SEEING AND BEING SEEN: TOWARD A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC THEORY OF SPECTATORSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Digital media provides us with many ways of satisfying our desires to see and be seen. Democratic theorists have introduced concepts such as “audience democracy,” “ocular power,” and “spectatorship” to emphasize the experiences of watching in contemporary politics. Can the people exert power over political leaders simply by watching them, or are spectators subject to the power of those they watch? How can we understand the conundrum that being seen can be potentially oppressive to an individual, who is subjected to the scrutiny of the watcher, but also empowering, as those on the public stage influence what is seen and how they are seen?

Democratic theorists have focused on the people’s experiences as spectators of their political leaders, with little consideration of the people’s experiences of being seen. By conceptualizing spectatorship as a socially embedded and dual-ended process that affects both those who see and those who are seen, I examine the ways various forms of inequalities – social, economic, and political – may shape experiences of being seen.

I turn to the works of Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and Adam Smith to show how ideas about seeing and being seen have been a part of ideas about representative government and liberalism for centuries and can illuminate contemporary ethical and political questions about accountability, media, privacy, and surveillance. Each thinker brings into focus a different perspective: the state seeing its subjects and controlling what they see, the democratic citizens overseeing the state, and individuals observing each other. I attend to particular epistemic,
psychological, and affective aspects of spectatorship while also highlighting how inequalities mediate such experiences. Watching can be an experience of subjection for spectators, but they can also actively make moral and political judgments. The power of political leaders can be exacerbated by their enjoyment of an audience, whereas unjust public scrutiny can be disproportionately directed toward the vulnerable. I argue the people’s abilities to influence the images of politics that all see as well as their autonomy to control the terms of their appearances to others are crucial components of liberal democratic spectatorship.
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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Rise of Audience Democracy

“I’m going to smile, and my smile will sink down into your pupils, and heaven knows what it will become.” – Jean-Paul Sartre

“Someone who has never reflected cannot be clement, or just, or pitying; nor can he be wicked and vindictive. He who imagines nothing feels only himself; in the midst of mankind he is alone.” – Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In the spring of 2001, George Kateb proposed that the technological development of expansive data collection and surveillance, though motivated by various purposes that did not include “total domination,” could become “irreversibly tyrannical” as the result of a single “trauma,” a warning resembling prophecy to those concerned about the expansion of American domestic surveillance programs after 9/11. Before that violent spectacle rendered fear and

security the obvious justifications for sacrifices of privacy, however, Kateb claimed society was already marked by a “loss of appetite” for privacy.\textsuperscript{4} American democratic culture intensifies “human sociality” towards particular behaviors: friendliness and openness even among strangers, exhibitionism, and a craving of “audiences that are larger and grander than oneself,” in order to fulfill a desire for “the aestheticized reality of one’s self.”\textsuperscript{5}

Yet the culture that Kateb describes resonates with Adam Smith’s centuries old description of commercial society. Smith describes how members of a commercial society “converse with the openness of friends,” resulting in a “frank, open, and sincere” civil society (\textit{Theory of Moral Sentiments}, V.2.10-11, 207-208). Such openness is the product of individuals seeking to improve their social status all out of the desire “to be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy” (I.iii.2.2, 50). The desire for attention, however, is inextricably linked to a corresponding “pleasure” derived in “seeing” the “happiness” of others, with which Smith begins his treatise (I.i.1.1, 9). With this desire, Smith suggests an answer to Kateb’s rhetorical question about what drives the development of technological systems capable of surveillance: the desire “to penetrate into each other’s bosoms, and to observe the sentiments and affections which really subsist there” (VII.iv.28, 337).

But acknowledgement of the twin desires to see and to be seen need not demand democratic rule and constitutional restraints on power toward the protection of individual liberty. Before Smith, Thomas Hobbes argued the desire for the esteem of others as well as the manipulation of spectators by false prophets performing false miracles contributed to violent

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 286-292.
disorder and argued for the political superiority of a regime that could channel the powers of the audience toward obedience to undivided sovereign authority.

Modern technology has brought to the fore how essential the relationship between the desires to see and be seen is to our politics. Watching is the predominant way that Americans consume the news, whether online or on television. While television remains Americans’ preferred medium for watching their news, their preference for online video increased by eight percent between 2016 and 2018. The use of social media platforms for news consumption is increasing as well, with at least two thirds of Americans getting at least some news from social media, even as they trust social media much less than other resources, such as national news organizations, local news organizations, and even their friends and family directly.

Although Americans can watch news broadcasts through social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube, they use these sites to present themselves to each other as well: “to be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy.” But in exchange for the access to both see and be seen by others, platforms collect data about them, and sometimes even non-users, collecting data which can be accessed by government authorities as well. In turn,

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7 Mitchell.
information gathered by users’ internet browsing habits, interactions with other users, shopping transactions, both online and off, help determine what content they are shown. The popularity of social media despite recent privacy scandals, evokes another claim from Kateb: “most people would rather be watched and known by anonymous and invisible forces than remain unwatched and unknown altogether.”

Recent democratic theory has explored the phenomenon of the rise of watching as a part of political experience. Jeffrey Green argues the people can exercise democratic power by watching the elite compete for power, arguing that “being seen” can be made disciplinary and burdensome even for the most powerful members of society. Others lament that twenty-first century democracy is under threat of deterioration into earlier forms of emaciated popular government due to citizens’ tendencies to be merely an audience of politics, rather than participate themselves. Despite their different evaluations of the current moment, they share a vision of the contemporary democratic citizen as primarily a spectator who watches the elite vie for power rather than exercise it themselves. As a result, they have left underdeveloped the ways in which ordinary people might be motivated by their desires to be seen to participate politically,

as well as the ways in which they are already seen by each other, corporations, and the state, potentially oppressively.

In examining the relationship between spectatorship and power, political theorists tend to focus on either the experience of seeing or the experience of being seen. This dissertation brings these together to investigate a fundamental conundrum: being seen may be potentially oppressive to an individual, who is subjected to the power of the watcher, but also empowering, as those with access to the public stage gain power over what is seen and how they are seen. I advance a conceptualization of political spectatorship that considers both seeing and being seen as a symmetrical and interactive process with consequences for both those who see and those who are seen. Sensitive to both accounts that have advanced spectatorship as offering democratic promise and those that have criticized its anti-democratic and illiberal potential, I seek instead to uncover the ways in which spectatorship is a fundamental feature of liberal, representative democracy and in what ways it threatens it, and how we might manage to encourage the former but not the latter.

While I am inspired by the nature of digital media, in which experiences of watching, consciously presenting oneself to others, and being watched by known and unknown entities, all interact, I build this theory by retrieving notions of sight and supervision from early modern thinkers: Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and Adam Smith. By returning to the early modern era, I build an alternative to the asymmetric model of surveillance advanced by Michel Foucault. While I do not aim to refute Foucault’s groundbreaking critique of modern power, which remains invaluable for contemporary scholarship, I retrieve approaches to the relationship between power and both experiences of seeing and being seen that his work and legacy has eclipsed. Associated with the Enlightenment or with liberalism to varying degrees, these thinkers have been criticized by more contemporary scholars for an excessive embrace of social
conformity. By using spectatorship as a lens, I challenge these characterizations. In the process of illuminating connections between experiences of seeing and being seen in the cultivation of moral and political judgment, these thinkers clarify the unequal benefits and burdens felt by the powerful and the vulnerable in experiences of being seen. As a result, their insights lay the groundwork for my normative defense of autonomy in being able to control the terms of one’s appearances to others, even as I argue for commitments to liberal pluralism and democratic empowerment that go beyond their philosophies.

In this introduction, I situate my work with respect to two different types of recent theoretical scholarship. First, I examine scholarship relating to sight and its centrality in western thought from today through the Enlightenment era, including within the liberal tradition. Second, I examine contemporary democratic theorists’ writings on audience democracy and spectatorship as a political experience distinctive of our time. Although they share different normative positions, contemporary theorists tend to emphasize the experiences of ordinary people as spectators and the politically powerfully as those observed, without attending to the ways in which ordinary people experience being seen, whether oppressive or empowering. Then I introduce my conceptualization of spectatorship and summarize the chapters to follow. I argue that while seeing and being seen involve various forms of subjection, the abilities to scrutinize political actors, influence the vision of politics that all see, and have control over the terms of one’s own appearance, avoiding surveillance, are all important for democratic citizenship. As such, situating spectatorship as a part of representative democracy points to the continued importance of liberal principles of pluralism and individual autonomy.
I. Liberalism and Spectatorship

Aspects of spectatorship, both literal and figurative, permeate modern, western political thought. Enlightenment thinkers examining natural, social, and political phenomena were deeply interested in human sense perception, and sight appears to have a special place in their studies.  

Although the very name “Enlightenment” suggests the relevance of sight to the project of many early modern thinkers, reference to their interest in blindness may be the best starting point.

Numerous theorists from Locke to Voltaire reflect upon what is referred to as the “Molyneux Question,” which asked whether a person born blind, but having acquired knowledge about the world through other senses, would easily understand visual experience if he were to become able to see.  

After Dr. William Cheselden performed surgery on a boy blinded by cataracts since birth in 1738, the struggles of the young man to adjust to the ability to see, and match what he saw to the knowledge he had had of objects through his other senses, such as touch, appeared to confirm the “anti-innativist” arguments of philosophers such as Locke, who emphasized experience and sense perception as the resources for all ideas and knowledge.  

In this manner, sight plays an important role in the development of empiricism that buttresses the power of individual reason embraced by various scholars.


17 The question was named after the lawyer who wrote to Locke about it in 1693. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 64.

18 Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 64.
Historians of visual culture have related the Enlightenment’s approach to sight to an emphasis on reason. Some thinkers such as Locke, Descartes, and Diderot have been cast as embracing approaches to the individual’s sense perception that separate sight from the human observer’s physiological nature.\(^{19}\) Cartesian dualism appears to describe not only the disembodiment of reason but also a disembodiment of the eye.\(^{20}\) Although other sensationalist thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Locke, and Isaac Newton depart from Descartes by emphasizing “external objects,” not our inner minds, as “the source of our ideas,” scholars group all of them under an approach that considers sight “the noblest” of all senses, models vision after the camera obscura, and emphasizes a connection between “lucidity and rationality.”\(^{21}\) If Descartes and the sensationalists model vision after not the human eye but the camera obscura, then they offer a model of the “observer as isolated, enclosed, and autonomous” defined by a “withdrawal from the world, in order to regulate and purify one’s relation to the manifold contents of the now exterior world.”\(^{22}\) In sum, prevailing arguments regarding the Enlightenment’s privileging of sight assume a particular kind of approach to sight, unfettered by physiological processes, and connected to a model of human rationality that is itself disembodied as well.

Scholarship tracing liberalism to the Enlightenment often rely on a more metaphorical notion of spectatorship, emphasizing less physical theories of sight and more the rise of political commitments to publicity and transparency. Jeremy Waldron draws a connection between the empiricism of the Enlightenment or the growing “confidence in the human ability to make sense

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\(^{20}\) Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 47.


\(^{22}\) Crary, 38.
of the world” at the level of every individual mind and the development of a liberal attitude that demands “to make authority answer at the tribunal of reason.”23 In other words, “society should be a transparent order” wherein the justifications for the social order can be understood and critically scrutinized by its members.24

Of course, the demand for political publicity runs against some liberals’ concern for allowing for privacy for individuals to develop “moral agency.”25 In other words, the liberal individual ought to be able to observe the functioning and rationales of the political system, but depending on commitments to privacy, other aspects of society, such as economic relations, may or may not be transparent, and one’s own life may or may not be open to the scrutiny of the public’s gaze. Although many consider a sharp public/private divide a definitive feature of liberalism,26 Waldron proposes Jeremy Bentham’s panopticism illustrates the extremes to which liberals may be committed to extending the principle of transparency throughout society.27

The implications of the Enlightenment’s and liberalism’s emphases on the importance of seeing inspire critics to draw attention to detrimental consequences of being seen. Twentieth century critics of the Enlightenment and its legacy take the story of its linkage of vision to rationality, and, rather than completely reject its supposed ocular-centrism, embrace what Martin Jay calls “ocularphobic” discourse.28 Jay points to Foucault and Guy Debord, critics of the

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27 Waldron, “Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism.”, 147. Waldron cites Wolin’s reference to Bentham that is further examined before.
28 Jay, Downcast Eyes, 13, 229.
domination of surveillance or spectacle respectively within the modern world, as key figures in the twentieth century “denigration of vision” in French thought. Foucault traces the modern “trap” of “visibility”\(^\text{29}\) that disciplines individuals to Enlightenment reforms generally and Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon prison project specifically.\(^\text{30}\) Foucault and others have taken Bentham’s panopticon to represent not only how literally seeing exercises power over those who are seen, but also to represent a metaphorical ideal of totalizing social transparency. Sheldon Wolin cites Bentham’s panopticism to criticize what he considers to be liberalism’s replacement of political authority with social conformity, arguing, “If public opinion compels us to conform we are really coercing ourselves – which is a neat way of translating Rousseau’s general will into the language of liberalism.”\(^\text{31}\) Wolin continues the tradition of ocular rhetoric when he writes, “blindness to social coercions persisted in the thought of nineteenth-century liberal writers and accounts in no small measure for the failure of liberalism to comprehend the phenomena of ‘mass societies.’”\(^\text{32}\) Wolin also traces liberalism’s supposed insensitivity to the problems of social coercion to Smith’s philosophy, arguing his model of moral judgment, the impartial spectator, is reducible to the “opinions of society.”\(^\text{33}\) Although Wolin does not focus on treatments of sight to the extent that Jay does, his argument suggests the connection between political and social themes within liberalism to the sense of sight itself. The thinkers share in


\(^{30}\) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 55 and 145, and 200-209. See also Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 240-241. Jay also provides an account of psycho-analyst Jacques-Alain Miller’s similar arguments about Bentham’s panopticon, 228-229.


\(^{32}\) Wolin., 312.

\(^{33}\) Wolin., 308.
common a critique of Enlightenment and liberal thinkers as prioritizing the promises of seeing without sensitivity to its dangers for those who are seen.

But this story of the western philosophy’s transition from embracing sight and visibility to fearing it occludes the variety of approaches which attend to not only seeing but being seen, with both hope and anxiety. Characterizations of the Enlightenment as “ocularcentric” tend to rely on oversimplified accounts of the centrality of reason in the Enlightenment, which muddle epistemic and ideological conceptions of rationalism and fail to reflect the diversity of approaches to emotions or sentiments. My chapter will challenge these simplifications by showing each author’s approach to sight connects to complex conceptions of the relationship between reason and emotions.

Insofar as these accounts accept a Foucauldian influenced equation of the Enlightenment’s legacy with the development of liberalism, they suggest that a liberal approach to spectatorship would be one that is sanguine both about literal experiences of seeing as well as experiences of being seen within a metaphorically transparent society. However, in the contemporary debate among democratic theorists about the rise of “audience” or “ocular” democracy, the lines are redrawn between a hopeful turn to ocular power as exercised by the people over the powerful and liberal pessimism about the paralyzing effects of seeing on the spectating public. In responding to these two positions, I also challenge the aforementioned, oversimplified treatments of Bentham and Smith. These thinkers are fitting resources for

34 See Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 7. While I depart from some of Dupré’s readings of particular thinkers, I find his argument for understanding the eighteenth century as the “age of self-consciousness” rather than the “Age of Reason” compelling (53).

considering the complex possibilities and dangers of treating spectatorship of the powerful as a resource for political accountability. They also help us move toward a conceptualization of spectatorship that includes how the people experience being observed themselves. The flipside of their acknowledgement of the difficulties of directing a scrutinizing gaze to the powerful is a sensitivity to the importance of ordinary people having control what they disclose to others in light of the potential harms of public exposure.

II. Democratic Theory and Spectatorship

Political theorists have turned to the people’s experiences as spectators as a crucial element of contemporary democratic politics. Some theorists treat spectatorship as a potential resource for empowering the people, whereas others treat it as a danger that threatens to erode citizens’ autonomy, on which self-government relies. Jeffrey Edward Green and Nadia Urbinati use the term “spectatorship” in order to refer to a stable division between a political elite that actually rules and the passive masses that they seek to represent. Whereas Green and Urbinati tend to agree on our state of affairs, they face it differently, with Urbinati condemning Green’s hopeful turn to plebiscitary democracy as providing an alternative framework for political accountability using the gaze of spectators as only further entrenching illiberal and antidemocratic tendencies within the body politic.

Green’s and Urbinati’s theories share a common inspiration in Bernard Manin’s arguments regarding the rise of “audience democracy.”36 Manin offers audience democracy as the latest iteration of representative democracy, comparing it with nineteenth century parliamentarian democracy and early-to-mid twentieth century party democracy. Although Manin did not use the term “spectatorship,” he uses the term “audience democracy” to evoke

“the metaphor of stage and audience” to express the “distinction and independence” between the political actors, especially representatives in electoral campaigns who delineate the terms of social cleavages, and the voters who react to them. While Manin’s focus is on politicians and their campaigns, he emphasizes the importance of the democratic character of the freedom of opinion along theatrical lines as well, arguing that it prevents politicians from “being the only actors on the political scene.” Freedoms of speech and association allow political participation whereby the people themselves might seek audiences and affect the events unfolding on the public stage.

Although the theater is not solely a visual experience, Manin draws out the visual in his characterization of two key features of audience democracy: the election of representatives and the partial autonomy of the representatives. Whereas the voters in a party democracy decide primarily on the basis of platform, and their decisions were often consistent with their “social, economic, cultural characteristics,” voters in audience democracy react primarily to the personalities of candidates. However, the personality reflects a return to the priority of trust and personal connection that characterized voters’ choices in parliamentarian democracy.

Manin attributes the shift back toward personal connection to two causes. The first cause reflects novelty of the moment – the increased breadth and complexity of governance, including global economic interdependence. This renders the problems candidates will confront in office more unpredictable; rather than tie their hands with policy promises, candidates are incentivized to offer themselves as possessing the capacity for exercising good judgment once in power.

