly alluring ornament that the prince cannot help but love him, love that in turn allows the courtier to influence the prince in ways that would otherwise be impossible. The courtier captivates to instruct. Turning to Machiavelli’s Prince and, to a lesser extent, The Discourses, I argue that Machiavelli
turns Castiglione’s performance upside down: he instructs to captivate the prince. In seeming to eschew rhetoric, he does not avoid rhetoric, per se, but rather a certain style of rhetoric: the grand style. Turning from the grand style to the plain style assimilates Machiavelli’s act of counsel to the act of teaching, and whatever appeal his argument has will be rooted not in his graceful concealment of his learning, but in its display.

Chapter 3, “The Monarch’s Plague’: The Problem of Flattery and Hobbes’ Contingently Unitary Sovereign,” centers on seventeenth-century England. I begin by discussing the place of flattery in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English political thought, honing in on the theme of flattery in criticisms – and defenses – of monarchy prior to and during the English civil wars. I then turn to Hobbes, discussing his essay, *The Life and History of Thucydides*, along with *De Cive, Elements*, and *Leviathan*. Keeping in mind Hobbes’ skepticism about both participatory governments and the dangers of flattering rhetoric, I argue that Hobbes prefers monarchy to non-monarchies because they are contingently unitary. That is, precisely because monarchies – and only monarchies – feature a unity of both the natural person of the sovereign and the artificial person of the sovereign, they are less susceptible to flattery than non-monarchies.

In Chapter 4, “The Bewitching Engine’: Mandeville and Smith on Flattery, Praise, and the Origins of Language,” I explore Mandeville’s account of flattery’s role in political and cultural development, on the one hand, and Smith’s response to Mandeville, on the other. Focusing on Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees, Part II*, and *Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, I highlight Mandeville’s account of the place of flattery in maintaining social and political conventions. Mandeville’s account is noteworthy for being a non-moralistic account of flattery, and is, as I’ll suggest, structurally similar to his account of the origins of language. I then turn to Smith’s writings, focusing largely on the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but also the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* to explore Smith’s response to Mandeville: by distinguishing between the desire for praise and the desire for being worthy of praise, Smith is able to develop an account of sociability that maintains a place for self-love without becoming a world of manipulation. In doing so, he not only rejects Mandeville’s account of flattery but also Mandeville’s account of language – and he does so, I’ll suggest, from within politics, and not without.

Chapter 5, “Flattering to Young Ambitious Minds’: Representing America in the Ratification Debates,” focuses on American political
thought, chiefly the *Federalist Papers* authored by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, and selected Anti-Federalist writings. I first discuss the theme of flattery in eighteenth-century American political thought more broadly, particularly as it related to colonial criticisms of the English crown. I then turn to the role played by worries about and accusations of flattery in the *Federalist Papers* and a range of Anti-Federalists. The bulk of the chapter, however, will center on a reading of the *Federalist Papers* and selected Anti-Federalists, honing in on how each set of authors represents America to itself, while at the same time accusing their opponent of engaging in a flattering representation. For the Federalists, the Anti-Federalists flatter local prejudices; for the Anti-Federalists, the Federalists offer a flattering – and dangerous – prospect of greatness.

**Conclusion** is the shortest chapter of the work, and grapples briefly with a problem I did not expect myself to be grappling with when I first began writing this book: the prospect of a “patrician demagogue,” to use Syme’s phrase for Julius Caesar, not simply being the nominee of one of our major parties, but perhaps being elected president. I am referring, of course, to Donald Trump, who as I completed this manuscript locked up the Republican presidential nomination and was in a close race with the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton.

This book deals with a theme – flattery – through an exploration of a range of figures and periods drawn from the history of political thought. Though I do not seek to develop a sequential or developmental narrative, the chapters are thematically connected, and each deals with flattery from a particular theoretical perspective. Chapter 1 focuses on flattery and its connection to social relations, with a particular emphasis on equality and inequality and their effects on social relations, while Chapter 2 turns to flattery and its relationship to modes and styles of discourse. Chapter 3 explores flattery’s relationship to forms of political authority, and Chapter 4 turns to flattery as an element of theories of language and identity formation. Chapter 5 centers on accusations of flattery as a political tactic, along with flattery’s relationship to the sense of resentment and humiliation. The arguments and interpretations I present do not, then, give rise to an overarching historical narrative, but they do engage with flattery through a range of related political and social theoretical approaches.

Before concluding my introduction, however, I should say a few things about how and why I’ve chosen the texts and authors that I’ll be discussing.

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over the course of this book. Some of the texts and authors I’ll be discussing fall squarely within the canon of the history of political thought – Machiavelli and Hobbes, Smith and the Federalists – while others, if not always included in the canon, are certainly hovering on its edges – Cicero and Mandeville, various Anti-Federalists, Pliny and Castiglione, Milton and Plutarch. Generally speaking, though, the texts and authors I’ve selected lend themselves to being put in dialogue, whether by their chronological and geographic proximity (e.g. Cicero and Pliny) or their conceptual and linguistic overlap (e.g. Machiavelli and Castiglione). And I put these texts in dialogue, in turn, with other works – some of which are more strictly philosophical than others, but all of which, I hope, serve to flesh out the themes I’m interested in or to locate the texts themselves in their particular contexts. As to the moments I’ve chosen to focus on – the late Roman republic and early empire, sixteenth-century Italy, seventeenth-century England, eighteenth-century Britain, and eighteenth-century America – these are moments in which pressing political and ideological questions can either be explored through the theme of flattery or revolved around questions of power and discourse that entailed a focus on flattery. I have much less to say about classical Greek thought on flattery than I do about Roman thought – a choice that reflects just how much good work (which I note in Chapter 1) has been done by political theorists on flattery and frank speech in Greek political thought. My choice of authors and moments is, of necessity, selective, limited in no small part by my ability to consult works in the original language and my scholarly roots in Roman political thought. I hope I do not flatter myself in thinking this selection to be at least somewhat justified.
I

“Suffer No Man to Be King”

*Friendship, Liberty, and Status in Roman Political Thought*

In the prior chapter, I discussed flattery, seeking to distinguish it from related phenomena – hypocrisy, bullshit, and lying – by focusing on the way in which flattery proceeds: namely, by the use of language or deed that, through pleasing the recipient, leads her to do something that she would not have done otherwise. In doing so, I drew a distinction between moralizing accounts of flattery and strategic accounts of flattery, the prior viewing flattery as a vice and producing a harm in the flattered, the latter viewing it as a strategy aimed, in part, at limiting harms for the flatterer. After connecting my interest in flattery to republicanism, deliberative democracy, and representation, I briefly discussed, through a moralistic lens, the political dangers associated with flattery in two regimes in particular: democracy and monarchy.

This chapter will continue to explore monarchy, focusing on two Roman sources: Cicero and Pliny. My chief concern is how the discourse of friendship and flattery could, on the one hand, serve to delegitimize monarchical rule in Cicero’s writings, while nevertheless paving the way for a legitimate – if rarefied – monarchy in Pliny’s *Panegyric*. My interest is thus in the discourse of friendship and flattery as a legitimating ideology, and the potential for the republican friendship–flattery discourse to both legitimize and delegitimize monarchy. I will be drawing on my

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The phrase “suffer no man to be king” is part of the oath that Brutus had the Romans swear after his expulsion of the Tarquins. Livy, *From the Founding of the City*, trans. B. O. Foster (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), II.1.
discussion of James Scott in the prior chapter, too, and address several of Cicero’s other works – especially *On Duties* and *On the Republic*.

Given the connection between *dignitas*, or standing, and *libertas* in Roman thought, as I’ll show below, we might expect that the emergence of monarchical rule – incipient with Caesar, and full-blown with Octavian (later Augustus) – in Rome would pose something of an ideological problem for the Roman political vocabulary. After all, on a standard reading, Caesar’s rule – let alone the rule of Augustus – meant the end of Roman republican liberty. The Latin term for king – *rex* – was, as Brunt puts it, “detestable,” and Augustus himself was always at pains not to call himself, or be called, *rex.* Yet within 150 years, the same Roman political culture that seems to chafe at the superiority of someone like Caesar would celebrate, in Pliny’s *Panegyric*, the emperor Trajan as a restorer of liberty. How are we to make sense of so radical a change? The answer I offer is that the republican discourse of friendship (found most clearly in Cicero’s dialogue *Laelius on Friendship*, or simply *On Friendship*) would, in effect, serve as the foundation for Pliny’s praise and advice for the emperor Trajan in his *Panegyric*. Focusing on the themes of flattery in two of Cicero’s works – his speech *On Behalf of Marcellus* and *On Friendship* – and Pliny’s *Panegyric* (a speech of thanks and counsel), I show that the discourse of friendship and flattery could serve to delegitimize monarchical rule and its concomitant social and political inequalities in Cicero’s writings, while nevertheless paving the way for a legitimate – if rarefied – monarchy in Pliny’s oration. I will be particularly concerned with three concepts: *libertas* (liberty, or free speech in some contexts), *amicitia* (friendship), and *dignitas* (dignity, or standing). Each of these concepts stands in a tense relationship to flattery, which is a mark of domination, perverts friendship, and is incompatible with dignity.

My discussion in this chapter focuses on Roman thought rather than Greek thought, though I’ll begin by saying a few things about Plato and Aristotle. This has to do, in part, with the sheer quality and quantity of the work done in political theory on flattery and frank speech in Greek thought. And it also has to do with the narrative structure of my book, and my particular concern with the place of flattery in existing (and often unequal) polities, as discussed in the prior chapter. Beyond that, my focus also has to do with important differences between the Athenian democratic regime and the Roman republican, and then imperial, regime. First,

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in the Roman context, we witness the transition to monarchical rule from a set of institutions that, while not democratic, was participatory. Second, Rome was a highly stratified society, and these stratifications, when connected to the shift to a monarchical form of rule, intensified Roman elite anxieties about their own status and their relation to others, magnifying worries about being unequal and engaging in flattery.

I begin, in the following section, with a brief discussion of the theme of flattery in Plato and Aristotle, turning then in Section III to the figure of the elder Dionysius of Syracuse (ruled 405–367 BCE) in Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations (c. 45 BCE). Cicero’s portrait of Dionysius brings together several themes that I will engage throughout the chapter: Dionysius’ power, his character, his inability to form friendships, and the prevalence of flatterers at his court. I then turn to the connection between dignitas and libertas in two of Cicero’s letters, concepts that are important in understanding Cicero’s speech On Behalf of Marcellus, a speech I interpret in Section IV as performing a public transcript that legitimizes a certain form of political inequality by rendering inequality compatible with dignitas and libertas. Section V centers on Cicero’s On Friendship, a text I interpret as delegitimizing the relations between both superiors and inferiors embodied in On Behalf of Marcellus, but which also points to a form of friendship compatible with social and political inequality. This model of frank speaking—yet unequal friendship—serves as the foundation for my account of Pliny’s Panegyric in Section VI, a work I read as embodying a legitimating ideology while highlighting just how great an obstacle hierarchy posed to frank speaking friendship. Section VII serves to conclude my chapter, briefly connecting my account of Cicero and Pliny to James Scott’s account of public transcripts, which we encountered in the Introduction.

II

The earliest philosophical treatments of flattery and its relationship to political life (in western thought, at least) are to be found, unsurprisingly, in democratic Athens. Athens was a regime that prided itself on—and to whose ideology was central—parrhesia, or frank speaking, a practice that was “daring and courageous” and entailed “the resistance to hiding what is true because of deference to a hierarchical social and political world or a concern with how one appears before the gaze of others.”

was, in short, a sort of shamelessness, and the centrality of *parrhesia* to Athenian ideology is particularly evident in the words of Theseus in Euripides’ *Suppliant Women*: “This is the call of freedom [*toulētheron*]: ‘What man has good advice to give the city, and wishes to make it known?’”⁴ If one was engaged in *parrhesia*, one would not be engaged in flattery (*kolakeia*) – the *kolax*, the *parrhesiastes*’ opposite, does not embody “forthright integrity of word and act.”⁵ Courageous and non-deferential speech – *shameless* speech – constituted the practice of *parrhesia* in democratic Athens, and was well suited to the regime given the egalitarian ideology of Athenian democracy.

Against and drawing on this backdrop, Plato’s *Gorgias* is the earliest sustained philosophical treatment of flattery and its relationship to Athenian democracy, a rhetorical practice opposed to the *parrhesia* that Socrates himself values and embodies in the dialogue. While one can certainly read the work as anti-rhetorical *tout court*, recent readings emphasize the ways in which the dialogue modifies, rather than rejects, rhetorical and affect. Thus, in the dialogue, Socrates both embodies and advocates a form of *parrhesia*; for him, it “refers to the disposition needed for one to participate in a serious search for truth as distinct from a competition for rhetorical victory.”⁶ While Socrates’ use of the term seems puzzling, given just how central it was to Athenian democracy, and just how anti-democratic Plato often seems, Socrates’ activity is “in some sense organic to Athenian aspirations.” Indeed, he opposes *parrhesia* to the practice of rhetoric (*be rhetorike*), the practice of persuasive speech often linked to democracy.⁷ When pressed by Polus as to which craft (*techne*) he takes oratory to be, Socrates responds that it is not a craft, but a “knack” – *empeiria*. Specifically, it is a knack that produces “a certain gratification and pleasure.”⁸ Like the related knacks – cookery, cosmetics, and sophistry – it is a species of flattery (*kolakeia*). The conventional orator, for Plato, does not practice a craft at all, then, which is to say that the

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⁷ Ibid., 162.

conventional orator is not able to give an “account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing.” 9 Rather, conventional oratory – a species of flattery writ large – proceeds by holding forth “what’s most pleasant at the moment,” by which “it sniffs out folly and hoodwinks it.” 10 It is able to convince those that it seeks to convince because they lack knowledge, “so that if a pastry baker and a doctor had to compete in front of children, or in front of men just as foolish as children, to determine which of the two, the doctor or the pastry baker, had expert knowledge of good food and bad, the doctor would die of starvation.” 11 It does what it does – that is, it pleases its listeners – “because it guesses at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what’s best.” 12

The audience is ignorant, on Plato’s account, but it is not the only locus of ignorance: orators, as Plato puts it at 467a, lack nous, which Zeyl translates as “intelligence.” Plato’s flattering orator, lacking intelligence, does only what he “sees fit,” having in effect no power at all. 13 Since the flatterer engages in mere guesswork, and does not speak from knowledge, the flatterer is unstable in speaking, shifting his words as a function of his rhetorical situation, evident in Socrates’ description of Callicles’ behavior toward the Athenian people: “If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian demos denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear.” 14 And because the orator says only what she guesses that the audience wishes to hear, she appeals to particular appetites, not those that make an individual better, but rather “those that make him worse” – the practice of no less than Pericles, according to Socrates. 15

At the level of the individual, the object of successful flattery is in a worse state as a result of being flattered: Plato suggests that the flatterer, not speaking from knowledge, focuses on and feeds appetites that should not be fed in any particular individual. Politically speaking, the phenomenon is similar for Plato: just as the successfully flattered individual will have a soul that is “disorganized” as a result of having harmful and disorderly appetites nourished, so too will the political community be worse off as a result of flattering oratory, lacking “justice and self-control”

11 Plato, Gorgias, 464d. 12 Ibid., 465a. 13 Ibid., 467a. 14 Ibid., 481e. 15 Ibid., 503d.
as a result of its unhealthy desires being indulged. Unhealthy desires must be checked, and checking them through dialectic requires often painful criticism. Or, as Tarnopolsky aptly puts it, “A false consensus ... forms wherein ‘debate’ becomes a reciprocal exchange of pleasantries, such that neither party ever has to endure the pain of having one’s identity or ideals criticized by another.” Moral development requires that one engage in “the discomforting and perplexing recognition” that is central to acquiring “new norms, ideals, and exemplars of different ways of living.”

It is worth noting, as numerous commentators have pointed out, that the argument here is not against affect’s place in rhetoric, per se; indeed, rhetoric – fitting content and form depending on the occasion – and shame both play important roles in the dialogue, especially in the myth of judgment Socrates relates to Callicles. Also worth noting is that Socrates describes Callicles, the ostensible villain of the dialogue, as possessing parrhesia and lacking just the sort of shame that can impede the beneficial moment of recognition that Tarnopolsky describes. Callicles generally says what he thinks without an eye to pleasing the audience, but he does not practice the true Socratic rhetoric either, given his aim of getting away with injustice. Like a good doctor’s treatment of her patients, the true orator should not flatter her audience, giving it what it wants, but should instead make a practice of “redirecting its appetites and not giving in to them, using persuasion or constraint to get the citizens to become better.”

Socrates’ conventional orator merely tells her audience what it wants to hear out of a desire to secure their favor; in doing so, the orator does not improve them, and likely makes them worse. Flattery, in this instance, is clearly harmful for the one being flattered, fitting neatly into the moralistic account of flattery I developed in the Introduction chapter. Less evident, though, is that the flatterer knows what he is doing, given that he is engaged in a sort of guesswork. Yet to the extent that orators flatter the people, moreover, they affirm the people as agents worth flattering; that is, they are politically powerful. Flattery is a deviation from the ideal of parrhesia, a manifestation of the perverse forces at play in democratic politics.

When we turn from Plato to Aristotle, we see that Aristotle’s account of flattery in Book II of the Nicomachean Ethics differs from Plato’s in an important way, and in a way that is of particular relevance to my

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16 Ibid., 504d. 17 Tarnopolsky, Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants, 162. 18 Ibid., 162.
19 Ibid., 47.
20 On Callicles and parrhesia, see Monoson, Plato’s Democratic Entanglements, 163.
21 Plato, Gorgias, 516c.
argument concerning Cicero and Pliny. Aristotle’s flatterer, as we’ll see, is quite clearly a social or political inferior of some sort, and his flatterer is marked off less by ignorance than an excess of a particular disposition: the disposition connected, in its mean state, to the virtue of friendliness. Lacking such a disposition is a vice, and thus bad for the flatterer. We encounter Aristotle’s flatterer in his discussion of the pleasures of “daily life,” in which he delineates the virtue of friendliness (philia), a virtue of character that is embodied in the “person who is pleasant in the right way.”

Those who are excessively friendly may be placed into two categories: the one who “goes to excess” for no purpose “will be ingratiating” (areskos), while the flatterer (kolax) is “the one who does it for his own advantage.” They are distinguished, then, not by their behavior, per se – both are too friendly – but rather by their aim. Flatterers engage in excessive friendliness in order to secure something for themselves, while ingratiating people do not; the Aristotelian flatter is more straightforwardly self-aware and pursues an ulterior motive more clearly than the Platonic flatterer, who, if truly ignorant, might better be described as ingratiating. Aristotle says much the same thing somewhat later in the text in discussing the virtue of friendliness, remarking that those “who praise everything to please us and never cross us, but think they must cause no pain to those they meet,” are “ingratiating” – that is, they are hoi areskoi.

The areskos “aims to be pleasant with no ulterior purpose,” while the flatterer is especially concerned with money and “what money can buy.” They are both vicious, but while the latter is manipulative, the former is to be pitied.

The flatterer, seeking to please for his own purposes, reappears later in Aristotle’s discussion of friendship. There, we see that “the many” (hoi polloi) seem to be particularly vulnerable to flattery, since they “seem to prefer being loved to loving” (boulethai phileisthai mallon e philein). This is a function of their philotimia – their love of honor. For Aristotle, then, the flatterer, who “is a friend in an inferior position [huperechome-nos gar philos ho kolax], or rather pretends to be one,” finds his opening in the character flaw of another because he “pretends to love more than he is loved.” To be loved (phileisthai) seems to be near to being honored

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23 Ibid., 1108a28–29.
24 Ibid., 1126b12–13.
25 Ibid., 1127a7–9.
(timesthais), and the flatterer, who is excessively pleasant for her own sake, finds a ready target in the honor-loving many. Again, the audience’s ignorance is less salient than their passions—especially self-love and the inferior position of the flatterer. We also encounter the flatterer in the context of Aristotle’s discussion of the virtue of greatness of spirit (megalolopsucheia). The great-spirited man lets no one “determine his life” save for his friend, as allowing someone besides a friend to do so “would be slavish” (doulikon). It is for this reason, according to Aristotle, that “all flatterers are servile [pantes hoi kolakes thetikoi] and inferior people [boi tapenoi] are flatterers,” again showing the connection between flattery and subordinate social status.27

Aristotle’s typology of the vices associated with the pleasures of daily life—the excessively friendly for no reason (oudenos heneka), or the areskos, and the excessively friendly for their own advantage (opheleias tes auton), or the kolax—provides a way of distinguishing flattery from ingratiating behavior, a distinction not so evident in Plato’s Gorgias. Those who ingratiate themselves do so through some weakness on their part—a lack of self-esteem, or an over-pronounced desire for affection; they seek to please others even if it is not to their advantage. Those who are base (tapeinos) are flatterers, and flatterers are servile (thetikoi). While the kolax consciously seeks some pleasure or money, the ingratiating person (areskos) seeks more generalized favor. Those who consciously flatter, by contrast, do so for some purpose of their own. Flattery seeks to achieve a particular good or set of goods, and thus relies on the flatterer having in mind a plan of action and the intention to deceive. Flatterers of this sort are aware that they are flattering, as was Aesop’s fox or Anderson’s swindlers; the ingratiating flatterer may simply do so through habit or a character flaw. Ingratiating behavior, insofar as it does not involve a plan of action and the intention to deceive, is more undignified—a sign of a slavish character—than it is outright deceptive, closer to Anderson’s courtiers than to Anderson’s swindlers.

The political dynamics of flattery—and the slavishness of the flatterer—are evident in Aristotle’s Politics, where he links flatterers to two regime types: the type of democracy in which “the multitude has authority, not the law,” and tyranny.28 The multitude has authority in place of the laws in such democratic regimes because the people “become a monarch, one

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27 Nicomachean Ethics, 1125a1–2.
person composed of many.” Because such a people does not wish to be ruled by law, it “becomes a master” (despotikos) and the consequence is that flatterers are honored in the persons of demagogues. Flattering demagogues’ power lies in their ability to persuade the people, as they control “the people’s opinion.” Aristotle claims that tyranny and “the extreme kind of democracy” share a set of practices, including “the dominance of women in the household . . . and the license of slaves.” He explains: “slaves and women not only do not plot against tyrants but, because they prosper under them, are inevitably well disposed toward tyrannies and toward democracies as well.” This is so because those with a certain kind of character – those who are obsequious, or tapeinos, a term we encountered above in discussing Nicomachean Ethics 1125a1–2- are well suited to either regime. The obsequious person has a servile character: “no free-minded [phronema ecbon eleutheron] person would flatter” tyrants, since those who are good seek friendship. At the same time, “it is characteristic of a tyrant not to delight in anyone who is dignified or free-minded” (semnoi med’ eletheroi) because those who are virtuous deprive the tyrant of his “superiority” and status. As a result, tyrants hate those who are virtuous. Extreme democracies and tyrannies create social and political circumstances in which those with non-servile characters will not flourish, or at least they won’t engage in frank speech. The conditions of certain forms power, namely, mastery by one person (be it literally one or the many united in power) in the absence of law, foster servility and endanger those who find such behaviors beneath them.

In addition to the distinction between flattery and obsequiousness, we see, then, with Aristotle more clearly than with Plato that flattery is connected to differences in social status: the flatterer is a social or political inferior, in Aristotle’s account. By contrast, with Plato, to the extent that flattery (kolakeia) is opposed to parrhesia, it need not entail status differences; the orator was part of the demos even as he addressed it. Gorgias, moreover, sees himself as a superior of sorts (a master of the other arts) and Callicles certainly thinks he is superior to just about everyone in Athens. We can, to be sure, imagine a superior who seeks to ingratiate herself and flatters her subordinates to do so, but this is a strange, even

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29 Ibid., 1292a10–11.
30 Ibid., 1292a25–26. Demagogues, of course, can emerge in oligarchy as well; the few themselves may be the object of demagoguery, as can the people in oligarchic regimes.
31 Ibid., 1305b21–30.
32 Ibid., 1313b33–38.
33 Ibid., 1314a2.
34 Ibid., 1314a6–7, 1314a8.
comical, image, as with the character Michael Scott in the television program *The Office*, mentioned in the Introduction. Much more intuitive for the classical sources we are encountering in this chapter is the image of an inferior flattering a superior. With respect to flattery, then, Aristotle directs our attention to differences in status.

III

With my discussion of Plato and Aristotle in mind, and especially Aristotle’s distinction between flattery and obsequiousness, I’ll turn now to Cicero’s thought, beginning with what is perhaps his most vivid depiction of a tyrant: Dionysius of Syracuse, whom Cicero discusses in *Tusculan Disputations* 5.57–63. Flattery plays a central role in this portrait of Syracuse’s “tyrant,” thus called because he reduced the city to slavery (*servitudem oppressam*). Despite his apparently good reputation according to some authors, his nature was “unscrupulous . . . and unjust.” As a result of his vicious character, says Cicero, “he was necessarily supremely wretched.” Like Plato’s tyrant, he was unable to get what he wanted, despite his power; he, like Plato’s tyrant, trusted himself to slaves he had freed, along with “certain refugees and uncivilized barbarians.” As a result, Dionysius lived in a sort of prison, even using his daughters to shave his face lest a barber be able to cut his throat – though he denied his own daughters the use of iron grooming tools when they were older. So paranoid was he that he used a drawbridge to control access to his bedroom.

Cicero’s portrait of Dionysius is striking because, in his account, Dionysius was well aware of his own unhappiness, evident in the story of Damocles, one of his flatterers (*adsentatoribus*), who praised the tyrant as being most happy. Dionysius had Damocles seated and adorned with beautiful cloth, surrounded by treasure, given “chosen boys of rare beauty” to meet his urges, along with flowers, incense, food, and so forth. Once it was all in place, Dionysius had a sword hung from the ceiling by the hair of a horse over Damocles’ neck, and the flatterer was unable to enjoy any of these things for fear of his imminent demise.

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35 Ibid., 5.58.
remarks, given this story, “there was no happiness for the man who was perpetually menaced by some alarm.” Even if Dionysius had wanted “to retrace his steps to the path of justice, to restore to his fellow citizens their freedom and their rights [libertatem et iura],” he could not: “with the inconsiderateness of youth he had entangled himself in such errors and been guilty of such acts as made it impossible for him to be safe if he once began to be sane.”

And while Dionysius was intensely worried by “the disloyalty of friends,” it is also clear “how deeply he felt the need of them.” He was thus especially miserable because he had “cut himself off from the intimacy of friendship [consuetudine amicorum], from the enjoyment of social life, from any freedom of intercourse at all.” Instead, “he regarded no man who either felt worthy of freedom [libertate dignus esset] or had any wish at all to be free [vellet omnino liber esse] as a friend [amicum].” Such a figure is not, then, to be envied, and it is no wonder that he was surrounded by flatterers.

Cicero’s portrait of Dionysius echoes Plato’s discussion of a flattered (and flattering) tyrant in Books VIII and IX of the Republic, along with Aristotle’s connection of tyranny to flattery in Book V of the Politics. But it also captures, I suggest, a very important Roman worry about status and dependence. This concern is not quite akin to what we encountered in democratic Athens, for whatever sort of regime Rome was – a matter that is still being debated, to be sure – Rome was no democracy if Athens serves as our classical model, though it was both contestatory and participatory. As such, it would seem a rather odd place to look for something like the Athenian – and democratic – parrhesia, insofar as parrhesia entailed non-deferential speech. Rome, after all, was a highly stratified society in which deference was quite important. Yet even if

38 Ibid. 39 Ibid. 40 Ibid., 5.63.
parrhesia was not quite a citizen attribute for the Romans *tout court*, something like it certainly was central for Rome’s elite, for whom *dignitas* and *libertas* were tightly connected.\(^{43}\) Indeed, Romans of the republic – or at least elite Romans – are famously suspicious of sociopolitical inequality, given its link to degrading dependence. Syme puts this quite well, noting in his seminal study of Tacitus

When Caesar the dictator paraded a merciful and forgiving spirit . . . he did not endear himself to all men in his class and order. Clemency depends not on duty but on choice and whim, it is the will of a master not an aristocrat’s virtue. To acquiesce in the “*clementia Caesaris*” implied a recognition of despotism.\(^{44}\)

We might add that such acquiescence also implied a recognition of Caesar’s social and political superiority, and thus the inferiority of his fellow Romans.

This concern with *libertas* and *dignitas* is powerfully articulated by Cicero. His letters provide us with two striking examples of the importance of speaking freely, and its connection to *dignitas*. The first is a letter to Lentulus Spinther, dated February 55 BCE. After noting his support for Pompey – support that he emphasizes is not just strategic, but rooted in his “affection for Pompey” – Cicero suggests that his friendship (*amicitia*) with Pompey may allow a “return to my literary studies.” Out of the question, though, is what he most wished “after attaining the highest state dignities [*honoribus amplissimis*]” – namely, the *dignitas* entailed in speaking his opinions, and the *libertas* entailed in engaging in public affairs (*in re publica*). Faced with the triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus (the *paucis* to whom he refers in the letter), he can choose “between undignified [*nulla cum gravitate*] support . . . and fruitless opposition.”\(^{45}\)

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\(^{43}\) Some argue that free speech would have been valued primarily by Rome’s elites, while others argue that it would have been valued by non-elites as well. For an example of the prior view, see, e.g., Kurt A. Raaflaub, “Aristocracy and Freedom of Speech in the Greco-Roman World,” 56–57. Cf. Chaim Wirszburg, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 19. For the latter view, see, e.g., Stefan G. Chrisanthos, “Freedom of Speech and the Roman Republican Army,” in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Whether it was highly valued by lower status Romans or not, my argument focuses on Rome’s elites.


Almost a decade later, with Caesar dominating Rome’s politics, Cicero wrote a letter to Gnaeus Plancius dating to late 46 BCE. After recalling that Plancius had congratulated him on retaining his “former standing” (*pristinam dignitatem*), Cicero writes:

Well, if “standing” [*dignitas*] means to feel as a loyal citizen and to have one’s sentiments approved by honest men, then I do maintain my standing. But if it consists in the power to implement [*re efficere*] one’s feelings, or even to speak freely in their defense [*libera oratione defendere*], not a vestige of standing is left to us.\(^{46}\)

These passages – one dating to the First Triumvirate, the other to Caesar’s dominance – are striking not just because we see in them the importance of freely speaking and its apparent loss due to the rule of the few, or the one. They are also significant because of the connection between free speech and *dignitas*, whereby one without the ability to speak freely is reduced to an undignified position akin to Dionysius’ flatterers. *Dignitas*, moreover, was central to the Roman aristocrat’s self-perception, as Morstein-Marx has shown, a centrality to which Cicero himself amply attests.\(^{47}\) For example, Cicero defines *dignitas* in *On Invention* as “the possession of a distinguished office which merits respect, honor, and reverence,” stating in a letter to Quintus that slaves (*servi*) cannot possess *dignitas*.\(^{48}\)

Yet even if Cicero was profoundly worried about the indignity of servility, and the dangers of tyranny, not all sole rulers were tyrants or masters, and not everyone subject to a monarch was a slave, per se. Scipio, in Book 1 of *On the Commonwealth* (51 BCE), not only counts monarchy (*regnum*) as a good form of government (in keeping with philosophical tradition), but says, “[I]f I had to express approval of one of the simple forms, then I would choose monarchy.”\(^{49}\) In doing so, he is


sure to distinguish between the tyrant (*tyrannus*) and the king (*rex*). Kings “captivate” us by their *caritas*; and as long as the sole ruler is just (*iusti*), monarchy is in fact best (*optimos*). So long as kings are just, they have the “goodwill” (*voluntas*) of those they rule; when they cease to be just, however, “the form is immediately destroyed,” and monarchy degenerates into tyranny with the corruption of the monarch. Though he seems to endorse monarchy (having been forced to choose), however, he is not unequivocal – he states that while monarchy is “a genuinely good form of commonwealth . . . it verges on the most terrible type.” In addition to its proximity to tyranny – and its dangerous instability, given its reliance on the character of the ruler – monarchy falls short because “no one else has sufficient access to shared justice or to deliberative (*communis iuris et consilii*) responsibility.” While Rome was no monarchy, and Romans were famously hostile to *reges*, the Roman political vocabulary could certainly differentiate a (good) king from a tyrant.

IV

A king, as opposed to a tyrant, was the object of affection, and possessed a virtuous character. It is perhaps little surprise, given this distinction, that when we turn to the speech *On Behalf of Marcellus*, addressed to Caesar by Cicero, Cicero deploys just such themes in his idealized portrait of Caesar. It is a speech in which we see quite clearly the tension between status inequality and *libertas*; as Zarecki notes in discussing Cicero’s frequent attribution of *clementia* to Caesar, “The problem with *clementia*, at least as it is presented in *Pro Marcellus* and *Pro Ligarius*, is that it is incompatible with a republican government.” In particular, “The conferral of *clementia* from one man to another confirms the superior position of the one who bestows the beneficence.” It is also a speech that some scholars find to be embarrassing: Syme, in particular, holds it – along with Pliny’s *Panegyric* and Seneca’s *On Mercy* – in contempt, describing it as a “type of discourse devoted to flattering the supreme power.”

50 Ibid., 1.55, 1.61. 51 Ibid., 1.64–65. 52 Ibid., 2.48.
55 Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.95.
Cicero goes out of his way in this speech to give very high praise to someone who was not only exceptionally powerful but whom he would go on to describe as a king (rex) and master (dominus) and, a few short years later in On Duties, would label a tyrant and claim to have been killed justifiably. This speech is thus puzzling: how could the Cicero who, in his letters, is so concerned with both his dignitas and his libertas give such a speech? The speech, delivered in 46 BCE (On Friendship being written in 44 BCE and On Duties in 43 BCE), is of concern not just because it poses a puzzle for thinking about Cicero’s corpus, but for two additional reasons pertinent to my argument: Cicero’s sketch of Caesar’s virtues, a sketch that portrays a powerful – and lovable – person characterized by self-control and moderation, and the speech’s status as, like Pliny’s Panegyric, a speech of thanks given to an exceptionally powerful individual identified as such within the speech itself. Thus, Cicero clearly states that Caesar is in a position of “supreme power” – in summa potestate. Yet Cicero also states, “Today, too, marks the resumption of my old habit of expressing freely [quae vellem ... more dicendi] my desires and my opinions.” Despite Caesar’s power, then, he is being spoken to and of in this speech as if he were not a tyrant, and as if Cicero were free.

Why does Cicero claim to be able to speak freely? The answer has to do with the virtues that he ascribes directly or indirectly to Caesar: mildness, mercifulness, and an incredible and almost divine wisdom (mansuetudo, clementia, incredibilem sapientam ac paene divinam), or again (indirectly) mercifulness, mildness, justice, moderation, and wisdom (clementia, mansuetudo, iustitia, moderatio, and sapientia). Those who display such virtues – even if we only read about them – attract us, “so that our affection oft goes forth to men whom we have never seen [quos...}

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56 Ibid., 95.
58 This does not, of course, imply that Cicero is speaking with sincerity in this speech; it may be the case that he is, for example, trying to commit Caesar to the course of actions that these virtues would tend to produce – thus Fuhrmann remarks of the Pro Ligario that “Cicero had sought to hold the dictator to his policy of leniency, just as he had previously done in his vote of thanks on behalf of Marcellus.” Manfred Fuhrmann, Cicero and the Roman Republic, trans. W. E. Yuill (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 149. Given the precariousness of the political situation, moreover, and Cicero’s own situation, it would be strange if he were to give a speech to Caesar in which he called Caesar a tyrant and listed his vices. Whether sincere or insincere, the speech presents a moralized portrait of rule – that is, it presents Caesar as legitimate if, perhaps, more than a little idealized.
59 Cicero, Pro M. Marcello, 1, 9.
Because Caesar has shown that he seeks to rescue “whatever wreck of the constitution [rei publicae] the fortune of war has left us,” specifically by pardoning Marcellus, he is worthy of praise (laudibus). Quite importantly, he, like the king of On the Commonwealth, will now be “embraced” with good will – benevolentia complectemur. And it is no wonder – he has not only conquered in war, but he has succeeded elsewhere, able “to conquer the will, to curb the anger [iracundiam], and to moderate the triumph.” His virtues are all the more notable because they were performed “in the hour of wrath [iracundia], which is the foe of counsel [inimica consilio], and of triumph [victoria], which in its very nature is haughty and overweening [insolens et superba].” Caesar, it would seem, despite having great power – and despite being in a situation in which many have been tempted to vice by their passions and their power – is not a tyrant. This is because of his virtues, qualities that bring him affection in a fashion akin to Scipio’s (good) king. Though Caesar was not yet the princeps, per se, Wallace-Hadrill’s comments are still illustrative: “In Latin terms, the behavior of emperors fluctuated between civilitas, the conduct of a citizen among citizens, and superbia, the disdainful bearing of a king and superhuman being.”

Cicero’s situation in this speech is, of course, precarious, given the facts of Roman political life in 46 BCE. In light of these facts, a good case can be made that Cicero is not speaking sincerely. Yet Cicero’s sincerity is separable from the ideological functions of the speech, a point supported by Scott’s discussion of public and private transcripts, along with Millers-Roberts’ account of demagoguery, both of which we encountered in the Introduction. We cannot, as Roberts-Miller suggests, know whether Cicero was sincere or not. And, as we have seen above, Scott remarks that given the asymmetries in coercive and appropriative power that characterize relationships of domination, subordinate groups will normally engage in public performances that are “shaped to appeal

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to the expectations of the powerful.” To reiterate a passage I’ve discussed in the Introduction, Scott suggests – in an admittedly “crude and global generalization” – that “the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exerted, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast.”

We may pause, then, for a moment to consider, given Cicero’s (public) portrait of Caesar as both exceedingly powerful and virtuous, if those subject to Caesar in such a situation are *servile* on his description – sincere or not. That is, have they been reduced to the status of slaves, constrained to flatter due to their dependence on the whims of a master, deprived of the *dignitas* that only the free and honorable could have? If we take seriously the attractive power of Caesar’s virtues, along with their production of *benevolentia*, it would seem that the answer is no. Caesar is, at least on the face of it, virtuous; Cicero (sincerely or not) recognizes his virtue, along with his superiority, and praises precisely those virtues that entail restraint. Leaving aside the issue that, formally speaking, Caesar was a dictator, we see three important themes in Cicero’s account: Caesar is exceptionally powerful; he is a virtuous ruler because he voluntarily restrains his own power through his many virtues; and he is loved as a result. Caesar is less a tyrant than a king, capable of loving and being loved; those subject to him are not servile, and freely – and affectionately – embrace his rule. Far from the Cicero deeply skeptical of power inequalities that we typically encounter, Cicero – in this speech – is presenting an image of unequal power that was morally acceptable. But it was morally acceptable *precisely* because Caesar was, in this speech, at least, decidedly moral.

Speaking freely was, then, a key component of Roman elite ideology, and Cicero’s situation, in addressing Caesar, was fraught with tension. This tension was resolved in part, I suggest, by Cicero’s performance: Caesar is loved because he restrains himself, and this love-producing restraint eliminates the need for groveling servility. Yet even if freely speaking was important, and being unable to speak freely was a sign of servility,

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65 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, 2. It is perhaps for reasons such as these that Cicero was so worried by the phenomenon of flattery, as we will see in discussing *De Amicitia*.

66 Ibid., 3.
speaking freely did not mean saying everything. This is the unpleasant truth of friendship, today as it was in the first century BCE: we do not always speak truthfully and openly to our friends for fear of giving them the “offense” that is central, as Cicero puts it in On Friendship, to “the usefulness and loyalty of friendship.”

True friends, after all, give advice “with all freedom of speech [libere facere], but without harshness [non aspere].”

In discussing how one ought to give and receive “advice and rebuke,” Cicero has Laelius, in On Friendship, make two important remarks.

A troublesome thing is truth [veritas], if it is indeed the source of hate [odium], which poisons friendship [amicitia]; but much more troublesome is complaisance, which, by showing indulgence to the sins of a friend, allows him to be carried headlong away; but the greatest fault is in him who both scornfully rejects truth and is driven by complaisance to ruin.

The term translated as “complaisance” is obsequium: it can have the innocuous meaning of complaisance, or politeness, just as it can mean the more negative obsequiousness. In this context, Cicero uses it in the more positive sense, as he has Laelius contrast the positive sort of obsequium he has in mind with assentatio in the second of the two remarks:

But in showing complaisance – I am glad to adopt Terence’s word, obsequium – let courtesy [comitas] be at hand, and let flattery [assentatio], the handmaid of vice, be far removed, as it is unworthy not only of a friend but even of a free man [quae non modo amico, sed ne libero quidem digna est]; for we live in one way with a tyrant and in another with a friend.

Obsequium (of the right sort) is of great use in fulfilling one of the key duties of friendship – first and foremost because the helpful criticism that is essential to one’s friend avoiding “ruin” goes down easier with courtesy. Second, we see a distinction between obsequium as comitas and obsequium as assentatio, with the prior being helpful, and the latter harmful and associated with vice. Third, and perhaps most important, we see that engaging in assentatio is beneath the worth (ne libero quidem

68 Ibid., 91. 69 Ibid., 89. 70 Ibid.
71 As Powell remarks, “The various words for flattery in the Latin have slightly differing connotations; adulatio originally and literally means ‘fawning’ as applied to dogs and other animals; blanditia means wheedling or ingratiating talk; assentatio, the most relevant for this context, means constant agreement with everything the object of flattery says.” J. G. F. Powell, Cicero: Laelius on Friendship and the Dream of Scipio (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1991), 115.
digna est) of a free person, and is associated with tyranny. To engage in flattery is, for a free person, to lack dignitas.

Now, one might engage in flattery in a fashion similar to what Tarnopolsky describes as a friendship-like relationship in which neither party feels the “pain” that accompanies questioning.72 Such behavior is the sign of a misunderstanding of friendly speech, a false sense of politeness. One might also flatter, though, not out of an understandable (if misguided) desire not to offend one’s friend, but because one was simply vicious: flattery73 is “peculiar to fickle and false-hearted [levium hominum atque fallacium] men who say everything with a view to pleasure and nothing with a view to truth.”74 The soul of such a person is always in flux, and thus cannot be a party to friendship, which makes “one soul out of many.”75 Cicero refers to Terence’s Gnatho to illustrate:

He says “nay,” and “nay” say I; he says “yea,” and “yea” say I; in fine, I bade myself agree with him in everything.76

The flux is a function of fitting one’s character to the object of flattery. Gnatho is a well-known example of the parasite, a common figure in New Comedy, “employing his wit to entertain his patrons, and practicing the arts of flattery to maintain his position”; Powell remarks that “he is typically a man who will do anything to win a dinner invitation.”77 Interestingly, Cicero thinks it is quite possible for flatterers to be in higher stations in life than that of Gnatho; such persons, high in “birth, fortune, and reputation,” are more dangerous because “their insincerity is supported by their position” (cum ad vanitatem accessit auctoritas). Flatterers of this sort, in addition to being found across social statuses, emerge in both tyrannical and non-tyrannical regimes; thus, Cicero remarks, presumably with an eye toward contemporary Rome, that “there are many like Gnatho.”78 These Gnathos are,
presumably, not the sort of men who have the character of 

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iberi, or free

men, though they live in a free and republican regime.

Flattery is not conducive to friendship and is beneath the dignity of “a free man,” and even if we may find flatterers in all regimes, Cicero suggests it is especially connected with tyranny.\textsuperscript{79} What is it about tyrants that makes them lack friends, and makes them prone to being flattered? Tyrants, “surrounded by unlimited wealth,” seeming “to abound in every material blessing,” nevertheless lack anyone to love or to love them.\textsuperscript{80} Cicero’s language here echoes what we saw in the Tusculan Disputations, and this lack of love has to do with the nature of tyranny: “there can be no faith [\textit{fides}], no affection [\textit{caritas}], no trust in the continuance of goodwill [\textit{benevolentiae}]; where every act arouses suspicion and anxiety and where friendship has no place [\textit{nullus locus amicitiae}].”\textsuperscript{81} It is not difficult to see why tyrants have such trouble with friendship, and why it would be difficult to speak frankly to a tyrant as one would a friend. As Brunt puts it, “The range of \textit{amicitia} is vast. From the constant intimacy and goodwill of virtuous or at least like-minded men to the courtesy that etiquette normally enjoined on gentlemen, it covers every degree of genuinely or overtly amicable relation.”\textsuperscript{82} Because the tyrant is feared, genuine amity is unlikely: those who fear the tyrant cannot love him, and would think twice before speaking frankly, and tyrants cannot love those whom they believe to be afraid of them.

