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QUEENS COLLEGE PRESS, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11367
AN UNSPOKEN PROLOGUE TO A PUBLIC LECTURE 
AT ST. JOHN’S 
[In Honor of Jacob Klein, 1899-1978] *

The common sense of mankind has granted old men certain privileges in order to compensate them for the infirmities of old age or to make it easier for them to indulge those infirmities. Not the least of these privileges is the permission granted to old men to speak about themselves in public more freely than young men can in propriety do. I have always regarded it as both an honor and a pleasure to come to St. John’s to lecture and to meet faculty members and students. But I also had a private reason for enjoying my journeys to St. John’s. St. John’s harbors—it is a perfect harbor for—my oldest friend, Jacob Klein. Permit me to pay homage to Mr. Klein on the present occasion, the first occasion after his sixtieth birthday. What I intend to do I regard as an act of duty although of a pleasant duty. Yet however innocent our actions may be as regards their intentions, the circumstances in which they are performed may cloak these actions with an appearance of malice. In such a situation one must not be squeamish and still do one’s duty. In addition—such is the complexity of the things of the heart, even if we are virtuous men, we may derive some pleasure from the appearance of malice, provided we keep within certain bounds. In the present case the appearance of malice arises from Mr. Klein’s idiosyncratic abhorrence of publicity—of anything which even remotely reminds of the limelight. I always found that Mr. Klein went somewhat too far in this but all too justified abhorrence. When we were in our twenties we worked every day during a longish period for some hours in the Prussian State Library in Berlin and we relaxed from our work in a coffee house close by the Library. There we sat together for many hours with a number of other young men and talked about everything which came to our mind—mixing gravity and levity in the proportion in which youth is likely to mix them. As far as Mr. Klein was concerned, there was, I am tempted to say, only one limit: we must not appear to the public as young men cultivating their minds; let us avoid at all costs—this was his silent maxim—the appearance that we are anything other than idle and inefficient young men of business or

*The occasion for which this piece was written was the 60th birthday of Jacob Klein. The editors thought it to be a fitting tribute in his honor. —Ed.
of the lucrative professions or any other kind of drones. On such occasions I derived enjoyment from suddenly exclaiming as loudly as I could, say, "Nietzsche!" and from watching the anticipated wincing of Mr. Klein.

Nothing affected us as profoundly in the years in which our minds took their lasting directions as the thought of Heidegger. This is not the place for speaking of that thought and its effects in general. Only this much must be said: Heidegger who surpasses in speculative intelligence all his contemporaries and is at the same time intellectually the counterpart to what Hitler was politically, attempts to go a way not yet trodden by anyone or rather to think in a way in which philosophers at any rate have never thought before. Certain it is that no one has questioned the premise of philosophy as radically as Heidegger. While everyone else in the young generation who had ears to hear was either completely overwhelmed by Heidegger or else having been almost completely overwhelmed by him engaged in well-intentioned but ineffective rear-guard actions against him, Klein alone saw why Heidegger is truly important: by uprooting and not simply rejecting the tradition of philosophy, he made it possible for the first time after many centuries—one hesitates to say how many—to see the roots of the tradition as they are and thus perhaps to know, what so many merely believe, that those roots are the only natural and healthy roots. Superficially or sociologically speaking, Heidegger was the first great German philosopher who was a Catholic by origin and by training; he thus had from the outset a pre-modern familiarity with Aristotle; he thus was protected against the danger of trying to modernize Aristotle. But as a philosopher Heidegger was not a Christian: he thus was not tempted to understand Aristotle in the light of Thomas Aquinas. Above all, his intention was to uproot Aristotle: he thus was compelled to disinter the roots, to bring them to light, to look at them with wonder. Klein was the first to understand the possibility which Heidegger had opened without intending it: the possibility of a genuine return to classical philosophy, to the philosophy of Aristotle and of Plato, a return with open eyes and in full clarity about the infinite difficulties which it entails. He turned to the study of classical philosophy with a devotion and a love of toil, a penetration and an intelligence, an intellectual probity and a sobriety in which no contemporary equals him. Out of that study grew his work which bears the title "Greek Logistics and the Genesis
of Algebra." No title could be less expressive of a man's individuality and even of a man's intention; and yet if one knows Klein, the title expresses perfectly his individuality, his idiosyncracy mentioned before. The work is much more than a historical study. But even if we take it as a purely historical work, there is not, in my opinion, a contemporary work in the history of philosophy or science or in "the history of ideas" generally speaking which in intrinsic worth comes within hailing distance of it. Not indeed a proof but a sign of this is the fact that less than half a dozen people seem to have read it, if the inference from the number of references to it is valid. Any other man would justly be blamed for misanthropy, if he did not take care that such a contribution does not remain inaccessible to everyone who does not happen to come across volume III of section B of "Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik, Astronomie und Physik" and in addition does not read German with some fluency. One cannot blame Klein because he is excused by his idiosyncracy. I hope that you, faculty, and students of St. John's, do not accuse me of trespassing if I say: some man or body of men among you should have compelled Klein, if need be by starving him into submission, to close his eyes while you arrange for a decent English translation and its publication.1 The necessity for his is in no way diminished by the fact that Mr. Klein is said to prepare now a new book which may contain a very long footnote giving the first intelligent account of the Platonic dialogue and which will probably be entitled Mathematics in the Curriculum of the School of Gorgias.2 But it was not in order to make to you the foregoing suggestion that I made these prefatory remarks: I ask you to rise and join me in giving Mr. Klein an ovation.

1 An English translation of this work, prepared by Eva Brann, was published by the M.I.T. Press in 1968 under the title Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra. —Ed.

2 Klein was preparing to publish A Commentary on Plato's Meno. It was brought out in 1965 by the University of North Carolina Press. —Ed.
Caius Marcius Coriolanus has proved the most belittled of Shakespeare’s tragic creations. Shaw’s and Bradley’s disparaging appraisals of his intellect have seldom been seriously challenged, and for most readers his harshness, arrogance, and overbearing contentiousness discourage sympathy. Yet, if one seeks to understand the play that he so effectively dominates, one must try to see what may have been Shakespeare’s purpose in constructing a tragedy around this truculent, austere, and half-repellent Roman warrior. For Marcius does stand forth from the rather colorless context of his society as the one personage in Shakespeare’s version of republican Rome who possesses sufficient stature to enlist the wonder, and even in some degree the reverence, that one accords to a tragic protagonist. The nobility Coriolanus possesses may be of a narrower sort than that displayed by superabundantly reflective minds such as Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear; but his courage, energy, and, above all, his high-minded devotion to honor establish his pre-eminence over his fellow citizens. His aspirations are more high-pitched than those of his associates and his spirit more capacious. Moreover, his uncompromising pride and godlike presence point to a certain kinship with the classical ideal of the superlatively honorable man developed by Aristotle in Book IV of the Nicomachean Ethics. Coriolanus’ affinities with this ideal are so strongly marked that the play appears designed to solicit a thoughtful comparison of its protagonist with the Aristotelian standard. I suggest that such a scrutiny provides an approach to the most important issue in the drama—indeed, that when once we have grasped Coriolanus’ relation to Aristotle’s description of great-souledness we are in a position to account for the grandeur of his character as well as for his equally remarkable limitations.

The relevance of Aristotle has not gone unnoticed in recent criticism of the play. Rodney Poisson and R. W. Battenhouse have each considered the problem of Coriolanus’ resemblance to the great-souled man of the Ethics. However, although their treatments of this
question are helpfully provocative, their conclusions, I think, are incorrect. Poisson maintains that Shakespeare portrays in his protagonist an unqualified exemplar of magnanimity:

the distinguishing traits of the hero, including certain features which have seemed most objectionable or even repellent to some modern readers, do, in fact, belong to Aristotle's character of the high-minded or magnanimous man.2

On this ground Poisson seeks to justify Coriolanus' exaggerated disdain for praise, his invariable harshness in his dealings with the plebs and tribunes, his vitriolic anger, and his vengeance against his country. Poisson also finds that the hero's more attractive qualities—his courage and noble self-respect, his contempt for riches, his honesty and directness—are consistent with the Aristotelian description of magnanimity. Hence he views Coriolanus' tragedy as a dramatic rendition of the "mature irony" that "the shoddy and the second rate . . . inherit the earth precisely because the magnanimous man cannot be shifty or ruthless, and that noble anger is helpless against the calculation of the base." Similarly, Battenhouse stresses the resemblance of Coriolanus to Aristotle's great-souled man, although he contends the play develops Christian premises and is intended to demonstrate the limitations of a pagan ethic. For Battenhouse the moral norm of the play should be found in Virgilia and Cominius, who, he says, prefigure Christian virtues that stand as correctives to a predominantly pagan world Shakespeare means to criticize:

I would not claim that Shakespeare's Coriolanus has in its cast of characters any unequivocal representatives of Christian magnanimity. Virgilia and Cominius, who approximate the Christian sense of this virtue, are yet caught within a Roman ethos which defeats their better instincts . . . [Shakespeare's] historical insight permits him, however, to suggest a foreshadowing of Christian magnanimity in these best of the Romans, and to place it in contrast to two other versions of magnanimity, both classically pagan: the Roman one in Menenius and a predominantly Greek one in Coriolanus.3

Contrasting Coriolanus with the ideal of Christian nobility approached by Virgilia and Cominius, Battenhouse concludes that the pagan version of magnanimity contains fatal limitations. Ultimately, he argues that: "Coriolanus is tragic in Shakespeare's view on two
counts: by aspiring originally to a Grecian excellence, and by accommodating to a Roman one, its philosophical cousin.”

Despite their differences in evaluating the classical measure, both Poisson and Battenhouse agree that Coriolanus embodies Aristotelian magnanimity. However, I would argue to the contrary that Coriolanus’ tragedy resides precisely in his failure to encompass the elusive ideal of the Ethics. As I see it, the play does enforce the relevance of the Aristotelian measure, though not, as Battenhouse says, in order to criticize it nor, as Poisson believes, in order to show Coriolanus in admirable conformity with it. Rather, I think Shakespeare intends us to understand his protagonist as a tragically defective imitation of Aristotle’s magnanimous man. His actions quite frequently recall those ascribed to the Aristotelian model, but his character and fate suggest an imperfect, and typically Roman, misunderstanding of what it means to be great-souled.

One’s initial impression is that Shakespeare constructs the character of his protagonist in strict accord with Aristotle’s description of megalopsychia. For Coriolanus certainly behaves in the manner of Aristotle’s exemplar with respect to his response to great dangers and in his performance of heroic deeds. The philosopher remarks that the great-souled man displays his courage only when the issue is momentous:

He does not run into trifling dangers, nor is he fond of danger, because he honours few things; but he will face great dangers, and when he is in danger he is unsparing of his life, knowing that there are conditions on which life is not worth having.5

The impressive catalogue of martial exploits recited by Cominius before the Senate amply attests Coriolanus’ habitual self-expenditure in the service of heroic ambition. Furthermore, the deed for which he receives his surname must be exactly the sort of thing Aristotle has in mind in distinguishing great from trifling danger. Cut off from his comrades within the walls of a hostile town Marcius earns by his display of solitary valor the awed tribute of Titus Lartius, “A carbuncle entire, as big as thou are,/Were no so rich a jewel” (I, iv, 55-56).6 The jewel-like rarity of the exploit answers to the singularity of the hero’s courage as does the name which commemorates it. We are reminded of the name and the deed in the play’s final scene where Shakespeare departs from his Plutarchian source to
make the place of Coriolanus’ greatest triumph the setting for his death. Here in his last fatal outburst, when he speaks of fluttering the enemy “like an eagle in a dovecote,” Marcius gives witness to his belief that life is not worth preserving at the cost of dishonor.

The hero of Corioles also manifests the disdain for material possessions that Aristotle attributes to the magnanimous (1124a). In contrast to his common followers, who begin plundering before the battle has been concluded, Coriolanus is coolly indifferent to the spoils of victory even when these are offered to him as tokens of gratitude, for he “cannot make my heart consent to take/ A bribe to pay my sword” (I, ix, 38-39). In the manner of the great-souled man, he values “beautiful and profitless things rather than profitable and useful ones” (1125a). That is, Coriolanus relishes honor, most especially, the honor of a great name, more than any of the common and tangible rewards that are put in his way. His disregard of profit proceeds not from a painful effort of self-control but rather from his high-minded contempt for anything that seeks to compete with the splendor of glory. In his aloofness he displays the native liberty of mind that Aristotle associates with megalopsychia. Likewise this freedom from demeaning considerations appears in Marcius’ inveterate frankness which, again according to Aristotle, is one of the derivative qualities of the magnanimous man:

He must also be open in his hate and in his love (for to conceal one’s feelings, i.e., to care less for truth than for what people think, is a coward’s part), and must speak and act openly; for he is free of speech because he is contemptuous, and he is given to telling the truth, except when he speaks in irony to the vulgar (1124b).

If he is anything Coriolanus is prodigiously explicit in his hates and loves, excessively so his mother and friends complain, certainly too much so for his own safety, as evidenced in the expulsion and assassination scenes. But prudence is decidedly a secondary consideration for the magnanimous man who will not bridle his spiritedness simply for safety’s sake. Although his mother urges him to gloss over his hatred for the commoners when he must make a speech petitioning their favor, Coriolanus refuses:

I will not do’t
Lest I surcease to honour my own truth,
His subsequent outburst against the tribunes and populace, "The fires i'th' lowest hell fold in the people" (III, iii, 68), honors his own truth at the risk of his life. Indeed, on every occasion when one might expect him to temper true feeling with a politic tactfulness, Marcius instead allows free scope to his irrepressible frankness. He can be heedless in his utterances because, like Aristotle's magnanimous man, he is big enough to contemn calculations of personal security. Nevertheless, we shall see that Marcius cannot afford to be high-mindedly indifferent to what other men think when it is his reputation rather than merely his life which is threatened.

Aristotle says the great-souled man can be distinguished from the pusillanimous by the greatness of his claims. The former puts forward the highest claims for his virtue, whereas the poor-spirited man claims less than his due (1123b). In view of his intense consciousness of his merit, Marcius cannot be charged with pusillanimity. If one gives literal weight to Menenius' description of the regalia of state he enjoys in the Voscan camp, it appears that Coriolanus will accept even divine perquisites (V, iv, 22-25). However that may be, he aspires to the highest honor Rome can offer when he seeks to be consul in reward for his military services. Here, though, his claim obviously exceeds his merit, for if it is true, as Poisson asserts, that Coriolanus displays greatness of spirit by disdaining to beg what he thinks he deserves (II, iii, 120-121), it is also true that he gravely over-estimates his political desert. The city does not owe him the office of consul merely because he has proved a splendid soldier, but Marcius mistakenly thinks his prowess as warrior should earn him the honor of chief executive. In this overbidding of his deserts he more closely resembles another Aristotelian character opposed to both the pusillanimous and the magnanimous man. Aristotle says of this type: "On the other hand he who thinks himself worthy of great things, being unworthy of them, is vain" (1123b). The hero's pride, at first reminiscent of magnanimous integrity, begins to reveal itself as something less attractive when we see how it leads him to exaggerate his qualities and angrily to resent those who will not approve his inflated claims.

The aspect of Marcius' conduct that most immediately calls to mind the great-souled paradigm is his monolithic pursuit of distinc-
tions, and this trait is in fact the chief evidence of similarity urged by critics who see him as an exemplification of the Aristotelian model. Certainly Aristotle begins his description by observing that the magnanimous man values honor above all other external goods:

Desert is relative to external goods; and the greatest of these, we should say, is that which is the prize appointed for the noblest deeds; and this is honor; that is surely the greatest of external goods. Honor and dishonors, therefore, are the objects with respect to which the magnanimous man is as he should be. And even apart from argument it is with honor that magnanimous men appear to be concerned; for it is honor that they chiefly claim. . . (1123b).

In his obsession with honor Marcius continually exhibits a passion so intense that it crowds out all other feelings—this ambitiousness is the essence of his character. However, it is crucial to note that for Aristotle the magnanimous man's concern for honors is a relative, rather than an absolute, disposition. He values tokens of recognition more than other external goods such as wealth or power; but, finally, he does not value greatly even honor. Praise is by no means indispensable for Aristotle's great-souled ideal, "For not even towards honor does he bear himself as if it were a very great thing. . . Power and wealth are desirable for the sake of honor . . . and for him to whom even honor is a little thing the others must be so too" (1124a). The reason for the magnanimous man's contempt even of "that which we render to the gods" derives from his very essence. He is as nearly autonomous in his virtue and happiness as a human being can be. This, and not the concern for honor, is ultimately the distinguishing mark of his character. Thus, Aristotle finally locates magnanimity in the self-sufficient man who has no indispensable needs which he must depend on others to supply. Because he has no such needs, he is free, courageous, generous, and open in all his actions; and because he is independent, he can despise those things which other men need, including honor. He does not need praise because he is already supremely certain of his own worth. This confidence is in itself the unfailing source of his contentment. If it is true that he accepts praise generously, he does so in the spirit of one who rates not the gift but the kindly intent of the giver, "since they have nothing greater to bestow on him" (1124a). Similarly, he will not be greatly disturbed by imputations of dishonor "since in his case they cannot be just" (1124a). And, for the same reason, he will not be mindful of wrongs "for it is not the part of the magnanimous man to have a long memory" (1125a).
From these considerations one can see that for Aristotle *megalopsychia* is essentially an attitude, a distinct moral outlook, rather than a particular sort of action, although it is an attitude that informs all the actions of the man who displays it, even down to the stately tempo of his walking gait (1125a). This outlook might be characterized as the consciousness of great merit based on solid claims to excellence. Aristotle makes it clear that magnanimity stands as “a sort of crown of the virtues” because it rests upon the basis of “perfect virtue” (1124a). Hence we could say that magnanimity equates with the self-knowledge of the morally excellent man. The mention of perfect virtue raises further questions about the kind of excellence that might support noble self-esteem. At this point in the *Ethics* Aristotle has dealt only with the moral virtues; his formal discussion of the speculative life begins considerably later with Book VI. Therefore, it seems likely that the perfection of which he speaks has reference to the fullness of moral virtue only, rather than moral and intellectual excellence at once. *Megalopsychia* may point toward the life of philosophy as a yet higher kind of independence, for in Book X Aristotle concludes “the self-sufficiency that is spoken of as most conducive to happiness must belong most to the contemplative activity” (1177a). However, moral virtue alone would appear to suffice for at least a sort of self-sufficiency, and therefore one should not simply identify the magnanimous man with the philosopher. From his discussion in Book IV it is obvious that Aristotle has in mind a moral type which, though rare, is not so singularly rare as the man who devotes himself unreservedly to an all-consuming pursuit of wisdom.7

Although the great-souled man need not possess pre-eminent wisdom, it would appear he must be at least basically just if perfect virtue refers, as I suppose it does, to the entire moral range. He is certainly just in his estimate of his deserts since this, according to Aristotle, is the first criterion of magnanimity. Moreover, his claims to the greatest rewards could hardly be warranted were he himself habitually unjust. Presumably, justice in this instance depends more on a sort of connatural moral taste than upon speculative wisdom.

However, the fact that Aristotle discusses magnanimity prior to his formally comprehensive treatment of justice in Book V may indicate that he does not consider the great-souled character to be just in the fullest possible sense. For to be so one would assume he must possess a high degree of intellectual ability. Complete justice
would require the profound discrimination necessary for understanding what is just in terms of equity beyond or beneath questions of mere legality; or, put in another way, the perfectly just man would need to comprehend what is right by nature as distinguished from what may be held right by convention. The discussion of justice in Book V appears to provide an introduction for a new beginning developing a complete reconsideration of virtue. One might say that from this point onward Aristotle conducts his inquiry from a different vantage, a perspective centering upon intellectual rather than moral excellence. But this change of perspective begins to place us at some distance from the magnanimous man, since nothing in Aristotle's description in Book IV establishes any ground for believing that the man of proper pride possesses supreme intelligence. Obviously a figure who deserves substantial honors and grasps his proper worth could not be simply vacuous, but at the same time one notes that this sort of aristocrat devotes himself to conspicuous deeds rather than to a life of intellectual activity. He lives in and for public pursuits although he does not seem to cultivate the strictly political activities of a statesman whose chief concern would be justice. I do not want to oversimplify an extremely complicated problem of interpretation by giving the impression that the *Ethics* conveniently catalogues all the attainments and corresponding limitations of its several ethical models. The question of the interrelatedness of moral and intellectual excellence is probably the central problem raised by the *Ethics*, and it is by no means clear that the problem is definitively resolved. The extent to which Thomas Aquinas is obliged to impose upon the text in his *Commentary* in order to force an answer out of Aristotle's reserve serves as a fair indication of the resistance encountered in the original. Aquinas' attempted solution of the difficulty has been received coldly by some Aristotelian purists, and his attempt to synthesize moral and intellectual virtue has been properly questioned. Perhaps for our purposes it will suffice to remark that the *Ethics* apparently presents three peaks of virtue. Aristotle commences with the portrait of the magnanimous man, moves then to a second height in his consideration of justice, and surpasses the first two types of nobility with his final inquiry into speculative excellence. It also seems clear that the final stage of virtue enjoys pre-eminence because the contemplative act promises a more complete realization of the *eudaemonia*
which from the beginning Aristotle says is the end towards which all human activity is directed. The extent to which each of the three peaks participates in the others is a long question of doubtful determination. However, it appears most probable that Aristotle understands the great-souled man as a distinct moral type standing apart from the philosopher, certainly, and presumably distinguished from the exemplar of justice as well.

This raises the further question of the relation between the magnanimous soul and that other well-known Aristotelian figure, the tragic protagonist. Is the good but not pre-eminently virtuous tragic hero described in chapter 13 of the Poetics identical with the magnanimous man of the Ethics? Again as with the general problem just discussed of determining continuity between the various ethical models, the connection between tragic grandeur and megalopsychia presents difficulties. The two conditions seem related but not finally the same. The fact that the great-souled man does not enjoy complete intellectual virtue may leave room for the hamartia spoken of in the Poetics, since we customarily translate the term by equivalents that imply some cognitive error. That particular blindness, frailty, or intellectual deflection of the tragic protagonist which leads to his fall very likely has reference to some deficiency in prudence rather than moral turpitude; and, consequently, noble-minded yet imprudent heroes such as Oedipus, Creon, Prometheus, or Hippolytus would seem to exemplify Aristotle’s idea. The Aristotelian tragic formula might then be said to look towards both the splendor and the limitation of megalopsychia. The magnanimous man stands between the surpassingly virtuous figure whose fall, Aristotle says, would merely arouse indignation, and the morally defective character whose change from felicity to its opposite would merely flatter our moral expectations without exciting the pity and terror proper to tragedy. The magnanimous man, essentially just and high-minded yet exposed to catastrophe because of intellectual shortcomings, fits some of the requirements Aristotle lays down for his noble, yet flawed, protagonist of tragedy.

However, Aristotle appears to stop well short of a simple identification. The tragic hero may fall somewhat below the level of moral competence associated with magnanimity. Perhaps it should be added that the imprudence which impairs tragic characters seems to be connected in Aristotle’s thought with some substantial, even if
Coriolanus and Aristotle’s Magnanimous Man

unmalicious, injustice for which the hero is himself in some way responsible. Otherwise, the fall of such a man might strike us as incomprehensible or disgustingly capricious as would the spectacle of catastrophe overcoming an absolutely virtuous man. It seems likely that Aristotle’s concept of the tragic hero only looks toward the magnanimous man as a sort of upper limit while allowing for types of lesser nobility who yet suggest great-souledness in some decisive way. Within that larger range we might place such acknowledged tragic figures as Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Brutus, and in fact all Shakespearean protagonists, men who are all to varying degrees implicated in an injustice but who nevertheless attest to a certain spiritual elevation quite beyond the ordinary. Coriolanus answers to this description in both his positive and negative aspects. He is undeniably greater than anyone else in his city, yet we have seen that he is also something less than the great-souled man of Aristotle inasmuch as his claims exceed his just deserts. A more decisive difference between the character exhibited by Coriolanus and that of the magnanimous man comes to sight when we appreciate Shakespeare’s portrayal of Coriolanus’ dependency upon the opinions of others.

Aristotle speaks of characters which “imitate the magnanimous man without being like him” (1124b). When we look deeper into the action of Shakespeare’s play we see that Coriolanus imitates but does not realize the independence of the great-souled. He reveres his own honorific surname because he believes it memorializes a moment of self-sufficiency, and he seeks to perpetuate this condition of autonomous nobility. But from his relationship with the various personages of his world as also from the excesses to which he is driven by his hunger for fame, one can conclude that Coriolanus is, in fact, far from self-sufficing. His conception of nobility requires that his worth be recognized by others, either directly in the form of praise or indirectly through submission to his superior power. Thus, despite his occasional exhibitions of contempt for popular favor, Coriolanus reveals his compulsive need for recognition. He must have friends to praise him voluntarily or, better yet, enemies to attest his superiority against their will. A particularly telling indication of his compulsion is his early tribute to his arch-enemy, Aufidius:

Were half to half the world by th’ears, and he
Upon my party, I’d revolt, to make
Only my wars with him.  (I, i, 228-230)
Although Coriolanus desires to be independent and divinely aloof, he interprets this condition relatively. That is, he aspires to excel others in terms that everyone can recognize, the terms of Rome being military or political power. Yet the play shows that transcending others by such means involves Marcius in an unending contradiction. He must constantly reassert his superiority by eliciting some sort of recognition from those whom he seeks to excel. Hence he becomes, in a way, dependent upon everyone with whom he is connected, not only because by withholding approval they can force him to undertake further proofs, but because even in granting him recognition they assert their prerogative to approve, and thus to judge, his worth. Coriolanus' concern for honor exceeds that of the magnanimous man because he lacks the latter's autonomous confidence in himself. The genuinely great-souled man identifies his virtue and happiness with an activity that is its own reward, valuable quite apart from whatever praise its exercise might secure for him. Moreover, he needs neither friends nor enemies to sustain his self-esteem. By contrast, Coriolanus must at least assure himself of a steady supply of enemies, and he does so by making enemies of those (the commoners, for example) who are prepared to be his friends. But the compulsive activity of making enemies undermines his independence as much as would playing the role of sycophant that he so indignantly rejects.

Because he is not really self-sufficient, Coriolanus displays other qualities opposed to those Aristotle attributes to the great-souled man. His rancor and contentiousness in all his commerce with the plebians are precisely the opposite of what we should expect from a man who is genuinely self-confident. Aristotle remarks that it is vulgar to make a display of strength among humble people and that the magnanimous man is "unassuming towards those of the middle class" (1124b). Perhaps the people do not deserve Marcius' praise, and perhaps he is right in saying that they should be loved "as they weigh" (II, ii, 72). But if they do not merit the favor of a noble man, much less should they be able to inspire in him unseemly exhibitions of spleen. By his constant self-assertiveness against the lowly plebs, Marcius reveals that they have a certain power over him. He seems actually dependent on their enmity to define his superiority. Similarly, because he is not really detached from human standards, Marcius cannot be oblivious to wrongs inflicted upon him. Unlike Aristotle's ideal he continually reminds himself of the injuries he
Coriolanus and Aristotle's Magnanimous Man

has suffered, and once he has become the self-proclaimed "lonely dragon" Marcius lives only to redress his grievance and to fashion himself a new name from that vengeance. In his gestures of spite and revenge, Marcius acts contrary to the spirit of the magnanimous man in that here also he allows his life to revolve around others.