The second cause reflects a return to past forms of political communication, facilitated by the television, which he argues approximates “the face-to-face character of the representative link that marked the first form of representative government.” With radio and television (and, now social media platforms), candidates can communicate directly with the people. This allows those competing in even the federal election in mass politics to simulate the face-to-face communal relationships that formed the basis of voters’ decisions regarding parliamentary representatives in the nineteenth century. As mass media approximates direct communication between politicians and voters, party networks lose their communicative value. Consequently, the members of elite leadership transitions from party bureaucrats to media experts, with adeptness of using the media as a skill required for winning elections. But it is crucial to note Manin does not consider the voters’ concern about personality a delusion facilitated by the passive and entertaining nature of the experience of watching candidates on television; knowing the unpredictability and complexity of contemporary governance, it makes sense for them to prioritize their trust in the individual.

Second, although Manin emphasizes the vote as the exercise of the people’s sovereign power, he characterizes electoral choices as a response to “images,” whether of a candidate or of a party, which we might juxtapose against verbal articulation of policy platforms. However, by “images,” Manin evokes visual experience but treats the term more metaphorically, defining “images” as “highly simplified and schematic mental representations.” Although “image” can seem to suggest superficiality, Manin, argues that opinion polls show that the images that voters

conceptualize include significantly political content.\textsuperscript{47} These images function to buttress the partial autonomy of representatives from the represented while also providing intellectual shortcuts with which voters can make decisions without reference to social identity or party identity.\textsuperscript{48}

Green criticizes Manin for accurately diagnosing the character of democratic politics at the dawn of the twentieth-century yet clinging to the “vocal model” of popular sovereignty as exercised by the people through their votes.\textsuperscript{49} Green argues Manin missed an opportunity to see the crisis of representative government as demanding a reconsideration of the nature of the people’s power, recommending his “ocular” model of spectatorship as a “postrepresentational” alternative.\textsuperscript{50} (He calls for the empowerment of a “popular gaze,” which he calls a “hierarchical form of visualization that inspects, observes, and achieves surveillance” instead of conceptualizing the people as expressing a voice or will.\textsuperscript{51} By drawing our attention from the vocal to ocular model, Green argues we shift from aspiring toward an ideal of the people’s autonomy, through participatory self-rule, to an ideal of “candor…the institutional requirement that leaders not be in control of the conditions of their publicity.”\textsuperscript{52} Green connects the ideal of candor to Hannah Arendt’s emphasis on spontaneity in political life and her “theatrical model of politics,” arguing that by making sure politicians’ have less control of their public image, his model will offer “a political life that will satisfy not only the few who enjoy the fame and

\textsuperscript{47} Manin, \textit{The Principles of Representative Government}, 227.
\textsuperscript{48} Manin, \textit{The Principles of Representative Government}, 228.
\textsuperscript{49} Jeffrey Edward Green, \textit{The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship} (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109-112.
\textsuperscript{50} Green, \textit{The Eyes of the People}, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 13.
responsibility of self-disclosure on the public stage but the many who routinely watch such figures as they appear.”

Nadia Urbinati categorizes Green’s theory as a “disfigurement” of representative democracy, one that aims to supplants citizens’ dual powers of judgment and will (represented by freedom of opinion and voting respectively), with only one: the supposed power of the audience. The plebiscitarian model turns to spectatorship as a resource for accountability at the expense of liberal emphases on limiting political power and legal institutions. Urbinati defends Manin for comprehending the phenomenon of audience democracy without endorsing it, arguing he ultimately laments it as ushering a decline in self-government. She calls plebiscitarian democracy the “the audience imbecility of the many before the spectacle played by the few.”

Whereas Green rests his argument on the experiences of the powerful being exposed to public judgment, Urbinati emphasizes the other end of spectatorship: the effects on those who see. She considers “sight” one of the “passive organs of sense’ par excellence” and characterizes “seeing” as experiences of subjection for the audience, rather than the audience’s exercise of power over the political actors who are watched. The problem with “seeing” is that contemporary mass media visual experience develops spectators’ aesthetic judgments at the expense of the cognitive and participatory political judgment that is at the heart of democratic public opinion. Urbinati proposes that the predominance of images over speech erodes features essential to political participation: the use of human reason, the people’s access to civic

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55 Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 233.
56 Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 215-216.
57 Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 14.
58 Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 208.
perspectives distinct from their social or personal perspectives, and, similarly, the increase in attention to the personalities and personal behavior of politicians over and against communication of substantive information about policy.

First, Urbinati counters the claim that seeing exercises power over the seen because of its intellectually disempowering effects for those seeing. She argues the predominance of visual experience in itself is more harmful to critical thinking at the heart of democratic autonomy than even politicians’ ownership of the mass media. She conceptualizes visual experience as shaping the very ways in which people perceive the world without their conscious effort, in an identificatory process with others who watch and that which they see, over and against the “Enlightenment” approach where “commonality consists in a communicable interest based on reason.” By being shaped by images, rather than “concepts” or “abstract mental constructs,” the individual loses both a subjective position from which to judge and even true cognitive understanding itself, resulting in citizen-spectators with “impoverished critical potential.”

According to Urbinati, “the empire of the ocular” in our time has shaped citizens incapable of summoning the scrutinizing power on which Green’s theory appears to rest, and turning to vision will not solve the problems that it has helped create.

Second, the erosion of reason and understanding means that individuals lack the shared civic identity from which they can deliberate and evaluate politics. Urbinati subsumes the internet within her ocularphobic framework, insisting that because individuals have lost any sense of themselves as citizens, they lack any “external reference point to the mind and life of the

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59 Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, 208.
61 Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, 203.
private person,” rendering their online communications solely personal.⁶³ She suggests interactions through images preclude the very possibility of communication. Urbinati compares the contemporary “audience” to the limited rights of the Roman people in voting assemblies. Romans “talked freely” as “private individuals,” but in the voting assemblies, they remained private individuals without the right to publicly speak and contribute to deliberation.⁶⁴ She evokes Gustave Le Bon’s writings that the crowd of signals a replacement of individuals’ rational contributions to political deliberation with collective, irrational “act[s] of power.”⁶⁵ Because of its limits on individuals, the Roman model is not something to aspire to, even if the crowd exercised a kind of “passive” but “influential” check on political actors in the forum.⁶⁶

Finally, the erosion of the individual’s civic identity is mirrored by a growth in the media’s emphasis on the personalities of people vying for power. Green’s interest in “watchability” evokes a sense of seeing as geared toward entertainment, wherein individuals fixate on the person rather than policies.⁶⁷ While Urbinati acknowledges the dangers inherent in politicians’ access to and direct ownership of the media,⁶⁸ she argues the fundamental issue is the mass media’s commercially-incentivized goals of appealing to the “aesthetic taste and spectacular desires of the crowd” and stirring emotions.⁶⁹ Consequently, the media only shows people the personal activities and qualities of politicians, leaving political skills and actions,

⁶³ Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 215.
⁶⁴ Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 222-223.
⁶⁵ Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 191-192, 226.
⁶⁶ Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 221, 223-224.
⁶⁷ Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 211.
⁶⁸ Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 28, 174. Urbinati builds her argument with examples from Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s tenure in Italy, highlighting his ownership of a “media empire” (28).
including corruption, “unseen and unrevealed.” As such, what the people do see only functions to distract them and conceal the exercises to power that ought to be subject to scrutiny. In an ocularcentric democracy, Urbinati asserts, popularity trumps accountability.

Both Green and Urbinati’s responses to the rise of audience democracy are insufficient for either critically evaluating the state of democratic politics or for building a liberal and democratic approach to experiences of political spectatorship. First, Green’s ideal neglects to seriously consider the effects that preexisting hierarchies, such as socioeconomic inequality, have on the very experience of watching political competition and governance. Second, Urbinati’s criticisms of Green and plebiscitarian democracy in general are valuable in complicating Green’s one-sided approach to spectatorship and underscoring how its effects on the citizen-spectator who sees render the public exposure of politicians insufficient for accountability. Nevertheless, she offers an oversimplified characterization of visual communication today. Experiences of seeing, although potentially experiences of subjection for those who see, are also not entirely “passive” nor inherently antithetical to critical, political judgment. Third, both authors fail to take seriously the ways in which citizens desire to be seen or not, including the reality of how surveillance by each other, corporations, and the state affects members of democracies today.

Despite Green’s relation of his model of the popular gaze to theories that propose the power of the gaze is a reflection of a broader underlying hierarchy exercised through it (including Foucault’s), he fails to adequately answer how the ideal of candor could effectively counterbalance not only the strict political hierarchy of plebiscitarian democracy but other forms

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71 Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, 182.
72 Green, *The Eyes of the People*, 11.
of social and economic inequality. Green acknowledges his book “says nothing” about the “deeply underprivileged economic minority” who suffer from “insufficient access to basic resources like healthcare, safety, and education” or the “broader issue of economic inequality on politics.”\(^73\) He is right to highlight how “ocular field offers a venue in which power might manifest itself” and to acknowledge that the people’s gaze nevertheless relies on “nonocular sources” of power, like “elections.”\(^74\) Yet his arguments neglect to take into account how preexisting inequalities mediate experiences of seeing and being seen. It is difficult to trust that policies prioritizing the spontaneity of the actions of candidates and “eventfulness” to satisfy spectators will result in the electoral success of competent rulers, especially considering the distinctly aesthetic and ocular advantages of the wealthy and politically powerful. In addition to the ease with which socially popular individuals attract the attention of both the media and the people directly, wealthy better allows individuals to cultivate their appearances and reputation to appeal to the preferences of spectators.

Urbinati improves upon Green by highlighting to the role economic inequality plays in exacerbating the antidemocratic and illiberal dangers of ocular democracy as well as citizens’ desires to appear on the public stage themselves. She emphasizes the oversight and evaluation of the successful functioning of democratic institutions because “social inequality does translate


\(^{74}\) Green, *The Eyes of the People*, 11-12.
into unequal power” and that democracy aims “to break the continuity between the power of wealth and political power.”

Socioeconomic inequality is particularly able to be entrenched through the media, wherein people with more wealth are better able to attain “the ownership or the control of the means of communication” and direct the attention and judgments of spectators. Urbinati argues that Madisonian pluralism can diffuse power of the media and criticizes the reluctance of American politicians to intervene in the market accordingly.

However, considering Urbinati emphasizes the negative consequences of visual experience itself over the ownership of the media, increased pluralism of media outlets would not resolve all the dangers she fears. Because her conceptualization of spectatorship is purely passive and aesthetic, the very nature of visual experience appears contrary to democratic participation. She relies on Kant’s distinction of taste from imagination, or “hypothetical reasoning,” as Urbinati calls it, to argue that spectatorship entails solely aesthetic judgment that can only be subjective and “isolates but does not foster communication.” Accordingly, spectatorship comes at the expense of the public’s rational deliberation and criticism of political authority. The visual, emotional, and personal are diametrically at odds with the deliberative, rational, and political, resulting in an account excessively suspicious of the role that spectatorship can play in representative democracy.

Furthermore, it’s not clear Urbinati’s approach to spectatorship accurately captures contemporary political communication. Rather than eroding the civic and leaving only the personal, frequent use of Facebook appears to expand what users interpret as political

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75 Urbinati, Democracy Disfigured, 241, 237.  
76 Ibid., 237.  
77 Ibid., 240.  
78 Ibid., 208-209.
communication. This suggests that instead of coming to the online public square seeing others as private persons, as Urbinati suggests, spectators can actually derive political meaning from something the original poster only considered personal. This is reminiscent of Manin’s insistence that people often imbue “images” they encounter through electoral campaigns with significant political substance. Although the lines between personal and political may be blurred in much of today’s media consumption, spectators do not necessarily fail to see politics.

Ironically, Urbinati’s version of ocularphobia hampers her compelling suggestion that ocular democracy might be “interpreted as a tool for more participation, or even the breaking of ordinary politics.” The notion of spectatorship can indeed be used to argue for the importance of capacities of ordinary citizens to shape the political events and attract others as spectators. The seeming democratization of access to media technologies through the technological development of the internet, cheaper cameras, computers and cell phones, and the rise of a handful of major social network platforms, appears to promise ordinary people and political activists’ better access to the public stage. Broadcast networks’ editorial decisions to devote television coverage of police brutality of civil rights protesters in the mid-twentieth century shaped the movement, whereas today’s activists use digital media to draw attention to their cause. While this can appear to be an improvement in ordinary citizens’ potential to draw the attention of spectators, today’s activists also face different challenges in navigating how to most effectively use different

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80 Jaime E. Settle, *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America*, 134. That said, people with partisan beliefs are more likely to impute political meaning onto a less explicitly politically visual content.
81 Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, 212.
social media platforms, which may include an increase in the role played by the demand of users, or spectators, in driving content dissemination. Even absent a repressive state, companies and users can exert significant control over what people present to others through algorithmic design (which determines virality and incorporates data surveillance of users), content policies, and “community policing.” As a result, considerations of spectatorship demand attention to how citizens see and are already seen by each other, corporations, and the state.

Both Urbinati and Green offer incomplete approaches spectatorship insofar as they neglect the people’s experiences of being seen. Green’s model of spectatorship supposedly relies on a notion of asymmetrical surveillance; he writes that the people must be able to “observe the few without being observed in turn by them” (128-129). However, he fails to further prove this central premise of his normative argument. Perhaps uses of the media that dominated the twentieth century – newspapers, radio, television (network, then cable) – could approximate a kind of asymmetric watching of the ruled of the powerful. However, the promise of the people’s ability to watch their leaders without being watched themselves runs up against the reality that some people subject to numerous forms of asymmetric surveillance from the state. It also ignores the fact that the population’s increasingly preferred means of watching politics, digital media, often allows them to watch only while also being watched themselves – whether that is by each other as fellow users of social media platforms, corporations, or by the state. If he Green serious about the importance of the citizen-ruler being able to avoid being seen, then even the pursuit of the ideal of candor may rely on appears maintaining an ideal of autonomy, insofar as it helps us pushback against the surveillance of the ruled.

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83 Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, 134-135, 138. By “affordances,” Tufekci refers to “the actions a given technology facilitates or makes possible” (xi).
84 Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, 143-147.
The problems of surveillance bring out the need to consider political, social, and economic inequalities in conceptualizing spectatorship. As scholars of surveillance have shown, Americans simply do not escape the gaze of the state, or each other, for that matter, with marginalized members of the population more often scrutinized than the powerful. As I argue throughout this dissertation, by considering how different people experience being seen, we can see how spectatorship can be distorted by inequalities, rendered a weak tool for the discipline of the powerful, and often used for the oppression of the marginalized.

By turning to Adam Smith’s approach to spectatorship as a basis of moral judgment, I show that watching, including visual experience, can be conductive to the development of moral and political deliberation and judgment. In doing so, I also investigate political dangers of spectatorship, but I show how these problems arise from forms of political, social, and economic inequalities; insofar as visual experiences challenge prejudices or inspire independent and critical judgment, ocular democracy can be a resource for inspiring political participation. As I result, I reconsider spectatorship as a crucial part of the representative democrat’s commitment to the people as possessing the power to express themselves, participate, and influence the actual decision-making of their representatives. Examining seeing and being seen as potentially oppressive and empowering experiences for the people themselves highlights the continued relevance of a liberal democratic ideal of autonomy for confronting problems relating to political spectatorship.

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III. Spectatorship as Seeing and Being Seen

The public’s role as an audience demands a reconsideration of the ways that desires to see and be seen, as well as not seen, shape democratic politics. Theorizing about spectatorship cannot and should not be limited to the experiences of citizens as only spectators. Such a democratic theory is woefully unprepared to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. Often people see while being seen in some capacity, whether it is at a public meeting, protest, or rally, or virtually, on social media by interacting with others through likes and comments or by the companies that own the platforms. People’s experiences as spectators can influence how they experience being seen, and vice versa. As a result, I treat spectatorship as a two-ended experience with consequences for both the person who sees and the person who is seen, while also theorizing about these experiences can intersect. I examine various dynamics involved in seeing that complicate the view held by some theorists that oversight promises a disciplinary exercise of power over political leaders while also bringing in the experiences of ordinary people of being exposed to the scrutinizing sight of others.

Considering how appearances on the public stage influences the perspectives and judgments that the watching citizens bring to bear in their everyday lives, we cannot reduce being seen to an oppressive experience. Nevertheless, many citizen-spectators are subject to the public judgments of others, including the state, elucidating how being seen can indeed be an oppressive experience, but especially for the vulnerable instead of the politically powerful.

In this section, I define what I mean by “spectatorship.” I also succinctly set out a myriad of dynamics that complicate both the excessively sanguine and excessively ocularphobic interpretations of visual experiences or political spectatorship offered by other scholars.
Spectatorship can refer to various ways of observing our world, using myriad senses, directly or indirectly between us and those to whom we direct our attention. Although it is very difficult to disentangle these various methods of interacting with our world, I emphasize the specific role played by the sense of sight in political life. I do so for both cases of “seeing” and being literally “seen,” with one’s facial expression, body, and other aspects of one’s appearance exposed to the sight of others. Nevertheless, considering our sense of self goes beyond our physical appearance and even beyond our physical interactions by virtue of virtual interactions, within “being seen” I include phenomena of non-visual exposure of our personal identities.

However, vision is necessarily embedded within various cognitive processes that affect how we interpret and respond to what we see. In particular, my conceptualization of spectatorship also attends to the power of the imagination in shaping our experiences of seeing and being seen. Our imagination can itself be shaped by what we observe, visually and otherwise. Socialized understandings about nature, humanity, and morality all mediate how we perceive and judge what we see.

For many people, the imagination also facilitates the “mind’s eye,” whereby the individual mentally pictures something, like an object, interaction, or memory. Through the mind’s eye, blind people can also develop the ability to visualize objects that they perceive through other senses like hearing. While my model of spectatorship highlights visual experiences, it is important to consider these more complicated imaginative experiences, which

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86 In doing so I follow Ruth Abbey’s critique of Green’s arguments insofar as he neglects the active interpretation involved in sensory experiences of seeing and hearing that he repeatedly calls “passive” (Abbey, Symposium, 204).

play a role in how we feel about being seen and anticipate the judgments of those who watch us.
The imagination bridges experiences of seeing and being seen.

The desire to be seen by other people is closely related to ideas about honor and glory (Hobbes) but also commercial ambition, sympathy, and love (Smith). I treat seeing and being seen as not just two different ends of the same processes but as often interactive. Against Urbinati’s insistence that seeing is solely conducive to a subjective, aesthetic judgment of taste, I argue that seeing is connected to our intersubjective development of moral and political judgment. As I will explain more fully in my chapter on Adam Smith’s theory of the impartial spectator, seeing each other facilitates the self-reflection necessary to evaluate moral conduct. Furthermore, Smith roots the principles of justice in our affective reactions to what we observe (III.4.11, 161). Smith’s intersubjective approach suggests our emotional responses to what we see shape our understandings of right and wrong, but at the same time, moral systems also inform how we respond and how we think we should respond to what we see (VII.ii.1.47, 293). As a result, spectators can err and can make better and worse moral and political judgments.