This does not mean that tyrants do not \textit{seem} to have friends; Cicero acknowledges that this is the case. But “when by chance they have fallen from power, as they generally do, then it is known how poor they were in friends [\textit{inopes amicorum}].”\textsuperscript{83} This has to do in part with the character of tyrants, with Cicero giving as example Tarquinius Superbus, whom we already encountered; but it also has to do with their great power (\textit{opes praepotentium}), which excludes “faithful friendships.” Those who are “embraced” by fortune “are generally transported beyond themselves by wanton pride and obstinacy”; even those who were “formerly affable in their manners,” once elevated “by military rank, by power, and by prosperity [\textit{imperio potestate prosperis},” change for the worse, and change their old friends for new ones.\textsuperscript{84} The passage echoes what

\textsuperscript{79} Cicero, \textit{On Friendship}, 89.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 52.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 53.  
\textsuperscript{82} P. A. Brunt, “\textit{Amicitia} in the Late Republic,” in \textit{The Fall of the Roman Republic and Other Related Essays} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 381.  
\textsuperscript{83} Cicero, \textit{On Friendship}. 53.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 54. The passage may be compared with \textit{On Duties} 1.90, in which Cicero emphasizes the need to bridle those “whom success has made unbridled and over-confident,”
we encountered in the speech On Behalf of Marcellus, where Cicero remarked that Caesar’s virtues were all the more notable because they were performed in a moment of changed fortune “in the hour of wrath [iracundia], which is the foe of counsel [inimica consilio], and of triumph [victoria], which in its very nature is haughty and overweening [insolens et superba].”85 Both the character of the tyrant and the sheer power of the tyrant pose obstacles to friendship, and would seem to encourage flattering servility. In short, one certainly cannot give advice “with all freedom of speech [libere facere]” to a tyrant; flattery is to be expected when speaking to those we fear and suspect, and whose insecurity makes them fear and suspect us.86

Cicero is thus understandably skeptical of superiors being friends with inferiors, though he does not deny that it is possible. Because “oftentimes a certain pre-eminence [excellentiae] does exist” in friendships, forging such relationships requires working to be a peer. Laelius gives the example of Scipio himself, who, though clearly superior to a number of his friends, did not display (antepositus) his superiority even if his friends were of “a lower rank” (inferioris ordinis amicus). A true sign of Scipio’s friendship, in this regard, is that he “desired that he might be the cause of enhancing the dignity [ampliores volebat] of all his friends.”87 Cicero recommends this as a course for all: if one is endowed with any superiority in virtue, intellect, or fortune (praestantiam virtutis ingeni fortunae), one should impart it to relatives or next of kin. This behavior ought to be a function of proximity: the closer the relationship, the greater the effort. As he puts it, “For the fruit of genius, of virtue, and, indeed, of every excellence, imparts its sweetest flavor when bestowed on those who are nearest and dearest to us.”88

In spite, then, of the corrosive effects of inequality on friendship and frank speech, and the connection between inequality and servility,
friendship (and thus frank speech) is possible between those who are unequal. This friendship requires a good deal of effort on the part of not just superiors, but also inferiors, who should not be resentful of their situation. Thus, Cicero has Laelius argue that an inferior “ought not to grieve [non dolere] that he is surpassed by the former in intellect, fortune, or position.” 

The problem is that many inferiors “are continually uttering some complaints or reproaches,” and the best way to take care of such persons is to ensure that they should not think “themselves slighted.” Should they be subordinated to the virtuous, and should they recognize their superiors as being virtuous, one imagines that their sense of being slighted would be less than if their superiors were viewed as undeserving. And while Cicero talks about mental and ethical inequalities – that is, relationships in which one person is virtuous, and the other is not, or is less so – he is also clearly talking about inequality of wealth and status, as the hypothetical superior friend should “increase the means of those” (eorum augeant opes) who are “of a lowly station,” while being a source “of honor and influence” (eisque honori sint et dignitati) to those who lack those goods.

In either case, a rightly behaving superior does not diminish the dignitas of his inferiors: those who are superior in relationships, and who wish for these relationships to be friendly, must take steps to lower themselves and to raise those beneath them.

If it is difficult for inferiors and superiors to be friends, it is downright impossible to be friends with those who are powerful and vicious, a point that again brings us back to what we have seen in the speech On Behalf of Marcellus. Benevolentia, argues Laelius, joins us together (coniuncti, consensio) and it is opposed to hatred (odio). Without benevolentia, we can have only closeness (proinquitas), but not friendship (amicitia). Friendship, moreover, is only possible between boni, for Cicero, by which he does not mean the Stoic ideal, but rather something more modest: persons who possess integrity, equity, liberality, constancy, and probity (integritas, aequitas, liberalitas, constantia, probitas), and who lack greed, inordinate desire, and audacity (cupiditas, libido, and audacia). So strong is this bond of affection, for Cicero, rooted in the love of virtue, that “we feel a sort of affection even for those whom we have never seen [quos numquam vidimus, quodam modo diligamus],” provided they are virtuous.

Ibid., 71.  
Ibid., 71, 72.  
Ibid., 70.  
Ibid., 82, 20.  
On Friendship, 19  
Ibid., 19.  
Ibid., 29.  
Ibid., 28.
uses strikingly similar language in this passage to what we saw him use in his speech On Behalf of Marcellus, in which he remarked – after discussing virtues he indirectly ascribes to Caesar – “our affection oft goes forth to men whom we have never seen” (*quos numquam vidimus, diligamus*). This is so because “there is nothing more lovable than virtue [*nihil est enim virtute amabilius*], nothing that more allures us to affection [*nihil magis alliciat ad diligendum*].” This same attraction – and it is just before this section that Cicero points out that *amicitia* derives from *amor*, which “leads to the establishing of goodwill [*ad benevolentiam coniungendam*]” – causes all to hate Tarquinius Superbus. Hannibal, in particular, will always be hated by Romans “because of his cruelty [*crudelitatem*].”

In discussing the hatred felt toward Tarquinius and Hannibal in On Friendship, it is worth noting Cicero’s description of Tarquinius in On the Commonwealth, along with his description of Caesar in On Duties, as these accounts not only are similar to On Friendship, but echo what we have seen in the Tusculan Disputations and On Behalf of Marcellus. In On the Commonwealth, Cicero argues that Tarquinius, on taking power, changed from king to a master – *de rege dominus* – or, as Cicero glosses the Greek, a *tyrannus*. He was not like a king, “who looks after his people like a parent and keeps those of whom he is in charge in the best possible condition of life.”

His account of the *tyrannus* is striking not just because the affective foundation of rule is absent, but also because “no animal can be imagined that is more awful or foul or more hateful to gods and men alike.” Though his appearance is human (*figura est hominis*), “through the viciousness [*immanitate*] of his character he outdoes the most destructive beasts.” This is because the tyrant lives, in a way, outside the bonds of humanity: he has no partnership with humanity (*nullam humanitatis societatem*). And it is no wonder – Tarquinius was “of unsound mind” and had killed “the best of kings,” Servius Tullius.

After a bad beginning, he became insolent (*exultabat insolentia*), controlling neither himself nor his family’s desire, evident in his oldest son’s rape of Lucretia.

That much on Tarquinius; what of Caesar? Caesar serves in Cicero’s On Duties as an example of those who forget justice because of a fixation

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(cupiditatem) on “command or honor or glory.” Citing Ennius’ verse “To kingship belongs neither sacred fellowship nor faith” (Nulla sancta societas / Nec fides regni est) approvingly, Cicero explains:

For if there is any area in which is it [sic] impossible for many to be outstanding [plures excellere], there will generally be such competition [contentio] that it is extremely difficult to maintain a “sacred fellowship” [sanctam societatem].

With respect to Caesar, Cicero is quite clear about what this means: “he overturned all the laws of gods and men for the sake of his preeminence [principatum], that he had imagined for himself in his mistaken fancy.”

Caesar’s status as a tyrant, however, is confirmed more directly in Book II of On Duties, where Cicero again uses him as an illustration of a broader point: the desirability of being loved if one wishes to become influential in a community. Again, he cites Ennius:

Quem metuum, oderunt; quem quisque odit, periisse expetit.

They hate the men they fear; and whom one hates one would have dead.

Like Tarquinius, the affective foundation of rule is absent, and Caesar serves as Cicero’s example as one who fell victim to the hatred (odiis) of many despite his power (opes). Labeling Caesar (like Tarquin) a tyrant (tyranni), who was obeyed only because of “force of arms,” Cicero affirms that goodwill (benevolentia) “keeps faithful guard forever.”

Caesar, lacking goodwill, the crucial element of friendship that tyrants cannot possess due to their power and their vice, turned to fear to preserve his power, bringing about hatred and his own demise.

The problem, for Cicero, is that Caesar was in effect like a master (eris) ruling over his servants (famulos), relying on force to control those whom he “cannot otherwise control.” His position, though, was tenuous at best, since he entered on his tyranny in a “free city” – civitate libera. A free city would not readily bear servitude, after all. He may, through his power (opibus), have overawed the laws, but “Freedom will bite back more fiercely when suspended than when she remains undisturbed.”

Cicero paints a similar portrait of Caesar in Book 3, though he ups the ante, describing Caesar as “a man who longed to be the king [rex] of the

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104 Cicero, On Duties, 1.26. It is worth noting, of course, that I am talking about Cicero’s later views of Caesar, after Caesar was dead; I do not mean to suggest that Caesar was viewed in a similar light by, say, the Roman plebs, or even Cicero’s writings in the late 50s or early 40s BCE.

105 Ibid., 1.26.

106 Ibid., 2.23.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 2.24.

109 Ibid.
Roman people and master [dominus] of every nation.”

Driven in his pursuit of such a position by cupiditas, the result was “the death of laws and liberty” (legum et libertatis); Caesar had made the Roman people his slave – servire.

We may note several features that these depictions of Tarquinius, Caesar, and Dionysius share and why they could not be friends with their subordinates given the argument of On Friendship. First, tyrants like these are exceptionally powerful: Tarquinius and Dionysius are domini, and Caesar possesses ops, in addition to being described as a dominus at On Duties 2.2. This alone makes friendship difficult. Second, tyrants, because of their power and their character, are the objects of fear, and not love. Third, because tyrants are feared, they lack goodwill (as with Caesar) or do not have friends at all (Tarquinius and Dionysius) and, in the example of Dionysius, are accompanied by flatterers. Each of these tyrants is a powerful superior who does not produce affection on the part of his inferiors. In effect, each of them is the sort of superior who does not take steps to lower himself, cannot be friends with inferiors, and cannot be spoken to frankly.

Those most susceptible to being flattered, in turn, have, according to Laelius in On Friendship, deficient characters, as he who is most susceptible to, and most threatened by, flattery is “most given to self-flattery [qui ipse sibi assentetur] and is most satisfied with himself” – a description that would fit many a tyrant. This is not to say that those who are, in fact, morally excellent should not delight in their moral excellence; they should, as should their friends. Rather, those who “wish not so much to be, as to seem to be, endowed with real virtue” are those who “delight in flattery, and when a complimentary speech is fashioned to suit their fancy [ad ipsorum voluntatem] they think the empty phrase is proof of their own merits.” Nonetheless, even those who are “stronger and steadier” must be aware of those who would engage in “crafty” flattery – the one who “flatters and cajoles by pretending to quarrel, until at last he gives in.”

Being in a situation in which one is not free, and one’s conditions are servile, means being constrained to flatter due to one’s dependence on the uncertain will of another. And it is, I suggest, the one who flatters due to constraint – and not the habitual flatterer who does so through vice – that is especially worrisome to Cicero. To be constrained to flatter by political
circumstances, even if one does not have the character of the habitual flatterer, is degrading, and beneath the status of someone who is free.

VI

Regarding Cicero’s portrayal of Dionysius in Tusculan Disputations, the connection between libertas and dignitas, the negotiation of tensions in the speech On Behalf of Marcellus and the dialogue On Friendship, along with the distance of the ideal from Tarquinius and Caesar in On Duties, we can now say that though it was difficult to speak frankly even to friends in general, and more difficult to do so in dealing with those who are one’s superior, it was nonetheless possible to have friendships between superiors and inferiors, provided that steps were taken by superiors to equalize these relationships and that the superiors were themselves virtuous. Absent such steps and qualities, superiors would provoke resentment for lesser status among their inferiors. Moreover, given the attractive role of virtue in friendship, and the possibility that an exceptionally powerful person could be virtuous, simply being powerful, or even a king, did not make one a hateful tyrant. This is not an easy balance to strike; the mere existence of extreme forms of social and political inequality could chafe if untreated, as seen in On Friendship. These forms of inequality could, however, be tempered through the exercise of virtue on the part of the powerful, and its recognition by their inferiors.

Keeping in mind my discussion of Cicero, and the model of sociopolitical inequality in which such inequalities can be accepted by those subject to them, enabling those at the top can be held in goodwill, I want now to turn to Pliny’s Panegyric, a speech of thanks to Trajan for his advance to the consulship (given on September 1, 100 CE).

This speech, and especially the theme of Trajan being a friend that runs throughout, bears a striking thematic resemblance to what we have encountered in discussing Cicero’s account of flattery, friendship, and affection. Pliny would later write this of the Panegyric:

I hoped in the first place to encourage our Emperor in his virtues by a sincere tribute [veris laudibus] and, secondly, to show his successors what path to follow to win the same renown, not by offering instruction but by setting his example.

before them [non quasi a magistro sed tamen sub exemplo praemonetentur]. To proffer advice on an Emperor’s duties might be a noble enterprise, but it would be a heavy responsibility verging on insolence, whereas to praise an excellent ruler [optimum principem] and thereby shine a beacon on the path posterity should follow would be equally effective without appearing presumptuous.  

In the oration, he depicts the fairly new emperor Trajan as a new Brutus, or Camillus, each of whom had expelled reges; Trajan expelled regnum, replacing a dominus (that is, Domitian) with a princeps. Under Trajan, liberty is restored (redditate libertatis), and whereas Domitian’s reign was characterized by a “lamentable spirit of adulation” (adulationis), under Trajan, flattery is absent from the Senate. In short, Trajan’s rule demonstrates a key theme of Pliny’s speech: “Tyranny [dominatio] and the principate [principatus] are diametrically opposed.” And because Trajan is so virtuous (he is the optimus princeps) he is a “true prince,” and “most welcome to those who can least endure a tyrant.” In the immediate context, he is most welcome to his friends (amicos) whom he chooses because of their excellence, and because Domitian himself had hated them.

Trajan’s capacity for friendship is an important component of Pliny’s praise of him, as is Trajan’s status as a princeps, not a dominus, though it seems that Pliny was “innovating” in making this an important theme of his discourse. As Noreña points out, “Friendship . . . was never a prominent theme in the extensive Greek and Roman literary tradition on monarchy, and only seems to emerge as a part of the discourse on good kingship in the early second century BCE.” In this way, Pliny’s discourse looks back more to Cicero’s own analyses of friendship than to earlier writings on monarchy. After all, there is something strange about Pliny’s frequent deployment of the theme: friends were supposed to be equals, for Cicero, and when they were not equals, it was necessary to smooth out power differentials, lest one cause resentment. This task was not particularly easy to achieve even outside the context of monarchy. How, though, could Trajan, the princeps, be friends with his inferiors, and not be surrounded by flatterers? More important, what would make

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118 Ibid., 58.3, 54.1, 54.5.
119 Ibid., 45.3.
120 Ibid., 45.3.
him, as a princeps, more like Scipio’s rex, and less a tyrannus or dominus, as was his predecessor Domitian?

The answer is that Trajan displays just the sorts of behaviors that we saw Cicero outlining in On Friendship and praising in the speech On Behalf of Marcellus. Pliny’s public transcript, to use Scott’s phrase, has, in effect, a distinctly Ciceronian quality. Among the many changes Pliny celebrates in contrasting the reign of Trajan with that of his predecessor, Domitian, is Trajan’s restoration of “humanity’s former blessing of friendship” – amicitia. Prior to his rule, friendship had been replaced by flattery, blandishment, and simulated love (adsentatio, blanditia, and amoris simulatio, two of which echo Cicero’s own language at On Friendship 91); the last of these Pliny describes as even worse than hatred. To explain the demise of friendship, Pliny resorts to the language of servitude: “how could friendship survive between men thus divided, the one half feeling themselves the masters [sibi alii domini], the other half their slaves [alii servi]? Trajan has restored friendship in part because “he knows how to be one.” But he has also restored friendship because under his rule, love (amor) is not commanded by the ruler (imperator), and love cannot be compelled in any event, as “there is no sentiment so lofty and independent [erectus et liber], so impatient of tyranny [dominationis impatiens], so uncompromising in its expectations of a return.” Those who can love are liberi, not servi; they are like Cicero’s liber, possessing a certain capacity for action and dignity. Love (amor) is the root of amicitia, as we saw in Cicero; given this root, amicitia is different, as Konstan argues, from societas, which “lacks the personal intimacy associated with friendship.” This intimacy, in turn, requires that the princeps himself loves, as one cannot be loved unless he himself loves (amari nisi ipse amet non potest). Love is a reciprocal and mutual relationship, then, but what makes possible the people’s love of Trajan is that he voluntarily descends (submitteris) “from being emperor to being friend” (in amicum ex imperatore). Trajan lowers himself, just

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122 Pliny, Panegyricus, II.85.1. 123 Ibid., 85.2.
124 David Konstan, “Are Fellow Citizens Friends? Aristotle versus Cicero on Philia, Amicitia, and Social Solidarity,” in Valuing Others in Classical Antiquity, ed. Ralph M. Rosen and Ineke Sluiter (Boston: Brill, 2010), 243. Konstan suggests that if we see the term amicitia being used to characterize relationships between superiors and inferiors, those in the relationship “had managed to overcome a social barrier and establish a genuine parity between themselves, insofar as their personal affection and respect were concerned” (239).
125 Pliny, Panegyricus, II.85.4. 126 Ibid., 85.5.
as we saw Cicero suggesting that superiors ought to lower themselves (and using the same verb, no less), or raise those beneath them, when dealing with inferiors. There is a prudential component to this, to be sure: “a prince needs every kind of friendship to maintain his position, and so his first care is to provide himself with friends.”\footnote{127} Trajan’s sheer power, moreover, provides him with “opportunities for putting your friends under obligation to you [amicos tuos obligandi],” so “that no one, without ingratitude [nisi ingratus], can fail to make sure that his love exceeds your own.”\footnote{128} But prudence is not the only thing at play: this lowering reflects Pliny’s characterization of Trajan’s virtues, along with Pliny’s own status.

Trajan’s capacity for friendship, in turn, is closely related to the ideal of civilitas: “To use no force, to remember at all times that whatever the powers anyone is granted, liberty [libertas] will always be dearer to men’s hearts,” behavior that is fitting to a citizen (civile) “and proper for one who is father to us all [parenti publico].”\footnote{129} This stands in contrast with other principes, who, while “master [domini] of their subjects, were the slave of their freedmen [libertorum erant servi], at the mercy of their counsels and their whims.”\footnote{130} It is worth quoting Wallace-Hadrill on this point:

An emperor whom ritual and ceremonial raised above the level of human society, whose power was represented symbolically as deriving from “outside,” from the gods, owed nothing to the internal structure of the society he ruled. To act, by contrast, as a member of that society, as the peer of its most elevated members, was (symbolically) to associate autocratic power with the social structure . . . The moderation of the emperor placed his own dignity on the same scale of values as that of his subjects.\footnote{131}

Like Cicero’s Caesar (of On Behalf of Marcellus) and his idealized superior in On Friendship, Trajan makes his superiority palatable through his virtues.

Friendship’s possibility, then, is rooted in two of Trajan’s attributes: first, his virtue, and second, his correlated willingness to lower himself to the level of his (elite) subjects. Because he is virtuous, he is the object of love, like a father and not a master, and his fellow Romans can hold him in affection, and not resentment. Pliny provides, over the course of the

\footnote{127}{Ibid., 85.6.} \footnote{128}{Ibid., 85.8.} \footnote{129}{Ibid., 87.1.} \footnote{130}{Ibid., 88.1. This echoes a common motif in ancient thought, one we encountered in the Tusculans.} \footnote{131}{Wallace-Hadrill, “Civilis Princeps,” 47.}
speech, a wide array of attractive virtues to characterize Trajan; I cite but a few instances: piety, abstinence, mildness, humanity, temperance, good nature, chastity, frugality, mercifulness, liberality, affability, continence, discipline, fortitude, moderation, seriousness, good humor, gravity, plainness, and majesty.\textsuperscript{132} Because he is so virtuous, he is not just beloved, but he brings to Rome liberty, well-being, and security—\textit{libertas, salus}, and \textit{securitas}.\textsuperscript{133}

Moreover, because Trajan is willing to lower himself to the level of his subjects, he is able to engage in relationships with his subjects that do not diminish their \textit{dignitas}. His superiority, unlike that of Tarquinius or the Caesar of \textit{On Duties}, does not leave them feeling resentful and humiliated. As Roche remarks, “It has long been recognized that a fundamental characteristic of these imperial virtues is their celebration of differing nuances of the emperor’s ability to moderate his own absolute power and to observe self-imposed limitations.”\textsuperscript{134} We encounter this theme many times in the speech, particularly when Pliny describes Trajan’s moderation (\emph{moderatio}).\textsuperscript{135} Again and again, Trajan declines honors due to his \emph{moderatio} and \emph{modestia}, as in his refusal to take the title \emph{pater patriae}, or in observing legal rituals involved in becoming consul that no one “intended ... to apply to the Emperor.”\textsuperscript{136} There is no doubt that he is superior to all other Romans (“the greatest of us simply because you are the best [\textit{maior quod melior}]”) but he behaves as if he were not; we have already seen that he voluntarily lowers himself to a position of friendship, just as Cicero had recommended.\textsuperscript{137} Trajan is not simply the object of a public transcript; he follows a ritualized script himself.

In doing so, his superiority coexists with the \textit{dignitas} of his inferiors, a point that Pliny makes about himself, remarking at 92.1 that Trajan has added \textit{dignitas} to \textit{dignitas} by making him a consul while he was a prefect of the treasury. More important, though, are two other representative remarks that he makes. Pliny states,

In the heavens it is natural that the smaller and weaker stars should be overshadowed [\textit{obscuret}] by the rising of the greater ones, and in the same way an emperor’s legates can feel their prestige dimmed [\textit{dignitas inumbratur}] when

\textsuperscript{132} Pliny, \textit{Panegyricus}, II.2.5, 2.8, 3.4, 4.3, 4.6. I leave aside mention of the appealing physical qualities of Trajan, which Pliny emphasizes as well; these, too, are literally attractive.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.}, 8.1; cf. 27.1. \textsuperscript{134} Roche, “Pliny’s Thanksgiving,” 8.

\textsuperscript{135} Pliny, \textit{Panegyricus}, II.54.5. \textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}, 65.1. \textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}, 21.4.
he appears. But you could be greater than all without anyone’s suffering from your majesty [sine ullius deminutione maior]; no one lost in your presence the authority he had enjoyed before you came, and many found men’s regard for them the greater [reverentia accesserat] because you shared it too.138

Far from diminishing his inferiors’ status, Pliny suggests that Trajan enhances it precisely because of his virtues. Under Trajan, as opposed to Domitian, Pliny states that

no one need purchase security by disgrace . . . everyone’s life is safe and safe with honor [salva est omnibus vita et dignitas vitae] . . . foresight and prudence no longer prompt men to spend a lifetime keeping out of sight. The rewards of virtue are now the same under an emperor as they were in times of liberty, and good deeds win more solid recognition than the mere consciousness of having performed them.139

Trajan’s merit produces a meritocracy, in which all maintain both their lives and their dignity; his virtue is so great that his subordinates cannot resent his superiority. As a result, Trajan’s rule and status are, in a way, voluntarily granted. Konstan puts it thus: “friendship with Trajan depends on the moral equality between the emperor and those who are, by reason of their virtue, similar (similes) to him.”140 Pliny goes as far as to describe the relationship between Trajan and his subjects as one of love, a love that is merited: his subjects love him because he is worth being loved (Amamus quidem te in quantum mereris).141 Though love and hatred are far apart, “they have one close resemblance: we give our love more unrestrainedly to good princes in this very place where we have freely hated bad ones.”142 So loving and harmonious is the relationship, as opposed to prior emperors, under whom their “successes and misfortunes did not coincide with ours,” that “we share with you both joys and sorrows, and we cannot be happy without you any more than you can without us.” Indeed, their bond is so close that Pliny remarks: “Nothing stands higher with you than your subjects’ affection [amore civium].”143 Trajan is the Romans’ beloved and deserving friend, a status he enjoys because they enjoy him – and they validate his legitimacy through their voluntary and loving acknowledgment of his superior status. Pliny and his fellow elite Romans need not flatter Trajan because he, in a sense, makes their inferior position acceptable, leaving them independent of his will insofar as he is virtuous. One might go so far as to say that he, in effect, flatters them.
Inequalities of power were, as we have seen, an obstacle to friendship, for Cicero, and certain forms of inequalities – insofar as they might distort frank speech and foster flattery – were inimical to liberty writ large. Individuals like Tarquinius, Caesar, and Dionysius were tyrants not just because they were powerful, but because they were vicious, and given that vice, they were not lovable, nor could they be loved. Yet Cicero could conceive of individuals with great power whose standing might not be incompatible with the well-being of the community, or even liberty, provided that these individuals were in fact virtuous. Virtuous behavior softened and legitimized power inequalities. In Pliny’s *Panegyric*, the virtues of Trajan – especially those involving his self-restraint and moderation – similarly softened and legitimized his relations to Rome’s elites, mitigating the demeaning elements of social inequality, while at the same time making possible affective ties between Rome’s princeps and his subjects. Trajan’s virtues make it possible to love him, to befriend him, and – crucially – to sever the close relationship between the princeps and his flatterers that characterized rulers such as Domitian. Cicero’s account of friendship, and his republican worries about status and power inequalities’ connection to flattery and tyranny, ultimately makes possible a situation of social and political inequality legitimized by the presence of friendship and the absence of flattery.

This ideological framework – incipient in Cicero and on display in Pliny – entails a two-part script: on the one hand, the voluntary submission and display of virtue on the part of the powerful, and on the other hand, the recognition and acceptance of this superiority and virtue on the part of inferiors. The outcome of this script was twofold: an elite Roman who did not resent his inferiority precisely because his dignity was left intact, and a princeps whose legitimacy rested on the projection and recognition of virtue. The Caesar of Cicero’s *On Behalf of Marcellus* is one whose virtues make his superiority compatible with the status of his inferiors, just as the moral superior of Cicero’s *On Friendship* does not arouse justified resentment on the part of his inferiors. And Trajan, in Pliny’s portrait, is just the sort of superior who inferiors could love, befriend, and address without the lost dignity of the servile flatterer. So long as everyone played his role properly, such an ideology could foster overtly consensual relationships of inferiority and superiority on the part of those who would otherwise chafe at such differences in status. If a ruler like Trajan wished to be perceived as legitimate according to the
criteria that Pliny sets out, he ought to follow the advice that Pliny provides, playing the role of a superior and a friend.

The stability of such a system of role play is, of course, questionable. A misstep on the part of a superior might have devastating consequences: a story from Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar* will suffice to illustrate. In the context of describing various actions on Caesar’s part that brought him disrepute for desiring to be a king, Plutarch writes:

Another time, when the senate had conferred on him some extravagant honors, he chanced to receive the message as he was sitting on the rostra, where, though the consuls and praetors themselves waited on him, attended by the whole body of the senate, he did not rise, but behaved himself to them as if they had been private men, and told them his honors wanted rather to be retrenched than increased. This treatment offended not only the senate, but the commonalty too, as if they thought the affront upon the senate equally reflected upon the whole republic; so that all who could decently leave him went off, looking much discomposed.  

Going against the script meant humiliating one’s subordinates, and making their inferiority all too evident. Such impolitic displays of status difference made resentment – and flattery – both more likely and more worrisome. We would do well to recall Scipio’s reserved endorsement of monarchy in this regard: “when a king begins to be unjust, the form is immediately destroyed,” and monarchy degenerates into tyranny.

It is worth noting, by way of conclusion, that I have sought to side-step the issue of sincerity, that is, whether Cicero’s praise of Caesar is sincere, or whether Pliny’s praise of Trajan is sincere. That Cicero and Pliny may have been engaged in flattery is certainly possible, and in my view, quite likely for Cicero (and less so with Pliny). However, if we are conceiving of their speeches as, in effect, public transcripts – as I have tried to do – whether they are sincere is not essential. Their efficacy, moreover, is a function of the discourse of flattery itself: in their performance, they both embody anxieties about frankness and resolve them in their performance. That elite Romans, trained in rhetoric, may have deployed “figured speech” to conceal their true beliefs is well established by Ahl’s classic article. But whether the speech is figured or not, the script

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it conveys performs the function of overtly legitimizing social and political inequalities that might otherwise be unbearable, reassuring elite Romans that they could be unequal and yet not be flatterers. Such a script provides ideological resources for legitimating authority just as it provides potential ideological resources for resisting authority should it fall short, giving elite Romans the possibility of living with an inferior status without resorting to flattery.
Flattery’s relationship to elite anxieties over status in Roman political thought was the focus of the prior chapter. Beginning with the connection between *libertas* and *dignitas* in Cicero’s thought, and the ideology of the republic more broadly, I turned to Cicero’s speech *On Behalf of Marcellus* to explore the grounds of his praise for Caesar, praise that centered on three factors: Caesar’s virtues, their attractiveness, and Cicero’s concomitant liberty. I then argued, through a reading of *On Friendship*, that Cicero provides a model for friendship – and frank speech – between unequals, while at the same time providing a model for critiquing Caesar’s behavior. This discourse of friendship, I argued, paved the way for Pliny’s idealized portrait of Trajan, along with providing an ideological basis for the *princeps*’ legitimacy. While the republican discourse of friendship made possible the ideology (through a public transcript) of the good emperor, it also made possible the delegitimization of bad rulers: rulers with whom senators could not be friends, and to whom they could not speak frankly. The encounter with flattery was an encounter with and negotiation of a non-ideal world, and the ideology that ensued, I suggest, was in no small part a recognition and negotiation of this non-ideal reality by status-conscious elites.

Whereas status and legitimacy were my concerns in the prior chapter, I focus in this chapter on the style of two sixteenth-century Italian writers: Niccolò Machiavelli (chiefly *The Prince* and *The Discourses*) and Baldassare Castiglione (*The Book of the Courtier*). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli seeks favor from a superior, engaging in a courtly performance, while in the *Discourses*, he describes how to give counsel; in *The Book of the Courtier*, Castiglione describes how one should engage in the courtly performance – and gain favor – such that one can effectively give counsel. Behind both Machiavelli and Castiglione’s accounts looms flattery: one seeking favor might engage in flattery, one giving counsel might engage in flattery as well, and powerful persons taking counsel needed to be on the watch for flatterers. The differences between the courtly styles in these two writers, I will suggest, reflect their divergent understanding of the dangers of flattery and how to gain favor (and give counsel). And these differences come down to a matter of style: Castiglione captivates to instruct, while Machiavelli instructs to captivate.

I will argue that flattery is as much a matter of style as it is of substance, for Machiavelli, and speaking in an apparently unflattering way meant speaking in an apparently unornamented style. Indeed, as many have recognized, Machiavelli goes out of his way to avoid not just the semblance of flattery in the *Prince*, but apparently the practice of rhetoric altogether. Despite the fact that Machiavelli’s Florence was a “city pervaded by the cult of eloquence,”¹ Machiavelli disavows the use of key elements of rhetoric, describing his style in his *Dedicatory Letter* to Lorenzo de’ Medici in the following terms:

I have not ornamented [*non ho ornata*] this work, nor filled it with fulsome phrases [*clausule ampule*] nor with pompous and magnificent words [*parole ampullose e magnifiche*], nor with any blandishment [*lenocinio*] or superfluous ornament [*ornamento estrinsico*] whatever, with which it is customary for many to describe and adorn their things. For I wanted it either not to be honored for anything or to please solely [*la facci grata*] for the variety of the matter and the gravity of the subject.²

Najemy suggests that Machiavelli, in using “terms that echo the technical language of the rhetorical arts: *ornata, ornamento, ornare, ampule* and *ampullose* . . . deliberately and polemically shares in, and contributes to . . . the modern misunderstanding of *ornamentum* as a purely decorative and thus dispensable aspect of language.” That is, insofar as Machiavelli

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describes ornamento as “extrinsic,” he “rejects the techniques of rhetoric” and “implicitly repudiates the entire tradition, central to Renaissance humanism, that had accepted the beneficent power and the utility of language and eloquence in politics and political discourse.” In short, Machiavelli sets out to “establish a discourse of politics independent of rhetoric and eloquence” that reflects his own “mistrust and rejection of ordinary speech.” Such a rejection is politically pointed: in rejecting ordinary speech, Machiavelli seems to reject the Renaissance claim that “the study of eloquence was to be pursued for utility, not ornament, and for the frequently asserted – though seldom properly defined – motive of the common good.”

I will suggest, however, that when Machiavelli claims to reject ornament, he is rejecting a particular style of rhetoric in favor of another, a point that Hariman makes in describing what he terms Machiavelli’s “realist” style. Machiavelli deploys (for the most part) the plain style, a style that had been elaborated in classical sources such as Cicero and Quintilian. I will have more to say about this below, but it is worth noting for now that Cicero suggests in Orator that in deploying the plain style, “all noticeable ornament [insignis ornatus], pearls as it were, will be excluded”; indeed, such speech lacks “the charm and richness [suave et afluen] of figurative ornament [ornatum].” A plain speaker, says Cicero, is verecundus – that is, modest. Machiavelli does not reject the virtue of ornatus, so central to elocutio, altogether; he rejects a particular form of ornamented style. In doing so, he not only signals his trustworthiness as an advisor, but also fulfills his own counsel on giving counsel in the Discourses. His worth as an advisor – and his advice on seeking advisors – stands in contrast to Castiglione’s ornamented courtier. Machiavelli announces his merits, rather than conceal them, and deploys the sort of style one might deploy between equals, rather than the sort of style one might deploy in addressing a superior. His (un)courtly performance exemplifies and embodies his diagnosis.

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of the problems of flattery and counsel, while his performance itself resolves them: he captivates by instruction.

To make this argument, I begin in Section II by discussing the virtue of *ornatus* and its relationship to style in the rhetoric of Cicero and, to a lesser extent, Quintilian. I then turn in Section III to Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, arguing that the strategy of his courtier is to captivate by ornament in order to instruct his prince. Machiavelli is the center of the subsequent discussion, a discussion I begin in Section IV by noting Machiavelli’s concern with flattery in a number of works, along with scholarly treatments of his style. After this preliminary discussion, I turn to Machiavelli’s account of counsel in *The Discourses* (still in Section IV) and then, in Section V, to his account of flattery and counsel in the *Prince*. In Section VI, I conclude by arguing that while Castiglione’s courtier captivates to instruct, Machiavelli develops an innovative approach: he (and his counselor) captivates through instruction, announcing rather than concealing his study.

II

The terms that we have seen Machiavelli using in the *Dedicatedary Letter* – *ornate*, *ampule*, *ampullose*, *magnifiche*, *ornamento* – and which he describes as being *lenocinio* and *estrinsico* – are, in fact, linked to a particular *element* of rhetoric, namely, *elocutio*, or expression, one of the five activities of the orator in Roman rhetoric, along with *inventio*, *dispositio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntatio* (invention, arrangement, memory, and delivery). And terms like *ornate*, *ampule*, *ampullose*, *magnifiche*, *ornamento* – which Machiavelli claims to avoid in his letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici – were central features of *elocutio* in two key classical sources for Renaissance writers: Cicero and Quintilian. *Ornatus* (ornamentation, or adornment) – along with *latinitas*, *perspicuitas* (clarity, factual and in speech), and *decorum* – was one of the virtues of style, or *elocutio*, as discussed by Cicero and Quintilian. *Latinitas* refers to “the correct use of the Latin language”; factual *perspicuitas* emerged through *inventio* as a result of having one’s argument in good order, while “clarity of diction” was a function of using proper terminology; *decorum* involved fitting a speech to the audience and topic. *Ornatus*, by contrast, focused very much on the effect of the speech on the audience, seeking “to give *delectatio*,” or delight. The import of *delectatio* lies in its ability to make the task of

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persuasion easier to achieve; the virtue of *ornatus*, or *dignitas*, as it was sometimes identified, then, is a crucial component of speaking persuasively.

Cicero has a fair amount to say about *elocutio* and style in *On the Ideal Orator* (a text widely known in sixteenth-century Italy), in which he has Crassus develop the topic of *ornatus* in Book 3, linking it to *decorum*, and arguing that *elocutio* includes:

seeing to it that the speech is as pleasant as possible [*quam maxime iucunda*], that it penetrates the audience’s feeling as deeply as possible [*quam maxime in sensus eorum qui audient influat*], and that is equipped as fully as possible in terms of content.\(^8\)

Pleasing one’s audience and engaging with its feelings is thus a key aim of the speaker, and the virtue of *ornatus* allows him to achieve these aims. A speech becomes ornate (*ornatur*)

by its general character and its own particular complexion and vitality ... it should be weighty [*gravis*], charming [*suavis*], and learned ... well-bred, admirable, and accomplished, and ... contain as much feeling [*sensus*] and emotion [*dolores*] as necessary.\(^9\)

These qualities emerge throughout the speech as a whole. This ornate quality is achieved through the use of “flowers of language and thought” (*verborum sententiariumque floribus*), ornaments that are “distributed here and there in the way that decorations and lights are arranged when a public place is adorned.”\(^10\) One must hold the attention of one’s audience, and give them pleasure (*delectat*) without satiating them (*sine satietate*). The problem, as Crassus describes it, is that “the very things that most stir our senses with pleasure and rouse them most strongly are also the quickest to give us feelings of aversion and satiety, and thus to alienate us.”\(^11\) Ornament thus profoundly affects and moves its audience, but in doing so, it can pose a danger. Hence, the ideal orator’s use of *ornatus* should be charming, but the “charm [*suavitatem*] should be austere and firm, not sweet and overripe [*dulcem et decoctam*].”\(^12\) Excess is always a danger, and an orator must have good taste if he is to avoid it. Yet the highest form of *eloquentia* is intimately involved with *ornatus*, and it is especially worthy of praise when it involves “amplifying something by imparting distinction to it” (*amplificare rem ornando*).\(^13\) *Amplificatio* is most effective in arousing the feelings of


one’s audience, and “this is the unique excellence of the orator, the one that is most his own.”

Cicero’s later work *Orator* is of special importance to my discussion of ornament for two reasons. First, it is here – in the course of describing what he terms the *idea* of the orator, following Plato – that Cicero clearly links the different styles of speaking to the different activities of the orator: plain to *probare* (to prove or instruct), middle to *delectare* (to please), and grand to *flectere* (to move). Second, Cicero argues in *Orator* that the virtue of *ornatus* is irrelevant to the plain (*subtilis*) style. The point emerges in his initial discussion of style, and differentiates the plain from the grand (*grandiloquens*) style. Orators practicing the grand style deployed speech that was marked by “power of thought and majesty of diction” (*ampla et sententiarum gravitate et maiestate verborum*); they “were forceful, copious and grave, trained and equipped to arouse and sway the emotions” (*vehementes, vari, coposi, graves, ad permovendos et convertendos animos instructi et parati*). Those deploying the plain style, by contrast, aimed at clarity, and used “a refined, concise style stripped of ornament [*limata,*]” though some were “to a slight degree ornate” (*leviter ornate*). The middle, or “tempered style,” is “akin to both,” marked by “ease and uniformity,” deploying “simple ornaments [*ornamentis*] of thought and diction.” The plain style corresponds to the activity of *probare*, or proving, and hence the Aristotelian proof of *logos*; the middle corresponds to *delectare*, or pleasing; and the grand to *flectere*, or moving. The ideal orator is able to use all three appropriately. Each task is necessary to the activity of the ideal orator in its own way: “To prove is the first necessity, to please is charm [*delectare suavitatis*], to sway is victory [*flectere victoriae.*]

Cicero makes a few remarks contrasting the plain style and the grand style that are particularly noteworthy:

How inappropriate it would be [*Quam enim indecorum est*] to employ general topics and the grand style when discussing cases of stillicide before a single referee [*cum apud unum indicem dicas*], or to use mean and meager [*summisse et subtiliter*] language when referring to the majesty of the Roman people.

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14 Ibid., 3.105.
15 Each of the three styles corresponds, in turn, to the task of the orator – “to prove, to please and to sway or persuade” – *probet, delectet, flectat*. Cicero, *Orator*, 69.
16 Ibid., 21.
17 Ibid., 69.
18 Ibid., 72.
Indeed, the plain style is akin to what Cicero terms the philosophical style, which also aims at “instructing [docendi] rather than captivating [non capiendial].” The philosopher’s language “is called conversation [sermo] rather than oratory.”¹⁹ This is not to say that the plain style is identical to the philosophical style; rather, this is to highlight the relationship between style and the activity undertaken: plainness is connected to instruction, or proof, when there is little reason to arouse the audience’s emotions and one’s ethos is persuasive because of one’s wisdom – and when those participating in conversation are, broadly speaking, equal.²⁰

A speech composed in the plain style is, for Cicero, like those women who “are said to be handsomer when unadorned – this very lack of ornament becomes them,” since with both the unadorned woman and the unadorned speech “there is something in both cases which lends greater charm, but without showing itself.”²¹ The language of such oratory “will be pure Latin, plain and clear; propriety will always be the chief aim.” The orator himself will be “modest” (verecundus) in using the “stylistic embellishments” (ornamentis).²² Cicero specifically argues that the plain style, unlike either the middle or the grand, lacks the quality of ornatus, or “the charm and richness of figurative ornament” (ornatum suave et afflens).²³ Such ornament as will feature in his orations will be “figures of thought,” and not speech, but they will “not be exceedingly glaring.”²⁴ A speaker deploying such a style, suggests Cicero, “is esteemed wise [sapiens] because he speaks clearly and adroitly.”²⁵

By contrast, orators deploying the grand style are “forceful, versatile, copious, and grave,” able to “arouse and sway the emotions” – or more literally minds (ad permovendos et convertendos animos).²⁶ The grand style “is magnificent, opulent, stately and ornate” – amplus, copiosus, gravis, ornatus.²⁷ Oratory of this sort is especially political, connected to the exercise of power at the grand level: the grand orator is the “man whose brilliance and fluency [ornatum dicendi et copiam] have caused admiring nations to let eloquence attain the highest power in the state.”²⁸ Cicero’s description of its effect is striking:

[It is] the kind of eloquence which rushes along with the roar of a mighty stream, which all look up to and admire, and which they despair of attaining. This eloquence

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¹⁹ Ibid., 63–64.
²¹ Cicero, Orator, 79.
²² Ibid., 80.
²³ Ibid., 79.
²⁴ Ibid., 85.
²⁵ Ibid., 99.
²⁶ Ibid., 20.
²⁷ Ibid., 97.
²⁸ Ibid., 97.
has power to sway men’s minds and move them in every possible way [*tractare animos, huiss omni modo permovere.]*

The grand style deploys a good deal of ornament, given its aim of transporting the minds of its auditors; the grand orator “will rule and sway men’s minds [*reget et flectet animos*], and move them as he will.”

And the true function of the orator is, for Cicero, “to speak ornately [*dicendi et ornandi*].” Yet someone only able to speak in such a style may “seem to be a raving madman among the sane, like a drunken reveler in the midst of sober men.”

In addition to Cicero’s discussion of *ornamenta* and their place in *elocutio*, *elocutio* has a place of special importance in Quintilian’s account of rhetoric, in which *elocutio* “presents the greatest difficulty.” So important is this activity of the orator that, if it is not deployed, it makes “the preliminary accomplishments of oratory” – that is, invention and arrangement – “as useless as a sword that is kept permanently concealed within its sheath.”

For Quintilian, *elocutio* is a necessary condition of persuasion. As we saw in Cicero’s *Orator*, Quintilian deploys a metaphor of physical beauty to illustrate the risks of style, which can lead, through “over-attention to the niceties of style,” to “the deterioration of our eloquence”; Quintilian suggests that “the man who attempts to enhance these physical graces by the effeminate use of depilatories and cosmetics, succeeds merely in defacing them by the very care which he bestows on them.” The dilemma, then, is that “words which are obviously the result of careful search and even seem to parade their self-conscious art” lack a certain grace – *gratia* – and seem to be insincere.