Coriolanus' tragedy proceeds from the fact that he becomes completely isolated without becoming self-sufficient. His progressive isolation drives forward inexorably to its bitter and pathetic conclusion without even the compensation of a self-recognition. In a general way this dilemma calls to mind Achilles. Both the Homeric and the Shakespearean warrior desire honor but do not acknowledge dependence on others for the praise that publicly ratifies their worth. Achilles, however, is deepened and apparentlyennobled through tragic realizations brought home to him by the death of Patroclus and the appeal of Priam, so that he eventually becomes magnanimous almost in the strictest Aristotelian sense. At the end of his brief life he has lost all personal ties, yet he has achieved a sort of godlike calm and detachment in the midst of his desolation. In his grief Achilles can display generosity, and in his final gestures he appears at last self-possessed and no longer feverish for glory. By contrast, the culminating moment of Coriolanus' isolation coincides with his final, pathetic attempt to reassert his former glory when he recalls the feat of solitary bravery which earned him his surname: "Alone I did it," he boasts before his Volscian executioners on the site of his lonely triumph. In addition to the significance earlier noted, Shakespeare's return to the setting of Corioles enforces an irony which Coriolanus does not perceive and which connotes the distressing circularity of the hero's career. Marcius ends where he began. He cannot break free from the spiritual confinement that derives from his need to elicit from others repeated assurances of his unconditional pre-eminence. By his taunt "boy of tears" Aufidius not only withholds such an assurance but charges its opposite. Aufidius thus insults the hero with a charge of juvenile dependence that forces Marcius once again to enter the round of boasting and insult which has brought him to this deadlock. With almost his last breath Marcius seeks to force an admission of his singular transcendence at the same time that he reveals a pitiable dependence upon those who have now become, as were the Romans, both friends and enemies. He is given sufficient opportunity here and in the crisis of his mother's intercession to
grasp the nature of his dilemma and his flaw. But his failure to avail himself of the chance for self-knowledge leaves to the audience the experience of anagnorisis which should have been his.

The extent of Marcius' ignorance may be appreciated by considering Plutarch's description of contrasting attitudes toward honor in his Comparison of Alcibiades with Coriolanus. Shakespeare may have read the Comparison together with the Life, but, however that may be, Plutarch's observations point to a similar course of thought developed in the play. Plutarch speaks of three public men—Metellus, Aristides, and Epaminondas—who, like Coriolanus, were driven into exile, rejected in elections, and condemned in courts of justice but who, unlike Coriolanus, showed no resentment against their cities when they were later asked to return. These men, says Plutarch, not only professed their indifference to public honors but were in fact genuinely independent of such signs of approval and therefore neither valued honors bestowed nor became angry when they were refused. On the other hand, Alcibiades openly professed his pleasure in being honored and his hurt in being overlooked. His love of distinctions caused him to court favor and "to place himself upon good terms with all that he met."1 2 Even during his second exile he could resume friendly relations with the Athenian commanders. Alcibiades' frank pursuit of honors suggests the sort of man Aristotle first discusses in his remarks on megalopsychia—the man who delights in honor above all else—whereas the three Greeks Plutarch contrasts to him suggest the more elevated version of Aristotelian magnanimity exhibited in characters who by virtue of their supreme self-confidence can transcend the desire for praise. Beneath the contrast we observe that Alcibiades resembles Metellus, Aristides, and Epaminondas in at least one important respect. Like them he is comfortable in the position he adopts toward honors. Coriolanus, however, never can find a comfortable stance either in regard to the praise he receives or in response to adverse opinion. His invariably contentious language and his continually abrasive dealings with commoners indicate a fundamental discordancy in his soul. Plutarch makes this tension explicit in his comment that "Coriolanus's pride forbade him to pay attentions to those who could have promoted his advancement, and yet his love of distinction made him feel hurt and angry when he was disregarded."1 3 In the light of Plutarch's comparison we can describe Coriolanus' tragedy more precisely. His
unique predicament seems to be that he can neither achieve the detached self-sufficiency of an Aristides nor be happy with the unabashed delight in praise of an Alcibiades. That is, Marcius cannot rise to the higher version of Aristotelian magnanimity, and he will not accept the lower by acknowledging his need for the good opinion of others. Once again we are reminded of Aristotle's reference to the vain man who seeks to imitate megalopsychia yet fails in the essentials.

Coriolanus' failure in tragic recognition is the most conspicuous evidence of the limited reach of his interior life, and this lack of self-awareness comprises part of the price he pays for his exclusive identification of nobility with direct heroic action displayed through strife. It is hardly possible to conceive a peaceable Coriolanus. For how would he spend his time were he not constantly engaged in the heady rigors of war? Aufidius' servant associates peace with sexual adventures, asserting that peaceful interludes are great breeders of adulterers. He affects the soldier's scorn of tranquility:

Peace is a very apoplexy,
lethargy; mulled, deaf, sleepy, insensible; a getter of
more bastard children than war's a destroyer of men. (IV, v, 226-229)

His sentiments are not far off those expressed less vulgarly by Titus Lartius, Volumnia, and Coriolanus himself. Except that Marcius really feels what Aufidius' henchman only pretends to feel. It is not possible to imagine him in the peacetime role envisioned by the servant. Like Brutus he lacks the gamesomeness of an Antony who loves when he can and fights when he must. Coriolanus must fight or he is nothing. His intimate enemy Aufidius cannot recognize him when he is not painted in that suit of blood which his mother also thinks becomes him best. Aufidius must demand no less than six times that Marcius reveal his name when he appears out of armor at Aufidius' home in Antium. On the same occasion the disguised Coriolanus tries to make a small joke about cuckoldry:

Third Servingman How sir? Do you meddle with
my master?
Coriolanus Ay, 'tis an honester service than to meddle
with thy mistress. (IV, v, 46-49)

Besides its being forcible-feeble and derivative, like his only other
essay in levity (III, iii, 15-19), one notes that it seems the most uncharacteristic speech of the play. Marcius’ jesting lightly about sexual matters sounds utterly anomalous, as though his disguise has changed his speech along with his appearance. More in tune with his character is his subsequent praise of the chaste Valeria as an “icicle/That’s curded by the frost from purest snow” (V, iii, 65-66). His use of erotic figures of speech reveals a spirit enamored with austerity. When he meets his fellow warrior on a battlefield that promises them still another opportunity to engage the enemy, Marcius experiences a rare moment of ebullience:

O, let me clip ye
In arms as sound as when I wooed, in heart
As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
And tapers burned to bedward! (I, v, 29-32)

His simile finds an echo in a declaration of camaraderie pronounced by his kindred spirit, Aufidius, “more dances my rapt heart/Than when I first my wedded mistress saw/Bestride my threshold” (IV, v, 117-19). Volumnia had earlier boasted that were her son her husband she would delight more in his warfaring than in his lovemaking (I, iii, 2-5). The martial-marital comparisons are most appropriate to the three bellicose spokesmen and especially indicative of Marcius’ temperament. In this the least erotic of Shakespearean tragedies sexual passion is subsumed by martial ardor so that it does not seem incongruous that the soldier should embrace his comrade as he would his wife, or look forward to another battle as though it were a second honeymoon. Coriolanus transfers the energies of eros and of philia to the field of glory where he finds the rewards lesser men may locate in the bed and hearth.

Coriolanus’ education disposes him to underrate habits of civil accommodation. Apparently he has had no opportunity to grow up among domestic proprieties since he seems to know nothing of his father (whom the play never mentions). If he has not been bred to appreciate marital affection neither has he had the benefit of observing fundamental examples of political rule (in the Aristotelian sense of alternately ruling and being ruled) within the household. This has obvious consequences for his own despotic political behavior. Instead of the customary training of the child in household affairs, the ordinary primer of education in politics, Marcius has been
"bred in the wars." Again parallels with Achilles come to mind. Like Achilles, Marcius knows little else but the life of the camp. We are told that he fought against Tarquin when he was sixteen and engaged in seventeen subsequent battles since this youthful debut (II, ii, 85-99). Hence it is not surprising that his friends appeal to his constant war experience when they seek to excuse his excesses (III, i, 319-322; III, iii, 52-57), that his mother explains statecraft to him in terms of military strategy (III, ii, 47-51), that his son should seek to emulate his father by ignoring his schoolmaster in favor of predatory games (I, iii, 53-64), or that Marcius should think a drum the most reliable and least corruptible form of human communication (I, ix, 41-44). Titus Lartius believes that Marcius' own voice has acquired the percussive qualities of the kettle drums he so admires (I, iv, 56-61).  

Coriolanus' conspicuous diplomatic liabilities derive from this narrow education. He knows no other way to treat people than as simple superiors or simple subordinates. The life of the city is too evasive in its demands and too complicated in its relatedness to allow for the pleasant collegiality of war comrades. Coriolanus has supporters in the city, of course, but he is most often at odds with his friends and can feel at one with them only when they are facing a common intramural enemy, as we see, for instance, at the beginning when he and Menenius face down the unruly plebs, or in the later crisis when civil war again threatens to break out. He is not completely despotic in his desires since he can be comfortable in a clearly subordinate position, as when he occupies the second place under Cominius in the Volscian wars. But Marcius seems incapable of understanding the requirements of political as distinguished from despotic rule, or of political rule in the Aristotelian sense. That is, he does not know how to conduct himself in a setting that requires a man both to rule and to be ruled in turn. Put in still another way, he seems not to grasp how political decisions may result from harmonizing divergent positions through deliberative discourse. In this regard we may see that Aristotle's thought bears upon the play from another vantage rather different from the one we have been focusing upon and that the Politics as well as Ethics may help us understand the larger issues with which Shakespeare is concerned.

An important foundation of Roman jurisprudence was its distinction between two fields of the law, domi (at home) and militiae
Thus it magnanimity. Aristotelian between his needs to be properly in shock of be properly truth crucial capacity and play records and in diction that spiritual vacuum. are deprived of would be merely spiritual "from transition to transition" (IV, iii, 39-46). Marcius has great difficulties in thinking of the mean-spirited plebians as fellow Romans. He prefers to view them in camp terms as lowly subordinates or even as his collective enemy. His political pronouncements and his public bearing are colored by his devotion to the noble simplicities of life in the field. For Marcius a world without war would be not merely dull but a sensible emptiness, a void completely deprived of interest and color. When he is not contentious (the moments are infrequent) Marcius is himself dull and indeed almost a spiritual vacuum. His manner of address is consistently disputatious, and in the absence of dispute he is grudging or altogether silent. The play records no instance of Marcius participating in what could properly be called a conversation. He defines himself through the shock of military and verbal contests and seems to lack both the capacity and the desire for discussion or for solitary contemplation. Thus it is not surprising that he fails to reflect upon his fate. The crucial truth about his nature, unextracted by himself, remains latent in the reversal that brings about his personal catastrophe. That truth needs to be further specified in order to appreciate the difference between his obsession with glory and the more solid self-assurance of Aristotelian magnanimity.

A recent critic has discerned in Coriolanus' career a contradiction that leads necessarily to his destruction. Michael MacCanles
locates the cause of Marcius’ fall in a self-defeating “dialectic of transcendence”:

[which] allows him neither complete harmony with those he seeks to transcend nor complete detachment. Inasmuch as his superiority depends precisely on his measuring himself against those whom he seeks to rise above, he is constantly at war against the various relations he successively creates with others, no matter what they be.16

The futility MacCanles ascribes to Coriolanus’ “dialectic of transcendence” Aristotle perceived as a dilemma bound up with the very nature of honor-seeking. This is evident from two remarks of the *Ethics*:

A consideration of the prominent types of life shows that people of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with honor, for this is, roughly speaking, the end of the political life. But it seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow honor rather than on him who receives it, but the good we divine to be something proper to a man and not easily taken from him. (1095b)

A steady sense of self-worth based upon confident self-knowledge seems to answer to the “good we divine” rather than the more tenuous self-regard that must be supported by tokens of acclaim. The anxious soliciting of honors implies the absence of certainty on the part of the man who seeks them out. For Aristotle observes in his subsequent discussion of friendship that “those who desire honor from good men, and men who know, are aiming at confirming their own opinion of themselves; they delight in honor, therefore, because they believe in their own goodness on the strength of the judgement of those who speak about them” (1159a, italics added). Aristotle’s insight into the dependence upon public opinion of men who are avid for honor points us to the source of Marcius’ disequilibrium. He desires noble autarchy, yet he must force attestations of his uniqueness from everyone he encounters. This bondage to opinion underlies the frustrating dialectic that MacCanles detects throughout the play. However, I cannot agree with his view of the play’s resolution which rests upon his claim that the embassy scene dramatizes a decisive change of relationship between Volumnia and her son. For MacCanles the embassy reveals Volumnia to be a person who “serenely cares for no one.” She is, he says, “the topmost rung on
the scale of transcendence," and she uses her persuasive power to victimize her son as he has hitherto used his power to transcend others:

Her "love" for Coriolanus translates explicitly Coriolanus' own implicit "love" of the commoners and of Aufidius: it is the "love" of the master for the slave, of the snob for his inferiors, and as such it is really an assertion of power and dominance.... Volumnia's appeal to Coriolanus' subservience in the last act, which brings about his immolation in fact, repeats analogically the dialectic of transcendence with Coriolanus as victim, which Coriolanus had been himself enacting throughout the play as master. In short, Coriolanus dies as the result of a power play to which his own drive to power on the scale of transcendence has left him particularly vulnerable.17

On this interpretation, the recognition available to Coriolanus in the final dramatic reversal is simply that he can be dominated as he has sought to dominate other people. According to MacCanles, we see him catastrophically subjugated by the one attachment in his life that has not been based on his own desire to subjugate, namely, his affection for his mother. Though this hypothesis is suggestive I think it somewhat misleading, since it is difficult to accept the contention that Volumnia betrays a monstrous resolve to dominate her son which makes her willing to satisfy her pride at his expense. The truth seems to be rather that Marcius is not victimized so much by his mother as by his own ignorance. Critics tend to overlook the significance of Volumnia's appeal to her son's desire for fame. She says her son's honor can only be maintained if he spares the city (V, iii, 132-48); and Coriolanus relents only after she has made this point. He thinks that he will earn a greater and more lasting glory by sparing the city than by destroying it. In fact he believes he has so effectively affirmed his nobility by showing mercy that he can look back on his action as another conspicuous triumph. Upon his return to Corioles he insouciantly invites the Volscians to rejoice with him over what he considers a glorious victory (V, vi, 71-81). Marcius does not feel that he has been exploited; nor, I think, does the play suggest that he has. He achieves the revenge he has desired simply by demonstrating his power to destroy Rome. In terms of winning glory, he could gain nothing more by going on to level the city. The clear demonstration of his capacity to do so is altogether sufficient. His act of mercy therefore does not constitute a renunciation of his supreme motive but a furtherance of it consistent with his essential
character. The recognition latent in the last act is that Coriolanus, rather than becoming the victim of Volumnia, has finally destroyed himself through a misjudgment prompted by his characteristic disability. He fails to realize at the conclusion of his life what he has failed to realize all along: That the end of self-sufficiency and the end of honor are not identical and that his pursuit of acclaim prevents his becoming genuinely self-sufficient. His mercy is merely another way of asserting his superiority, just as his wrath had been before; and, in changing his means he does not change his purpose which is still a desire for fame. By virtue of his display Marcius assures himself of a notable place in the chronicles, but he fails to rise above his native infirmity. Yet to the end he remains unaware of his failure because he knows his goal and measure only imperfectly.

Coriolanus’ tragedy derives from his characteristic inability to understand the necessary conditions that would enable him to fulfill the quest for nobility he has embraced. However, although he suffers most by it, he is not alone in his ignorance, for we can see that his intellectual failure derives from the defective ethos which debilitates Shakespeare’s Roman world. He desires the highest sort of excellence—the absolute self-possessedness of the pre-eminently noble. However, he identifies his quest with the exercise of virtù, the Roman ideal of manly valor which, according to Cominius, is reverenced by the regime as the epitome of human excellence (“It is held/That valour is the chiefest virtue, and/Most dignifies the haver” [II, ii, 81-82]). But, as Machiavelli understood, virtù is essentially transitive. Without an object and audience power is mute. It must be exercised upon other men so that it may be duly recognized and admired. Therefore, the display of manliness necessarily involves the valorous man in relationships with others and makes him to some degree dependent on these relationships. The desire for honored distinctions through whatever means must entail much the same consequence, but the pursuit of glory through virtù compounds the dependence of the hero on his associates. This awareness of a bondage which cannot be surmounted underlies Marcius’ contentiousness and proves the cause of his destruction. His need to be approved prevents his becoming in truth the great-souled man he partially resembles. Coriolanus’ Roman version of magnanimity therefore turns out to be imperfect and even self-defeating precisely because it falls short of the standard described by Aristotle.
In one sense the story of Coriolanus suggests the tragedy of any city that identifies ultimate human excellence with martial virtue. The community encourages unbounded spiritedness in the soldier so that he may expend himself without stint in defense of the city. The soldier must learn to relish the delights of contention more than the usages of peace if he is to be serviceable to the community. The city rewards such dedication with the wages of godlike honors. Yet to the extent that the warrior is bred in the wars, he is weaned away from the habits of civil accommodation, from the oblique manners, self-effacements, and mutual concessions which constitute civility. In the hero’s eyes the city itself becomes mean in its impurity, and his activity which began in patriotism comes to be pursued for its own sake as a noble alternative to an enervating and demeaning political existence. The warrior then changes from a docile watchdog at the gate to a lion in the streets, and the city finds that by extolling valor as the chiepest virtue it has produced a man larger than itself. It cannot live peaceably with him, but it may not be able to live at all without him. The warrior is equally the casualty of this dilemma since he is denied, first by training then by inclination, the complete life natural to the human being. Coriolanus’ fate suggests this perennial tension between the city and the manly arm of the body politic.

Apart from this universal dimension, Coriolanus’ tragedy reveals a more distinctively Roman problem. Shakespeare’s Romans tend to identify their worth with the impression they make upon other men. Shakespeare had already portrayed their zealous cultivation of fame in the thrasonical careers of both Caesars, Brutus, Antony, and the Roman convert, Cleopatra. Roman heroic personages display a remarkable avidity for seeking the approval of a society they profess to transcend. They lead lives of calculated celebrity so that they may insure public acknowledgment of their singularity. It appears that one of Shakespeare’s purposes in the three plays based on Plutarch’s biographies is to consider the high costs to the spirit exacted by a life given over to self-glorifying performances. Machiavelli admires the Romans for being “full of the desire for worldly glory,” whereas Shakespeare’s Roman tragedies remind us of what can be lost by measuring nobility by the standard of fame. His Roman heroes characteristically fail to discriminate between noble self-confidence and vainglory. They cannot conceive a greatness of spirit that suffices of itself with or without the sanction of public approbation. Yet
they are all dimly aware of some image of unconditional purity which beckons them beyond the comparatively petty ends of their fellow Romans. Coriolanus can glimpse "a world elsewhere" beyond the confinements of Rome, yet he cannot discover an access to it because he knows no other end for his virtue than the rewards of renown. His tragedy thus defines the limits of an ethos which confuses great-souledness with the power to enforce admiration.

1 Shaw facetiously called Coriolanus "Shakespeare's greatest comedy," and Bradley remarked of the title character that were he subjected to Lear's storm he would merely set his teeth. Subsequent critics have continued to question the status of Coriolanus as a tragic figure, usually on the grounds that he lacks the requisite intellectual presence. John Palmer finds him "the splendid oaf who has never come to maturity" Political and Comic Characters of Shakespeare. (London: MacMillan & Co., 1965), p. 297. Similarly, if more temperately, D. J. Enright has complained "if only, we may feel, he could be rather more introspective—in the way that Macbeth is... If only we were persuaded that there is more to him than is reflected in his armor." ("Coriolanus: Tragedy or Debate?" Essays in Criticism, IV, 1954), p. 7. O. J. Campbell argues that "the play can be understood only if it be recognized as perhaps the most successful of Shakespeare's satiric plays," Shakespeare's Satire (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 199. See also Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1950), p. 217.


Two new studies of the place of Coriolanus in Shakespeare's understanding of the Roman regime indicate thoughtful reassessments of the hero in terms similar to those I propose. Both Paul Cantor's Shakespeare's Rome (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976) and Michael Platt's Rome and Romans According to Shakespeare (Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Institut fur Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1976) should be considered by anyone who attempts to understand the philosophical implications latent in Shakespeare's portrayal of Roman politics. Neither Cantor nor Platt treat systematically the theme of Aristotelian magnanimity, but their remarks upon Coriolanus' tragic devotion to honor suggest that each understands the difference between the self-sufficient
magnanimous man of Aristotle and the dependent Roman of Shakespeare. I believe critics have rightly emphasized the intellectual limitations of Coriolanus but wrongly denied him the dignity of a tragic hero. Although his tragedy is perhaps of a minimal sort, since he understands his fate less fully than more introspective Shakespearean protagonists, his largeness of spirit and his uncompromising fidelity to himself go a considerable way towards making up the deficit. I should think his positive qualities place him in the rank of tragic figures occupied by Ajax, Philoctetes, Heracles, and Shakespeare's Timon.  

2 Rodney Poisson, "Coriolanus as Aristotle's Magnanimous Man," Pacific Coast Studies in Shakespeare, p. 210. Poisson provides ample evidence for his contention that Shakespeare could have been acquainted with the Nicomachean Ethics either through contemporary translations or through the numerous Renaissance ethical treatises and conduct books which refer to Aristotle or derive from his Ethics. On the question of Shakespeare's knowledge of Aristotle see also F. N. Lees, "Coriolanus, Aristotle and Bacon," Review of English Studies, I (n.s.) (1950), 114-25.


4 Ibid., p. 372.

5 Nicomachean Ethics, 1124b, W. C. Ross translation, The Basic Works of Aristotle, Richard McKeon ed. (New York: Random House, 1941). All subsequent references are to this edition, though I have taken the liberty of reading "magnanimity" and "magnanimous" where Ross translates "pride" and "proud."


7 For an example of the kind of character who possesses self-sufficiency without being particularly devoted to the speculative life see Ishmael's description of Queequeg in Chap. X of Moby-Dick. Although Aristotle mentions no specific examples it seems he has in mind characters more like Achilles than Socrates. However, there is something about the unbounded heroic eros of Achilles which resembles the unbounded dedication of Socrates just as Ishmael explicitly notes in the "calm self-collectedness" of Queequeg a "Socratic" resemblance (Moby-Dick, ch. X, p. 58, Riverside Edition). That Aristotle intends self-sufficiency in something less than an absolute sense is evident from his remark that: "by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who leads a solitary life, but with parents, children, wife, and in general friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship." (Ethics, Bk. X, ch. 7, 1177b).


10 Aristotle would apparently deem such a sentiment merely perverse for he says, "no one chooses to be at war, or provokes war, for the sake of being at war; anyone would seem absolutely murderous if he were to make enemies of his friends in order to bring about battle and slaughter" (Ethics, Bk. X, ch. 7, 1177b).

11 Exactly how much the people do "weigh" could be debated. Shakespeare's portrayal of the populace does not seem as favorable as that of Plutarch since he makes their initial rebellion more questionable and casts doubt upon the citizens' ability as soldiers (I, v, 4-8; I, vi, 43-45). Yet on several occasions the commoners show good judgment and at least a willingness to be persuaded by convincing speech (I, i; II, iii; III, iii). We also note that Cominius appears to have a higher estimate of their soldiering than Coriolanus (I, vi, 1-3), and at one point even Marcius is obliged to praise their manliness (I, vi, 76-78). On the whole Shakespeare's commoners appear good-hearted but extraordinarily malleable—which makes them about as good as their leadership at any given moment. Coriolanus may under-estimate the degree to which the common file can be improved by good leaders and especially by effective speech. But then Coriolanus characteristically deprecates the importance of persuasive speech tending, as he habitually does, to identify rhetoric with flattery (I, i, 162-72; I, i, 205-09; II, ii, 73-75; II, ii, 144-47; III, ii, 7-16).


13 Ibid., p. 293.

14 Marcius' entire demeanor states that he is intransigently a-music. His voice is harsh, his movements mechanical and meteoric, and he enjoys only one sort of tune, the exaggeratedly Doric rhythms of battle marches. He reveres the simple musical instruments of the camp as though they were sacramentals (I, ix, 41). This reverence depends upon his belief that drums and trumpets cannot prevaricate or flatter. Unlike human speech they must convey the true state of mind of those who employ them. The final speech of the play and the accompanying stage direction comment upon this belief. Aufidius, whose conspirators have just killed Coriolanus following the long-plotted strategem of their leader, commands a mournful thumping of drums in honor of his dead enemy. Hence the death march with which the play concludes is noble flattery commemorating Coriolanus' acknowledged worth yet obscuring the envy of the assassin who has ordered them to sound. All forms of human communication are subject to the complexities and ambiguities attendant upon spoken words. An understanding of the mixed nature of speech enables a thoughtful man to work good through
the art of intelligent rhetoric in the service of justice, whereas ignorance of the character of language or even a high-minded contempt for rhetorical self-consciousness may leave a man vulnerable to the linguistic devices he despises. On two occasions—when he is banished and when he is killed—Coriolanus proves the incoherent victim of a linguistic ambush. After the Ethics and the Politics Aristotle's Rhetoric provides the understanding which Coriolanus lacks.

The ending of the play with the brief obsequy and burial honors suggests a final link to The Iliad since it reflects upon Coriolanus in much the same way that the concluding events of the epic reflect upon Achilles. Homer's hero comes to learn that the desire for a noble grave barrow imposes a limit upon his desire to be self-sufficient. As Seth Benardete has pointed out, one lesson Achilles learns from the ghost of Patroclus is that although "one can be brave all by oneself one cannot bury oneself [and that] burial lies at the heart of the human" ("The Aristeia of Diomedes and the Plot of The Iliad," ARS 2, 1968, 10-38), pp. 33-34). The play's final words note the ultimate dependence of the warrior upon some society even though it be not necessarily his native country. Coriolanus' pathos is deeper and sadder, if that is possible, than the pathos of Achilles' final condition because, unlike Achilles, Coriolanus dies without coming to realize this truth.

15 See Kurt Von Fritz, The Theory of the Mixed Constitution in Antiquity: A Critical Analysis of Polybius' Political Ideas (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 210-12. Of course these legal terms do not appear in the play nor do they occur in Plutarch. Scholars are not even certain when these usages first became current in the ancient Republic. I am not suggesting that the two forms of law are formally noted in Shakespeare's play or even that Shakespeare knew the historical fact of their existence. What Shakespeare obviously does understand is the political principle that underlies the distinction, and the consequences of failing in this understanding. Marcus' inability to come to terms with his country arises largely from his inability to approach Shakespeare's understanding.