According to this framework, the spectator is not a passive consumer what she sees but engaged in an active mental deliberation informed by non-visual ideas. Moreover, she actively considers how what she sees ought to inform her own behavior and help her imagine what others ought to think of her. In this manner, the process of imagination connects what we see to how we anticipate and experience being seen by others. Such experiences can include empathetic approval and “identification,” as Urbinati argues, but the spectator can also react critically and disapprovingly to those we observe. Nevertheless, spectatorship can be a burden for those who are seen, particularly due to the reality that spectators often make mistaken judgments. Prejudices relating to social power relations are apt to distort spectatorship and exacerbate the
risk of mistaken judgment. Therefore, it is important to consider the consequences of seeing on those who are seen.

In sum, my conceptualization of spectatorship includes both visual experiences of seeing and the experience of feeling exposed to the eyesight of others. But it also takes into account cognitive processes such as the imagination, the mind’s eye, and socialized understandings of principles of justice, morality, the human senses, and nature. These different mental processes influence the person’s active engagement in interpreting and evaluating what she sees, as well as envisioning how she appears to and is judged by others.

IV. Overview of the Dissertation

My approach recognizes the reciprocal and interactive nature of experiences of seeing and being seen and emphasizes the political, social, and economic circumstances in which these experiences are embedded. Although the ability to observe the powerful may be a necessary precondition for accountability, it is not sufficient. Understanding spectatorship requires attending to the advantages of that the politically, socially, and financially powerful have in influencing how they are seen by the public as well as the ways in which the prejudices of the typical spectator may render them deferential to those who dominate the public stage. Furthermore, any understanding of citizens’ capacities as spectators is incomplete without considering the ways in which they are observed, sometimes oppressively by others, including political authority. For this reason, the principle of autonomy is crucial for both ensuring privacy, including the freedom to develop one’s own social and political relationships and ideas, as well as the positive ability to seek to shape the events of the public stage and the possibilities of social and political modes of being that the rest of the community sees.
Contemporary technology and political events may render the question of the relationship between watching and power ever more urgent, but as this dissertation shows, spectatorship lies at the heart of various political theories throughout history. Some theorists have acknowledged the interactive nature of democratic spectatorship, in which some citizens act with others spectating and roles switched at other times, but they have relied on the thought of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. Bryan Garsten argues that Arendt’s politics of appearance assumes that others in society serve as spectators, and as such, they can engage in a unique mode of judgment that infuses subjectivity with responsibility for one’s own evaluations. Alternatively, Xavier Marquez argues for the expansion of Arendtian spaces of appearances for ordinary citizens, though enlisting Foucault’s arguments about surveillance for maintaining equal visibility among participants and spectators and allowing the possibility of escape from visibility. He seconds Green’s argument and suggests democratic power can be exercised by applying the Foucauldian notion of asymmetric surveillance over the competition for political office. Nevertheless, the application of Foucauldian surveillance to the experience of political authority and the application of Arendtian politics of appearance to the lives of ordinary people elide the manner in which experiences of seeing and being seen reflect preexisting relations of power and the underlying reality of who is more able to control the terms of their appearance. Although Foucault’s model works as a powerful critique, it resists constructive normative argumentation. Additionally, Arendt’s argument that only being seen, and heard, by others can

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89 Garsten, “The Elusiveness of Arendtian Judgment.”  
90 Marquez, “Spaces of Appearance and Spaces of Surveillance,” 22, 28.  
91 Ibid., 29.
render our feelings, our thoughts, and our selves real, risks devaluing the democratic merit of personal privacy.  

Each of the authors I examine offer an understanding of reciprocal experiences of seeing and being seen, rather than simply analyze the experience of the spectator or the experience of the person being watched. They illuminate the ways in which experiences of spectatorship have been at the heart of part of approaches to representative government, democracy, and liberalism, in order to reconsider how we can conceptualize the promises and problems of today’s ocular politics. Although the insufficiency of experiences of watching for holding authority accountable means that constitutional limits and institutional design of representative government cannot be jettisoned, considering ordinary people’s experiences of seeing and being seen can illuminate what must be done to protect their autonomy.

The authors I examine offer distinct understandings of how the power of observation functions or ought to function in a political society. While two of the main authors, Hobbes and Bentham, elucidate spectatorship as a means of political and institutional power, Smith facilitates an examination of the moral dimensions of spectatorship, elucidating the ways in which citizens experiences of watching and being watched form their moral and civic characters.

Each author offers a vision of spectatorship from a different primary point of view within the political community: the state seeing its subjects and controlling what they see, the democratic citizens overseeing the state, and individuals observing each other. First, Hobbes captures the incentives and power of the state as both the spectating supervisor over the citizenry and the director and critic of public spectacles. Second, Bentham’s arguments for publicity of the government captures the opposite end of this relationship: how democratized tools of visibility

and public spectatorship of the powerful prevent or punish governmental abuses of power. By focusing on the people’s perspective, I find how Bentham also understood how the asymmetric dissociation of sight from being seen could be used to empower the vulnerable rather than discipline them. Third, Smith’s moral theory of spectatorship, which includes notable, if sparse, political commentary, provides insights on the relationship of spectatorship among citizens over each other, including the inner experience of the individual seeing and being seen. Although all theorists consider how experiences of seeing and being seen influence the civic character of individuals, Smith’s insights on the harms of forced public exposure inspire my normative argument for the importance of the individual’s control over their appearance to others.

Examining the approaches of political spectatorship implicit within the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and Adam Smith draws out a common theme that still resonates today: the ways in which social power relations inevitably shape experiences of seeing and being seen. However, each thinker also highlights a different dynamic of how experiences of seeing and being seen can interact with political consequences: how seeing can be a form of subjection for the spectator instead of the person who is seen, how symmetrical or reciprocal kinds of seeing and being can facilitate representative democratic participation, and how being seen can be morally and psychologically harmful particularly for the vulnerable and marginalized.

First, my examination of Thomas Hobbes’s philosophy highlights how the experience of seeing may involve two kinds of subjection for those who see instead of those who are seen: (1) vertical subjection, whereby the viewers are apt to be manipulated by those they watch, and (2) horizontal subjection, whereby the experience of being among an audience influences how viewers interpret and respond to what they see. For Hobbes, sight and the other senses form the
very basis and limits of what we think and imagine. However, his explanation of how people react to what they see shows a keen appreciation for the way that epistemic authorities, such as the Catholic church and the scholastics, influence individuals’ judgments. The socialized understandings of supernatural phenomenon perpetuated by these authorities render the people less capable of relying on their own senses, more susceptible to the manipulations of ambitious individuals, and less capable of “civil obedience” (2:8, 11).

The second kind of subjection, that of the audience on the individual spectator, evokes Gustave Le Bon’s “crowd psychology.” Hobbes’s argues that when a person is a member of a broader audience, the individual spectator’s skepticism suffers, thwarting the independent engagement she might have in a singular face-to-face interaction. Although this is not a purely visual phenomenon, it is a crucial factor to consider when we speak of spectatorship, especially to reflect on the way in which contemporary politics is indicative of “audience democracy.”

These two kinds of subjection lay the foundation for Hobbes’s arguments against both the private freedom of association and the institution of the democratic assembly. Hobbes arguments for state education and public assemblies implicitly adopt these psychological phenomena related to spectatorship toward the end of civil obedience. While Hobbes lays the groundwork for considering representative government as an extension of the people, emphasizing the application of the rule of law as a tool against social inequality, his account is primarily illustrative of how spectatorship can be used to entrench political authority and limit individual autonomy.

Second, a symmetrical model of spectatorship, that emphasizes the publicity of the powerful while also prioritizing the power of the people to democratically participate, including through the freedoms of the press and association, shows how spectatorship can be conducive to
representative democracy. Jeremy Bentham’s arguments on a public audience of parliament illuminate how a symmetrical model of spectatorship can help shape a scrutinizing and politically active populace. Bentham argues for the public audience of parliament on the basis of its effects on the politicians who would be seen as well as its consequences for improving overall publicity of political debates and policies throughout the community. Parliamentary debate could serve as a model for developing the political attitudes, deliberative practices, and individual judgment that support representative democracy. That said, spectatorship is not enough; in his later works, Bentham criticizes state licensing practices, which resemble those advanced by Hobbes, for hindering the ability of people to interact amongst themselves and build the independent judgment necessary for democratic participation. Nevertheless, even as he praises the people’s abilities to listen calmly and reject impassioned rhetoricians on the streets of London, Bentham expresses some concerns for the affective nature of sight and insinuates the detrimental effect of emotions on political judgment. Thus, a question remains regarding how precisely visual experiences and emotional sensitivity be conducive to good moral and political judgments, which I address through my chapter on Adam Smith.

Third, I draw attention to how harms of forced public exposure disproportionately affect marginalized members of the community. I highlight criticisms of unjust public scrutiny in the works of both Bentham and Smith. In the chapter on Bentham, I offer his designs for a private refuge (the Sotimion) for pregnant women, especially the unwed, as a model for how privacy and asymmetric surveillance can empower people rather than discipline them in the face of social prejudice and legal restrictions. However, by turning to Smith’s moral philosophy I offer an account for the psychologically and morally harmful aspects of forced public exposure. In addition to more thoroughly examining this third dynamic of political spectatorship, my chapter
on Smith complements and challenges arguments offered by Hobbes and Bentham. Contra Bentham, Smith offers a model of spectatorship that shows how watching and being watched as an intersubjective process can empower the individual to develop moral reflection and judgment. Experiences of seeing and being seen can productively incorporate both emotion and reason equally to develop a sense of justice, not just aesthetic taste. Complementarily to Hobbes, Smith shows that spectatorship still involves moral and political challenges, not so much because of its inherent visual or emotional character, but because of the forms of inequality such experiences are embedded. He casts doubt on proposals that improving our sight of the powerful will help hold them to account by underscoring how unequal power includes a distinctly aesthetic dimension. According to Smith, inequality renders the “ocular field” one of subjection by virtue of a tendency to admire the wealthy, including their vices, causing problems of moral corruption. Because people are “eager to look,” trust, and admire the wealthy and powerful (I.iii.2.1, 51), they are more likely to experience the public stage as an empowering rather than disciplinary experience.

I conclude the dissertation with an argument for the importance of the ideal of autonomy when considering contemporary experiences of spectatorship. The ways in which power is exercised over those who see render it crucial to consider the people as not only spectators but possessing or utilizing the potential to enter the public stage. This may not mean through institutional means, like being elected to office, but may mean political organizing and other forms of public interactions that attract an audience and minimize the dominance of only the political or socioeconomic elite in constructing the images of politics that all see. Pluralism is also be valuable for allowing people to exercise their autonomy in communal settings and for mitigating the dominance of the public stage by the powerful.
While my arguments for autonomy and pluralism is inspired by the dynamics of spectatorship that I uncover through the examination of Hobbes, Bentham, and Smith, I am also going beyond their arguments. Of course, in calling for autonomy and pluralism I directly challenge Hobbes’s arguments for state control of who enjoys a public audience and what the people see. Alternatively, Bentham provides inspiration for how exercising freedoms of expression and association can allow for people to present themselves to each other and develop the characteristics demanded of a scrutinizing and participatory democratic populace. Smith’s account of the effects of inequality on spectatorship and the harms of public exposure provide inspiration for why we must take differences into account when we consider people’s experiences of being seen by the public, but he does not argue for democratic empowerment. In other words, Bentham and Smith provide resources for the problems of public scrutiny, but they still maintain significant forms of political exclusion. On their own, Bentham’s and Smith’s sensitivities to the demand for privacy as refuge from unjust public judgments risk allowing for political exclusion without the right to shape what the rest of the politically community sees and the political and social possibilities they imagine.

Instead, I argue for a thicker conception of autonomy where people ought to have control over their ability to retreat from public view while maintaining the importance of being able take the public stage requires to addressing underlying problems of inequality, prejudice, and unjust public scrutiny. What people see influences the possibilities of political imagination as well as how people see and judge each other. Liberal pluralism both mitigates the dominance of the political leaders over the public stage and the imaginations of spectators and allows the people to actively shape the images of politics and society that all see. It can also be instrumental in
challenging the public judgments that render forced public exposure particularly harmful for certain members of the community.

Adopting Nancy Rosenblum’s arguments about pluralism and privacy, I reassert that contemporary representative democracy to make room for citizens as actors and directors, not just spectators. Privacy is both conducive to this process, as it allows for people to experience the feeling of autonomy and shape one’s self-presentation, and produced by pluralism, whereby individuals can have “shifting involvements” within various group experiences, such that they can never be completely known by others. Rather than being about merely the individual’s solitude, perpetuating a view of liberalism as atomism, privacy is valuable for individuals developing intimate relationships with others as well as a part of the process by which individuals may develop the political positions upon which they enter the public stage via membership in associations or more informal ways of connecting with others.

Those on the public stage do influence the imaginations, ideas, and judgments of the people. Therefore, appearances on the stage can challenge prejudices that facilitate the public scrutiny to which many people are unjustly subject. Nevertheless, empowering people to avoid forced public exposure, improving their autonomy, and embracing methods that allows for political expression without being seen, are also crucial features of a liberal democratic approach to spectatorship.

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94 Rosenblum, 67, 71.
Chapter 2

Thomas Hobbes on the Powers of the Audience

In his perceptive discussion of the effects that being in a crowd has on diminishing the inhibitions of individuals, presaging the theories of Gustave Le Bon and Georg Simmel, Hobbes presents an event that opens Lucian’s *How to Write History*:

There was once a great conflux of people in *Abdera*, a city of the Greeks at the acting of the tragedy of *Andromeda*, upon an extreme hot day; whereupon a great many of the spectators falling into fevers, had this accident from the heat and from the tragedy together, that they did nothing but pronounce iambics, with the names of *Perseus* and *Andromeda*, which, together with the fever, was cured by the coming on of winter; and this madness was thought to proceed from the passion imprinted by the tragedy. (8:25, 43)

A confluence of the emotional spectacle of the tragedy and the extreme heat resulted in a psychological infliction on the group of people who had watched the play. Hobbes depicts this episode as a temporary and contagious madness that permeated an entire community completely due to an experience of social spectatorship. The tragedy’s power to “imprint” a psychically corrupting passion in the minds of the people recalls Hobbes’s other references to a process of “imprinting” throughout discussions on education, particularly with respect to the “impressions of religion and the arts,” left on individuals and influencing their understandings of the world on a basic level. Teresa Bejan highlights how Hobbes uses the metaphor of “imprinting” for educational experiences toward obedience. But in this case, the affective “imprint” causes mayhem in the Greek city.

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This image of the effects of the ancient Greek drama on its spectators is a fitting entry point for considering Hobbes’s approach to the relationship between power and spectatorship. Hobbes was inspired by the theater, using understandings of representation taken from the theater in his explanation of sovereign power.\footnote{Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State,” \textit{The Journal of Political Philosophy}, Volume 7, Number 1, 1999, 1-29, 6, citing Pye 1984 and Runciman 1997; see also Hanna Pitkin, \textit{The Concept of Representation}, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 23-28.} Christopher Pye uses Hobbes’s reference to Abdera to argue that the power of the sovereign is based on “a bewildering confrontation between spectators and a spectacle,” rather than an “economic exchange between author and actor.”\footnote{Christopher Pye, “The Sovereign, The Theater, and the Kingdom of Darknesse: Hobbes and the Spectacle of Power,” \textit{Representations}, 8, (1984), 84-106, 93.} Whereas Pye uses the Greek episode to analyze Hobbes’s approach to representation, I start this chapter with it to underscore the importance of the presence of fellow audience members on the perceptions of the spectator. Yes, Hobbes is concerned with how what people see influences their behavior and, consequently, the body politic, but he also considers how the presence of fellow spectators’ compounds that influence.

In other words, we must be careful not to be distracted by Hobbes’s references to spectacle so as to miss the important role our fellow spectators play in bringing about the emotional “imprinting” of what we see. While the Abdera example highlights a dangerous form of theatrical “imprinting,” Hobbes follows it with an example of how spectacle can be used to correct such temporary, communal “madness.” He refers to Plutarch’s account of how magistrates responded to a suicide epidemic among Milesian women; the magistrates “stripped” the bodies of women who hung themselves and displayed the naked bodies for all the public to see (8:25, 43). Hobbes concludes that publicly exposing the corpses appealed to female
spectators’ sense of “honour” to counteract the excessive disdain for life that appeared to be spreading among them. However, women who might have been susceptible to committing suicide were deterred not solely by seeing others’ bodies stripped naked, but by witnessing other spectators’ responses to the spectacle and fearing the public exposure of their own bodies to those same spectators after their deaths. Thus, Hobbes articulates how control over individuals’ publicity instills habits of dissimulation by virtue of a spectator’s awareness of the broader audience of which they are apart, not the mere sight of the spectacle itself.

Whereas much of the existing literature on the visual or theatrical aspects of *Leviathan* focus on Hobbes’s frontispiece, the relationship between his writings on optics and his political philosophy, or his approach to representation, this chapter highlights the role that

audiences play in mediating both the sovereign representative’s and the subject’s observations and judgments. Hobbes’s frontispiece, which he developed while experimenting with a collection of optical instruments and writing the “Minute or First Draught of the Optics,” illustrates the sovereign’s “visible power” (17:1, 106) that overawes humanity. The reader gazes upon the sovereign, a supreme being whose body is composed of different subjects, backs to the reader, who also gaze up at his face. By forming the body of the sovereign, subjects become a singular audience of him, and by gazing upon the frontispiece, we join them. The manner in which the subjects gaze upon their representative as a single audience brings to mind Hobbes’ discussions of crowd psychology. To imagine the Hobbesian subject as spectator requires imagining him as a member of a broader public audience among his fellows. The effects that others have on our experiences as spectators motivate Hobbes’s recommendations relating to how the sovereign ought to control both the subjects’ experiences as spectators within the community and also the forms of spectatorship within governmental institutions.