Yet one cannot be an orator in the truest sense of the word, for Quintilian, without excelling in *elocutio*, and especially *ornatus*. After all, “Even the untrained often possess the gift of invention, and no great learning need be assumed for the satisfactory arrangement of our matter.” Through *ornatus*, the orator “appeals to the enthusiastic

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29 Ibid. 30 Ibid. 31 Ibid., 113. Cicero remarks at 64 that “all speaking is oratory, yet it is the speech of the orator alone which is marked by this special name” – thus suggesting, in its immediate context, that philosophers are engaging in conversation (*sermo*), not oratory. 32 Ibid., 99. 33 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), VIII.Pr.13. 34 Ibid., VIII.Pr.15. 35 Ibid., VIII.Pr.22, Pr.19. 36 Ibid., VIII.Pr.23. 37 Ibid., VIII.3.2.
approval [popularem laudem] of the world at large”; one armed with such weapons combats “not merely with effective, but with flashing weapons.”\textsuperscript{38} So powerful is \textit{ornatus}, according to Quintilian, that it can transport auditors to “a perfect ecstasy of delight.”\textsuperscript{39} Such effects are useful because they make audiences more amenable to one’s argument through pleasure, enhancing both “their attention and their readiness to believe what they hear.”\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, if carried out particularly well, one’s audience can be “transported by admiration.”\textsuperscript{41} As with Cicero, the kind and degree of \textit{ornatus} to be deployed in speaking is a function of “the nature of the material to which it is applied.”\textsuperscript{42} Whereas one engaging in a demonstrative speech is “like the hawker who displays his wares,” forensic oratory requires “a more exact style,” and private cases require “simple and apparently unstudied language.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Elocutio}, then, and especially the virtue of \textit{ornatus}, involving as it does copious language and \textit{amplificatio}, is central to the task of the orator, and indeed distinguishes the activity of the orator from other forms of speaking. The special faculty of the ideal orator (who can deploy all three styles), after all, is the ability to arouse the emotions of an audience and, in doing so, to push and pull them in particular directions. Moreover, \textit{elocutio} is quite powerful in its effects on auditors, compelling them to feel certain emotions, enabling the orator to produce – seemingly at will – whatever psychological state she wishes to produce in her auditors: the virtue of \textit{ornatus} allows the orator to move, or to transport, her audiences. So powerful is this ability that it not only delights auditors, but it can move them in a way that is not evident to audiences. After all, efforts that are too obvious would simply fail in this domain, losing their efficacy through the appearance of “self-conscious art,” as Quintilian put it.\textsuperscript{44} Too much effort lacks grace, and too little effort can fall flat; but when it came to at least a particular style of speaking – the plain style – one simply did not \textit{need} to deploy the techniques that please and move one’s audience in delivery. Speaking in the plain style, as opposed to the middle or grand, involved, then, a concern with propriety, given the task at hand (\textit{probare}), but it also entailed a different approach to and understanding of one’s audience, recognizing that appeals to \textit{ethos} and \textit{pathos} were inappropriate means for achieving persuasion.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., VIII.3.2. \hspace{1em} \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., VIII.3.4. \hspace{1em} \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., VIII.3.6. \hspace{1em} \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., VIII.3.6. \hspace{1em} \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., VIII.3.12. \hspace{1em} \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., VIII.3.13, 14. \hspace{1em} \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., VIII.Pr.3.2.
III

With this discussion of style, *ornatus*, and *decorum* in the background, I’ll now turn to the place of flattery in Renaissance thought more broadly, and especially in the mirror genre, a genre that Machiavelli engages in *The Prince*, albeit with important departures. Flattery was an important concern for Renaissance writers of princely mirrors, works that were in their “heyday” during the late fifteenth century and would continue to be produced by humanists in the sixteenth century as well. Mirror writers (often looking back to Isocrates) hone in on flattery as a political problem especially salient for princes, and we should not be surprised: as we have seen in the prior chapters, when power is concentrated, seeking to please the power holder is to be expected. Thus Brunetto Latini argues that the prince should “avoid entertainers who praise him to his face,” suggesting that he should “be as sad when he is praised by bad people as he would be if he were praised for bad works.” Giovanni Pontano argued that “the person who inclines his ears towards flatterers utterly ceases to be his own master” and that flatterers are “to be shunned completely.” Desiderius Erasmus, in his *Education of a Christian Prince*, discussed flattery quite frequently. One of the “evil counselors” that can plague monarchies, flattery is to be avoided through the right choice of “nurses” and “attendants,” the right outlook on receiving honorifics, and especially right education through reading and encouraging frank speech among friends: “Nothing speaks the truth more honestly or more advantageously or more candidly by books; but the prince

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47 On this point, see Gilbert, *Machiavelli’s Prince and Its Forerunners*, 17.


must nevertheless accustom his friends to the knowledge that they find favor by giving frank advice.”

The irony of this advice, however, is that while writers in this genre sought to support and strengthen rulers against flatterers, they often went to great lengths to see that the readers of their works were well disposed to them, emphasizing the virtues of the addressee and their own humble status and qualifications. Whether these authors were sincere in their efforts is not essential; suffice to say that they, like Pliny or Cicero, can be said to be performing a public transcript. This is unsurprising, given the differences in status, power, and wealth between author and audience. Petrarch, for instance, writes in his *Letter to Francesco da Carara* that his goal is “arousing virtue with the spur of praises, for nothing is more powerful to stimulate a noble spirit”; adding, “I ought not to wish and cannot wish anything but your good,” since Francesco is “peaceful without laziness, glorious without being proud,” and his “modesty vies with magnanimity.” Erasmus’ preface to *Education of a Christian Prince* is also enthusiastic in its praise: he notes Charles’ “good nature,” “honesty of mind,” and “ability,” among other merits. Even those who would instruct princes – and who would do so with professed honesty – praised them in order to secure their favor and trust, a reflection in part of their inferior status, and in part of their desire to persuade their audiences through securing goodwill.

It is thus of little surprise, then, when we turn to Castiglione that flattery and favor are such prominent themes. After all, Castiglione’s focus – the courtier – is just the sort of person who inhabited a world of stark differences of status, wealth, and power, but was also just the sort of person who depended on superiors for his station and security. Castiglione, in *The Book of the Courtier*, seeks to describe “what form of Courtiership [la forma di cortegiania] most befits a gentleman living at the courts of princes, by which he can have both the knowledge and the ability to serve them [loro servire] in every reasonable thing, thereby winning favor from them [acquistandone da essi grazia] and praise from others.” In short, he is interested in the “perfect Courtier” (perfetto cortegiano).

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The goals of the courtier, then, center on serving (servire) the prince and acquiring his favor (acquistare grazia); the art of the courtier is thus to serve and to please; his task echoes that of the mirror writers we have already encountered.⁵⁴

The courtier, who is “in the service” of his “lord” (servitú, patrone)⁵⁵ ought, in the words of Ludovico de Canossa, to have “that certain grace [grazia] which we call an ‘air’”;⁵⁶ he should “avoid affectation in every way possible, as though it were some very rough and dangerous reef; and . . . [should] practice in all things a certain non-chalance [sprezzatura], so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it.”⁵⁷ This recalls what we have seen in both Quintilian and Cicero, who emphasize the need to conceal art in order to maintain the proper and pleasing appearance. This air, according to Ludovico, has an aesthetic and emotional function, making its possessor “at first sight pleasing and lovable [grato ed amabile] to all who see him”; the art itself serves as “an adornment [ornamento] informing and attending all his actions.” In effect, it is an outward display that affects the minds of those who observe him, attaching them to those they observe through its graceful appeal to their emotions.⁵⁸

After arguing that the ideal courtier should be of noble birth and that “the principal and true profession of the Courtier must be that of arms,” Ludovico spends a good deal of time describing the other activities of the courtier, a discussion that involves much attention to the courtier’s adornment and the need to supplement his martial prowess with other skills. Even within the domain of martial prowess, however, Ludovico emphasizes that the courtier must maintain a kind of balance informed by the desire to avoid “ostentation” (ostentazione) and, through bragging, the “hatred and disgust [ odio e stomaco] of those who hear him.”⁵⁹

Indeed, displaying too much of any particular quality – including effort – will have the effect of repelling, rather than attracting, his observers.

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⁵⁴ The terms he deploys in characterizing the courtier’s aims are, as we will see, nearly identical to those Machiavelli deploys in his letter to Lorenzo.
⁵⁵ Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, 85. ⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 32. I have modified the translation here; in the original, sprezzatura is not bracketed, while nonchalance is.
⁵⁸ For a discussion of the emphasis on external comportment in the portrait of the ideal courtier, see Frank Lovett, “The Path of the Courtier: Castiglione, Machiavelli, and the Loss of Republican Liberty,” The Review of Politics 74, no. 4 (2012).
⁵⁹ Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, 1.17.
“Grace” and “good judgment” – grazia and buon giudizio – must be present in all of his behavior if he is to attain his goal – namely, universal favor.  

 His behavior, overall, ought to be “full of grace” (aggraziato). In describing what he means by grace, along with how one comes to be graceful, Ludovico argues, as we saw, that the truly graceful courtier must practice sprezzatura; it is from this sprezzatura that “much grace comes,” a function of one who is excellent in a domain without apparent effort. Sprezzatura, or nonchalance, is “the real source from which grace springs,” and it serves as an “adornment” (ornamento) to human action.

 This ornament has, according to Ludovico, two functions: it displays knowledge through action, rather than announcing knowledge directly, and “often causes [action] to be judged much greater than it actually is” precisely because it makes observers think that the actor, acting with so little effort, could perform even more impressively.

 It is crucial, then, to understand the different kinds of adornment or, more literally, ornament, that can enhance and manifest the courtier’s grace. Though many forms of ornament are features of the body, ornament is even more a feature of the soul: “for as the soul is far more worthy than the body, it deserves to be more cultivated and adorned [più culto e più ornato].” Many things provide ornament, in this regard, though: in addition to “goodness,” Ludovico argues that “the true and principal adornment [ornamento] of the mind” is letters. Even the great generals of antiquity, such as Alexander, who slept with a copy of the Iliad nearby, “added the ornament [ornamento] of letters to valor [virtù] in arms.” Ludovico, and his interlocutor Giuliano, go so far as to argue that music and painting are graceful ornamenti. Ensuring that such ornaments work is itself an art – so argues Federico in Book II:

 If you have a beautiful jewel with no setting, and it passes into the hands of a good goldsmith who with a skillful setting makes it appear far more beautiful [molto piú bella], will you say that the goldsmith deceives the eyes of the one who looks at it? Surely he deserves praise for that deceit, because with good judgment [giudizio] and art his masterful hand often adds grace and adornment [aggiunton grazia ed ornamento] to ivory or to silver or to a beautiful stone by setting it in fine gold.

 This buon giudizio recalls the buon giudicio of 1.21, giving rise to grazia through the ornamental virtue of sprezzatura, and avoiding the vice of affetazione. It is worth noting that Federico is responding, in deploying...
this metaphor, to Gaspar Pallavicino’s claim that the courtier’s practice is “not an art, but an actual deceit,” an activity that is not “seemly for anyone who wishes to be a man of honor.”

The danger, however, is that a focus on pleasing the prince might entail flattery. We see this clearly in Book II, where Federico states: “I would have the Courtier devote all his thought and strength of spirit to loving and almost adoring the prince he serves above all else, devoting his every desire and habit and manner to pleasing him [compiacergli].” Yet Pietro da Napoli, another speaker in the dialogue, answers him: “you have . . . sketched us a noble flatterer [nobile adulatore].” Federico disagrees; “flatterers love neither the prince nor their friends, which I wish our Courtier to do above all else; and it is possible to obey and to further the wishes of the one he serves without adulation, because by wishes I mean such as are reasonable and right, or those which in themselves are neither good nor bad.” So long, then, as the courtier serves and loves what is not bad in his prince, and has the wisdom and tact to do so, he is no flatterer. Yet the courtier must still “perceive what his prince likes, and [have] the wit and prudence [lo ingegno e la prudenza] to bend himself to this,” though he must also have “the considered resolve [la deliberata volontà] to like what by nature he may possibly dislike.” The courtier, then, must observe due decorum in speaking to his prince, and will display “the reverence and respect [quella reverenza e rispetto] that befit a servant in relation to his master [al servitor verso il signor].”

The role of ornament and its connection to pleasing the lord come to the fore in Book IV, where we see that the ideal courtier, competing as he is against mere flatterers, and aiming at what is good for the prince and not just for himself, can tell his lord “the truth about everything he needs to know, without fear or risk of displeasing him.” This is the culmination of the courtier’s strategy: captivation by an ornamented style, making possible instruction. Through his successful practice of the courtly arts, and his acquisition of grace through the aesthetic appeal of ornament, “he may dare to oppose him and in a gentle manner avail himself of the favor acquired by his good accomplishments, so as to dissuade him of every evil intent and bring him to the path of virtue.” Far from simply being interested in acquiring the prince’s favor, the courtier is a kind of

68 Ibid., 80. 69 Ibid., 80–81.  70 Ibid., 81.  71 Ibid., 81.  72 On this point, see Lovett, “The Path of the Courtier,” 596. Castiglione has Ottaviano contrast his courtier with “flatterers” in Book IV, noting that the latter try “to gain profit from their close association.” Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, 211.
teacher; the ideal courtier must “gain the good will [d’acquistarsi la benevolenza] and captivate [gadescar] the mind of his prince that he may have free and sure access to speak to him of anything whatever without giving annoyance.” Only then can the courtier fulfill his vital function: namely, to lead his prince along “the austere path of virtue, adorning it [adornandola] with shady fronds and strewing it with pretty flowers to lessen the tedium of the toilsome journeys for one whose strength is slight.” The courtier’s tactic is “beguiling him with salutary deception” (ingannandolo con inganno salutifero), and a key weapon in his arsenal is ornament. Achieving this task requires that the courtier captivate the prince through his ornamented – and aesthetically pleasing – activity. In doing so, he pleases the prince without flattering him in the moralistic sense of making him worse or doing it for purely self-interested motives, as encountered in the Introduction.

Why is such an art necessary? Because princes “have the greatest lack of what they would most need to have in abundance . . . someone to tell them the truth and make them mindful of what is right.” The prince’s enemies cannot be expected to help; his friends may not be of much help either, as even those who are close to him “are wary of reprehending [him] for [his] faults as freely as they would private persons, and, in order to win grace and favor, often think of nothing save how to suggest things that can delight and please [his] fancy, although these things be evil and dishonorable.” The prince’s friends, because of who he is and their desires, “become flatterers” (adulatori). As a result, princes are made drunk [ineebriati] by the great license [licenza] that rule gives; and by a profusion of delights are submerged in pleasures, and deceive themselves so [s’ingannano] and have their mind so corrupted [l’animo corrotto] . . . that then they become intolerant of any advice or opinion from others.

Even if the behavior of the ideal courtier is not flattery, the harm of flattery is moral; it makes the prince worse, corrupting his very soul. The corrupted prince, “never hearing the truth about anything at all” and drunk with license, comes to view ruling as “a very easy thing,” turning to “sheer force,” and focuses only on “maintaining the power they have,” seeking to keep the power that gives them license. The truly corrupted prince goes so far as to view obeying “duty and honor” as a form of “servitude” (servitù). The problem of the corrupted prince is that he does not know

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73 Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, 213. 74 Ibid., 213. 75 Ibid., 213. 76 Ibid., 211. 77 Ibid., 211.
“how to govern peoples,” ignorance that leads to “so many woes, deaths, destructions, burnings, ruins, that it may be said to be the deadliest plague that exists on earth.”

A prince like that is in desperate need of an education – perhaps a “strict philosopher” to “reveal” truth (mostrar) and “teach” him (insegnar). Such language brings to mind Cicero’s language about probare, the plain style, and the philosophical form of discourse, as seen above. The problem is that anyone who would seek “openly and artlessly [apertamente e senza arte] to reveal . . . the harsh face of true virtue” to the corrupt prince would be in for a bad fate: the prince would “abhor him” like “an asp,” or “deride him as a thing most vile.”

The mode of discourse fitting a philosophical disputation would be quite ill-advised when speaking to one’s superior. Public transcripts are costly to break, and agents deploy them in no small part because they can serve to protect them. Yet the ideal courtier’s role is vital, given the problem the ignorant and corrupted prince poses, and his art serves his ends; a seeming flatterer, he is actually the prince’s best defense against flattery, using the prince’s own shortcomings – his self-love and attraction to pleasure – to make him better by appealing to his emotions. The turn to art is itself a sign of the constraints – social and political – that the courtier faces in the context of principalities; he cannot accomplish his task overtly, given his dependence.

The catch is that if the courtier is ideal, he has great power over the prince. It is not as if the prince chooses to be beguiled by the courtier’s arts, any more than the audiences moved or transported by Cicero and Quintilian’s ornament-deploying orators chose to be moved or transported by their speeches. The thrust of the courtier’s performance is for the prince to be so enamored of him that he cannot help but trust and listen to him, and that he be unaware of the courtier’s grip. He loves the courtier because the courtier, like the orator of Cicero or Quintilian, knows how to use ornaments – in both speech and action – such that he can please and move the prince. Such ornaments make him both lovable and trustworthy, serving as external manifestations of internal excellences. The ideal courtier, like the ideal orator, is able to move and to please his audience, and this ability is essential to him being able to give the prince the advice that he needs and that he would otherwise be unwilling to hear. It is not flattery in the moralistic sense; after all, the courtier is merely manipulating the prince to do what he ought to have done in the first place. But in a strategic

78 Ibid., 212.
79 Ibid., 213.
80 On this point, see Lovett, “The Path of the Courtier.”
sense, it is flattery: the courtier is using praise, and affection more broadly, to manipulate the prince into doing what he otherwise would not have done. The outcome is that the prince may in fact be made better, in spite of the efforts of mere flatterers. Moreover, knowing the prince’s likes and dislikes allows the courtier to use his performative prowess effectively, fitting his knowledge and expertise to the appropriate style, much as the orator does in the activity of elocutio.

IV

Let us turn, now, from Castiglione to Machiavelli. It is no surprise that flattery was a concern for Machiavelli given his engagement with the mirror genre in The Prince and his immediate audience: a prince from whom he seeks to gain favor. Not only is flattery the subject of its own chapter in the Prince, it features as a theme in the Florentine Histories and the Art of War, reflecting Machiavelli’s acute awareness of the possibility of flattery in relationships of patronage, actual or potential, and the way in which subordinates might praise the powerful to ingratiate themselves. In the Art of War, for instance, he notes that one may praise those who are dead, “since all cause and suspicion of flattery [cagione e sospetto di adulazione] have disappeared” – that is, because the one praising has nothing to gain from the one being praised.

Machiavelli is particularly aware of the problem that flattery poses in communications between patrons and their dependents. In the dedicatory letter to the Florentine Histories, Machiavelli writes,

And because I was particularly charged and commanded by Your Holy Blessedness that I write about the things done by your ancestors in such a mode that it might be seen I was far from all flattery [si vedessi che io fussi da ogni adulazione discosto] (for just as you like to hear true praise of men, so does feigned praise presented for the sake of favor [grazia] displease you), I very much fear that in describing the goodness of Giovanni, the wisdom of Cosimo, the humanity of Piero, and the magnificence and prudence of Lorenzo, it may appear to Your Holiness that I have transgressed your commands.

Machiavelli chalks this up to the fact that the records he consulted were “full of praise for them,” requiring him either to report them as found or

81 Though one hopes the prince would have done it if he were better informed, or a better person.
“out of envy to be silent about them.”

He further emphasizes his distance from adulazione by describing the history itself, and especially his desire to write speeches such that the speakers’ “judgments and their order preserve the proper humor of the person speaking without any reservation.”

One cannot, then, read this work and call Machiavelli a flatterer – adulatore – because he is not in the practice of “staining the truth” while still trying “to satisfy everyone,” and in particular because he said little about Giuliano de’ Medici, father of Clement VII.

Machiavelli’s posture as a frank speaker would seem to connect to his style, or so I will argue. Machiavelli’s style has, to be sure, attracted much attention over the centuries (and I will turn to some recent accounts below), but I want to start things off by briefly noting a seventeenth-century reaction to his style. In his 1663 work, Some Considerations Touching the Style of the Holy Scriptures, Robert Boyle points to Machiavelli’s Prince as a model of style: his “plainness” was evident in the Dedicatory Letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici, which announced that it was a work “not Adorn’d with any of those enveagling outward Ornaments, usual to other Authors in their Writings.”

Ironically, perhaps, given his oft-attributed impiety, Machiavelli’s style illustrates Boyle’s broader argument about the “Unaffected Style of Scripture,” such that God would expect “a welcoming Entertainment for the least Adorn’d parts of a Book, of which the Truth is a direct Emanation from the Essential and Supreme Truth.”

Adornment is, for Boyle, not intrinsically connected to the effective expression of truth, as the truth itself emanates from a text without ornament, and Machiavelli serves as an exemplar of unaffected style.

Castiglione, of course, argues that the ideal courtier’s conduct should be characterized by a lack of affectation as well – the term sprezzatura (which Castiglione created) means, in effect, nonchalance.

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84 Ibid., 3–4.
86 Robert Boyle, Considerations Touching the Style of the Holy Scriptures. Extracted from Several Parts of a Discourse (Concerning Divers Particulars Belonging to the Bible) Written Divers Years since to a Friend (London: Henry Herringman, 1663), 152–53.
entails a graceful effortlessness that in fact conceals a good deal of effort, and one who possesses this quality will behave in way that seems unaffected despite the practice and knowledge that effortlessness requires. In this regard, the style of Castiglione’s courtier would seem similar to Machiavelli’s style in *The Prince*. Yet the effortless and graceful performance of Castiglione’s courtier – who seeks to gain favor – entails a good deal of beautiful outward *ornament*: as Javitch puts it, “The prime function of the courtier is to delight, and a large part of the book devoted to him suggests that the pleasure produced remains an end in itself . . . Only when Ottaviano insists [in Book IV] on enlarging the role of the ideal courtier do didactic and persuasive functions take on any real importance.”87 If Machiavelli’s style is deliberately (and perhaps ostentatiously) *unadorned*, Castiglione’s courtier engages in a highly adorned – and yet seemingly unaffected – style.

I’ll compare Machiavelli and Castiglione in more detail now, but first wish to emphasize that in the Renaissance, as we have seen with Cicero and Quintilian, “Rhetoricians of all schools declared that *elocutio* was the most important part of rhetoric.”88 For the Roman sources, *elocutio* was chiefly aimed at the emotions of the audience, and, as such, the elements of *elocutio* – the ornaments – were “functional, persuasive, not decorative.”89 The importance of ornament, and its intimate connection to persuasion through its effects on emotions, is, as we have seen, a prominent theme in Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*. With this in mind, I’ll turn to recent readers of Machiavelli’s style, who may, for simplicity’s sake, be divided into two categories: those reading him as conventional, and those reading him as an innovator. Viroli, for instance, reads *The Prince* conventionally, understanding it as a text composed “following the rules illustrated by the Roman masters of rhetoric,” and in particular “the rules of the deliberative genre.”90 This is due, in part, to Machiavelli’s training, itself a manifestation of Florence’s “cult of eloquence,” but it is also due to Machiavelli’s goal in writing *The Prince*, which was to convey his “reputation in the art of the state,” an art that was thoroughly rhetorical.91 With respect to Machiavelli’s style, Viroli remarks that he adhered to the advice of Cicero and Quintilian, who “agreed that in deliberative oratory ‘the whole speech should be simple and grave

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89 Ibid., 743.
90 Viroli, *Machiavelli*, 73, 75.
91 Ibid., 75, 77.
simplex et gravis’), because the matter being discussed has a splendour and magnificence of its own.”92 For Viroli, “Machiavelli diligently follows both the advice on the plain style and the advice on examples.”93

Viroli’s account may be critiqued, however, for reading Machiavelli as too conventional a rhetorician, especially when compared with other humanist writers. As Kahn, Hariman, and Najemy amply document, Machiavelli’s relationship to the rhetorical tradition, and to the humanist tradition of mirrors for princes, is fraught with tension. Though focusing less on Machiavelli’s style – which she terms “strategic” – Kahn argues that Machiavelli “does not so much abandon the resources of humanist rhetoric as use them against humanism itself.”94 This is so in part because Machiavelli shows “what humanists had always known and feared: faithful imitation inevitably involves the possibility of feigning; what appears to be virtue may in practice turn out to be vice.”95 Moreover, Machiavelli uses the technique of arguing in utramque partem to undermine humanistic assumptions that the tactic lent itself to effective argument, contending that “the conditions of human life simply do not allow one ‘to have and exercise’ only morally good qualities,” destabilizing “political virtue” in the process.96 Machiavelli’s strategic style is rooted not just in what a prince may learn “by reflecting on Machiavelli’s prose,” but also in his tactics as a writer.97 In particular, Machiavelli achieves what Kahn terms the “demoralization of prudence,” arguing that “the humanist view of politics is not rhetorical enough.”

92 Ibid., 80. Viroli is referring to Cicero’s De partitione oratoriae 27.97 and Quintilian’s Institutio oratoria 3.8.61.
93 Viroli, Machiavelli, 80. Though focusing more on the matter of The Prince than its style, Cox’s analysis of the text in light of the Rhetoric to Herennius is worth noting as well. Like Viroli, Cox seeks to make sense of the work as conventional rather than innovative, looking not to its adherence to the stylistic guidelines of Cicero, but instead to its similarities to the patterns and arguments of the Herennius. What is most shocking about Machiavelli’s text – namely, his “promotion of expediency as the overriding criterion in political deliberation” – is far less shocking when viewed with one of the key rhetorical texts of the Renaissance. The Rhetoric to Herennius is, unlike Cicero’s On the Ideal Orator, “relatively unshackled by moral commitments.” In this rhetorical model, Machiavelli found a text that presented “security and virtue as alternatives between which the orator is free to choose at will.” See Virginia Cox, “Machiavelli and the Rhetorica Ad Herennium: Deliberative Rhetoric in the Prince,” The Sixteenth Century Journal 28, no. 4 (1997), 1112, 1116, 1120.
95 Ibid., 19. 96 Ibid., 25. 97 Ibid., 33.
Najemy and Hariman also emphasize Machiavelli’s innovation when viewed from the perspective of humanist rhetoric, though each focuses on the relationship between this innovation and Machiavelli’s style. Najemy emphasizes that in the *Dedicatory Letter*, Machiavelli is seeking “to distance himself from the classical traditions of rhetorical *amplificatio*,” and holding that his book’s honor will “be a function, or so he hopes, not of its language but of its success in putting readers into direct contact with things themselves.” Rooted partly in Machiavelli’s suspicion of ordinary linguistic usage, he seeks “to establish a discourse of politics independent of rhetoric and eloquence.” Thus Machiavelli seeks “to stabilize and control the meanings of words,” evident in his “obsessive reliance on differential pairs.” Machiavelli’s overt eschewal of ornament, then, is part and parcel of his effort to show that “the Prince’s discourse comes closer to truth – and to power – the less it depends on, and the more it is isolated from, the common dialogue,” with the prince’s interactions with his advisor(s) themselves a dialogue.

Hariman’s Machiavelli is equally an innovator, but his reading of Machiavelli’s innovation (a reading that greatly informs my own reading of The Prince) centers on what he terms Machiavelli’s “realist style.” The realist style marks “all other discourses with the sign of the text: It devalues other political actors because they are too discursive, too caught up in their textual designs to engage in rational calculation.” Such a style “activates the endemic assumption in modern political thought that political power is an autonomous material force” and that texts must achieve “realization in a material world.” In effect, “Machiavelli successfully affects a lack of affectation,” given that he is engaged in “a competition for status.” This is not to say that Machiavelli avoids style, or rhetoric; rather, he “turned rhetoric against itself,” in that he draws a distinction between a real world and a “textual world,” by which a discourse “is a true representation because it is devoid of ornament (that is, because it is not directed to please others),” and hence the texts stands “independently of a social situation, free of social motives such as the quest for higher status.”

I wish to add, however, that Machiavelli’s embrace of the plain and unadorned style is politically charged – we may think back here, again, to the equal status of those deploying the philosophical style in Cicero’s

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99 Ibid., 91.
100 Ibid., 94.
101 Ibid., 106.
102 Hariman, Political Style 13.
103 Ibid., 17.
104 Ibid., 19, 15, 17.
105 Ibid., 24, 30.
account. More broadly, however, Machiavelli is engaged in counsel, given that he emphasizes he is providing advice. And as both Cox and Viroli discuss, Machiavelli engages in a kind of rhetoric analogous to deliberative oratory, insofar as he is advising his reader about future events, the outcomes of which are uncertain; this, too, is what Castiglione’s courtier seeks to do. As Cox puts it,

In the division among three genres of classical rhetoric, a florid and elaborate style was conventionally seen as appropriate principally to the demonstrative genre . . . Deliberative or political rhetoric, by contrast, was better served by a self-consciously lean style.

Machiavelli, then, is choosing the style appropriate to the task of deliberation and “casting himself emphatically as an engaged political actor and not as an apologist or intellectual cheerleader.”

But his use of the plain style, even if conventional from the perspective of the deliberative genre, is more politically salient, and intimately connected to Machiavelli’s own understanding of the activity of the counselor. This political salience and the performative dimension of Machiavelli’s activity are evident in The Discourses. For while Machiavelli discusses flattery and the choice of counsel in the Prince, he discusses how to engage in counsel – and the style of effective counsel – in Discourses 3.35: “The Dangers Encountered in Acting as Leader in Advising Something; The More Unusual It Is, the Greater the Dangers.” Machiavelli turns to “those dangers which citizens, or a prince’s advisers, undergo in taking the lead in a serious and important decision” (una deliberazione grave e importante) “when all the advice on the matter will be charged to them.”

This activity – deliberative rhetoric – is fraught with danger, since “all the evil produced” from actions resulting from counsel is imputed to the author of the counsel (s’imputa allo autore del consiglio); and while he may be “commended” for the good that comes, “by a great deal the reward does not weigh as much as the harm.”

Machiavelli adduces two instances to illustrate the dilemma, the first being Sultan Selim’s execution of an advisor who had urged him to attack the Sophy. Though Selim was victorious, many of his troops were lost due to the arid environment through which he had to move. Selim was irato, and his counselor (the autore del consiglio) paid the price. The second

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example comes from Livy, who tells the story of plebeian consuls’ defeat in battle after being elected through the efforts of a small number of Romans: “from this those advisers [consigliatori] would have suffered harm, if there had not been great strength in the party in whose behalf that decision was made.” Whether one advises princes or republics, then, one is in danger (unless, of course, one is backed by a sufficiently strong party). Moreover, if advisors “do not, without reservation [sanza rispetto], advise things that they believe useful, either for the city or for the prince, they fail in their duty [ufficio]; if they do advise them, they put themselves in danger of life and position, since all men blindly judge good and bad advice by its outcome.”

The solution, for Machiavelli, is for the dutiful advisor to behave in a particular manner. The advisor must speak with moderation; he should not “seize upon any of the plans brought forward as his own undertaking,” speaking without passion and with modesty (sanza passione con modestia); his style is emphatically not that of the richly ornamented grand orator of Cicero or Quintilian. Rather, he echoes Cicero’s modest speaker of the plain style, as noted above: such an orator is “modest” (verecondus) in using the “stylistic embellishments” (ornamentis). If one speaks in such a fashion, those who follow one’s advice – be it “the city or the prince” – do so “voluntarily” (volontario); they cannot then think that they were “pushed by your urgency” (tirata dalla tua importunità). Again, this voluntary quality is not the effect of the grand style, which does push and pull the audience. Because neither a prince nor a people (popolo) thus advised goes against the “wishes of many other advisers,” you will be safe, since “whenever many oppose you . . . they unite to ruin you” should your counsel fail. One who speaks with moderation may “miss the glory gained by being alone against many in urging something that results happily,” but will be safer; more important, if one’s moderately argued counsel is rejected, and “from other people’s advice some calamity results, you obtain the utmost glory.”

The style of the advisor is, I would suggest, plain: modest, moderate, dispassionate. It is not the richly ornamented and deeply moving grand style.

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This is not simply a matter of the dictates of decorum in the deliberative context, though; it is a matter of prudence as well, given the dependent and precarious position of the advisor. And it is worth noting again what we encountered in our earlier discussion of style, and especially the plain, or what Cicero terms *subtilis*, style. One who engages in such a style is restrained and humble; she imitates custom (*consuetudinem imitans*); her way of speaking is *verecondus*, in that she will not deploy “the charm and richness of figurative ornament.” She avoids the powerfully affective figures of the middle and grand styles; but the activity in which she engages (instruction, or *docere*) succeeds not primarily because of its use of *ethos* and *pathos*, but rather by virtue of the *logos* of the speech itself. The speech wins the assent of the audience in a way that more vehement styles do not, involving the audience’s rational faculties more than the emotional faculties. One accepts the results of another’s teaching not because one is moved to do so, but because of the qualities of the teaching itself. Such a style lacks the love – and trust – producing ornament deployed by Castiglione’s courtier, so necessary to gaining the favor of the prince, but it gains trust and achieves its ends instead through calm demonstration of learning. Such a style leaves agency in the hands of the auditor, captivating through instruction, rather than captivating to instruct. Machiavelli’s style of counsel, then, echoes the non-ornamented plain style we encountered in Cicero.

Machiavelli believes this mode of proceeding is the only viable option for counselors, since “to advise men to be silent and not to speak their opinions would be to make them useless [*inutile*] to their republic or their prince,” and it would not provide one who kept quiet with a viable defense, as it would lead to suspicion. To illustrate the latter, Machiavelli tells the story of Perseus’ defeat at the hands of Aemilius Paulus, after which one of his friends told him “of many errors that had caused his ruin.” Perseus was enraged and killed him, exclaiming, “Traitor, so you have put off telling me until now when I have no further remedy!” This man’s error was “having kept silent when he should have spoken and . . . having spoken when he should have kept silent; he did not escape the danger by not giving the advice [il consiglio].”

We may pause here to note, again, that the kind of counsel that Machiavelli describes – without passion, moderate, modest – does not entail the storm and thunder that would be associated with the richly

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110 Ibid., 76, 79.
111 Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1. 3.35.
ornamented grand style, or even the more moderate, but still ornamented, middle style. Moreover, the emphasis on speaking without passion at all, and delivering one’s counsel such that one’s audience takes it voluntarily, would seem to eschew ornament altogether. After all, it was especially through the richly ornamented emotional appeals of the middle and grand styles, the activities of *delectare* and *flectere*, respectively, that orators engaged with, and manipulated, the emotions of their audiences. And it was the richly ornamented style of Castiglione’s courtier that won the heart of his lord. Speaking moderately and modestly, and avoiding passion in making one’s case, removes the suspicion that one has been manipulated into making a decision: it is a matter of the auditor’s choice, not the orator’s art. After all, if the matter turned out badly, the orator could not be blamed for being manipulative, since he spoke plainly and calmly all along, leaving it to his auditor to choose a course of action for himself. Yet the non-ornamented style is a conscious choice and just as affected as any other stylistic choice; as we saw with Hariman, he “affects a lack of affectation.”

This portrait of counsel is puzzling, however, in a crucial way: it would seem highly ill-suited to winning favor from the powerful, an activity we might associate with the richly ornamented style of Castiglione’s courtier, and the task of *delectare* in Cicero and Quintilian. Indeed, given his biography, we might expect Machiavelli to try to cultivate a pleasing self-portrait in writing *The Prince*. After all, Machiavelli had been protected and supported by the gonfalonier for life of the Florentine Republic, Piero Soderini – so close were they that Machiavelli was considered by many to be his “puppet.” He had served the Republic diligently and in a number of positions and capacities – diplomatic, domestic, and military – and his family had a history of service as well, having “provided twelve gonfaloniers and fifty-four priors.” With the return of the Medici, he had been restricted to Florentine territory for the period of a year by the new government, banned from the Palazzo

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112 Hariman, *Political Style*, 17.
for the same duration, and required to pay 1,000 gold florins as bond. To top it off, he was tortured and imprisoned as a result of his implication in the conspiracy of Capponi and Boscoli. When Dietz remarks that Machiavelli often depicts the Medici in a “decidedly negative” light – especially in the Florentine Histories – we should not be surprised if he aroused their suspicion.\footnote{Mary Dietz, “Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception,” Political Theory 80 (1986), 791.}

It would seem, then, that Machiavelli, in his Dedicatory Letter, might engage in high dudgeon in order to ingratiating himself to Lorenzo. Yet he says less, and says it more plainly, to ingratiate himself than we might expect – his strategy is to foreground what Castiglione’s courtier worked so hard to conceal: his knowledge and abilities. To be sure, the letter includes a typical “humbly topos,” in which the author downplays his merits before his superior.\footnote{Christine de Pizan, The Book of the Body Politic, trans. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xviii.} Machiavelli positions himself as the inferior seeking the favor of the superior – his goal is to “acquire favor” (acquisitare grazia); the terminology used is identical to that used by Castiglione in describing the goal of his courtier.\footnote{ibid., 3.} He desires to offer himself to Lorenzo with “some testimony of my homage” – servitù, “a feudal term of submission” qua Mansfield, echoing the language of Castiglione as well.\footnote{ibid., 3.} In short, Machiavelli is taking the stance of the would-be courtier, dependent on the favor of Lorenzo. Yet he deploys a plain style, avoiding the grand in just the way that Cicero says someone addressing a single auditor should avoid the grand, as we saw above, in a passage I want again to note: “How inappropriate it would be [Quam enim indecorum est] to employ general topics and the grand style when discussing cases of stillicide before a single referee [cum apud unum iudicem dicas].”\footnote{Cicero, Orator, 72.}

To further ingratiate himself, Machiavelli brings Lorenzo a token of his earnestness. Noting that those with the goal of acquiring grace “come to meet [the prince] with things that they care most for among their own or with things that they see please him most,” Machiavelli offers what he cares most among his possessions: “the knowledge [la cognizione] of the actions of great men [uomini grandi], learned by me from long experience [esperienza] with modern things and a continuous reading [lezione] of ancient ones.”\footnote{ibid., 3.} Yet unlike the ideal courtier, who seeks to
conceal his study, Machiavelli is keen to show his, since his knowledge qualifies him for his role; he is to be listened to because of his knowledge, experience, and reading, each of which he announces. Despite his qualifications for writing such a work, he doubts that his work is worthy of Lorenzo’s presence, signaling his humility and subordination. He hopes, however, that through Lorenzo’s umanità he would accept it, as he offers nothing less than the “capacity [facultà] to be able to understand [intendo] in a very short time all that I have learned and understood in so many years and with so many hardships and dangers for myself.” He says, moreover, little more of Lorenzo’s virtue, at least until chapter 26.

Machiavelli suggests that the merits of the work, unadorned as it is, are in its content, not its form. We have already explored Machiavelli’s language in describing his style, but it is worth briefly revisiting. The terms he disavows – ornate, clausule ample, parole ampullose e magnifiche, lenocinio, ornamento estrinseco, ornare – do not, as we have seen, implicate all rhetoric, but particular forms of elocutio – the grand and middle styles. The work does not need such figures because it will be honored as a result of the variety of its material and the gravity of its subject, themselves rooted in Machiavelli’s experience (esperienzia) and study (lezione). It is not that Machiavelli disavows rhetoric altogether, then; rather, such figures and tactics are inappropriate to the matter at hand, which is displaying his learning and understanding. In this regard, I partly agree with Najemy, who writes:

Any honor his book earns should be a function, or so he hopes, not of its language but of its success in putting readers into direct contact with things themselves, with a materia and subietto whose newness and importance do not need to be enhanced by artful, and inevitably artificial, uses of language.

I depart from Najemy, however, and incline to Hariman’s view in this regard: Machiavelli claims to avoid the seductive art that was part of the courtier’s art of captivation, moving to the reality of things and avoiding ornament and polish; his style does not seek to please or titillate overtly, unlike Castiglione’s courtier. He affects a lack of affectation, to return to Hariman’s wonderful phrase. His goal is not to conceal his art, but to seem to avoid art altogether. But there is something nonetheless pleasing about such an ethos, and he is indeed building an ethos, through which he wants to display his knowledge, rather than conceal it – his art is both hidden and in full view.

Even though Machiavelli is Lorenzo’s inferior and emphasizes his lower status, there is, as Ferster notes, a certain irony to advice books and the subservient stance their authors affect: “despite the rhetoric of the address of the servant to the patron that often elevates the patron in the dedicatory letters at the beginning of the advice manuals, there is something inherently leveling about advice.”

Machiavelli is aware of this – he emphasizes that he does not “want it to be reputed presumption [presunzione] if a man from a low and mean state dares to discuss and give rules for the governments of princes.” It is the lowly Machiavelli who best understands princes, gazing up at the mountain from beneath; he has a perspective Lorenzo lacks, just as Lorenzo has a perspective that he lacks.

For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well [a conoscere bene] the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well [a conoscere bene] the nature of princes one needs to be of the people.

Even if their perspectives are complementary, though, he has something beyond what Lorenzo has: cognizione of princes rooted in experience and study and a perspective connected to his status. And it is his cognizione – which he advertises – that makes him worth listening to in the first place. Machiavelli is to be trusted because he speaks truly and plainly; and because he speaks truly, he can speak plainly. This is not just frankness; this is boldness, and boldly unadorned.

I want now to turn to the two chapters of The Prince most closely related to flattery: chapter 23 of The Prince, “How Flatterers Are to Be Avoided,” and the related chapter 22, “Of Those Who a Prince Should Have as Secretaries.” Both chapters deal with flattery, insofar as they deal with how to receive and evaluate advice that may be self-interested, and hence untrustworthy. Whether or not one’s ministers are good is a function of the prince’s prudenza; if one looks at those who surround a “lord” and sees that “they are capable and faithful,” such a lord “can always be reputed wise because he has known how to recognize them as capable and to maintain them as faithful.” Those surrounded by incapable and faithless ministers will be subject to “unfavorable judgment.”

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125 Ibid., 92.
126 Ibid., 92.
Machiavelli provides the example of Antonio da Venafro, minister of prince Pandolfo Petrucci of Siena, who was evidence of his lord’s merit because of his own qualities. Pandolfo, presumably, had the kind of brain “that discerns what others understand” (discerne quello che altri intende) – the other two being the “one that understands by itself” (intende da sé) and the one “that understands neither by itself nor through others.” If Pandolfo did not understand by himself, at least he discerned what Antonio understood. If a prince is able “to recognize the good or evil that someone does or says, although he does not have the capacity for invention [invenzione] himself, he knows the bad deeds and the good of his minister, extolling the one and correcting the other. The minister cannot hope to deceive him and remains good himself.”

This leaves unanswered a fairly obvious question: how can the prince know whether his minister is good? Observe his behavior, and look to see who he serves:

When you see a minister thinking more of himself than of you, and in all actions looking for something useful to himself, one so made will never be a good minister; never will you be able to trust him, because he who has someone’s state in his hands should never think of himself but always of the prince, and he should never remember anything that does not pertain to the prince.

The minister must be loyal, then; and the prince must keep him good (mantenerlo buono) by “honoring him, making him rich, obligating him to himself”; in a word, making sure that he knows “he cannot stand without the prince” and that he fears “changes.” The minister must rely on the prince if the prince is to rely upon his minister; he must be dependent to be dependable. One thing that is clear, though, is that counsel – and counselors – must be freely chosen.

Machiavelli is still left with a related point, to which he turns in chapter 23. This is “an error from which princes defend themselves with difficulty, unless they are very prudent [prudentissimi] or make good choices.” The danger is flatterers (li adulatori), and though it is unclear, at least initially, what danger they pose, he soon explains that flatterers can cause the prince to fall “headlong” (e’ precipita). Courts are filled with flatterers, and it is no wonder, since “men take such pleasure [si compiacciono] in their own affairs,” and “deceive themselves” (si ingannono). One should, presumably, be on alert for excessively pleasant advice. The problem, however, is that in seeking to defend oneself from flattery,

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127 Ibid., 92.  
128 Ibid., 93.  
129 Ibid., 93.
“one risks the danger of becoming contemptible [contennendo].”\textsuperscript{130} To be held in contempt is, of course, undesirable (the prince who is “held variable, light, effeminate, pusillanimous, irresolute” will face threats to his power).\textsuperscript{131} How is it contemptible, though, to avoid flattery? One must make clear that \textit{uomini} – chiefly one’s counselors – “do not offend you in telling you the truth; but when everyone [ciascuno] can tell you the truth, they lack reverence [la reverenzia] for you.”\textsuperscript{132} Machiavelli deploys just the term Castiglione does here: \textit{reverenzia}.\textsuperscript{133} Machiavelli himself emphasizes the prince’s need to hold “firm the majesty of his dignity [dignità],” since “he can never want this to be lacking in anything.”\textsuperscript{134} Those who may be spoken to frankly by just \textit{anyone} are not held in sufficient awe; but those who are not spoken to frankly at all are in grave danger.