17 Ibid., p. 53.

18 For Machiavelli, who attempts to restore the dignity of antique virtú against Christian prejudice, the greatest glory attaches to the man who can most effectively enforce his power of personality upon others. See The Discourses passim; see also Leo Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli, (Seattle, Wash.: Univ. of Washington Press, 1958), pp. 177-78, 189-90, 274-77, 286-89. Coriolanus, and possibly the Roman plays as a group, may be read as a Shakespearean questioning of Machiavellian premises.
THE "LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM" OF LORENZO VALLA AND THE RENAISSANCE HUMANISTS*

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Renaissance humanism has made perhaps its largest bequest to today's freshman composition teachers, for this movement was, at its core, a pedagogical movement¹ which profoundly shaped not only the study of classical languages but also the methods by which vernacular languages came to be taught in the schools. Lorenzo Valla and the Renaissance humanists strove to establish the primacy of a single form of the Latin language, that form common to the great writers of antiquity, and to this end railed incessantly against those medieval teachers and writers whose so-called debased Latin had come to dominate the schools. In so doing, they were guided by the concept of a normative or standard dialect, a concept which more and more controlled both the study of the classical languages and, in time, the study of the national languages. Today, a significant number of rhetoricians have renounced that heritage, declaring:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.²

An analysis of the humanist position as set forth by Lorenzo Valla, together with the history of its evolution and ultimate rejection, will not only illuminate the process of change which has produced this

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remarkable *volte-face*; it will also serve to restore an understanding of the Renaissance arguments for the primacy of a single language. These educational precepts, whose validity and efficacy are as defensible today as they were in the fifteenth century, provide, when properly understood, both a critique and a defense of the contemporary students' right to their own language.

The context which gave rise to the humanists' reforms and their call for a return to the Latin of antiquity is often misunderstood. We who read and appreciate the vernacular works of Dante, Froissart, and Chaucer may misread the humanist position unless we look to the most prevalent genre in use among the medieval literati, the literature of their professions, for this genre provided their primary contact with written and spoken Latin. After nearly two millennia of use, the Latin language had become the vehicle for new concepts in philosophy, in law, in statecraft, and in medicine, adopting new terms and structures invented to convey those concepts. Late medieval culture, however, lacked television, newspapers and interfacing computers; thus the language developed independently within each discipline and subdiscipline, so independently in fact that a modern student of medieval Latin must have access to at least four or five lexicons. Such specialization did not bother the humanists in and of itself; they never physically invaded the chanceries and the Inns of Court to cast out the word-changers. Rather, the proximate and efficient cause of the humanist call for a return to classical Latinity was the burgeoning dominance of scholastic Latin in the schools, especially in the basic trivium, the introductory courses in Latin grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, for there the impact of scholastic thought and scholastic diction was effectively to block the student's access to the much broader corpus of information and modes of expression available within the classical tradition.

The dominance of the Scholastics was reflected in both the organization and the content of the trivium. In the late Middle Ages the sequence of the trivium was grammar, rhetoric, and finally dialectic, which drew upon the first two for its matter; consequently skill in argumentation alone, and not skill in the other aspects of eloquence, came to be the highest and virtually the only art inculcated in the trivium. The emphasis on dialectic was more than a matter of sequence; it impinged on the content of the courses in grammar and rhetoric as well. The Scholastics had been compelled
to develop a vocabulary and syntax suitable for dialectic and thus fifteenth-century students learned their Latin grammar, which they assumed to be the grammar of an ubiquitous and long-lived language, through the medium of a language that was neither ubiquitous nor long-lived, but rather restricted to a specific time—the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—and, more importantly, to a specific place, i.e., the haunts of the Scholastic philosophers, who, it must be pointed out, were not to be found in the chanceries, the courts, or the pulpits but chiefly in the universities. To be specific, the basic grammar text from the thirteenth century onwards was Alexander of Villa Dei's Doctrinale, a poem of some 2,600 lines which gave a more or less accurate and comprehensive list of prescriptions for Latin grammar in mnemonic but not memorable hexameters. By the last half of the fifteenth century, however, each line had gained a lengthy and markedly Scholastic discussion which the student was also required to master. Thus a single line from the Doctrinale, Artifici regimen datus hic ut 'epistola Pauli' (the governing of the maker is indicated in this way: 'Paul's letter') gives rise to a discussion which reads in part:

Definition: the word signifying a thing made by man can govern the genitive signifying the efficient cause of that thing, as epistola pauli.

Question: Whether this rule can be turned around or not?

Solution: Yes, for a word signifying the maker can govern the genitive signifying the thing made by him . . . This type is called ex vi causae efficientis because the governing word signifies a cause; but when it signifies an effect, then it is called ex vi effectus causae efficientis.

Argument: the governed word is prior to the word governing, but the effect is posterior to the cause. Therefore, it cannot govern the cause.

Solution: The effect is posterior to the cause according to nature. Nevertheless, I say then that the word "effect" signifies confusedly and the word "cause" prescriptively; effect can be prior by reason of confusion, and according to this the more confused words are prior words. 

This passage represents only a fraction of the commentary on this one line—multiply this by 2,600 and then have pity on the student, as Valla and the Renaissance humanists did when they sounded their call for reform.

The most resonant call to humanist action came from Lorenzo Valla (1407-57) in his Preface to the Book I of De Linguae Latinae Elegantia, a clarion call which, because of its completeness and its
eloquence, was repeated through almost 60 printings before 15327 and then re-echoed in the minds of countless students who used that work as the text-book of Latin style until 1800.8 This Preface deserves attention because it is probably the most comprehensive humanist statement on the primacy of classical Latin as well as the most often read; it deserves a close and thorough reading because Valla had taught rhetoric at the University of Pavia for four years, then served as secretary to the humanist prince Alphonso the Magnanimous of Aragon, and finally returned to teaching as Professor of Eloquence at the University of Rome. Thus his Preface has a powerful but subtle emotional impact, an impact which came to be so great that the exposition of Valla’s own position was obscured for other readers by his call to action. Further, the figures which control this piece are figures which lost their metaphorical nature and became the substance of arguments about language even to this day. Nonetheless, Valla does take a position which, when stripped of its hortatory rhetoric, is not uncommon among both Renaissance and modern humanists. That such a position actually exists in this Preface, however, is neither so obvious nor so memorably stated as Valla’s call to action, and so his rhetoric, the goals of that rhetoric, and its historical weaknesses must be carefully identified.

Valla’s intent in the De Elegantia is to promote a return to the language of Augustan Rome;9 to this end he causes the image of Rome—Rome as empire, Rome as a fallen and yet somehow persisting commonwealth, and Rome as a republic—to dominate the Preface. Valla begins with a personal judgment expressed as a comparison between the establishment of the Roman empire and the spread of the Roman language: “Often, when I review by myself the deeds of our ancestors and those of other kings and peoples, our men appear to have distinguished themselves above all the rest not in might alone but in the dissemination of language.”10 It should be noted, first of all, that this is expressed not as a statement of fact but as a statement of opinion, carefully qualified by an abundance of I’s in its formulation. More important, however, is the two-fold potential of this statement: it might be an intimation of a cause-effect relationship developing from the close temporal and spatial conjunction of the Roman language and the Roman empire, a relationship that would have a certain ring of pragmatic truth; or, it might simply be a quite different but as yet undefined assertion by
Valla which he is going to qualify and then prove in his own way. For Valla and his contemporaries, it is the latter, a somewhat startling assertion that is worthy of demonstration in itself, for to claim that Rome was as distinguished for the spread of its language as it was for its might in arms would be a novel idea indeed for a society which valued the warrior king above all others; it would perhaps not be as novel for Alphonso and his circle, yet if it were to be proved true, it would go far to compensate for that prince's own political failures and to enhance his limited successes.

In support of this novel assertion, Valla first calls his readers' attention to an important difference between the Roman empire and its predecessors: "It is clear that the Persians, Medes, Assyrians, Greeks and others held sway far and wide; although they were somewhat inferior to the Romans, they did hold sway longer; yet none of them thus spread their language as our ancestors did."1 Valla, however, does not permit his readers to explore the political ramifications of that phenomenon but rather he presents it as a historical fact whose importance lies in its transcendence of history and politics:

Such an accomplishment is indisputably much more outstanding and splendid than to have spread the imperium itself, for those who add to the imperium are usually laden with great honor and called emperors; those who bring benefits to men, however, are more properly extolled with divine honors and not human ones, for they are not only concerned about the size and fame of their city but also about the well-being of the state and the safety of men. Thus our ancestors surpassed the rest of men in military matters and in their many honors; they surpassed themselves, moreover, in the extension of their language, as if leaving their empire on earth and joining the company of gods in the heavens.12

The euhemerism of this passage is not, of course, to be taken literally, but it does firmly reinforce Valla's claim that the ubiquitous language promoted by the Romans transcends their transitory empire because of its own inherent virtue, a virtue far superior to any possessed by long-dead empire-builders: "For what reason," he asks, "would any equitable judge not prefer those who were preserving the holy rites of letters to those illustrious men who were waging terrible wars?"13 Thus Valla's euhemeristic argument, though it treats of an historical and political phenomenon, effectively denies any consideration of politics and emphasizes instead the supernatural nature of
the phenomenon of lasting importance—the Latin language—which miraculously escaped what was for Valla and his contemporaries the inexorable process of historical collapse.

Thus the Roman language and not the Roman state is clearly Valla’s concern, for looking to his own day, he calls attention to the historical reality: “That imperium, like an unwanted burden, races and nations have long abandoned; this language, however, all have thought sweeter than nectar, smoother than silk, more precious than gold or gems.”14 Indeed, the language has an almost supernatural power: “The bond [sacramentum] of the Latin speech is great; indeed, it is a great power [numen] because among travellers, foreigners, [barbari] and enemies it is guarded scrupulously.”15 Thus Valla’s novel assertion in the opening lines of the Preface is confirmed: “We have lost Rome, we have lost the dominion, we have lost the imperium . . . through the fault of time; nonetheless through this speech we rule even now a more glorious dominion.”16 No one knows better than the secretary to Alphonso V that the Roman Empire as a political reality is and will be no more; thus it follows that while what remains—its language—echoes that empire, the important fact is that it transcended that empire by virtue of the benefits it offered mankind. Valla’s primary image of Rome thus persists, but it is a Rome which he and his audience have radically redefined as something supernatural and therefore outside of history.

If this transcendent Rome persists for Valla, what then is his problem? Continuing to use the image of Rome, he moves backward to an earlier period for his rhetorical answer: “What man of letters, what lover of the common good can abstain from tears when he sees the language in the same condition as Rome taken by the Gauls, everything turned upside down, put to the torch, and destroyed, so that the Capitoline citadel barely survives?”17 This image of republican Rome under attack by the Gauls in the 4th century B.C. dominates the remainder of the Preface. Through this image Valla bewails the decline of good Latinity and at the same time suggests the disastrous consequences of insisting upon a strict correlation between the political empire and its language: “Indeed, for many years now not only has no one spoken in good Latin but no one who has read it has understood it . . . it is as if, since the Roman imperium is lost, it is no longer fitting either to speak the Roman language or to savor the brilliance of Latinity which has been allowed to become
Valla's concern, as should be obvious to those entwined in his rhetoric, is for a world of the mind, where it is Valla's wish that "the Roman tongue...flourish more than the city itself, and that along with it all disciplines shall come to be restored."8 If that wish is to be realized, however, something must be done, and so Valla, assuming the warrior role so ubiquitous in the daydreams of scholars, issues his call to action and "gives the signal for attack"; as he himself will say later, "I have taken on the most difficult part of the task...in order to render others more quick to pursue the work to be done."9

Valla's transition to figures and images of an earlier Rome is not accidental; rather it is a subtle shift to images supporting a transcendent and apolitical idea which we have seen developing throughout this Preface, an intellectual commonwealth for which the Roman republic is adopted as the proper analogue. Valla laid the groundwork for such a shift in his earlier insistence upon the benefits accruing to mankind, and not territorial expansion, as the mark of a great rule; he now makes that shift explicit by his Ciceronian oratory and his call for a new Camillus. By echoing the opening of Cicero's most famous Catilinarian oration, Valla takes for himself the mantle of that great republican and anti-imperialist as he cries

How long, citizens (for so I call literate men and those who cultivate the Roman language, who are the true and only citizens; the rest indeed are better said to be non-residents), how long, citizens, will you suffer your city (I do not mean the home of the imperium but rather the source of our letters) to be held by the Gauls, that is, Latinity oppressed by barbarians [barbari]?10

For his contemporaries, this echo would be novel and yet very appropriate; for Valla, it is the opportunity to suggest succinctly not one but two elements which threaten his commonwealth of the mind, for the conjunction of Catiline's shadow, the image of the Gauls, and the reference to barbari describe for his fellow rhetoricians the crux of the problem facing classical Latinity. With this echo Valla depicts classical Latinity as a commonwealth of the mind under attack both by "new men" such as the Scholastics who wish to refashion the language in their own image and by the territorial languages whose vocabulary and syntax have intruded into legal and diplomatic Latin. Both of these groups are rightly called barbari, not because they are rude and uncultured (though that inference is permitted for the sake
of the image) but because they commit barbarisms, which for rhetoricians from Quintilian to Valla were primarily gross errors in the use of a language, and only secondarily indices of a lack of culture. For Valla and his contemporaries, to say that something is "infinitum a parte ante et a parte post" is to commit a barbarism, not because the idea is rude and unsophisticated (which it certainly was not) but because the use of post and ante in this way is meaningless to anyone save another philosopher. Equally barbaric were the formulations of lawyers who wrote a blend of Latin and their own vernacular but still called it Latin. Thus Valla's metaphors—the shadow of Catiline and the Gauls—fuse into the equally metaphoric pun barbari, a pernicious force which must be repulsed by the warrior rhetoricians lest this republic of the mind and its attendant benefits be lost to mankind.

It is the concrete figure of Camillus, however, which conveys the full sense of the action Valla is promoting, for this Roman is, above all, a republican whose renown derives from the services he rendered his society. Camillus, as Livy described him and thus as Valla and his contemporaries would have known him, first saved the city by his victories against the Gauls. Valla therefore portrays contemporary attempts at writing histories in classical Latin as analogous to Camillus' taking of Veii, their translations of Greek works as Camillus' exile at Ardea, and their poems and orations as his defense of the heart of Rome. But Valla's appeal for a new Camillus permits him to demand more from his audience. Valla, like Camillus in his oration to the assembly reported by Livy, does not see the restoration of the fatherland as an end in itself, but as an act which insures the members of that commonwealth the continued enjoyment of its benefits. The historical Camillus restored the Roman republic and then proceeded to make the benefits of that republic attractive to plebians as well as patricians; Valla would have a new Camillus restore freedom of expression to the intellectual commonwealth represented by the Latin language and in so doing open that commonwealth to all men. Valla is too much the medieval Christian to believe that such a human hero and such a territorial restoration is possible in a world grown old; nonetheless, he is conscious enough of the power of language and rhetoric to think that it could be imitated in man's spirit, which for Valla and his contemporaries was the only dominion worth holding.

These images of Rome—Rome as empire, Rome as a fallen and
yet somehow persisting commonwealth, and this new and spiritual Rome as a republic to be restored and defended—control the work and thus remain in the reader's mind long after he has set the work aside. There are other concepts in this preface, however, which are expressed through other images, concepts which for Valla and his contemporaries flow naturally from the major images and which constitute an important element of their position on Latin's place in society. Valla's exaltation of the Latin language is founded upon the fundamental and existential fact of its ubiquity in time and in space, an ubiquity whose magnitude created an intellectual commonwealth of a dimension far greater than any such before or after. Because this commonwealth is of the mind and not of the world, the ordinary relationships between the conqueror and the conquered need not apply; thus, Valla never argues that other languages are intrinsically inferior to classical Latin and should therefore be eliminated but instead first uses the relationship between Latin and the vernacular languages to demonstrate exactly how supernatural this commonwealth of the mind really is:

... They who accepted our imperium... thought that they gave up their own and stripped themselves of freedom but not of the chance of injury; with respect to the Latin language, however, they did not think their own to be diminished, but rather built up in some way, as wine, discovered later, did not preclude the use of water, nor silk the use of wool and linen, nor did gold cast other metals out of their possession but rather added its gain to their other goods.24

In fact, Valla sees the rise of classical Latin as a phenomenon concomitant with the amelioration of the vernaculars, and as just the opposite of a temporal invasion, expanding his simile with yet another image:

And just as a gemstone encased in a gold brooch is not disfigured but rather adorned, so our language as it was acquired brought splendor to the common speech of others, but did not replace theirs, for it did not achieve dominion by arms or gore or wars but by good deeds, love, and concord.25

While this position flows naturally from Valla's earlier assertion that the spread of the Roman language was something supernatural, it also introduces a separate image pattern, a world of commingled wine and water, silk and wool, gold and bronze, elements which are
not mutually exclusive but rather complementary to one another. Controlling the value-system of this passage is the image of the gemstone and its golden brooch which, because of both its lack of specific referrents—which language is the gemstone and which the brooch?—and its studied ambiguity—which is more valuable, the gemstone or the brooch?—tends to preclude any invidious comparison between Latin and the vernacular languages with which it coexists.

Valla has more to say about other languages later in the Preface, for having denied the intrinsic superiority of Latin while asserting its primacy by virtue of its more beneficial ubiquity and greater utility, he also addresses the issue of ideas contained in other languages through a short discussion of Greek. At this point in the Preface, Valla has described the physical geography of this transcendent commonwealth of the mind, comparing it favorably to the commonwealth of the Greeks:

The Greeks may go and brag about the richness of their tongues; our single tongue, impoverished as they would have it, has nonetheless done more than their five which are the richest (if we would believe them). The Roman language is one, like a single law, for many races; there is not one language for all of Greece (which ought to be a cause for shame) but rather many, like factions in a republic.26

What may be overlooked in this comparison is the fact that Valla sees himself as responding to a pre-existing claim made by certain of his contemporaries which he must refute if his claim for Latin is to be valid. His refutation, like the Preface as a whole, is dependent upon the image of an intellectual commonwealth, for while he appears at first to challenge the Greek claim to pre-eminent richness with a faint echo of Calchas’ warning to the Trojans—“if we are to believe them!”—he ultimately faults them for dialects that are “like factions in a republic.” For an intellectual commonwealth such as that envisioned by Valla, this factionalism represents a fatal flaw which will prevent the formation of a Greek republic of the mind. His final evaluation of the Greeks’ claim, then, is this:

Authors among them speak in various dialects—Attic, Aeolian, Ionian, Doric and Koine; among us, that is, among many nations, no one speaks save in the Roman tongue in which all the disciplines worthy of a free man are contained, just as they are in the multiformed language used among the Greeks.27
Valla's position on the vernacular and his concept of Latin's function in a world of vernaculars are common to virtually all of the North European humanists, with Erasmus as the sole exception; more importantly, it is the position adopted by almost all the teachers who wrote on the theory of education in this period. Erasmus and John Sturm, Erasmus' disciple who reconstituted the school at Strassburg in 1538, stand quite alone in their utter contempt for the vernacular; most humanists imitate Rudolph Agricola, who could appreciate Petrarch's poetry and who applied himself diligently to the study of Italian in order to recite its poetry and prose properly; or Alexander Hegius, who attacked those who committed barbarisms in either Latin or their own language; or More, whose Utopia envisions children being instructed in the vernacular. Juan Luis Vives perhaps best stated both the humanist respect for the vernacular and the central argument for the use of classical Latin when he wrote in his *De causis corruptarum artium*,

Quintilian says that to be eloquent is first to express all that the mind has conceived and secondly to cause that expression to be perceived by those listening; without the latter, the former is like a sword kept in a scabbard and stuck there. It does not matter what language is used, for there are many men eloquent in Scythian, French, German and Spanish; because a man may be learned and eloquent in Latin and Greek he will not necessarily be eloquent in another language, for such men are but babblers to Parthians and Medes. . . . Certainly, no one ought to favor or even approve of vilness and flaws in speech, for from such vilness and flaws has come the greatest part of, first, the destruction of art, and finally, the destruction of judgment.  

Vives here gives voice to the premise upon which both Valla and the North European humanists (with the noted exceptions) base their arguments for the re-establishment of classical Latin, the premise of Quintilian's definition of eloquence which supports without any sense of contradiction both an argument for the re-institution of classical Latin in the schools and, at the same time, the argument for instruction in the vernacular. Eloquence, these humanists consistently argue, is not a function of any language's intrinsic superiority; rather, it is a function of any language's ability to communicate one's well-formed thoughts effectively to one's audience. The historical fact of Latin's ubiquity, Valla and others argue, is a godsend not possessed by any other language; therefore that language ought to be used because of its historical effectiveness in both the formulation of
an idea and the communication of that idea to the broadest possible audience. The position of such Renaissance humanists does not deny a student the use of his native tongue; rather, by being led to a mastery of classical Latin, the student is made better able to formulate and communicate ideas beyond his immediate circle, something he could not do using the Latin of the philosophers or his native tongue. This was indeed a humanistic approach to language.

Valla's presentation of this humanist position was not only widely accepted by his fellow humanists but also received the widest possible dissemination through the long-lived popularity of the entire De Elegantia as the standard and authorative text-book of classical Latin style. This popularity, however, had a pernicious potential which Valla could not have recognized: what was for his fellow rhetoricians a symbolic call to arms in defense of an academic position could be read by less sophisticated and more nationalistic readers as a pragmatic statement about the role of language within a nation. The success of Valla's rhetorical manipulation of the image of Rome depends for its success upon a set of medieval commonplaces which did not persist much beyond his lifetime and which thus could not control the reading of this Preface in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century schoolrooms. Valla's subtle rhetoric invites misreadings. If the reader is not struck by the novelty of Valla's assertion that Rome distinguished itself not so much in might as in the dissemination of language, he would tend to see Valla's thesis as a cause and effect relationship wherein the Latin language plays a central role in the rise of the Roman Empire, a cause and effect relationship whose proof is almost self-evident. For such a reader, the rest of the Preface would be a restatement of that relationship, with the work as a whole pointing to the necessity of spreading the language along with the imperium, a very commonsense position indeed. Even a reader who is able to avoid that misreading might nevertheless fall prey to the allusiveness of Valla's euhemeristic treatment of those Romans who spread the language as they spread their imperium: If such a reader does not follow Valla's shift of subject from the transitory Roman heroes to their eternal and transcendent language, he may also be able to view such euhemerism as a metaphor for glory and thus may merely be left with the idea that the dominance of a single language (especially his own) is a credit to himself and his nation. Further, a reader of the seventeenth or eighteenth
“Linguistic Imperialism”: Valla and Renaissance Humanists 41

century may very well not be inclined to admit that his own nation was incapable of surpassing the Romans; by the nineteenth century, it would be assumed that it had in fact surpassed that empire. Thus Valla’s rhetorical movement from the physical Roman empire to a spiritual commonwealth would not be immediately perceived or appreciated; instead, a progressive Englishman would find in the Preface a description of an inferior state which, although it rotted in the end, did have a sound political philosophy which England improved and put to use in its own empire. Finally, the distinction between empire and commonwealth so crucial to an understanding of Valla’s position gradually ceased to be anything more than a very abstract distinction as territorial expansion and the common good became more and more synonymous: within a century, such a distinction can be found only by a Raphael Hythloday in the never-never land of an Utopia. In short, Valla’s Preface can be misread in so many ways that his metaphor of the gemstone and the golden brooch cannot prevent a tacit value judgment by later readers, for those who were inclined to see the ubiquity of a language as an imperialistic weapon, a path to glory, or a feature of a truly superior state would come to set the gem of their language at the center of the golden brooch of the classical tradition, a gem whose worth they would value for itself and far above that of its setting.

The humanists’ arguments for the primacy of Latin as set forth in this Preface lost ground gradually and almost imperceptibly, for the earliest proponents of the vernacular readily admitted the preferability or ‘elegance’ of classical Latin even as they attempted to elevate the study of the vernacular tongues. Richard Mulcaster is notable in this respect: historians such as Joan Simon see him as a radical innovator, who, she says, “cast mockery on the humanist plans for a classical education from the nursery onwards” (a plan that is perhaps more properly attributable to Erasmus than to most humanists) when he argues “It is not proof because Plato praiseth it, because Aristotle alloweth it, because Cicero commendeth it, because Quintilian is acquainted with it or any other else... that therefore it is for us to use.”29 I suggest, however, that what he is rejecting here is a much older tradition of appealing to the ancients as authorities, and that his utilitarian argument is in perfect consonance with the reasoning of the earlier humanist writers, for Valla and his successors base their preference for Latin not on its antiquity
but on its spatial and temporal ubiquity. Mulcaster, moreover, argues in his “Peroration” to the Elementarie, one of the first English grammars, that “No one tongue is more fine than another naturally, but by industry of the speaker who . . . endeavors to garnish it with eloquence and to enrich it with learning.”\(^3\)\(^0\) Echoing Valla, he notes that “the Roman authority first planted the Latin among us here by force of their conquest; the use thereof for learning does cause it to continue, though the conquest be expired.”\(^3\)\(^1\) Further, he argues that “there be two special considerations which keep the Latin and other learned tongues, though chiefly the Latin in great countenance among us, the one thereof is the knowledge which is registered in them, the other is the conference which the learned of Europe do commonly use by them in both speaking and writing.”\(^3\)\(^2\) Nonetheless, Mulcaster is a Protestant Elizabethan Englishman who has observed the growth of the English language and the English nation, and thus he writes:

For is it not indeed a marvelous bondage to become servants to one tongue for learning’s sake the most of our time, with loss of most time, whereas we may have the very same treasure in our own tongue with the gain of most time? Our own bearing the joyful title of our liberty and freedom, the Latin tongue remembering us of our thraldom and bondage? I love Rome, but London better; I favor Italy, but England more; I honor the Latin, but I worship the English.\(^3\)\(^3\)

Mulcaster then goes on to describe the necessary improvements in the study of the English language which would bring it up to the level of Latin in usefulness, an improvement that is possible because of a concept of linguistic evolution and historical progress, neither of which Valla or his immediate successors ever recognized. Mulcaster subscribes to the central humanist ideal of effective communication as the criterion for language preference; his nationalism, however, caused him to attempt to create within his national language elements which would allow it to equal and surpass the effectiveness of classical Latin. Mulcaster’s attempt was not in vain; what he hoped for actually came to pass over the course of the next 400 years, as is evidenced by the ubiquity of English today.

This humanistic argument for the study of the vernacular was to be soon overshadowed by a much more popular appeal which, I suggest, may have been reinforced by a misreading of Valla’s Preface. John Brinsley, in his Ludus Litterarius or the Grammar Schoole
(1612), argues that English should be taught because

The purity and elegancie of our own language is to be esteemed a chiefe part of the honour of our Nation: which we all ought to advance as much as in us lieth. As when Greece and Rome and other nations have most flourished, their languages also have been most pure: and from those times of Greece and Rome we fetch our chiefest patterns for the learning of their tongues.34

Brinsley's defense of the English language appears to echo Valla's euhemeristic treatment of the Romans; for Brinsley however, it is no metaphor, but rather a concrete historical reality: the glory which Valla rhetorically gave to the language itself Brinsley would assign to the state by means of the language. For Valla the glorious fact is that the language continued to exist despite the ultimate fall of the Roman empire, that it created a transcendent republic of the mind. For Brinsley, the glorious fact is England itself, a glory enhanced by her language. In like manner, the Augustan poetry of the next century, while drawing on the Latin tradition as a frame of reference, would be English and not Latin poetry, written about English and not Roman subjects, and it would be intended to ameliorate the English language and nation and not to create an appreciation of Rome or the Roman language. For those poets—whose poetry was profoundly political—language serves the nation above all and only serves the intellect in passing to that end. This was not Valla's conception of language; nonetheless, it was suggested by his rhetoric.