In order to retrieve Hobbes’s model of spectatorship, I first offer an analysis of Hobbes’s epistemology of sight. Although Hobbes wrote other work on the physics of vision, with his

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104 Bredekamp, “Thomas Hobbes’s Visual Strategies,” 42. Bredekamp offers a convincing argument connecting the frontispiece to a “perspective glass” that Hobbes had used, “in which Ottoman sultans would merge together and, from their fragments, reassemble themselves in the form of the young king of France, thus becoming visually subordinate to him” (42).


study as optics a “model” for the rest of his natural philosophy,\textsuperscript{107} I focus on Hobbes’s discussions in \textit{Leviathan} to highlight his sensitivity to how social factors mediate individuals’ interpretations of what they see. Much of Hobbes’s criticisms of scholasticism, the Catholic Church, and other religious organizations highlights how supernatural beliefs cause people to be more susceptible to civically destabilizing ambitions of “false prophets” motivated by the desire for recognition.

Bryan Garsten characterizes Hobbes’s discussion of the flaws of sense perception as countering Protestant reformers’ rhetoric of conscience and vision and argues Hobbes aimed for his own rhetoric to undermine individuals’ trust of their own observations and judgments, making them more willing to follow the judgments of a sovereign representative.\textsuperscript{108} However, my account examines how Hobbes actually shows hope for the reliability of sight over second-hand reports or rumors, but only if better education eliminates the power of the predominant and mistaken theories of sense perception and supernatural phenomena. Nevertheless, Hobbes is more concerned with how a social psychological phenomenon exacerbates the fallibility of our senses: the power of a credulous audience to dampen our skepticism toward what we observe. Although the power of the audience is not solely visual, it is a factor that influences spectatorship, as Hobbes argues a single person watching a person’s speech or supposed performance of a miracle will interpret and react to what he sees differently than if he is one spectator among many.

The rest of the chapter connects Hobbes arguments regarding the social nature of sight to two different categories of institutional recommendations: those regarding how the state ought to


\textsuperscript{108} Garsten, \textit{Saving Persuasion}, 51-52.
manage what the people see as well as how the state manages its own form of vision.

For the first, Hobbes argues for state licensing all group associations in society, giving the state great control over what the people observe and managing who gets to benefit from the powers of an audience. In this manner, the requirement of state approval could be considered both a form of surveillance and also a means of censorship by overseeing the activities of the people and limiting what they might be able to observe and reflect upon. At the same time, Hobbes harnesses the powers of crowd psychology in the state’s public assemblies that serve to impart civic lessons to the subjects each week. By use of these educational institutions, the state can spread its own socialized understandings to better shape subjects’ obedience. But the public assemblies are not the only method through which the sovereign affects how the people see it. Hobbes also recommends the sovereign representative use its execution of the rule of law as a method of presenting itself to the people to counter the tendency to associate social status with political authority.

For the second, Hobbes extends his concerns about the effects of audiences into the institutions of governance in his arguments against deliberative open assemblies. People’s behaviors as speakers and as listeners change when they are aware of fellow spectators. In this manner, the open deliberative assembly is apt to become a kind of spectacle that inhibits good decision-making. As a result, Hobbes favors one-on-one meetings, which improve the sovereign representative’s abilities to question the advice of its counselors, while also providing for total confidentiality. However, these approaches that improve political decision-making have the added consequence of limiting the subjects’ view of the state. In other words, Hobbes’s preferred

institutional design further controls how the ruled view the rulers by maximizing governmental secrecy.

The Hobbesian model of spectatorship empowers the state over the subjects, constraining the possibilities of the publicity of both communal activities and also the state’s own policymaking, affecting both how people are able to be seen by each other and the state and what they are able to see. Despite Hobbes’s limited commitment to toleration (by respecting the private thoughts and beliefs of people that may contradict what they profess publicly), his strict management of who is allowed to attract an audience necessarily has consequences for the thoughts of individuals according to his own logic whereby imagination is “nothing but decaying sense” (2:2, 8). By controlling who gets access to a public audience, the sovereign representative controls what ways of looking at the world the people are exposed to, determining the possibilities of their political vision, literally and figuratively. When all outward behavior of the people is subject to state oversight, it is unclear to what extent people would really feel any sense of “privacy” or freedom of thought. However, Hobbes considers these appropriate sacrifices in the interest of protecting civil peace from the disruptions of religious sectarians and demagogues.

I. Hobbes’s Epistemology of Sight

Hobbes begins *Leviathan* with a series of chapters on the fundamental features that determine humans’ interactions within the world, such as the senses, imagination, speech, reason and science, and passions. In doing so, he sets up the premises about humanity on which he can establish his theoretical model of the state of nature and his political philosophy. Admittedly, Hobbes’s arguments regarding speech and its role in disagreements that give rise to violent
conflict are a crucial part of his account. However, Hobbes offers a variety of arguments relating to the political and social nature and consequences of visual experiences throughout *Leviathan*.

By attending to Hobbes’s approach to experiences of “seeing,” I illuminate numerous ways in which “seeing” can be an experience of subjection for the spectator. That “seeing” can be a process of subjection render it both a threat to civil stability as well as a tool that can be used in service of the sovereign authority to ensure civil obedience. Hobbes’s understanding of the forms of subjection involved in “seeing” justifies the measures he takes to restrict voluntary associations, in which individuals can see and be seen by each other, and to empower the sovereign authority’s control over what the subjects observe or do not observe about itself.

In this section, I examine Hobbes’s account of sight, but in doing so, the discussion extends beyond purely visual experiences. This is because Hobbes is quite sensitive to the ways in which social factors mediate our experiences of “seeing,” including how we immediately interpret and respond to what we see. Hobbes may not consider human beings sociable, but he does consider them social, or intersubjective. I focus on three important components of Hobbes’s account of sight, two of which consider aspects of sociality that influence how people see.

First, I examine the connections that Hobbes draws between eyesight and cognitive and affective processes. According to Hobbes, “imagination” is “nothing but decaying sense” (2:2, 8). As a result, what we are able to observe significantly determines our thoughts and beliefs.

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about the world around us and also influences how we manage our passions.\textsuperscript{112} Although Hobbes argues that our interactions with the material world significantly shape the thoughts of individuals,\textsuperscript{113} Hobbes highlights sight in particular.

Second, I examine how socialized understandings about human sense perception and the natural world shape how we process what we see. As a result, sight is not only socially embedded but politicized; Hobbes criticizes how groups such as the scholastics and the Catholic Church have perpetuated socialized understandings to render people particularly superstitious and liable to believe in fictitious supernatural phenomena in order to bolster their own authority.

Third, I examine Hobbes’s account of the social psychological effects of being in a crowd on the behavior of individuals. Hobbes’s crowd psychology illuminates the experience of spectators who are not alone but members of a broader audience, and how being a member of an audience can influence how person interprets what she sees. Although being in a crowd does not always, but often, includes experiences of seeing and being seen by each other, the crucial point is not the visual nature of the psychological phenomenon itself but how it impacts how a person interprets what he sees.

The three components of Hobbes’ account of sight amount to a characterization of experiences of “seeing” as exposing those who see to two different categories of subjection: one which I call, “vertical,” whereby spectators’ imaginations and beliefs are shaped by who or what they see, and another which I call, “horizontal,” whereby spectators’ interpretations of what they see are shaped by the psychological effects of being a part of an audience. Although there may be various ways in which these two different kinds of subjection might interact, Hobbes is

\textsuperscript{112} Samantha Frost, \textit{Lessons from a Materialist Thinker}, 24-27.
\textsuperscript{113} Frost, \textit{Lessons from a Materialist Thinker}, 107.
explicitly concerned with how those seeking the power of vertical subjection harness the influence of horizontal subjection by conspiring with groups of collaborators in order to manipulate unsuspecting individuals.

First, Hobbes starts the main text of *Leviathan* with a proclamation that sense is the origin of all thoughts, which he identifies with “representation or appearance, of some quality or other accident, of a body without us, which is commonly called an object” (1:1-2, 6). While Hobbes describes various senses, sight appears to hold a special place, considering that he refers readers to his previously published work on vision, *Tractatus opticus*, for more information on sense perception, and primarily expands upon the process of sight in order to set his approach apart from the scholastics’ theories. Hobbes juxtaposes his materialist approach, which emphasizes that our sensations are caused by the way external matter stimulate our different sense organs (1:4, 7) with the scholastics’ Aristotelian approach that argues we truly understand something because it “sendeth forth intelligible species, that is, an intelligible being seen, which coming into the understanding makes us understand” (1:5, 7). Hobbes is careful to note that when we see something, we are seeing “the fancy it begets in us,” separate from the object itself, and that “fancy” is “the same waking that dreaming” (1:4, 7). Although Hobbes explains “the bodies…we see, or hear” stimulate our senses “by their strong though unobserved action,” he is able to clarify his argument by drawing an analogy to the reflections of objects in mirrors: “we see they are, where we know the thing we see is in one place, the appearance in another” (1:4, 7).

Having examined sense perception, Hobbes goes on to explain what is produced in us by our sense perceptions: our imagination and our memory. Hobbes appears to reference what we
call “the mind’s eye,”

For after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latins call imagination, from the image made in seeing, and apply the same, though improperly to all the other senses…Imagination, therefore is nothing but decaying sense, and is found in men and many other living creatures, as well sleeping as waking. (2:2, 8)

When our senses are so struck by external objects, we retain impressions that we can call upon as we continue to move about our world. Although we can retain impressions from different sensual experiences, and Hobbes notes that imagination is a misleading term as it refers to the visual at the cost of other “fancies,” he continually turns to visual experiences to better explain the process.

Hobbes adds that “imagination” and “memory” are different terms we use to signify different ways we relate to the same phenomenon; “memory” emphasizes the “decay” of a sense perception, signifying how the sense perception we recall is “fading, old, and past” (2:3, 8-9). But how does sense “decay?”

Hobbes suggests that our continuous sense perceptions overwhelm the impressions left in our minds by previous sense perceptions. He compares the new sights and sounds we experience to the way the “light of the sun obscures the light of the stars” (2:3, 8). As Hobbes writes, “And any object being removed from our eyes, though the impression it made in us remain, yet other objects more present succeeding and working on us, the imagination of the past is obscured and made weak, as the voice of a man is in the noise of the day. From whence it followeth, that the longer the time is after the sight or sense of any object, the weaker is the imagination” (2:3, 8).

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114 By which I mean the colloquial term we use to describe mental visualization, not the Cartesian notion that Frost argues Hobbes rejects (Frost, 46-47).
The notion of “memory” captures the process by which present experiences obscure past experiences, distancing our thoughts from earlier sense perceptions, such that “we lose (for example), of cities we have seen, many streets, and of actions, many particular circumstances” (8). As a result, while the force of what we see can leave an influential impression on our minds, Hobbes blames the continual stimulation of our senses for the weakening of human memory.

Insofar as our very thoughts are dependent on and limited by our sense perceptions, Hobbes’s account of vision evokes a kind of subjection. Hobbes acknowledges our inherent dependency when he compares human “sight, and other acts of sense, as also knowledge and understanding, which in us is nothing else but a tumult of the mind, raised by external things that press the organical parts of man’s body” to God’s powers, as he must not have such faculties, “being things that depend on natural causes cannot be attributed to him” (31:27, 240). Our senses are the marks of our dependency, finitude, and humanity.

Although Hobbes underscores the impact of external objects that we can sense on our inner thoughts and creative ideas, he equally considers the embeddedness of our sense organs within our physical bodies. As a result, he underscores the way in which our affective state and physical environment mediates what we think we see and how we interpret what we see. A lack of sleep, fear, and anxiety can make us think we see things that are not real, or that what we have dreamt has actually happened. A person’s fears, superstitious worry, or “troubled” conscience can make a man think he sees things that were not real or natural (2:7, 10). Hobbes offers the example of Brutus seeing the apparition of Julius Caesar the night before a battle. Hobbes argues Brutus had been dreaming but had slept so miserably that he was unaware he had slept at all, let alone that he had dreamt. Hobbes asserts that when we are “alone in the dark” and we are nervous or superstitious we are susceptible to believing that we “see spirits and dead men’s
ghosts waking in churchyards” when these “fancies” are either entirely in our imagination or are really other people cunningly taking advantage of our fear (2:7, 10). Whereas scholastic approaches to the senses and imagination theorize that our good and bad thoughts have external sources, like God or the Devil, Hobbes argues that our environment and physical state of being interact with our cognitive processes to affect how we perceive the world around us (2:8-9, 11).

Second, experiences of seeing are mediated by not only feelings within us such as fear and fatigue, but also our beliefs and cognitive processes that are shaped by our interactions with others. Hobbes first mentions generalized “superstitious” beliefs for facilitating a lone person’s self-deception by “fancies” in the dark (2:7, 10), but he builds a more political argument by articulating how socialized understandings of human sense perception and the natural world problematize the process of seeing. Hobbes argues scholastic and religious organizations empower themselves by failing to correct mistaken thoughts about supernatural entities such as fairies or ghosts and the processes of sense perception in order to protect the use “of exorcism, of crosses, of holy water, and other such inventions” (2:8-9, 11). By advancing his own philosophy of the human mind whereby sense perception was completely dependent on local motion, rather than mediated by an inner soul, Hobbes refutes the Aristotelian natural philosophy and undercuts what he considers to be the politically pernicious doctrines of religious groups that relied on it. Hobbes seeks to dispel mistaken beliefs related to human imagination and theology that rendered people more susceptible to the ambitions of Anglican ministers, the Catholic church, and other

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While there is much scholarly debate over the extent of the Hobbesian sovereign’s commitment to truth, it is clear that Hobbes condemns the falsities that scholastics, the Catholic church, and Protestant reformers propagated for sabotaging individuals’ judgments of their own sense perceptions, thereby empowering themselves and other power-seekers against legitimate state authority (47:33-34, 484).  

In other words, Hobbes appears to blame religious leaders’ ambitions for glory and power for motivating their perpetuation of false notions of nature. Hobbes’s philosophy may be the earliest articulation of the human desire for recognition and its impact on politics. Hobbes considers the desire for recognition as largely “disruptive” and something that must be contained to maintain a peaceful society. The status-seeking behavior of individuals hoping for “honor and dignity” relative to each other is one of the main reasons human beings are not naturally sociable like other animals (contrary to Aristotle’s philosophy) (17:7, 108). As a result, human beings feel a unique conflict between the common good and their private good, insofar as their personal happiness hinges on comparing themselves to each other (17:8, 108).

Hobbes is not merely concerned with restricting the power of the organizations that have perpetuated false notions of the supernatural, as he also highlights how the doctrines that they have perpetuated have rendered the community vulnerable to still more “false prophets” that may seek to destabilize society. Although he considers their religious rhetoric a major part of their

119 See also Garsten, Saving Persuasion, 47-48.
121 Hont, Politics in Commercial Society, 53. See also Abizadeh’s arguments regarding glory in “Hobbes on the Causes of War.”
political danger, he also highlights false prophets’ use of spectacles. Hobbes artfully describes that rather than “enchanting” any stick into a serpent, or water into blood, a false prophet enchants the spectator instead, “so that all the miracle consisteth in this: that the enchanter has deceived a man, which is no miracle but a very easy matter to do” (37:11, 298). Individuals seeking power need only to manipulate a person into believing they possess supernatural ability, which doctrines perpetuated by the scholastics and churches make particularly easy to do.

Although Hobbes was particularly concerned with the civically divisive efforts of religious leaders during the English Civil War, he acknowledges the dangers of the manipulations of ambitious individuals are not confined to religion and alleged displays of supernatural power; Hobbes argues that the actions of political demagogues that use flattery, reputation, and military support to gain power are akin to “the effects of witchcraft” (29:20, 218). That said, Hobbes does not offer a similar discussion of non-religious use of spectacle (as opposed to rhetoric) to manipulate followers.

Despite Hobbes’s acknowledgement of the fallibility of human sense perception, Hobbes singles out the mistaken socialized understandings regarding natural science as a major determinant of civil disorder. He concludes that proper education regarding visions, dreams, and supposed supernatural entities or forces would render society much more peaceful and orderly: “If this superstitious fear of spirits were taken away, and with it prognostics from dreams, false prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civil obedience” (2:8, 11). While it may be impossible to rid human beings from the competitive passions that drive some to manipulate others, their manipulations would not work so well were individuals better prepared to be skeptical of what they see (2:8, 11). While ambitious individuals can manipulate others
using rhetoric, Hobbes also draws the reader attention to visual tricks and how education can improve the spectator’s skeptical judgments: “For in these times I do not know one man that ever saw any such wonderous work, done by the charm or at the word or prayer of a man, that a man endued but with a mediocrity of reason would think supernatural” (37:13, 300). To illuminate how often things that may appear to be miracles are not, Hobbes offers the visual example of solar and lunar eclipses. Less educated individuals gaze with wonder and awe at eclipses they consider acts of God, whereas more educated individuals know that they are caused by nature and can even use natural science to predict when such eclipses would occur (37:4-5, 294).

Admittedly, the socialized understandings of sense perception and natural phenomena that Hobbes criticizes and seeks to supplant are not limited to experiences of sight, nor are they solely visually communicated. However, they show that when Hobbes considers experiences of a spectator, he considers how our very perceptions of the world around us are mediated by social and cognitive processes. By analyzing Hobbes’ criticism of the scholastics in view of its impact on spectatorship, it becomes clearer that Hobbes’ concerns regarding sight appear to be less about the inherent fallibility of sight itself and more about the social and political factors that exacerbate it.

In fact, assuming individuals are better educated to understand their senses and the science that explains natural phenomenon, Hobbes argues written and spoken accounts or rumors of miracles are more likely to deceive individuals than if they were to witness the trick themselves (37:13, 300). Thus, he actually concludes subjects should only even consider believing a miracle as possibly having occurred if they witnessed it themselves, rather relying on

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the word of others (37:13, 299-300). Witnessing a purported miracle firsthand allows individuals to fully question and investigate what they have seen and whether it might be physically possible for a person to have tricked them. Despite his acknowledgement of the myriad of ways we can think we can be mistaken by what we see, Hobbes suggests we ought to trust individual judgment of first-hand observation over second-hand reports given spectators accurately understand natural science.

It must be noted that although Hobbes argues individuals would be much better eyewitnesses if they were better educated, he nevertheless argues individuals ought not to defer to their own judgments but by the consulting the “lawful church” and its head, which ought to be the sovereign representative (37:13, 300). He emphasizes deference to public reason to resolve the problems posed by disagreements in individual witnessing and judgments. The phrase itself, “publique reason,” counters “prophesiers using the language of conscience.”