The prudent prince must find some middle ground between letting \textit{everyone} tell him the truth and letting \textit{no one} do so through concern with his reverence. Both courses are dangerous, after all, so he must find a third way, a \textit{terzo modo}. The solution is to choose “wise men [\textit{uomini savi} in his state,” and give “freedom” (\textit{libero arbitrio}) only to these “to speak the truth [\textit{la verità}] to him, and of things only that he asks [\textit{domanda}] about and nothing else.”\textsuperscript{135} They are, presumably, minds of the first sort, which can gauge things on their own, but their frank speech is a function of his choice, and not theirs; it is his will that matters, not theirs. While they may only speak to him when asked, “he should ask them about everything and listen to their opinions,” and then make his own decision (\textit{deliberare da sè a suo modo}); in dealing with “these councils and each member of them,” he must make it clear that he will accept more freely the advice that is spoken more freely (\textit{liberamente}). Such a style would \textit{not} be highly ornamented, to put things mildly. Having been advised, he must “move directly to the thing that was decided and be obstinate in his decisions [\textit{deliberazioni}].” To do otherwise, suggests Machiavelli, is a danger: such an individual “either falls headlong because of flatterers [\textit{adulatori}] or changes often because of the variability of views, from which a low estimation of him arises.” Machiavelli’s example – the emperor Maximilian – serves to illustrate failure on two counts: he did not take counsel prior to acting, and when his plans were “known and disclosed,” they were “contradicted” by those around him, and he changed his mind. As a result, his policies were unstable and inconsistent.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 93.  \textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 72.  \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 94.  \textsuperscript{133} Cf. Castiglione, \textit{The Book of the Courtier}, 81.  \textsuperscript{134} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 91.  \textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 94.
The thrust of the example of Maximilian is to show that the prince “should always take counsel,” but only when he wants to do so. Maximilian did not take counsel when he should have, and took counsel when he should not have done so. The prudent prince is a “very broad questioner,” “a patient listener to the truth,” and “should become angry when he learns that anyone has any hesitation to speak it to him.” But if the prince is not wise (savio), he cannot be counseled effectively without putting himself under the authority of “one person alone to govern him in everything, who is a very prudent man”; the danger this person poses, of course, is that such a “governor would in a short time take away his state.” The flip side of the dilemma, though, is that an unwise prince who takes counsel from more than one person “will never have united counsel, nor know by himself how to unite them.” Such an outcome is inevitable, as any given counselor “will think of his own interest,” and the prince will lack the wisdom to “correct them or understand them.” The only solution, it seems, is to force the counselors to be good, as “men will always turn out bad for you unless they have been made good by a necessity.” Prudent princes receive good counsel; good counsel does not make a prince prudent. Absent prudence in the first place, the prince will be unable to receive good counsel at all.

VI

Is there anything the prince can do, though, to recognize flattery and hence avoid flatterers? Machiavelli does not tell us explicitly how flatterers speak in The Prince, but we may infer that they do not speak freely, that they do not speak the truth, and they speak in a cloying fashion, a fashion chosen for the purposes of manipulation – and a fashion incongruous with the task of advising a single person, as we saw above with Cicero’s account of probare. They would, presumably, deploy the style Machiavelli eschews in the Dedicatory Letter, and hence feature pleasing and moving ornaments in their speech. Moreover, flatterers’ activity is connected to the fact that men are very pleased with themselves, fostering self-deception. Their way of speaking does not offend; and while they may display the outward signs of reverence, they do not speak the truth – il vero. And they would not speak in the way that Machiavelli describes in the Discourses, moderately and without passion.

\[136 \text{ Ibid., 95.}\]
One should select plain and honest speakers as a prince, and one should speak plainly as an advisor. Machiavelli – and his plain-speaking counselor – is to be trusted through the knowledge he deploys (and announces) in speaking clearly, and not because his manner of speaking is so beautiful that it wins the affection of his auditor. To be sure, the form of Castiglione’s courtier is pleasing only because the underlying matter is truly excellent; yet this excellence is best displayed through the concealment of effort, and the excellence is most fully appreciated through the bewitching effects of aesthetically pleasing ornament. Machiavelli’s apparent plainness and openness, by contrast, mark him off as a non-flattering counselor; indeed, it announces him as such. Machiavelli is the ideal courtly figure – the sort of person a prince should listen to – precisely because of his (un)courtly performance. Machiavelli’s performance turns Castiglione upside down, in a sense, performatively resolving the dilemma of counsel. In doing so, he makes use of a style – the plain style – more characteristic of discourse between equals, captivating his audience not through ornament, but through the content of his teaching.
In the prior chapter, I compared Machiavelli’s performance of the courtly arts with what we encounter in Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier. Whereas Castiglione’s courtier captivates to instruct, using pleasing ornament and praise to render the prince more receptive to his otherwise harsh teachings, Machiavelli instructs to captivate, minimizing praise and announcing the absence of ornament. Rather than conceal his abilities, Machiavelli is at pains to display them, but his display of these abilities diminishes the need for him to deploy ornament, creating an image of himself as a frank speaker. At the same time, Machiavelli’s overt rejection of ornament was intimately related to his understanding of the office of the counselor, as described in the Discourses. In seeming to speak frankly and without adornment, and thus to avoid the richly ornamented and attractive behavior of Castiglione’s courtier, Machiavelli presented himself, in essence, as the ideal courtier.

I now turn to Hobbes, writing in the century following Machiavelli and Castiglione, a writer who faced the problem of flattery in his defense of monarchy. Hobbes’ defense, I argue, took seriously the political dangers of flattery while deploying a non-moralistic solution. This is not surprising, since the problems flattery posed to monarchs are widely evident in English

political thought from the rule of King James I through the Restoration, and
involved the possibility of flattering a monarch such that he would not rule
well. We will see four specific themes related to flattery in an array of writers
critical of monarchy: monarchs were susceptible to flattery because they
were singular and powerful rulers; the courtly arts taught, and the courts
themselves featured, the flattery of monarchs; a flattered monarch was a
corrupt and dangerous monarch; monarchy could reduce subjects to flatter-
ing servility. Each theme echoes what we have seen thus far, and writers in
Hobbes’ time typically dealt with the problem of flattery in one of two ways:
first, by inculcating virtue in the monarch, the strategy of King James I in
Basilicon Doron; second, by either limiting the monarch’s power, in com-
 brow with or through constitutionalism; or, with Milton and Sidney,
elimming monarchy through the creation of plural forms of sovereignty.

Hobbes’ defense of monarchy in light of the problem of flattery centers
on what I term its contingent unity. Unlike James I, Hobbes does not chiefly
defend monarchy by an appeal to virtue. 1 Indeed, Hobbes would have had
great difficulty defending monarchy through an appeal to virtue because
of his egalitarianism, without which his consent theory would have little
foundation. In addition, Hobbes provides no virtue related to detecting
or avoiding flattery in his list of virtues in Leviathan chapters 14 and 15,
nor does he discuss this topic in his account of the office of the sovereign
representative, as we’ll see. 2 Rather, I argue that Hobbes, as opposed to
Milton and Sidney, viewed the non-plural qualities of monarchy as assets
rather than liabilities. Hobbes’ defense of monarchy is that it best resists
flattery because monarchy is not just unitary qua institution (after all, all
forms of sovereignty are necessarily unitary, for Hobbes: one may perhaps
complain about the “person” of the sovereign, but not its “unity”), 3 but
contingently unitary. Only in the case of monarchy is the artificial person
of the sovereign representative identical to the natural person of the sovereign
representative. Because the two persons are identical, the dangers of flattery
are minimized; when the natural and artificial persons of the sovereign are
not identical, however, the dangers of flattery are maximized.

1 I wish to thank Al Martinich for this helpful formulation.
2 Miller’s argument that Leviathan functions as a sort of mirror strikes me as persuasive, as
does his argument that Hobbes’ mirror shows that “[t]he high demands of conformity
with heavenly virtues, at least as a matter of sovereign legitimacy, no longer apply.” Ted
To make this argument, I turn first in Section II to three seventeenth-century texts that illustrate the danger flattery poses to monarchy: Jonson’s *Sejanus* and Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, each of which illustrates the dangerous susceptibility of monarchs to flattery and the salience of concerns with flattery in early seventeenth-century England, and then Bacon’s essay *Of Friendship*, which highlights the need for, and danger of, close monarchical relationships. I then turn, in Section III, to two different ways of dealing with the problem of flattery: King James I’s reliance on virtue, and Milton and Sidney’s efforts to diminish (if not eliminate) the power of the king through plural forms of rule. Section IV demonstrates that, and explains why, Hobbes does not rely on virtue in his defense of monarchy, along with why Hobbes is not particularly worried about the power of monarchs as compared with other forms of rule. I then turn to an initial account of the unity of interest between the artificial and natural person in monarchies, which I have termed “contingent unity.” This discussion is illustrated through Hobbes’ 1629 essay on the “Life and History of Thucydides.” Section V turns to Hobbes’ comparison of monarchy with non-monarchy in the *Elements*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan* to show how his defense of monarchy in light of its contingent unity echoes and expands on his criticisms of plural sovereigns in these earlier texts. The following section centers on a further benefit of the contingent unity of monarch: Hobbes’ account of monarchical deliberation as a form of dialogue. I conclude my argument in Section VII by arguing that Hobbes’ reliance on monarchy’s contingent unity in effect minimizes the importance of the ruler’s character due to the importance of institutions, and turning briefly in Section VIII to a comparison of two different versions of the *Discourse against Flatterie* (1611 and 1620), credited to William Cavendish, Hobbes’ pupil.

II

Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare each wrote plays involving the danger of flattery in monarchies, and flattering counsel in particular. Jonson’s *Sejanus*, written in 1603, drew on Tacitus (and Suetonius) and is a vivid depiction of the dangers of flattery at court. The play begins

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with an encounter between two self-described outsiders and critics of the court, Sabinus and Silius. They lack the “fine arts” of the court:

We have no shift of faces, no cleft tongues,  
No soft and glutinous bodies, that can stick,  
Like snails on painted walls; or, on our breasts,  
Creep up, to fall from that proud height, to which  
We did by slavery, not by service climb.⁵

The court is a place of duplicity in which individuals advance on their bellies through servitude, and not merit. Sabinius and Silius, who are honest and virtuous men, keep their distance from it and from the likes of Satrius and Natta, clients of Sejanus. The description of their manipulation and obsequy is worth quoting at length. Satrius and Natta, creatures of court,

... can lie,  
Flatter, and swear, forswear, deprave, inform,  
Smile, and betray; make guilty men; then beg  
The forfeit lives, to get their livings; cut  
Men’s throats with whisperings; sell to gaping suitors  
The empty smoke, that flies about the palace;  
Laugh when their patron laughs; sweat when he sweats;  
Be hot and cold with him; change every mood,  
Habit, and garb, as often as he varies;  
Observe him, as his watch observes his clock;  
And, true, as turquoise in the dear lord’s ring,  
Look well or ill with him ...⁶

Their immorality is intertwined with their moral and physical flexibility; their lack of character makes them well suited to taking on the character of their patron.  
That such creatures abound in Tiberius’ reign shows that it was a corrupt age – ruined by “vile and filthier flatteries.” Sabinus’ and Silius’ is a world turned upside down: gone is the Rome of old, marked by freedom and equality. As Aruntius describes it,

... the times are sore,  
When virtue cannot safely be advanced;  
Nor vice reproved.⁷

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⁶ Ibid., 1.1.27–38.  
⁷ Ibid., 3.481–84.
Instead, they have become “the slaves to one man’s lusts; and now to many” – that is, first to Tiberius, and his arch-flatterer, Sejanus, and then to the many flatterers whose deceptive art gives them power. Sejanus himself is the quintessential manipulative flatterer, echoing the swindling merchants of Andersen encountered in the Introduction. Sejanus’ goal is simply (and in his words) “To thrust Tiberius into tyranny,” making Tiberius so great an object of hatred through his manipulation that the prince will be utterly isolated:

And he in ruins of his house, and hate
Of all his subjects, bury his own state;
When with my peace and safety, I will rise,
By making him the public sacrifice.\(^8\)

A would-be ruler, Sejanus is particularly dangerous, however, because he does not flatter through fear, as was the case with Andersen’s courtiers; he flatters in pursuit of his private purposes, purposes that are inimical to the interests of Tiberius. He uses language strategically, appealing to Tiberius’ shortcomings qua man, to cause Tiberius qua monarch to act in ways that do not conduce to his office. Sejanus is the moralistic villain par excellence.

Through many twists and turns, Sejanus meets his downfall, stripped of his offices and honors by Tiberius, and to the delight of the Senate. Yet even their cheers are not genuine: as Lucius Arruntius puts it,

But had Sejanus thrived
In his design, and prosperously opprest
The old Tiberius; then, in that same minute,
These very rascals, that now rage like furies,
Would have proclaim’d Sejanus emperor.\(^9\)

The corrupted and corrupting world of Tiberius is thus inimical to honesty and virtue.\(^10\) The sheer presence of so much flattery, and such powerful flatterers, might give us pause in thinking about the politics of the court and its corruptive effects on monarchs. As Sabinus puts it,

Tyrants’ arts
Are to give flatterers grace; accusers, power
That those may seem to kill whom they devour.\(^11\)

Tyrants and flatterers go together: where there is one, we should expect the other, tyrants honoring flatterers, and flatterers honoring tyrants.

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\(^8\) Ibid., 2.2.391, 2.2.401–4.
\(^9\) Ibid., 5.790–94.
\(^10\) Ibid., 1.1.43.
\(^11\) Ibid., 1.1.70–72.
Shakespeare’s *King Lear* does not revolve around flattery, per se, but it would be hard to imagine the *tragedy* of the play unfolding without flattery. The plot begins with Lear’s decision to divide his kingdom into three parts, one for each daughter, though it is worth noting that the choice entails a tension between his desires as a man – namely, “To shake all cares and business from our age” – and his interests as a king – “the cares of state.”\(^{12}\) The real trouble is that he does not divide it as he should. Instead of making his decision based on an honest appraisal of his daughters’ merits and abilities, in keeping with the interests of state, his criterion in dividing his kingdom is personal: how much his daughters love him. He asks,

Which of you shall we say doth love us most,  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where nature doth with merit challenge?\(^{13}\)

His elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, are up to the rhetorical challenge – the former loves Lear “more than word can wield the matter,” more than liberty, life, and health; the latter can only be happy in her father’s love – “I am alone felicitate in your dear highness’ love.”\(^{14}\) Lear is quite pleased by their performances, and each receives her portion. When it comes time for Cordelia to speak, who all along has been expressing her distaste for her sisters’ performances, sums up her love in the following word: “Nothing.”\(^{15}\) To be sure, she expands her account, emphasizing that she loves him according to her “bond, no more, nor less,” but Lear finds it unsatisfying – “So young, and so untender?” For Cordelia, no matter the appearance, her sentiment is both “young . . . and true.”\(^{16}\)

Lear, of course, disowns her, casting off his “paternal care, propinquity and property of blood,” his daughter becoming “a stranger” to him.\(^{17}\) The Earl of Kent, Lear’s longtime and loyal courtier, tries to speak sense to Lear – “What would thou do, old man? Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak when power to flattery bows? To plainness honor’s bound when majesty falls to folly.”\(^{18}\) Indeed, Kent is someone who speaks plainly; as Cornwall says of the disguised Kent in Act 2, “He cannot flatter, he; An honest man and plain, he must speak truth.”\(^{19}\) Lear banishes him as well; telling his patron what he does not want to hear

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 1.1.49–51.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 1.1.53, 1.72–73.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 1.1.83–85.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 1.1.104–5.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 1.1.111–13.  
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 1.1.144–47.  
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 2.2.92–94.
does not get Kent very far. By contrast, Goneril and Regan succeed in getting what they want – generous shares of their father’s kingdom – through flattery. But flattery is a “glib and oily art” – so says Cordelia. It is an unsavory art that she lacks, as she is unable “To speak and purpose not.” Her unwillingness – or perhaps her inability – to engage in flattery has dire consequences in the play, as, in her words, it “deprived me of your grace and favor.” Yet she is gladdened that she did not have the art of flattery, “though not to have it hath lost me in your liking.” She does not exaggerate, as Lear responds by saying, “Better thou hadst not been born than not t’have pleased me better.”20

More striking, perhaps, than Lear’s erratic behavior and his inability to see that Cordelia and Kent love and serve him, is how quickly his daughters Goneril and Regan change their tunes once they are alone. They know that they have deceived their father – as Goneril puts it, “He hath always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.” Regan chalks it up in part to “the infirmity of his age,” but she also notes that “he hath ever but slenderly known himself.”21 It is not simply, then, that Lear is getting on in years – though he certainly states his desire “to shake all cares and business from our age”;22 rather, his poor decision is also a matter of his lack of self-knowledge. Alas for Lear, he realizes the sheer scope of his error too late:

Ha! Goneril with a white beard! Ha, Regan! They flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my Beard ere the black ones were there. To say “ay” and “no” to Everything that I said “ay” and “no” to was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make Me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found ’em, there I smelt ’em out. Go to, they Are not men of their words. They told me I was everything. ’Tis a lie; I am not ague-proof.23

As opposed to Tiberius, then, whose susceptibility to flattery is a sign of his tyrannical tendencies and the viciousness of the times, Lear’s susceptibility to flattery is a sign of mental weakness, through age and ignorance, and the gap it creates in his desires as a person and his office qua king.24

20 Ibid., I.1.221–33. 21 Ibid., I.1.289–93. 22 Ibid., I.1.37.
23 Ibid., 4.6.97–105.
24 Lear realizes only too late “the nature of majesty,” as Curtis puts it, and “recognizes his failures of governance,” while he is shivering and naked on the heath. Cathy Curtis, “The Active and Contemplative Lives in Shakespeare’s Plays,” in Shakespeare and Early
In pursuing friendship, and allowing individuals to become close, kings risked, in effect, driving a wedge between their persons and their royal persons, that is, their passions and interests qua individual, and their interests qua king, possessors of an office that would live beyond them. United though they were, the imperfections of the man might weaken the sovereignty. Yet avoiding close relationships altogether would deprive a king of necessary counsel. This is evident in Francis Bacon’s 1612 essay \textit{Of Friendship}, in which Bacon (onetime Lord Chancellor to James I and occasional employer of Hobbes’ talents) writes:

It is a strange thing to observe how high a rate great kings and monarchs do set upon this fruit of friendship ... so great, as they purchase it many times as the hazard of their own safety and greatness. For princes, in regard of the distance of their fortune from that of their subjects and servants, cannot gather this fruit, except ... they raise some persons to be as it were companions and almost equals to themselves, which many times sorteth to inconvenience.\footnote{Francis Bacon, \textit{Of Friendship}, in \textit{The Major Works}, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 392.}

Though kings might want friends, having a friend meant having a (near) equal, and with such intimacy came problems. Kings must be careful about letting anyone get too close, lest they lose some of their dignity, a point we saw with Machiavelli.

Yet even with kingly friendship’s risks, a man without friends was worse off than one with friends. Friends help us make decisions, since “the light that a man receiveth by counsel from another, is drier and purer than that which cometh from his own understanding and judgment; which is ever infused and drenched in his affections and customs.” The counsel we give to ourselves, compared with that of our friends, is as different as the “counsel of a friend and of a flatterer.”\footnote{Ibid., 393–94.} Freely speaking friends check flattery; without friendship, we make worse decisions. These two tendencies might be at odds with each other, evident in Bacon’s example: Sejanus’ friendship with Tiberius, which we encountered with Ben Jonson’s play of the same name. This was hardly a relationship worth emulating: Sejanus illustrates quite vividly the dangers of kingly friendship precisely because he, under the guise of friendship, was a highly manipulative flatterer. Tacitus credits him with being the “starting-point and the cause” of Tiberius’ tyranny, and characterizes him thus: he

possessed “multifarious arts,” by which “he bound Tiberius fast,” a strange combination of *adulatio et superbia*.  

### III

It is no wonder, given the themes of flattery and corruption in courtly life, that monarchs (in this case the Stuarts) might be sensitive to suggestions about flattery. James I and his favorites – especially Buckingham – were a source of some scandal. And Buckingham would continue to be a source of embarrassment for James’ successor, evident in Charles I’s reaction to a famous invocation of Tacitus. Sir John Elliot, an avid student of Tacitus, concluded a parliamentary speech on May 10, 1626, with a reference to the Duke of Buckingham:

Of all the precedents I can find, none so near resembles him as doth Sejanus, and him Tacitus describes thus . . . In his public passages and relations he would so mix his business with the prince’s, seeming to confound their actions, that he was often styled *laborum imperatoris socius*: and does not this man do the like? Charles I did not much like the reference; as Tenney writes, “‘Implicitly,’ he exclaimed, ‘he must in-tend me for Tiberius!’ and hurried to the lords.” Charles’ concern may have stemmed from his awareness of Buckingham’s poor reputation, evident in the satire of Buckingham in two English versions of Pierre Matthieu’s biography of Sejanus.

It is, then, no surprise that James I was concerned with flattery, evident in his 1599 *Basilicon Doron*, a work of advice to a future king. He is acutely aware of the problem flatterers pose to his son Henry, partly from the perspective of public opinion, but also because of the harm that they can cause him. As he puts it early in *Basilicon Doron*, in discussing what he terms a “leaprouse conscience” that would make Henry “senselesse of sinne, through sleeping in a carelesse securitie as King Dauids was after his murther and adulterie,” he argues that the antidote to such a corrupted conscience is honest and ruthless self-examination:

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28 On Tacitus and his role in various criticisms of court and courtly life, see Salmon, “Stoicism and Roman Example.”


As for a preservative against this Leapersie, remember ever once in the four and twenty hours, either in the night, or when ye are at greatest quiet, to call your selfe to account of all your last dayes actions, either wherein ye haue committed things ye should not, or omitted the things ye should doe, either in your Christian or Kingly calling: and in that account, let not your selfe be smoothed over with that flattering, which is overkindly a sicknesse to all mankind: but censure your selfe as sharply, as if ye were your owne enemie.

Were Henry to do this, and also watch over his court closely, he might live up to James’ ideal of a king who is above all concerned with the well-fare and peace of his people; and as their natural father and kindly Master, thinketh his greatest contentment standeth in their prosperitie, and his greatest sureitie in having their hearts, subjecting his own private affections and appetites to the weale and standing of his Subjects, ever thinking the common interesse his chiefest particular.32

Being flattered, and allowing flattery to flourish, whether in court or toward one’s own person, would pose problems to James’ ideal of kingly rule, and a king who was thought to be surrounded by flatterers would not be well regarded.

In developing his conception of monarchy and the monarch’s duties, James emphasizes the importance of Henry being a good ruler:

it is not enough to be a good King, by the sceptre of good Lawes well execute to gouerne, and by force of arms to protect his people; if he ioyne not therewith his virtuous life in his owne person, and in the person of his Court and company; by good example alluring his Subjects to the loue of vertue, and hatred of vice.33

In becoming a good king, and “a law-booke and a mirror to your people,” Henry needs to move beyond his power as a king and look to his own person, paying attention to two things in particular: first, “the gouernment of your Court and followers, in all godlinesse and vertue,” and second, being sure that he himself is virtuous.34 The particular importance of Henry watching over his court is that if it is comprised of vicious individuals, his subjects might think that “yee haue chosen a company vnto you, according to your owne humour, and so haue preferred these men, for the loue of their vices and crimes.”35 This is even more pressing when it comes to “the offices of the Crowne and estate,” since these officials will directly affect the lives of Henry’s subjects. Those who fill these offices ought to be “of known wisedom, honestie, and

32 Ibid., 20.  33 Ibid., 34.  34 Ibid., 34.  35 Ibid., 35.
good conscience”; they should not be men of “factions and partialities.” Above all, though, James stresses that they must be specially free of that filthie vice of Flatterie, the pest of all Princes, and wracke of Republicks: For since in the first part of this Treatise, I fore-warned you to be at warre with your owne inward flatterer … how much more should ye be at war with outward flatterers, who are nothing so sib to you, as your selfe is; by the selling of such counterfeit wares, onely preassing to ground their greatness vpon your ruines?

James is quite clear about the danger of flatterers: their greatness will be built on the ruin of the king. By deceiving the king, and telling him what he wants to hear, they create a wedge between the man and his office. A successfully flattered person would make a bad ruler. So important is it that Henry not fall victim to flattery that Basilicon Doron itself serves as an antidote to obsequiousness. Thus, James urges Henry to keep this book close, as Alexander did the Iliad: “Yee will finde it a iust and impartiall counsellour; neither flattering you in any vice, nor importuning you at unmeete times.”

Yet there was little reason to hope that an absolute monarch would always be a virtuous monarch, and James’ conception of monarchy was certainly absolutist (in theory if not practice), in which even if a king ought to rule by law, “yet is hee not bound thereto but of his good will, and for good example-giuing to his subjects.” It would not take long for these themes to be taken up by Parliament’s allies in their conflicts with Charles I, evident, for instance, in Parliament’s May 20, 1642, resolution, which held “that the king, seduced by wicked counsel, intends to make war against the parliament.” The term “seduce” is important: it implies the kind of manipulative sweet-talk that flattery entails. For critics of Charles I and his rule, absolute monarchy, servility, corruption, and flattery stood opposed to freedom, equality, virtue, and honest speech. That Charles could be seduced was a poor sign of his character.

Such themes, and the connection between monarchy and flattery, are frequent topics in Milton’s political writings. In his 1641 *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence against Smectymnuus*, in the context of discussing “liberty of speaking, then which nothing is more sweet to man,” and which was in force due to the “resurrection of the State” through Parliament, Milton turns to the practice of certain “Princes, and great Statists” of mingling with the “popular throng” in disguise so that “they might hear every where the free utterances of privat breasts, and amongst them find out the precious gemme of Truth.” They engaged in such behavior because it would let them catch and thus avoid the “evill of flattery that ever attends them, and misleads them, and might skilfully know how to apply the several redresses to each malady of State, without trusting the disloyall information of Parasites, and Sycophants.” This goes to show the danger of flattery in monarchies, and it suggests that such artifice is unnecessary in the context “of free writing,” which “carries home to Princes … such a full insight of every lurking evil.” Plain-speaking individuals, then, are “the prospective glasses of their Prince.”

Eight years later, flattery would emerge as a theme in Milton’s answer to Charles I’s *Eikon Basilike*, the 1649 *Eikonoklastes*, “a virulent attack on the king and his evil counselors for reducing the people to slavery, and a pointedly anti-monarchical text.” Milton argues that it would be quite strange, and “most unlike a Law,” to place all of England’s “safety, or prevention” in “the sole judgement of one Man, the King,” so strange indeed that the idea that the “Kings negative voice” was law was simply “an absurd and reasonless Custom, begott’n and grown up either from the flattery of basest times, or the usurpation of immoderat Princes.” For Milton, the fact that the king is just one person – and an exceedingly powerful person – is a particularly knotty problem. Indeed, Charles I is, by Milton’s account, both the object of flattery and himself a flatterer. His idea, for instance, that “his onely not agreeing should lay a negative barr and inhibition upon that which is agreed to by a whole Parlament” shows the effect of flattery on Charles: “Court-breeding and his perpetual conversation with Flatterers, was but a bad Schoole.”

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44 Ibid., 670.
47 Ibid., 410.
distracted Charles (the vain person) from his duties as Charles the king. Though Charles seeks to excuse himself through “the uprightness of his intentions,” this simply shows “His not knowing, through the corruption of flattery and Court Principles, what he ought to have known.” To Charles’ claim that he desired “the prosperitie of his people,” Milton remarks “that Tyrants are not more flatter’d by thir Slaves, then forc’d to flatter others whom they feare” – that is, in Milton’s mind, this was Charles merely (and cravenly) trying to win the good graces of those whom he clearly did not serve well. Charles is little more than “another Rehoboam, soft’nd by a far worse Court then Salomons, and so corrupted by flatteries … to the overturning of all peace, and the loss of his own honour and Kingdoms.”

Finally, in his 1660 The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, Milton drives home the point about monarchs’ susceptibility to flattery in comparing the rule of one with the rule of many:

Certainly then that people must needs be madd or strangely infatuated, that build the chief hope of thir common happiness or safetie on a single person: who if he happen to be good, can do no more then another man, if to be bad, hath in his hands to do more evil without check, then millions of other men. The happiness of a nation must needs be firmest and certainest in a full and free Counsel of thir own electing, where no single person, but reason only swaies.

The fact that a monarch is one particular person just goes to show that monarchy is quite dangerous. Given this, a return to monarchy, for Milton, is almost unthinkable, a point he emphasizes:

how a people and thir leaders especially can do, who have fought so gloriously for liberty, how they can change thir noble words and actions, heretofore so becoming the majesty of a free people, in to the base necessitie and court flatteries and prostrations, is not only strange and admirable, but lamentable to think on.

Throughout these writings, then, we see a connection between political liberty and virtue, on the one hand, and flattery and tyranny, on the other. Within a free polity,
they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and druges to the public at their own 
cost and charges; yet are not elevated above thir brethren; 
live soberly in thir families, walk the streets as other men, may be spoken to freely, 
familiarly, friendly, without adoration. Wheras a king must be ador’d like a 
Demigod, with a dissolute and haughtie court about him, of vast expence and 
 luxurie, masks and revels, to the debauching of our prime gentry both male and 
female . . . to the multiplying of a servile crew, not of servants only, but of nobility 
and gentry, bred up then to the hopes not of public, but of court offices.53

In *The Readie & Easie Way* and elsewhere, Milton views the fact that a 
king is a single person as a particular problem. For Milton, the combin-
ation of a single, powerful, individual making decisions without check, 
and surrounded by ambitious persons seeking advance, was a dangerous 
scenario. Given how dangerous one person is in such a situation, Milton 
puts his hope in plural forms of sovereignty.

An even more radical expression of flattery’s danger and how to deal 
with it is to be found in the writings of Algernon Sidney. In critiquing 
Filmer’s claim in *Patriarcha* that even vicious kings should be of less 
concern than the masses, Sidney writes that “tho kings were always wise 
by nature, or made to be so by experience, it would be of little advantage 
to nations under them, unless their wisdom were pure, perfect, and 
accompanied with clemency, magnanimity, justice, valour, and piety.” 
That is to say, kings must be virtuous to avoid this danger, yet “[w]e 
sometimes see those upon thrones, who . . . seem to have been designed 
for the most sordid offices; and those have been known to pass their lives 
in meanness and poverty, who had all the qualities that could be desir’d in 
princes.”54 The solution is to “place kings within the power of the law,” 
and thus “equally provide for the good of king and people.”55

Sidney, like Milton, also hones in on the fact that the king was a single 
person, and an exceptionally powerful person, with power that, in the 
hands of one person, is highly corruptive. “Every man has passions; few 
know how to moderate, and no one can wholly extinguish them”: this fact 
is amplified in the case of monarchy, as “a crown comprehends all that can 
be grateful to the most violent and vicious.” Whatever bad tendencies were 
there at first are nurtured by the crown’s power and flatterers, whose 
“wicked advices . . . always concurring with their passions, incite [kings] 
to exercise the power they have gotten with utmost rigor, to satiate their

53 Ibid., 425.
54 Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, ed. Thomas G. West (Indianapo-
 lis: Liberty Classics, 1990), 282.
55 Ibid., 303.
own rage, and to secure themselves against the effects of the publick hatred, which they know they have deserved.” A flattered king, then, does not fulfill his office well. Worse still, even a good king is little security, and if power is “in the hands of one man,” Sidney argues, “ill men will always find opportunities of compassing their desires.” Such individuals abound at court, and the “chief art of a courtier” is manipulating princes, having discovered “to what vice a prince is most inclin’d.” Concentrating power in a single ruler is even more dangerous given how easily one can be led astray: “No men are so liable to be diverted from justice by the flatteries of corrupt servants.”

Kings are susceptible to flatterers; flatterers spring up in courts, deceiving the king and bringing him toward his worst desires by the courtly arts; a flattered king is a dangerous king; monarchy, as a form of rule, might undermine virtue writ large by fostering servility and encouraging flattery and a vicious cycle of corruption. In being pulled to his private desires or vices, or simply making bad decisions, the manipulated person of the king – be it Lear, or even Charles – impeded him in his performance of his office. Whether the solution was to get rid of the king altogether, to erect a mixed government, or to place him under the law, flattery – and the king’s susceptibility to it – spoke against monarchy, and certainly absolute monarchy. Because a monarch was just one person, flattery was more dangerous, and more likely, than it would be with plural forms of sovereignty. This is so in part because he is surrounded by those seeking favor and engaging in flattery to achieve it; but it also is a function of there being no checks on an absolute monarch. That a monarch was just one person, that he might be of impure virtue, that he had particular desires, and that he was necessarily powerful were certainly important weaknesses of monarchy, and three of the greatest points in favor of republics or mixed regimes. The absence of checks, and the concomitant power, could corrupt monarchical character, further exacerbating the danger of flatterers.

IV

With worries about flattery current in English culture, James I himself writing on it (not to mention Buckingham seeming to embody it), and Milton and Sydney honing in on it, it would seem that Hobbes was in a

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56 Ibid., 234. 57 Ibid., 251. 58 Ibid., 266. 59 Ibid., 547.
difficult position while defending monarchy. He was not inclined to argue that kings qua kings were exceptionally virtuous, that there was any kind of special kingly virtue, or even that there was divine right. After all, Hobbes was a fairly strict egalitarian, and our mental and physical equality are clear: “If Nature therefore have made men equall; that equalitie is to be acknowledged: or if Nature have made men unequall; yet because men that think themselves equall, will not enter into conditions of Peace, but upon Equall termes, such equalities must be admitted.”60 To deny this is to be “proud.” And if we look at two of Hobbes’ key intellectual virtues – prudence and “acquired wit” – his account is also strikingly egalitarian. Indeed, prudence differs from subject to subject due to “Experience, and Memory of the like things, and their consequences heretofore”; such differences as exist in prudence are due to different quantities and kinds of experience.61 Thus, “To govern well a family, and a kingdome, are not different degrees of Prudence; but different sorts of businesse; no more then to draw a picture in little, or as great, or greater then the life, are different degrees of Art.”62 Acquired wit is simply “Reason; which is grounded on the right use of Speech; and produceth the Sciences.”63 Hobbes rejects Aristotle’s argument for a natural kingship, partly on the grounds that “there are very few so foolish, that had not rather governe themselves, than be governed by others.” Were it possible to have anyone remotely like Aristotle’s natural king come into being, consent would be irrelevant; it is precisely because we are all by nature equal and possessed of equal right and liberty that we are subject only to authority to which we do, or could, consent. Hobbes does grant that “if there had been any man of Power Irresistible; there had been no reason, why he should not by that Power have ruled and defended both himselfe and” his fellows, but this is because such a person possesses “irresistible” power, and not virtue.64 Nor, we may note, does Hobbes’ account of the office of the sovereign representative in chapter 30 feature a description of the virtue of listening; his advice there on taking counsel echoes his account in chapter 25, where he emphasizes that the speakers should speak singly and that the auditor should be able to interrupt.

61 Ibid., II.108. 62 Ibid., 108. 63 Ibid., 110. 64 Ibid., 558.
A further problem is that Hobbes does not and cannot deny the appeal of flattery, since flattery has a ready target in our love of honor, a love that is so strong that it causes us to quarrel, a point on which he is consistent. In the *Elements*, Hobbes defines honor as “the acknowledgment of power,” further claiming that “every man thinking well of himself, and hating to see the same in others, they must needs provoke one another by words, and other signs of contempt and hatred, which are incident to all comparison.” That is, our self-love is so deep that whenever we compare ourselves to others, there is a potential for conflict. In *De Cive*, Hobbes refers to “that desire of praise which is bred in humane nature,” and earlier claims that our passion for glory is so intense that it cannot be a secure foundation for society, since “glorying, like honour, is nothing if everybody has it, since it consists in comparison and preeminence.”

In *Leviathan*, after arguing that honor is bestowed upon power in chapter 10, he states in chapter 13 that every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he set upon himself: And upon all signs of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavours, as far as he dares . . . to extort a greater value from his contempters, by dommage; and from others, by example.

This love of honor is precisely what we have seen repeatedly to make individuals vulnerable to flattery. For Hobbes, we love and crave honor, and love and crave to have more of it than others. As he puts it in *Leviathan*, “let a man (as most men do,) rate themselves at the highest Value they can; yet their true Value is no more than it is esteemed by others.”

Honor is, as Pettit puts it, a “positional good,” that is, “a desire to be in a certain position in comparison to others.”

We all like to be praised, and to be loved, because each is a sign of being honored; the problem is not, as Abizadeh has noted, merely vain-glory, but glory. This fondness for glory is embedded in custom; thus the inferior shows honor to the superior through the following behaviors: “To praise; to magnify; to bless, or call happy; to pray or supplicate to; to thank; to offer unto or present; to obey; to hearken to with attention;

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66 *De Cive: English Version*, 136. 67 *Leviathan*, II.190. 68 Ibid., 134.
to speak to with consideration; to approach unto in decent manner; to keep distance from; to give the way to.”\textsuperscript{71} In fact, we even like to be flattered: “To be sedulous in promoting anothers good; also to flatter, is to Honour; as a signe we seek his protection or ayde.”\textsuperscript{72} It makes, after all, little sense to flatter someone who is not powerful enough to be \textit{worth} flattering, and it is not hard to see why a person with a Hobbesian psyche might be susceptible to flattery.

Humans \textit{generally} have a passion for honor and its signs, and an aversion to dishonor and its signs. To be dishonored is, in effect, to be robbed of one’s power, insofar as the one dishonoring you shows that she does not hold your power in high esteem. Because of this, while writers such as Milton or Sidney saw the kingly passions – especially self-love, a passion dangerously enhanced by great power – that led to flattery’s purchase as quite dangerous, they were less so for Hobbes. Monarchs are no less trustworthy, with respect to their love of honor, than any other men, since \textit{all} men are vulnerable to flattery because all men like to be honored and praised.

Simply stating that \textit{all} people like to be honored, and hence praised (and perhaps even flattered) does not take the defender of monarchy very far. A critic might respond that the sheer vulnerability of any particular person suggests that no \textit{single} person should have that much power in the first place. A critic might go further, replying that even if we generally desire honor, this desire is stronger in monarchs because they are powerful and because they are single persons. Such vulnerability makes it quite likely, if we have only one ruler, that flattery might drive a wedge between the person of the king and the king’s duties. Hobbes’ tactic, despite this potential objection, is to deny that the possibility of the sovereign’s interests being pulled apart through flattery increases while the number of those who hold sovereign power decreases. Rather, he argues that it is precisely because the sovereign is one – what I have termed a contingent unity – that we are better off with monarchy than non-monarchies. While all sovereigns are artificial persons – that is, all sovereigns’ words and actions “are considered as representing the words and actions of an other” – only in the case of monarchy is the sovereign representative, to use Hobbes’ terminology, a single \textit{natural} person: that is, his words and actions “are considered as his owne.”\textsuperscript{73} This cannot be said of plural sovereigns.

\textsuperscript{71} Hobbes, \textit{The Elements of Law Natural and Politic}, 49.  
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Leviathan}, II.136.  
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}, 244.
This broad tactic is evident in Hobbes’ earliest writing published under his own name, *Of the Life and History of Thucydides*, where he remarks that Thucydides “least of all liked the democracy.” His reasons for saying this are clear:

upon divers occasions he noteth the emulation and contention of the demagogues for reputation and glory of wit; with their crossing of each other’s counsels, to the damage of the public; the inconsistency of resolutions, caused by the diversity of ends and power of rhetoric in the orators; and the desperate actions undertaken upon the flattering advice of such as desired to attain, or to hold what they had attained, of authority and sway amongst the common people.

The desire for honor manifests itself in rhetorical competition, and flattery became an instrument in this struggle, with self-interested speakers deploying flattery and emotional appeals to win given their and their audiences’ love of honor. Nor does Hobbes think Thucydides is a fan of rule by the few, “amongst whom, he saith, every one desireth to be the chief; and they that are undervalued, bear it with less patience than in a democracy; whereupon sedition followeth.” Both forms of government are flawed because of contention over positional goods, manifested in rhetorical jousting via the device of flattery. The greatest praise Thucydides had for Athenian democracy, in Hobbes’ mind, was when it was “in effect monarchical under Pericles.” Or, as he would put it in his verse autobiography,

There’s none that pleas’d me like Thucydides.  
He says Democracy’s a foolish thing,  
Than a republic wiser is one king.

With respect to Thucydides, Hobbes’ “criticism of public rhetoric takes aim at the psychological properties of both leaders and the amassed collectivities over whom they cast their spell.” In democratic Athens, the people had a high opinion of their power; moreover, they believed in

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“the facility of achieving whatsoever action they undertook.” Because of this, “such men only swayed the assemblies, and were esteemed wise and good commonwealth’s men, as did put them upon the most dangerous and desperate enterprises.”

Love of self and self-confidence made the Athenians ripe for receiving bad advice tinted by emotional appeals. By contrast, those whose advice was “temperate and discreet” were thought to be cowards, “or not to understand, or else to malign their power.” This is so because their prosperity made each Athenian “in love with himself; and it is hard for any man to love that counsel which maketh him love himself the less.”

The Athenians, in short, were in the grip of flattery’s greatest ally: self-love.

Yet self-love and self-confidence are not the only causes of this behavior: group dynamics are crucial. Being led astray by self-love and self-confidence, and falling victim to the dynamics that allow flattery to flourish, is more likely with the many than with one, for Hobbes:

a man that reasoneth with himself, will not be ashamed to admit of timorous suggestions in his business, that he may the stronglier provide; but in public deliberations before a multitude, fear (which for the most part adviseth well, though it execute not so) seldom or never sheweth itself or is admitted.

In the instance of the isolated individual, it is precisely because only one person is reasoning that the reasoning is better: one doesn’t feel ashamed of fear when one is alone. With groups, however, competition and competitiveness intervene, and the concern for the positional good of honor takes over, with the result that in Athens, “wicked men and flatterers drave them headlong into those actions that were to ruin them; and the good men either durst not oppose, or if they did, undid themselves.”

The competition for honor created by group dynamics, the space it gives to the propensity to be flattered, and the problem of plural judgment lie, then, in the background of Hobbes’ criticisms of democracy and defense of monarchy. The greater the number of individuals in an audience, the greater is the number of potential objects of flattery; the more people are involved, the more potential there is for positional conflict; and the greater the number and proximity of individual passions, the greater is the fuel for flattery to consume. As Boyd writes, “Hobbes fears the release from individual inhibitions provoked by the intrinsic properties of the group.”

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then, will rely in part on monarchy’s elimination of the intrinsic property of groups and monarchy’s ability to reinstitutionalize the individual inhibitions lost as a result of group dynamics through the concentration of all power in a single person. Given these relationships, Hobbes emphasizes in *Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan* the contingently unitary character of monarchy in demonstrating its superiority to non-monarchies, rather than the virtue of the monarch.

The passages cited from Hobbes’ *Of the Life and History of Thucydides* show, even in Hobbes’ earliest writing published under his own name, his suspicion of plural forms of rule in light of flattery, and his preference for situations in which single persons engage in reasoning. This suspicion – and this preference – is consistent throughout his systematic political works. That said, it is also important to note that, despite his distaste for democracy and aristocracy he could, in principle, have been a democrat or an aristocrat (as long as the democracy or aristocracy was absolute), though, on balance, he thought monarchies would be more stable and effective than non-monarchies. What is crucial, for Hobbes, is that any form of sovereignty must be absolute: “For the Soveraign is absolute over both [sovereignty by institution or conquest] alike; or else there is no Soveraignty at all.”