Even more pernicious was the postulation of a causal relationship between language and empire, a causal relationship set forth by Edward Gibbon in a formulation much like that of Valla's opening lines: "So sensible were the Romans of the influence of language over national manners that it was their most serious care to extend, with the progress of their arms, the use of the Latin language."35 For this idea, Gibbon cites three sources—Augustine, Pliny the Elder, and Justus Lipsius36—but in so far as the first two are quoted in the third,37 I think it safe to assume that Lipsius was his only source. I would suspect, however, that there is a third unacknowledged and perhaps even unrecognized source—Valla's Preface—for Lipsius' thesis is almost antithetical to Gibbon's, as Lipsius argues that the pronunciation of Latin (like the language itself) was garbled because it never was firmly established and like a transplanted tree really never took root.38 As Gibbon sees it, however, the Latin language was but
another weapon in the Roman arsenal, one which was wielded with
great effect. Such an attribution is possible because Valla’s text was
still in use as a manual of style39 and because Valla’s Latin opening—
“non modo ditionis... verum etiam linguae propagatione ceteris
omnibus antecelluisse”—might be ambiguous to a hasty reader (as it
was for me at least) since he might mistake the ablative of respect for
an ablative of means, especially if he is predisposed to see a causal
relationship therein. I suggest, then, that Gibbon may indeed be
echoing a youthful misreading of Valla in his perception of the rela-
tionship between Rome’s military successes and its language. Such a
suggestion becomes stronger when, later on in the same section,
Gibbon appears to criticize the Greeks for arrogance (as Valla had
done) and to state that both the Greeks and Egyptians isolated
themselves linguistically and thus never flourished politically,40 a criti-
cism which had led Valla to conclude only that the Greek language
could never be the basis of an intellectual commonwealth. Gibbon,
however, clearly sees language as a tool of empire, a political tool
which was ignored by the Greeks and Egyptians to their detriment.
Gibbon’s view of the relationship between language and empire,
moreover, has been accepted by many to this day; consciously or
unconsciously, states seem to operate on this very principle.

Was Valla actually misread? Did his image patterns in the
Preface to the De Elegantia, reinterpreted by later readers, shape our
political perception of language? The answer to the latter can only be
an inference made from a close reading of Valla’s text in light of the
medieval values which make his rhetoric work and from a dispassion-
ate evaluation of modern history. That he was misread by empire-
builders is hard to document, for few politicians are willing to attrib-
ute their great ideas to a textbook from their youth. I suggest,
however, that the one instance where Valla is clearly misread can
make the prevalence of such a misreading not only possible but
probable. One could reasonably expect that Foster Watson, the
eminent student of Renaissance education in the early twentieth
century, would be objective in his presentation of Valla’s position.
Nonetheless, he reads Valla’s Preface as both the embodiment of
Italian nationalism and thus as the statement of an attitude towards
vernaculars that is almost antithetical to that of Vives.41 Further, he
supplies a partial translation of this preface which silently edits out
the passages wherein Valla treats the vernaculars. Finally, his transla-
tion retains only the concrete image of the Roman state, fusing together the Roman empire and the Roman republic in such a way that the important distinction between empire and commonwealth is obliterated; thus he misreads, misrepresents, and finally denies the work's rhetorical movement in support of Valla's chief concern, the commonwealth of the mind, and sees instead only rampant nationalism. Professor Watson was a competent Latinist and an extremely well-read student of Renaissance humanism and pedagogy; he was not an empire-builder, but a scholar and teacher. If this is his learned impression of Valla's position, how must this Renaissance humanist then have appeared to thousands of schoolboys between 1477 and 1800?

I have suggested that Valla's Preface to the De Elegantia is dependent upon a perception of the Roman state as something irretrievably lost in time and which can only be recreated as a commonwealth of the mind. When that historical perspective was supplanted by the idea of progress, when the Roman state was seen as something that could not only be reduplicated in time and space but even surpassed, then Valla's work became ripe for misreading. I would also suggest that Valla's work lies silently at the center of modern quarrels about language in the classroom, for today Edited American English (the ideal standard English, a form no more and no less definable than classical Latin) is seen by both its proponents and its opponents as an integral part of the political system: many of its proponents tend to view this form of the English language as an intrinsic and almost infallible indicator of social position within a natural societal hierarchy; those who rail against it view it as a concrete manifestation of political oppression. Further, both proponents and opponents claim the mantle of the Renaissance humanists in the defense of their positions; its proponents argue that they, like a new Camillus, are fighting the good fight to restore the standards and hold off the barbarians; its opponents argue that their position is the divinely sanctioned one, for their intent is to benefit all humanity and not any political system, since all such systems are bound to collapse in a process as inexorable as a world growing old. Both of the parties to this dispute, I suggest, fail to appreciate fully the humanist position; both parties are blinded by the accretions of intervening interpretations of the humanist position. Valla had argued that the Romans spread their language more broadly than any
other nation, and that the excellence of a language is a function of the benefits it brings to all men. From that, modern proponents of Edited American English have fallaciously come to infer that various languages have varying intrinsic values which must be defended, while its opponents have come to infer, equally fallaciously, that the spread of a single language is a political and imperialistic act which must be resisted for the common good.

Renaissance humanists such as Valla, Agricola, Hegius, More, and Vives neither made nor permit such inferences. Their argumentation, when stripped of its once powerful but now pernicious rhetoric, is existentially simple: a contingent fact of history provided their culture with a vehicle for communication that could reach more people, contain more information, and provide access to a larger frame of reference than any other language or dialect; therefore, if they were to promote effective communication, they should emphasize mastery of that language above all others, but were not to deny the validity of any other language. Thus, Vives was no less a humanist for explicitly stating that there was eloquence in the vernacular; Mulcaster was no less a humanist for his search for eloquence in English; and those who teach composition and rhetoric today are no less humanists for insisting upon a student's mastery of Edited American English—in order that he might assert himself most effectively within a larger societal group—while at the same time recognizing that the student's natal dialect has its own unique value, its own unique eloquence in situations they may never have encountered.


2 This is the resolution adopted by the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) on March 21, 1972 ("Secretary's Report No. 66," College Composition and Communication, 23 [1972], 325). This resolution was subsequently augmented by a series of position papers distributed to the members of the CCCC and was characterized by Newsweek as "more a political tract than a set of educational precepts." ("Why Johnny Can't Write," Newsweek, December 8, 1975, p. 61).

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5This passage from Gerhard von Supthen’s “Glossa Notabilis” is cited by Terrence Heath in his article “Logical Grammar, Grammatical Logic, and Humanism in Three German Universities,” Studies in the Renaissance, 18 (1971), 14. While this article ignores the equally important role and evolution of the Doctrinale in the grammar schools, it does provide a valuable overview of the adversary relationship between this grammar and humanist reforms.

6All references to and citations from this Preface will be based upon the text found in Lorenzo Valla, Opera Omnia, ed. Eugenio Garin, Monumenta Politica et Philosophica Rariora Series I, Number 5 (Turin, 1962), I, 3-5. A truncated version of this Preface may be found in Florence A. Gragg, ed., Latin Writings of the Italian Humanists, (New York, 1927), pp. 146-49.

7Eugenio Garin, “Premessa” to Valla’s Opera-Omnia, I, vii, n. 3.


9For a detailed study of the entire De Elegantia, see Henry J. Stevens, Jr., Lorenzo Valla’s Elegantiae: A Humanistic View of the Latin Languages, Diss. Bryn Mawr 1973. Especially important is Stevens’ discussion of the term elegantia, whose sense of “appropriate choice” may be opposed to the sense of our modern “elegance.”

10“Quum saepe mecum nostrorum maiorum res gestas, aliorumque vel regum, vel populorum considero: videntur mihi non modo ditionis nostri homines, verumetiam linguae propagatione caeteris omnibus antecelluisse.” p. 3.

11“Nam Persas quidem, Medos, Assyrios, Graecos, aliosque permultos longe, lateque rerum potitos esse: quosdam etiam ut aliquanto inferius quam Romanorum fuit, ita multo diuturnius imperium tenuisse constat: nullos tamen ita linguam suam ampliasse ut nostri fecerunt.” p. 3.

12“Opus nimirum multo praeclarius, multoque speciosius, quam ipsum imperium propagas. Qui enim imperium augent, magno illi quidem honore affici solent, atque imperatores nominantur: qui autem beneficia aliqua in homines contulerunt, ii non humana, sed divina potius laude celebrantur. Quippe qui non suae tantum urbis amplitudine, ac gloriae consulat, sed publicae quoque hominum utilitati, ac saluti. Itaque nostri maiores rebus bellicis, pluribusque laudibus caeteros homines superarunt, linguae vero suae ampliatione seipsis superiores fuerunt, tanquam relictio in terris imperio, consortium deorum in coelo consecuti.” p. 3.

13“Quare quis aequus rerum aestimatur non eos praeferat, qui sacra literarum colentes, iis, qui bella horrida gerentes clari fuerunt?” p. 3.

14“Illud pridem, tanquam ingratum onus, gentes, nationesque abiecerunt: hunc omni nectare suaviorem, omni serico splendidiorem, omni auro gemmaque preciosiorem putaverunt. . . .” p. 4.

15“Magnum ergo Latini sermonis sacramentum est, magnum profecto numen, quod apud peregrinos, apud barbaros, apud hostes, sancte ac religiose per tot secula custoditur. . . .” p. 4.
16 "Amisimus Romam, amisimus regnum, amisimus dominatum, tametsi non nostra sed temporum culpa: verumontem per hunc splendidiorem dominatum in magna adhuc orbis parte regnamus." p. 4.

17 "Nam quis literarum, quis publici boni amator a lachrymis temperet, cum videat hanc in eo statu esse, quo olim Roma capta a Gallis, omnia eversa, incensa diruta ut vix Capitolina supersit arx?" p. 4.

18 "Siquidem multis iam seculis non modo Latine nemo locutus est, sed ne Latina quidem legens intellext: . . . quasi amisco Romano imperio, non beating Romane aut loqui, aut sapere, fulgorem illus Latinitatis situ ac rubigine passi obsolescere." p. 4.

19 "... confido propediem linguam Romanam virere plus quam urbem et cum ea disciplinas omnes iri restitutum." p. 4.

20 "De me tantum affirmare possum . . . difficillimam sumpsisse laboris partem . . . ut redderem alios ad caetera prosequenda alacriores." p. 5.

21 "Quousque tandem Quiretes (literatos appello et Romanae linguae cultores qui et vere et soli Quiritis sunt, caeteri enim potius inquilini) quousque inquam Quiretes urbem vestram non dico domicilium imperii, sed parentem literarum a Gallis esse captam patiemini, id est, Latinitatem a barbaris oppressam?" pp. 4-5.

22 Livy 5.43 ff.

23 Livy 5.51-54.

24 "... qui imperium nostrum accipiebat, suum amittere et (quod acerbius est) libertate spoliari se existimabat, nec fortasse iniuria. Ex sermone autem Latino non suum imminui, sed condiri quodammodo intelligebant: ut vinum posterius inventum aquae usum non excussit: nec sericum, lanam linumque: nec aurum, caetera metalla de possessione eiecit, sed reliquis bonis accessionem adiunxit." p. 3.

25 "Et sicut gemma aurea inclusa anulo, non deornamento esset, sed ornamento: ita noster sermo accedens, aliorum sermoni vernaculo contulit splendorem, non sustulit. Neque enim armis, aut cruore, aut bellis dominatum adeptus esset: sed beneficiis, amore concordia." p. 3.

26 "Eant igitur nunc Graeci et linguarum copia se iactent. Plus notra una efficit et quidem inops (ut ipsi volunt) quam illorum quinque (si eis credimus) locupletissimae: et multarum gentium velit una lex, una est lingua Romana: unus Graeciae (quod pudendum est) non una, sed multae sunt tamquam in Republica factiones." p. 4.

27 "Varie apud eos loquentur autores, Attice, Aeolice, Ionice, Dorice, Koine: apud nos, id est, apud multas nationes, nemo nisi Romane in qua lingua disciplinae cunctae libero homine dignae continentur, sicut in sua multiplici apud Graecos." p. 4.

28 "'Eloqui est,' inquit Marcus Fabius, 'omnia quae mente conceperis promere, atque ad audientes perferre;' sine quo supervacanea sunt priora et similia gladio condito, atque intra vaginam suam haerenti: non referit quo sermone, nam et in Scythico, et Gallico, et Germanico, et Hispano multi sunt eloquentes: nec quod Latinus, et Graecus sermo, eruditi sint, et copiosi, continuo nullus erit in alio sermone eloquens, nam et his ipsi Parthis ac Moedis
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barbarismi sunt... Equidem sordes et vitia sermonis nemo vel amare debet vel probare, unde maxima pars cladis tum artium, tum judiciae est accepta."


Elementarie, p. 268.

Elementarie, p. 268.

Elementarie, p. 269.


Gibbon, Decline, I, 47, n. 39.


Lipsius, De Pronunciatione, p. 15.

Gibbon called Valla "a fastidious grammarian" (Decline, VII, 332) and later, "an eloquent critic and a Roman Patriot" (Decline, VIII, 349). Gibbon's education in the classical languages did not really begin until his sojourn in Lausanne where, under the tutelage of M. Pavillard, he spent a large part of his time reading both primary and secondary sources and laboring to develop both his French and Latin styles. The De Elegantia, it must be remembered, was the best work on Latin stylistics available at that time.

Gibbon, Decline, I, 48-49.


Watson, Vives, p. cxxvii, n. 3. The only other published translation of this Preface is found in James B. Ross and Mary M. McLaughlin, eds., The Portable Renaissance Reader (New York, 1953), pp. 131-35; this translation, however, also suffers from the same silent compression of images, sentences and ideas, though to a somewhat lesser extent.
One of the more curious developments in recent intellectual history is the metamorphosis of freedom of speech and press into freedom of expression \textit{tout court}. To cite but one somewhat bizarre example, \textit{Time} reported in its July 12, 1976 number (p. 61) that Mike Nichols, Colleen Dewhurst, Ben Gazzara, Gay Talese and Ramsey Clark had attended a meeting to raise funds for the legal aid of one Harry Reems. The magazine described Mr. Reems as "the actor convicted on obscenity charges in Tennessee for his singular stint with Linda Lovelace in \textit{Deep Throat}.” Why were these celebrities so concerned to have this conviction appealed and, if possible, reversed? Mike Nichols explained: “It’s not about taste. It’s about freedom of expression. People should be free to explore anything they are moved to.”

It no longer matters, it would seem, what is expressed, how it is expressed, or for what purpose it is expressed. All that matters is that someone wants to express it. The freedom of the press, under which films are now subsumed, has become freedom of expression, and freedom of expression has become an absolute.

Now, freedom of expression so understood may be the logical term toward which the theory of freedom of speech and press has inexorably tended from the beginning. At any rate, enough people, particularly among intellectuals and journalists, hold this view of the matter that one may call it the conventional wisdom of contemporary liberal society. On the other hand, the conventional wisdom may be wrong. It is possible that freedom of expression, detached from any consideration of justifying purpose, is not a development but a perversion of the tradition that furnished the rationale for freedom of speech and press.

Willmoore Kendall has listed the major works in that tradition in the following paragraph.

We may \ldots speak properly of a \textit{literature} of the problem of freedom of thought and speech, one easy to identify in the sense that most scholars in the field of political theory, regardless of their views on that problem \ldots, would name the same list of “must” items dealing with the problem, and cite those
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items over and over again when they address themselves to the problem. . . . the items are: Plato’s Apology and Crito, Locke’s Letters concerning Toleration, Spinoza’s brief discussion of the problem in the Tractatus, Milton’s Areopagitica and, above all. . . . Mill's Essay on Liberty.¹

Fully to answer the question of whether the current absolutist doctrine of freedom of expression is a development or a perversion of this intellectual tradition would require a thorough analysis of all the works listed by Kendall—to which list some would doubtless wish to add still other “classics.” But this article will attempt only a minor contribution to that task.

Kendall correctly describes the literature as dealing with freedom of thought and speech, because the freedom of the press was joined to it only after the invention of printing. Freedom to publish one’s views in print has, however, been a major object of the struggle for intellectual freedom in the modern period. At the beginning of this effort stands John Milton’s Areopagitica, said to be “the first work devoted primarily to freedom of the press.”² This article will confine itself, therefore, to Areopagitica and will ask how broad are the conclusions regarding freedom of expression that one may legitimately draw from it.

It is not an easy question to answer. As its subtitle declares, Areopagitica is a plea “for the liberty of unlicenc’d printing.” But it is not clear, nor is it universally agreed among scholars, how far Milton meant to go in his attack on censorship. As Arthur Edward Barker has remarked, “In spite of the radical tone of its arguments . . . the extent of the freedom Milton demands remains uncertainly restricted.”³

What Milton openly advocated in Areopagitica was considerably less than full freedom of the press as it is understood in modern liberal democracies. This fact does not of itself exclude the possibility that a greater freedom than he contended for was implicit in his premises and arguments. But all that he explicitly demanded was the abolition of the official prior censorship of books that had been established by an Order of Parliament in June 1643, somewhat over a year before Milton published his pamphlet.

The key phrase of this Order required that no “Book, Pamphlet, paper . . . shall from henceforth be printed . . . by any person or persons whatsoever, unless the same be first approved of and licensed under the hands of such person or persons as both, or either of the
said Houses [of Parliament] shall appoint for the licensing of the same..." Milton's declared object in Areopagitica was to persuade Parliament to revoke this requirement of licensing. It was compatible with this purpose to accept the punishment of authors and printers of books subsequent to publication and to set limits to the views that could be published without punishment. That was in fact Milton's explicit position—though it remains possible that he really wanted more than he openly asked for.

Milton asserts that the licensing of books was an invention of the Council of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition, imported into England by Romanizing Anglican bishops. "Till then," he says, "Books were ever as freely admitted into the World as any other birth; the issue of the brain was no more stifl'd than the issue of the womb...; but if it prov'd a Monster, who denies, but that it was justly burnt, or sunk into the sea." Again, Milton approves an earlier parliamentary order

that no book be Printed, unlesse the Printers and the Authors name, or at least the Printers be register'd. Those which other wise come forth, if they be found mischievous and libellous, the fire and the executioner will be the timeliest and the most effectuall remedy, that man's prevention can use.

Milton, then, opposes prior censorship or licensing but accepts subsequent punishment for "mischievous" (without defining the term) and libellous publications. He also indicates in the following passage that the toleration of the publication of diverse opinions that he proposes has limits:

Yet if all cannot be of one mind, as who looks they should be? this doubtles is more wholesome, more prudent, and more Christian that many be tolerated, rather then all compell'd. I mean not tolerated Popery, and open superstition, which as it extirpats all religions, and civill supremacies, so it self should be extirpat...: that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or maners no law can possibly permit, that intends not to unlaw it self: but those neighboring differences, or rather indifferences, are what I speak of, whether in some point of doctrine or of discipline.

Milton has often been hailed as a herald of the modern liberty of the press. But, because of the restrictions he placed on toleration, others have taken a dim view of his liberalism. Thus Leonard W. Levy says: "Unquestionably several passages in the Areopagitica,
which are ritualistically quoted to the exclusion of all else, carry implications of majestic breadth, but no one who reads him with care should refer to ‘Milton’s dream of free speech for everybody.’” In fact, Levy claims, Milton’s tolerance extended only to “Protestantism in a variety of Puritan forms.”¹²

Willmoore Kendall, in the article previously quoted, contends that Areopagitica does not belong at all among the classics of freedom of thought and speech. Rather, it is really an anti-freedom tract.¹³ It lends itself easily to misinterpretation, Kendall concedes, because it “abounds in passages, highly quotable because of their intoxicating rhetoric, which when wrenched from context do indeed seem to commit Milton to the libertarian ‘side’ on the freedom of thought and speech issue.” But Milton is arguing only for tolerance within an essentially closed society whose members are in such full agreement about important things that they can afford to tolerate one another. “The ‘principles’ that should have ‘led Milton on’ to demand a still broader toleration,” says Kendall, “are simply not there.”¹⁴

Enough has been said to indicate that there is considerable disagreement about the extent of the freedom that Milton advocated in Areopagitica. One source of the disagreement is the nature of Areopagitica itself. It was not a dispassionate and exhaustive investigation of the whole question of freedom to think and to publish one’s thoughts. It was a pamphlet aimed at an immediate practical result: the repeal of the parliamentary Licencing Order. There is no reason to doubt Milton’s sincerity, but in a pamphlet written with such an object, a man may well say both more and less than he would say in a philosophical treatise.

But, for the purpose of the present article, we may leave unanswered the question of what Milton “really meant” and how far he wanted to go in Areopagitica, and may proceed upon a different premise. We shall borrow it from a paper read by the Dean of St. Paul’s, W. R. Matthews, at a conference held in London in 1944 to commemorate the tercentenary of the publication of Areopagitica, where he said:

We must own that Milton’s conception of the nature of tolerable books was limited, and it appears that many who have not recently read his book have an exaggerated notion of what he urges as reasonable liberty. . . . Are we wrong, then, in venerating Milton as a pioneer of intellectual freedom? Certainly we are,
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if we regard only what he himself intended, but we are right if we regard the arguments he used, for they carry us beyond the limits which he would have imposed.¹⁵

Now, to accept Dean Matthews’ position is to do what Willmoore Kendall has told us we must not do, namely, to find “principles” that should have “led Milton on,” but which are simply not there in his work. Let us assume Dean Matthews’ reading of Milton none the less, not as demonstrably the correct reading, but as the most liberal one that can reasonably be sustained. Let us agree, for the sake of argument, that the arguments Milton used “carry us beyond the limits which he would have imposed.” We may then ask to what limits, or lack thereof, they carry us in regard to freedom of expression.

Milton states in general terms two chief goals to be achieved by allowing the publication of books without prior censorship. He says that “books freely permitted are [a means] both to the triall of vertue, and the exercise of truth.”¹⁶ In more modern terminology, reading a wide range of books that have been published without previous restraint helps men to develop their moral characters and to pursue truth.

Since that is the substance of Milton’s case against censorship, he of course devotes his efforts to showing that freedom to publish really does serve the ends he states for it. But to argue for a freedom on the basis of the ends it serves to make the freedom less than absolute. For those uses of a freedom that do not promote, still more those which actually inhibit the achievement of the end, are not justified by the end and may even be prohibited by it. We may therefore ask how much freedom to publish can be inferred from the goals that Milton alleges to be served by the unrestrained publication of books.

Let us first consider the “exercise of truth.” Truth, for Milton, is to be pursued by the use of human reason. Books are important because they embody, as it were, reason. Thus he says:

Books are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be active as that soule was whose progeny they are: nay they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.

It is for this reason that Milton admits that Church and Common-
wealth may keep a vigilant eye on books and may "confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors": they are like the dragon's teeth in the fable, and "being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men."\textsuperscript{17}

Milton's real point, however, is that suppressing books is an attack on reason and on truth. He therefore immediately adds:

And yet on the other hand unless warinesse be us'd, as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods image; but hee who destroys a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye.\textsuperscript{18}

In this line of argument, then, books are valuable as expressions of reason. The function of reason is to seek truth. It is not necessary that the books that reason produces or uses should express only true opinions, since even erroneous ones have their uses. On this point Milton appeals to the authority of the eminent and learned member of Parliament, John Selden, who, he says, has proved "that all opinions, yea errors, known, read, and collated, are of main service & assistance toward the speedy attainment of what is truest."\textsuperscript{19}

Milton therefore is thinking primarily of the writing and the reading of books by intelligent and learned men. Having argued at length that the licensing system does not and cannot achieve the goal at which it aims, namely, the protection of the people against intellectual and moral corruption, he continues: "I lastly proceed from the no good it can do, to the manifest hurt it causes, in being first the greatest discouragement and affront, that can be offer'd to learning and to learned men." Milton means those who "evidently were born to study, and love lerning for it self, not for lucre, or any other end, but the service of God and of truth. . ."\textsuperscript{20}

When such "a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done he takes himself to be inform'd in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him. . ."\textsuperscript{21} What, then, can be more fair than to let a man of this kind "openly by writing publish to the world what his opinion is, what his reasons, and wherefore that which is now thought cannot be sound"?\textsuperscript{22}

When a man has done hard intellectual labor "only that he may try the matter by dint of argument," for his opponents to silence
him by prior censorship "is but weaknes and cowardise in the wars of Truth. For who knows not that Truth is strong next to the Almighty; she needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licencings to make her victorious..."

The liberty that Milton seeks to defend is that of sincere, though possibly erring, seekers after truth. His argument assumes that truth, while never completely grasped, is attainable, that progress in finding it can be made, and that truth will emerge from open and honest intellectual debate. This is so even in regard to religious truth, from the discovery of which reason is by no means excluded. According to Barker, in the group of pamphlets of which Areopagitica forms a part, "the emphasis is not on reformation and divine prescript [as it was in Milton’s earlier pamphlets] but on liberty and free reasoning. Instead of a rebuilding according to the clearly revealed pattern, reformation becomes a progressive search for truth." 

What, then, is Milton’s conception of truth? "Truth," he says, "indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on." But after the death of His apostles, "a wicked race of deceivers" arose who hewed the body of Truth into pieces. Since that time "the sad friends of Truth" have been "gathering up limb by limb." But we shall not find them all "till her Masters second comming; he shall bring together every joynt and member, and shall mould them into an immortall feature of lovelines and perfection." In the meantime, we must not prevent men by licensing laws from trying "to unite those dissever’d peeces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth." On the contrary:

To be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal, and proportionall) this is the golden rule in Theology as well as in Arithmetick, and makes up the best harmony in a Church; not the forc’t and outward union of cold, and neutrall, and inwardly divided minds.

Milton was neither a skeptic nor a relativist. Sirluck points out: "What must be emphasized is that although the truth is now known only in part, this part is absolutely known." We search for what we know not by what we do know. Nor need we fear that the search will end in anything other than the truth. Milton assures us:

And though all the winds of doctrin were let loose to play upon the earth, so
Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licencing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falshood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter. Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing.  

At least in the part of Areopagitica in which Milton contends that freedom to publish will certainly forward the pursuit of truth, he seems open to B. Ifor Evans' comment:

His conception is based ultimately on the conditions which might have prevailed in a small Athenian community had printing been then invented. It presupposes a small audience, all of them capable of forming their own judgments, with ample discussion to correct false views. He has in mind the formulation of adequate conclusions by a Socratic method. Even the England of his own day did not fit that picture altogether, and the world of our own does not fit it at all. A small group of men in full command over the machinery of the press, or of the radio, effect a secret tyranny over the minds of millions.

Whatever one may think of the alleged tyranny of the communications media, as we now call them, it would seem that Milton's argument is most applicable to academic publications. Its applicability diminishes steadily as one moves out of the academic world, in which a reasoned presentation of one's views must at least appear to be made, into a world of writing in which there is far less, and often no, pretense at the rational pursuit of truth. If one wishes to defend an unqualified freedom of expression in such publications as gossip columns, commercial advertisements, comic books, pornographic magazines and films, and other forms of popular entertainment, one must look for arguments elsewhere than in this part of Areopagitica. An argument proves no more than it proves, and all that Milton is here trying to prove is that freedom to present a reasoned exposition of one's views will aid the pursuit of truth. He is not speaking of catering to tastes that have little or nothing to do with a desire for the truth.