Although Hobbes allows that individuals are free to personally believe or not believe miracles regardless of the sovereign’s judgment, it is crucial that in all outward speech and actions they conform to public reason (37:13, 300, 46:37, 466). Consequently, Hobbes emphasizes habits of dissimulation, not just better education about natural science. For Hobbes, civic obedience and political stability rely first and foremost on individuals being able to keep personal passions and beliefs to themselves and conform in social spaces. Hobbes justifies the sovereign’s role as an adjudicator on the authority that individuals have given to him to do whatever is necessary for the security of the community (37:13, 300). In the trade-off between personal experience and public order, Hobbes lands firmly on the side of public order by proposing that individuals

123 Garsten, Saving Persuasion, 44.
124 See also Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan: Hobbes on Education,” 614.
express deference to the sovereign.  

Socialized understandings of sense perception, the imagination, and the supernatural powerfully mediate individuals’ interpretations of what they see. Hobbes’s sensitivity to the social embeddedness of individuals extends to the basic functioning of sensory processing. Through his criticisms of scholastic and ecclesiastical teachings, Hobbes acknowledges the political nature of the origins, maintenance, and consequences of intellectual doctrines. He also turns to politics to resolve the problems caused by predominant educational and religious authorities.

Third, another distinctly social factor mediates the spectator’s interpretation of what he sees while also proposing a significant threat to the habits of dissimulation: the social psychological impact that being a member of an audience has on a spectator’s judgment. The passages about the public performance of *Andromeda* and the Milesian suicide epidemic cited above illustrate Hobbes’s early notion of crowd psychology. Of course, the experience of being a part of a crowd is not purely visual; there are many diverse sensory aspects of such an embodied experience that impact a person’s feelings. That said, seeing other members of the crowd and knowing that one is seen by them is inherently apart of the experience. For the purposes of this dissertation, the value in discussing Hobbes’s crowd psychology does not lie solely in that it often can consist of seeing while being seen, but that it comes into play in many experiences of spectatorship, whenever the spectator is not isolated and alone.

Hobbes characterizes the “madness” of a crowd as a case where the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. Though each individual may not be so excessively impassioned on his own, the actions of the crowd as a whole are apt to indulge in a kind of “madness” as a whole: “For

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example, though the effect of folly in them that are possessed of an opinion of being inspired be not visible always in one man by any very extravagant action that proceedeth from such passion, yet when many of them conspire together, the rage of the whole multitude is visible enough” (8:21, 42). In the midst of a group, “civil individuals become cruel and irrational.”⁴ Hobbes describes individuals in such situation being driven to acts of violence they would never have engaged in alone, including against people they previously considered “best friends,” exhibiting a kind of loss of inhibition as a result of being amongst a crowd (8:23, 42). Hobbes calls the phenomenon both a display of “madness” and of “too much appearing passion,” and compares it to drunkenness (8:23-25, 42-43).

By comparing the madness of the crowd to inebriation, Hobbes underscores the way in which both reveal the innermost, hidden passions of individuals: “For (I believe) the most sober men, when they walk alone without care and employment of the mind, would be unwilling the vanity and extravagance of their thoughts at that time should be publicly seen; which is a confession that passions unguided are for the most part mere madness” (8:23, 43). The social psychological phenomenon of the crowd weakens people’s capacities for dissimulation; like wine, it “takes from them the sight of the deformity of their passions” (8:23, 43). Rather than encouraging strict control of one’s presentation to each other, being seen by fellow members of a crowd liberates the person from such self-discipline and inspires in them a desire to share in the excessive passions expressed by those surrounding them. If the sober, solitary individual exemplifies our commitment to carefully managing the expression of our innermost feelings and thoughts, then the individual within the crowd, “drunk” with the simultaneous feelings of appearance and anonymity (as he is only a single participant whose actions are ultimately

⁴ Boyd, Uncivil Society, 65.
subsumed within the larger whole) exemplifies the ways seeing and being seen can entail experiences of subjection to each other, which Hobbes suggest also facilitates subjection to our very own “unguided” passions.

However, the experience of being a spectator among many is not limited to spontaneous experiences, although Hobbes is concerned with those. Instead, the horizontal subjection that one experiences vis-à-vis the mass of other spectators can be used by those seeking to impose vertical subjection. Hobbes is explicitly concerned with how ambitious individuals can 

\textit{conspiratorially} harness the power of audiences to influence what the rest of society see and believe. The construction of an entire audience to take part in a false miracle, acting as witnesses, lends credence to a false prophet’s trickery and may, in our terminology, “propagandize” the public:

But if we look at the impostures wrought by confederacy, there is nothing how impossible soever to be done that is impossible to believe. For two men conspiring, one to seem lame, the other to cure him with a charm, may deceive many; but many conspiring, one to seem lame, another so to cure him, and all the rest to bear witness, will deceive many more. (37:12, 299)

As examined above, the visual trickery of an ambitious false prophet, potentially exerts a vertical kind of power over the unsuspecting spectator who watches, evoking the appearance of supernatural authority. Although Hobbes expresses hope that better education would help such spectators be more skeptical about what they see, it might not counter the added influence that being amongst a credulous audience has over the spectator. In this manner, the lack of inhibition and the desire to conform to the testimony of the rest of the audience overwhelms the individual’s skepticism toward whomever he watches.

\footnote{Arash Abizadeh, “Publicity, Privacy, and Religious Toleration in Hobbes's \textit{Leviathan},” \textit{Modern Intellectual History} 10, no. 2 (August 2013): 261–91, 289.}
In sum, Hobbes’s account draws out various modes of subjection that can characterize experiences of seeing, including when such experiences are intertwined with experiences of being seen. First, by characterizing imagination as merely the product of compounded sense perceptions, particularly visual experiences, Hobbes attributes what we see with incredible potential to define our political ideas, beliefs, commitments, and identity. As a result, those with the ability to appear before the public can greatly influence those who are subject to their presence. Second, by highlighting the way that socialized understandings shape how we interpret and respond to what we see, Hobbes highlights how the fallibility of individual sense perceptions and judgments can be exacerbated, or potentially, guarded against, by social and political attempts to influence how people understand the world. Finally, Hobbes often depicts the subject as one spectator among many others, subject just as much to the impassioned whims of the crowd as he is to the visual power of the spectacle that he watches. Consequently, ambitious individuals seeking to influence spectators can buttress their performances by taking advantage of the “horizontal subjection” a spectator experiences within a crowd.

II. Managing What the People See

In light of the problems that the social psychology behind seeing and being seen poses for civil peace, Hobbes presents a two-pronged approach to controlling what the people observe and how they respond to one another by making use of forms of surveillance and spectacle.

His requirement for state licensing of all group associations stems from a suspicion of secrecy and controls what kind of people and organizations can attract a public audience. By controlling who is able to be seen by the rest of society, the Hobbesian sovereign would be able to manage what the people see, and, consequently, their political imaginations. Insofar as state licensing requires all purposes of group associations to be known, the Hobbesian sovereign also
exercises a kind of informational surveillance. The sovereign authority can use the licensing requirement to prevent ambitious challengers of its authority from attracting the public audience and also maximizes its view of the activities of the subjects.

However, Hobbes also encourages the state to actively cultivate what the people see. The public assemblies, or “civic Sunday schools,” to borrow Bejan’s terminology,\(^{128}\) harness the powers of crowd psychology Hobbes seeks to curtail in other contexts.

Finally, Hobbes’s approach to the rule of law considers the power of what the people see to affect their behavior. Instead of emphasizing personalistic or spectacular forms of presentation of state power, Hobbes depicts the careful and equal application of the rule of law as the most important manifestation of the office of sovereign that will be observed, judged by, and responded to by the people.

First, Hobbes argues for total transparency of private assemblies unrelated to state business. He condemns secret assemblies, the purposes of which are unknown and hidden, as “dangerous,” “unjust,” and, therefore, unlawful (22:29, 153).\(^ {129}\) Considering all social interactions among people potentially politically disruptive, Hobbes insinuates the need for constant surveillance of subjects.\(^ {130}\) In this manner, the Hobbesian approach to surveillance opposes basic limits of liberal constitutionalism by rejecting the possibility of private social interactions and by justifying “any means that is deemed necessary to monitor the actions of...

\(^{128}\) Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” 618.

\(^{129}\) Rousseau makes similar arguments against the theater in Geneva in the Letter to D’Alembert, especially his approval of the gossiping social circles and open-air festivals on the basis of their publicity and his concerns regarding the privacy the darkness of the theater and private meetings afforded to individuals and couples (Letter, 108, 125, 128-29).

\(^ {130}\) Boyd, Uncivil Society, 73-74.
Hobbesian subjects.”¹³¹ Because Hobbes is not interested in only persecuting “associations that have broken the law” or “conspiring to do so” but also those who might act civically disruptive in any way, his theory implies the acceptance of methods we would consider unconstitutional, such as “unwarranted questioning, searches, seizures,” and detainments based on what people “might do,” not what they have done.¹³²

What are the implications of Hobbesian surveillance and control of the terms of publicity within the community? Considering Hobbes’s embrace of dissimulation, it does not fit under Foucault’s model of the transformative power of disciplinary surveillance. Instead, Hobbes’s goal appears to be control over the terms of who gets to enjoy an audience in public space, anticipating the destabilizing power of group dynamics on public order. By ensuring that all associations are approved by the state and meet a standard of transparency, the sovereign representative constricts the activities of civil society. It is a policy that can deter, predict, and punish ambitious power-seekers who would challenge the state’s authority with a genuine audience of followers, possibly with the aid of conspirators.

Nevertheless, by determining who can be seen and heard by members of the political community, the sovereign representative also determines what the people see. As examined above, Hobbes argues that the people’s sense perceptions constitute their thoughts. Consequently, Hobbesian surveillance also acts as a kind of censorship, with implications for the very thoughts of the people, by restricting the kind of interactions that they can have together. By controlling who gets to access a public audience, Hobbes both curbs ambitious individuals’

¹³¹ Boyd, Uncivil Society, 74. It is important to note that even though Hobbes does not include the freedom of association (Boyd 12), he does encourages the importance of certain freedoms, such as subjects’ abilities to contract with one another and make personal decisions regarding their children’s education and their own diets (Ch. 21, par. 6, p. 138).
¹³² Boyd, Uncivil Society, 74.
competitions for recognition and controls the ideas and communal environments to which individuals are exposed.

For example, Hobbes’s licensing requirement is reminiscent of English laws requiring the state licensing of theatrical productions preceding the English Civil War as well as Parliament’s shuttering of all theaters during the War.¹³³ Recall Hobbes’s considerations of the performance of Andromeda’s “imprinting” of a mass sociogenic illness (8:25, 43); the licensing requirement would allow the sovereign to determine which kinds of mass spectacle that people could watch together to prevent such moments of widespread, public loss of inhibition.

Second, by constructing weekly public assemblies, the sovereign harnesses the same powers of collective experience that the sovereign can deny private subjects in order to buttress its authority and encourage subjects to interpret what they see according to public reason. Hobbes prioritizes forms of public assembly as a tool of the state, from organizing public worship to institutionalizing regular educative assemblies to teach the people about their duties to the commonwealth (31:37, 242 and 30:10, 223).

Public assemblies and other educational institutions provide opportunities for the sovereign representative to shape subjects’ imaginations. The public assemblies that would be paired with religious services would follow their methods of preaching whereby subjects would develop an unreflective obedience.¹³⁴ Thus, participation in these public assemblies may be the tool for deep, internal transformation of the very perspectives of subjects that the sovereign’s oversight of non-state group meetings is not.

The public assemblies are where the sovereign would impart lessons of the moral and

¹³⁴ Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” 618-619.
civil science that Hobbes offers in the *Leviathan*. Hobbes compares moral and civil science to “prospective glasses” to correct the myopic focus that human beings’ “passions and self-love” give them that cause them to avoid duties they owe the commonwealth (18:20, 118). In other words, public assemblies are not merely a transmission of the mode of judgment – the sovereign’s, or public reason – to which individuals should learn to defer, but likely experiences that change the very way subjects see the world. For example, public assemblies would be opportunities to disempower the religious rhetoric, theology, and beliefs about the senses and imagination that rendered individuals more susceptible to clergy’s insurgent ambitions, which Hobbes believed facilitated the civil war, and instead draw people towards compliance with the public reason of sovereign authority.\(^\text{135}\) The lessons in the assemblies could mimic Hobbes’s rhetoric in the *Leviathan*, which replaces religious imagery that confused the people’s senses and judgments by conjuring images associating the sovereign with God’s “irresistible power” and the state of nature with hell in his reader’s minds.\(^\text{136}\) In this manner, rhetoric and education through the public assemblies could “imprint” individuals’ minds with new ways of perceiving the world around them, to render them less susceptible to power-seekers and more dependent on the sovereign authority.\(^\text{137}\) The act of watching the speeches and rituals of the public assemblies as one member of a broader audience would undoubtedly harness the affective power of the crowd to influence the spectator’s deference to the authority he watches, akin to Hobbes’s depiction of


\(^{137}\) This appears to be one of the goals of the sovereign’s “public assemblies,” which I discuss in greater detail in the next section.
the way the audience conspiring with the false prophet persuades the spectator to watch with less skepticism.

While I have sought to suggest that the public assemblies could be opportunities to replace the mistaken notions of natural science that Hobbes criticizes throughout *Leviathan*, I must acknowledge that Hobbes does not explicitly connect the substance of the public assemblies to these doctrines, emphasizing instead “civic lessons.” But the civic lessons that Hobbes outlines include discussions for shaping how people respond to the people they watch in society. For example, Hobbes emphasizes that the lessons ought to counter the desire for recognition by teaching subjects not to follow leaders on the basis of their reputational status or “virtue” (30:8, 222). Regardless of the form of government, whether monarchical or democratic, subjects must see legitimate authority as based not on the qualities of particular individuals but on the institution of the office of the sovereign:

…they are to be taught that they ought not to be led with admiration of the virtue of any of their fellow subjects, how high soever he stand, nor how conspicuously soever he shine in the commonwealth, nor of any assembly (except the sovereign assembly), so as to defer to them any obedience or honour appropriate to the sovereign only, whom (in their particular stations) they represent, nor to receive any influence from them but such as is conveyed by them from the sovereign authority. (30:8, 222)

Hobbes relies on civic education to help inoculate subjects against the ambitions of potential popular leaders who challenge sovereign authority. Hobbes returns to his visual rhetoric to capture the spectacular character of social status-seeking that might pose political threats by describing a potential challenger to the sovereign as “shining” within the commonwealth. He categorically denies the possibility that any personal qualities, whether based in virtue or merely social status, of individuals might provide special justification for their domination over others. It is crucial that the ruled are taught to reserve their honor only for the sovereign, and not attribute that honor to the particular individuals serving in lesser magisterial offices, whose power is only
an extension of the sovereign’s, guarding against the dangers of popular leaders and elite discord.

Consequently, Hobbes also denies the person (or people) occupying the office of the sovereign representative recourse to charismatic or personalistic influence on which popular challengers rely. It is the institution itself that lends any individual the political power that ought to inspire admiration.

If the person or people who occupy the office of the sovereign ought not to inspire obedience by reference to spectacular character of their higher social status nor by reference to their personal qualities or virtues, then how ought they inspire respect? The sovereign must be conscious of how it presents itself to the people through its institutional performance, particularly through its execution of the rule of law. Although Hobbes seeks to protect the secrecy of the sovereign’s deliberative processes akin to the hidden nature of the thoughts of individuals (which will be the focus of the third subsection below) he recognizes the sovereign’s exercise of law will be seen and judged by the populace. Juxtaposing his philosophy against Aristotle’s emphasis on virtuous leaders, Hobbes argues “Not the appetite of private men, but the law, which is the will and appetite of the state, is the measure” (46:32, 464). Hobbes blames Aristotle’s political empowerment of individuals leaving communities vulnerable to civil strife spurred by demagogues who deceive the populace into believing civil war could be preferable to the sovereign authority (46:35-36, 465-466).

This brings us to the third and final way the sovereign determines what subjects see. In general, the appearance of the sovereign’s power is essential in Hobbes’s account. But in addition to educating the people against faith in the relevance of personal qualities for power in order to buttress against demagogic threats to authority, government actors must view their own

presentation to the people as intimately connected to how they uphold the law. As Skinner notes, Hobbes is anxious to emphasize that “sovereigns are nothing more than actors who body forth the actions of the Commonwealth” and clarifies in the letter dedicatory to *Leviathan* that he writes “not of men” but “the seat of power.” Despite Hobbes insistence that the individuals directly occupying the office of the sovereign representative are not subject to civil laws (26:6, 174), anyone else must be, particularly those personally close to the person(s) embodying the commonwealth in the office of the sovereign. Hobbes again uses metaphor of the sun and the stars, but rather than describing sense perceptions, he describes how individuals occupying subservient but political positions, such as a duke or a prince, may enjoy socially hierarchical positions relative to other subjects, but become equal to all other subjects before the sovereign: “And though they shine, some more, some less, when they are out of [the sovereign’s] sight, yet in his presence they shine no more than the stars in [the] presence of the sun” (28:19, 117).

Hobbes uses the same reference to eye-catching illumination that he later uses to describe the civic lesson regarding the importance of honoring the sovereign above lesser magistrates, who may be potential sources of division within the regime (30:8, 222). Although Hobbes’s metaphor here appears in the context of explaining the sovereign’s preeminent power over all individuals within the community, the image of the subjects equally eclipsed by sovereign

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140 Pye, “The Sovereign, the Theater, and the Kingdome of Darknesse,” 97, drew my attention to this passage. That said, Pye argues that this metaphor elucidates how the “visible awe” of the sovereign that compels obedience is also the origin of subjects’ powers. The relevance of this passage for considering the visibility of the sovereign is undeniable, but I want to underscore the importance of how all are equal in front of the sovereign to connect this comment on power to Hobbes’s approach to the law.

141 Skinner convincingly argues that this section, particularly 28:18, is a rebuke of parliamentary writers’ arguments that the body of the people retain greater power than the king, whereas Hobbes argues the people as an aggregate of individuals must be subordinate, and insofar as they
authority evokes his arguments elsewhere regarding equality before the law. The rule of law
must mimic the equality of individuals in the state of nature so that people of all social ranks are
equally able to seek recompense for the injustices they suffer and the wealthy and powerful
“have no greater hope of the impunity when they do violence, dishonour, or any injury to the
meaner sort” than when the poor do should they injure them (30:15, 226). The rule of law thus
appears as a corrective to the “ocular” power that various individuals have at their disposal vis-à-
vis the rest of society due to their superior social status, which may or may not be connected to
political power.