And Hobbes, in his defense of monarchy against non-monarchic, does not hesitate to admit that monarchy is imperfect and that monarchs certainly can be flattered, a point he makes in chapter 1 1 of *Leviathan*: “And from hence it is, that Kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring it a home by Lawes, or abroad by Wars: and when that is done, there succeedeth a new desire; in some, of Fame from new Conquest; in others, of ease and sensuall pleasure; in others, of admiration, or being flattered for excellence in some art, or other ability of the mind.”

For Hobbes, the question is not whether a monarch is powerful – all forms of sovereignty, for Hobbes, are and ought to be not just powerful, but absolute. He puts it thus in *Leviathan*, in comparing their aptitude for peace: the difference between the “three kindes of Common-wealth, consisteth not in the difference of Power; but in the difference of Convenience, or Aptitude to produce the Peace, and Security of the people”.

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83 Ibid., 150, 152.  
84 Ibid., 288.
should be unitary – Hobbes rejects divided sovereignty. What Hobbes prefers about monarchy, given the problem of flattery, is that it is *contin- gently unitary* – in addition to being an undivided and absolute form of government, the person who holds sovereignty – the artificial person – is a single natural person. What makes him or her different is power, as Runciman notes:

To be sovereign is to be no different than the rest of us, yet to be utterly different, because of the power sovereigns wield . . . To rule in a modern state is by definition to play a kind of double role – that of the everyman who is also the only person with real power.  

Power simply works toward the ends of sovereignty more effectively as a result of being concentrated in one person.

Hobbes makes a number of arguments in support of his preference for monarchy based on its contingent unity in the *Elements*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan*, and there is a fair amount of overlap between them. All of them, moreover, center on one feature of monarchy, as opposed to other forms of sovereignty: the artificial person in the case of monarchy is a single, natural person, and not many natural persons. The advantage this gives to monarchy, from Hobbes’ perspective, stems from the fact that

whosoever beareth the Person of the people, or is one of the Assembly that bears it, beareth also his own natural Person. And though he be carefull in his politique Person to procure the common interest; yet he is more, or no lesse carefull to procure the private good of himself, his family, kindred and friends; and for the most part, if the publique interest chance to crosse the private, he prefers the private.

Hobbes’ sovereign, plural or unitary, faces the same dilemma as Tiberius, Lear, or Charles. If this is the case, then that form of government that most clearly unites public and private interest is best for procuring the public interest. Predictably, Hobbes states: “The private interest is the same with the publique” in a monarchy.

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87 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II.188.
88 Ibid., 288. Hobbes’ sovereign would, it seems, overcome the dilemma that plagued King Richard II who, in Kantorowicz’s famous account, was born “not only with greatness but also with human nature.” Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in
of monarchy – the fact, again, that the artificial person of the king is identical to the natural person of the king – minimizes the risks associated with sovereign representatives composed of more than one natural person. If Hobbes is, in principle, capable of supporting democracy, this alone would give him great pause in endorsing it.

In the *Elements*, Hobbes compares the danger of “the affections and passions” of sovereigns, rather than power, per se, since all sovereigns are (or ought to be) absolute by Hobbes’ conception. Hobbes does not find terribly worrying, then, concerns about monarchs being especially powerful, since all sovereignty, if prudently instituted, is absolutely powerful. The issue, again, is not power, but convenience. Cast in these terms, monarchy fares much better than aristocracy. An aristocracy includes a number of individuals, and

if the passions of many men be more violent when they are assembled together, than the passions of one man alone, it will follow, that the inconvenience arising from passion will be greater, than a monarchy.\(^9^0\)

The problem of the passions, then, increases as the number of individuals involved in governance increases.

A related advantage of monarchy centers on the susceptibility of plural sovereigns to rhetoric and rhetorical appeals. The sheer practice of persuasion in assemblies aggravates the problem of passionate groups even further, as each speaker

endeavourareth to make whatsoever he is to set forth for good, better; and what he would have apprehended as evil, worse, as much as possible; to the end his counsel may take place; which counsel also is never without aim at his own benefit, or honour: every man’s end being some good to himself.\(^9^1\)

The desire to win for private gain shapes speech. This task cannot be achieved “without working upon the passions of the rest,” and “the passions of those that are singly moderate, are altogether vehement.” Flattery is to be expected and tends to cause turmoil in such situations.

Similarly, Hobbes argues in *De Cive* that “very few in a great Assembly understand” matters of state, and those who would seek to advise the

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\(^8^9\) Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, 139.

\(^9^0\) Ibid., 139.

\(^9^1\) Ibid., 139.


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counsel without knowledge would produce “meer lets and impediments.” But it is not just the ignorance of audiences that matters: the nature of assemblies is such that “every one who delivers his opinion holds it necessary to make a long continued Speech, and to gain the more esteem from his Auditours, he polishes, and adorns it with the best, and smoothest language.” Eloquence augments and diminishes qualities – “Good and Evill, Profitable and Unprofitable, Honest and Dishonest” – precisely because those arguing appeal to or take their bearings not from “true Principles,” but instead from “vulgar received opinions, which, for the most part, are erroneous.” Those engaging in eloquence seek to fit their speeches not to “the nature of the things they speak of,” but rather “to the Passions of their mindes to whom they speak.” The end of eloquence, after all, “is not truth”; it is “victory.” Its “property is not to inform, but to allure”; they speak to please their audiences, and by extension engage in flattery. Likewise in Leviathan: those who speak in assemblies often lack knowledge, and “are to give their advice in long discourses, which may, and do commonly excite men to action, but not governe them in it.” Again, the unity of the monarch is a source of strength when it comes to the inconvenience of inconstancy, which is present in monarchies due to “Human Nature,” but is amplified in assemblies because of the number involved.

The plural nature of non-monarchical forms of government is similarly problematic when it comes to stability. In the Elements, Hobbes notes that the potential for the law to “be altered” by the monarch is certainly inconvenient. Nevertheless, having more than one holder of sovereignty increases this danger as well: “the mind of one man is not so variable in that point, as are the decrees of an assembly. For not only they have all their natural changes, but the change of any one man be enough, with eloquence and reputation, or by solicitation and faction, to make that law to-day, which another by the very same means, shall abrogate to-morrow.”

In De Cive, Hobbes discusses potential “grievances”: a monarch, “beside those monies necessary for publick charges ... may also, if he will, exact others through his lust, whereby to enrich his somes, kindred, favourites, and flatterers too.” Granting that the danger is real, Hobbes notes that such dangers “accompany all kindes of government,” emphasizing that monarchy is preferable because “though the Monarch would

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92 De Cive: English Version, 137. 93 Ibid., 137. 94 Leviathan, II.288. 95 Ibid., 290. 96 The Elements of Law Natural and Politic, 140.
enrich them, they cannot be many, because belonging to one.” The situation is, as seen, different in non-monarchical governments, especially in democracies, in which Hobbes points out “how many Demagoges, (that is) how many powerfull Oratours there are with the people . . . so many Children, Kinsmen, friends, & Flatterers, are to be rewarded.” Though the monarch may engage in favoritism and corruption, this can be borne with ease, whereas in a democracy, given the problem of ambition, “many are to be satisfied, and always new ones.”

He says something quite similar in *Leviathan*. Monarchs may well, to enrich “a favourite or flatterer,” take from their subjects; though an inconvenience with monarchies, it is magnified by the size of the assembly:

> For their power is the same; and they are as subject to evill Counsell, and to be seduced by Orators, as a Monarch by Flatterers; and becoming one anothers Flatterers, serve one anothers Covetousness and Ambition by turns.

Assemblies, comprised of many, entail more favorites and more scope for flatterers than monarchies, which are singular. Far from being a liability in light of the problem of flattery, monarchy’s singular and unitary character is its strength, diminishing the harmful characteristics of groups that give space to flattery.

Perhaps the most interesting argument that Hobbes makes, given criticisms of monarchy involving the susceptibility of one (as opposed to many) to flattery, and hence the potential for the flattered individual’s interest to go against the public good, is that the interest of the monarch qua man and qua monarch are identical. As opposed to plural forms of government, in which the separate interests of those natural persons who comprise the artificial person may well clash, this simply cannot occur in the case of monarchy. He argues in the *Elements* that “where the union, or band of commonwealth, is one man, there is no distraction.” Similarly, in *De Cive* he argues that the best safeguard of monarchy is the identity of the monarch’s private interest with the public interest, for “we cannot on better condition be subject to any, then one whose interest depends upon our safety, and welfare . . . for every man of his own accord endeavours the preservation of his inheritance.” Such identity is absent in groups, which feature many individuals with many different interests and passions. The unitary structure of monarchy, by contrast, concentrates the passions of the private individual and links him to his public

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97 *De Cive: English Version*, 132.  
98 *Leviathan*, II.132.  
99 *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, 140.  
100 *De Cive: English Version*, 140.
person; in doing so, it makes the interest of the king, qua person, identical with the interests of the king, qua sovereign representative – and identical with the interests of the sovereign’s subjects, as was the case with James’ ideal in *Basilicon Doron*.

And, again, he says much the same thing in *Leviathan*. Whoever rules seeks to care for the public and “to procure the private good of himselfe, his family, kindred, and friends,” and will, “if the publique interest chance to crosse the private,” choose his private interest because “the Passions of men, are commonly more potent than their Reason.” This is a point that Hobbes makes elsewhere in *Leviathan*: he notes in chapter 18 “that the greatest pressure of Soveraign Governours, proceedeth not from any delight, or pro fi t they can expect in the dammage, or weakening of their Subjects, in whole vigor, consisteth their own strength and glory,” and in chapter 30 writes, “The good of the Soveraign and People, cannot be separated. It is a weak Soveraign, that has weak Subjects; and a weak People, whose Soveraign wanteth Power to rule them at his will.”

**VI**

Thus far, we have seen Hobbes argue that, on balance, we are better off with monarchies than non-monarchies precisely because monarchies are contingently unitary. The issue, again, is not whether their power is absolute or not – all forms of sovereignty ought to be absolute, for Hobbes – but whether they are effective in achieving their end: “the peace for which civil association is instituted.” On balance, plural forms of sovereignty are less useful than monarchies in securing the peace because they are not contingent unities, though they may be unitary sovereigns. Moreover, monarchs, because they are one, can act expeditiously and are well suited to pursuing the safety of the public. Hobbes’ account of flattery supports this reasoning as well. Hobbes, as we have seen, is quite careful to deny that the power of any sovereign can be limited, though he is not blind to the dangers that monarchs such as Nero or Caligula can pose, or those that flatterers may pose. Hobbes grants, but minimizes, the danger by delineating a conception of deliberation that approximates an individual reasoning in isolation.

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The source of monarchy’s superiority in taking counsel and making decisions, in this regard, is not the *virtue* of the monarch qua monarch or qua individual. As noted earlier, Hobbes does not include a virtue of counsel-taking in *Leviathan*. Rather, his solution is to be found in the manner of taking advice. In this regard, the source is institutional and psychological: the monarch is *contingently unitary*, and because he is one, we are dealing with the problems of only one person. Because the monarch is the only individual deliberating, he does not need to worry about comparing himself to others or what others will think of him in the process, allowing him to pay attention to all of his emotions – including fear. As Oakeshott remarked, “Man is solitary; would that he were alone.”

When man is alone, the positional goods recede in importance. Hobbes’ monarch is alone: not only is the monarch the sole holder of sovereignty, but because the monarch should hear only one advisor at a time, advisors do not feel compelled to compete for position in speaking, lessening the chance of the poor deliberations that Hobbes believed characterized the Athenian assembly. The unitary character of monarchy provides a favorable institutional setting for counsel and its reception, just as we have seen Hobbes argue in comparing monarchies to non-monarchies that the latter were susceptible to the machinations of flattering orators who might soothe or seduce the people.

His discussion of counsel, in chapter 25 of *Leviathan*, is useful here. Those who command, counsel, and exhort all use the words “*Doe this*.” Despite this, each activity is very different, and Hobbes defines each of the terms in “their proper and distinct significations.” He defines command thus:

COMMAND is, where a man, saith, *Doe This*, or *Doe not this*, without expected other reason than the Will of him that says it. From this it followeth manifestly, that he that Commandeth, pretendeth thereby his own Benefit: For the reason of his Command is his own Will onely, and the proper object of every mans Will, is some Good to himselfe.

Counsel, by contrast,

Is where a man saith, *Doe*, or *Doe not this*, and deduceth his reasons from the benefit that arriveth by it to him to whom he saith it. And from this it is evident, that he that giveth Counsell, pretendeth onely (whatsoever he intendeth) the good of him, to whom he giveth it.  

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A command benefits the one commanding, not the one being given counsel. Commands lack justification; counsel provides it. Counsel instructs; commands do not.

Exhortation (and its opposite, dehortation) is related to counsel, but differs initially in degree, as it is “accompanied with signes in him that giveth it, of vehement desire to have it followed; or to say it more briefly, Counsell vehemently pressed.” Those who exhort do not engage in “true reasoning,” but use “the common Passions, and opinions of men, in deducing their reasons.” Exhortation, as Hobbes expands his account, differs from counsel in kind, incorporating an element of command: it “is directed to the Good of him that giveth the Counsell . . . which is contrary to the duty of a Counsellor.” In addition, exhortation is a deeply rhetorical practice, embodying, one imagines, not a clear and simple exposition, but a vehement use of emotion. This is the danger of flattery: self-interested counsel deploying emotional appeals to get its way. We can tell whether one is giving self-interested counsel by observing him, evident in “long and vehement urging, or by the artificall giving thereof.” Hobbes also argues that one can engage in exhortation and dehoration only when dealing with “a Multitude,” since when one is addressing a single individual, “he may interrupt him, and examine his reasons more rigorously, than can be done in a multitude.” One person may, on Hobbes’ view, more readily interrupt and question a rhetorical performer than can many.

Those who engage in exhortation and dehortation “are corrupt Counsellours, and as it were bribed by their own interest.” What makes a counselor good at his office? Hobbes’ account of the intellectual virtues is famously modest; prudence, for him – which “dependeth on much Experience, and Memory of like things, and their consequences heretofore” – is evident when “a man, that has a designe in hand, running over a multitude of things, observes how they conduce to that designe; or what designe they may conduce unto,” and “his observations be such as are not easie, or usuall.” A counselor’s advice is effective, then, in the way an individual’s reasoning is effective: “Experience, being but Memory of the consequences of like actions formerly observed, and

105 Ibid., 400.
107 Hobbes, Leviathan, II.402.
Counsell but the Speech whereby that experience is made known to another; the Vertues, and Defects of Counsell, are the same with the Vertues, or Defects Intellectuall."

In effect, counselors are a proxy for the sovereign’s memory. The problem is that “a naturall man” (monarch or otherwise) acquires memory from his own senses, “which work upon him without passion, or interest of their own.” The artificial memory of the counselor, however, may have “particular ends, and passions, that render their Counsells always suspected, and many times unfaithfull.” As in the case of contingently unitary sovereigns, we see again that Hobbes prefers single natural persons to situations of plurality. Good counselors, then, must have ends and interests consistent with those they counsel. Moreover, those who counsel must do so “with as firme ratiocination, as significant and proper language, and as briefly, as the evidence will permit.” What this means is that “obscure, confused, and ambiguous Expressions, also all metaphoricall Speeches, tending to the stirring up of Passion ... are repugnant to the Office of a Counsellour.” One who exhorts, or flatters, is not a good counselor, indicated by his speech, speech that is easy to recognize when the audience is one.

Monarchy’s contingent unity checks flattering speech. But Hobbes also thinks that counselors should be heard individually, and not in or in front of a group. Group dynamics creates problems; apart, as he argued in Of the Life and History of Thucydides, “you have the advice of every man; but in an Assembly many of them deliver their advise with I, or No, or with their hands, or feet, not moved by their own sense, but by the eloquence of another, or for feare of displeasing some that have spoken, or the whole Assembly, by contradiction.” The more people that are involved, the more likely it is that there “be some whose interests are contrary to that of the Publique; and these their Interests make passionate, and Passionate eloquent, and Eloquence drawes others into the same advice.” That is to say, they would engage in exhortation.

Hobbes explains that “the Passions of men, which asunder are moderate, as the heat of one brand; in Assembly are like many brands, that enflame one another ... to the setting of the Common-wealth on fire, under pretence of Counselling it.” When hearing one counselor at a time, or in isolation from others, one can interrupt and ask questions; but in an assembly, one “is rather astonied, and dazled with the variety of discourse

\[108\] Ibid., 108, 404.  
\[109\] Ibid., 404, 406.  
\[110\] Of the Life and History of Thucydides, 572.
upon it, than informed of the course he ought to take.” Worst of all, in any assembly, we face ambitious men, who pursue position and want “to be thought eloquent, and also learned in the Politiques.” Speaking from ambition, not knowledge, they seek “the applause of their motly orations, made of the divers colored threds, or shreds of Authors.”

The unitary structure of monarchy, along with the dialogic qualities of communications between monarch and counselor, helps ensure that monarchs receive better advice and make better decisions than non-monarchies. Whereas the latter are, by their plural nature, susceptible to flattery, monarchy, by its singular nature, is less so.

VII

Hobbes’ understanding of deliberation reflects his favorable attitude towards unitary institutions: “A man that doth his businesse by the help of many and prudent Counsellours, with every one consulting apart in his proper element, does it best, as he that useth able Seconds at Tennis play, placed in their proper stations.” To use only one’s judgment is second best; worst of all is he “that is carried up and down to his businesse in a framed Counsell.” Hobbes’ indictment of popular commonwealths is striking: “though it be true, that many eys see more then one,” as many of monarchy’s opponents might agree, this does not work well when there are many people making final decisions. This is “because many eyes see the same thing in divers lines, and are apt to look asquint towards their private benefit; they that desire not to misse their marke, though they look about with two eyes, yet they never ayme but with one.” This is a defense of absolute monarchy against popular government that does not rely on monarchical virtue, is quite pragmatic, and reduces public reasoning to the reason of a solitary individual. Hobbes’ strategy, moreover, is to use the arguments of monarchy’s critics against them, elevating the isolated individual’s reason over that of groups.

Part and parcel of his preference for contingently unitary sovereigns, moreover, is his conception of rhetoric and its relationship to plural sovereigns and group psychology. As we have seen, the style of speech that most fits counsel, and which avoids “obscure, confused, and ambiguous Expressions, also all metaphoricall Speeches, tending to the stirring up of Passion,” is the kind of speech that is not likely to be

111 Leviathan, II.408, 410. 112 Ibid., 412.
before assemblies. Such situations make mob rule much more likely; as Flathman points out, “A democracy ... is a mob ruled by that worst kind of aristocracy, an ‘aristocracy of orators.’” Those applauding do not proceed via the sort of reasoning and definitions that Hobbes thinks give rise to good calculations of the common good, but looking to mere opinion massaged by flattery; indeed, “Hobbes directly repudiates ... the widespread humanist assumption to the effect that, if a given belief has been accepted ab omnibus, this in itself gives us some reason for espousing it.”

Monarchy, however, bypasses these difficulties. The interests of the king qua king and qua man are united, which is not the case in assemblies. The king’s reason is the only reason that counts, and a king reasoning in isolation – and with the assistance of isolated counselors – reasons better than groups. Rhetorical tactics are less effective with a single auditor, in part because the king can interrupt, and in part because the king is one, linking him to his office and concentrating his passions. What this means, for Hobbes, is that who happens to be king is less important than that there be a king. In effect, the issue of who fills the office of the kings is less important than that the office be instituted properly when it comes to flattery.

This is not to say that monarchs are infallible, and Hobbes says something quite striking in this regard in chapter 30 of **Leviathan**:

To the care of the Soveraign, belongeth the making of Good Lawes. But what is a good Law? By a Good Law, I mean not a Just Law: for no Law can be Unjust. The Law is made by the Soveraign Power, and all that is done by such Power, is warranted, and owned by every one of the people; and that which every man will have so, no man can say is unjust. It is in the Lawes of a Common-wealth, as in the Lawes of Gaming: whatsoever the Gamesters all agree on, is Injustice to none of them. A good Law is that, which is Needfull, for the Good Of The People, and withall Perspicuous.

Hobbes explains his reasoning:

A Law may be conceived to be Good, when it is for the benefit of the Soveraign; though it be not Necessary for the People; but it is not so. For the good of the

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113 Hobbes’ worries about metaphor are widely echoed by a variety of seventeenth-century sources; on this point, see Hannah Dawson, *Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. chapter 3.


116 Hobbes, **Leviathan**, II.540.
Sovereign and People, cannot be separated. It is a weak Sovereign, that has weak Subjects; and a weak People, whose Sovereign wanteth Power to rule them at his will. Unnecessary Lawes are not good Lawes; but trapps for Mony: which where the right of Sovereign Power is acknowledged, are superfluous; and where it is not acknowledged, unsufficient to defend the People.\textsuperscript{117}

In effect, he grants that sovereigns may well make laws that are not in the interest of their subjects, though they are in the apparent interests of the sovereign, which is precisely one of the dangers of flattery. His tactic is, in part, to deny that such calculations are accurate – what is in the interest of the sovereign is necessarily in the interest of the people, and vice versa. In other words, his tactic is to reiterate his earlier claims about contingent unity. We have not seen him argue, in this passage (where he talks of sovereignty in general), or elsewhere (where he compares unitary and non-unitary forms of sovereignty), that any form of sovereignty is insulated from potentially catastrophic miscalculation.

It is not difficult, of course, despite his relative faith in monarchy against non-monarchies, to think of monarchs who do, in fact, separate their good as natural persons from the good of their subjects; Hobbes himself names a few, including Nero, as seen above. Yet I think we can say that Hobbes’ move here is similar to the move he makes in defending contingently unitary sovereigns from contingently plural sovereigns: the best defense against bad law is the unity of interest between the natural and artificial person of the monarch. The clearer this unity is, the less likely it is that the sovereign will make poor decisions. As Flathman remarks of Hobbes, “his skepticism leads him to the view that Sovereigns who pursue objectives significantly beyond peace and defense will almost certainly fail to achieve them and are very likely to lose their authority in the process.”\textsuperscript{118} Such sovereigns, I suggest, are more likely to emerge in his view in cases of contingently plural sovereignty, and in situations of non-dialogic counsel – we may think of the behavior of the Athenians, as Hobbes describes it, and his description of commonwealths that pursue war in ruinous ways: “such commonwealths, or such monarchs, as affect war for itself, that is to say, out of ambition, or of vain-glory, or that make account to revenge every little injury, or disgrace done by their neighbours, if they ruin not themselves, their fortune must be better than they have reason to expect.”\textsuperscript{119} The likelihood of a law or policy being conceived good, and not being good for the people, would

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., \textit{540}. \textsuperscript{118} Flathman, \textit{Thomas Hobbes}, \textit{110}. \textsuperscript{119} Hobbes, \textit{The Elements of Law Natural and Politic}, \textit{177}. 
seem to increase as the number of natural persons comprising the sovereign increases for reasons with which we are already familiar.

VIII

To conclude, I would like briefly to examine and compare the two different versions of the Discourse against Flattery, one published in 1611, the other published in the Horae Subsecivae of 1620, which contains three essays credited to Hobbes himself. The author of these essays was likely William Cavendish, Hobbes’ pupil, and the 1611 version of the work was clear about the danger flatterers posed to monarchs despite Hobbes’ own clear monarchism in his writings from 1627 onward. Thus, after relating an expression of Quintus Curtius “that more kings and kingdomes are ouerthrowne by this close flattery then by publike enemies,” Cavendish adds, “It is a poyson dangerous to euery particular person, but indeede farre more dangerous, to the person of a king and state.” Cavendish hones in on the king qua king (i.e., the sovereign representative in Hobbes’ language) and the king qua person. Indeed, he remarks of flattery,

then this there is nothing more dangerous; especially in the Courts of Princes, for it works deeply ynder the slewe of friendship . . . And where Flatterie beares the sway, honestie hath no being.

The problem, however, is that flatterers . . . are hurtfull to all, and profitable to none, yet of all sorts of men most dangerous to Princes, and yet by them chiefly accepted. For these great men, it now adaies being such a means to get credit and preferment, shall haue their kinsfolkes, friends, and principall officers, who professe this mysterie, and such as they could not well auoid if they would.

The particular danger of flatterers to princes, for Cavendish, is that through “flattering the Prince, they leade and heep him in his vices and errors, to his great shame.” Yet flatterers also pose a danger to princes in another way: they can flatter the people, and “make themselues popular, and so by that means striue to deusie a way to set themselues vp, by the deposing of their lawfull Prince.” It is incumbent, then, that “eury

122 Ibid., 45.
123 Ibid., 65–66.
124 Ibid., 72.
125 Ibid., 72–73.
King that desires his safetie... be carefull as he can, not to suffer any subject to make himselfe popular, by flattering of the people.”

The 1620 essay, despite sharing the same title as the 1611 version, was different in important ways. As with the 1611 version, the author of the 1620 version cites the same passage from Quintus Curtius. Unlike the 1611 version, however, there is no mention of flattery being particularly dangerous to kings. Similarly, whereas the 1611 version noted the danger of flattery in courts after citing Proverbs 26:25, the 1620 version cites the same Proverb (“A false tongue hateth the afflicted, and a flattering mouth causeth ruine”), but does not mention the court. The passage in which the 1611 version noted that flatterers are “men most dangerous to Princes” is simply gone in the 1620 version.

The 1620 version treats the danger popular men pose to princes, as does the 1611 version, but it does so without mentioning the “great shame” of those princes who are themselves flattered. Instead, the 1620 author writes of the danger of the popular man, that insinuates and windes himself into the loue of the multitude, by pleasing and praysing them in all their desires, and by the application of himselfe vnto their humours. The end of which obseruance must needs bee, to strengthen himself in their good opinions; by that meanes hoping, that in any designe of his against the Prince or State, they would second his attempts. This is the common end of affected Popularity, and that thousands of examples can justifie.

The author points to Julius Caesar as his example, who obtained “the fauour and trace” of his soldiers, allowing him to make “himself absolute Monarch.”

126 Ibid., 78.
127 A Discourse against Flatterie, in Horae Subsecivae (London: Edward Blount, 1620), 444.
128 Ibid., 65.
129 Ibid., 457–58.
130 Ibid., 459. The passage may be compared with Hobbes’ Leviathan: “Also, the popularity of a potent Subject, (unlesse the Common-wealth have very good caution of his fidelity,) is a dangerous Disease; because the people (which should receive their motion from the Authority of the Soveraign,) by the flattery, and by the reputation of an ambitious man, are drawn away from their obedience to the Lawes, to follow a man, of whose vertues, and designes they have no knowledge. And this is commonly of more danger in a Popular Government, than in a Monarchy; as it may easie be made believe, they are the People. By this means it was, that Julius Caesar, who was set up by the People against the Senate, having won to himselfe the affections of his Army, made himselfe Master, both of Senate and People. And this proceeding of popular, and ambitious men, is plain Rebellion; and may be resembled to the effects of Witchcraft.” Hobbes, Leviathan, II.516.
Both versions of the *Discourse* discuss the example of Henry Bullingbroke to illustrate the danger of demagogues; both treat the biblical account of Absalom (2 Samuel 15), and both do so as an example of someone who sought popularity with the people in order to seek power for himself. The 1620 version, however, is much more systematic in its account, not simply relating the same passages, but giving a step-by-step analysis of Samuel to explain how Absolon succeeded in his “popular Flattery.”

You finde his diligéce, *He rose up early*; his purposéd shewing himself to the multitude, *He stood hard by, &c.* his affability, *And every man that had*; his finding fault with the present government, *Thy matters are good and righteous,* but: a promising of redresse, if power were transferred to himself, *Oh that I were.* A shew of extraordinary respect and love to the people, *And when any man came neere.* And this course hee tooke, not with any particular; but applied himselfe to all the people. *And in this manner did Absolon to all Israel.* And so it came to passe, saith the text, that, *hee stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

The author of the 1620 version, it seems, was much more worried about popular flattery – and much less worried about monarchical flattery – than the author of the 1611 version. And the author’s worries about popular government, by contrast, are much more pronounced – and they are echoed in Hobbes’ own accounts of the weaknesses in popular government. In effect, the 1620 version – whether written by Hobbes or not – provides us with a more “Hobbesian” account of flattery than the 1611 version.

Whether the author was Cavendish, Cavendish under Hobbes’ eye, or Hobbes himself, the author minimizes the danger of flattery linked by many to monarchy, and transfers it instead to popular government.

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131 Chandos, *A Discourse against Flatterie*, 461.  
132 Ibid., 461–62.  
133 Three *Discourses* from the 1620 version of the *Horae Subsecivae* were published as works of Hobbes by Noel B. Reynolds and Arlene W. Saxonhouse: *A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus*, *A Discourse of Rome*, and *A Discourse of Laws*. The Discourse against Flatterie is not attributed to Hobbes by Saxonhouse and Reynolds. (See Noel B. Reynolds and Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Three Discourses: A Critical Modern Edition of Newly Identified Work of the Young Hobbes* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995].) I do not wish to take a side in the debate over whether to credit these Discourses to Hobbes or not, but it seems that the thought of the 1620 Discourse against Flatterie is more “Hobbesian” than the thought of the 1611 version. For a representative example of scholarship skeptical of the attribution, see Aloysius Martinich, “Three Discourses: A Critical Modern Edition of Newly Identified Work of the Young Hobbes (Review),” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (1997).

134 I am obligated to Al Martinich, who kindly drew my attention to some of the more subtle differences between these works, and suggested the possibility of Hobbes having taken an increased editorial role in the second edition.
If we ask why the text changed in this way, certainly Hobbes’ role – either as editor or writer – is a plausible explanation. But a less controversial explanation, it seems to me, was the rapid rise of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, at the court of James I. James’ fondness for Buckingham, and Buckingham’s influence on and proximity to the king, were no secret, and disapproved by some. Buckingham would go on to be a favorite of James’ son, Charles, and the Commons would petition Charles to remove him from office, seeing him as “the great evil counsellor who poisoned the channels of royal authority,” as Woolrych puts it. With Buckingham’s visible rise, and the seeds of scandal sown, minimizing the role of royal flattery – whether by Hobbes or his pupil – made a good deal of sense. In the figure of Buckingham, we are, it would seem, presented with a good example of the “monarch’s plague.”


136 Woolrych, Britain in Revolution, 58.
In the prior chapter, I argued that Thomas Hobbes makes a rather ingenious argument in defense of monarchy in light of concerns raised by his contemporaries over the very real dangers that flattery posed to monarchs. His strategy, in effect, was to grant monarchy’s critics their point, only to turn it against them: any danger flattery posed to monarchies was far worse in non-monarchies, and any susceptibility to flattery to be found in the person of a monarch was a function of human nature, and hence no different from anyone else’s susceptibility to flattery. While all forms of sovereignty ought to be unitary in the sense that all sovereign powers ought to be united (absolutely) in just one sovereign representative, not all forms of sovereignty were unitary in the sense that the natural person occupying the office of the sovereign representative was just one in number. Contingently plural forms of sovereignty, in which the sovereign representative was comprised of more than one natural person, are more susceptible to flattery, and to rhetorical manipulation writ large, simply because they were plural. And as Hobbes’ favored form of sovereignty entailed a sovereign representative who was just one natural person, so, too, did his favored form of counsel entail a contingently unitary sovereign representative taking counsel from a contingently unitary counselor.

With Hobbes, as with Machiavelli in Chapter 2, we saw flattery demoralized: that is, the dangers flattery posed to the individual had less to do with the moral harms that it might cause than the errors in policy that it might give rise to. In this regard, both Hobbes and Machiavelli depart from the moralistic accounts of flattery’s harms we encountered in Greek and Roman sources in Chapter 1, along with Castiglione in Chapter 5. Even if they didn’t view flattery as bringing about moral harm to the flattered, though, Machiavelli and Hobbes both still viewed it as a bad thing insofar as it produced bad outcomes: it is bad for the prince to be flattered, even if Machiavelli’s concern wasn’t quite that it would make him the prince a worse person, per se; it is bad for the sovereign representative to be flattered because it will lead to bad policy, even if Hobbes, again, doesn’t quite worry about whether it will make him a worse person.

Yet one of this chapter’s two focuses – Bernard Mandeville – uses the term “flattery” in such a way that it is clear that he does not think it a bad thing at all. Nor does he use the term “flattery” in quite the sense of a public transcript, either: those who flatter aren’t subordinates, for Mandeville. Instead, for Mandeville, flattery is both a mechanism of socialization and moral education; a form of exchange deployed in an economy of esteem, it is a type of language uniquely capable of manipulating humans into behaving in ways they would not ordinarily choose. Moreover, language itself, on Mandeville’s account, seeks at its origins not to disclose our thoughts, but rather to control others and to reaffirm our own sense of worth; it is rooted in our capacity for speech, but is not, in itself, a mark of a distinctively human propensity for sociability. The phenomenon of language as it exists, that is, language achieving communication, differs in reality from its appearances: its original motivation is not to communicate, but to deceive. In this regard, it shares much with Mandeville’s familiar pattern of arguing for public virtues via private vices, phenomena that achieve collective benefits and that are unintended by the actors themselves. Mandeville, in short, not only instrumentalizes flattery as a mechanism of socialization, but positively celebrates its role in the creation of a prosperous society. This is rooted, in turn, in Mandeville’s understanding of human nature – asocial and egocentric – and his account of the origins of language, an account that allows him, I suggest, to deny that flattery and praise can be differentiated.

In this regard, he stands in sharp contrast to Adam Smith, the other focus of the chapter, who directly addresses Mandeville’s account of flattery in the Theory of Moral Sentiments and who both differentiates
praise from flattery and understands the origins and functions of language in a very different way than his predecessor. Smith’s account of the formation of language is, like his account of the formation of the moral personality, decidedly two-sided: as fundamentally social and sociable creatures, we want others to agree with us, and we want to agree with them. The formation of both language and character are driven and shaped by the fundamental human desire for sympathy: we seek to make our thoughts known to each other, just as we seek to be approved by others, as opposed to the account we find in Mandeville, for whom the formation of language is an unsympathetic phenomenon. Whereas the Mandevillian account of socialization proceeds by anxious individuals seeking others, and originally creating language itself, to affirm their own worth and manipulate others, Smith’s account proceeds in the opposite way: individuals perceive worth in others and are anxious to embody it in themselves given their longing for sympathy. As a result, Smith is able to remoralize flattery, and provide an account of an economy of praise to replace Mandeville’s economy of flattery. Yet in remoralizing flattery, I’ll suggest, he does so from within the domain of politics, and not from without.

I begin in the following section with an overview of the place and function of flattery in Mandeville’s argument, focusing especially on his account of human nature and the role it plays in rendering humans, in general, susceptible to flattery. I then turn, in Section III, to Mandeville’s account of language’s origins and the distinction between the effects of language and the motivations of its first speakers, a distinction that serves as the foundation for his narrative of both language’s development and flattery’s functionality. Section IV turns to Smith, honing in on his account of the origin of language, its connection to sympathy and human nature, and the importance of sympathy in his thought more broadly. Sympathy’s relationship to stylistic propriety is the focus of Section V, which illustrates the degree to which effective communication relies upon the production of sympathy, sympathy that diminishes the potential for Mandevillian manipulation. Drawing on these two sections, I focus in Section VI on Smith’s rejection of Mandeville’s argument, with particular attention to the distinction he makes between the desire for praise and the desire for praise-worthiness, a distinction that allows him to remoralize flattery from within the boundaries of existing social practices. I conclude, in Section VII, by briefly summarizing my argument and connecting my comparison of Mandeville and Smith to my discussion of non-ideal theory in the Introduction.
II

Mandeville is arguably the greatest theorist of flattery, if for no other reason than the pride of place – and the explanatory space – it holds in his thought. This central place is at the forefront of the *Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, a text with which I’ll deal at some length. The *Enquiry* seeks to explain the apparent paradox that structures *The Fable of the Bees* and that gave rise to its subtitle – *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*:

And Virtue, whom from Politicks
Had learn’d a Thousand Cunning Tricks,
Was, by their happy Influence,
Made Friends with Vice: And ever since,
The worst of all the Multitude
Due something for the Common Good.¹

Mandeville sets out to show how man – being “a compound of various Passions … that govern him by turns, whether he will or no” – can be taught the difference between virtue and vice in spite of “his own Imperfections.”² This is necessary since, like all other “untaught Animals,” humans “are only solicitous of pleasing themselves, and naturally follow the bent of their own Inclinations, without considering the good or harm that from their being pleased will accrue to others.” Virtue, it would seem, is unnatural, insofar as it involves us being concerned with the good of others. Given our selfish inclinations, humans must “be made sociable,” and we cannot – crucially – be made sociable “by Force alone.”³

Mandeville does not explain here why force is inadequate, but Hundert’s account is instructive: unlike Hobbes, who held that “social order and the principles of contract could coherently be reconstructed primarily from” fear, Mandeville holds that we need to perceive obedience to the social order as in our self-interest absent the prospect of punishment.⁴ Interesting the parties in obedience, and moving beyond force, means turning to the broader set of human passions, a turn entailing a sort of trick played by “Lawgivers and other wise Men.” Such a trick was necessary because these lawgivers needed to make those they would

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³ *Ibid.*, 41, 42.
socialize believe that they were better off looking to the public good rather than their own private good. The task was imperative given the tendencies of untaught humans who, after all, seek only to please themselves; selfish humans needed to be persuaded that not being selfish (and being virtuous) was good for them. Given that this act of persuasion was “a very difficult Task,” they needed to find “an Equivalent to be enjoy’d as a Reward for the Violence . . . they of necessity must commit upon themselves.” For this exchange to work well, the reward needed to be of little cost to the giver and yet of great value to the receiver, and what they discovered was that “none were either so savage as not to be charm’d with Praise, or so despicable as patiently to bear Contempt.”

Flattery would be their “bewitching Engine” of socialization, as it is the “most powerful Argument that could be used to Human Creatures.” As we will see, Mandeville’s argument is more subtle than it first appears: flattered creatures are not actually acting against their self-interest, as it turns out.

Prior to reaching this point, his argument about flattery is worth attending to in some detail due to both its ingenuity and its unconventional quality. In effect, the strategic use of (largely false) praise allows us to substitute a psychological reward for the immediate material rewards that typical untaught humans generally seek. Flattery convinces us that it is beneath the “Dignity of such sublime Creatures” as we all are to satisfy those appetites that we “had in common with Brutes” while not attending to our higher faculties. In a particularly clever trick, the moralists grant that it is tough to master these appetites, thus enhancing the pride of those who do so and emphasizing “how scandalous” it would be not to master them. To further facilitate the effect of the engine, they divided humans into two groups – those who were “always hunting after immediate Enjoyment,” and “incapable of Self-denial,” and those “lofty high-spirited Creatures” who despise what “they had in common with irrational Creatures.”

The irony of Mandeville’s argument, of course, is that those who have the most self-possession and virtue are, in fact, the most proud, a point I return to below. A further irony: Mandeville does not say that engaging in the behavior that we are flattered into adopting is bad for us – far from it; it is advantageous to behave in conventionally virtuous ways. But it is also the case that short-sighted pleasure-seekers would not behave in such ways absent manipulation, and that our conventionally virtuous

5 Mandeville, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, 42–43. 6 Ibid., 44.
behaviors are not in fact done from selfless motives. And, it is worth emphasizing, this is not quite a public transcript, a form of ritualized or semi-ritualized speech aimed at the dominant and used by subordinates; it is a method of top-down social control.

Flattery’s function and success as a sort of currency are both rooted in Mandeville’s account of human nature. Every human being is susceptible to flattery if it is “artfully perform’d, and suited to his Abilities”; we are all proud, after all. Moreover, flattery is hard to detect — and hence hard to resist — “the more general” it is.⁷ He explains the latter, noting, “What you say in Commendation of a whole Town is receiv’d with Pleasure by all the Inhabitants” (a point we see in practice when politicians’ stump speeches are littered with paeans to their particular audiences’ favorite foods or local sports teams).⁸ As he remarks of the prior, “The meanest Wretch puts an inestimable value upon himself, and the highest wish of the Ambitious Man is to have all the World, as to that particular, of his Opinion.”⁹ Flattery’s power is, then, at least initially, a function of the fact of human pride:

Pride is that Natural Faculty by which every Mortal that has any Understanding over-values, and imagines better Things of himself than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted with all his Qualities and Circumstances, could allow him. We are possess’d of no other Quality so beneficial to Society, and so necessary to render it wealthy and flourishing as this, yet it is that which is most generally detested.¹⁰

Pride and its converse, shame, serve to socialize creatures that would otherwise be anti-social; both are manifestations of our underlying self-love: “There is nothing so universally sincere upon Earth, as the Love which all Creatures, that are capable of any, bear to themselves; and as there is no Love but what implies a Care to preserve the thing beloved, so there is nothing more sincere in any Creature than his Will, Wishes, and Endeavours to preserve himself.”¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 51–52.
⁸ As a Wisconsinite, it is hard for me to imagine that Iowa is quite as wonderful as it is made out to be by presidential candidates.
We may note here just how different Mandeville’s use of the term “flattery” is from the prior writers we’ve encountered. Whether it was Cicero, Pliny, Castiglione, Machiavelli, or Hobbes, flattery was a bad thing, though the kind of harms it posed varied: for Cicero, Pliny, and Castiglione, it was primarily a moral harm, deleterious to the agent and demeaning to the flatterer, whereas for Machiavelli and Hobbes, it was primarily harmful because it deprived the flattered of information or perspective, information and perspective essential to effective rule. To be sure, (apparently) flattering speech could perform an important function, captivating a prince so that he might successfully be given good advice, as with Castiglione, or serving a crucial role in the performance of a public transcript, as with Pliny. Mandeville, however, seems to view flattery as a good thing, at least at the social level, insofar as it brings about outcomes that are collectively desirable and impossible – or at least quite difficult – to achieve by other means: the agents of socialization are weak enough that they cannot simply use force to achieve their ends, though they aren’t quite subject to domination. To be sure, flattery, in Mandeville’s account, involves deception: we are not the “sublime Creatures” that moralists make us out to be, and getting us to act as if we are sublime requires a fair amount of legerdemain. It also involves self-deception, as we see in his remarks on the Fable: “if Reason in Man was of equal weight with his Pride, he could never be pleas’d with Praises, which he is conscious he didn’t deserve.” Of course we are pleased with praises we don’t deserve for Mandeville – he gives as example the soldiers who, even if compelled to fight, would “be esteem’d for what they would have avoided, if it had been in their Power.”¹²

How, though, can we think of the phenomenon he is describing as flattery, given that Mandeville both thinks it is generally beneficial and seems not to distinguish between flattery and praise? Mandeville provides an example of what he’s getting at in the Enquiry:

When an awkward Girl, before she can either Speak or Go, begins after many Intreaties to make the first rude Essays of Curt’seyng, the Nurse falls in an ecstacy of Praise; There’s a delicate Curt’sey! O fine Miss! There’s a pretty Lady! Mama! Miss can make a better Curt’sey than her Sister Molly!

The problem, of course, is that Miss Molly – “being four Years older” – knows that this can’t possibly be true, since she actually knows how to curtsey. And Miss Molly then

wonders at the Perverseness of their Judgment, and swelling with Indignation, is ready to cry at the Injustice that is done her, till, being whisper’d in the Ear that it is only to please the Baby, and that she is a Woman, she grows proud at being let into the Secret, and rejoicing at the Superiority of her Understanding, repeats what has been said with large Additions, and insults over the Weakness of her Sister, whom all this while she fancies to be the only Bubble among them.

Mandeville suggests that such “extravagant Praises” would be recognized as “fulsome Flatteries, and, if you will, abominable Lies,” by just about anyone – as they are by Miss Molly. In this instance, the praise is false because its content is emphically false: she is objectively not good at curtseying. Nevertheless, “Experience teaches us” that we are able to inculcate manners precisely through “such gross Encomiums.” The process of socialization (and moral education) writ large thus mirrors Miss Molly’s socialization and moral education.

While we can recognize this as, in some sense, flattery – after all, Miss Molly’s anger is assuaged because of her vanity, and the toddler is hardly demonstrating objectively good form in her fumbling attempt at a curtsey – we might hesitate to call it flattery if we subscribe to anything like a moralistic account. We could simply say that the toddler is making a good try, and needs encouragement, and even a fumbling curtsey is better than no curtsey at all. Any parent knows that praise is a valuable way of getting children to do what we want them to do, and what they would do (in any event) if only they weren’t children; force alone would not suffice. Beyond that, leaving aside the issue of the speaker’s motivation, we could say that the actions that the moralists and politicians trick their auditors into taking are, in fact, good for them, unlike most things we are flattered into doing; the flattered toddler is not, one imagines, akin to the raven of Aesop’s fable. We might even say that if those who are flattered were already the products of the very socialization that is brought about through flattery, they would not need to be flattered in the first place.