There is, however, another line of argument in Areopagitica that may be more to the purpose of defending an absolute freedom of expression, the one concerned with "the triall of vertue." Here Milton argues that the knowledge of good depends upon the knowledge of evil, and the development of virtue upon confrontation with vice. This state of affairs is the result of original sin:

It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and
evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill.⁴⁰

We are no longer living in the Garden of Eden, and this has important consequences for our moral lives.

As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdome can there be to choose, what continence to forbeare without the knowledge of evill? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian.³¹

Because we are born in sin, “we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather.” We can no longer, therefore, seek the vanished virtue of a prelapsarian innocence: “that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary.” We must not flee the knowledge of evil: “That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure...” And this, says Milton, “was the reason why our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*... describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain.”³²

It might seem to follow that the true wayfaring Christian should perform his own rite of passage through such bowers of earthly bliss as are available by frequenting taverns, brothels, gaming houses and opium dens in order to see and know, and yet abstain. But Milton does not draw that conclusion. Instead, he says:

Since therefore the knowledge and surva[y] of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human vertue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity then by reading all manner of tractats, and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.³³

The unrestricted reading of books, and therefore their unrestrained publication, is a positive aid to moral growth, with which wise and good men cannot dispense. Milton does not deny that to the many who are weak, reading bad books may be a temptation or at best a waste of time. He is content to say that “bad books... to a
discreet and judicious Reader serve in many respects to discover, to
confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate,” and to insist that to
mature men

such books are not temptations, nor vanities; but usefull drugs and materials
wherewith to temper and compose effective and strong med'cins, which mans
life cannot want. The rest, as children and childish men, who have not the art to
qualifie and prepare these working mineralls, well may be exhorted to forbear,
but hinder'd forcibly they cannot be by all the licencing that Sainted Inquisition
could ever yet contrive...35

This leads Milton into his next contention, namely, that the
attempt to protect the masses from temptation by licensing publi-
cations simply will not succeed. Furthermore, he argues, if we hope
"to rectifie manners" by regulating printing, in consistency "we must
regulat all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightful to man," but
that will only "make us all both ridiculous and weary, and yet
frustrat...."36 We must accept the fact that all the pleasures of life
are subject to abuse, and that it is not the licensing of books or of any-
thing else that will restrain the abuses. We must rather rely on "those
unwritt'n or at least unconstraining laws of vertuous education, reli-
gious and civill nurture...; these they be which will bear chief sway
in such matters as these, when all licensing will be easily eluded."37

God Himself, after all, showers us with "all desirable things,"
while commanding us to be temperate, just, and continent. "Why
should we then affect a rigor contrary to the manner of God and
nature, by abridging or scanting those means, which books freely
permitted are, both to the triall of vertue, and the exercise of truth."
We should rather "learn that the law must needs be frivolous which
goes to restrain things, uncertainly and yet equally working to good,
and to evill."38

Milton's thesis is no more than that the effort to protect morals
by prior censorship is bound both to be ineffective and to deprive
good men of a positive benefit. But the arguments he presents for his
thesis would seem to sustain the further conclusion that the publ-
cication of books should not be subject on moral grounds to subse-
quently restraint on publication. If, then, the publication of books that
present vice in its most alluring forms is on the whole a benefit to
mankind, it ought to be free of any legal restraint either previous or
subsequent.
One reason for not accepting this conclusion is that, as one writer has put it, Milton himself allows for the suppression as well as the publication of books and his "opposition seems to be not so much against a policy which will permit suppression as against a policy which would put the power of restraint into the hands of unfit persons."\(^{19}\) This much is true, that throughout Areopagitica Milton's wrath is directed chiefly against the requirement that a writer's work, before it can appear in print, must be subject to what in one place he calls "the hasty view of an unleasur'd licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps far his inferiour in judgement, perhaps one who never knew the labour of book-writing. . . ."\(^{20}\)

But it can be replied to this that in Areopagitica Milton was preoccupied with licensing and prior censorship precisely because a Licencing Order was in effect and the immediate need was to have it repealed. It does not follow that he would have been willing to have writers and printers subject to subsequent penalties for publishing the kind of "bad books" that he defended.

That leads to the more basic question, how wide a range of books did Milton defend. A French writer, Jean-Jacques Mayoux, has described the liberty that Milton advocated in very broad terms, but none the less with significant limitations. The important theme of Areopagitica, he says, is the urgent plea that it makes for freedom to write everything, to read everything, and to experience everything at least in imagination, as a necessary element of the moral liberty of a responsible human person.\(^{21}\) Milton, he says, defends not only man as the rational and autonomous master of himself, but man as the experiencer of pleasure. Himself a Puritan, Milton takes a malicious pleasure in ridiculing all puritans from Plato onwards. This is Milton the artist and man of sensibility speaking.\(^{22}\) And yet, Mayoux adds, we must not make Milton into the kind of contemporary critic who pleads the cause of The Story of O or the writings of the Marquis de Sade. "The idea that one can read or write without bearing one's responsibility in mind never occurred to him, would have seemed to him devoid of sense."\(^{23}\)

In Areopagitica Milton discusses what Herbert Read calls the "scurrilous writers of antiquity" and, according to Read, "is clearly of the opinion that there never was a case for suppressing any of them." He refers also to "Milton's tolerance of the printing even of obscenities."\(^{24}\) But tolerating the occasional scurrility or obscenity
of acknowledged classics seems to be about as far as Milton was willing to go.

Allen H. Gilbert devoted an article to Milton's views on obscenity, and concluded with the following remarks, which are worth quoting in extenso.

Milton deals with the use of plain or bawdy language in two situations. The first is the instance of strong feeling, as when God denounced the wickedness of the Jews. The second is the comic employment of such language.

The comic authors Milton liked suggest what his practice would have been had he attempted comedy. Aristophanes he calls the "loosest" of the old comedians and a book "of grossest infamy," yet he refers to the Greek as though not unfamiliar with him, and annotators have traced to him passages in Paradise Regained. He had no objection to the reading of "scurrill Plautus" and thought his jests, like those of the old Greek comedians, "elegant, urbane, clever, and witty." The bawdry of Shakespeare and Jonson did not cause Milton to withhold his admiration. The sexual double meaning jocosely employed [by Milton himself] in the attack on [Alexander] More is quite such as a comic author familiar with Italian literature might employ.

Altogether, Milton's literary background, his theory of what is allowable in stirring up laughter, and his practice in both verse and prose... lead one to suppose that had he attempted comedy, he would when required by decorum—"the grand masterpiece to observe"—not have hesitated to set down passages as bawdy as some of those in Jonson and Shakespeare, his favorite English comedians.

But there is a considerable distance between the bawdiest passages in Aristophanes, Plautus, Shakespeare or Jonson and The Story of O or Deep Throat. That is to say, there is a difference between the occasional and, in Milton's eyes, justified use of obscenity in literature and works that pander to prurience, morbid curiosity, lust and the appetite for violence.

There remains the question of the literature that, according to Milton, reveals "vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures" and presents "the utmost that vice promises to her followers." Milton does not name it. Presumably it is the same scurrilous literature, largely of antiquity, that he has been discussing up to that point in his text. Be that as it may, it is worth remarking that the conclusion of his defense of freely permitting books as a means to "the triall of vertue and the exercise of truth" is that "the law must needs be frivolous which goes to restrain things, uncertainly and yet equally working to good, and to evill." A literature that works equally to
good and to evil may indeed contain passages that offend pious ears or create temptations for the immature. But it is surely something less than a massive and sustained solicitation to vice.

Milton’s defense of “books promiscuously read” is that they serve a moral as well as an intellectual end: “the knowledge and survey of vice [that] is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human vertue.”48 One must ask, then, how much and what kind of survey of vice is needed to constitute human virtue. The works that set before the reader the utmost that vice promises to her followers must be compatible with this end. If one wishes to use Milton’s argument in favor of absolute freedom of expression, one must show that it serves the moral end by which he justifies reading “bad books.” Today, that would require a demonstration that every possible presentation of vice, complete with audio-visual aids, is necessary or at least useful for the development of moral character.

It would not be necessary to show that the works protected by absolute freedom of expression are intended to serve a moral end. Milton defended reading works which he regarded as immoral in their intention. But it would be necessary to show that the works protected do in fact serve a moral end. Milton clearly thought that the immoral works of literature that were available in his day served such a purpose, at least for a judicious reader. It does not follow that he would have thought the same about all of the immoral or merely trivial publications available today. More importantly—since what Milton would have thought is not the controlling consideration—it is taxing credibility to maintain that we can stretch his justification of “bad books” to cover the whole range of publications on our contemporary market. That would be asking us to believe that pandering to the lowest tastes of a mass audience performs the function of helping the true wayfaring Christian—or, for that matter, the highminded agnostic—to see and know, and yet abstain.

Granted Milton’s contention that one cannot be truly temperate who has not experienced and learned to master the enticements of pleasure, it does not follow that an unrelenting assault on the passions is an aid to temperance. Milton’s thesis, after all, is that “passions within us, pleasures round about us... rightly temper’d are the very ingredients of vertue.”49 There must be some proportion between the means and the end, if one wishes to remain within the framework of Milton’s thought. But today there is a vast quantity of
publication—including photographs, films, records, and other products of modern technology—that makes no pretense or only the flimsiest pretense of serving any end other than the uninhibited satisfaction of desire. One finds in it no proportion between the means employed and a moral (or, for that matter, an aesthetic) end. It is this kind of publication, above all, that is defended by the plea for absolute freedom of expression, because the meaning of the plea is that expression is a value in itself and needs no relationship to a justifying, and potentially limiting, purpose.

To absolutize freedom of expression by detaching it from purpose is therefore not only to go beyond anything that Milton advocated but beyond anything that can reasonably be inferred from his premises. In Areopagitica, Milton was contending for the removal of certain limits on publication, and therefore gave only passing attention to the limits that he would maintain. Those that he mentioned were certainly more stringent than would be generally acceptable today. But even if we agree with Dean Matthews that Milton’s arguments carry us beyond the limits which he would have imposed, his arguments do not lead to the conclusion that there should be no limits. To the extent, then, that Milton represents or, on a liberal interpretation of his thought, can be made to represent the intellectual tradition in favor of freedom of the press, the contemporary absolutist position on freedom of expression is not a development but a perversion of that tradition.

4 Complete Prose Works, ed. Sirluck, II, 797; the complete text of the Order is found in Appendix B, pp. 797-99.
5 Sirluck takes this as Milton’s genuine position. “Introduction,” pp. 163-64.
It is remarkable how generally this view has been accepted, for it is widely at variance with the facts." Sirluck, "Introduction," p. 158.

*Areopagitica*, in *Complete Prose Works*, II, ed. Sirluck, p. 505. All subsequent references to *Areopagitica* will be to this edition.

Ibid., p. 569. Sirluck remarks in a footnote: "There is an ambiguity here. It was a legal offence for books to be published anonymously or without the publisher's imprint, even though they were neither 'mischievous' nor libellous; it was another offence to publish 'mischief' or libel, even though the publication carried the name of author and publisher."


Ibid., pp. 175-77. For an even more radical assertion of Milton's authoritarianism, see John Illo, "The Misreading of Milton," *Columbia University Forum*, VIII, 2 (Summer 1965), 38-42.


*Areopagitica*, p. 528.

Ibid., p. 492.

Ibid., p. 513.

Ibid., pp. 530-31.

Ibid., p. 532.

Ibid., p. 548.

Ibid., pp. 562-63.

"The divorce pamphlets, the *Areopagitica* and *Of Education* form a group not only in time but because each contributes to Milton's definition of Christian liberty, 'domestic or private.' " Op. cit., p. 118.

Ibid., p. 75.

Areopagitica, pp. 549-51.


Areopagitica, p. 561.

"Lessons of the Areopagitica," *Contemporary Review*, 166 (1944), 344.

*Areopagitica*, p. 514.

Ibid., pp. 514-15.

Ibid., pp. 515-16.

Ibid., pp. 516-17.

Ibid., p. 512.

Ibid., p. 521.

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37 Ibid., p. 526.
38 Ibid., p. 528.
40 *Areopagitica*, p. 532.
42 Ibid., pp. 204-05.
43 Ibid., p. 202. The translation is mine; the original is: “L’idée que l’on pût lire ou écrire sans avoir présente à l’esprit sa responsabilité ne l’effleurait pas, lui aurait paru vide de sens.”
47 Ibid., p. 528.
49 Ibid., p. 527; italics added.
In the age of party government and its attendant spirit of partisanship, the name of George Saville, First Marquis of Halifax is remembered primarily for his "unprincipled" principles associated with the term, Trimmer. A Trimmer eschews partisanship on principle. As Halifax explains:

The innocent term Trimmer signifieth no more than this, that if men are together in a boat, and one part of the company would weigh it down on one side, another would make it lean as much to the contrary; it happeneth that there is a third opinion of those who conceive it would do as well if the boat went even, without endangering the passengers.¹

Yet Halifax is commonly identified with typically unscrupulous or dissimulating opportunism in statecraft, with little attention given to other of his pamphlets aside from The Character of a Trimmer. Nevertheless, his life and the complete body of his writings warrant in retrospect more generous, perspicacious estimates of Halifax’s statesmanship. If nothing else, his career demonstrates a full reliance of policy on principle, and the result for England was not inconsequential. Twice managing to avert civil war, Halifax delayed the reckoning for James II until that unfortunate monarch enflamed a crisis which forever removed him and the Stuart male line from the throne of England. It was as though Halifax had profoundly imbibed lessons learned from Machiavelli, according to whom the prudent statesman prepares for peace by going to war and inspires a "revolution settlement" by upholding the principle of legitimacy. Like Hume, Halifax was a non-Whig who nevertheless regarded political society as if it were based upon a tacitly understood original contract.²

Speaking in his own name, Halifax wrote that: "As a sword is sooner broken upon a featherbed than upon a table, so his [Charles II’s] pliantness broke the blow of a present mischief much better than a more immediate resistance would have. . . . If he dissembled, let us remember first, that he was a King, and that dissimulation is a
jewel of the Crown. . . .” Halifax adds pertinently: “Virtues must be enlarged or restrained according to differing circumstances.” Halifax does not and cannot be thought to recommend dissimulation for dissimulation’s sake. Each political quality or virtue has its uses when well adapted to the variety of circumstances for which it is suitable.

Halifax observes that good government is not the right of the governed, although all government is based on a tacit contract. Good government stems from the people’s good fortune or is a benefit unthinkingly received from the skill of a few—which the people neither deserves nor has contributed towards. Many often fail to notice a distinction between good and bad government except in the extreme circumstance. The fact happens to be that there are few policies adopted intentionally for the public good: “There is seldom any good thing set on foot for the public good, but that a private ayme is the true motive of it . . . [;] the people are never so perfectly backed that they will kick and fling, if not stroked at seasonable times.” Halifax hastens to emphasize: “In corrupted governments the place is given for the sake of the man; in good ones, the man is chosen for the sake of the place.” Kings or rulers would not seem to constitute exceptions to this fundamental rule, and Halifax anticipates Bolingbroke’s watchword, “not men, but measures.”

Halifax’s method of philosophizing on government is not articulated in the form of the political treatise. But if certain transitions are supplied by the investigator, a complete political method and set of principles for statecraft emerge—refined and coordinated in all aspects by the man of whom Macaulay wrote, “The truth is that the memory of Halifax is entitled in an especial way to the protection of history.” More recent historians have seen fit to sustain Macaulay’s judgment, and the Revolution Settlement of 1688, of which Halifax is regarded as a prime mover and shaper, still constitutes for them the pivotal event of English seventeenth-century history. The consensus of present-day historians identifies Halifax as England’s Elder Statesman in the gathering crisis of 1687-88, and they are in substantial agreement that it was Halifax who insisted that the form of the constitution in the Revolution Settlement be decided before the question of who was to rule. What some historians have at times scanted, however, is the revolutionary role of Halifax’s writings and the fact that his politics are better seen as a reflection of his writings than his writings as a reflection of his
politics. The variousness of Halifaxian statecraft is especially not perceived as stemming from his unprincipled principles. H. C. Foxcroft’s Life and Letters (1898) puts this problem in its proper perspective, but Foxcroft is not thoroughly enough consulted on this problem. The result has been to overlook the unity of precept and practice from Halifax’s Advice to a Daughter to The Character of a Trimmer, and the characteristic self-explanation which illumines the core of Halifaxian statesmanship is thereby neglected. This self-explanation was entirely epitomized by “our Trimmer” who “is . . . fully satisfied of the truth of those principles by which he is directed in reference to the public.”

Halifax has been accused, both in his time and intermittently ever since, of being a vacillating opportunist, an intriguer without integrity rather than a patriot. The fact that he never composed a systematic, ‘scientific’ treatise on politics has been alleged to signify that he never held unchanging political views, and his works have been dismissed as merely occasional pamphlets or tracts for the times. That Halifax was a patriot and that his works are something more than tracts for the times will soon become apparent. Admittedly, Halifax himself acknowledges the non-treatiselike presentation of his views; but this cannot be taken to mean that his writings are merely occasional pieces, owing to their discursive restatement of consistent political principles. As George H. Sabine observes apropos of the discursive, closely-reasoned quality of Halifax’s works: “Thus Halifax, though he would not have been flattered by being called a philosopher, displayed an intellectual temper which became an integral part of philosophy.”

Halifax’s manner of writing, with its admixture of policy and principle, is illuminated by his sleighting estimate of human reason considered in the abstract, that is, the reason of most men most of the time. He considers men to be subject to rationality less frequently and to a more superficial degree than is generally recognized.

Most men make little other use of their speech than to give evidence against their own understanding. A little learning misleadeth and a great deal often stupifieth the understanding. In an unreasonable age, a man’s reason let loose would undo him. A man that steps aside from the world, and hath leisure to observe it without interest or design, thinks all mankind as mad as they think him for not agreeing with them in their mistakes.
Halifax: Complete Trimmer Revisited

That Halifax’s policy recommendations were various or inconsistent is not borne out by the consensus of historians (pace Hume). Almost singlehandedly, in a century of civil wars he twice thwarted the likely recourse to civil war in England, once during the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-81 and again in 1688. His Rough Draught of a New Model at Sea (1694) helped reestablish Britain on the Baconian path of naval imperialism which it successfully pursued up until 1914. In the Rough Draught Halifax advertises to the occasion for his work and seems to present a reason for its apparently ad hoc manner: “It is not pretended to launch into such a voluminous treatise as to set down everything to which so comprehensive a subject might lead. . . ”

Since men are prone to consult their own interest rather than their reason, it is prudential to refrain from arguments presented on the strength alone of principles. Because of men’s known partiality for their own opinionated preferences, it is hard to connect valid principles with the detailed arguments which apply them so as to be persuasive. The virtue of persuasiveness must assume that some, at least, are disposed to change their minds; but also that they are inclined to do so for reasons other than general arguments. In either case, Halifax vouchsafes one universal criterion as invariably applicable in politics: “That there is hardly a single proposition to be made which is not deceitful, and the tying our reason too close to it may in many cases be destructive.” Halifax adds: “Circumstances must come in, and are to be made a part of the matter of which we are to judge; positive decisions are always dangerous, more especially in politics.”

J.P. Kenyon has noted a parallel between Halifax and Burke, and there is something ascertainably Burkean in the former’s unwillingness to reduce the complex manifold of political life to any set of analytical principles. The same goes for Halifax’s perceptions of the need for society to dissemble its differences behind some sort of veil. For example, Halifax speaks of “the embroidered part of the government” and remarks that “there must be milk for babes, since the greatest part of mankind are, and so ever will be included in that list.” Likewise in the Burkean manner Halifax emphasizes the harmonious coordination of the various orders and ranks in the regime, so that one part of the constitution is proportionally offset and limited by another. “Our government is in a just proportion—no tympany, no unnatural swellings either of power or liberty.”
The value of general arguments for political persuasion is undermined, in Halifax's mind, by men's partiality for their own preconceived ideas. Nevertheless, Halifax does not let this tendency prevent him from offering the public his own thoughts in a generalized form, according to J. P. Kenyon. It is a suggestive fact that in the *Rough Draught* where Halifax argues for the inefficacy of general principles, he delays the introduction of his specific recommendations for policy until more than half way through. Indeed, its title, *A Rough Draught of a New Model at Sea*, is quite misleading, as the work exhibits anything but a "rough" construction, and the opening line ironically underlines the delayed specific recommendations: "I will make no other introduction to the following discourse than that the importance of our being strong at sea was ever very great..." The irony consists in the fact that this introduction next proceeds to discourse on the "forms (i.e. systems) of government" until more than half way through it concludes with the sentence, "the Navy is of so great importance that it would be disparaged by calling it less than the life and soul of the Government." The policy recommendation has at this point yet to be made.

We thus see that principles and general propositions are related to policy in such a way that the reader is led to consider general arguments at length before being introduced to specifics. Halifax does allude to "the present controversy" before he takes up the general "forms of government," but he decides that it is best to defer consideration of the former because "a man, who will be master of an argument...must look around to see what objections can be made." General arguments constitute a necessary part of presenting such 'objections.' Accordingly, the reader will "not go in a straight line, which is the ready way to lead him into a mistake." Almost in a literal way the reader is forced by Halifax to trim, viz. to proceed as if tacking in a sailing vessel, between general principles and expositions of, or allusions to, specific policies. Halifax, then, is more than simply a Trimmer in politics; in his very method of literary construction he "trims" between general principles and "the present controversy." This impression is enforced by Halifax's frequent use of antithesis in his writings and speeches.

Hence the structure of *A Rough Draught* reflects the Trimmer's pattern: first, general propositions are advanced as regards "the first
article of an Englishman’s political creed,” then allusion is made to “the present controversy between the gentlemen and the tarpaulins.” Third, general “forms of government” are discussed and finally a return is made to “the present controversy.” The Trimmer’s zig-zag pattern of political conduct is reproduced within the dimensions of Halifax’s literary method in A Rough Draught. Halifax’s art of writing is a mirror reflecting his moderatist statesmanship.

The tactic of literary “trimming” is further exemplified in the framework of the discourse: “… for as the sea hath little less variety in it than the land, so the naval force of England,” explains Halifax, “extendeth itself into a great many branches, each of which are important enough to require a discourse apart, and peculiarly applied to it.”20 But variousness, to be handled expeditiously, must be reduced to a single unified whole, for “a principle to be laid down that there is a differing consideration to be had if such a subject-matter as in itself distinct and independent, and of such an one as being a limb of a body, or a wheel of a frame, there is a necessity of suiting it to the rest and preserving the harmony of the whole.”21 It emerges clearly and distinctly that the “body” or “frame” of which the harmony of the whole consists parallels in itself the unity of the part or “limb.” Though the parts are various, their integrity among themselves is guaranteed by the unity of the whole, as is the case in practice of the English navy as part of the English Constitution. The English Constitution is the whole of which the English navy is its most integral representation. An alteration in the latter would mean an alteration in the former, which it represents. “A man must not in that case,” explains Halifax, “restrain himself to the separate consideration of that single part, but must take care it may fall in and agree with the shape of the whole creature of which it is a member.” The whole is not only the sum, but the paradigm of its parts.

In the framework of Halifax’s discourse, then, the tactic of literary “trimming” between general propositions and specific applications forms part of a strategy which is dialectical. Dialectically, the mixed constitution as between monarchism and republicanism, exemplified by the temperate English climate and in what combines the opposites of sea and land as sea power (e.g., a flotilla), prescribe the mixed naval establishment Halifax recommends. The strategy, in general terms, is to strike a balance of the extremes by
defining a middle course. In addition, Halifax wishes to avoid any appearance of “affectation or an extravagant fit of unseasonable politics.” That this strategy is a result of dialectic can be seen by the contrast of two principles: (1) “Mankind naturally swelleth against favour and partiality,” and (2) “Partiality and common prejudice direct most men’s opinions without entering into the particular reasons which ought to be the ground of it.”

These principles are both drawn from *A Rough Draught*, and they demonstrate how such conflicts are to be mediated by Halifax’s own activity as an author of political discourses. That activity may be seen to provide “a steady foundation” upon which prejudices can give way to reliable judgments. The process is the following one. Halifax holds general propositions to be useless without specific policy recommendations. Accordingly, “there is so much ease in acquiescing in generals, that the ignorance of those who cannot distinguish, and the laziness of those that will not, maketh men very apt to decline the trouble of stricter inquiries, which they think too great a price for being in the right, let it be never so valuable.”

What causes men’s judgments to miscarry is precisely a combination of such generalizing, “ignorance” or “laziness,” so that the result is either that men “let their opinions swim along with the stream of the world, or give them up wholly to be directed by success.” To avoid either supine laxity or unmitigated opportunism, men’s partiality must be transformed into impartiality and prejudice into reliable judgments. Without such a transformation, “the effect of this [laxity or opportunism] is that they change their opinions upon every present uneasiness, wanting a steady foundation upon which their judgment should be formed.”

Partiality can only be modified and prejudice transformed when a method is available for the formation of sound judgments through linking general propositions to their specific applications. This method consists in following the Trimmer’s middle course of balancing the extremes. The middle course is accordingly not an abstraction, but corresponds to a concrete series of policy decisions, made, in Halifax’s case, with amazing foresight. Macaulay focussed attention on this aspect of Halifaxian statesmanship when he wrote: “[Halifax] always saw passing events, not in the point of view in which they commonly appear to one who bears a part in them, but in the point of view in which, after the lapse of many years, they appear to the philosophic historian.”
Halifax: Complete Trimmer Revisited

II

The sole modern political thinker to be mentioned by name by Halifax in the whole corpus of his works is Machiavelli. Judging from the context of this single reference, Halifax’s estimate of Machiavelli is favorable—a fact to which we will recur. Foxcroft notes that Halifax’s maxim, “Men are more the sinews of war than money” (reflecting Machiavelli’s warning to the plutocratic Medicis) is derived from the Discorsi, II, xx.26 This in itself would be more or less indicative of a Halifaxian reliance on Machiavelli’s thought. But numerous other examples present themselves which render the tie unmistakable. For example, Halifax’s statement that “Mistakes, as all other things, have their periods, and many times the nearest way to cure is not to oppose them, but stay till they are crushed with their own weight”27 recalls another chapter heading from the Discorsi (other than that of II, x), i.e., I, xxxiii: ‘When an evil has sprung up either within a State or against a State, it is a more salutary proceeding to temporize with it than to attack it rashly.’ Machiavelli adds by way of explanation: “For almost always those who try to crush it make its force greater, and make that evil which is suspected from it to be accelerated . . . since it is difficult to recognize these evils when they spring up, this difficulty caused by the deception which things give when they [first] spring up . . . . [And] by temporizing with them, they will either extinguish themselves, or the evil will at least be deferred for a long time.”28 It is an extraordinary fact that Halifax guided his statesmanship according to this derived precept, and it constituted the ground of his conduct during the Exclusion Crisis and the Revolution of 1688. In the first circumstance, he deferred the evil of civil war by lending support to the Duke of York’s claim to the throne. In the second, he anticipated the failure of James II’s statecraft by clandestine polemics to its disadvantage, such as A Letter to a Dissenter, and allowed the Jacobite cause to founder. Halifax’s statement about mistakes paralleling Machiavelli’s was prepared in manuscript for Charles II, but the work where it occurs, The Character of a Trimmer, was only published in 1688 to warn against premature resistance to James—and even then under his uncle’s name. This activity fitted Halifax’s prudential character, for it was shortly after the Trimmer’s appearance that he became a reluctant conspirator against the Crown. The Elder Statesman of the Revolution was a
conspiratorial student of Machiavelli and his *Discorsi*, which presents a conspicuous chapter on conspiracies (III, vi), the treatise’s most extensive one. It should come as no surprise that Halifax’s reference to Machiavelli occurs precisely in *The Character of a Trimmer* and there alone.