As a result, the sovereign ought not to be blind to the socioeconomic status of subjects
when distributing rewards or punishments. Any honors that the sovereign bestows onto the great
ought to be for “the beneficence and aid” they offer to people who have less social status (30:16,
226-227). The harms of “the violences, oppressions, and injuries” perpetuated by the wealthy
and socially powerfully are amplified by the simple fact that these people “have the least need to
commit them” (30:16, 227). Thus, Hobbes argues the sovereign must be particularly harsh in its
responses to the injustices perpetuated by individuals occupying highest social ranks to prevent
the rest of society from rebelling against the nobility, for “impunity maketh insolence; insolence,
hatred; and hatred, an endeavor to pull down all oppressing and contumelious greatness, though
with the ruin of the commonwealth” (30:16, 227). Failure to punish the socially advantaged is
particularly threatening to the stability of the regime, for it risks encouraging the elite’s abuses of
their privilege and incurring a reaction from the rest of the public against the apparently
oppressive social order.

form a singular body it is only as the commonwealth, which itself is represented by the sovereign
and thus has the same amount of power; Skinner, “Hobbes on Representation, 71.
Consequently, we can consider the sovereign representative’s execution of criminal justice as a kind of performance through which it presents itself to the people. The sovereign must anticipate the perspective of the people, particularly with respect to status inequality, when executing the law. Hobbes argues the sovereign must be careful to apply the law equally among socially unequal individuals lest it incite mass “indignation,” hinting at the power of the public audience to influence the sovereign’s behavior, albeit a limited influence dependent on the threat of violent uproar. The exercise of law serves as a corrective to the power that superior ranks of social status appears to grant.

For example, if the sovereign representative fails to adequately punish “sons, servants, or favourites of men in authority,” then it appears to “authorize the injustices of those who commit the crime” (30.23, 230). In such situations, those who occupy the office of the sovereign appear to make exceptions for the privileged people close to power. It is crucial to underscore Hobbes’s use of the word “authorize” in this case. Elsewhere, Hobbes forcefully argues that the people have authorized the sovereign to act on their behalf, (29:9, 213), and as a result, the actions of the sovereign ought to be considered attributable to the entire commonwealth and to themselves, rather than the particular person embodying the office of the sovereign.142 When the people see the sovereign representative allow the criminal actions of individuals personally close to him, the people may feel a kind of betrayal that ruptures the supposed connection between themselves and the sovereign representative. If he turns a blind eye to the actions of people personally close to him, the officeholder risks perpetuating an image of political authority as reducible to personal privilege, as opposed to the equal execution of the rule of law. Punishing criminals both deters

others within their social ranks and shows the rest of the population that they can trust the
individuals in the office of the sovereign to properly execute its legitimate political power on
behalf of the commonwealth, as opposed to the behalf of the particular person(s) in office.

To illustrate the importance of the sovereign’s execution of justice for its public image,
Hobbes makes an obscure reference to the rape of Lucretia and its impact on the transformation
of the Roman monarchy into a republic. In doing so, he highlights the dangers of failures to
punish repugnant crimes committed by the privileged to subvert a commonwealth’s institutions:

It belongeth also to the office of the sovereign to make a right application of punishments
and rewards. And seeing the end of punishing is not revenge and discharge of choler, but
correction, either of the offender or of others by his example, the severest punishments
are to be inflicted for those crimes that are of most danger to the public, such as are those
which proceed from malice to the government established, those that spring from
contempt of justice, those that provoke indignation in the multitude, and those which,
unpunished, seem authorized as when they are committed by sons, servants, or favourites
of men in authority. For indignation carrieth men, not only against the actors and authors
of injustice, but against all power that is likely to protect them, as in the case of Tarquin,
when for the insolent act of one of his sons he was driven out of Rome, and the monarchy
itself dissolved. (30:23, 230)

Although Hobbes also articulates the view of punishment as a corrective and influential
example for deterring others from disobeying authority, it is striking that he also emphasizes the
importance of executing punishment in order to prevent mass “indignation.” The failure to
punish the criminal actions of those approximate to political power appears to be a primary cause
of mass indignation. When the Roman monarch failed to satisfactorily punish his son’s rape of
the noblewoman Lucretia, he brought the indignation of the people upon himself, losing his
political power and destabilizing the political community in the process. The state’s failure to
punish a crime of obscene, interpersonal violence led to political violence, instability, and,
finally, republican revolution. The broader population appears as an underlying audience whose
respect the sovereign representative must be careful to maintain.
Furthermore, while Hobbes calls for more severe punishment for the crimes of the great, he calls for leniency when judging crimes that the multitude may be apt to commit, arising from “great fear, great need, or from ignorance whether the fact be a great crime” (30:23, 230; see also 27:23-26, 198). In cases of uprisings, Hobbes takes a position towards the people that may be interpreted as either patronizing or compassionate, arguing that the “leaders and teachers” ought to be punished but not the “poor seduced people” (30.23, 230). By punishing the masses who follow ambitious challengers to the sovereign, the sovereign misdirects punishment that ought to be directed toward himself for failing to better instruct the people in their civic duty to admire the institution of the sovereign and not the personal qualities of popular leaders (30:23, 230). In addition, any popular leaders who sought mass support and challenge the superiority of the sovereign office must be noticeably punished to deter others from similar ambitions (30:24, 230-231). Although the exercise of the rule of law may not necessarily be visual, it is an important feature of the people’s authorization of the state. It highlights Hobbes’s turn to institutions to counteract the ways in which the reputation of the elite may threaten civil disorder.

**III. Managing How the State Sees**

Hobbes consistently applies his distrust of the effects of group dynamics on individual perception and judgment within governmental institutions. The “artificial man” of the state is susceptible to the same persuasive force of a credulous audience that thwarts the natural man’s skepticism and impacts how he interprets what he observes. Hobbes’s institutional recommendations against deliberative assemblies aim at two separate but related goals: (1)

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143 Additionally, Hobbes argues that the state ought to provide for the well-being of individuals who are physically unable to work rather than “expose them to the hazard of such uncertain charity” of other subjects within the community (30:18, 226), although it should force others who are in need to work (30:19, 226-227).
preventing the psychological effects of group dynamics from hindering good governmental judgment, and (2) maintaining governmental secrecy. Hobbes does not appear to explicitly connect these goals but refers to them both throughout his criticisms of the open assembly. However, by comparing state decision-making processes to the thoughts of the sovereign, Hobbes’s support for the secrecy of state business brings to mind his defense of the freedom of thought of the subjects. Just like the Hobbesian state approvals of associations in society, the Hobbesian push for secret, one-on-one meetings with counselors instead of open deliberative assemblies in government has the additional consequence of limiting what the people are able to observe.144

Hobbes explicitly compares the counselors to the sovereign representative to the memory of natural man (Introduction, par. 1, 3). But we can also consider the counselors the eyes of the sovereign representative in light of Hobbes’ archery metaphor:

And though it be true that many eyes see more than one, yet it is not to be understood of many counselors, but then only, when the final resolution is in one man. Otherwise, because many eyes see the same thing in divers lines, and are apt to look asquint towards their private benefit, they that desire not to miss their mark, though they look about with two eyes, yet they never aim but with one; and therefore no great popular commonwealth was ever kept up, but either by a foreign enemy that united them, or by the reputation of some one eminent man amongst them, or by the secret counsel of a few, or by the mutual fear of equal factions, and not by the open consultation of the assembly. (25:16, 172)

While it is important that the sovereign access insights from others with different experiences and expertise about governance, each counselor will be divided between his private interest and his sense of the common good. Rather than canceling each other out, combining the

144 Pye argues we should understand Hobbes different arguments regarding the power of the sovereign to “visibly awe” subjects and his preference for monarchy because it maximizes the secrecy of political judgments as connecting to arguments about the limits of visibility in Renaissance texts such as Edward Forsett’s Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique (1606). Pye, “The Sovereign, the Theater, and the Kingdome of Darknesse,” 97.
divided insights of all of these individuals in one open group discussion increases the chance of the sovereign being led away from what decisions would best serve the overall wellbeing of the commonwealth. A key difference between the artificial man and the natural man lies in the multiplication of distinct passions, interests, and personal ambitions of counselors which introduce challenges to judgment that an individual doesn’t have to manage (25:11, 169). To resolve these challenges, Hobbes recommends various principles for choosing good counselors, such as seeking out counselors whose personal interests would be best served by also serving the interest of the sovereign representative and the stability of the commonwealth (25:11, 169). However, besides choosing good counselors, Hobbes recommends institutional design to allow the sovereign representative to consult individually with each counselor to ensure good governance.

Undoubtedly, part of Hobbes’s criticisms of deliberative assemblies focus on the problems posed by rhetoric and worries that individuals’ competition for reputation in public debates might “lead to violence.” However, Hobbes pinpoints the source of the problem of rhetoric in the effects of audiences on speakers, inspiring long, rhetorical speeches, and on spectators, dampening the skepticism of their observations and lessening their abilities to silently and verbally question the dominant speakers.

The same group dynamics that Hobbes identifies as a danger to civil peace can also threaten the independent, skeptical decision-making of the sovereign representative. Hobbes

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145 By emphasizing how the observational roles of the counselors characterize the way the state “sees,” I disagree with Strong’s claim that sovereign’s status as a “moral god” means that it does not rely on a form of “sight” because Hobbes argues that God does not require sense perception. Strong, “Seeing the Sovereign: Theatricality and Representation in Hobbes’ Leviathan,” 36.

146 Garsten, Saving Persuasion, 37. See Garsten, Saving Persuasion, Chapter 12 for further analysis of Hobbes’ antipathy toward rhetoric.
argues individuals only successfully indulge rhetorical “exhortation” when speaking front of a crowd because a single spectator cannot as easily interrupt him to “examine his reasons more rigorously” (25:8, 167). The open assembly exacerbates the weaknesses of the “artificial man’s” senses in a manner analogous to the phenomenon through which the crowd influences the natural man’s judgment: by impeding his ability to question the intentions, trustworthiness, and quality of the actor he observes.

However, the problem is not just the way the skillful rhetorician avoids the sovereign’s questioning; it is the way that other counselors change their behavior and advice when they serve as an audience to one another. When counselors serve as an audience to one another they may change or hold back their advice after being moved by the eloquence of another, afraid of “displeasing” another or the whole audience by contradicting them, or afraid of being humiliated by appearing less intelligent (25:15, 170-171). Many may feel inhibited by the presence of an audience, but rather than improving the quality of debate, this only advantages the most extroverted or most skilled performer over the most incisive advisor.

Furthermore, in an open assembly of counselors, the “artificial man’s” senses are susceptible to delusion and distraction that will impede his ability to consider and act in the common interest. As Hobbes emphasizes,

In hearing every man apart one may examine (when there is need) the truth or probability of his reasons, and of the grounds of the advice he gives, by frequent interruptions and objections, which cannot be done in an assembly, where (in every difficult question) a man is rather astonished and dazzled with the variety of discourse upon it than informed of the course he ought to take. Besides, there cannot be an assembly of many, called together for advice, wherein there be not some that have the ambition to be thought eloquent (and also learned in the politics), and give not their advice with the care of business, propounded, but of the applause of their motley orations, made of the divers coloured threads or shreds of authors, which is an impertinence at least, that takes away

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147 We may be able to add Irving Janis’s theories regarding “groupthink,” to the collection of modern ideas that have precursors in Hobbes’s philosophy.
the time of serious consultation, and in the secret way of counseling apart is easily avoided. (25:15, 171)

The audience of other counselors may enflame the ambitions for glory and recognition of some individuals, perpetuating a focus on the style of speech rather than the content and quality of the advice given. Consequently, any spectator might be emotionally moved and impressed but not informed. The lively, spontaneous, and competitive nature of mass debate makes it difficult for individuals to interrupt and ask further questions about those speaking, which would challenge their rhetorical dominance. Both counselors who may have more helpful advice to share and the distinct sovereign representative, if there is one in particular, are more likely to fall under the spell of the most eloquent and potentially ambitious figures by observing the rapture of the rest of the audience.

Alternatively, if the sovereign representative arranges one-on-one meetings instead of an open deliberation, then each counselor is better able to prepare his advice, consider all the potential consequences of the directions he recommends, and is less likely to be misled by the competitive envy or admiring emulation that he may feel when observing the advice of others in an open debate (30:26, 232). In turn, the sovereign representative is better able to interrupt a counselor’s advice and skeptically interrogate his reasoning and motives in order to better decide to what extent he should take his counsel. The sovereign can better judge to what extent the counselor thinks of the good of the commonwealth as opposed to his own personal good.

Although many of Hobbes criticisms of the deliberative assembly rest on the way the audience influences the character of the deliberation and political decision-making, he also often refers to the importance of secrecy. He argues that because so many people must be informed at once in a democracy, it’s difficult to maintain secrecy, rendering it inferior to monarchy (19:5, 120). When further examining deliberation, Hobbes reasserts that there are many “deliberations
that ought to kept secret” in politics, and concludes that large assemblies must limit those deliberations “to lesser numbers, and of such persons are most versed, and in whose fidelity they have the most confidence” (25:15, 171).

In light of the passages examined above, Hobbes preference for monarchy includes both the ways in which the monarch can guard against the pernicious effects that spectators have on open deliberations as well as the ways in which the government can conceal its decision-making from the populace and foreign actors. Although Hobbes’s commitment to maintaining secrecy within the government is distinct from the issue of minimizing the detrimental effects of the audience in political decision-making, altogether his institutional theory grants those in power great discretion over the subjects’ experiences of seeing and being seen by each other. At the same time, he minimizes the subjects’ view of political authority, except for official policies and judgments. In addition to managing what the subjects see beyond state actions, the Hobbesian sovereign exerts great control over how the subjects see it.

IV. Conclusion

Beyond his research on optics and references to theater, Thomas Hobbes offers a distinct approach to the political nature of experiences of seeing and being seen. His work illuminates the how experiences of seeing can be experiences of subjection. According to Hobbes, our very ideas are dependent on our sense perceptions, and sight appears to be a particularly important way in which we interact with our world. Yet spectatorship cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the ways that social factors mediate our experiences of seeing as well. These factors include socialized forms of understanding within the communities of which we are apart as well as social psychological effects of being a spectator among a broader audience. By examining the epistemology and social psychology of sight, I have highlighted an overlooked
source of civil strife in Hobbes’s account: how those hoping to exert a vertical exercise of power over subjects as spectators can take advantage of an horizontal form of power by conspiring with a group to form a credulous audience, dampening unsuspecting spectators’ skepticism.

In light of Hobbes’s concerns about subjection and seeing, his institutional arguments use political power to manage the subjects' experiences of seeing and being seen by each other and the state. His arguments for public assemblies and for the state oversight of associations seek to inculcate the perspective of public reason to mediate people’s perceptions and replace the false, supernatural doctrines perpetuated by the scholastics and ecclesiastic authorities that Hobbes argues render subject less “fitted” “for civil obedience” (2:8, 11).

On the one hand, Hobbes can be read as seeking to protect individual reason from the dangers of false doctrines and of excessive passions brought out by group experiences. On the other hand, Hobbes does allow for the suppression of and punishment of “even true philosophy.”148 From the point of view of experiences of spectatorship within Hobbes’s account, what appears important above all is that the sovereign authority holds discretion over (1) which group associations are allowed to come together and draw an audience and (2) uses the psychological effects of group dynamics to its advantage to develop the civic character of the citizens in its own public assemblies. Hobbes’s ideal commonwealth appears to be one where the people direct their attention first and foremost to the institution of the office of the sovereign representative, not each other, like the crowd that forms the body of the sovereign in the frontispiece. There, and in weekly public assemblies, the solidarity and passions that sharing in a singular experience with others stir within the individual can be harnessed to connect each

person to the commonwealth. The sovereign, in turn, oversees society to prevent ambitious
challengers from conspiring with others and inspiring factional conflict.

By empowering the state’s gaze of the people and its ability to control what they see,
both of each other and of the state, Hobbes offers a distinctly anti-democratic model of
spectatorship. Richard Tuck argues that Hobbes expressed hostility specifically to deliberative
democracy but not “democratic power exercised without deliberation.” Some aspects of
Hobbes’s arguments about counsel in Leviathan appear to back up his reading. For example, in
domestic affairs, Hobbes argues the people ought to serve as counselors to the office of the
sovereign, writing, the sovereign should “diligently” consider “the general informations and
complaints of the people of each province, who are best acquainted with their own wants,”
provided the people do not seek to diminish the essential rights of the sovereign (30:27, 232).
Nevertheless, Hobbes concludes that the one-on-one meetings that he considers major
components of effective decision-making are significantly more difficult in a democracy than in
a monarchy (19:5, 120).

Furthermore, the deliberations of the artificial man, like the thoughts of the natural
subject, ought to take place in secrecy. Subjects ought only to be able to observe its final,
outward actions, including declarations of law, judicial decisions, and the execution of
punishments. While the ruler or rulers ought to have an expansive and penetrating view of the
speech and actions of the ruled, the ruled have a restricted and heavily constructed view of the
rulers. Hobbes leaves room for the opinions of the people to be heard by the sovereign but not in
a theatrical environment open to the spectating of all. Instead, the state ought to hold discretion

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over who and what ideas may be disseminated through social associations, including its own weekly influence over the people in the form of public assemblies.

By empowering the state’s gaze of the people and its ability to control what they see, both of each other and of the state, Hobbes offers a distinctly anti-democratic model of spectatorship. Even as Hobbes defends the ability of individuals to keep their true beliefs to themselves, protected against public judgment and punishment, Hobbes grants substantial power to the state to influence those very thoughts through education and public worship. By determining which religious sects and other group associations can meet, the sovereign can minimize both the experiences that will shape people’s imaginations and the dissemination of certain socialized understandings that mediate their sense perceptions, while also managing who gets to enjoy the pleasures of being seen by others.