Yet Mandeville still uses the term. A key to his puzzling use of the term, it seems to me, has to do with Mandeville’s understanding of the importance of motivation in thinking about the worth of actions. For an action to count as “virtuous,” in Mandeville’s argument – an argument mocking what Kaye terms “rigorism” – it must be carried out as a result of virtuous (i.e., disinterested or, better yet, selfless) motives. Thus he remarks “that it

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13 An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, 53.
14 Kaye does not list Shaftesbury among the “rigorists” to whom Mandeville was (initially) responding, though Shaftesbury’s thought features claims that fit the rigorist bill: after all,
is impossible to judge of a Man’s Performance, unless we are thoroughly acquainted with the Principle and Motive from which he acts” – a comment he makes in doubting the utility of pity as a distinctly moral passion, arguing that it can “produce Evil as well as Good.”  He goes on to remark, with regard to certain cases of famous men “among the Heathens” who tried to conceal their actions from those they benefited, that they might well have “more refin’d Notions of Virtue” than he is describing. Indeed, they may well be motivated by a “Love to Goodness,” as he puts it. Yet he goes on to suggest that they may equally well have been motivated by the reward of the action – namely, “Contemplating on his own Worth.”

Is such action virtuous, on Mandeville’s account? The answer is no: Mandeville describes virtue as “every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavor the Benefit of others, or the Conquest of his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good.” As Heath puts it, “very few individuals are virtuous in this sense.” In the example of the heroes of antiquity, they are not denying their passions (though they would likely deny that they are not denying them and, in any event, are benefiting others), and they are not acting out of a rational ambition of being good. To apply this to praise: if what makes an action moral is its motive, and if we act in conventionally moral ways in order to receive praise, and not through a disinterested desire to

Shaftesbury held, “’Tis impossible to suppose a mere sensible Creature originally so ill-constituted, and unnatural, as that from the moment he comes to be try’d by sensible Objects, he shou’d have no one good Passion towards his Kind, no foundation either of Pity, Love, Kindness, or social Affection.” He further argues that “Sense of Right and Wrong therefore being as natural to us as natural Affection itself, and being a first Principle in our Constitution and Make; there is no speculative Opinion, Persuasion or Belief, which is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it.” Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit, in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Douglas Den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 25. Such a sense is part of the natural sociability of human beings: the “Sense of Fellowship” is, on his view, as natural as any other sense, rooted in the “herding Principle, and associating Inclination.” Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour, ed. Douglas Den Uyl, in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), vol. I, 71.

This is not to say that Mandeville thinks pity cannot be an effective motivator of action; indeed, it is likely the source of “the virtue of charity,” as Force remarks. Pierre Force, Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.


be morally good, then praising someone for the moral worth of their actions is really giving that person false praise – even if she were to perform the acts of politeness correctly, to use Miss Molly’s example. Praise, for Mandeville, seems to collapse into the functional equivalent of flattery, even if it brings about good ends, and even if the speaker does not intend it as flattery. The issue is not so much the motive or the speaker, for Mandeville, but what praise does.

The upshot of this economy of flattery – an economy in which praise is deployed as a currency valuable to those who are proud and is of little cost to those deploying it – is that those who went against their (untaught) desires received a reward that compensated them for their apparent material loss with psychological gain in the form of praise. Once one accepts that there are better and worse sorts of people, that those doing without fall into the prior category, and those unwilling to sacrifice fall into the latter, membership in the prior category is compensation on its own. A further compensation: material benefits do in fact adhere to those who engage in virtuous behavior. Thus “Savage Man was broke,” and in breaking them, “the Ambitious” pulled a great trick, allowing them to “reap the more Benefit from, and govern vast numbers of them with the greater Ease and Security.”

Such a portrait of the founders of moral-political systems – they are the ambitious and clever who seek to rule for their own benefit – is, needless to say, not particularly flattering. And it is they – and those they socialized through persuasion – who decided to term as vice that “which, without Regard to the Publick, Man should commit to gratify any of his Appetites,” while virtue would designate “every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavor the Benefit of others.” So it was by the “skilful Management of wary Politicians” that “the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride.”

This is not to suggest that flattery is always consciously deployed, nor that all “wary Politicians” are always actual politicians, nor that there are always particular individuals deploying flattery at different concrete historical moments. As Rosenberg notes, Mandeville is describing “an essentially evolutionary process,” highlighting in particular the following passages from The Origin of Honour:

Horatio. But, how are you sure, that this [the origin of honour] was the Work of Moralists and Politicians, as you seem to insinuate?

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19 Mandeville, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, 47.
20 Ibid., 49, 51.
I give those Names promiscuously to All that, having studied Human Nature, have endeavoured to civilize Men, and render them more and more tractable, either for the Ease of Governours and Magistrates, or else for the Temporal Happiness of Society in general. I think of all Inventions of this Sort... that they are the joint Labour of Many. Human Wisdom is the Child of Time.21

The socialization of originally asocial humans was a long process; while particular individuals may be said to intervene (echoing Rosenberg’s use of “interventionist”) at particular moments, in general, the process is more anonymous, unplanned, and open-ended for Mandeville than it would at first seem – just as his account of the formation of language is gradual and evolutionary, as we will see.22

Flattery of a certain sort, then, is a good thing, for Mandeville, and its appeal to our pride – across time and at particular moments – is helpful, not harmful. To be sure, flattery causes humans to behave in “unnatural” ways, if all untaught animals are selfish. But flattery brings about positive collective outcomes (without it, there would be no society at all), and positive outcomes even for those whose behavior is most altered through flattery.23 On the prior point, Mandeville remarks that “even those who only strove to gratify their Appetites” realized that “they receiv’d, as well as others, the benefit of those Actions that were done for the good of the whole Society, and consequently could not forbear wishing well to those of the superior Class that perform’d them.” On the latter point, he explains, “the more intent they were in seeking their own Advantage, without Regard to others, the more they were hourly convinced, that none stood so much in their way as those that were most like themselves.” Even “the very worst of them” – and Mandeville adds here “more than any” – buy into the system wrought by flattery, at the very least because it lets them “indulge their own Appetites with less disturbance.”24 While flattery brings about a system of behaviors that is, in a way, “contrary to the impulse of Nature,” this system of behaviors is good for all involved:


22 For a discussion of the gradualist dimensions of Mandeville’s account, along with the account not being intended to be a literal one, but instead “a theoretical sketch,” see M. M. Goldsmith, Private Vices, Public Benefits: Bernard Mandeville’s Social and Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chapter 3.

23 On flattery’s role in the formation of norms, see Heath, “Mandeville’s Bewitching Engine of Praise,” 215.

society as a whole benefits from the cooperation of its members, and the individual members are able to achieve goals they could not achieve so easily if they weren’t manipulated to act against their immediate natural impulses. The flattered agent does, in effect, the sorts of things that he ought to have done in the first place.²⁵

III

If this sounds like an overly simple account of human behavior, it quite arguably is – as many of Mandeville’s critics recognized. For Bishop Butler in particular (and apparently of particular concern to Mandeville, as we will see shortly) the simplicity of the argument itself is an important problem. By reducing all human behavior to the operation of self-love, a faculty that desires only pleasure in Mandeville’s account, Mandeville runs into a problem when trying to explain actions undertaken by human beings that not only result in short-term losses (albeit with long-term gains), but may well result in their ruin (and hence are not pleasurable in the long run). As Butler puts it,

Man may act according to that principle or inclination which for the present happens to be the strongest, and yet act in a way disproportionate to, and violate his real proper nature. Suppose a brute creature by any bait to be allured into a snare, by which he is destroyed. He plainly followed the bent of his nature, leading him to gratify his appetite: there is an entire correspondence between his whole nature and such an action: such an action therefore is natural. But suppose a man, foreseeing the same danger of certain ruin, should rush into it for the sake of a present gratification. He in this instance would follow his strongest desire, as did the brute creature: but there would be as manifest a disproportion, between the nature of a man and such an action as between the meanest work of art and the greatest master in that art; which disproportion arises, not from considering the action singly in itself, or in its consequences, but from comparison of it with the nature of the agent. And since such an action is utterly disproportionate to the nature of man, it is in the strictest and most proper sense unnatural; this word expressing that disproportion.²⁶

Self-love, it would seem, can lead to self-destruction, and pursuing what is natural could bring about a result that would seem deeply inconsistent

²⁵ On Mandeville’s broader project of explaining the hidden sources of human cooperation, along with his effort to prevent his contemporaries from bemoaning them, see Brandon P. Turner, “Mandeville against Luxury,” Political Theory 44, no. 1 (2016).

with our natural urges. As Hundert puts it, “self-love must be understood as (what we would now call) a second-order affection, a framework for other particular desires embodied within it.” Judging these particular desires – and adjudicating between them – entails, as Hundert puts it, “the capacity to distinguish between various objects of desire.” And this involves, in Butler’s argument, conscience: “There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions.” Humans are thus quite different from other animals, taught or not, and those objects that we desire are chosen because they are “suitable to satisfy a particular passion.” Self-love entails, then, a rational capacity, and “among the desires which motivate individuals may well be found those that increase the happiness of others.”

Given Butler’s criticism, which in effect denied that human motivation can be reduced to the operations of pride or self-love in quite the way that Mandeville argued, Mandeville refined his theory, creating a social theory – and an account of the origins of language – that supports and deepens his account of flattery and human nature. This theory of language, rooted in the refinements Mandeville made to his theory in *Fable of the Bees, Part II*, makes his theory of flattery possible. As Hundert and Kaye suggest, a key development in the dialogue *Fable of the Bees, Part II*, is Mandeville’s famous differentiation between self-love (pre-social and largely linked to biological survival) and self-liking (social and linked to psychological needs), a differentiation “likely in reaction to Butler’s criticism.”

Horatio – who is the counter to Mandeville’s voice, Cleomenes – expresses (as Hundert points out) precisely Butler’s objection when he asks: “What is all this but the old Story over again, that every Thing is Pride, and all we see, Hypocrisy, without Proof or Argument?” As Butler argued, such an account alleges hypocrisy without actually ruling out the possibility of benevolent action.

Mandeville countered Butler’s criticism by refining his account of pride’s role in human sociability, distinguishing between self-love and self-liking. The distinction emerges through the words of Cleomenes in the Third Dialogue of *Fable of the Bees, Part II*:

That Self-love was given to all Animals, at least, the most perfect, for Self-Preservation, is not disputed; but as no Creature can love what it dislikes, it is necessary, moreover, that every one should have a real liking to its own Being, superior to what they have to any other. I am of Opinion, begging Pardon for the Novelty, that if this Liking was not always permanent, the Love, which all Creatures have for themselves, could not be so unalterable as we see it.\footnote{Bernard Mandeville, \textit{The Fable of the Bees, Part II}, ed. F. B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), 129.}

The importance of this distinction is that it allows Mandeville to explain how a “Moralist or Politician” was able to “teach Men to be proud of hiding their Pride,” or, in other words, to explain why it is humans were capable of congregating in the first place.\footnote{Ibid., 128. They are, in this regard, reminiscent of the ancient hero who was not unselfish but was instead “Contemplating on his own Worth.” An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, 57.} Because humans have, in addition to the self-love that encourages us to preserve ourselves, an “Instinct by which every Individual values itself above its real Worth,” humans are characterized by “a Diffidence, arising from a Consciousness, or at least an Apprehension, that we do over-value ourselves.” This diffidence, in turn, makes us seek out “the Approbation, Liking, and Assent of others,” as they serve to “strengthen and confirm us in the good Opinion we have of ourselves.”\footnote{\textit{The Fable of the Bees, Part II}, 130.} We seek out others, in effect, because they can make us feel good by remediying our anxiety about our own worth.

Cleomenes goes on to argue that self-liking makes possible being proud of concealing our pride, of observing decorum and manners, or, in a word, “Politeness.” The basic biological impulse of self-love would make “savage” man care for himself and his offspring, but “Self-liking would make it seek for Opportunities, by Gestures, Looks, and Sounds, to display the Value it has for itself, superiour to what it has for others.”\footnote{Ibid., 133.} Being “untaught,” such humans would grow angry at signs (gestures, looks and sounds) of being under-valued, elated at signs of being valued, and laugh at those who were inferior. The fact that we do not do this anymore – or at least are better at hiding our reactions – goes to show just how well taught we are. All that is required to bring this process about, in effect, is the project of moralization through socialization to tame the rough edges of this self-liking. Self-liking itself procures for those who are pleased with themselves on account of their politeness a strong measure of happiness: “It is the Mother of Hopes, and the End as well as the
Foundation of our best Wishes: It is the strongest Armour against despair.”\textsuperscript{36} Self-liking makes us enjoy the praise – the flattery – that would otherwise provide little compensation for forgoing our biological impulses.

Three crucial components of the human constitution allow for self-liking to work toward the socialization process: “Understanding, Speech, and Risibility.”\textsuperscript{37} Risibility\textsuperscript{38} allows individuals possessed of a strong opinion of themselves to laugh at their (perceived) inferiors; understanding and speech allow us to register our opinions of ourselves to others and to gauge others’ opinions of our value. Self-liking and the formation and operation of language are, for Mandeville, intimately connected: language is a system of symbols that can signify (dis)esteem, and self-liking human beings originally sought such symbols to confirm their own sense of worth given their anxiety (that is, diffidence or apprehension) about their actual merits.

It is not just, then, that moralists and politicians deploy language to persuade otherwise proud and selfish creatures to behave in socially beneficial ways through the device of flattery. Language and persuasion are only created in the first place because of our capacity for self-liking and desire for praise. We are initially motivated to speak because we value ourselves, and we value others because of what they can do for us, not the least of which is to praise us. Humans have, to be sure, a natural capacity for language – “Speech . . . is a Characteristic of our Species, but no Man is born with it,” remarks Cleomenes, with Horatio adding shortly after, in the Compliment we make to our Species, of its being endued with Speech and Sociableness, there is no other Reality; than that by Care and Industry Men may be taught to speak, and be made sociable, if the Discipline begins when they are very young.

The process of developing speech, moreover, would have taken quite a long time – Cleomenes remarks “a dozen Generations proceeding from two Savages would not produce any tolerable Language.”\textsuperscript{39} Yet even if humans are not born with speech, Mandeville argues that humans, like other animals, possess a natural capacity for understanding each

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 136. \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 133. \textsuperscript{38} Mandeville thus shares the Hobbesian understanding of laughter as fundamentally derivative. Thus Hobbes describes laughter in \textit{Leviathan}: “Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.” Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, II.88. \textsuperscript{39} Mandeville, \textit{The Fable of the Bees, Part II}, 190–91.
other – and, in the case of his “wild Couple,” Mandeville thinks they would have had “a very good Understanding, before many Sounds past between them.” They would lack language, and they would also lack any idea that they needed language, or that its absence posed “any real Inconvenience.” This is not to say, though, that humans lacked “Tokens” beyond mere gesture that could express their “Grief, Joy, Love, Wonder and Fear” – he notes, for example, the crying of babies.40

Language develops gradually: first the wild couple would figure out particular sounds for the objects “they were most conversant with” to allow them to raise “the Idea’s of such Things, when they were out of sight.” These sounds would be taught to their children, and over time, and as a function of the length of the savages’ lives, the number and complexity of the vocal symbols would increase. Meanwhile, offspring would be more capable of forming sounds than their parents given their more flexible vocal organs, and thus able to further improve on the existing set of vocalizations. Over the long passage of time, language would have emerged: “this must have been the Origin of all Languages, and Speech itself, that were not taught by Inspiration.”41 Language, in other words, is a human creation that emerges in and develops through time, a claim that makes Mandeville, in Kaye’s words, “a pioneer.” Unlike his many contemporaries, Mandeville did not trace the origins of or the capacity for language to Providence; some, such as Locke, saw it as an arbitrary invention, though most took the “speaking Adam”42 of Genesis to be proof of the divine origins of language – God speaks to Adam at Genesis 2:19, after all, before he lives with another human being, and even gives him the authority of assigning names to the other creatures. No less an apparent skeptic than Hobbes takes the story of the speaking Adam to be true: “The first author of Speech was God himself, that instructed Adam how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight.”43

On hearing this preliminary account of the hypothetical origins of language, Horatio remarks, “The Design of Speech is to make our Thoughts known to others” – a perfectly plausible remark, since Cleomenes suggests that the first sounds were uttered to stir up ideas. Yet Cleomenes denies that this is the case, though he grants that humans

43 Hobbes, Leviathan, II.48.
speak to be understood in a certain sense: they “desire that the Purport of the Sounds they utter should be known and apprehended by others.” He denies, though, that in speaking, humans seek that “their Thoughts may be known, and their Sentiments laid open and seen through by others, which likewise may be meant by speaking to be understood.”

In speaking, at least initially, we do not want to be understood in the sense of openly registering our thoughts and sentiments so that others might know them. In this regard, language writ large echoes the motivational framework of flattery, which is so motivated as to render it as distinct from praise, concealing its nature from the flattered.

We are motivated to speak through our natural (and selfish) passions, and we use language to exploit and manipulate others. Language, in its origins, serves the interests of those who deploy it: “The first Sign or Sound that ever Man made, born of a Woman, was made in Behalf, and intended for the use of him who made it.” Indeed, the “first Motive and Intention that put Man upon speaking” was persuasion of a very particular sort:

to persuade others, either to give Credit to what the speaking Person would have them believe; or else to act or suffer such Things, as he would compel them to act or suffer, if they were entirely in his Power.

Indeed, even the practice of intensifying and amplifying spoken language with gesture, along with the modulation and modification of voice, is also a manifestation of “The natural Ambition and strong Desire Men have to triumph over, as well as persuade others.” And in this very paragraph, spoken by Cleomenes, Mandeville refers to the modulation of the voice’s pitch and volume as “a bewitching Engine to captivate mean Understandings” – deploying the phrase he used in the earlier Enquiry to describe flattery itself. The original motivation behind language, it would seem, is rooted in what Mandeville earlier in the dialogue describes as “that natural Instinct of Sovereignty, which teaches Man to look upon every thing as centring in himself, and prompts him to put in a Claim to every thing, he can lay his Hands on.” The irony is that language, rooted in our sovereignty instinct, can serve to tame that very instinct through law and morality in just the sort of “teaching” that makes men sociable through the bewitching engine of flattery.

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44 Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, Part II, 289.
46 Ibid., 291.
47 Ibid., 271.
Self-love prompts self-preservation; self-liking prompts the search for recognition. We speak – and seek others out to speak to and to hear from – not because we are sociable, per se, but rather through our love of ourselves, a love that motivates us to seek out signs that confirm our sense of our own worth, or to use signs to manipulate others into doing what they would not otherwise do. The system of flattery exploits and instrumentalizes our self-love through the use of non-disclosing language. Take away the capacity for language and, just as importantly, the original motivation for deploying it, and the economy of flattery – and likely society itself – would be inoperable. Language, on Mandeville’s account, is unsympathetic at its core, though it allows for cooperation.

Such an unsympathetic account puts Mandeville sharply at odds with Adam Smith. Smith, as is widely known, read and responded to Mandeville, especially in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The engagement is also evident, even if Mandeville himself is not mentioned, in Smith’s accounts of language and its origins, especially his *Considerations Concerning the First Formations of Language*, which builds on an earlier hypothetical history of language in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, passages that I will shortly explore. But Smith also makes a noteworthy comparison of Mandeville to Rousseau in his famous letter to the short-lived *Edinburgh Review* of 1755–56, in which he suggests that Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* was profoundly influenced by Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees, Part II*. Rousseau “softened, improved, and embellished, and stript of all that tendency to corruption and licentiousness which has disgraced [these principles] in their original author.” To be sure, Rousseau and Mandeville depict “the primitive state of mankind” in quite different ways – Mandeville’s is “the most wretched and miserable that can be imagined,” while Rousseau’s is the opposite. The fundamental similarity between their arguments, for Smith, is that they both held “that there is in man no powerful instinct which necessarily determines him to seek society for its own sake”; this is an argument Smith emphatically rejects, as we will see. For Mandeville, society is a remedy for our natural misery, while Rousseau traces sociability to “unfortunate accidents having given birth to the unnatural passions of ambition and the vain desire of superiority.” Each of them views as “gradual” the development of practices and institutions central to living together, such as language; both also view “those laws of justice, which maintain the present inequality amongst mankind,” as the “inventions of the cunning
and the powerful” to bring about their “unnatural and unjust superiority” over others.\textsuperscript{48} The core difference between them, in Smith’s view, is that Rousseau argues that pity – which Mandeville also thinks is in fact “natural to man”\textsuperscript{49} – can bring about the virtues “whose reality Dr. Mandeville denies.”\textsuperscript{50}

Smith shares with Rousseau, as Hanley shows, the concern that the society Mandeville describes – a world in which we are fixated on actually receiving the approbation of others – is not salutary, as Mandeville argues, but instead deeply unhealthy.\textsuperscript{51} But he departs from both Mandeville and Rousseau\textsuperscript{52} in crucial ways. First and foremost, he accepts as a

\textsuperscript{48} Adam Smith, Essays on Philosophical Subjects (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 250–51.

\textsuperscript{49} Mandeville, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, 56.

\textsuperscript{50} Smith, Essays on Philosophical Subjects, 251.

\textsuperscript{51} Ryan Patrick Hanley, Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 94–99.

\textsuperscript{52} Rousseau first speculated at length on the origins of language in the Discourse on the Origins of Inequality, and it is no wonder, given his concern with the origins of relations of dependence among humans, and the dependence of these relations, in turn, on the process of socialization, a process that operates through a capacity in human nature beyond mere self-love. Like Mandeville in Fable of the Bees, Part II, Rousseau distinguishes self-love (amour de soi-meme) from what Mandeville terms self-liking and Rousseau terms amour propre. Unlike Mandeville, Rousseau does not hold that language originated “in the domestic dealings between Fathers, Mothers and Children” precisely because this argument would naturalize an arrangement – the family – when it is plainly artificial. Moreover, language would have been unnecessary for humans to procreate and the species to be perpetuated (a point Mandeville makes as well): “males and females united fortuitously, according to chance encounters, opportunity, and desire, without speech being an especially necessary interpreter of what they had to tell one another.” In addition, Rousseau thinks that persuasion – the activity for which language was first developed in Mandeville’s account – would have come much later in human history, as it would be useful primarily in dealing with “assembled men.” Instead, as is well known, Rousseau remarks that the “first language, the most universal, the most energetic and the only language needed” prior to persuasion “is the cry of Nature” – a form of language that was particularly well-suited to arousing pity in its hearers. Only when there was closer communication between human beings, and our “ideas began to expand and to multiply,” would a system of “more numerous signs” emerge, though this would consist largely of vocal inflection – especially imitative, onomatopoeic vocalizations – and “added gestures.” Eventually, due largely to issues of convenience, vocalizations would come to replace gestures – though this would have required consent, and raises the paradox of speech seeming “to have been very necessary in order to establish the use of speech.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men or Second Discourse, ed. Victor Gourevitch, in The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145–47.

His later Essay on the Origin of Languages takes up and fleshes out the account of the Second Discourse. The origin of language begins with one human recognizing “another as a sentient, thinking Being, similar to himself,” and then being seized by “the desire or
the need to communicate to him his sentiments and thoughts,” a desire that leads him to “seek the means to do so.” Communication involves acting on the senses, and Rousseau thinks that sight and hearing would be more important senses in developing communication than touch, as touch requires proximity. As in the Second Discourse, Rousseau argues that gesture would precede vocal language in part because it “is easier and less dependent on conventions,” and in part because gestures are more economical than sounds, as they are “more expressive and say more in less time.” Yet while gestures allow “for more accurate imitation” – my infant son can imitate my gestures – “interest” – that is, “moving the heart and inflaming the passions” – is, according to Rousseau, “more effectively aroused by sounds.” Spoken language is much more evocative of emotion than mere vision; Rousseau suggests that we are far more moved by another describing his suffering than simply seeing his suffering. Or, as he summarizes: “Pantomime alone unaccompanied by discourse will leave you almost unmoved; Discourse unaccompanied by gesture will wring tears from you.” It thus makes good sense for Rousseau to suggest, then, that part of language’s function is the communication of sentiment, and language is able to “cause us to feel what we hear” through its effect on “the very depths of the heart.” Were our needs purely “physical,” Rousseau suggests that we humans may have needed only a gestural language, and our turn to language is intimately connected to our inner lives. Essay on the Origin of Languages, in The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 246–51. Instead, as he makes clear in the subsequent chapter, “the origin of languages is not due to men’s first needs,” as our first needs served to separate us, giving rise to the global dispersal of the human race. Language was instead rooted in “the moral needs, the passions,” and it is human passion that unites those who were forced “to flee one another” by “the necessity to seek their subsistence.” Passions that could manifest only in society – “love, hatred, pity, anger” – gave rise to language; these passions “wrung their first voices from them.” The most primitive of languages would have sought to “convey to the ear as well as to the understanding the almost inescapable impressions of passion seeking to communicate itself.” Ibid., 250–55. In describing the origin of language as lying in “moral needs,” Rousseau is clearly connecting it to amour propre.

As Griswold remarks, Smith’s use of “human creature” is both “striking and almost oxymoronic”: what Smith is describing here is something “less than fully human.” For Smith, “Our natural state is in society. Spectatorship is the condition for agency . . . and imagination is a condition for seeing oneself.”\(^54\) It is not just that humans are naturally sociable; without society, and without the formative effects upon the personality that living with others produces via our capacity for sympathy, we are not fully human.

Just as Smith’s embrace of society and sympathy separates him from both Mandeville and Rousseau, this sympathetic sociability is, in turn, central to Smith’s understanding of language and its development – an understanding that is also distinct from Mandeville (and Rousseau). This departure is critical, as it helps us to understand the role of language in Smith’s account of sociability: at its origins language is, unlike with Mandeville, cooperative and mutually beneficial, rather than exploitative and manipulative. Whereas Mandeville’s is an unsympathetic language, Smith’s is sympathetic to the core. This sympathetic, and ultimately disclosing, dimension of language allows Smith, in turn, to remoralize flattery through his hypothetical history of language.

Smith first engaged in what Dugald Stewart described as a “Theoretical or Conjectural History” of language in the third of his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. As we saw with Mandeville, Smith speculates that nouns would be “amongst the first” words to be created, writing:

Two Savages who met together and took up their dwelling in the same place would very soon endeavor to get signs to denote those objects which most frequently occurred and with which they were most concerned. Their aim, in doing so, was “to make their thoughts about these [objects] known to one another,” and the pair “would by mutual consent agree on certain signs whereby this might be accomplished.”\(^55\) Smith asserts here,

\(^{54}\) Charles L. Griswold, “Imagination: Morals, Science, and Arts,” in The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith, ed. Knud Haakonsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36–37. In Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment, Griswold writes that, on Smith’s view, “we cannot be a human individual without that connectedness resulting from recognition of one another as spectators . . . Our natural state is, so to speak, in society. Spectatorship is the condition for the possibility of agency.” Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 106.

albeit in an inchoate form, what we saw Mandeville deny above: namely, that humans seek that “their Thoughts may be known, and their Sentiments laid open and seen through by others, which likewise may be meant by speaking to be understood.” Initially, the nouns would apply to particular objects, and would later come to apply to classes of objects with similar properties. Eventually, they would develop prepositions and adjectives as these nouns became insufficient for distinguishing objects “accurately from one another.” To be able to do what humans deploying language seek to do – i.e., register their thoughts – it was thus necessary for language to become more complex. But language’s development is not driven by need alone, and we can discern certain principles at play in the development of language. For example, adjectives’ endings were matched to “the terminations of the suitable substantives” through an aesthetic principle: “The agreeableness of the same sound repeated or love of Rythme.” Attention to the communicative and non-instrumental dimensions of language – how pleasant it is to the ear – is thus present from the start. The desire to be able to express one’s thoughts would even motivate linguistic development due to encounters with speakers of other languages. Smith suggests that “the substantive and possessive verbs” would be the most likely candidates, giving the following example:

A Lombard when he had forgot amor for I am loved, would say ego sum amatus, A citizen of Rom(e), civis de Roma. For I have loved, Ego hab(e)o amatum, instead of amavi.

Languages, like machines, are in the beginning “vastly complex but gradually the different parts are more connected and supplied by one another.” There is a trade-off with language, unlike machines, though, as simpler languages have less “variety and harmony of sound” and are less “capable of various arrangement” – that is, syntax will become increasingly fixed as languages become simpler.

The argument in the later Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages builds on that of the Third Lecture, but reflects a direct engagement with Rousseau. Smith begins (again) with the claim that substantive nouns would have been “one of the first steps towards the formation of language,” referring (again) to the pair of savages who “would naturally begin to form that language by which they would endeavor to make their mutual wants intelligible to

56 Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, Part II, 289.  
57 Ibid., 9, 11, 13.
each other.” The goal, as with the Third Lecture, is mutual intelligibility, or being understood. Nouns denoting particular objects – the wolf, the bear, the cave – would go on to denote classes of objects – wolf, bear, cave – and identical names would be used in both instances because the term would “present itself to their memory in the strongest and liveliest manner.” The remainder of the argument expands on and refines that of the Third Lecture; Smith even reiterates the claim about language retaining its complexity were it not for encounters with speakers of other languages: “Each nation, in order to make itself intelligible to those with whom it was under the necessity of conversing, would be obliged to learn the language of the other” – he even uses a Lombard as his example again, along with “ego sum amatus.” Similarly, language, like machines, becomes simpler over time – it “becomes gradually more and more simple, and produces its effects with fewer wheels, and fewer principles of motion.” And the process of simplification poses problems of an aesthetic sort, aesthetic problems connected to “the purposes of language”: simpler languages are “more prolix,” which undermines beauty, as “the beauty of any expression depends upon its conciseness.” Moreover, simplification of the principles of language – e.g., cases – “renders them less agreeable to the ear,” just as it restrains speakers from “disposing such sounds as we have, in the manner that might be most agreeable.” As a result, modern languages may be simpler, but this comes at the cost of the “prolixness, constraint, and monotony of modern languages.” Simplification comes with an aesthetic cost, as language ought to be beautiful, and humans naturally desire it to be so.

As Phillipson puts it in describing Smith’s argument about the formation and development of language, “Need was making them sociable and giving them the capacity for thought. It was a conjecture that invited the speculation that the history of language was synonymous with the history of mind.” The development of the savages’ conceptual capabilities occurs in and through the development of language itself: the capacity to conceive not just of the wolf, say, but of a wolf, is an example; language is a manifestation of, and tool for, achieving the fundamental desire for mutual intelligibility. And when Smith goes on to describe how humans engage in exchange – whether in Wealth of Nations or Lectures

58 Adam Smith, Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages, in Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, ed. J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 203.
59 Ibid., 204. 60 Ibid., 220–21. 61 Ibid., 223, 224, 226.
on Jurisprudence – language is clearly implicated. In Lectures on Jurisprudence, Smith explains that the division of labor “flows from a direct propensity in human nature for one man to barter with another, which is common to all men and known to no other animal.” Mutual wants, that is, the desires of the parties involved in an exchange, are expressed via language: “Man . . . works on the selflove of his fellows, by setting before them a sufficient temptation to get what he wants; the language of this disposition is, give me what I want, and you shall have what you want.” Language is a sign of our dependence on exchange – or rather, our interdependence – but it is our capacity for language that enables exchange relationships to involve the capacity for persuasion. As he remarks, “The philosopher and the porter are of advantage to each other. The porter is of use in carrying burthens for the philosopher, and in his turn he burns his coals cheaper by the philosopher’s invention of the fire machine.” The difference between them, for Smith, is due not to their “genius,” but rather to the division of labor itself; and the division of labor, in turn, is rooted in “that principle to persuade which so much prevails in human nature. When any arguments are offered to persuade, it is always expected that they should have their proper effect.” Should our assertions be met with indifference or hostility, we feel “a kind of uneasiness in being contradicted.” Persuasion, as it turns out, helps us to assuage the uneasiness that results from the sense that we are not at harmony with others: “We ought then mainly to cultivate the power of persuasion, and indeed we do so without intending it.” This is a result of all humans, in effect, engaging in persuasion throughout their lives: were we not mutually dependent and sociable creatures, and if we did not feel uneasy about disagreement, we would neither need nor come to improve our capacity for persuasion, and were we independent and asocial, persuasion would have little natural purpose. Human nature or, rather, our natural sociability works in tandem with sympathy and our efforts at communication to develop and improve our persuasive capacity via a process of mutual learning.

Smith makes much the same argument in Wealth of Nations. The division of labor, rooted in the human “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another,” is likely the “necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech.”

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63 Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 219, 221, 222.
this is a distinctively human capacity. Should an animal seek “to obtain something either of a man or of another animal,” the only means of persuasion is for it “to gain the favour of those whose service it requires.” Smith does not deny that humans do, in fact, deploy such behavior at times. For instance, “when he has no other means of engaging them to act according to his inclinations, [he] endeavours by every servile and fawning attention to obtain their good will.” But he doubts the widespread applicability of fawning and servility while also using strikingly negative terms to describe such activity, terms that can be associated with flattery. Humans, unlike other animals, who are generally “intirely independent” as adults, have “almost constant occasion” for assistance from other humans. And while “benevolence” can provide such assistance, it is more probable that assistance is offered “if he can interest their self-love in his favour.” As in Lectures on Jurisprudence, Smith describes bargaining as a kind of persuasion: “Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want”; when we engage in exchange, we “never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.” Persuasion, in effect, helps to diminish dependence, as only a “beggar chuses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens.” In effect, we satisfy our “wants” (the very term Smith uses to describe the origins of language) through voluntary exchange – that is, through persuasion. If the goal of even the most primitive speakers – and progenitors – of language is mutual intelligibility, or the desire to be understood, effective communication is the aim of deploying language, and not manipulation, in order to meet our mutual needs. Smith’s first speakers aim at transparency, and not, as with Mandeville’s first speakers, opacity; they are driven, I suggest, by the desire for sympathy expressed most fully in agreement and understanding. This desire shapes their language, just as it shapes them.

V

How, though, does this account of language and persuasion connect to flattery? We have seen in the prior section that flattery – exemplified by fawning and servility, in the Wealth of Nations – is a sort of second-best to persuasion when it comes to appealing to others. For Smith, they are

65 Ibid., I.ii.2.
both signs of dependence; it is a form of communication that humans have in common with the beasts. Flattery may ingratiate us, but it demeans us and indicates our subordination. Humans can move beyond fawning and similar ways of attaining the good will of their fellows, relying on persuasion to interest their fellows in their fates. Achieving effective persuasion is, in turn, the result of a process of mutual learning, aided by the capacity and desire for sympathy.

Servile behavior, though not unnatural, per se, is, I wish now to suggest, improper. The quality of propriety, in turn, is a key component of effective communication, on Smith’s account. Propriety, for Smith, is (as Phillipson remarks) part and parcel of our “hope of improving our ability to communicate effectively with others.” In the Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Smith first uses the term “propriety” in the Second Lecture:

We may indeed naturally expect that the better sort will often exceed the vulgar in the propriety of their language but where there is no such excellence we are apt to prefer those in use amongst them, by the association we form betwixt their words and the behaviour we admire in them. It is the custom of the people that forms what we call propriety, and the custom of the better sort from whence the rules of purity of stile are to be drawn.

The connection between behavior and words, and the pleasing quality of the association we make between them, is evident in this passage, albeit in an inchoate form. His subsequent discussion of propriety elaborates on this idea. He goes on to argue in the Eighth Lecture:

That when the words neatly and properly expressed the thing to be described, and conveyed the sentiment the author entertained of it and desired to communicate [to his hearer] by sympathy to his hearers; then the expression had all the beauty language was capable of bestowing on it.

Not only will style change with the sentiment the author seeks to convey – “as the sentiment will be different, so will the stile also” – style will change with the character of the author, even if “all other circumstances are alike.” Thus, a “grave” author will describe the object in a manner different “from one of more levity.” Indeed, a wide array of characters can be “expressed in very different stiles, all of which may be very agreeable.” What is essential, for Smith, is that “one should stick to his natural character.”

66 Phillipson, Adam Smith, 96. 67 Smith, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, 4–5. 68 Ibid., 40.
The essence of propriety – as Bryce remarks in his introduction – is “language which embodies and exhibits to the reader that distinctive turn and quality of spirit in the author ‘qui lui est propre.’” Swift, then, “is remarkable for his propriety and precision”; his style is to a great extent a function of his character – he was “a plain man.” More to the point, as he explains in Lecture Nine, “Swifts naturall moroseness joined to the constant dissapointments and crosses he met with in life would make contempt naturall to his character; and those follies would most provoke him that partake most of gayety and levity.” The aesthetic dimensions of language are thus intimately related with the possibility of achieving sympathy.

More pointed – and perhaps most illustrative – is his account of propriety in the Eleventh Lecture, where his earlier discussion reaches a sort of crescendo in his scathing portrayal of Shaftesbury. He begins the lecture by making the following claim about the prior chapters:

The Result of all which as well as the rules we have laid down is, that the perfection of stile consists in Express(ing) in the most concise, proper, and precise manner the thought of the author, and that in the manner which best conveys the sentiment, passion or affection with which it affects or he pretends it does affect him and which he designs to communicate to his reader.

Effective – and beautiful – communication requires that the author succeeds, then, in conveying the sentiment she wishes to communicate; stylistic excellence fosters the cultivation of sympathy. This claim echoes Smith’s arguments, encountered above, concerning the origin and role of language itself, which aims at intelligibility and sympathy.

Smith imagines that a skeptic might chalk all of this argument up to “common sense,” and grants “it is no more.” He goes on to declare this to be the case about “all the Rules of Criticism and morality when traced to their foundation,” suggesting that he has only shown that the authors he discussed “acted agreeably to that Rule, which is equally applicable to conversation and behaviour as writing.” An agreeable person is someone whose “sentiments appear to be naturally expressed, when the passion or affection is properly conveyed and when their thoughts are so agreeable and naturall that we find ourselves inclined to give our assent to him.” Natural expression, proper conveyance, agreeable thoughts: these are the essence of sympathetic relations. He continues:

69 Ibid., 18. 70 Ibid., 41. 71 Ibid., 48. 72 Ibid., 133.
A wise man too in conversation and behaviour will not affect a character that is unnaturall to him; if he is grave he will not affect to be gay, nor if he be gay will he affect to be grave. He will only regulate his naturall temper, restrain within just bounds and lop all exhuberances and bring it to that pitch which will be agreeable to those about him. But he will not affect such conduct as is unnaturall to his temper tho perhaps in the abstract they may be more to be wished.

Affectation will be shunned by those of understanding, and the only adjustments that wise persons will make to their behavior will be to moderate – or, in the words of the Theory of Moral Sentiments, “flatten” – their behavior such that those observing him will be able to sympathize with him. And what holds true in behavior writ large certainly holds for style, in Smith’s view; an author with an agreeable style deploys language that “seems naturall and easy,” speaking “in a manner not only suitable to the Subject but to the character he naturally inclines to.”

Central to the efficacy – and beauty – of communication, then, is the possibility of authentic representation of sentiment, thought, and character; sympathy drives style.

If Swift is a writer who displays just the sort of aesthetically – and morally – pleasing propriety that Smith describes, then Shaftesbury was characterized by “ignorance of true propriety of language.” This is so, in Smith’s (in)famous description, because Shaftesbury seems “to have formed to himself an idea of beauty of Stile abstracted from his own character, by which he proposed to regulate his Stile.” Rather than have his style emerge naturally from his character in an easy way that embodies propriety, then, Shaftesbury started with a concept of style, and worked backward. Smith’s characterization of Shaftesbury is, in effect, that he was socialized to have little strong attachment “to any particular sect or tenets in Religion,” while also being himself “of a very puny and weakly constitution,” a “delicate frame” that prevented him from engaging in rigorous inquiry, let alone pursuing “Love and Ambition.” Given the weakness of his passions, men like Shaftesbury are quite able to behave according “to the Rules they have proposed to themselves,” and generally excel in “fine arts, matters of taste and imagination” that are not difficult to pursue. He was, as a result, most attracted to the system of the “Platonists” (being repulsed by Puritans, Hobbes, and the “School philosophy”), given the Platonists’ “refined notions both in Theology and Philosophy.”

Ibid., 133.  
Ibid., 57.  
Ibid., 58.
Thus Shaftesbury’s subject: what of his style and whether it was “suitable to the same character that lead him to this Scheme of Philosophy”? Given his sickly physical qualities, Smith suggests that he was inclined to no “particular temper to any great height,” resulting in a style that was similarly tempered. Lacking “great depth in Reasoning,” he deployed ornament, utilizing “a pompous, grand and ornate Stile.” Smith grants that he pulled this off fairly well – in fact, better than could be expected; but this was only because Shaftesbury was engaged in writing: “The writer may review and correct anything that is not suitable to the character he designs to maintain. But in Common life many accidents would occur which would be apt to cause him loose his assumed character and if they are not immediately catched there is no remedy.” Pretense may survive in writing, but it will not survive long in life.

As we’ve seen, Shaftesbury chose his style independent of his character, and he aimed at “Polite dignity,” which he thought might be achieved by “a grand and pompous diction.” The result of this is a style that often simply didn’t fit the subject – “when the subject was far from being grand, his stile is as pompous as in the most sublime subjects.” Worst of all, because he uses “the same pompous diction” when engaging in ridicule, “he hardly ever makes us laugh.” From the perspective of the aims of language – a system of symbols that seeks to render our sentiments and thoughts intelligible to others, a system that relies for its efficacy on the appearance (and actuality) of naturalness in behavior and speech – Shaftesbury failed, as neither he nor his arguments were agreeable to his readers, in Smith’s view. That is to say, they could not sympathize with him. Contrived and inauthentic language – and behavior – may, in a sense, work to achieve the ends of language, but this is possible only if the author (or actor) has a remarkable amount of control over his situation – thus Smith’s point on writing (and revising one’s writing) versus acting. But in ordinary circumstances, affectation is the bane of effective communication, violating the aesthetic – and moral – standard of propriety.

With this discussion in mind, we can appreciate more fully a remark that Phillipson makes, when he suggests that Smith viewed “the specialized

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76 Ibid., 58–59.
77 Ibid., 59–60. This strikes me as a not entirely fair jibe. On Shaftesbury as a figure who thought quite a lot about humor and its political and ethical importance, see Ross Carroll, “Ridicule, Censorship, and the Regulation of Public Speech: The Case of Shaftesbury,” Modern Intellectual History (forthcoming).
problems of rhetoric as aspects of the principles of sociability.” Language itself – and understanding its formation – was thus central “in understanding the nature of the human personality,” as “all our sentiments – moral, political, intellectual and aesthetic – were acquired, developed and refined in the process of learning to communicate with others.”

Sympathy is at the foundation of effective communication; and character should give rise to style in order to produce sympathy. Shaftesbury has got things backward, and as a result, his style is disagreeable, and incapable of producing sympathetic agreement. Language emerges from and through our capacity for sympathy, and its efficacy – and beauty – depends on its ability to produce sympathy.

VI

If, given the discussion of sympathy and persuasion, and sympathy and style, we think back on Mandeville, we can now appreciate an important difference between how he thought of language and how Smith thinks of language, a difference that has profound implications for why Mandeville’s economy of flattery is more properly, for Smith, an economy of praise. Language, for Mandeville, is a manifestation of our naturally selfish urges at its origins, and we deploy language in an opaque fashion to get what we want: reassurance of our anxiety, and for manipulation. For Smith, language is something else entirely: to be sure, it starts with our needs, but beginning with the aim of achieving understanding and disclosure, it quickly takes on a broader role, shaping its speakers as they shape it, with the speakers themselves aiming at transparency. And even the most natural and proper speaker voluntarily restrains the heights and depths of his communication in order to render himself agreeable to others: our impulse to sociability – and, I suggest, our capacity and desire for sympathy – thus fosters and shapes the development of language itself, just as the development of language makes us fit to live with others.

The desire – and willingness – to allow the responses of others to affect our own behavior, of course, does not take us all that far from Mandeville. The economy of flattery relies, after all, upon agents’ willingness

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78 Phillipson, Adam Smith, 101.