Furthermore, the complete context of just this reference of the Trimmer’s recalls several passages from the first Book of the *Discorsi*. The Trimmer opines: “The people can never agree to show their united powers till they are extremely tempted and provoked to it, so that to apply cupping-glasses to a great beast naturally disposed to sleep, and to force the tame thing whether it will or no to be valiant, must be learnt out of some other book than Machiavelli [sc., the *Discorsi*], who would never have prescribed such a preposterous method . . . duty, justice, religion, nay, even human prudence too, biddeth the people suffer anything than resist; but our corrupted nature, where ever it feels the smart, will run to the nearest remedy.”\(^2^9\) In *Discorsi*, I, lv, Machiavelli notes that the Roman plebs—often referred to by classical authors as the many-headed beast—did not think of evading a certain decree of the Senate and that lack of popular disorders “derives not so much from the goodness of the people . . . as from having a King who keeps them united, not only by his virtue, but by the institutions of those kingdoms which are yet unspoiled.”\(^3^0\) The parallel with Halifax’s view here is sufficiently evident. Moreover, in *Discorsi*, I, lvii, “Together the Plebs are strong, dispersed they are weak,” Machiavelli writes: “For the multitude many times is audacious in speaking against the decision of their Prince: but, afterwards, when they see the penalty in sight, not trusting one another, they run to obey.”\(^3^1\) Now, Halifax appeals to Charles II in *The Character of a Trimmer* for the convening of Parliament, adding that the English monarchy exerts greater force in foreign policy when backed by Parliament. Parliament may even be an example, for Halifax, of Machiavelli’s “institutions of those kingdoms which are yet unspoiled,” and Halifax’s reference to Tacitus elsewhere may suggest his recognition that parliamentary institutions are a Germanic inheritance, for it was Tacitus who emphasized the novelty of the same in *De origine et situ Germanorum*. Certainly, Halifax’s close friend, Sir William Temple, shared this awareness, as is evident from the trial introductory chapter of his history of England.\(^3^2\) At the same time, where Halifax
invokes an *ad hominem* address to Charles II in the rhetoric of princely *virtu*, his arguments do not rely on separating the person of the King from the Crown or dividing the unity of King and Parliament as the earnest of national strength. The people are not disposed to criticize or resist the King while their institutions are respected, for from these institutions stem what Halifax terms ‘duty, justice, religion, nay even human prudence too’ and what Machiavelli calls “the goodness of the people” (*la bontà de’ popoli*).

Halifax allows for the limited conflict between partisans of divine right and partisans of the people’s right, but he knows that the source of the English revolution of 1640-60 lay in Charles I’s Personal Government. The ruler’s *virtus* is and can be no substitute for the institutions, the laws and Parliament, which unite prince and people and provide the limit and framework to institutionalized conflict. But neglect or corruption of the institutions—which Machiavelli calls ‘modes and orders’—leads to self-defence as the sole criterion for action; in their ‘corrupted nature’ the people become ready for anything and hence dangerous.

The argument in *The Character of a Trimmer* for reliance on “the King himself, without the mixture of any other consideration” turns out to be nothing more than the admission that “whatever he can do, it is [not!] possible for us to be angry with him…” Alone, the monarch can do little good and much harm because he cannot lead the people by himself, but alone he can provoke them, according to Halifax. Halifax’s deceptive rhetoric in favor of princely *virtus* is actually a warning about the limits of executive leadership and the sensitive nature of executive example.

A good deal more can be made of the derivation of Halifax’s political thought from Machiavelli’s analysis of the interaction of prince and people. It should be pointed out that, in doing this, there is no necessary contradiction to be found between Machiavellian and Burkean statesmanship. The need to understand *The Character of a Trimmer* in the light of Machiavelli’s thought is not only rendered clear by Halifax’s far-ranging, but indirect references to other political theorists in that work, but what must have been Halifax’s repeated reading of and reflection on *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*. If I am not mistaken, the Trimmer adverts indirectly to views of Filmer and republican theorists such as Harrington and Sidney—and perhaps also to Bossuet. In so doing, his criterion is
political realism; however, political realism is variously understood. For example, political realism can be taken to mean Bismarckian Realpolitik. The solution to this problem seems to be already indicated (in outline) at the beginning. For when we specify political realism as Machiavellian political realism, there exists an ever solid basis on which to determine Halifax's apprehension of political reality. Halifax's understanding of political reality in terms of his principle will exclude other possible understandings: affirming a principle rules out affirming its opposite. In this way, every principle by its own character as affirmative is exclusionist. Halifax's political realism as a principle is no exception to this rule, and in its origin it is Machiavellian in an adapted or modified sense. (For example, Halifax declines to give tyrannical advice, unlike Machiavelli, as witnessed by his caution in ascribing virtues to Charles II.)

All in all, however, Halifax's debt to Machiavelli is best seen in his opinion on religion, as the sequel (III) will bear out. The Machiavellian aspect of Halifax's political realism is accordingly set apart in all its distinctness by comparison with, for example, Clarendon's religious policy of restoring the Anglican establishment as the chief support of monarchy. Clarendon, unlike Halifax, did not perceive the Great Rebellion as a kind of constitutional calisthenics which—in a less accentuated form—"are natural to all mixed governments [and] ... do by a mutual agitation from the several parts rather support and strengthen than weaken or maim the constitution." As with what the Trimmer has to state in favor of Reason of State, this Halifaxian judgment reflects further the Machiavellian necessity of providing scope for the inevitable discords between the two natural orders of men. This can be perceived as an aspect of the founding process, extended into the infinite future through the never-ending process of maintaining the state. As Mansfield summarizes Machiavelli on this subject: "The necessity of acquiring [new lands] reveals the two "humours" of "the people" and "the great" ([Discorsi] I, iv) ... men differ in this respect, some desiring to command and others not to be commanded. When acquisition becomes paramount, the regime becomes a problem; the two orders of men, naturally hostile to each other, must be "managed" by the ruling or princely orders ... the laws must tolerate discords so that the rulers can manage them."

By "mixed governments" Halifax means mixed regimes whose
ruling parts reflect the distinction between “the people” and “the great,” as in seventeenth-century England. The monarch or the princely order must allow for dissensions and discords between the popular and the aristocratic “humours” naturally hostile to each other so as to be able to “manage” them by shaping the creative tensions thus established and maintained. The direction of this management moves essentially into foreign policy—in England, to be specific, towards the Baconian naval imperialism asserted by A Rough Draught of a New Model at Sea (1694). Here the tensions are constituted by the discord between the tars and the gentlemen in staffing the navy. Because such discords are necessary, without exerting power over and ‘managing’ conflict between the two natural orders of men, there would otherwise be stagnation.38 When the discords are well managed, “the whole frame (of the government), instead of being torn or disjointed, cometh to be the better and closer knit by being thus exercised,”39 according to the Trimmer.

As we have just seen, Halifax owes a debt not only to Machiavelli, but to Bacon as well, who wrote: “We are much beholden to Machiavelli and others that wrote what men do, and not what they ought to do.”40 This ethical revolution against classical philosophy constitutes the basis of modern political realism. Halifax belonged, as most commentators perceive, essentially and unmistakeably to the moderns. As he wrote in attestation of this fact, “Philosophy, astronomy, etc., have changed their fundamentals as the men of art no doubt called them at the time—motion of the earth, etc.”41 Paul Elmer More emphasized that Halifax belongs to the modern tradition of Machiavelli and Bacon, or “to that small group of writers in England who kept their eyes steadily on the reality of things.”42 It has been the neglect of Halifax’s evident debt to Machiavelli and Bacon which has constituted the chief obstacle hampering recent interpretations of Halifax’s thought. J. P. Kenyon, for example, though he rightly interprets the experiential factor in Halifaxian thought, omits mention of Machiavelli altogether from his Introduction to Halifax: Complete Works (1969).

Before we turn to the question of Halifax’s religion, we should note that what Machiavelli attributes as the origin of justice is reflected in Halifaxian maxims. Again, the source of these considerations is the Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio. Halifax states: “He that is not concerned when he seeth an ill thing done to another
will not be very eager to do a good himself.’” Amplified, this statement becomes: “He that can be quite indifferent when he seeth another man injured, hath a lukewarm honesty that a wise man will not depend upon.” With regard to injuries done to ourselves, however, Halifax asserts: “It is a general fault that we dislike men only for the injuries they do to us, and not for those they do to mankind.” First of all, the problem of justice in Machiavelli is separate from the problem of the regime, which supposes a juridical order applicable to ‘the people’ and ‘the great.’ The former is clarified by the fact that men forget the murder of their fathers sooner than the loss of their patrimony. That is to say, in general, injuries done to others are less resented than injuries done to oneself. If so, the question is then, how are self-centered men to attain a sense of justice and how is it to prevail in the ordinary course of affairs, as it must for the problem of the regime to arise? Machiavelli devotes the following exposition to explicate this question. In the beginning, before the founding of every regime, men lived dispersed and “like beasts.” We can see from the outset that Machiavelli generates a sense of justice from men’s common lack of a sense of justice. As generations multiplied, men gathered together and began to elevate the strongest and more courageous as chiefs for the sake of common defence. Seeing one of their number gratuitously injure their common benefactor whom they had agreed to obey, caused feelings of hate and compassion. They censured the offender’s ingratitude and rewarded those who manifested gratitude towards their benefactors, “believing also that these same injuries could be done to them... [and so] to avoid similar evils they were led to make laws and institute punishments for those who should contravene them; whence came the cognition of justice.” Machiavelli identified such an origin as the origin also of “the cognition of honest and good things.”

Such is the original contract understood as a tacit social contract, as it was envisaged by Halifax. This is what he means when he reminds us that: “That Prince’s [sc. Charles I’s] declarations allow the original of Government to come from the People.” As a non-Whig, Halifax recognizes that the terminology of the original contract originates with the Whigs, but as he understands the term, it militates against party government, that is, against a final partisan effort to dominate the government. “A Party, even in times of peace,
(though against the Bill of Rights and the Original Contract) sets up and continues the exercise of martial law; once enrolled, the man that quitteth, if they had their will, would be hanged for a deserter.”

At all events, Halifax’s conception of the origin of government, law and justice is similar to Machiavelli’s. Laws—that is, ‘a constitution of laws’—are the condition without which “our unruly passions . . . like wild beasts let loose, would reduce the world into its first state of barbarism and hostility.” Without laws and the dignity of public justice, “the world would become a wilderness, and men little less than beasts,” according to the Trimmer. Fear, with Halifax as with Machiavelli, is not a sufficient condition for the rise of government; there must also be love or gratitude. “So that without a principle of love there can be no true allegiance, and there must remain perpetual seeds of resistance against a power that is built upon such an unnatural foundation as that of fear and terror.”

The origin and principle of such gratitude, it seems, is the ability to imagine injuries done to another as if they were done to oneself. This sentiment of pity or compassion akin to gratitude, which leads to justice and law, is present in the just and absent in the unjust. Such a sentiment is a natural foundation as opposed to fear and terror, which constitute an unnatural foundation. Moreover, it contributes to the anticipation of just treatment. Where absent, as Halifax notes: “it . . . [is] impossible to do injustice and not fear revenge.” And Halifax adds that he who observes “the rules of justice hath always the blessing of an inward quiet and assurance, as a natural effect of his good meaning . . .” The Trimmer completes the analysis of justice by observing that “there can be no greater solecism in government than a failure of justice.”

Evidently, then, Halifax and Machiavelli are in accord on the subject of government and the motive for justice. At the very least one is forced to admit that Halifax leans more to the Machiavellian than to the Hobbesian origination of government. In point of fact, Halifax’s works contain no mention of the expression, “state of nature,” and his conception of the original contract is not even Lockean because for him the contract is not an explicit agreement, just as his notion of consent is of “virtual consent.” Likewise, Halifax conceives of the rights of the people as correlative to their duties. It follows that government by consent is not a right but a
privilege deserved by the fulfillment of duties.

On one further point Halifax approaches the teaching of Machiavelli. He denies that it is possible to adhere to a doctrinaire mean between the extremes: "Human nature will not allow the mean. . . . The generality of the world falleth into an insufficient mean that exposeth them more than an extreme on either side." For Machiavelli human things are in motion and human affairs must consequently either rise or sink. There is no place in the natural order for a permanent equipoise of forces in conflict. This conclusion is expressed in The Prince, where it is not possible that "any state ever believe that it can always adopt safe policies." "For this is what we find to be in the order of things: that we never try to escape one difficulty without running into another . . . ." In consequence, there exists no exact mean between the extremes; the prince must either act through the nature of the beast or of the man—he cannot act as a centaur. Or as Machiavelli expresses the same thought in terms of Roman history: "The Romans . . . in judgments pronounced by their government . . . always avoided a middle course and preferred the extreme. . . . That they never adopted a middle course is, as I have said, of importance, and rulers should imitate them in this." Accordingly, the Trimmer's is not a permanent mean between the extremes, but a shifting mean which constitutes an extreme with regard to the opposed policy presenting the greatest immediate threat. In this, as in other matters, the Trimmer is au fond a Machiavellian political realist.

III

In 1688-89 the English regime changed from being an unlimited monarchy by divine right to being a limited monarchy by consent of the aristocracy. At the same time, the essentially Whig doctrine of the divine right of the people, espoused by the Puritan clergy, yielded to a more or less deliberate demotion of the religious issue, and this demotion was effected, for example, by the Toleration Act of 1689. Locke's Letter on Toleration expresses the fundamentally secularist aim of post-Settlement toleration: "The Commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for preserving
and advancing their civil goods [which are] ... life, liberty, bodily health, and freedom from pain, and the possession of ... lands, money, furniture, and the like.” In the process of achieving a tolerationist religious settlement, divine right—Jacobite and popular alike—underwent an irreversible decline as the principle by which to order and guide the English regime. As Edmund Burke later declared concerning the secularist aim of the Revolution Settlement in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), “the great parties which formerly divided and agitated the Kingdom are known to be in a manner entirely dissolved.” The “great parties” are the pre-Settlement parties of Whig and Tory arising with the Exclusion Bill crisis and divided on the issues of the divine right of kings, and of papacy and episcopacy. The pre-Settlement Whigs and Tories were parties constituted by religious principle and activated by indefatigable, boundless, burning zeal. It was by damping down the ardors of the “great parties” and submerging them in the Revolution Settlement which Delolme calls a “System of Public Compacts” that Halifax effected his anti-partisan policy announced by the Trimmer. At the same time, this Trimmerlike solution turned out to be indefectible owing to the fact that it allowed for the moderate partisanship of small parties (the eighteenth-century Whigs and Tories). Indeed, through the error of equating eighteenth-century Whigs and Tories with pre-Settlement Whigs and Tories, we encounter an irremovable obstacle to an understanding of Halifaxian statesmanship.

Halifax reinforces his anti-partisan in *The Character of a Trimmer* by his implied criticism of Filmer and divine right monarchy, on the one hand, and, on the other, of Whig republican theory, which was allied with the Puritan notion of popular divine right. Accordingly, Halifax’s intended demotion of the religious issue, repeated in both *A Letter to a Dissenter* (1687) and *The Anatomy of an Equivalent* (1688), is indissolubly linked with the Trimmer’s pursuit of “the rules of governing prudence.” The partisanship which Halifax prudentially managed to defeat was the essentially religious partisanship of the “great” parties.

Hence we can perceive the significance and thrust of Halifax’s Machiavellian opinion concerning revealed religion. For Machiavelli, Christianity was the religion which effeminated the martial “modes and orders” of the Roman principate. It preached an unarmed
Heaven and the solicitude of an unarmed Prophet—which Machiavelli intended to supersede with a civil religion teaching an armed Heaven.59 As Halifax once asseverated entirely in the spirit of Machiavelli: “Men must be saved in this world by their want of faith.”60 Halifax equally observes in his Political Thoughts and Reflections under the heading “Religion”: “The several sorts of religion in this world are little more than so many spiritual monopolies.”61 On God, Halifax has this to say: “He that feareth God only because there is an Hell, must wish there were no God. . . .”62 On the other hand, Halifax dares to avow: “The people would not believe in God at all, if they were not permitted to believe wrong in Him.”63 With Machiavelli’s irony and in view of his condemnation of Ferdinand II’s “pious cruelty” in the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Halifax declares: “In her [the Church of Rome’s] language the writ de Haeretico Comburendo is a love letter, and burning men for differing with them in opinion, howsoever miscalled cruelty, is (as they understand it) the perfection of flaming charity.”64 Furthermore, in Advice to a Daughter Halifax asserts: “Religion doth not consist in believing the legend of the nursery, where children with their milk are fed with tales of witches, hobgoblins, prophecies and miracles.”65 But Christianity is nothing if it is not founded on a miracle—the resurrection. To condemn religions equated with the fabulosities of the nursery is for Halifax to indict Christianity itself.

To say the very least, Halifax’s ironical and skeptical tone in his treatment of revealed religion indicates a persistent lack of conviction. In editing Political Thoughts and Reflections H. C. Foxcroft notes a parallel between the maxims under the heading “Religion” and Montaigne’s Essays—for example, II, xii. There Montaigne claims that “the most unknown things are most proper for being deified”; religion consists of mysteries and miracles, while knowledge is founded on the testimony of the senses. Religion is presented as a pure convention supported by belief in its divine source. “Some make believed that they believe what they do not believe; others, in greater numbers, believe it, not knowing what it is to believe.” The clergy are such men. Halifax accordingly directs his attention toward the clergy in “Religion”: “It is a strange thing that the way to save men’s souls should be such a cunning trade as to require a master.”66 Prior to this he had just stated: “The clergy, in this sense, [are] of
Divine Institution—that God hath made mankind so weak that it must be deceived. So are dry nurses of Divine Institution, etc."6 7 (Paganism, we might assume, is a wet nurse of divine institution.) The majority of men in matters of religion are like children in the nursery, and Christianity resembles a nursery tale designed to frighten timorous and susceptible children into complying with the behest of their nurses. As Halifax elsewhere says of the problem of the clergy, "good resolute nonsense backed with authority" no longer avails as it had in "ages of less inquiry," "when the men in black had made learning such a sin for the laity that, for fear of offending, they made a conscience of being able to read."6 8 Halifax is consequently determined to be resolutely anti-clerical—and this includes all the existing sects of Christianity, not just Roman Catholicism. Incidentally, Halifax reserved high praise for Montaigne's skepticism. In a preface to Cotton's translation of the *Essais* he writes that they constitute "the Book in the world I am best entertain'd with."6 9

When we consult Hume's judgment concerning Halifax, we find further indications of his utter lack of religious belief. Hume asserts: "The abuses, in the former age, arising from overstrained pretensions to piety had much propagated the spirit of irreligion; and many of the ingenious men, of this period, lie under the imputation of deism. Besides wits and scholars, by profession... Halifax [and] Temple are supposed to have adopted these principles."70 The *Encyclopædia Britannica* in recounting Halifax's life includes mention of Clarendon's suspicions of his irreligion and comments: "his brilliant paradoxes, his pungent and often prophane epigrams were received by graver persons as his real opinions and as evidences of atheism."71 It is noteworthy in this regard that Halifax's family chaplain, William Mompesson, undertook to vindicate Halifax of the charge of irreligion. As Foxcroft observes, this vindication 'must be accepted with considerable reservation': "It is the misfortune of great men that they are thought to entertain low-ebbing thoughts of Religion, when they do lay open the wrong methods by which it is managed. His Lordship suspected broad symptoms of alay in the Church to the present decay and the possible ruin of Christianity, but... of Religion itself he had a noble and a lively sense."72

Again, in considering Halifax's opinion on Christianity we gain the clearest insight by returning to Machiavelli's anti-Christianity,
reflected in his contempt for Papal politics and his praise for ancient Roman religion. At the beginning of "The Trimmer's Opinion Concerning Religion in relation to the Producing Quiet Amongst Ourselves," there is also praise for ancient Roman religion. The Trimmer remarks: "And though false gods have been imposed upon the credulity of the world, yet they were gods still in their opinion; and the awe and reverence men had to them and their oracles kept them [sc. the Romans] within bounds towards one another, which the laws alone, with all their authority could never have effected." \(^7\) \(^3\)

Foxcroft in a footnote avers that this sentence has a parallel in a passage of Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, I, xii. That passage from the section on Roman religion states:

Titus Livy shows how the plebs, out of reverence for religion, preferred rather to obey the Consul than to believe the Tribunes; and on behalf of the ancient religion uses these words: "Not as yet was there that negligence of the gods which now prevails in the world, nor did the individual put upon oaths and laws his own interpretation" . . . Religion enabled the Senate to overcome these difficulties, which, otherwise, they would never have succeeded in doing.

The ancient Roman religion aided the polity and led to the faithful observance of oaths and promises. Christianity, on the other hand, promoted the zeal and reciprocal hatred of the "great parties" because they were parties of religious faction. The same attitude towards factiousness informed *The Federalist*, reflecting the common opinion of statesmen up until Burke that parties are no more than factions. This explains why Halifax was a non-Whig who also condemned Toryism based on divine right monarchy. Halifax alone saw that in order for the English regime to be transformed into a limited monarchy by consent of the aristocracy, the aristocracy had to be cured of its persistent factionalism, which had occasioned the Civil Wars and sustained the Interregnum. For Halifax the principle of legitimacy and the principle of factional party government could not co-exist in English politics. Bolingbroke also understood this. That is why Halifax delayed until late in 1688 when the aristocracy was united for the first time since 1660 to repudiate monarchy *jure divino* and institute on the ground of aristocratic consensus the system of public compacts which was the Revolution Settlement. The Trimmer's teaching eventuated in the bipartisan programme Halifax initiated on the grounds of aristocratic consent.
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What was this programme and what constituted its fundamental? The fundamental of the Revolution Settlement was the demotion of the religious issue, which gave rise to the unrestrained factionalism of the "great parties." The religious issue was demoted by the Toleration Act of 1689, the Licensing Act of 1694 and the irremovability of judges. As Mansfield indicates, these "were actually parts of the religious settlement. By William's policy and the Act of Settlement (1701) judges received tenure during good behavior, rather than at pleasure—a reform which Trevelyan praises for placing judges outside and above the sphere of politics. But one must remember that the politics above which judges were placed was religious politics, in which judges like Justice Jeffries sought out the enemies of the King. The Licensing Act of 1694 which provided for 'full liberty of unlicensed printing,' was held by Macaulay to be the most important reform resulting from the Revolution . . . . Comparison with the Licensing Act of 1662 shows that the new liberty of printing was chiefly in regard to heresy, or to sedition caused by heresy. As any student of Milton or Spinoza knows, freedom of the press was first and foremost an aspect of religious liberty."74

The other, subsidiary aspect of the Revolution Settlement was the Bill of Rights (1689), guaranteeing no taxation without Parliament's consent, no recruitment of a standing army in time of peace without the same and no excessive bail. To the aristocracy the Bill of Rights represented an extension of Magna Carta and of Coke's agitation against judicial arbitrariness. Accordingly, the Revolution Settlement seems less a triumph of Parliament than a victory of the aristocracy and the extra-Parliamentary establishments officered by the aristocracy. Halifax recognized that a Parliament divided on partisan lines as it had been during the Exclusion crisis was incapable by itself of effecting a Revolution Settlement. In particular, the House of Lords had been paralyzed by the deterioration of that conflict. For his reforming policies, Halifax needed the assent and obtained the consensus of the aristocracy at large. Similarly, the Revolution Settlement was made less in the spirit of Locke and more in the spirit of Halifax since the Trimmer's teaching was a parte ante, whereas Locke's views were ex post facto, especially on the new fiscal institutions such as The Bank of England.75 The similarity of recommendations as between The Character of a Trimmer and the post-revolutionary Rough Draught (1694) shows the continuity of
policy pursued by Halifaxian statesmanship where throughout Halifax attempted to imbue the extra-Parliamentary establishments, such as Church and navy, with the new spirit of compromise and consensus. The lessening of religious partisanship was the key to the whole consensus and compromise, which excluded only the Jacobites. Halifax's consensus is one to be seen primarily in the light of Machiavelli and the Machiavellian attack on Christianity as a disturbing influence on political life.

Apparent inconsistencies in Halifaxian statesmanship are produced by his need to temporize when the aristocracy becomes deeply divided on the issues of religious partisanship. Accordingly Halifax writes: "There must in everybody be a leaning to that sort of men who profess some principles, more than to others who go upon a different foundation; but when a man is drowned in a party, plunged in it beyond his depth, he runneth a great hazard of being upon ill-terms with good sense or morality, if not with them both." Thus Halifax allows to the Trimmer a qualified or moderate partisanship: "If there are two parties, a man ought to adhere to that which he disliketh least, though in the whole he doth not approve it; for whilst he doth not list himself in one or the other party, he is looked upon as such a straggler that he is fallen upon by both. Therefore a man under such a misfortune of singularity is neither to provoke the world nor disquiet himself by taking any particular station. . . . Happy those who are convinced so as to be of the general opinions." Halifax, however, is satisfied with the evidence of the irrationality of most men most of the time, and this would apply also to parliamentarians. Not only is a little learning a dangerous thing; a great deal is often useless. "In an unreasonable age, a man's reason let loose would undo him. A man that steps aside from the world, and hath leisure to observe it without interest or design, thinks all mankind as mad as they think him for not agreeing with them in their mistakes." The issue between Halifax and Locke is that while Locke assumes that there is a human reason governing men's passions, Halifax tended to see reason itself, as did Hobbes, as only a further passion.

It would be fundamentally an error on the part of historians to believe that the Revolution Settlement of 1688-89 was caused by an inevitable concatenation of events. No fate or destiny determined its outcome from the onset in the form of "historical force," hidden or
patent. Constitutions are results of the statesman’s art, of his prudent calculation in the shaping of events and the moulding of policy. Nor does the Revolution appear to be in any sense attributable to pure happenstance. “The tendencies which were made dominant after 1688 were in being before 1688. Nevertheless we shall try to show that the measures taken in religion and in public finance constitute a program. Certainly they were more than the results of a consensus of existing forces.” Halifax addresses himself to this problem and summarizes a general solution to it. “A Constitution cannot make itself; somebody made it, not once, but at several times. It is alterable [and] ... its life is prolonged by changing seasonably the several parts of it at several times.” If party government is no substitute for statesmanship, so statesmanship is no usual substitute for party government. To a large extent this is Aristotle’s antithesis, aut rex aut lex, party government corresponding to the rule of uninterpreted law. For Halifax the issue is weighted in favor of statesmanship. Halifax especially calls attention to the art of his own statesmanship. For example, the 1688 Settlement depended essentially on the Toleration Act and that Toleration Act is based (pace Macaulay) on a tacit but universal principle: toleration necessarily enjoins intolerance of the intolerant. Roman Catholics were excluded from toleration, and this was not accidental but deliberate. The wisdom of such policy is best argued in A Letter to a Dissenter (1687), and the unity of all Protestants is founded on their intolerance of the intolerant. The constitutional reform of 1688 was a deliberate, principled act stemming essentially from the teachings of Halifaxian statesmanship.