That being said, Hobbes’s model of spectatorship contrasts with contemporary democratic theory that turns to the importance of personality and models plebiscitary democracy.¹⁵⁰ Hobbes argues there is great political danger in rooting political power in personal characteristics, emphasizing that power comes solely from office-holding and that the exercise of law, rather than personal presentation, communicates the representative nature of political authority. Hobbes argues for equal application of the rule of law to correct the ocular privileges of socially superior individuals, both in terms of their personal characteristics or even spectacular material luxuries. As such Hobbes’s emphasis on the quality of criminal justice as an observable manifestation of political power may be a helpful insight for contemporary attempts to consider the features of a liberal approach of spectatorship.

¹⁵⁰ Green, The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship.
Writing in the context of the English Civil War, Hobbes was particularly concerned with religious zealotry and sectarianism, wherein miracles were the most potent spectacle that might mobilize individuals against each other and the state. However, at the heart of his understanding of the social factors that determine civil conflict lies an anxiety of the crowd that appears throughout the history of political thought, particularly in the modern era with rise of mass politics. Hobbes’s framework, particularly as it relates to the individual’s experience as a spectator among other spectators offers three core generalizable insights for thinking about experiences of seeing and being seen in politics today.

First, watching can be a form of subjection for the person who sees, rather than for the person who is seen. Hobbes’s insights about the forms of subjection involved in experiences of seeing complicate the predominant approach to ocular power that emphasizes its potential to exercise a disciplinary power on those seen. Hobbes’s argument on our very dependency on our sense perceptions for our ideas, creative thinking, and political imagination, captures a very fundamental view of sight as subjection. However, he also acknowledges the way that those in front of an audience exercise a kind of power on spectators by influencing what they see or don’t see. Finally, those individuals can make use of another form of horizontal subjection that a person may feel as a spectator who knows sees and is seen by other spectators in a public audience.

Second, reflections on visual experience must take into account factors that mediate how people interpret and respond to what they see. Hobbes criticizes the scholastics and religious authorities for perpetuating myths about supernatural phenomena that sabotage individuals’ abilities to rely on their eyesight to comprehend reality in order to fortify their own power. Hobbes appears to argue for improving education so that people can better question the veracity
of what they see, whether it is a trick by someone else or an illusion caused by their affective circumstances. Nevertheless, he protects the sovereign’s power to shape individuals’ judgments and ultimately cultivate their deference to its own authority.

Third, that Hobbes is not clearly concerned with the dissemination of true science as much as political order also underscores his willingness for political authority to use socialized understandings to shape the very way people see the world around them. When we see we do not passively consume but interpret in light of beliefs we have about the world. Political power can be used to shape this very process to the benefit of those who dominate the public stage, challenging hopes that watching the powerful can be an experience of subjection for them instead of those watching.\(^{151}\) That being said, the presentation of political power on the public stage need not emphasize the personal qualities of rulers, but from Hobbes’s perspective, must take the form of the equal application of the rule of law in order to stay true to the representative nature of sovereign authority.

Finally, it is worth returning to Hobbes’s vivid example of the Milesian strategy of curing the suicide epidemic among women. Although Hobbes’s licensing policy appears to be the clearest articulation of a rudimentary form of surveillance, Hobbes’s rather uncritical treatment of the Milesian spectacle suggests a lack of concern for the physical privacy of individuals when social order is at stake. The Milesian display of the naked corpses of suicide victims’ functions not merely as a threat of posthumous punishment to individuals but a public spectacle, in which women watch as other spectators react to the dishonoring of the dead. Experiences of both seeing and being seen as spectators, and the threat of being violated posthumously, in order to appeal to “honor,” facilitate the social control of women’s passions.

\(^{151}\) Green, *Eyes of the People*. 
In sum, Hobbes’s approach to spectatorship shows the ways in which political power can be used to buttress political authority over the powerless who see. Recognizing human beings’ status-seeking behaviors and their desires for glory and reputation amongst each other, Hobbes both takes away the power of personal charisma from the state and circumscribes the social conditions that allow private subjects to harness its power. Hobbes’s ideal of early modern state uses licensing requirements and state institutions to ensure the uniformity of public authority and its superiority over other forms of group associations that might seek to challenge its power. By granting the state discretion over what is taught in the schools and in public assemblies as well as who other gets to enjoy an audience. Hobbes manages not only the desires for glory within society by those who wish to be seen but the ways of looking about the world of the subjects as spectators. The Milesian example illustrates just how far Hobbesian political authority might go to use spectacle and spectatorship socially control the inner lives of subjects.
Jeremy Bentham offers a compelling response to Hobbesian attempts to control experiences of seeing and being seen by criticizing governmental secrecy, emphasizing publicity, treasuring freedoms of association, and even expressing a sensitivity to the ways in which being exposed to the sight of others can be harmful way to control members of the public. That Bentham offers such a slew of rejoinders may be a surprise to those who know him primarily through the philosophy of Michel Foucault. Since he called Jeremy Bentham’s panoptic prison “a technical programme” that illustrates how modern society “is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance,” Bentham has been associated with disciplinary power integrated throughout all of society, but particularly exercised by the politically powerful over the vulnerable. By way of Foucault, Bentham’s panopticon has inspired a myriad of influential studies of power, including digital surveillance, the phenomenon of industrialized killing as modeled by slaughterhouses, and the history of racial formation in the policing of black people under

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152 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 217. Jeremy Bentham’s brother Samuel came up with the original design concept, but Jeremy Bentham devoted much more effort to attempting to build it.


slavery through today. Various political theorists have aimed to problematize Foucault’s interpretation of Bentham, but the vivid image of the panopticon continues to obscure other models of the relationship between visibility and power found within Bentham’s own writings.

Rather than litigate different readings of Bentham’s panopticon, in this chapter I offer two alternative illustrations of spectatorship: Bentham’s Sotimion for pregnant women, particularly as it relates to unwed women, and his treatment of parliament. Together these two models offer a vision of liberal and democratic politics directly contrary to that suggested by the panopticon: to counteract social, economic, and political forms of inequality, measures must be taken to maximize the vision of the ruled over their rulers while at the same time allowing for protection of vulnerable members of the community from harmful judgments of others. For a representative democracy, the politically powerful are the most important object of a supervisory gaze, whereas those who might suffer under social prejudices ought to be protected and empowered to control the terms of their own visibility. Yet, the democratic gaze is two-sided, meaning that what the people see can have just as much of an impact on them and their capacity for vigilant censure of the powerful. Furthermore, the formal freedoms of speech, press, and association may be necessary but are not sufficient to ensure that public opinion reins in government abuse. Alternatively, the Sotimion illustrates Bentham’s concerns for problems caused by excessive and prejudicial public scrutiny for ordinary members of the community. Both models contrast greatly with the approach to spectatorship offered by Hobbes and point the

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direction toward what a contemporary liberal and democratic approach to experiences of seeing and being seen might look like.

Bentham’s Sotimion offers a secluded refuge to women who have visibly violated social norms limiting women’s sexuality within the bonds of marriage. Within this refuge, Bentham grants women control over their own visitors as well as a communal space of their own that they can control democratically. A crucial part of its design was reminiscent of the panopticon’s asymmetric surveillance, except that instead of an inspection tower, each woman would be given the name of her visitor and the opportunity to see the visitor without being seen by him to verify his identity and decide whether he would be allowed to enter. In the Sotimion, asymmetrical visibility typically associated with the panopticon is harnessed in order to empower vulnerable members of society.

Alternatively, Bentham’s arguments for publicity include measures relating to the visibility of parliamentary members such as the legal accommodation of members of the public as an audience of parliament debates. Bentham’s parliamentary model inverts the typical image of the panopticon by putting the most powerful under the watch of the rest of the community. While Bentham’s approach to the power of public opinion represents a broader and more metaphorical supervisory power over government, it rests on his recommendations for the physical presence of members of the public. Whereas the prisoner in the panopticon might be uncertain of who was watching him when, the politicians would have to be aware of the physical presence of the public audience for the politicians’ feelings of “being seen” to discipline their debates. But if he were to evoke the power of the visibility of the audience whom the debating parliamentarians, Bentham would have to take into account the manner in which the different identities of the audience members might encourage different kinds of performances. As a result,
he forbids women and impoverished men from the public audience, due to his concern that their presence would inspire emotional and demagogic debate. He would also take into account how appearances of the parliamentary members may impact the judgments of their spectators.

However, because the political spectatorship of parliament is reciprocal, Bentham also considers its effects on the ruled that see. He argues the people’s observations of forms of legal resistance and well-reasoned debate shape their senses of political judgment. He emphasizes the importance of reading newspapers (as opposed to watching politicians) for shaping individuals’ democratic dispositions. Nevertheless, he also values people’s actual participation in political discussions with other members of the public and even enjoying their own political gatherings to practice appearing before each other and exercising independent political judgments. Overall, the people’s observation of the “spectacle” of parliamentary disagreements and resolutions may perhaps be more fundamental to Bentham’s theory of socialization than their experiences of being seen.

First, I examine Bentham’s Sotimion and contextualize it within Bentham’s sensitivity to the potential harms that public opinion can bring to bear on the vulnerable. I compare the vivid image of the Sotimion to Bentham’s recommendations for protections that would help people speak up against government abuse. Second, I examine Bentham’s arguments for the publicity of the arguments and actions of politicians, highlighting the attention he pays to the visibility of parliament with respect to his recommendation of that a public audience be formally permitted to watch debates. However, because of the symmetric nature of the parliamentary model, as opposed to the panoptic model, Bentham argues for the exclusion of women and lower-class men from the parliamentary audience. Third, I highlight how, unlike the panopticon design, Bentham’s parliamentary model takes into account the effects that seeing has on those that see.
The people’s observations of the parliamentary model help shape the democratic disposition with which the public peacefully scrutinizes the powerful. Fourth, in order to better elucidate Bentham’s socialization theory, I examine his emphasis on the need for a thriving press to facilitate the public’s observation of government action. That said, he also emphasizes face-to-face interactions among members of the public; as a result, effective spectatorship, social engagement, and political participation would be hard to disentangle within Bentham’s model of a well-functioning representative democracy.

By bringing Bentham’s alternative models of spectatorship out of the panopticon’s shadow, I use his insights to build part of a liberal and democratic approach to contemporary experiences of seeing and being seen. The people’s ability to watch the powerful, both literally and figuratively is a crucial component of Bentham’s approach to representative democracy. Nevertheless, Bentham suggests developing a scrutinizing view of the powerful relies on a robust participation by ordinary people in the media and in civil society to challenge political authority’s domination of the view of politics that everyone can see. As a result, democratic politics requires both scrutiny of the powerful and active challenges to their dominance of the view of politics offered by others’ political expressions and social activities. Additionally, the Sotimion illustrates how the public eye can prejudicially harm ordinary people, and how secrecy and visibility can be mobilized to protect. I also bring in women’s practice of clandestinely using Parliament’s ventilation shaft to watch proceedings, which began sometime after they were banned from the parliamentary audience in 1778 and the 1820s.¹⁵⁷ Rather than speculate what Bentham might have thought of this practice, I touch on it as a model that challenges and moves

beyond Bentham’s exclusionary politics to illustrate how individuals can seek hidden, communal spaces of observation and possibilities of improved political participation.

I. The Sotimion: Secrecy as Protection from Social Censure

First, the Foucauldian legacy of the panopticon has attributed to Bentham a sanguine embrace of the normalization of individuals under pervasive experiences surveillance integrated throughout social life. Yet both within his overall panopticon project and his broader political philosophy Bentham embraces forms of secrecy in the interest of minimizing the suffering of people vulnerable to the forces of harsh social prejudices and punishment from established political authorities. While preexisting literature has examined Bentham’s views on publicity, public discussion, and freedom of the press as essential instruments of representative democracy, allowing the public to oversee and counter the powerful,158 scholars have not fully considered Bentham’s sensitivity to both the limits and excesses of public opinion.

In this section, I offer Bentham’s Sotimion for pregnant women, particularly the unwed, as an alternative model to the panopticon that illustrates Bentham’s sensitivity to how harsh public judgments can harm marginalized individuals and exacerbate inequality. The Sotimion represents how a cloistered space can provide refuge from the public’s judgments and also empower such individuals by granting them control of the terms of their own visibility.

The Sotimion helps highlight Bentham’s sensitivity to forms of inequality, including the way some people are likely to experience the judgments of the public opinion tribunal and of established authority. I follow up the image of the Sotimion with other examples of Bentham’s

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approach to secrecy. Acknowledging that our ability to “see” the arguments and actions of those in power puts first-hand witnesses, whistleblowers, reporters, and others at serious risk of retribution, Bentham argues for practices to help protect them from being seen and punished by the powerful.

Bentham’s “Sotimion” design describes a secluded institution that would provide room and board of pregnant women, particularly unwed pregnant women, to preserve their public “reputation.”\textsuperscript{159} Although there would be a paid deposit, women who could not afford it could wash the clothes and attend to the children of the wealthier women in exchange for its services.\textsuperscript{160} The design includes symbolic imagery to mark its entrance: “Charity with her children, Reputation with eyes uplifted to heaven, and Secrecy with her finger to her lips.”\textsuperscript{161} Next to the Sotimion would be the Nothotrophium (or “asylum for the innocent offspring of clandestine love”) for the children of the unwed mothers of the Sotimion. The children would work while they lived there until they paid off the costs of their room and board, the identities of their parents kept secret until they reached adulthood. As Semple notes, the separation of children from their families and their forced labor in exchange for a home is harsh, thought it may indeed be better than the abject poverty and death that such mothers and children might have faced, without the option,\textsuperscript{162} not to mention the consequences of illegal abortions.

One of the most striking aspects of Bentham’s Sotimion is his design for giving the residents discretion over their own visitors. A visitor could only see a woman if she gave

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{160} Williford, 173.
\textsuperscript{162} Semple, \textit{Bentham’s Prison}, 294.
\end{footnotesize}
permission. A porter at the entrance would ask the visitor to give his name in a sealed envelope, and then use a “conversation-tube” to call for the resident. Bentham proposed there ought to be a place “where the Member may see her Visitor before he can see her, in order for her to be assured that he is a person whom she has no objection to be seen by.”163 By being able to see visitors without being seen, the residents of the Sotimion would access the power of asymmetrical supervision that belongs to the inspector of the panoptic prison. Admittedly, Bentham’s concerns for the residents’ privacy may have been excessive, planning for women whose “condition(s) might be termed ‘indelicate’” to be “confined for relaxation and amusement to the Coffee Room,” a communal space democratically controlled by the residents and closed to visitors.164

To better understand Bentham’s Sotimion, it is important to consider pregnant women’s demand for “secret and safe refuge to deliver their babies” in light of society’s emphasis on female chastity and the severe legal penalties that women paid for abortions.165 Bentham highlights the sexual double standard to which women were subject throughout his writings. For example, in Principles of the Civil Code, Bentham praises legal separation for allowing women to escape from “ill-treatment,” but criticizes its insistence on legal equality by not allowing either partner to remarry “covers great real inequality,” arguing that “opinion allows great liberty to the stronger sex, but imposes great restraint upon the weaker one.”166 De jure equality exacerbates

163 UCL Box 107 Folio 102. See also Williford, 173 and Semple, 293.
164 Williford, 173, see also UCL Box 107 Folio 106/2.
165 Semple, Bentham’s Prison, 290.
the social inequality women face with respect to their sexuality. In his writings on sexuality, Bentham argues women “are much more liable to condemnation for fornication than men”\(^{167}\) and that for women, fornication risks “loss of reputation, to prevent that loss, abortion and infanticide, and, if discovery is made, prostitution.”\(^{168}\) Bentham also argues that custom renders women less financially autonomous than men and adds that the difficulties they face in gaining employment exacerbate their risk of turning to prostitution.\(^{169}\)

Although Bentham designed the Sotimion as a for-profit institution, like the rest of the Panopticon project, he hoped it would resolve the problems posed by preexisting for-profit private services advertised at the time. The intense public scrutiny of women’s sexuality, and the visibility of their sexual transgressions if and when they became pregnant, incentivized them to turn to secretive doctors who advertised a willingness to privately house pregnant women, and, potentially, administer abortive services.\(^{170}\) However, the secrecy of these practices would also

\(^{167}\) Williford, 173, citing Bentham’s 1817 “Sextus,” intended as a part of his larger work Not Paul but Jesus, published in 1823.


\(^{170}\) Semple, Bentham’s Prison, 290-291, citing UCL cviii, 101 and Morning Herald 7 April 1796. As Semple notes, common law allowed abortions before 4-6 months, but “in 1803 Lord Ellenborough’s Act” outlawed abortion, punishing any performed before 4-6 months with fines or exile and punishing later abortions with the death penalty. According to Cot, Bentham criticizes the use of the death penalty, writing, “If, in the whole field of sensitive existence, there is a proper object of sympathy, it is the mother – a being who, to the physical agonies of parturition adds the mental agony produced by the immediate prospect of an everlasting infamy. Such is the being to whose cost for no rational cause that can be mentioned sympathy is in every
put women in danger of abuse at the hands of such doctors. Bentham writes that since “no woman can complain of them without betraying herself, they are out of reach of the popular sanction.”\footnote{Semple, \textit{Bentham’s Prison}, 291, citing UCL cii 100, currently UCL Box 107, Folio 100.} These suspicions of secrecy as facilitating abuses of power would dominate Bentham’s broader political theory as well.

While the Sotimion, like the Panopticon, would be open to public visitors, perhaps in order to mitigate the risk of abuse that pervaded preexisting services, Bentham was careful to design the visitors’ policy with sensitivity to the women’s privacy. Visitors who would come “out of curiosity or with a view of taking a Lodging,” would be allowed only within delineated hours anticipated by the members in case they wanted to avoid being seen.\footnote{UCL Box 107 Folio 102.} Bentham first writes that no “strangers” be allowed to join the myriad of “common amusements” available, but seems to reconsider that women might be welcomed “by universal consent after being viewed.”\footnote{UCL Box 107 Folio 102, see also Semple, \textit{Bentham’s Prison}, 293.}

Unless and until public opinion regarding women’s legal, financial, social, and sexual autonomy was to evolve, Bentham’s Sotimion could shield individuals from humiliation and censure. With the Sotimion, Bentham responds to an essential dilemma that while excesses of social prejudices may inspire desires for sequestered, private spaces, the secrecy of those spaces may exacerbate the possibility of abuse within them. Bentham also saw that under the watchful gaze of society, women, for whom a chaste reputation was essential to their very livelihood, were not necessarily “disciplined” to be sexually modest but driven to abortions, infanticide, and

\footnote{Bentham’s Prison, 293, citing UCL cii 100, currently UCL Box 107, Folio 100.}

\footnote{UCL Box 107 Folio 102.}

\footnote{UCL Box 107 Folio 102, see also Semple, \textit{Bentham’s Prison}, 293.}
prostitution – practices that were all illegal and risked further ruin of reputation. In the Sotimion, women might gain some ability to be seen on their own terms, an ability that was otherwise beyond their grasp.