79 For an extended discussion of the role of sympathy in Smith’s rhetoric, see Stephen J. McKenna, Adam Smith: The Rhetoric of Propriety (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), esp. chapter 4. McKenna goes as far as to suggest that Smith arrived at “his notion of sympathy after considering what happens in effective human communication” (89).
(albeit unaware) to change their behavior to maximize their acquisition of praise (or to minimize unease, perhaps). The mechanism, for Mandeville, is diffidence; for Smith, it is unease. What, if anything, differentiates Smith’s “wise” man in the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* – or even the savages seeking to achieve intelligibility – from Mandeville’s agents who are so fixated on praise that they are the embodiment of Rousseau’s worries about the pathologies of *amour propre*? We may note, first, that the motivation of Smith’s first speakers is different from the motivation of Mandeville’s first speakers: the latter are moved, in part by their own anxiety regarding their self-worth, to seek out praise in order to diminish this anxiety, and in part by their desire to manipulate others into acting as they wish. The social capacity of language is, in a sense, rooted in our asociability, for Mandeville – especially the self-liking that can lead us into anti-social behaviors. For Smith, by contrast, it would seem that humans are sociable to their core – no sooner than we have two savages together than we observe them trying to signal their mutual wants to each other – and to be understood. Smith’s savages are not independent; they are, instead, interdependent, shaping and being shaped by the desire for mutual sympathy. Mandeville’s asocial agents presuppose others in order to be fully agentic; Smith’s agents are always sociable, though their full agency is connected to them living with others.

But this still leaves us with the problem of praise: even if we were to grant Smith’s different account regarding the origins of language, Mandeville might respond that once language is in place, its effect in Smith’s account – it encourages us to act in certain ways while discouraging us from acting in other ways – may not be different from Mandeville’s own version. Whether the exchange takes place in the domain of flattery or of commerce, humans are using language to get others to do what they might not otherwise do. Smith could, of course, respond that the relationship is one of reciprocity, and that the needs of the two parties are mutually related; Mandeville’s manipulator and his flattered targets are not in a similar relationship of reciprocity, at least not in the sense of being aware of the exchange taking place.

Yet Smith might make a further, and stronger, argument against Mandeville’s position, one that has to do with his underlying account of humanity’s natural sociability, and sociability’s role in the formation of the moral personality. Smith posits, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* III.2.1, that man “desires, not only praise, but praiseworthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody, is, however, the
natural and proper object of praise” – just as man desires not to embody “that thing which, though it should be blamed by nobody, is, however, the natural and proper object of blame.” The sort of pretense and hypocrisy with which Mandeville seems to have little difficulty – and which so famously worried Rousseau – is of great concern to Smith and, it would seem, is anathema to a well-functioning individual. And it is quite clear that Smith has Mandeville in mind here, remarking that “Some sullen philosophers, in judging of human nature, have done as peevish individuals are apt to do in judging of the conduct of one another, and have imputed to the love of praise, or to what they call vanity, every action which ought to be ascribed to that of praise-worthiness.” We may recall here what we saw earlier with Mandeville: we are pleased with praises we don’t deserve for Mandeville – he gives as example the soldiers who, even if compelled to fight, would “be esteem’d for what they would have avoided, if it had been in their Power.”

Smith offers a postulate: “The love of praise-worthiness is by no means derived altogether from the love of praise,” though they are similar. This has to do, in part, with the morally educative function of emulation and its motivational foundations: we naturally desire, on Smith’s view, to be like those whose character we admire and approve, “to be as amiable and as admirable as those whom we love and admire the most.” Emulation is rooted in the desire to excel, which in turn is rooted in “our admiration of the excellence of others.” And, he adds, we are satisfied only if we think that we are admired for the very same reason that they are admired, a satisfaction that derives from us becoming “the impartial spectators of

80 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, III.2.1. Mandeville rejects such an argument quite explicitly: he suggests, as we saw, that even the examples of apparently selfless heroes provided by antiquity were motivated by pride. Indeed, “the Reward of a Virtuous Action, which is the Satisfaction that ensues upon it, consists in a certain Pleasure he procures to himself by Contemplating on his own Worth: Which Pleasure, together with the Occasion of it, are as certain Signs of Pride, as looking Pale and Trembling at any imminent Danger, are the Symptoms of Fear.” Mandeville, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, 57. I take Smith here to be speaking more descriptively than prescriptively. For such an account, along with Smith’s recognition of the pathologies of judgment, see Jennifer Pitts, “Irony in Adam Smith’s Critical Global History,” Political Theory 45, no. 2 (2015).
82 Mandeville, Remarks, 63.
83 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, III.2.2.
84 Ibid., III.2.3.
our own character and conduct.” To be sure, we are happy when others do in fact see our admirable traits and admire them, but we can still derive satisfaction from our assurance that we possess these qualities even if others do not acknowledge them. In other words, I derive satisfaction from knowing, in my heart of hearts, that I do in fact do my best (on the whole) in performing my professional duties as a scholar and teacher. While I might derive additional satisfaction—and perhaps even more if accompanied by monetary benefits in the form of a raise—from others recognizing that I carry out my duties to the best of my abilities (and do at least a moderately decent job in doing so, or so I flatter myself), I will not be entirely unsatisfied even if no one knows at all. And this has to do with my awareness that I do (hopefully without flattering myself), in fact, possess the quality that I admire in others: a strong sense of professional duty. Mandeville, as we may recall, saw the desire for praise as rooted, partly, in “a Diffidence, arising from a Consciousness, or at least an Apprehension, that we do over-value ourselves.” For Smith, precisely the opposite is the case: our love of praise-worthiness, and our belief in our own praise-worthiness, can serve to ameliorate anxiety. As Hanley remarks, “Smith is well aware that too keen a sensitivity to the judgments of others corrupts insofar as it is anxiety-inducing... Insofar as happiness requires tranquility, happiness itself requires our cultivating an indifference to external judgments of our worth.”

Because of our desire to be praise-worthy, a desire rooted not in an anxiety about our own worth, but in a natural admiration for and attraction to those who are worthy, then, Smith suggests that “the love of praise seems, at least in a great measure, to be derived from that of praise-worthiness,” and not the other way around (as it would be for Mandeville). And since our attraction to praise-worthy qualities is based on our desire to emulate those who possess excellences that we admire, we are not, on Smith’s view, satisfied when we receive praise that is not “some sort of proof of praise-worthiness.” Indeed, “The man who applauds us either for actions which we did not perform, or for motives which had no sort of influence upon our conduct, applauds not us, but another person. We can derive no sort of satisfaction from his praises.” Rather, such false praises remind us that we are not whom we wish to be. And while there certainly may be people who are satisfied by “groundless applause,” this is because of their “vanity,” which Smith

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86 Hanley, *Adam Smith*, 141.  
terms “the foundation of the most ridiculous and contemptible vices, the vices of affectation and common lying.” To be satisfied with praise that we know we do not deserve is, in effect, to be content to look at ourselves through the eyes of others and see someone besides ourselves. Far more satisfying than such underserved praise, then, is the recognition “that though no praise should actually be bestowed upon us, our conduct, however, has been such as to deserve it.” Mandeville’s model of human psychology, in which an anxious self-liking seeks out praise to confirm its pride, and proud individuals are manipulated into other-regarding behavior via the bewitching engine of flattery, is a model based on a vice: vanity. Hanley puts it thus:

vanity is perfectly admissible as an animating force of the moral education of those whose age or ignorance forbids access to a more elevated disposition, but those who have come to understand the difference between deserving and claiming praise are expected to see vanity for what it is.

And not only is it a model that applies to but a small and vicious portion of humanity; it is also a model that gets the developmental story of the human personality that Smith tells backward: we begin with what we admire in others, and move from there to ourselves, rather than begin with ourselves and look to others for affirmation.

So erroneous is the view that humans only desire praise that, were it (and Mandeville’s argument) correct, humans would not be able to live in “that society for which [they were] made.” To be sure, Smith grants, “Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren.” Receiving approbation is, of course, “most flattering and most agreeable to him for its own sake.” But such a desire, and such pleasure, is insufficient, for Smith, to account for our sociability; to want only to please others “could only have made him wish to appear to be fit for society.” Flattery is simply not enough. Our desire “of being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men” is necessary for the viability of society, as it made us “anxious to be really fit,” producing the “real love of virtue, and ... the real abhorrence of vice.” Smith locates the desire to be “what ought to be approved of” in “every well-formed mind,” consigning the desire for (undeserved) praise alone to “the weakest and most superficial of mankind.” By contrast,
someone who cared only for praise would engage in “the affectation of virtue” and “the concealment of vice.”

It’s not entirely clear why Smith thinks this to be the case. Perhaps his reasoning has to do with the argument that “self-approbation” gives rise to the love of virtue. And he certainly thinks that someone who “broke through all those measures of conduct, which can alone render him agreeable to mankind, though he should have the most perfect assurance that what he had done was for ever to be concealed from every human eye,” would be tormented by shame. But there is a more practical point to be made: we do not always get the recognition that we deserve in life. And if we behave in a way that is contingent on us actually getting the recognition from others that we desire – and we do not, in fact, get the recognition that we desire – we may cease to behave in that way altogether. As Smith remarks in Wealth of Nations, “In civilized society he stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons.” We live among strangers, and we will quite often find that we do not get the praise we might want; but this does not mean that we will cease to act in praise-worthy ways. If we were to cease to act in praise-worthy ways because we do not get the praise we desire, we would have a much more difficult time living together.

But it is not simply for these pragmatic reasons that Smith would reject Mandeville’s reasoning as being compatible with sociability. Mandeville’s account of the development of the human personality simply rings wrong for Smith. I noted this passage above, but it is worth repeating here:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. All these are objects which he cannot easily see,

92 As Griswold remarks, “The self-approbation that derives from knowing oneself to be praiseworthy is a natural outgrowth of the process by which, through sympathy, we approve of others. Were this process impossible, we would be fit only for the ‘affectation of virtue’ and the ‘concealment of vice,’ rather than for the ‘real love of virtue’ and the ‘real abhorrence of vice,’ and would therefore wish merely to appear to be fit for society.” Griswold, Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment, 132.
93 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, III.2.8. 94 Ibid., III.2.9.
which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before.

The self-liking Mandeville prioritizes and sees as operative in creating social bonds is, instead, the product of our sociability itself. And for praise to work upon our self-liking at all, it “must indicate something about the self,” as Heath puts it (with reference to Hume). And what praise indicates about the self relies on the human capacity – and desire – for sympathy. The sort of reflection that gives rise to and is part of selfhood relies upon a mirror, and the mirror is to be found in the “countenance and behavior of those he lives with,” their approval and disapproval.

The process by which our capacity of judging our own behavior, then, is wrapped up in the very structure of human society: we first engage in “moral criticisms” of others, and then “learn” that our behavior is subject to scrutiny as well. We come, on Smith’s view, to “suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behavior, and endeavor to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us.” So long as we see ourselves as “the natural and proper objects of approbation” – as praiseworthy, even if we do not in fact receive praise – we are content. It is, by contrast, due to being “doubtful about” our worth that we are “more anxious to gain their approbation.” Anxiety about our own worth is rooted, then, in the structure of human society and the process by which the moral personality is formed; we seek approbation when we are anxious because we are concerned with being worthy of praise, and not simply because we want praise.

VII

I hope to have shown in this chapter that Mandeville’s account of flattery and its relationship to human nature as an agent of socialization relies upon his sociolinguistic theory as laid out in Fable of the Bees, Part II. Socializing praise is false, whether in the content of the affirmation (Miss Molly’s curtsey) or in the intention of the speaker (the cunning moralists), and serves to reward the object of flattery with a good desired by his or

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96 Heath, “Mandeville’s Bewitching Engine of Praise,” 221.
97 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, III.1.3.
98 Ibid., III.1.5.
99 This process is broadly in line with Smith’s naturalism, on which see, e.g., Alexander Broadie, “Sympathy and the Impartial Spectator,” in The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith, ed. Knud Haakonsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
her pride. Flattery, in turn, is an outgrowth of language that, at its origins, is manipulative and unsympathetic and rooted in our desire to control others and confirm our own sense of worth. With Smith, by contrast, language is built upon the human craving and capacity for sympathy; language properly seeks to disclose, not to obscure, and to reach mutual agreement, rather than relations of domination. This craving and capacity for sympathy not only shapes the formation of language and the cultivation of our persuasive capacity, but in turn allows Smith to distinguish between the desire for praise and the desire for praise-worthiness, a distinction that allows him to remoralize flattery by showing that it is distinct from persuasion and, indeed, connected to servility.

Mandeville’s portrait of the human personality, then, is accurate for Smith, but in a very limited way: he has portrayed a vain individual: “restless and impatient, and perpetually afraid that we have lost all respect for him... always anxious to obtain new expressions of esteem,” since he “cannot be kept in temper but by continual attention and adulation.”

Though a recognizable character, this sort of person is a subset of humanity, and not representative of humanity writ large. And rather than be anxious because he doubts his own worth and needs confirmation, as Mandeville suggested, he is anxious “because he has some secret consciousness that he desires more than he deserves.”

Smith’s moral agent, then, is more than capable of feeling displeased with praises he knows he does not deserve, unlike Mandeville’s actor, of whom he remarked, “If Reason in Man was of equal weight with his Pride, he could never be pleas’d with Praises, which he is conscious he didn’t deserve.”

It is worth noting, by way of conclusion, that Smith’s account has an additional virtue: reason does not account for our dissatisfaction with receiving praise that we know we do not deserve. Rather, our dissatisfaction is rooted in our sociability, and it is connected to our socially embedded lives. It is thus intimately connected to our capacity for sympathy: the love of praiseworthy is “both logically and temporally prior to a love of praise, the former being necessary to mitigate the excesses of the latter.” The sociability at the core of Mandeville’s theory, then, is intimately related to his argument about flattery and flattery’s role in his account of socialization. Beginning with humans as sociable creatures,
a fact he suggests both Mandeville and Rousseau deny, it is only natural that Smith should understand flattery in a very different—and more conventional—way. To be sure, for Smith we are, by nature, pleased with the approval of others and displeased with their disapproval, but the maintenance of society requires that we move beyond the mere “love of praise and fear,” a move made possible not by reason, per se, but rather by the sympathetic mechanisms behind the formation of language, the efficacy of style, and the differentiation of flattery and praise. Smith, in effect, has provided an account of the emergence of morality that allows him to ground from within the realm of social and political life the distinction between flattery and praise. Though Smith posits various ideals, his account does not depend on an idealized standpoint, but instead relies on what Levy terms “moral learning” in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “we encounter wrongs that excite our displeasure, then we think about and generalize about what makes those wrongs wrong, and enter a process of moving back and forth between particular cases, often particular cases about wrongs, and general principles, sometimes principles about what is right.” Remoralizing flattery, on my account, relies on just such a back-and-forth process, for Smith. In this regard, his response to Mandeville remoralizes flattery, but it does so in such a way that it does not require him to depart in radical ways from the social conventions that always shape us.

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104 In using the language “from within the realm of social and political life,” I have in mind political realism, following the distinction Williams makes between political moralism and political realism. Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

In the prior chapter, I explored the place and function of flattery in the thought of Mandeville and Smith. Focusing especially on Mandeville’s account of language’s development in The Fable of Bees, Part II, I argued that flattery serves a crucial exchange function, a function making possible his unsympathetic account of human sociability and socialization. This account, in turn, demoralizes flattery altogether, portraying flattery as a good thing. Smith, by contrast, views humans as sympathetic and social to the core, natural qualities that not only structure his account of language, but also make possible his remoralization of flattery. For Smith, Mandeville’s account is accurate to only a degree, and his assimilation of praise and flattery neglects the aspirations of all but the vainest. This remoralization, though, occurs from within the languages and practices of political and social life.

In this chapter, I am concerned with the theme of flattery in the ratification debates over the US Constitution. The argument I’ll make here is more complicated than that of the prior chapter and perhaps of any chapters of this book. In part, this is simply a function of engaging with more sources, but it is even more importantly due to an engagement with a more complex set of questions: why do both the Federalists (in this

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chapter, Hamilton, Jay, and Madison) and the Anti-Federalists accuse each other of flattery? What does each side think is flattering about the other side’s appeals, and why does each side connect flattery to particular related terms? Finally, what does their use of the term tell us about their respective understandings of the states’ present situation, their future possibilities, and which version would itself be more flattering to their audiences? At stake in answering these questions, is an analysis of not just their respective rhetorical appeals but their understandings of what America is and how America will exist in both the future and the present.

To answer these questions, rather than look back to the prior chapter, I’ll be looking back more to my discussion of Hobbes in Chapter 3. This has to do with the language we’ll encounter in late eighteenth-century America, a society transitioning from a monarchical regime to a republican regime, language that echoes the anti-monarchical discourse on display in my discussion of monarchy’s critics in seventeenth-century England. It also has to do with ways in which various Anti-Federalist writers use language about luxury and power that echoes the anti-monarchical language encountered in seventeenth-century England, language that was very much in circulation in eighteenth-century America.

Both the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, as we will see, employed the language of flattery in their polemical characterizations of their opponents. At stake in their rhetorical battle was not simply which side could be more plausibly described as engaging in flattery, however. Whereas the Federalists depict the Anti-Federalists as flattering local prejudices, a tactic especially evident in Hamilton’s writings, and of painting America’s political and economic situation in a far too rosy color, the anti-Federalists not only look back to and invoke anti-monarchical language familiar from seventeenth-century England; they also depict the Federalists’ desired outcome – the prospect of a strong regime capable of projecting power and achieving wealth and status – as a flattering prize. This prize, tempting as it might appear, was designed to rob America not only of its liberty, but also of its identity as an exceptional people. Like the Israelites of 1 Samuel, a text I will engage through Paine and several Anti-Federalist writers, post-revolutionary America faced a choice between being like other nations and staying true to its particular qualities. At stake, then, in the

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Anti-Federalist discourse was, as Riker has shown, similarly negative to that of the Federalist. William J. Riker, *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 37–42.
dueling accusations of flattery is which portrait of what America was and what it would be would prove seductive: a wealthy and powerful America taking its rightful place among other nations or a virtuous and free America whose difference was its strength. The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists were both engaged, in this respect, in an imaginative project, with the American people and their place in the world as objects of imagination.3

My focus, in what follows, is on the *Federalist Papers* and a range of Anti-Federalist writings.4 In discussing these works, I will focus on the two visions of peoplehood that the opposing sides present: what America was and might be. These two visions of peoplehood were both the objects of deliberation (that is, what was in the present and what would come to be) and the participants in deliberation. Both visions involve representing America to itself, and both visions involve representing America as exceptional. The Anti-Federalists, though, view the Federalist argument for a strong national government in order to protect and restore lost or threatened dignity and status as a sort of rhetorical bait and switch: they offer greatness and instead give servitude. That is, the Federalists hold forth the prospect of international standing and respect, but these are flattering prospects intended to convince Americans to become an empire no longer free.

3 In describing the project as imaginative, I’m indebted to Jason Frank, “Publius and Political Imagination,” *Political Theory* 37, no. 1 (2009). In what follows, though, I’ll be more interested in the rhetorical dimensions of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist accounts I discuss than the aesthetic dimensions, which Frank illuminates through a discussion of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, and especially Hume.

4 In choosing the papers written by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, and published as the *Federalist Papers*, I’m following the lead of many political theorists. I do not agree, though, with Wolin’s justification: “By virtually all accounts, the most influential and certainly the most enduring of interpretations was that produced by the authors of *The Federalist Papers*. That work was the nation’s first significant public hermeneutic; it may be said to have constituted that genre.” Sheldon S. Wolin, “Tending and Intending a Constitution: Bicentennial Misgivings,” in *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 84. As Maier notes, “Madison and Hamilton sent copies of early Federalist essays to Washington, who tried to get them published in Virginia, but only a handful were republished in the *Virginia Independent Chronicle* (Richmond). In fact, a careful modern study concluded that newspapers outside the state of New York republished only twenty-four of the eight five Federalist essays during the course of the ratification controversy.” Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787–1788* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 84. The essays would be more widely read after they were printed together in a 1788 volume. A fuller examination, one I might undertake in the future, would look to a broader set of writings in support of the Constitution.
By way of prologue to the ratification debates, Section II begins with Sheldon Wolin’s distinction between tending and intending modes of thought, a distinction that will frame my own argument going forward. I then explore Paine’s invocation of I Samuel in his 1776 Common Sense, focusing on his treatment of the text as a warning about monarchy and as a motif for understanding different visions of America’s place in the world. Section III turns to the trope of flattery in the invective deployed by the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Section IV focuses on the place of American dignity and standing in the Federalist depiction of the American people, while Section V hones in on the Anti-Federalist depiction of the American people and the connection they make between the Federalist vision and deceptive appearances. In Section VI, I return to I Samuel, first by way of various Anti-Federalists who invoke the language of imitation, often referring to I Samuel, and then highlighting the ways in which the Federalist and Anti-Federalist visions were mutually constitutive. I conclude by suggesting, in light of Benedict Anderson’s account of imagined community, that the Federalist vision proved more persuasive in part because it was a flattering vision of what America might be, and in part because it encapsulated both tending and intending.5

Central to my analysis is a framework broadly drawn from Sheldon Wolin’s “Tending and Intending a Constitution: Bicentennial Misgivings,” an essay written to commemorate and reflect on the bicentennial of the Constitution. This framework captures the broad contours of the rhetorical tropes we will encounter in what follows. In this essay, Wolin distinguished between “two persistent modes of thinking about and practicing politics,” the tending and intending modes. These two modes faced each other in the debates between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. With the Federalists embodying the intending mode, and the Anti-Federalists embodying the tending mode, the intending way of thinking about and practicing politics won the day.6 The Federalist’s intending vision, for Wolin, entails “a straining toward the future, an effort that requires power,” a way of seeing politics with “an expansionist

5 It also had to do, as Riker suggests, with the Federalists arguing – and having argued successfully – “that crisis necessitated reform.” Riker, The Strategy of Rhetoric, 256.
ideology implicit” in its discourse.7 Tending, by contrast, “is to be concerned about something that exists, something that requires being taken care of, if it is to perdure.”8 If the tending vision of politics “inclines toward a democratic conception of political life,” valuing the local and the different, the intending vision connected difference to weakness, a weakness rooted in “exception, anomaly, local peculiarities, and a thousand other departures from the uniformity that a certain kind of power prefers.”9

The intending vision of the Federalists was not simply embodied in the Constitution, according to Wolin; it was to be embodied and embedded in a new political culture – a national political culture. This society did not yet exist in 1787, and the Anti-Federalists, in resisting the Federalist vision, were tending to the society that already existed. Wolin cites “Agrippa” in this regard:

The idea of an uncompounded republick, on an average, one thousand miles in length, and eight hundred in breadth, and containing six millions of white inhabitants all reduced to the same standard of morals, or habits, and of laws, is in itself an absurdity, and contrary to the whole experience of mankind.10

Even if Jay, as we’ll see below, made the case for a united nation, no less than Washington himself recognized the diversity of the thirteen states in his letter transmitting the Constitution, where he notes the “difference among the several states as to their situation, extent, habits, and particular interests.”11 The Federalists were not so much describing what they saw, but rather intending “a single, unified society governed by a strong state.”12

In making their case for their vision, the Federalists met with a formidable obstacle: differences between and among the states and citizen identification with the local and the state, differences whose foundation Hamilton described thus:

It is a known fact in human nature, that its affections are commonly weak in proportion to the distance of diffusiveness of the object. Upon the same principle

7 Ibid., 90. 8 Ibid. 9 Ibid., 88, 93.
that a man is more attached to his family than to his neighbourhood, to his neighbourhood than to the community at large, the people of each state would be apt to feel a stronger bias towards their local governments, than towards the government of the union, unless the force of that principle should be destroyed by a much better administration of the latter.\textsuperscript{13}

While Wolin emphasizes the power of the final portion of the quotation, honing in on the matter of administration in keeping with his interest in the “scientific approach” of the Federalists, I am more interested in the portrait of a nation-to-be that the Federalists paint: strong, wealthy, and respected. This was a portrait that the Anti-Federalists saw as dangerous, and as a nation-to-be that would have the American people, like the Israelites before them, lose themselves in their quest to be like other nations.

With the distinction that Wolin draws in mind, though, I want now to turn to Paine’s \textit{Common Sense}, a work in which we will see the coexistence of tending and intending, and in which we see the invocation of the Israelites’ lost status as an exceptional people. In \textit{Common Sense}, Paine turns to scripture, first to Judges 6–8, and then to 1 Samuel 8 to show that monarchical rule is incompatible with God’s law. Paine’s invocation of 1 Samuel would have been resonant with a late eighteenth-century audience. As James Ceasar notes, “Based especially on readings of the Old Testament, in particular the book of Samuel, it was widely concluded that God had directly favored republican government, with the monarchy coming about as a result of rebellious and sinful people.”\textsuperscript{14} Paine refers to monarchy as “the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry,” an invention adopted “by the heathens” only to be “copied” by the Israelites.\textsuperscript{15} Israel’s choice of monarchy is a sin, first


\textsuperscript{14} James W. Ceasar, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” \textit{American Political Thought} 1, no. 1 (2012), 14. 1 Samuel had long been invoked against monarchical rule, just as it had also been invoked in support of monarchical rule by figures such as James I, as in \textit{The True Law}. On this tradition, see, e.g., Johann P. Sommerville, “English and European Political Ideas in the Early Seventeenth Century: Revisionism and the Case of Absolutism,” \textit{The Journal of British Studies} 35, no. 2 (1996). Such a turn was also in keeping with Paine’s “lower-class Quaker background,” eschewing the classical references favored by elite pamphlet authors and instead turning to Scripture in a plain style reminiscent of eighteenth-century revivalists. Harry S. Stout, “Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} 34, no. 4 (1977), 537.

contemplated after Gideon’s victory over the Midianites in Judges, and then carried through by the Israelites in 1 Samuel. It is then that the Israelites, faced with the prospect of Samuel’s rule passing to his sons, whom Paine describes euphemistically as having engaged in “misconduct,” clamor to have a king.¹⁶ Paine provides an extended citation of the text, interspersed with his commentary, and he notes, after introducing the Israelites’ demand for a monarch, that “we cannot but observe that their motives were bad, viz. that they might be like unto other nations, i.e. the heathens, whereas their true glory lay in being as much unlike them as possible.” In essence, the prospect of being like other nations flattered their sensibilities.

Each aspect of Samuel’s warning to the Israelites, in turn, receives a gloss from Paine with clear salience for his contemporary audience: the warning about appointing sons to serve in the king’s military “agrees with the present mode of impressing men,” a much-hated practice of the British navy, while daughters being taken as “confectionaries,” “cooks,” and “bakers” illustrates “the expense and luxury as well as the oppression of kings.”¹⁷ The threat that kings would take from the Israelites a portion of their agricultural production, in turn, shows “that bribery, corruption, and favoritism are the standing vices of kings.”¹⁸ Such a charge would have resonated; as Wood notes, “royal patronage . . . provided much of the colonists’ antagonism to the imperial system.”¹⁹

While Paine’s use of 1 Samuel shows God’s favor for republican government, it also serves implicitly to accentuate the way in which America, like Israel before its election of monarchy, is a distinctive nation, its oppressions echoing those of its ancient ancestor.²⁰ In choosing to be like other nations, the Israelites not only have fundamentally altered their character and glory


¹⁶ Paine, Common Sense, 10.

¹⁷ Expense and luxury would have resonated with the discourse of virtue so common in Paine’s time, which emphasized industry, frugality, and sobriety. See, e.g., Kramnick’s discussion in Isaac Kramnick, “The ‘Great National Discussion’: The Discourse of Politics in 1787,” The William and Mary Quarterly 45, no. 1 (1988), 15–17.

¹⁸ Paine, Common Sense, 10–11.


as a nation, along with their relationship to God, but they set out on a path of servitude, opting for monarchy. Like Israel, America is unlike other nations, especially with respect to its liberty: America stands as a place of refuge for the freedom that “hath been hunted round the globe,” “expelled” from Asia and Africa. Liberty is “a stranger” in Europe, and has been warned “to depart” from England. America will serve as “an asylum for mankind,” and is, like Israel before it, a nation unlike others, and its uniqueness is its strength combined with its liberty. 21

Yet for Paine, America, too, has its place among nations. This is a place commensurate with America’s greatness; the goal of King George is to keep America “low and humble,” and the colonies are “already greater” than George wishes. 22 America’s status as “a free port” pursuing “commerce” will, in Paine’s view, “secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe.” 23 Moreover, America must build a strong navy, as “We are not the little people now which we were sixty years ago; at that time, we might have trusted our property in the streets, or fields rather, and slept securely without locks or bolts to our doors and windows.” 24 Unique among nations, America is also a great nation, one whose greatness requires commensurate strength to protect it. Paine presents us with an America that is different and distinct, possessing qualities that other nations do not possess, but qualities that would yet make American more than comparable to them in the same wealth and power that other nations pursue.

Paine’s representation of America and his invocation of the Israelites provide us with two images: America as different and above in a political sense; America as different and distinct in a political sense. America is to be tended to in its difference, but this difference inclines America to greatness. The Israelites chose to abandon their difference as separation, seeking instead to be above the others on an earthly scale, constituting their original sin, while America’s separation from England would be a confirmation of its difference and purging of the sin of monarchy. This separation, though, would entail an increase in American strength, an increase that is, in a sense, flattering to the sensibilities of his readers: it confirms as valuable those features of the American polity that many of Paine’s readers would have been proud of. Those two images – the prospect of an America different and above, the present of America different and separate – lay behind the dueling visions of peoplehood that the Federalists and Anti-Federalists marshal.

21 Paine, Common Sense, 30. 22 Ibid., 24. 23 Ibid., 19. 24 Ibid., 32.
Just over a decade after the publication of *Common Sense*, accusations of flattering misrepresentations of America and their potential deceptive appeal are features of the debates between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. To be sure, both sides of the ratification debate accused each other of the vice of flattery, that is, “false or empty praise,” as Noah Webster would later define it.25 This is to be expected at a formal rhetorical level: redescription, the tactic by which political opponents redescribe the actions or terms of their opponents as embodying opposite qualities, is a time-worn tactic in politics.26 Nor is it surprising that such a loaded term would be used to characterize one’s opponents, as those who engage in flattery are duplicitous, and hence not to be trusted, with the term “flattery” itself bearing the mark of servility and dependence characteristic of “a dependent hierarchical world,” the very world the colonists were seeking to leave behind.27

Participants in the debates over ratification were themselves attuned to the tactic of redescription and its use by parties to the debate, while they also deployed redescription. For example, the October 8, 1787, letter of the “Federal Farmer” offers insight into how both sides of the ratification debate would proceed. “It must, however, be admitted,” he explained

that our federal system is defective, and that some of the state governments are not well administered; but, then, we impute the defects in our governments many evils and embarrassments which are most clearly the result of the late war. We must allow men to conduct on the present education, as on all similar ones. They will urge a thousand pretences to answer their purposes on both sides. When we want a man to change his condition, we describe it as miserable, wretched, and despised; and draw a pleasing picture of that which we would have him assume. And when we wish the contrary, we reverse our descriptions . . . It is too often the case in political concerns, that men state facts not as they are, but as they wish them to be; and almost every man, by calling to mind past scenes, will find this to be true.28

Redescription served parties to disputes in deliberative oratory – that is, the genre concerning the choice of action or policy – as an effective tool in countering the arguments of their opponents: what one’s foe described as advantageous might be described as dishonorable, or vice versa; one man’s frankness was another’s flattery. The same tactic would prove to be useful for the two sides in their debate about not only the Constitution, but what America was and what it might be. The conflict over America’s representation was apt for redescription, as the concepts and images used by both sides were contested and featured boundaries sufficiently blurry that they could yield what Kramnick terms “the confusion of idioms.”

The Federalists redescribed the Anti-Federalists’ defense of the salience of local bonds and liberties as flattery of prejudice, a particular form of demagoguery characterized by paying homage to local biases that would bring about weakness and disunion. Thus, when we turn to the Federalist Papers, in which Hamilton, Jay, and Madison accuse their opponents of more things than could readily be cataloged, some of the more vehement accusations cohere on precisely demagoguery as a term of abuse. Hamilton famously uses the term in Federalist No. 1, which framed much of the invective featured in subsequent papers. There, he suggests “that of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career, by paying an obsequious court to the people . . . commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants.” The phrase “obsequious court” is striking – it recalls the servility and dependence of monarchy’s subjects and, especially, of courtiers. Just a few examples show how the term encapsulates a family of related invective from across the Federalist Papers, a family of invective that includes terms such as “flattery,” along with “seduce.” Jay, for instance, refers to the “arts and endeavours” of those seeking to dissuade “the people” from accepting the

30 Riker’s catalogue of generic Federalist attacks on Anti-Federalists, and vice versa, is useful here – both accuse each other of making arguments that “are weak, sophistical, false, scurrilous.” Riker, The Strategy of Rhetoric, 267.
32 To flatter – “to sooth, praise, give false hopes” – and to seduce – “to lead astray by arts, entice from duty, debauch” are among the rhetorical tools of the demagogue, practicing the arts of the deception to advance their ambition at the expense of their country. Webster, A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language, 118, 271.
judgment of the Convention. Such invective is indicative of “Publius” depiction of the Anti-Federalists’ use of “seductive, titillating literary tropes to elicit the suspicion of power.” Madison remarks on the “distress under which these writers labour for objections,” a distress whose evidence can be seen in his opponents “stooping to such a misconstruction” of the federal tax power.

Hamilton, of course, is especially sharp in his language. Thus, he alludes, again in Federalist No. 1, to

the perverted ambition of another class of men, who will either hope to aggrandize themselves by the confusions of their country, or will flatter themselves with fairer prospects of elevation from the subdivision of the empire into several partial confederacies, than from its union under one government.

That is to say, in addition to flattering the local prejudices of the people of the various states, these demagogues flatter themselves with the possibility of powerful offices and honors connected to disunion. In a supreme irony, the Anti-Federalists become, in Hamilton’s words, the enemies of virtue. Hamilton suggests that the Anti-Federalists make arguments that “would utterly unfit the people of this country for any species of government whatever”; they engage in “political legerdemain,” making arguments that “can answer no other end than to cast a mist over the truth” (with respect to taxation). Hamilton accuses those who “would seduce us into the expectation of peace and cordiality between the members of the present confederation” of deploying a “fatal charm which has too long seduced us from the paths of felicity and prosperity.” To drive home the point, Hamilton adduces a classical example, noting that the ancient Achaean7s were “seduced” into disunity with disastrous consequences by the successors of Alexander the Great.

Similar patterns of polemic are evident in the works of the Anti-Federalists, who often suggest the Federalists are flattering their readers so that they might undermine the liberties of the American people. The form of the accusation, in the abstract, is something like this: the Federalists dangle a future greatness before the eyes of those they seek to convince of their weakness, offering this future greatness in exchange for their

34 Frank, “Publius and Political Imagination,” 73.
38 Ibid., 25, 70, 88.
present liberty. Just as the Federalists described their opponents as ambitious, so, too, did the Anti-Federalists describe their opponents in such terms; as Bailyn remarks, “Federalists and antifederalists both agreed that man in his deepest nature was selfish and corrupt; that blind ambition most often overcomes even the most clear-eyed rationality.”

“Cato” is especially sharp in this regard, warning of the Federal model that “ambition and voluptuousness aided by flattery will teach magistrates ... to have separate and distinct interests from the people.”

DeWitt describes the advocates of the Constitution as “ambitious men throughout America, waiting with impatience to make it a stepping stone to posts of honour and emolument,” and as “men who openly profess to be tired of republican governments, and sick to the heart of republican measures.” Indeed, DeWitt describes them as men who “daily ridicule a government of choice, and pray ardently for one of force.” Even if a national government built on the Constitution were to start out as something other than an aristocracy, DeWitt suggests that it will shortly “degenerate to a compleat Aristocracy, armed with powers unnecessary in any case to bestow” – that is, broad powers of taxation and the creation of a standing army. The result will be a government “which in its vortex swallows up every other Government upon the Continent.” DeWitt adds the following striking remark: “it can be said to be nothing less than a hasty stride to Universal Empire in this Western World, flattering, very flattering to young ambitious minds, but fatal to


Cato adds, shortly after, “your posterity will find that great power connected with ambition, luxury, and flattery, will as readily produce a Caesar, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian in America, as the same causes did in the Roman empire.”

41 DeWitt’s accusations against the Federalists, in this regard, are echoed by Adair’s far more neutral description of them. To be sure, Hamilton was particularly emblematic of the love of fame, but Adair remarks that it was characteristic of many of the Federalists who had “a personal stake in creating a national system dedicated to liberty, to justice, and to the general welfare.” Douglass Adair, “Fame and the Founding Fathers,” in Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair, ed. Trevor Colbourn (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974). Hamilton had famously referred, in Federalist 72, to “the love of fame, the ruling passion of the noblest minds, which would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit.” Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, The Federalist, 375.
the liberties of the people.” Whether it is the naiveté of a young people, or the ambition of the (younger) Federalists, the danger is clear. Yet this prospect of power is little more than a dangerous form of seduction, inimical to liberty. He continues:

Place the Frame of Government proposed, in the most favorable point of view, magnify the priviledges held forth to the people to their fullest extent, and enlarge as much as you please, upon the great checks therein provided . . . there cannot remain a doubt in the mind of any reflecting man, that it is a System purely Aristocratical, calculated to find employment for men of ambition, and to furnish means of sporting with the sacred principles of human nature.

Such an empire, he suggests in the following essay, would entail “the destruction of the different State Governments.” A flattering prospect especially to the ambitious Federalists, to be sure, but empire is inimical to the liberty of the people.

“Aristocrotis” engages in a similar line of attack, providing a sarcastic list of “a few directions to my worthy friends, the inventors and advocates of this admirable constitution.” He writes:

The distress of the people must be magnified as much as possible; they must be told that they are ruined and miserable, that they are all bankrupts; and that all these calamities is occasioned by their feeble governments (although in fact it is by their own extravagance); and that the new plan will effectually relieve all their wants and redress all their grievances; although in reality it must be their own industry and economy; but this they must not know for the present.

The Federalist case for the Constitution, in this view, amounts to a sort of rhetorical bait and switch: they offer an attractive prospect – empire – only to switch it for servitude. More stringent, though, is his ninth suggestion. “The highly and elevated station,” he explains, “to which this will raise America amongst the nations, must be held forth with great vehemence. The people are mighty fond of pomp and splendor, and will almost grant anything to raise their country to grandeur and magnificence.”

42 DeWitt, *John DeWitt III.*
43 On the danger of ambition to liberty more broadly in late eighteenth-century America, see Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,* chapter 4.
46 Ibid., 210.
The tempting prospect of high status in the international order is not lost on Aristocrotis. If, then, the Federalists depict their opponents as flattering demagogues, the Anti-Federalists depict the Federalists as flattering and disguised aristocrats.

IV

Behind the dueling accusations of flattery is a conflict over the identity of the people being represented to themselves. To return to Wolin, the Federalist representation is forward looking, emphasizing possibility and future greatness, consistent with what he characterizes as “intending.” Such a representation is evident in a speech given by Gouverneur Morris at the Convention on July 7 in response to the question, “Shall the clause allowing each State on vote in the 2d. branch, stand as part of the Report?”47 The speech follows a short statement by William Patterson, who suggested that he supported “an equality of votes” in the Senate so that “the small States” could defend themselves against the large ones. Morris, by contrast, held that the report “maintained the improper Constitution of the 2d. branch,” rendering it “a mere whisp of straw.”48 More broadly, he worried that the proposed Constitution might not “protect the aggregate interest of the whole,” as opposed to that of individuals and states.49 As he put it, “Among the many provisions which had been urged, he had seen none for supporting the dignity and splendor of the American Empire.” Against this backdrop, Morris in effect accuses the small states, seeking equal voice, of extortion: they are “aware of the necessity of preventing anarchy, and taking advantage of the moment.”50 More pointedly, he warns that too much strength in “local Govts.” makes “an efficient Govt.” an impossibility, noting that “no union is maintained in Germany” – disunion all the more striking since Germany, like America, is united by “a common language, a common law, common usages and manners – and a common interest in being united; yet their local jurisdictions destroy every tie.”51 What would otherwise be a strong and united nation was, according to Morris, rendered weak by local disunity and difference. We have already seen, with “Cato” and Washington, that this was not an unimpeachable description of America. It was, though, a vision of what it might be.

48 Ibid., 551.
49 Ibid., 552.
50 Ibid., 552.
51 Ibid., 553.
Another speech concerned with American dignity was delivered on June 29 by Hamilton who, as we will see, will make similar remarks throughout the Federalist. He asks, after discussing the supremacy of Parliament in the British Empire, “May not the smaller and greater states so modify their respective rights as to establish the general interest of the whole, without adhering to the right of equality?” A “free government,” by his account, cannot exist “if partial distinctions are maintained”; through uniformity, the freedom of the American republic will be preserved. And he points to the danger that would arise from conflict between the small and large states, a danger especially likely to come to fruition since “Foreigners are jealous of our encreasing greatness, and would rejoice in our distractions.” For Hamilton, European powers are themselves anxious “for the preservation of our democratic governments, probably for no other reason, but to keep us weak.” Hamilton puts the point firmly: “Unless your government is respectable, foreigners will invade your rights; and to maintain tranquility it must be respectable – even to observe neutrality you must have a strong government.” Absent unity and strength, then, America will be weak, in his view. As Kramnick puts it, Hamilton “had a grander vision for the American state, a call to greatness.”

The themes we see in Morris and Hamilton’s speeches – the importance of unity, the Americans’ present weakness and humiliation, and a future of greatness of standing – are widely evident in the later Federalist papers. For Morris and Hamilton, as with other Federalists, the United States faced a “military and economic crisis.” Such invocations of unity are reminiscent of what Frank describes as Publius’ “attempt to imaginatively unify the geographic, social, and political landscape of America.” Yet whereas Frank hones in on the theme of “alluring spectacles of Providential nationality,” with a particular focus on its aesthetic dimension, I am especially interested in the themes of dignity and standing. Thus, just as Hamilton, Jay, and Madison emphasize the political unity and consanguinity of the people, they also emphasize its diminished standing on the world stage due to its disunity and concomitant weakness. Intending, as we see, relies on not just appeals to administrative efficacy, but an appeal to standing and dignity or, in a word, pride. Such appeals and their connection to liberty and prosperity are evident from the start: Hamilton remarks that he views the adoption of the proposed

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52 Ibid., 472.
53 Ibid., 473.
56 Frank, “Publius and Political Imagination,” 89.
Constitution as “the safest course for your liberty, your dignity, and your happiness.” Were the states to go their separate ways, Jay exclaims in Federalist No. 2, America would cry “FAREWELL! A LONG FAREWELL, TO ALL MY GREATNESS.” America’s potential standing, standing it would have if the Federalist model were chosen, is described with such positive terms as “respect” or “dignity.” In its absence, America’s state is “humiliation,” it is an object of “contempt,” or even of “pity.” Jay offers the example of Genoa’s efforts to “appease” Louis XIV to illustrate the likely humiliating fate of a polity with “little consideration or power.” He asks, “Would he on any occasion either have demanded or have received the like humiliation from Spain, or Britain, or any other powerful nation?”

Echoing the language of Hamilton’s convention speech, Jay emphasizes that America’s “advancement in union, in power and consequence by land and sea” will arouse jealousy, but “the fleets of America may engage attention” just as Britain’s fleets do. Should the state remain united and prosperous, foreign powers “will be much more disposed to cultivate our friendship, than to provoke our resentment”; should the states be disunited, “what a poor pitiful figure will America make in their eyes! How liable would she become not only to their contempt, but to their outrage.”

The theme of national humiliation at the hands of foreigners, and the need for a strong union along the lines of the proposed Constitution, while evident in Jay, is most pronounced in those papers authored by Hamilton. Seeking to emphasize not just the threat of foreign war but also war between the states, Hamilton notes, by way of waking his readers from “the deceitful dream of a golden age,” the present “extreme depression to which our national dignity and credit have sunk.” A united and strong America would refute “the advocates of despotism” who look to “the disorders that disfigure the annals” of republics, providing them with a “broad and solid foundation of other edifices not less magnificent” than the “stupendous fabric reared on the basis of liberty.” This fabric will provide “glorious instances” to disprove their skepticism. Meanwhile, disunity would invite danger, and could “never promote the greatness or happiness of the people of America.”