It remains to examine Halifax’s criticism of Filmerian divine right monarchy and the people’s divine right adumbrated by the republican theorists. This criticism occurs only in The Character of a Trimmer and is one of the reasons why the Trimmer’s teaching provides the key to Halifax’s statesmanship as a whole. Halifax takes the basic position that his theoretical corrivals fail because they lack the Machiavellian political realism embodied by the Trimmer. For example, Filmer is presented to the Trimmer in terms of the inadequacy of divine right monarchism: “Our Trimmer thinketh it no advantage to a government to endeavor the suppressing all kinds of right which may remain in the body of the People, or to employ small authors [i.e., Filmer] in it, whose officiousness or want of money may encourage them to write, though it is not very easy to
have abilities equal to such a subject. They forget that in their too high strained arguments for the rights of princes, they very often plead against human nature, which will always give a bias to those reasons which seem of her side. It is the People that readeth those books [e.g., Patriarcha, or the Natural Power of Kings (1680): The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy (1680), etc.], and it is the People that must judge of them, and therefore no maximus should be laid down for the right of the government, to which there can be any reasonable objection." The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy is like the "good resolute nonsense backed by authority" which no longer avails when preached to discerning congregations because it imposes on men's intelligence, which though limited is not imbecile. As Halifax has already stated, "there can be no lasting radical security but where the governed are satisfied with the governors," but Filmer's doctrine does not begin to provide the basis for such satisfaction. Thus "it is a diminution to a government to promote or countenance such well affected mistakes, which are turned upon it with disadvantage whenever they are detected and exposed" [cf. Algernon Sidney's Discourses Concerning Government (1698)].

As regards the pamphlet war between the Filmerians and the republican theorists Halifax comments: "The nice and unnecessary enquiring into these things, or the licensing some books [e.g., Patriarcha] and the suppressing others [e.g., Sidney's Discourses] without sufficient reason to justify doing either, is so far from being an advantage to a government that it exposeth it to the censure of being partial, and to the suspicion of having some hidden designs to be carried on by these unusual methods."

Halifax's real though unstated antagonist in The Character of a Trimmer is perhaps Bossuet whose pro-monarchist tract, Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte (1679) articulates a political theology favorable to Louis XIV's aims in foreign policy. The original addressee of the Trimmer, Charles II, lived largely in later years on a subsidy from the roi soleil. The Trimmer adheres to a consistently anti-French foreign policy, and Halifax refers to Louis XIV where he mentions "ill arguments being seconded by good armies [which] carry such a power with them that naked sense is a very unequal adversary." Halifax was particularly opposed, with fierce determination, to Louis' religious policy. His dismissal from James II's government in 1685 was concurrent with the revocation of
the Edict of Nantes, and James evidently desired to emulate the regime and political methods of Louis XIV. Halifax deeply resented such an imitation, not only because it tended in the despotic direction, but perhaps even more because it was un-English. The Trimmer accordingly avows as regards Louis XIV: "Ambition is a devouring beast; when it hath so much the province, instead of being cloyed with it, it hath so much the greater stomach to another, and, being fed, become still more hungry; so that for the confederates to expect a security from anything but their own united strength is a most miserable fallacy, and, if they cannot resist the encroachments of France by their arms, it is vain for them to dream of any other means of preservation." James II intended no attempt to lessen French pretensions or curb French ambitions, even through his allies, and this aspect of Jacobite policy weighed heavily with Halifax to the King's disfavor.

In internal politics Halifax opposed the republicans as aiming at a constitution which neglected precedent and prescription. In addition, he believed the Whig republican theorists to lack political realism not so much because their arguments, as with the Filmerians, were nonsensical, but because their aims were too lofty. The Trimmer asserts: "The rules of a Commonwealth are too hard for the bulk of mankind to come up to; that form of government requireth such a spirit to carry it as doth not dwell in great numbers, but is restrained to so very few, especially in this age, that let the methods appear never so reasonable in paper, they must fail in practice, which will ever be suited more to men's nature as it is, than as it should be." As Machiavelli states in *The Prince*, ch. xv: "But my intention being to write something useful for whoever understands it, it seemed to me more appropriate to pursue the effectual truth of the matter ('la verità effectuale della cosa') rather than its imagined one. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for there is such a gap between how one lives and how one should live that he who neglects what is done for what should be done will learn his destruction rather than his preservation..." Halifax completes this thought in the *Trimmer* where he asserts: "By aiming to be more than a man, he [the ruler] falls lower than the meanest of them..." In other words, Halifax accepts Machiavellian political realism *in toto*, with no mitigations or reservations.
The Trimmer presents his policy as a third alternative to both divine right monarchy and a republic based on popular divine right. He appeals not to religion but to patriotism, to what is one's own—the way of life which is one's own. By "virtual consent," "the whole" of the nation is represented by Parliament, and the monarchical executive gives "the sanction to the united sense of the people." The object of men's veneration is not "nice disputes which can never be of equal moment with the public peace," but to the Trimmer "his country is in some degree his idol." Halifax anticipates by his reasoned basis for patriotism the Bolingbrokean programme of the patriot King.

In his peroration Halifax affirms the Trimmerlike qualities of the nation's institutions—its "modes and orders." "That our Church is a Trimmer between the frenzy of Platonic visions and the lethargic ignorance of Popish dreams; that our laws are Trimmers, between the excess of unbounded power and the extravaganza of liberty not enough restrained...." Finally, God Almighty Himself is divided between His two great attributes, "His mercy and His justice." Halifax ascribes to the divine (or even equates with the divine) the human insofar as it is confined to its particularity, the human understood as that which is one's own.

2 Despite Hume's pejorative references to Halifax in The History of England (Philadelphia, 1822), IV, 381-82, Halifax would have concurred wholeheartedly with Hume's conclusion in Essay VII ('Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic') that: "Absolute Monarchy, therefore, is the easiest death, the true Euthanasia of the British Constitution." (David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political and Literary [Oxford University Press], p. 53.)
3 H. C. Foxcroft, op. cit., II, 359-60, 408, emphasis in original.
4 Ibid., II, 264, 495, emphasis in original.
5 Ibid., II, 496, emphasis in original.
7 T. B. Macaulay, The History of England (Tauchnitz ed., Leipzig, 1855), VIII, 8. The historian adds: "For what distinguishes him from all other English statesmen is this, that, through a long public life, and through frequent and
violent revolutions of public feeling, he almost invariably took the view of the
great questions of his time which history has finally adopted." Cf. Henry
Halifax is described as "a man so sound in principle ... who had withstood the
arbitrary maxims of Charles and James ..."

8See, e.g., G. M. Trevelyan, The English Revolution of 1688-1689
(London, 1972), pp. 242-43; David Ogg, England in the Reigns of James II and
Revolution of 1688 (London, 1968) at p. 146 calls attention to the role of
Halifax's writings in the Revolution.

9H. C. Foxcroft, op. cit., II, 338.

10J. P. Kenyon has noted in his Introduction to Halifax: Complete Works
(Penguin, 1969), p. 27: "... if Halifax was slow to set down his ideas in any
ordered or systematic form for posterity, he did have what Macaulay termed 'a
passion for generalization.'"

11George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory (3rd ed., New York,

12H. C. Foxcroft, op. cit., II, 509, 513, 518, 520.

13Ibid., II, 456.

14Ibid., II, 458.

15Ed. J. P. Kenyon, Halifax: Complete Works, "Introduction" (Penguin,

16H. C. Foxcroft, op. cit., II, 296.

17See note 10.

18H. C. Foxcroft, op. cit., II, 455.

19See ibid., II, 281. This passage is reproduced in note 1.

20Ibid., II, 456.

21Ibid., II, 458.

22Ibid., II, 457, 463.

23Ibid., II, 457.

24Ibid., II, 427.


26Foxcroft, II, 517, and consider note 2.

27Ibid., II, 337; the variant reading is adopted. Halifax repeats this
thought in Miscellaneous Thoughts and Reflections under the heading "Of
Alterations": "In a corrupted age the putting the world in order would breed
confusion. A rooted disease must be stroked away, rather than kicked
away... To know when to let things alone is a high pitch of good sense."
(Foxcroft, II, 519.)

28N. Machiavelli, Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio, I, xxxii.

29Foxcroft, II, 340.

30N. Machiavelli, Discorsi, I, lv. Machiavelli gives the Germany of his time
as an example of popular soundness and political liberty where such prevent
foreigners from wishing to make inroads.
31 N. Machiavelli, Discorsi, I, lvii.
33 See Foxcroft, II, 337-78. Cf. A Character of King Charles II in Foxcroft, II, 343-60.
35 Clarendon, while Lord Chancellor, is reported to have asserted that “Sir George Saville was a man of a very ill-reputation amongst men of piety and religion, and was looked upon as void of all sense of religion, even to the doubting, if not denying, that there is a God, and that he was not reserved in any company to publish his opinions: which made him believe that it would neither be for his highness’s honour to propose it, nor for the king’s to grant it [viz., elevating Saville to the peerage] in a time when all licence in discourse and in action was spread over the Kingdom, to the heart-breaking of very many good men.” (H. C. Foxcroft, op cit., vol. I, p. 39, emphasis added.)
36 Foxcroft, II, 297.
38 Halifax would have perceived the current predicament of the British polity as a form of such stagnation.
39 Foxcroft, II, 297.
41 Foxcroft, II, 492.
43 Foxcroft, II, 525.
44 N. Machiavelli, Discorsi, I, ii. The edition of Discorsi which I have used in all references to Machiavelli is eds. F. Flora and C. Cordie, Tutte le Opere di Niccolo Machiavelli (Firenze: Mondadori, 1949), in two volumes.
45 Foxcroft, II, 503.
48 Ibid., II, 291. At this point Halifax seems to be rejecting the Hobbesian origin of government and the Hobbesian original compact. In De Corpore Politico, pt. I, ch. 2, xiii, Hobbes affirms: “It is a question often moved, whether such covenants [which establish the commonwealth] oblige, as are extorted by men from fear . . . And though in some cases such covenants may be void, yet it is not therefore void, because extorted by fear. For there appeareth no reason, why that which we do upon fear, should be less firm than that which we do for covetousness . . . And if no covenant should be good, that proceedeth from fear of death, no condition of peace between enemies, nor any laws, could be of
force, which are all consented to from that fear. For who would lose the liberty that nature hath given him, of governing himself by his own will and power, if they feared not his death in the retaining of it?" (Ed. Sir William Molesworth, The English Works of Thomas Hobbes [London: John Bohn. 1840]. IV. 92-93.)

49 Ibid., II, 292.
50 Ibid., II, 300.
51 See above, note 48.
52 Foxcroft, II, 347, 523.
58 On the Renaissance, Sir William Temple wrote concerning its spirit of partisanship: “Many Excellent Spirits, and the most Penetrating Genii, that might have made admirable Progresses and Advances in many other Sciences, were sunk and overwhelmed in the Abyss of Disputes about Matters of Religion, without ever turning their books or Thoughts any other Way. To these Disputes of the Pen, succeeded those of the Sword; and the Ambition of great Princes and Ministers, mingled with Zeal, or covered with the Pretences of Religion, has for a Hundred Years past infested Christendom with almost a perpetual Course, or Succession, either of Civil or of Foreign Wars...” (Sir William Temple, Works, ed. Jonathan Swift, [London, 1740], II, 167.)
60 Foxcroft, II, 520.
61 Ibid., II, 502.
62 Ibid., II, 291.
63 Ibid., II, 502.
65 Ibid., II, 389.
66 Ibid., II, 502.
67 Ibid., II, 308.
68 Ibid., II, 389.
69 Ibid., II, 272.
71 Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., XII, s.v. “Halifax.”
72 Foxcroft, II, 196-97.
73 Ibid., II, 301.
Interpretation

76 Foxcroft, II, 480.
77 Ibid., II, 507.
79 Foxcroft, II, 494.
80 Ibid., II, 292-93. Halifax is not referring to Filmer as a contemporary author, but to the recent politically-motivated republication of his works.
81 Sidney’s Discourses were circulated clandestinely during the Exclusion crisis, of which he was a prime political victim. More than Locke’s First Treatise it subjects Filmer to searching criticism and affirms the divine right of the people in that every citizen not only has a voice in the exercise of ultimate sovereignty, but is called upon to take an actual part in the discharge of some government function, local or general.
82 Foxcroft, II, 293.
83 Ibid., II, 330.
85 Foxcroft, II, 298.
86 Ibid., II, 287.
87 Ibid., II, 298.
In this essay I shall attempt to show that there is a consistent conception of happiness to be gleaned from Mill’s writings which is at great variance with the views commonly attributed to him. That conception is extremely subtle and complex, and is crucial to understanding Mill’s positions on justice and freedom. Moreover, it suggests a very different conception of utilitarianism than these critics have contemplated, one according to which Mill’s defense of liberty is utilitarian.

For a very long time, there was a fairly standard interpretation of the moral philosophy of John Stuart Mill, according to which he inherited doctrines from his father, James Mill, and from Jeremy Bentham, onto which he grafted other views not compatible with those of his mentors. Thus, unable to shake off his infantile security blanket, he could be charged with inconsistency and equivocation. Mill comes off as a good, kind, benevolent man, whose basic morality and humanness outstripped his moral theories, and, thus, as a morally admirable fathead.

Mill’s conception of happiness—the central concept in his moral and political philosophy—is an example par excellence of the way in which his views have been maltreated by the philosophical community. The commonly accepted version of Mill’s views goes somewhat as follows: Basically, Mill accepted the Benthamite doctrine that men are always and only motivated to act by a desire for pleasure; all actions are merely means to pleasure. Moreover, pleasure is the only thing which has value. Happiness, then, is conceived as a sum of pleasures, and is obtained when pleasures predominate over pains in one’s life. Now, it is true (the accounts admit) that in Utilitarianism, Mill distinguishes higher and lower pleasures, but such a

*I wish to thank David Blumenfeld, and my colleague, Marjorie Grene, for suggestions which have helped improve this paper. I am also grateful to Norman Dahl, who has raised points which are so far-reaching that I cannot deal adequately with them here, but which I plan to take up elsewhere.
qualitative distinction among pleasures presupposes that something other than pleasure has value. Also (it is further admitted), Mill does claim that men desire things such as power, money, and virtue as parts of happiness, but, in claiming this, he is either mistakenly confusing the desire for, say, money, with a desire for pleasure, or he is contradicting his original claim, that men always and solely desire pleasure. Moreover, in applying his theories to political philosophy, especially in the defense of freedom, he must use non-utilitarian arguments, since he cannot show that respecting freedom always has a further consequence the maximization of pleasure.\(^1\)

Virtually no part of this interpretation is any longer universally accepted, and certain parts of it are quite widely rejected. Recent Mill scholarship has, indeed, made most of it suspect.\(^2\) Nonetheless, the orthodox interpretation continues to dominate thinking about Mill.

Before beginning my argument, that Mill’s writings do offer a consistent concept of happiness, I should issue three disavowals. First, I shall not try to show that the interpretations I offer are consistent with everything Mill wrote, not even in the essay *Utilitarianism*. Such a task is beyond the scope of this paper. Second, I should indicate that aspects of my interpretation are suggested by, or explicitly maintained by, other commentators on Mill.\(^3\) To the best of my knowledge, however, a sustained investigation of Mill’s concept of happiness, along the lines I present, has not been done. Third, I shall not argue that the conception of happiness, and the resulting moral theory I shall attribute to Mill, are ultimately defensible. I think they are more defensible than those of the standard interpretation, but I do not think they will withstand all criticism. But, surely a proper understanding of the theory is a necessary prelude to fair criticism.

I

In this paper, I wish to demonstrate two important points:

(1) Mill did not hold the theory, usually attributed also to Bentham, that men desire or seek only pleasure; and

(2) Mill did not take pleasure, *simpliciter*, as the sole criterion of value, and then define happiness in terms of a sum of pleasures.
Thus, I shall reject the very foundations of standard interpretations of Mill on happiness.

The first proposition, that Mill did not think men are motivated solely by desires for pleasure, is actually very easy to demonstrate, because Mill explicitly rejected that view in a number of places in his writings. Some twenty-eight years prior to the publication of his essay *Utilitarianism*, Mill wrote a critical study of Bentham's moral and jurisprudential thought, entitled "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy." One of Mill's chief criticisms involved the claim that Bentham's conception of human nature, and, hence, of human motivation, was too narrow:

That the actions of sentient beings are wholly determined by pleasure and pain, is the fundamental principle from which he starts. . . . Now if this only means what was before asserted, that our actions are determined by pleasure and pain, that simple and unambiguous mode of stating the proposition is preferable. But under cover of the obscurer phrase a meaning creeps in, both to the author's mind and the reader's which goes much farther, and is entirely false: that all our acts are determined by pains and pleasures in prospect, pains and pleasures to which we look forward as the consequences of our acts. This, as a universal truth, can in no way be maintained. The pain or pleasure which determines our conduct is as frequently one which precedes the moment of action as one which follows it. . . . the case may be, and is to the full as likely to be, that he [a man] recoils from the very thought of committing the act; the idea of placing himself in such a situation is so painful, that he cannot dwell upon it long enough to have even the physical power of perpetrating the crime. His conduct is determined by pain; but by a pain which precedes the act, not by one which is expected to follow it. Not only may this be so, but unless it be so, the man is not really virtuous. The fear of pain consequent upon the act, cannot arise, unless there be deliberation. . . . With what propriety shrinking from an action without deliberation, can be called yielding to an interest, I cannot see. Interest surely conveys, and is intended to convey, the idea of an end, to which the conduct (whether it be act or forebearance) is designed as the means. Nothing of this sort takes place in the above example. It would be more correct to say that conduct is sometimes determined by an interest, that is, by a deliberate and conscious aim; and sometimes by an impulse, that is by a feeling (call it an association if you think fit) which has no ulterior end, the act or forebearance becoming an end in itself.4

In the essay, Mill continued with a criticism of Bentham's attempt to catalogue human motives:

The attempt, again, to enumerate motives, that is, human desires and aversions, seems to me to be in its very conception an error. Motives are innumerable:
there is nothing whatever which may not become an object of desire or of dislike by association. It may be desirable to distinguish by peculiar notice the motives which are strongest and of most frequent operation; but Mr. Bentham has not even done this. In his list of motives, though he includes sympathy, he omits conscience, or the feeling of duty: one would never imagine from reading him that any human being ever did an act merely because it is right, or abstained from it merely because it is wrong.5

In these passages, Mill seems to be saying that actions are caused by pleasures or pains, either the pleasure or pain anticipated as resulting from the act, or the pleasure or pain induced by the very thought of doing the act. In the latter case, that which is desired—the doing or not doing of an act—is not a pleasure anticipated as resulting from action, and Mill explicitly asserted that in this case there is no ulterior motive beyond the action or forbearance which is sought. The claim that Mill endorses here, that all actions are caused by pleasures or pain is not equivalent to the claim that men desire or seek only pleasure. These claims may be equally false; they are not, however, identical.

Now, this denial by Mill of the statement that men desire only pleasure, and all other things only as means to pleasure, was not an idiosyncratic occurrence. I shall cite several other places in which Mill not only rejected the view, but went on to offer an account of how, even if we originally desired only pleasure, we could come to desire other things without regard for pleasure, but for their own sakes. Nor can these passages be explained away as examples of Mill’s eclecticism, the worst form of which (it is sometimes alleged) is manifested in his attempts to embrace several inconsistent doctrines. The fact is that I can find no place in which Mill ever explicitly expressed a contrary view. At most, there are several passages in Utilitarianism which could be read as asserting the contrary doctrine. As these are also explainable in terms of the alternative doctrine expressed in many places, these passages provide little ground for a serious scholar to impute to Mill the view that men desire or seek only pleasure.

Let us look further at the evidence. In 1838, Mill wrote another essay assessing Bentham’s work, bearing the title, “Bentham.” Again, he complained of Bentham’s too narrow conception of human nature and human motivation. His criticisms were essentially the same as those of the earlier essay.6

A few years after this, in 1843, Mill’s A System of Logic was published. There, he maintained the view of human motivation out-
lined in the essays on Bentham, and went on to explain how we could come to desire things other than pleasures and the avoidance of pains, even if, originally, that is all we desire. In *Utilitarianism*, Mill refers the reader to this passage in the *Logic* which expresses his view concerning human motives:

> When the will is said to be determined by motives, a motive does not mean always, or solely, the anticipation of a pleasure or of a pain. I shall not here inquire whether it be true that, in the commencement, all voluntary actions are mere means consciously employed to obtain some pleasure or avoid some pain. It is at least certain that we gradually, through the influence of association, come to desire the means without thinking of the end: the action itself becomes an object of desire, and is performed without reference to any motive beyond itself. Thus far, it may still be objected, that the action having through association become pleasurable, we are, as much as before, moved to act by the anticipation of a pleasure, namely the pleasure of the action itself. But granting this, the matter does not end here. As we proceed in the formation of habits, and become accustomed to will a particular course of conduct because it is pleasurable, we at last continue to will it without any reference to its being pleasurable. Although, from some change in us or in our circumstances, we have ceased to find any pleasure in the action, or perhaps to anticipate any pleasure as the consequence of it, we still continue to desire the action, and consequently to do it. . . . A habit of willing is commonly called a purpose; and among the causes of our volitions, and of the actions which flow from them, must be reckoned not only likings and aversions, but also purposes. It is only when our purposes have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise that we are said to have a confirmed character.  

Finally, I would cite a footnote appended by Mill to an edition he published in 1869 (*after* the publication of his own essay *Utilitarianism*) of his father's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*. In the footnote he points out (again) how various things not themselves pleasures come to be desired "for their own sake, without reference to their consequences," by being so closely associated with pleasures.  

Oddly enough, the only places of which I am aware in which Mill might be taken as asserting that men desire only pleasure, or are motivated solely by desires for pleasures, are to be found in *Utilitarianism*. As this is the work which most commentators have dealt with exclusively, it is somewhat understandable that this view, explicitly rejected by Mill elsewhere, might be attributed to him by such critics. To begin with, Mill described the Principle of Utility in this way:
The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.  

Later, Mill attempted his famous "proof" of the Principle of Utility, in which he asserted that each man desires his own happiness. He then seems to try to show that nothing else is desired, i.e., that anything else desired is desired as a part of happiness. With regard to the desire of virtue, Mill held:

It results from the preceding considerations, that there is in reality nothing desired except happiness. Whatever is desired otherwise than as a means to some end beyond itself, and ultimately to happiness, is desired as itself a part of happiness, and is not desired for itself until it has become so. Those who desire virtue for its own sake, desire it either because the consciousness of it is a pleasure, or because the consciousness of being without it is a pain, or for both reasons united; as in truth the pleasure and pain seldom exist separately, but almost always together, the same person feeling pleasure in the degree of virtue attained, and pain in not having attained more. If one of these gave him no pleasure, and the other no pain, he would not love or desire virtue, or would desire it only for the other benefits which it might produce to himself or to persons whom he cared for. 

To the reader unfamiliar with Mill's other work, it might appear from these passages (and several others in the essay) that Mill maintained the following:

1. Men desire only happiness.
2. Happiness is pleasure and the absence of pain, thus, men desire only pleasure.
3. All other things desired are desired for the pleasure in them, i.e., it is the pleasure to be had from them which is desired, and the things themselves are not the object of desire.

Now if one thinks of Mill as having asserted (1)-(3), then the following passage must seem to be a mere inconsistency:
But does the utilitarian doctrine deny that people desire virtue, or maintain that virtue is not a thing to be desired? The very reverse. It maintains not only that virtue is to be desired, but that it is to be desired disinterestedly, for itself. Whatever may be the opinion of utilitarian moralists as to the original conditions by which virtue is made virtue; however they may believe (as they do) that actions and dispositions are only virtuous because they produce another end than virtue; yet this being granted, and it having been decided, from considerations of this description, what is virtuous, they not only place virtue at the very head of things which are good as means to the ultimate end, but they also recognize as a psychological fact the possibility of its being, to the individual, a good in itself, without looking to any end beyond it; and hold, that the mind is not in a right state, not in a state conformable to Utility, not in the state most conducive to the general happiness, unless it does love virtue in this manner—as a thing desirable in itself, even although, in the individual instance, it should not produce those other desirable consequences which it tends to produce, and on account of which it is held to be virtue. This opinion is not, in the smallest degree, a departure from the Happiness principle.

Mill cannot hold, as he does in this passage, that virtue, or anything else, is sought for its own sake, if it is the pleasure to be had from it which is sought. In Utilitarianism, however, Mill nowhere says it is the pleasure to be gotten from virtue which is sought. Though virtue would not be sought if it did not at some stage provide pleasure, it does not follow that pleasure is the object of the desire for virtue. Indeed, he explained the development of desires for things in themselves in the same associationist manner he employed elsewhere. The desire for money, he points out, is one of the strongest motives. Indeed, in the case of neurotic misers, it has been so associated with pleasure that its mere possession is desired. But, in such a case, that which is desired, though not sought for the sake of an end to be attained through it, has now become part of the end—the person thinks he would be unhappy without it:

The desire of it is not a different thing from the desire of happiness, any more than the love of music or the desire of health. They are included in happiness. They are some of the elements of which the desire of happiness is made up. Happiness is not an abstract idea, but a concrete whole; and these are some of its parts.

And, in a later paragraph:

So obvious does this appear to me, that I expect it will hardly be disputed: and the objection made will be, not that desire can possibly be directed to any-
thing ultimately except pleasure and exemption from pain, but that the will is a different thing from desire; that a person of confirmed virtue, or any other person whose purposes are fixed, carries out his purposes without any thought of the pleasure he has in contemplating them, or expects to derive from their fulfillment; and persists in acting on them, even though these pleasures are much diminished, by changes in his character or decay of his passive sensibilities, or are outweighed by the pains which the pursuit of the purposes may bring upon him. All this I fully admit, and have stated it elsewhere [the reference is to the previously quoted paragraph in the Logic], as positively and as emphatically as any one. Will, the active phenomenon, is a different thing from desire, the state of passive sensibility, and though originally an offshoot from it, may in time take root and detach itself from the parent stock; so much so, that in the case of an habitual purpose, instead of willing the thing because we desire it, we often desire it only because we will it.¹³

Now these passages are entirely in keeping with the views we have seen Mill expressing elsewhere. Moreover, they go some way toward helping us understand the passages in which Mill seemed to be expressing the view that men desire only pleasure.