Hamilton has in mind, in arguing for the union, not only what the country is and what humiliations it is experiencing, but “what this country is capable of becoming.” This remark, and his argument writ large, is emblematic of Hamilton’s broader ambitions, his belief that he was “one who through the grace of fortune was destined to establish an American empire that could promote the happiness of the human race and at the same time reward Alexander Hamilton with fame and immortality.” An intending refrain, this is a prospect of great worry to “the maritime powers of Europe” that would prefer to sow disunion among the states and hence clip “the wings on which we might soar to a dangerous greatness.” The issue is not just America’s present indignity, then, but the dignity it might someday possess were it to take the course that he is urging. Highlighting the present humiliation, Hamilton offers hope: with the Constitution ratified, and thus “a vigorous national government” commanding a navy “of respectable weight,” America would command a price “not only upon our friendship, but upon our neutrality.” By contrast, “A nation, despicable by its weakness, forfeits even the privilege of being neutral.” A strong nation, and a strong navy, will foster America’s “unequalled spirit of enterprise.” Without such strength, “poverty and disgrace would overspread a country, which, with wisdom, might make herself the admiration and envy of the world.”

Hamilton, in highlighting both America’s future greatness and its present weakened state, makes a point to emphasize the arrogance of Europe and America’s special role in breaking it. “The superiority she has long maintained,” he explains, has tempted her to plume herself as the mistress of the world, and to consider the rest of mankind as created for her benefit. Men, admired as profound philosophers, have, in direct terms, attributed to her inhabitants a physical superiority; and have gravely asserted, that all animals, and with them the human species, degenerate in America . . . Facts have too long supported the arrogant pretensions of the European.

Hamilton magnifies not only America’s geopolitical weakness, but European disregard for the very persons of Americans. The tactic is to arouse his readers’ anger and wounded pride, appealing to their sense of resentment, and then to offer hope and a properly dignified place. The appeal to his

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66 Adair, “Fame and the Founding Fathers,” 16.
68 Ibid., 51.
69 Ibid., 52.
70 Ibid., 54.
reader’s pride is not subtle, nor is it surprising given that Hamilton himself, like the United States as a whole, was a creole. As Benedict Anderson remarks,

whether we think of Brazil, the USA, or the former colonies of Spain, language was not an element that differentiated them from their respective imperial metropoles. All, including the USA, were creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought.71

Given this broad similarity, among others, to the metropole, elites such as Hamilton would be particularly sensitive to the insulting attitudes of those in the metropole who held that “creoles, born in a savage hemisphere, were by nature different from and, and inferior to, the metropolitans.”72

Returning to the “arrogant pretensions” of Europe, America, through union, strength, and the pursuit of prosperity protected by its powerful navy, can “vindicate the honor of the human race, and ... teach that assuming brother moderation.”73

So desperate are the times in his view, and so grave is the threat that the “sacred knot, which binds the people of America together” might be destroyed “by ambition or by avarice, by jealousy or by misrepresentation,” that Hamilton seeks to clarify the debate for those beset by the “sophistry” of his opponents.74 And he is quite clear in saying, “We may indeed, with propriety, be said to have reached almost the last stage of national humiliation. There is scarcely any thing that can wound the pride, or degrade the character, of an independent people, which we do not experience.” The states cannot even “remonstrate with dignity,” and America’s “ambassadors abroad are the mere pageants of mimic sovereignty,” unable to bring about “respectability in the eyes of foreign powers.”75 America’s current debased state is itself due to “those very maxims and counsels” that speak against the Constitution, seeking to keep in place the weak democratic institutions he excoriated in the Convention. Thus Hamilton urges, “Let us at last break the fatal charm which has too long seduced us from the paths of felicity and prosperity.”

Hamilton draws a similar contrast between the present state of shame and weakness and the hope for something greater in Federalist No. 30. In the context of discussing taxation and debt, he asks of America, “How can it ever possess either energy or stability, dignity or credit, confidence

71 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1983), 47. 72 Ibid., 60. 73 Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, The Federalist, 54. 74 Ibid., 68. 75 Ibid., 69.
at home, or respectability abroad? How can its administration be anything else than a succession of expedients temporizing, impotent, disgraceful?”

So, too, will the Senate play an important role with respect to dignity and respect, though this time in the words of Madison: “Without a select and stable member of the government,” he continues, “the esteem of foreign powers will not only be forfeited by an unenlightened and variable policy ... but the national councils will not possess that sensibility to the opinion of the world, which is perhaps not less necessary in order to merit, than it is to obtain its respect and confidence.” America’s “want of character with foreign nations,” again, is a flaw of the current system, leading to weakness and humiliation, and it is to be remedied through the new Constitution.

In using the terms “charm” and “seduction” to characterize their discourse, Hamilton suggests his opponents are, in effect, flatterers, practitioners of dishonest speech that caters to the baser desires and instincts of their audience. But the polemic goes beyond the Anti-Federalists’ language or style: it goes to the way that the Anti-Federalists represent the American people to itself. They present a deceptive picture of the present, inducing their audience to mistake their weakened state for a sort of golden age, holding forth prizes that cannot be produced by the course of action they urge. Hamilton seeks to awaken his readers from this illusion, and lays out the stakes as “our safety, our tranquility, our dignity, our reputation.” Such stakes are too high not to be defended against the deceptions of flattering demagogues.

And the promise is the dignity and standing that are rightfully America’s, commensurate with its genius – a fitting prospect to be offered by one whom Walling describes as “a liberal-republican Founder of the American nation-state, or as he often preferred to say, empire.”

V

Just as the representation of America was central to the Federalist critique of the Anti-Federalists’ arguments, so, too, was it central to the Anti-Federalists’ critique of the Federalists. The Anti-Federalist case for the danger that a large and consolidated federal government poses to liberty is well known; as such, I will review it only in brief. In reviewing it,

76 Ibid., 148.  77 Ibid., 325.  78 Ibid., 70.
though, I want to focus on a cluster of terms that emerge as the Anti-Federalists describe the Federalists’ goals and, at times, the Federalists themselves: pomp, splendor, dazzle, glory, greatness, grandeur, magnificence, and power. These are terms that had very particular connotations rooted in the traditions of American political thought, and ultimately in English political thought, which linked them to monarchy. They were especially resonant in the American states given the common strains of a republican discourse emphasizing simplicity, austerity, and industry or, in a word, virtue.

To give some sense of these terms’ connotations, we may turn briefly to Joseph Addison’s 1712 play *Cato: A Tragedy*, a work that was immensely popular in both England and the colonies. Addison characterizes Caesar, either the man or his deeds, with terms such as “pomp,” “great,” “active,” “success,” “fortune,” “bold,” and “ambition.” Caesar is a man whose luster and success leaves spectators “dazzled.” Cato, by contrast, is characterized by “abstinence, and toil, Laborious virtues all,” virtues set against “pomps and pleasures” as Cato’s “rigid virtue will accept of none.” Caesar, unsurprisingly, embodies monarchical qualities, while the virtuous Cato embodies republican virtue.

Just such a dichotomy is evident when we turn to the Anti-Federalists. The Federal Farmer remarks, in the context of discussing the relationship between the states and the federal government, “The splendor of the monarch, and the power of the government, are one thing. The happiness of the subject depends on very different causes: but it is to the latter, that the best men, the greatest ornaments of human nature, have most carefully attended: it is to the former tyrants and oppressors have always aimed.” The Federal Farmer here draws a key distinction between splendor and power, words with a monarchical connotation, on the one hand, and happiness, on the other, likening the Federalists’ plan to a decidedly non-republican political discourse.

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83 Ibid., 42, 19.
“Brutus” likewise draws a distinction between the well-being of citizens and the power and standing of the state, power and standing that are both alluring and that entail pomp and greatness. He writes, “The preservation of internal peace and good order, and the due administration of law and justice, ought to be the first care of every government. The happiness of a people depends infinitely more on this than it does upon all that glory and respect which nations acquire by the most brilliant martial achievements.”

A focus on “arms” and “war” is, for Brutus, characteristic of “European governments” – they are “their chief glory.” America, by contrast, “ought to furnish the world with an example of a great people, who in their civil institutions hold chiefly in view, the attainment of virtue, and happiness among ourselves.” Urging his fellow-citizens to allow Europe’s “monarchs” to pursue “glory” through arms, he declares that their focus should be on “the proper direction of [their] internal policy, and œconomy,” each of which, in turn, is the proper domain of the different state governments. The key to a strong defense is “the happiness and good order the people experience from a wise and prudent administration of their internal government.” Brutus, too, remarks upon the dangerous effects of “the passion for pomp, power, and greatness,” and the “allurements of power and greatness” that had nearly brought about a coup in America, a coup that was checked only because America “had at the head of the army, a patriot as well as a general.”

“Agrippa” displays a similar set of concerns. His claim that a large republic is inviable is familiar:

It is the opinion of the ablest writers on the subject, that no extensive empire can be governed upon republican principles, and that such a government will degenerate to a despotism, unless it be made up of a confederacy of smaller states, each having the full powers of internal regulation.

Quickly, though, he connects empire to deceptive appearances. Empires “may indeed dazzle the eyes of a distant spectator with their splendour,” but he asserts that “if examined more nearly are always found to be full of misery.”

The use of the term “dazzle” is striking. We may recall

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86 It is worth noting that Caesar, in Cato: A Tragedy, is depicted as especially successful and energetic in war: “thou know’st not Caesar’s active soul, With what a dreadful course he rushes on From war to war … He bound o’er all, victorious in his march.” Addison, Cato: A Tragedy and Selected Essays, 15.
87 Brutus, The Letters of “Brutus,” 482, 484, 413.
88 Agrippa, Agrippa IV.
Addison’s use of the term in describing Caesar: just as the splendor and glory of Caesar dazzled deceptively, so, too, does the splendor and glory of empire.

The best-known critic of the federal model, from the perspective of empire and its dangers, is Patrick Henry. With a style that Stout describes as reminiscent of eighteenth-century “revivalists in style and impact,” Henry sharply delineates empire and liberty, and again connects the Federalists’ endeavor to grandeur, splendor, and deception. Henry puts the matter thus, in considering “a revolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain.” He urges, “You are not to inquire how your trade may be increased, nor how you are to become a great and powerful people, but how your liberties can be secured; for liberty ought to be the direct end of your Government.” Such a revolution echoes those of “ancient Greece and ancient Rome,” cases of “the people loosing losing their liberty by their own carelessness and the ambition of a few.” In losing their liberty, these peoples pursued objects whose glittering appearances deceived them about their real costs. Henry continues, “And those nations who have gone in search of grandeur, power and splendor, have also fallen a sacrifice, and been the victims of their own folly: While they acquired those visionary blessings, they lost their freedom.” The American people, in pursuing what Henry sees as a grandiose Federalist vision, will have lost its identity and its innocence. Engaging directly with the view “that we are a contemptible people,” Henry notes that it was not always so, and asks why this is the case, answering, “The American spirit has fled from hence . . . It has gone to the people of France in search of a splendid government – a strong energetic government.  

Splendor, wealth, glory: these are dazzling qualities, to be sure, reminiscent of monarchical power, but they are also deceptive in their brilliance, a false luster that conceals their true cost.

VI

Like the Federalists, the Anti-Federalists also levied the charge of flattery – that is, seductive, charming, and dishonest speech designed through the use of pleasure to dupe its audience – against their opponents. The charge rests, I suggest, on their representation of America, and their insinuation

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of Federalist misrepresentation. The Anti-Federalists describe a present state of liberty to become a future state of despotism, on the one hand, and the Federalists describe a present state of weakness and disunity to become a future state of strength, standing, safety, and liberty, on the other hand. The Anti-Federalists, though, suggest that there is something foreign and un-American about the Federalist enterprise, a grasping not just for America’s place among the nations, but a desire to make America like other nations in just the sort of ways that would make it lose its distinctive identity. We have already encountered this tactic in Henry, but other Anti-Federalists make use of it as well. Mercy Otis Warren, for example, describes a foolish emulation of Europe in America’s pursuit of strength and power. Warren argues that Americans are faced with a choice between “the independent feelings of ancient republics, whose prime object was the welfare and happiness of their country,” and “the imitation of European systems in politics and manners.” The temptation to imitate the European powers is, perhaps, understandable, given “the factitious appearances of grandeur and wealth” that beckon. This appearance, though, is but an illusion, “a mist ascending from the pit of avarice,” distant from and alien to “that rich inheritance which they [the Americans] so bravely defended.”

Warren, too, notes that those in favor of altering the articles were, in part, “men who wished for a more strong and splendid government.”

Agrippa likewise connects the Federalist vision to something foreign. He suggests that having elected officials at the federal level with “a right to sit six, or even two, years with such extensive powers as the new system proposes” will create officials who are worthwhile for foreign powers to bribe, adding, “This is the only sense in which the Philadelphia system will render us more respectable in the eyes of foreigners.”

In Agrippa’s view, the Federalists argue that America should “be like other nations,” and he notes that many of the Federalists rather admire other nations, caustically remarking that “we shall find some of their leaders to have formed pretty strong attachments to foreign nations.” The Federalists, entranced by foreign ways, are incapable “of that generous system of policy which is founded in the affections of freemen.” Indeed, Agrippa

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argues in biblically resonant language, “Power and high life are their idols, and national funds are necessary to support them.”

Patrick Henry also echoes Scripture in his allusion to the Federalist desire to imitate other nations, suggesting that the Federalists wish to make America a less distinctive nation. “Shall we,” he asks, “imitate the example of those nations who have gone from a simple to a splendid Government. Are those nations more worthy of our imitation? What can make an adequate satisfaction to them for the loss they suffered in attaining such a Government for the loss of their liberty?” The government under debate, a government that would bring about “a great and mighty empire,” would indeed be “a great and splendid one.” But Henry argues that greatness and splendor were not the objects of “the American spirit” in the past, which instead had sought “Liberty.”

Just as Great Britain is made great “because liberty is its direct end and foundation,” so too has America “triumphed over every difficulty” because of its spirit of liberty. Should the states choose to become “a powerful and mighty empire,” or “one great consolidated empire of America,” they will have chosen a form of rule that “is incompatible with the genius of republicanism.” American “happiness” and “secure liberty” will not arise as a result of America being “feared by foreigners,” or by making “nations tremble.” Instead, happiness and liberty are connected to American difference and distinction.

Would the Americans, like the Israelites, become a nation like others, tempted by the Federalists to imitate other nations in their power and splendor, tormented by their sense of their own weakness? Melancton Smith invoked just such a possibility in his June 20, 1788, speech to the New York Ratifying Convention, specifically invoking Samuel, as Paine did just twelve years earlier:

This fickle and inconstant spirit was the more dangerous in bringing about changes in the government … The nation of Israel having received a form of civil government from Heaven, enjoyed it for a considerable period; but at length laboring under pressures, which were brought upon them by their own misconduct and imprudence, instead of imputing their misfortunes to their true causes, and making a proper improvement of their calamities, by a correction of their

92 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
errors, they imputed them to a defect in their constitution; they rejected their Divine Ruler, and asked Samuel to make them a King to judge them.95

Like the Israelites before them, the Americans were misjudging both the causes and nature of their own suffering and its remedies, along with the remedies’ costs. More ominous, perhaps, is Smith’s invocation of Samuel’s warning to the people of Israel, a warning that emphasizes that they have chosen to be like other nations, the sin of the people of Israel in Paine’s Common Sense.

The Americans faced a choice not only about the Constitution, but about their very existence as a distinct people. We may turn back to 1 Samuel, with which we began through Paine’s invocation of the text, to explore this point. When the Israelites’ elders first ask Samuel for a king at 1 Samuel 8:5, they put their demand thus: “Look, you yourself have grown old and your sons have not gone in your ways. So now, set over us a king to rule us, like all the nations.”96 After Samuel warns them, at God’s behest, of what monarchy entails, the people spoke again, “No! A king there shall be over us! And we, too, will be like all the nations and our king shall rule us and sally forth before us and fight our battles.”97 Their initial demand for a king was couched in the language of legitimacy and imitation, as Samuel’s sons were not adhering to his ways. The second demand for a king was framed not just in the language of imitation, but also in the language of security: the people of Israel wanted a leader in war who will unite them in battle. The ensuing monarchy – first the rule of Saul, then David, and finally Solomon – brought about a transformation in the regime of the Israelites. Yet by the reign of Solomon, the Israelites found themselves “secure” and at “peace.”98 The kingdom’s size was substantial, spanning “from the River to the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt,” as was its tribute and Solomon’s consumption of resources. Solomon himself oversaw a large and powerful army – “forty thousand horse stalls for his chariots and twelve thousand horsemen.”99 Israel had indeed taken a place of power and respect among nations, winning the military prestige it had sought, but it had also become like other nations, and hence it had lost its distinctive character.

97 Ibid., 280. 98 Ibid., 626. 99 Ibid., 626.
In this regard, the Anti-Federalists can be said to have seen the American people as a chosen people faced with a choice between glory, strength, and esteem in the eyes of other nations, on the one hand, and their distinctive and free identity, on the other. The Federalists, by contrast, can be said to have seen the American people faced with a choice between glory, strength, and esteem, on the one hand, and weakness and disunity, on the other. This weakness and disunity was the direct result of the Articles of Confederation, for the Federalists. One is reminded here of Aristotle’s suggestion in the *Rhetoric*: “whenever you want to praise anyone, think what you would urge people to do; and when you want to urge the doing of anything, think what you would praise a man for having done.” The Federalists provide an image of a praiseworthy people, an image toward which the Americans can aspire, while the Anti-Federalists provide an image of a praiseworthy people that will be lost should the Americans take the Federalists’ advice.

Tempting as it may be, it would be too simple to leave things there, with the Federalists having flattered the people into accepting *their* representation as opposed to that of the Anti-Federalists. After all, one can hardly tend a garden without intending its health and well-being, just as one can hardly tend to liberty without intending its security. The liberty and virtue that Anti-Federalists valued were to be protected by the Federalist goal of a strong union, just as the strong union would be protected by liberty and virtue. To give but one example: Paine, a democrat and “tender” in Wolin’s schema, was also a proponent of a strong navy in *Common Sense*, embodying intending tendencies. The energies and ambitions of the Federalists are, I would suggest, not alien to the Anti-Federalist understanding of the very features that made America unlike other nations, just as the visions of tending and intending are more mutually constitutive than opposed.

I close by returning to Addison’s *Cato: A Tragedy*, and to a central tension within the play. As opposed as Cato and Caesar are throughout

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100 For a summary statement of this Federalist theme, see Riker, *The Strategy of Rhetoric*, 113.
102 I am indebted to Jane Calvert for this point, and for having made it in the course of generously reading over an early version of this chapter.
the play, Caesar’s energetic ambition represents a central tension in the Roman imperial project that Cato himself endorses. The tension is the following: the pursuit of empire and the glory of Rome bring glory to the individual who defends and extends Rome’s empire, and the individual virtue that is a chief manifestation of Roman liberty is also the engine of Rome’s imperial growth. Cato’s endorsement is, to be sure, highly moralized and moralistic; as he remarks after his son Marcus’ corpse is brought in to be met by the mourning of Lucius and Juba,

Why mourn you thus? let not a private loss
Afflict your hearts. ’Tis Rome requires our tears,
The Mistress of the world, the seat of empire,
The nurse of heroes, the delight of gods,
That humbled the proud tyrants of the earth,
And set the nations free, Rome is no more.
Oh liberty! Oh virtue! Oh my country!

Rome’s imperial status is, for Cato, a good thing, and Rome possesses a distinctive imperial mission, a mission that is highly moralized, if not providential.

This language of Rome’s place in the world echoes Anchises’ words to Aeneas in Book VI of the *Aeneid*, words that are similarly moralistic and reflective of a sense of mission:

Roman, remember by your strength to rule
Earth’s peoples – for your arts are to be these:
To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.103

Rome’s exceptional mission to pacify, to spread law, and to humble the proud, is intimately connected by its “strength” to its place in history as a ruler. Whether in the words of Anchises or in Cato’s lament, Rome and its empire are a force for good, ensuring liberty as they displaced tyranny abroad.104

Yet maintaining firm boundaries between public and private, or individual and collective, in such a system was no easy task. Caesar’s longing for greatness and the “popular humanity” that Cato describes as a sort of “treason” subverted and corrupted the empire of liberty that had been

built by prior generations of Romans. At the same time, Caesar also fulfilled the logic of Roman imperialism. In his Civil War, Caesar claims in his own voice that his goals in waging civil war were the protection of his dignity and “to assert the freedom of himself and the Roman people who had been oppressed by a small faction.” Caesar had won his dignity in battle, and his dignity and liberty, entwined with that of the people writ large, were imperiled in his narrative by Caesar’s senatorial opponents. The freedom of the individual and the group, embodied in and protected by the power of the imperial Roman republic, can easily be subverted by the individual’s pursuit of power and dignity. In essence, Rome’s special status and qualities relied on mechanisms that could undermine what made it special in the first place.

The very liberty and virtues that the Anti-Federalists praise could produce the power and status that they feared, while this power and status could, in turn, protect the liberty and virtues they so deeply valued. We can imagine a form of community that is constituted by the incorporation of seemingly opposite claims, in other words. In this sense, both sides of the ratification debate appeal, I suggest, to what Benedict Anderson terms an “imagined community”; both sides are, in effect, imagining the community before and around them, persuading the American people (an imagined community itself) to imagine it as they do, and thus to choose to move in one direction or another. Anderson famously describes nations as “cultural artefacts of a particular kind,” defining the nation itself as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” From the perspective of the Anti-Federalists, the choice was analogous to that faced by the ancient Israelites – whether to be like the other nations, and to commit an act of impiety, or whether to be unlike them, and maintain their identity. For the Federalists, the choice was whether to be a people at all – and a people with standing – or to be weak and servile. If the Anti-Federalists could be said to echo Cato and look with regret to 1 Samuel, the Federalists could be said not only to seek their place among other nations, but also to be like them. Yet this is to ignore part of what makes the Federalist vision so appealing, and perhaps even flattering: America could be like the other nations – and have its rightful place among them – while at the same time

Addison, Cato: A Tragedy and Selected Essays, 81.
Anderson, Imagined Communities, 4, 6, 7.
remaining distinct. The Americans were, after all, already one people possessing great virtues; in the language of Hamilton and Jay, they simply needed to assert with strength the dignity that had been denied them. It is, then, no wonder that the Anti-Federalists viewed their opponents as engaging in a kind of flattery; in intending American preeminence on the world’s stage, the Federalists brought about, in their view, America’s loss of its special quality – its status as a “chosen people”– just as they cultivated a secularized sense of America’s mission. Yet in intending greatness, they also tended to America’s distinctive qualities. It is no wonder, perhaps, that the Federalists won the day. ¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

I began this book by arguing, first, that flattery was an important concern in the history of political thought and that most accounts of flattery have treated it as a moral vice and as producing political and morals harms. I suggested that flattery is a more complex phenomenon than straightforward moralistic accounts would have it, honing in on flattery as a strategy deployed by socially and politically marginalized figures and groups to achieve a range of aims. My particular interest in flattery as a strategy, or “weapon of the weak,” had to do with my skepticism about whether the flatterer’s intentions could be known with any precision, along with the relationship between the interpretation of the flatterer’s acts and the status of the observer. Beyond these conceptual matters, I suggested that even if flattery has receded as a focus of political theory scholarship, it is important not just on historical grounds, but also because of its relationship to inquiries into republicanism, representation, and deliberative democracy.

In the first substantive chapter of the book, Chapter 1, “‘Suffer No Man to Be King’: Friendship, Liberty, and Status in Roman Political Thought,” I argued, through a comparative study of Cicero (On Friendship, For Marcellus, On the Commonwealth, Tusculan Disputations, and On Duties) and Pliny (Panegyric) that the Roman Republican discourse of flattery and friendship paved the way for the ideological grounding of the Principate’s legitimacy. By highlighting a model of friendship between unequals predicated on the virtue of the superior and the acquiescence of the inferior, Cicero laid the foundation for the full-fledged legitimating ideology we encountered in Pliny. Whether either Cicero or Pliny was sincere in his performance (a sincerity I doubt in the case of Cicero, and
do not doubt with Pliny), their speeches amounted to their performance of a public transcript that displayed and enacted an idealized account of the relationship between rulers and ruled. To be a legitimate ruler was to be a friend; to be the sort of ruler one would be constrained to flatter was to fall short of the ideal; and to be the sort of ruler who was flattered, rather than praised, meant one was not a particularly good ruler at all.

Chapter 2, “Without ‘Superfluous Ornament’: Castiglione, Machiavelli, and the Performance of Counsel,” centered on a comparison of Machiavelli’s *Prince* and Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*. While the prior chapter focused on status, this chapter focused on style, and especially the role of ornament in the courtly arts. Behind this comparison was the concern, on the part of both writers, to understand and prevent the political harms of flattery, harms that were quite likely to redound to princes. Also behind this comparison were classical Roman rhetorical texts that dealt with style and ornament. Whereas Castiglione’s courtier deployed a richly ornamented style of address (and performance more broadly) in his efforts to captivate the heart of the prince so that he might instruct him, Machiavelli’s tactic was very different. In effect, Machiavelli instructed to captivate, eager to display his learning that would captivate the prince. Whereas Castiglione’s courtier made use of something akin to the grand style, Machiavelli recommends the plain style. This unornamented form of speech, in turn, embodied the advice that Machiavelli gives on giving advice in the *Discourses*: effective advice should seem not to be advice at all. And the best way to give effective advice without appealing to flattery is not to make oneself lovely, but to speak plainly and with moderation.

Focusing on Hobbes in Chapter 3, “The Monarch’s Plague’: The Problem of Flattery and Hobbes’ Contingently Unitary Sovereign,” I argued that, faced with worries about monarchy both as an institution and with respect to particular monarchs that centered on flattery, Hobbes developed a clever defense of monarchy. Granting the arguments of those who opposed Charles I or monarchy writ large, Hobbes argued that their worries were even more troubling for non-monarchies. In effect, Hobbes’ defense of monarchy centered on the unity between the artificial person of the sovereign representative and the natural person of the sovereign representative. This contingent unity, I suggested, allowed him to grant the dangers of flattery and to defend monarchy without relying on more familiar defenses of sole rule that relied on virtue. Hobbes’ emphasis on unity, moreover, is echoed by his account of effective deliberation. I made this argument about Hobbes largely, but not exclusively, through *Leviathan*,


while engaging a range of his contemporaries or near contemporaries: Jonson, Shakespeare, James I, Milton, and Sydney. I concluded this chapter by comparing the two different versions of the *Discourse against Flattery*, the first published in 1611, the second in 1620, with the latter showing a markedly Hobbesian shift toward minimizing the danger flattery posed to monarchies.

**Chapter 4**, “‘The Bewitching Engine’: Mandeville and Smith on Flattery, Praise, and the Origins of Language,” developed an argument built on a comparison of Mandeville – especially the *Enquiry into the Origins of Moral Virtue* and *Fable of the Bees, Part II* – with Smith – especially *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* and *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Beginning with a reconstruction of flattery’s role in Mandeville’s theory, I highlighted the unsympathetic foundations of his social and language theories, showing that Mandeville both instrumentalizes and demoralizes flattery while celebrating its role in the formation of prosperous societies. I then turned to Smith, suggesting that his theories of the formation of language and rhetoric were premised upon both the sympathy and sociability that Mandeville denies, holding that Smith’s account of praise and praiseworthiness allows him to reject both Mandeville’s understanding of flattery and to remoralize it. This remoralization, I noted by way of conclusion, took place within the context of human sociability and the confines of human society itself, marking Smith’s theory as what Williams termed “political realism.”

**Chapter 5**, “‘Flattering to Young Ambitious Minds’: Representing America in the Ratification Debates,” centered on a comparative reading of a range of Anti-Federalist writings and several of the *Federalist* papers authored by Publius. While I was interested in, and spent some time discussing, their respective uses of the term “flattery” to characterize their opponents, I was more concerned with exploring the way in which they described their own and their opponents’ visions of what America might be as a result of ratification. Like the ancient Israelites of *First Samuel*, the Anti-Federalists presented – or rather, re-presented – the American people with a choice about who they would be: a free people distinct from all other nations or an imperial people like other nations, and like them in just the sort of ways that the Americans had sought to reject through its war of independence. At stake, then, was not simply whether the Constitution would be ratified, but what sort of people the Americans were and what sort of exceptional people they might be in the future.

As I noted in the **Introduction**, this book deals with a theme that is of importance to the history of political thought and, I hope to have shown,
contemporary political theory: flattery. I have tried to make this case by exploring figures and periods drawn from a wide range of the history of political thought, and have done so with a close eye to contemporary debates. I have not sought in this book, as I noted, to develop an overarching historical narrative, but the chapters are thematically connected and each deals with the topic of flattery in light of a set of theoretical concerns. Chapter 1 focused on social relations, and the connection between flattery and the discourse of flattery to equality, inequality, and legitimacy; Chapter 2 turned to flattery’s connection to the style of discourse and political counsel. Chapter 3 explored the connection between flattery and its corruptive effects and various forms of political authority, while Chapter 4 addressed flattery’s relationship to theories of language and identity formation, along with moral psychology. Chapter 5 had a twofold focus: accusations of flattery as a tactic in polemic, and flattery’s connection to feelings of humiliation and resentment. Each of these theoretical concerns is, I suggest, of import not just to scholars of the history of political thought, but to political scientists in general.

Over the course of the book, I have developed a number of interpretive arguments focused largely on comparative readings of texts, some of which are canonic works of political thought (e.g., Machiavelli’s *Prince* or Hobbes’ *Leviathan*), some of which are widely known if not canonic (e.g., Cicero’s *On Friendship* or Mandeville’s *Enquiry into the Origins of Moral Virtue*), and some of which do not conform to narrow generic standards of what constitutes political thought (e.g., Pliny’s *Panegyric* or Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*). I hope, in doing so, that my choice of these texts – partly because of their similarity (linguistic, chronological, or conceptual), and partly because they were written at moments in which pressing political questions revolved around or could be explored by the theme of flattery – will not have been without justification.

I should note here that I have often been concerned in this book with writers who were approaching the phenomenon of flattery from a non-ideal perspective. In using the term, I do not have in mind Mills’ critical account of ideal theory as ideology, but rather what Levy has recently discussed. As he puts it, “political life is about friction” – the friction of injustice, and thus “no friction, no politics or justice.” Our institutions and the “social facts” in which they – and we – are embedded and which

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condition them remind us, when encountering the place of flattery in
the history of political thought, of the importance of the non-ideal.
Dependence, inequality, hierarchy: these are social facts that the thinkers
I’ve discussed are often grappling with in thinking about flattery and its
place in political life. And we should approach moralistic accounts of
flattery, viewing it as a matter of vicious motivation, with some skepti-
cism, as they will often be unsympathetic to those who are at the lower
end of scales of inequality, who find themselves in situations of depend-
ence, or who are at the bottom of social and political hierarchies.

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When I first started to write this book, Donald Trump was the host of “The
Apprentice.” As I began to write this conclusion, he was the Republican
nominee for president, and had a 24.3 percent chance of winning office,
according to FiveThirtyEight.com. Needless to say, I did not think that
a Trump candidacy would be the focal point of American politics as
I finished the book. Though in more than one way his candidacy is a timely,
if not entirely comforting, development; a figure like Trump would seem to
make a study of flattery especially relevant. That said, between the time in
which I was completing the manuscript, sending it in for review, and finally
hearing back from the Press, Trump had been elected. I faced a choice, then:
I could revise the book’s conclusion in light of his election and subsequent
developments, or I could keep it more or less as it was when I originally
wrote it, in the fall of 2016. I chose not to rewrite these reflections in light of
the election, in part because each day brings with it some new development
that might be discussed from the perspective of demagoguery, manipula-
tion, and flattery, which would simply make it impossible to complete the
book. But I also chose to do so because I wanted my perspective on Trump
to be reflective of my thinking in the fall of 2016, when I was thinking about
him in light of the argument of Chapter 5 of this book. At that moment,
I was more interested in his campaign rhetoric and his slogans than what
he would do if he was elected, or how he would be treated by subordinates.4
I’ll say more about that in a bit.

4 I can’t resist, though, noting just one development that has occurred just before I sent the
full manuscript in, which is the rather odd spectacle of Trump’s first full cabinet meeting,
which took place on June 12, 2017. The public portion of the meeting included a collective
round of praise for the president by his cabinet, an exercise that was strikingly reminiscent
of The Emperor’s New Clothing. www.cnn.com/2017/06/12/politics/trump-cabinet-
ranked/index.html.
But first, I’d like to step back. If it wasn’t a Trump candidacy that brought me to an interest in flattery, what was it? It was Barack Obama’s campaign for president in 2008, along with a New Yorker profile of Cory Booker from February 2008. In his race against then-Senator Obama, John McCain ran a web ad targeting him, titled “The One.” The ad mocked Obama’s rhetorical prowess, with a suitably gravel-voiced narrator stating, “And he has anointed himself. Ready to carry the burden of The One. He can do no wrong. Can you see the light?” The ad even features Charlton Heston parting the Red Sea, and concludes with the narrator, his voice “heavy, black, and pendulous,” saying “Barack Obama may be the one. But is he ready to lead?”

I recall finding it an odd attack. Certainly, I understood that it was supposed to be humorous, but I found myself asking: why should Obama’s rhetorical ability have been something to attack? To be sure, the content of his rhetoric was at issue as well – contained in the ad was a video clip of him saying that voters would see the light and vote for him, a phrase that would have been a tad much for many. Content aside, though, as someone who was interested in rhetoric and the rhetorical tradition, and who even then found Obama’s rhetorical abilities to be vastly superior to those of his predecessor, I was puzzled. Yet I quickly came to the conclusion that his rhetorical abilities were an object of concern because they could seem insincere, or excessively polished, or even manipulative, in their performance. (This attack surely had no small connection to Obama’s race.)

Now, the New Yorker profile: titled “The Color of Politics: A Mayor of the Post-Racial Generation,” the piece traced, in part, Mayor Cory Booker’s political development, along with the role played by Carl Sharif, “a near-mystical figure in the political world of Newark.” In describing the rhetorical challenges that Booker, outsider and newcomer, faced as mayor, Sharif put things quite neatly:

There are certain messages that the community has to have. Certain things you have to say, whether people want to hear them or not. But, you see, if you offend

6 The phrase “heavy, black, and pendulous” is borrowed from The Rocky Horror Picture Show, whose self-aware camp is the perfect antidote to the ugly kitsch of campaign advertising. Say what you will about Rocky Horror’s production values, but at least it has a sense of irony.
people, if you offend their sensibilities, they won’t vote for you. So you can’t say to
people, “Look, my sanitation department is not throwing trash on the ground.
You are! The community. You’re throwing trash on the ground. Stop throwing
crap out of your cars, put your garbage in your garbage cans. Stop walking down
the street, unwrapping wrappers and just dropping stuff on the ground, and then
calling City Hall and complaining about it. Clean up!”

City Hall was not omnipotent, and neither was Booker; this goes without saying. And yet they were being blamed for things that they could not entirely control, and they were unable to protest popular discontent with the truth. It was as if I was seeing in twenty-first-century America the very dilemmas of rhetoric captured by Plato in the *Gorgias*, the need to speak truly if we are to benefit those we are speaking to, on the one hand, and the difficulty of doing so when one depends on their approval, on the other.

Inspired by the 2008 presidential campaign and Booker’s profile, then, I envisioned writing a book that would vindicate rhetoric against Platonic worries, one that would focus on the issue of flattery and, in the process, show that flattery isn’t all that bad. To some extent, that is what I’ve done, or at least what I flatter myself to have done. Admittedly, I wound up writing vastly less about Plato (or Aristotle) than I initially expected, and much more about figures such as Mandeville, Smith, or sundry late eighteenth-century Americans than I thought I might have before beginning the project. And while I didn’t quite argue that flattery is not bad, per se, I found myself coming to a much more nuanced understanding of it than I began with – an understanding rooted in what I came to see as an unnuanced reading of Plato after reading Christina Tarnopolsky’s excellent book, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*.

Nor did I always wind up arguing what I expected to be arguing. I found the place of flattery in Cicero and Pliny to be less straightforwardly an indictment of the shift from plural to monarchical rule, given my initial suspicions and my prior work on Tacitus notwithstanding, than a ritualized expression of elite anxiety and self-assertion. The theme of flattery as a weapon of the weak, suggested by James Scott (and my colleague Jimmy Casas Klausen), led me to see in Machiavelli and Castiglione a form of rhetoric less morally worrisome, per se, than politically necessary and potentially subversive. The flattery “demoralized” by Machiavelli would remain such in Hobbes and Mandeville, with Hobbes

* Ibid. 
turning to institutions and eschewing virtue in meeting the challenge of flattery, while Mandeville positively exults in flattery and its place in his distinctive social and political theory.

I confess that I initially found, and in cynical moments still do find, Mandeville’s argument to be plausible; as a father of a four-year-old child, I flatter myself that part of my (highly limited) success as a parent comes from the judicious use of flattery with my son. But Mandeville’s account falls short, in my view, precisely because his use of the word “flattery” is so odd — it’s not as if I, in praising my son for blowing bubbles (which I, who used to be on the swim team, can blow in both a bigger form and more loudly) am praising him for doing something that he would not do if he knew more information, or had gotten over a very reasonable fear of putting his face in water. If anything, an older version of my son would likely be puzzled by his current fear of the swimming pool, and thank me (I hope) for making him do parent-assisted lessons with me at the YMCA, cold water and wet ears aside. I am neither Aesop’s fox nor Andersen’s courtiers when I praise him, or so I think, and even though blowing bubbles may not be a big deal in the cosmic sense, it certainly was for a three-year-old. Smith has the edge on Mandeville, in the end, because he distinguishes between the desire for praise and the desire to be praise-worthy: one of the most beautiful experiences of being a parent is seeing that my son wants to be praise-worthy, and actually wants to embody the qualities that we (my wife and I) value. I can only hope that the older version of him will value them as well, and see me as embodying some of them, too.

My exploration of American political thought — limited, as it is, to a selection of Anti-Federalist writings and the writings of the New York Federalists Hamilton, Jay, and Madison — took me longer to write than any other chapter. And when I started writing it just over a year ago, a little over a month after Trump declared his candidacy for president, I didn’t think much of the coincidence. (At the time, I certainly didn’t think he would be the nominee.) I simply plowed forward, reading and rereading the *Federalist Papers*, *Cato: A Tragedy*, *Brutus*, and an array of other Anti-Federalist writings. It wasn’t until I was done with the chapter, though, that I quite saw any connection between that chapter and the Trump campaign, and I saw it most clearly as the result of a comment made by a colleague after he read the chapter: “Hamilton flatters us about how powerful we will be, while the Anti-Federalists flatter us about how unique we could be. Kind of sounded like someone flattering us about how we can Make American Great Again.”
I do not take a stand on whether I think either the Federalists or the Anti-Federalists were, in fact, engaged in flattery, even if I try to show that some of their claims were more aspirational than descriptive, how their respective visions could be seen as flattering, and the ideological significance of their mutual accusations of flattery. Simply put, without knowing the intentions of the writers, one would have a tough time saying that they were in fact engaged in flattery—and, in any event, a case could easily be made that going the route of the Federalists has turned out well, just as one could easily make the case that it has not gone well in some of the ways the Anti-Federalists anticipated.

If, though, we grant that the Hamiltonian vision of American greatness and liberty really is flattering, we would do well to keep in mind that if it was persuasive in either Hamilton’s version or that of other advocates of the Federal Constitution, it must have been appealing to their audience. And the appeals to America’s wounded pride and resentment of Britain, be they Hamilton’s or Jay’s, must have resonated among at least some of their audience, with their vision of America, whether as a prospect or reality, salving the wound.

That point about America’s wounded pride and the appeal of greatness brings me back to Trump, whose slogan, after all, is “Make America Great Again.” His message, emphasizing economic anxiety and a loss of national greatness, has some appeal—I’ve already noted his probability of victory via FiveThirtyEight. But the story about anxiety and a sense of humiliation is complex. A piece in The Monkey Cage suggested that rather than understand the appeal of Trump’s message as rooted primarily in economic anxiety and only secondarily in racial resentment, the opposite is true: “racial resentment is driving economic anxiety, not the other way around.” The fact that Obama is not white is quite important, in this regard: “Obama’s race is largely responsible for the association between racial resentment and economic anxiety. And this racialized political environment undoubtedly aided Donald Trump’s rise to the top of the Republican Party.” Trump’s rhetoric and message work more effectively, it seems, among those whose perceptions of the economy were negative, perceptions that were themselves shaped by “racial resentment.” Anxiety, racially inflected or otherwise, would seem

to make Trump’s supporters highly receptive to his anti-elite and populist message, a phenomenon that my colleague Katherine Cramer has brilliantly documented at the level of Wisconsin politics in *The Politics of Resentment*.\(^{10}\)

But there is another interesting feature of Trump’s campaign, from the perspective of flattery and, more broadly, of flattery’s connection to discourses of dependence and independence. Trump, at least early in his campaign, made sure to emphasize his *independence* as a candidate, evident in this Tweet:

Remember, I am self-funding my campaign, the only one in either party. I’m not controlled by lobbyists or special interests – only the U.S.A.\(^{11}\)

His independence from donors pairs with his overt disavowal of “political correctness” to produce an image of unbridled honesty:

I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct ... I’ve been challenged by so many people, and I don’t frankly have time for total political correctness. And to be honest with you, this country doesn’t have time either. This country is in big trouble. We don’t win anymore. We lose to China. We lose to Mexico both in trade and at the border. We lose to everybody.\(^{12}\)

A straight-talking businessman dependent on no one: one doesn’t need to work hard to see the rhetorical appeal, and on the face of it, it would seem to have little to do with flattery. If anything, he is the latest in a series of self-declared straight-talkers. Just such a point about his apparent honesty and independence was made in a letter to the *Wisconsin State Journal*, published on August 23, 2016. Titled “Evangelicals Should Support Trump,” the author states, “I don’t want a

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\(^{10}\) See Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). I do not know enough about eighteenth-century America to say that racial resentment, of one sort or another, would have made readers more receptive to the economic dimensions of the Federalists. However, we find evidence of racial resentments and anxieties even in the *Declaration of Independence*, where we encounter the following grievances about King George: “He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”

\(^{11}\) https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/683394224184758272?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

Washington insider most concerned with re-election and power. I want someone not beholden to anyone. This scares the establishment.”

If anything, Trump is the epitome of the “hyper sincere” politician so well described by Elizabeth Markovits in her excellent book, *The Politics of Sincerity*.

Yet speaking truly and independently need not entail hostility to “political correctness,” whatever that term may actually mean. And attacking political correctness, unpopular (and ill-defined) as it is, is just the sort of thing that would resonate with those whose economic perceptions are colored by racial anxieties – and not just those with such anxieties. In effect, he is telling a certain sort of voter what they want to hear – a phenomenon I’m inclined to describe not as flattery, but as pandering. If one is resentful about race, attacks on “political correctness” could be quite appealing. And this message is just the sort of thing that would not resonate with those whose perceptions are not similarly colored.

Is the phenomenon I’ve just described flattery? Trump, like all politicians, likely engages in flattery, deploying false praise to get listeners to support him. He has said so much, so many times, throughout his campaign that he must have flattered his audience at one rally or another. The campaign slogan “Make America Great Again!” is flattering, to be sure: who wouldn’t want to be great? Appeals to lost greatness, to what we might be with strength: it is a flattering prospect that recalls what we encountered in discussing the Federalists. And if we need to be made great again, we aren’t great now (like the humiliated states of the Articles of Confederation), which is assuredly hard on the pride. I do, however, think he is a demagogue, in just the way that Roberts-Miller describes the term:

demagoguery is polarizing propaganda that motivates members of an ingroup to hate and scapegoat some outgroup(s), largely by promising certainty, stability, and what Erich Fromm famously called “an escape from freedom.”

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14 The OED is helpful here: the verb *pander*, from the noun *pander* (“a go-between in clandestine amours; one who supplies another with the means of gratifying lust; a male bawd, pimp, or procurer”) means “to minister to the gratification of (another’s lust),” “Pander, v.,” [www.oed.com/view/Entry/136753?rskey=AmPBCK&result=2&isAdvanced=false](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136753?rskey=AmPBCK&result=2&isAdvanced=false).

As for the outgroups, Muslims and Mexican immigrants have certainly been targets thus far. I’m inclined, though, to say that we face the same dilemma with Trump’s rhetoric that we face with any account of flattery that takes the speaker’s intentions to be important to describing the phenomenon. That is, he may well mean what he says, or believe it to be true. Whether that is a comforting thought, I leave to my readers.


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