First, let us recall that Mill held that what causes us to desire anything is either the pleasure of it, or the pleasantness of the idea of it. Now, because of repeated association, we can come to desire something not in itself pleasant; the same process of association with pleasure results in the idea of it being pleasant. Now, finding the thought pleasant, and being thereby caused to desire it, is not the same thing as desiring the pleasure, either of the idea, or of the thing, once obtained. It is (according to Mill) a desire for the thing, caused by the pleasantness of the idea of it. So, while it is always pleasure which causes our desire, our desire is not always a desire for pleasure. Thus, when Mill says that virtue is desired because the idea of it is pleasurable, and that one would not desire it if it gave him no pleasure, he is Remarks about the psychological formation and causation of the desire, not about the object of the desire. Now, the will is normally the result of desires. However, habitual acts of will can become dissociated from pleasure, done even when no pleasure, either immediate or anticipated, is involved. In that case, the acts come to be desired only because willed. This latter case does compromise somewhat the claim that all desires are caused by pleasure, but even here, Mill is quick to point out that the desire owes its origin to pleasure. Of course, despite its origin, the desire is not a desire for pleasure.¹⁴

Now, with the exception of these cases of habitual willing,
where pleasure is no longer associated with the doing of the willed acts (and of desiring something merely as a means to another end), it will be the case that something is desired if, and only if, it is thought pleasant. Moreover, a thing with which we have come to associate pleasure, and thus the thought of which is pleasant, may come to take great hold on us, so that we think we would be happy with it, unhappy without it. It is in this sense that one desires it as a part of happiness. What causes the desire for it now is the pain of the thought of being without it, and the pleasantness of the thought of obtaining it. Moreover (though there are serious problems with this claim), our desires for these things are part of what is involved in desiring our happiness, i.e., we desire happiness if, and only if, we desire all the things which we believe are required for our happiness. Happiness is not some further object to be had as a result or product of obtaining these. These are pleasures to us, and happiness consists in their attainment. To desire something as part of happiness does not require that one desires it thinking of it as a part of his happiness. Thus, though Mill did not always make this clear, in acting from desires for these things, it is not necessary that any immediate thought be given to happiness. A person may have come to habitually desire certain things (e.g., doing virtuous acts) as requisites for his well-being, so that in his subsequent behavior, he straightaway does the right thing as soon as his circumstances are realized, without any further thought of happiness. Though no thought is given to happiness, desiring these things is not something different from desiring happiness.

Do these explanations suffice, however, to account for the passage in which Mill described the Greatest Happiness Principle? He there said that "pleasure and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends," and he further stated that "by happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain." Not only do our explanations seem inadequate to handle this passage, the passage seems to support the second claim I am arguing against, viz., that Mill defined happiness as the accumulation of pleasure. Following this passage is Mill's attempt to distinguish higher and lower pleasures, and he thereby appears to run into trouble. Because he asserted that pleasure is the only thing desirable as an end, his critics hold him to be inconsistent for going on to regard some pleasures as more valuable than others, since whatever property or properties serve as the basis for
the qualitative distinction cannot also be pleasures.

I shall leave open the question of whether this line, commonly attributed to Mill, really is inconsistent. I wish to argue, instead, for an interpretation that avoids that issue entirely. It will also help bring the passage in question in line with my attempts to show that Mill did not hold that we seek only pleasure in all we do.\(^1\)\(^5\)

It is instructive to begin with the very paragraph in which Mill said that “by happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain.” The sentence which follows it is almost universally ignored in the literature. It reads: “To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question.” Now, if Mill meant to define happiness merely by saying it is pleasure, it is not clear that anything more needs to be said at all. For the most part, we have little doubt in our minds what pleasures and pains are. We recognize them easily. And, in what follows, Mill makes no attempt to provide a philosophical analysis of the notions of pain and pleasure; those notions are taken as perfectly clear.\(^16\) It is not in that respect that he goes on to attempt to clarify what is included in the idea of pleasure or of pain. If one looks closely at Mill’s discussion, it seems more accurate to say that, rather than analyzing the concepts of pleasure and pain, Mill presented an analysis of the notion of happiness with which he was working, thereby indicating what, in the way of pleasures, was included in that idea. Happiness, he indicated is composed of pleasures, but not every composite of pleasures which outweigh accompanying pains constitutes happiness. Mill may have thought that all pleasures have intrinsic value, and all pains disvalue; he almost certainly held that not all pleasures are equally valuable when considered in relation to their possessor’s happiness.\(^17\)

Thus, the paragraph in question, in which Mill described his Greatest Happiness Principle, was not his final definition of ‘happiness’. It was only a preliminary outline of the conception, in need of fleshing out before it could be ultimately accepted.

Now, if this account truly captures the logic of Mill’s discussion, it is true—but seriously misleading—to say that he held that pleasure is the only thing of value. It would be more accurate to say that happiness is what has value, or that it is pleasure in so far as it is a constituent of a person’s happiness which has value. (It should be
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remembered that it is entirely open to a utilitarian to ascribe value to whatever he thinks is valuable. In order to be consistently a utilitarian, his theory of what acts are right must take a certain form, but anything at all may be taken as having value.)

The conception of value I have outlined puts Mill's discussion of higher and lower pleasures in a very different light. If I am right, then Mill would have been arguing that some pleasures are more crucial to happiness than others, and thus more valuable. And, indeed, it seems to me that this is precisely the form Mill's argument took. In answer to the charge that Epicureans and others who hold that pleasure is man's ultimate goal maintain a doctrine fit only for swine, Mill replied:

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then no longer be an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification.18

Now, Mill went on to hold that some pleasures are inherently more valuable than others, and he offered his famous test for the superiority of pleasures. The test consists in consulting those who have experienced competing pleasures, who have the capacity to enjoy and appreciate them; and if such persons prefer one over others, even if it is also "attended with a greater amount of discontent," then it is superior in quality. In his following paragraph, Mill claimed that there are such pleasures—those which are involved in the fulfillment of man's higher faculties. For the most part, men are not happy without the fulfillment of those capacities; they will not give up those needs in exchange for maximum fulfillment of more animal-like desires.19

It is usually considered generous to Mill to ignore the paragraphs cited, or to downgrade their significance in one way or an-
other. He cannot, it is thought, literally define higher pleasures as those which would be chosen in the way indicated. And, of course, that much is true; at best, he has given a rough test, not the very meaning of the expression "higher pleasures." These passages are important, however, because they indicate an important feature of the choice process, viz., the basis on which a competent judge would select some pleasures over others, or the significance of his choice. The ground is, of course, his sense that some pleasures are requisite for his happiness, while others are not. And, who would be a better judge as to which of two pleasures is requisite for the happiness of creatures with certain capacities except someone with those capacities who has experienced those pleasures? Mill is clearly asserting in these passages that not just any accumulation of pleasures will make a man happy, and, thus, happiness cannot consist merely in the accumulation of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Indeed, it is only at this point that Mill indicates his ultimate definition of happiness, or of the Greatest Happiness Principle, in which it is clear that the ultimate end sought is happiness, conceived as made up of pleasures, but not indiscriminately compounded. The later definition reads:

According to the Greatest Happiness Principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable... is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who, in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison. This, being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality.  

There is an extremely important consequence of this conception: In this conception, human happiness is not an open concept in the sense that it consists of pleasures completely unspecified. Mill's concept of happiness is partly determinate in the sense that there are particular elements requisite to it. It is partially open in the sense that an indeterminate number of things can come to be seen as elements in a person's happiness. Human well-being—given human capacities—requires some particular elements, and may come to require many others which cannot be specified ahead of time. (Recall that in the paragraph in which Mill first described the Greatest Happiness Principle, he indicated that to some extent what is included "in the
ideas of pain and pleasure,” is left “an open question.”)

If this is a correct view of Mill, we should be able to indicate the permanent aspects of happiness. Moreover, doing so will bring out the fullness of Mill’s conception of happiness. In the last passages cited above, Mill asserted:

A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and is certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable; we may refer it to the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which do really enter into and contribute to it: but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.\(^{21}\)

Here, Mill was asserting that the requisites of happiness include a sense of one’s independence and self-determination, a sense of power, of freedom, a measure of excitement, and, described generally, whatever is necessary to maintain human dignity.

There are other parts of the essay in which Mill elaborated his conception of happiness. For example, in his discussion of rights and justice, he wrote:

To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask why it ought, I can give no other reason than general utility. . . . The interest involved is that of security, to everyone’s feelings the most vital of all interests. Nearly all other earthly benefits are needed by one person, not needed by another; and many of them can, if necessary, be cheerfully foregone, or replaced by something else; but security no human being can possibly do without; on it we depend for all our immunity from evil, and for the whole value of all and every good, beyond the passing moment; since nothing but the gratification of the instant could be of any worth to us, if we could be deprived of everything the next instant by whoever was momentarily stronger than ourselves. Now this most indispensible of all necessaries, after physical nutriment, cannot be had, unless the machinery for providing it is kept unintermittently in active play.\(^{22}\)
Interpretation

Whatever else he claimed in this passage, Mill was asserting that security (and perhaps the sense of it) is crucial to happiness, and that rights are a device which ensure security; thus, respect for rights occupies a high place on the list of duties. And this is the mode of Mill's defense of the importance of the rules of justice:

Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules, which concern the essentials of human well-being more nearly, and are therefore of more absolute obligation, than any other rules for the guidance of life; and the notion which we have found to be of the essence of the idea of justice, that of a right residing in an individual, implies and testifies to this more binding obligation. 23

Particular rules of justice were defended by Mill on grounds of their connection with maintaining what, loosely speaking, may be termed one's sense of security:

The important rank, among human evils and wrongs, of the disappointment of expectation, is shown in the fact that it constitutes the principal criminality of two such highly immoral acts as a breach of friendship and a breach of promise. Few hurts which human beings can sustain are greater, and none wound more, than when that on which they habitually and with full assurance relied, fails them in the hour of need; and few wrongs are greater than this mere withholding of good; none excite more resentment either in the person suffering, or in a sympathizing spectator. 24

From these passages (and others in the essay On Liberty), we can describe Mill's conception of the essential elements of human happiness. Roughly they divide into two related categories. First, are the constituents and requirements for an individual's sense of being his own man, developing his life as he chooses—a sense of freedom, power, excitement, etc. Second, are those things requisite for a sense of security, the prime ones being the fulfillment by others of the rules of justice, and their respect for our rights. These are related, and overlapping, of course, because foremost among the rules of justice are those that prescribe respect for freedom. To this description must be added Mill's endorsement of Von Humboldt's conception of happiness in chapter III of On Liberty. The additional element brought in here is the notion of a harmonious ordering and arrangement of the elements of a personality, fully developed in its capabilities and powers.

Now, it is important to bear in mind that Mill described a way in which other elements come to be regarded as requisites of one's
happiness. We have already seen that Mill recognized that virtually anything, or any mode of behavior, can come to be desired in such a way that failure to obtain it is viewed as a diminution of one’s happiness. This will mean that happiness (or one’s conception of it) consists of two kinds of required aspects or elements: (a) those requisites associated with being human, with certain human capabilities, needs, and requirements, (b) those elements which are acquired requisites for one’s happiness. Into the latter category would go the fulfillment of the desire for virtue when virtue has come to be sought for its own sake.

Now, both kinds of goods—the “natural” requisites of happiness, and those which are acquired—can be desired for their own sakes; but for Mill this did not entail that they are equally worthy of pursuit. At least, this does not follow if it is taken to mean that both kinds of goods are intrinsically valuable. I wish to show that Mill thought it to be the first group of goods which controls, in that other ends, including ones which have come to be parts of one’s conception of happiness, ought to be sought only if they do not conflict with the basic elements of happiness, only if they do promote it.

As we have seen, Mill considered it possible to desire a number of kinds of things for their own sakes—virtue, money, power, by the process of association with pleasure. He adds, however, that there is an important difference between virtue and the others, viz., that the desires for the others may be injurious to happiness by making the person obnoxious, while this is not possible with respect to virtue. Thus:

the utilitarian standard, while it tolerates and approves those other acquired desires, up to the point beyond which they would be more injurious to the general happiness than promotive of it, enjoins and requires the cultivation of the love of virtue up to the greatest strength possible, as being above all things important to the general happiness.25

Even with respect to virtue, however, what justifies making it an end in itself is the contribution of a virtuous state of character to the general welfare. Mill urged the inculcation of the desire to be virtuous for its own sake, and urged the formation of character in which being virtuous is among one’s “fixed purposes,” and virtuous action has become a matter of confirmed character. Ultimately, the actions come under the control of habit, and do not spring from an experi-
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ence of a pleasurable thought, or from the anticipation of a pleasure. The only thing which could justify the continuance of such habitual desiring, and its general inculcation, would be its contribution to happiness, but happiness defined independently of any reference to virtuous action. Indeed, Mill held:

That which is the result of habit affords no presumption of being intrinsically good; and there would be no reason for wishing that the purpose of virtue should become independent of pleasure and pain, were it not that the influence of the pleasurable and painful associations which prompt to virtue is not sufficiently to be depended on for unerring constancy of action until it has acquired the support of habit. Both in feeling and in conduct, habit is the only thing which imparts certainty; and it is because of the importance to others of being able to rely absolutely on one's feelings and conduct, and to oneself of being able to rely on one's own, that the will to do right ought to be cultivated into this habitual independence. In other words, this state of the will is a means to good, not intrinsically a good; and does not contradict the doctrine that nothing is a good to human beings but in so far as it is either itself pleasurable, or a means of attaining pleasure or averting pain.

What follows from this analysis is that not everything desired for its own sake is intrinsically desirable; also, we should seek to inculcate desires for some things for their own sakes, because the existence of such desires contributes to the general welfare. Thus, I conclude, the ultimate criterion of the value of all actions, and also of all desires for doing actions, is what is requisite for the happiness of man as a creature of elevated faculties. In the second, and subsequent editions of the Logic, Mill included a paragraph explaining that ends other than happiness should be sought; and that, in particular, the desire to perform virtuous acts without further consideration of happiness should be inculcated in people. He added:

The character itself should be, to the individual, a paramount end, simply because the existence of this ideal nobleness of character, or of the near approach to it, in any abundance, would go further than all things else towards making human life happy, both in the comparatively humble sense of pleasure and freedom from pain, and in the higher meaning of rendering life, not what it now is almost universally, puerile and insignificant, but such as human beings with highly developed faculties can care to have.

Moreover, the essay On Liberty will be misunderstood if this point is not grasped. Mill explained quite early in that work: “I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be
utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.”28 And, the first part of chapter III, entitled, “Of Individuality as One of the Elements of Well-Being,” is a quite explicit attempt to outline some of the basic components of such a conception of happiness, including Mill’s endorsement of Von Humboldt’s statement of the “end” of mankind as consisting in the full and harmonious development of man’s powers and capabilities.

There is one final point I wish to make, even if it cannot be developed fully. Mill is sometimes criticized as having an “atomistic” conception of society—society is a composite of individual “atoms,” and social interests just are a mathematical function of individual interests. But, in Utilitarianism and elsewhere, Mill denied this. In the much neglected chapter III of Utilitarianism, Mill speaks of a “powerful natural sentiment” in men—“the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures.” Not only is this a natural desire, it is reinforced by the influences of social progress, so much so that men never even conceive themselves as other than members of a social body. Thus, through natural and artificial influences, and their sympathy with others, men come to regard the interests of others as among their interests, culminating in an ideal utilitarian society in which men do not desire for themselves benefits which cannot be shared by others. There are many aspects of Mill’s moral and political philosophy which are illuminated by stress on the role of the “social feelings” in man, the fulfillment of which is requisite for men’s happiness. To cite just one very important example, part of the justification Mill gives in On Liberty for interference with conduct which can harm others is that “to be held to rigid rules of justice for the sake of others, develops the feelings and capacities which have the good of others for their object.”29

In the following section, I shall discuss some special problems presented by my interpretation of Mill.

II

The interpretation presented above will prompt the question of how the account fits in with Mill’s famous “proof” of the Principle of Utility. I believe I have shown that Mill consistently maintained
that men do not always give thought to happiness or pleasure as the object of all their voluntary acts. In *Utilitarianism*, he held that men can and *should* desire the doing of virtuous acts without giving thought to further consequences. But, in his "proof," he seems to be trying to show that only happiness is fit to be the end and test of morality because *only* happiness is sought (or is capable of being sought) without regard for an end beyond itself. Now, the notion of acts done without any regard to happiness—those made part of our confirmed character through the development of habitual willing—seems to be a counter-example to the claim that only happiness is (or is capable of being) sought. It *may* be that Mill thought that in these cases, the desire to do these acts really *is* part of the desire for happiness, even though in acting from such desires no thought is actually given to happiness. At least it seems from the text that he thought this *sometimes* the case, i.e., when we have reached that point where the not doing of such acts (or the *idea* of not doing them) is sufficiently painful that we cannot be satisfied without doing them; we conceive our happiness as bound up with acting in this way. Happiness might, in some sense, be regarded the *ultimate* object of the desires to do these acts. In *Utilitarianism*, the penultimate paragraph of chapter IV and the one preceding it suggest a different interpretation, however (at least for those habitual willings that have become entirely independent of pleasant or painful thoughts), which would have important consequences for the interpretation of the proof.

What is suggested is this: Mill *did* regard the class of acts done from habit as containing possible counter-examples to the claim that only happiness is desired or sought. He did not, however, think this admission undercut the claim of happiness as the end fit to be the test of morality. As he argued in that paragraph, *these* are cases of ends sought *out of habit alone*, which fact disqualifies them as candidates for that which is intrinsically good. Though these are not ends sought for the sake of something else, they are not sought *for the value in or of them*. So, the admitted exception to the claim in the premises does not undercut the conclusion of the proof. Now, if this, or something like it does capture accurately Mill's conception of the elements in his proof, he certainly did not bring this out clearly.

Second, Mill is unclear as to what he means by 'desires happiness'. He suggests that desiring happiness consists in desiring the things or elements which comprise one's happiness. But he seems to
leave it open that men do not desire happiness as he (Mill) conceives it, i.e., with the particular elements and weightings among them which he gives. Unreflective men may not view intellectual development, or self-determination, as requisite beyond a minimal degree for their happiness, and therefore, may have no great desire for these. Similarly, someone may desire something, i.e., wealth, thinking it requisite for his happiness, when it is not. In either case, desiring happiness does not seem to be the same as desiring the elements of happiness, at least not as Mill defined happiness as the end or test of morality. So, either men do not always desire happiness, or they do not always desire happiness as Mill conceived it, or both. Thus, even if we except acts done by virtue of being habitual, it is not clear that Mill did show that happiness, as he conceived it, is fit to be the test of morality, because it is the only thing men are capable of pursuing for its own sake.30

Finally, and perhaps most seriously, Mill leaves it unclear how to resolve conflicts among the elements of happiness, e.g., when acting may increase freedom but detract from security, or vice versa. All we can do is look to writings such as the essay On Liberty to see how, in fact, he weighed these elements in practice.31 One aspect of this problem which the present analysis brings out, however, is that the problem is not merely one of efficiency, i.e., how to maximize the achievement of the various separate elements of happiness. The problem is also one which Mill’s theory of value must face—what combinations and weightings are intrinsically good, or constitutive of human happiness. If happiness is conceived as requiring freedom as an essential ingredient, then no amount of security which destroys freedom can produce happiness. Similarly, if dignity is an essential ingredient of happiness, then increases in power which result in domination, or discriminatory treatment which degrades individuals, will necessarily decrease human well-being in one dimension. That Mill was insufficiently alive to the difficulties involved in conflicts among the elements of happiness, is clear enough. But I hope it is now equally clear that Mill’s critics have failed to see that his theory of what is intrinsically valuable (sense of dignity, freedom, self-determination), does not imply some of the worst consequences which they have complained it committed him to accept.

To fully detail the implications of this analysis of happiness would require extended discussion of such topics as Mill’s treatment
of the rules of justice and the defense of freedom. With respect to
the latter, it is fairly clear that the essay On Liberty is a defense of
freedom both as an intrinsic good—an essential ingredient of human
happiness—and as productive of other goods. Such a two-fold defense
is open to him using the analysis of happiness which I have attempted
to outline. Moreover, we have seen that his treatment of justice is
based on his claim that the rules of justice "concern the essentials of
human well-being more nearly... than any other rules for the
guidance of life." In both cases, Mill's most important and philosoph-
ically sound insights would be inexplicable if he held happiness defin-
able in terms of pleasures simpliciter, while a perfectly consistent,
sophisticated doctrine can be derived from the conception I have
indicated. There are serious problems with that view, also, but they
are different in kind from those which plague Mill on the traditional
interpretation. To my mind, that is a point in favor of my interpreta-
tion of Mill; it preserves his status as a philosopher worthy of being
taken seriously.

1The interested reader may consult the following (among numerous
others), as illustrations of critical interpretations of this sort: T. H. Green,
George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory (London: George G. Harrap,
1963), pp. 705-09; H. J. McCloskey, John Stuart Mill: A Critical Study (London:

2The journal literature is too voluminous to mention. Among the better
book-length works are: J. M. Robson, The Improvement of Mankind: The Social
and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill (London: University of Toronto Press,
1968); and Alan Ryan, The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill (London: Macmillan,
1970).

3Much of what I say of the psychological basis of Mill's theory is antici-
pated in two articles: Maurice Mandelbaum, "On Interpreting Mill's Utilitarian-
ism," Journal of the History of Philosophy VI (1968), pp. 35-46; and G. W.
Spence, "The Psychology Behind J. S. Mill's 'Proof'," Philosophy XLIII (Janu-
ary, 1968), 18-28. As there are aspects of my interpretation which go beyond
their work, I feel justified in overlapping their contributions. Similarly, there
are anticipations of my account of the relation between happiness and freedom
in a number of places. See, especially, C. L. Ten, "Mill on Self-Regarding

4"Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy," in Collected Works, X (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 1969), 12-13. (Mill's Collected Works, X will here-
after be abbreviated as CW.)

5Ibid., p. 13. Italics added in second sentence.
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6 Mill wrote:

Man is never recognized by him as a being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end; of desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his own inward consciousness. Even in the more limited form of conscience, this great fact in human nature escapes him. . . . Nor is it only the moral part of man's nature, in the strict sense of the term—the desire for perfection, or the feeling of an approving or of an accusing conscience—that he overlooks; he but faintly recognizes, as a fact of human nature, the pursuit of any other ideal end for its own sake. The sense of honour, and personal dignity—that feeling of personal exaltation and degradation which acts independently of other people's opinion, or even in defiance to it; the love of beauty, the passion of the artist; the love of order, of congruity, of consistency in all things, and conformity to their end; the love of power, not in the limited form of power over other human beings, but abstract power, the power of making our volitions effectual; the love of action, the thirst for movement and activity, a principle scarcely of less influence in human life than its opposite, the love of ease. (CW, pp. 95-6)


10 Ibid., p. 237.

11 Ibid., p. 235.

12 Ibid., p. 236.

13 Ibid., p. 238.

14 There is a certain lack of clarity in what Mill wrote. He did say such acts are desired because willed, but his language also suggests that no true desire is involved. Earlier, he had written that "desiring a thing and finding it pleasant . . . [are] two different modes of naming the same psychological fact." (CW, p 237.)

His father had written:

The term 'idea of a pleasure,' expresses precisely the same thing as the term, Desire. It does so by the very import of the words. The idea of a pleasure, is the idea of something as good to have. . . . The terms, therefore, 'idea of a pleasure,' and 'desire,' are but two names; the thing named, the state of consciousness, is one and the same. (Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind, pp. 191-92.)

The younger Mill, however, rejected his father's account, claiming that desire is "the initiatory stage of Will," including a tendency to act, along with the idea of a pleasure. (Analysis, pp. 194-95.) It would be a short step to take to hold that an impetus to act which is the result of the force of habitual desiring is a limiting case of desire. I do not believe that Mill ever fully removed the apparent contradiction between: (a) desiring something just is thinking of it as pleasant, and (b)
cases of habitual willing involve desiring something because willed, without any thought or sense of pleasure. It may be that he was groping to maintain (a), while dropping the idea that a desire is involved in habitual willingness. He may have been maintaining (what he virtually says in some places) that actions are sometimes produced by motives other than desires, e.g., by "fixed purposes." Thus, pleasure would be inextricably associated with desire, but not the only object of volitions, not the only thing sought. I believe that something like this is maintained by G. W. Spence, in an important contribution to Mill scholarship (Cf., "The Psychology Behind J. S. Mill's Proof," Philosophy, XLIII [January, 1968], 18-28). However, the passages Spence cites, taken with other passages in Mill, do not unequivocally support such an interpretation. It is also possible that Mill was maintaining that habitual acts are desired, but not for their own sakes, i.e., only out of habit. This would explain, in part, Mill's statement to the effect that nothing is a good to a man unless it is pleasurable, goods being those things desired for their own sakes. If one of these interpretations is correct, my claim will still stand up that Mill did not hold that men always seek pleasure as the object of all their actions.

15 It is possible that Mill did not consistently hold only one view as to the nature of the ultimate criterion of value. He may have been caught up with the notion that pleasure alone has value, and, having said that, thought he could consistently go on to make qualitative distinctions among pleasures. Were that the case, there is also a more sophisticated doctrine to be found in Mill's work, which, to a certain extent, avoids the problems of the other one. A defense of the consistency of Mill's distinction, even on traditional interpretations, is to be found in: Norman O. Dahl, "Is Mill's Hedonism Inconsistent?" in Studies in Ethics, American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), pp. 37-54. See also, Rex Martin, "A Defense of Mill's Qualitative Hedonism," Philosophy XLVI (April, 1972), pp. 140-51.

16 In fact, Mill's discussion virtually begs for such an analysis, as his use of the language of desire and pleasure is freighted with ambiguities. Sometimes (as was most often the case with his father), he used the term 'pleasure' to refer to an aspect of a sensation, or to an internal sensation itself. At other times, he speaks of desiring that which is a pleasure, e.g., intellectual activity, money, virtue. In fact, the latter use tends to predominate in Utilitarianism, and it is that use which is most consistent with the present interpretation. He does appear to have been confused, however.

17 If one reads the essay in this way, it is evident that Mill did not give his final definition of happiness until after this discussion.

18 CW, pp. 210-11.
19 Ibid., pp. 211-12.
20 Ibid., p. 214.
21 Ibid., p. 212.
22 Ibid., pp. 250-51. It is worth noting that the points made in this passage would help provide a rationale for an aspect of our moral life noted by Philippa Foot. If one distinguishes between positive duties (to aid someone), and negative duties (to avoid harming others), it would appear that, in general, the latter are
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stricter, and carry greater weight. (Cf. Philippa Foot, "Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," The Oxford Review V [1967].) This would be explained if security is central to happiness in the way Mill described, and observance of negative duties is the primary guarantee (open to human endeavor) of security.

23 Ibid., p. 255. Mill's theory of rights and justice is rarely taken seriously. I believe, however, that the essay On Liberty can best be understood as an application of his theory of justice. In particular, I believe the essay on liberty is a defense of the claim that everyone who meets certain conditions has a right to individuality. In his autobiography, Mill described On Liberty in these very terms. This, however, is a subject for another study.

24 Ibid., p. 256.
25 Ibid., p. 237.
26 Ibid., p. 239.
27 A System of Logic, pp. 621-22.
29 O.L., p. 162. Gertrude Himmelfarb, in a recent book on On Liberty, maintains that Mill departed in the essay from any concern with the social feelings, and that the essay represents a rejection of "community, fraternity, and morality." (Gertrude Himmelfarb, On Liberty and Liberalism [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974], p. 91.) The passage quoted above can hardly be understood on this interpretation. Moreover, as Mill was concerned with asserting what moral rule should govern freedom in light of man's powerful desire to conform, and society's natural control of our lives, her claims represent radical misunderstandings of Mill's moral and political views.

30 Perhaps he thought he had shown the following: men do pursue only happiness, but variously conceived. A kind of happiness is intrinsically superior to others. Since all men are capable or pursuing this kind of happiness in some measure (it involves fulfilling one's capacities as a man), and since it is superior, it is the prime candidate for the test of morality.

31 It may be that this was conceived by him as a matter for men of intelligence and experience to decide, i.e., to judge on the basis of their own experience and that of history what weightings of these elements are found satisfying to creatures with the nature and the capacities of men.
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