The Sotimion provides us with a compelling image of how secrecy and asymmetric surveillance could empower the vulnerable, rather than be mobilized to discipline deviancy. Although his Sotimion responds to the specific harms of gender inequality, we can also consider it a symbol of Bentham’s turn toward secrecy throughout his philosophy as a tool for protecting the vulnerable from social censure and political punishment. For example, Bentham acknowledges various ways in which his democratic concept of the “public opinion tribunal” could itself be plagued by unjust and antidemocratic prejudices. He argues that delusions, prejudices of the public, and even the influence of “sinister interest” can render the exposure of certain behaviors harmful to the individual publicly exposed. Bentham uses this argument to categorize homosexual behavior as deserving the respect of secrecy, for by forced disclosure, “a whole life may be filled by misery.”

Bentham’s sensitivity to the vulnerability of certain people to harsh scrutiny “for want of sufficient maturity in public opinion” is balanced by an acknowledgement of the power of political and socioeconomic elites to distort public opinion as well. As I will expand upon in the next section, the room that Bentham makes for secrecy for ordinary and vulnerable people is not granted to the politically powerful. Public opinion, in addition to succumbing to prejudice against the marginalized, is apt to be distorted toward the interest of the socioeconomic elite.

Even in a representative democracy, which Bentham considers the best regime for empowering the greatest number of people, the tribunal is divided between the interest of the wealthiest and aristocratic and the interest of the rest of society (SAM, 67). He cites the effects of inequality on the experiences of people under the public opinion tribunal as one of the primary disadvantages this “unofficial judicatory” has compared to the official one. Bentham writes,

“By the original structure of its constitution this body is destined to labour under two distinguishable diseases, having for their cause or causes the inward existence of two intestine sets of enemies: one set composed of the ultra indigent class of malefactors, who, being as such weak and powerless and objects of general disgust, are thereby exposed to punishment: the other composed of the ultra-opulent who, being as such powerful and objects of general respect, stand thereby exempted and preserved from punishment. Of both depredation is the characteristic occupation: by the ultra-indigent it acts ever upon a small scale, by the ultra-opulent upon the largest scale.” (67)

While Bentham claims that the rich and poor both tend to seek to serve their own interests at the expense of the common good, he concludes that the wealthiest are more able to succeed. The poorer, weaker, less powerful people are generally looked down upon with “disgust” by society, and, consequently, “exposed to punishment” (67). Alternatively, the wealthiest tend to be more powerful and respected, and, consequently more likely to be protected from punishment.177

As I explain further in the next section, Bentham responds to such inequality by arguing for enhanced scrutiny of the politically powerful. Even in a community where subjects’ freedom of speech and association are protected, Bentham argues that subjects are always incentivized to praise their government, proposing “all the good things that are at the disposal of government, is, by every man, seen stationed over his head, ready to drop, in appropriate and adequate morsels,

into the mouth of every man, who will be at the pains of earning it, by signalizing himself in the defence of everything, or any thing, and every person, or any person he sees established” (50).

Considering the “undue advantage” held by established authorities (50), the liberties of the press, speech, and association must be further buttressed by practices that protect and empower subjects to criticize and scrutinize the powerful. Bentham argues that fear, indolence, and poverty prevent people from bringing forth information on “transgressions” or “acts of oppression” by the government (SAM, 41-43). To counteract the force of fear, Bentham calls for “concealment of every person” that becomes vulnerable by exposing wrongdoing. While a newspaper reporter who receives the information ought to be able to know who they are in case of false reports, the person should otherwise be afforded maximal anonymity (41-42). In this manner, ordinary people ought to access the ability to influence the public’s view of politics without being seen. To protect the publicly known people who receive and publicize the information, Bentham offers a kind of “strength in numbers” approach: as many people in the highest social stations as possible should be involved in the dissemination of information to lessen the likelihood of government officials taking action against them, for “the higher and more numerous, the more dangerous: and the more dispersed, the more difficult” (42).

With respect to the problem of indolence, Bentham assumes that as long as the victims of government oppression are living, they will feel motivated to seek vengeance and bring attention to the transgressions of the sovereign (if they can overcome other obstacles), but he expresses concern over what might happen the victim of government oppression is killed by that oppression. In this case, any first-hand witnesses must be encouraged to speak up, by either appeals by people with social authority, punishments for those do not speak up, and rewards for those who do, determined by the circumstances (43).
Bentham also argues that relative poverty may hinder a person’s ability to speak up about governmental transgressions. Consequently, provisions must be made for covering the expenses of communicating with people and witnesses in various distant locations and “transmitting” their information, but how these investigations might be funded is left unclear (43-44). Bentham seems to suggest that legislation may be necessary to ensure investigations of transgressions (44).

To further empower the powerless over the powerful, Bentham argues for the weakening of libel laws. He rejects the position taken by governments at the time that specific “defamatory” claims and vague “vituperative claims” were worse offences if they were directed at a public official, “particularly in his public capacity, and much more if made against the whole government.” Instead, the extent to which political office already privileges the individual who holds it is adequate to help them counter such false accusations if truth is on their side (13). The support powerful people receive by virtue of their positions render them especially prepared to endure any negative consequences they face. Thus, to use the legal system to further protect such an individual only further weakens the ability of the press to exert a “check on the conduct of the ruling few” (12). Unless, a person’s accusation against the character and behavior of a political leader was false, groundless, the “result of willful mendacity,” and the accuser was conscious of its falsity, the accuser, who may often be of a much less powerful position, should not be punished (12).

Besides, Bentham considers it beneficial to scrutinize people with political power even in instances of false accusations. Though this is partly because he has faith that the truth is bound to prevail eventually, it is also because he considers enduring “momentary injustice” a valuable test

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178 Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 266.
of the strength of the self-confidence and character of a political leader (PT, 36). However, Bentham’s call to scrutinize the powerful is better represented by another model in his writings: the parliamentary audience.

II. Power in Presence: The Public Audience of Parliament

Foucault’s fixation on the panopticon obscures Bentham’s own rich account of how spectatorship can be used to serve as a popular check on political authority.†⁷⁹ Foucault attributes to Bentham a notion of power as “visible and unverifiable,” where authorities gain the privilege of seeing individuals while they remain unseen themselves.†⁸⁰ Yet in *Constitutional Code*, Bentham argued “power must be visible, open, and accountable and that each functionary must be held personally responsible (and punishable), not only for his actions but for the conduct of the business of his office,” and he includes designs of government offices that would facilitate such scrutiny.†⁸¹ In this manner, Bentham embraces the “see/being seen dyad”†⁸² insofar as those with great political power to observe and rule over others ought to be especially subject to inspection. Throughout his writings, Bentham’s democratic “public opinion tribunal” serves as a supervisor of those in power akin to Bentham’s insistence that the public have access to the panopticon’s central tower, in the interest of protecting the prisoners and serving as a check on the authority of the prison inspector.†⁸³ Yet, we need not rely on Bentham’s panopticon to illustrate his approach to the ocular scrutiny of the powerful because his arguments for

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†⁸³ Semple, “Foucault and Bentham,” 115.
parliamentary processes include a legally recognized public audience to oversee debates.

In this section, I examine the consequences of Bentham’s support for a public audience in parliament, which includes its influence on debate, his recommendations addressing the increased visibility of politicians, and his exclusion of certain members of the public from actually watching their rulers. Whereas Foucault interprets the panopticon as facilitating the prisoner’s internalization of a disciplinary gaze so that all that matters is the hypothetical possibility that the inspector may be looking at them, the implementation of actual, physical, and observable spectatorship is a key aspect of Bentham’s arguments for enhanced publicity of political assemblies.\textsuperscript{184} However, Bentham concludes that, due to the symmetrical nature of parliamentary spectatorship, only certain members of the population ought to be permitted to watch the debates.

In \textit{Political Tactics}, Bentham offers four different forms of publicity of parliamentary proceedings that combined help ensure good governance: (1) direct “authentic publication of the transactions of the assembly;” (2) “employment of short-hand writers for speeches” and for question and answer sessions; (3) allowance of “non-authentic publications” by members of the press; and (4) allowance of members of the public to be present as an audience of the assembly (Ch. 2, Section 5, 39-40). Publicity of the proceedings of a governing assembly requires both official and unofficial written accounts that could be read by the general public as well as the visible, physical presence of members of the public observing actual assembly meetings. Bentham argues these multiple forms of publicity would serve as checks on one another to ensure members of the public access to trustworthy accounts of parliamentary happenings (40).

\textsuperscript{184} That said Foucault may also elide the extent to which the actual supervision of prisoners is an important aspect Bentham’s panoptic prison, see Bruno, “Vigilance and Confidence,” 302.
Nevertheless, the public audience of parliament had its own unique consequences for parliamentary debate. Actual spectators would be a resource for both building the reputation of the members and also motivating the members to restrain “the different passions to which the debates may give rise” (Bentham 41).\textsuperscript{185} Hobbes considers the open assembly to have bad effects on debate, rewarding skilled and bombastic rhetoricians at the risk of alienating other politicians who may have better but opposing arguments that they become hesitant to share. While Bentham ultimately disagrees by supporting publicity of parliamentary proceedings, he acknowledges that the politicians do not serve as a useful audience to each other, for the assembly “will be most frequently divided into two parties, which will not possess, in reference one to another, the qualities necessary for properly exercising the function of judges” (30). As active participants, the politicians “will not be impartial” (30). Instead, they are particularly prone to be influenced first and foremost by their partisan commitments as opposed to other standards of evaluation when receiving others’ arguments. Bentham determines that partisanship prevents politicians themselves from being reliable sources of criticism and oversight: “The reproaches of friends will be little dreaded, and the individual will become insensible to those of his enemies. The spirit of party shut up within narrow limits, equally strips both praise and blame of its nature (30).”

Bentham hopes the presence of relatively anonymous members of the public would resolve the problem that partisanship poses to the quality of debate. Unaware of the specific political leanings of the spectators, the members would be cognizant of an audience of impartial judges, standing in to represent the broader perspective of public opinion, which can never be deduced to alignment with one party or another. In other words, both the physical audience in

\textsuperscript{185} See also Bruno, “Vigilance and Confidence,” 302.
parliament and its extension in the form of the public opinion tribunal more generally represent a possibility of impartial judgment that is otherwise severely lacking in a deliberative political assembly. Indeed, Bentham emphasizes that the audience’s character as being composed of “strangers” (the traditional term for visitors who were not members of parliament) who change each day helps incentivize politicians to restrain the passions that may be stirred by debate (40).

However, Bentham also argues that the presence of the audience would improve public confidence in the accuracy of “non-authentic” reports of the proceedings compiled by the free press as well as the accuracy of official records.\footnote{See also Bruno, “Vigilance and Confidence,” 302.} Knowing that there were witnesses to the debates helps individuals trust that the press and the government would not deceive or manipulate reports, knowing such attempts could easily be refuted by ordinary subjects.

In addition to encouraging a public audience, Bentham offers a variety of suggestions for improving the quality of debate that attend to the visibility of parliamentary members, motions, and rules. While the specific aims of each suggestion differ, all of Bentham’s recommendations serve to equalize the images of the politicians in the eyes of each other and of the public. Some of these recommendations relate to maintaining the focus and order of discussion, while others can be categorized as exceptions to the rule of publicity, using concealment and secrecy in order to protect individuals from certain kinds of negative judgments that do not pertain to good governance.

First, Bentham argues for a particular uniform to be worn by all members, which would “defend the poor man of merit from a disadvantageous comparison with the pride of fortune” (51). The dress should also be designed to equalize individuals on the basis of physical appearance or ability, “diminishing disadvantages of those who have to strive against any bodily
defect” (51). Such a dress would also distinguish them from the members of the public and impress spectators, “to maintain order and preserve decency” (51). Nevertheless, Bentham moves beyond aesthetic concerns to propose measures to equalize members’ abilities to participate, arguing for fixed times for beginning and ending meetings, in order to better accommodate “the infirm and the aged,” adding, “Any inconvenience which may deter feeble and delicate persons from this national service, is worthy of consideration” (55).

Second, Bentham’s recommendations for the physical layout of the parliament also reflect a concern for how visibility may be used to encourage equality. Bentham argues against planned or assigned seating, proposing a first-come, first-serve “free arrangement” is more conducive to equality and, as such equality would not be harmful, it would be more just (53). The free arrangement would prevent disputes over etiquette and prevent politicians and audience help correct the people’s tendency to attach “importance” to social status (53). He criticizes the extent to which such perceived places of privilege “are commonly regarded with more respect and defended with more obstinacy, than the most important laws” (53).187

Third, Bentham argues for the use of visual aids during debate. A “table of motions that succinctly articulated topics of debate,” observable by all members, would help prevent individuals from willfully misrepresenting the motion being debated by decreasing the need to rely on memory and eliminating the ability for a person to claim his misrepresentation as merely an “involuntary error” (47). It would also improve the chairperson’s ability to guide speakers back toward the main topic of discussion, lest they digress. Bentham complains about how,

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187 Bentham’s criticism of the aesthetic power of social distinctions is reminiscent of criticism of monarchy and his praise of the United States elsewhere, where he highlights the tendency to associate the splendor of a monarch’s crown and throne with “excellence, moral or intellectual, or both together.” Schofield, Utility and Democracy, 264, citing Bentham, First Principles, 261-3, 211-12.
without the use of a table of motions, members must interrupt a speaker to bring him back to the topic of discussion, which “wounds” the speaker’s “self-love,” compels the speaker to defend himself, and causes further unpleasant disruptions (47). Although Bentham thinks politicians ought to have the fortitude to endure untrue claims against their behaviors or characters, he considers it necessary to take steps to prevent the bristling of their egos within a debate setting, particularly when they are under the watch of the public. A chairperson could avoid such distracting conflicts of pride by quietly pointing to a table of motions, a gesture that seems like a general “appeal to the assembly,” as the act “not of an adversary, but of a judge” (47).

Bentham makes a similar argument for a visual display of the rules of the assembly, to help newcomers and lessen the advantage that long-term members have where the rules “far from being exposed to the eyes only exist by memory” (50). Bentham concludes that when the “law which condemns is before your eyes, and the tribunal which judges you at the same moment, rarely will rules be transgressed” (50).\textsuperscript{188} In this manner, Bentham does not solely rely on the presence of fellow politicians or of members of the electorate seeing them to discipline politicians but also on what they will see – the rules meant to ensure good deliberation. Bentham takes inspiration for this simple visual practice from English social clubs, declaring, “Governments have great progress to make before they will have attained, in the management of public matters, to the prudence which commonly conducts private affairs” (51).

The physical presence of an audience that the members of the political assembly inspires a question that would not be relevant for the unseen inspector in a panoptic prison: how would different audience members influence the public assembly discussions? Presumably, the

\textsuperscript{188} See also Schofield, \textit{Utility and Democracy}, 257-259 for more on the role of visibility and as architectural design in Bentham’s conception of using publicity to encourage governmental responsibility.
prejudices of the politicians in how they perceive the members of the public audience would influence how they might appeal to their spectators and conduct themselves. Even though Bentham argues for visual practices that might equalize the appearances of all parliamentary members, he reaffirms inequality in his recommendation for who is allowed to watch them debate. Bentham ultimately concludes that some members of the public – wealthier men – are more likely to encourage the best, most well-reasoned, and respectful debate, whereas others – women and poorer men – might inspire demagoguery.

Bentham expects the presence of a small amount of wealthy and educated men will ensure that parliamentary members debate in a composed and well-reasoned manner. Though Bentham writes of the public generally as a “tribunal” here (Political Tactics, 29) and more systematically in later writings, in order to prevent the physical audience from being so large as to demand a politician “the strength of voice and the declamation of an actor,” there must be some limits on who is admitted into the proceedings (62). Bentham decides the public seats ought to be paid for, calling that approach the one “most favourable to equality, in a case where equality is justice” (63). Allowing seats to be taken on a first-come basis will disappoint many when a popular deliberation takes place and would give “the strongest and rudest” advantages over others, and “the gallery would be filled with spectators, who would be the least profited by the debates, and who have the most to lose by the cessation of their labours” (63). If tickets were given by the government, people “would accuse it of partiality and dangerous intention” and speculate that politicians were surrounding themselves with allies in order to control what ought to be publicly minded discussions (63). Bentham also objects that if particular members gave out the tickets, “the prerogative of publicity” would become “a personal favor” rather than a “common right,” and the policy would violate equality without any benefit to the political
community (63). While he admits that requiring payment for a seat is “imperfect,” he approves of the fact that it would ensure “a respectable class of spectators” (63). In this manner, Bentham’s note of the relevance of equality to deciding how to distribute seats is easily curtailed by his elitism.

Although Bentham writes that the newspapers should report “everything which relates to the actors on the political theatre,” comparing politicians to actors, his image of the ideal parliamentary debate appears to be anything but theatrical (34). While Bentham argues publicizing deliberations has “ruined more demagogues than it has made,” by virtue of the competitive nature of parliamentary debate wherein other politicians refute the demagogue’s “exaggerations” and ridicule “his desire of momentary popularity,” he does express concern that a large audience or one that includes women and working class people might inspire demagoguery by encouraging politicians to “engage with the audience rather than the assembly” (*Political Tactics*, 37, 40).

Women introduce a particular threat: their presence may encourage male political leaders to use increasingly seductive rhetoric to discuss liberty, resulting in “imprudent resolutions and extreme measures” (64). In the presence of women, Bentham argues, “The right to speak would often be employed only as a means of pleasing; but the direct method of pleasing female sensibility consists in showing a mind susceptible of emotion and enthusiasm…No value would be put but upon those things which are brave and strong” (64). He concludes by approving of the 1778 decision to ban women from the strangers’ gallery in the House of Commons, after fifty years of women attending the sittings (64). He claims the “experiment” proved that the presence of women influenced the debates, where “self-love played too conspicuous a part – that personalities were more lively – and that too much was sacrificed to vanity and wit” (64).
Bentham argues that his exclusionary practice ought to be seen as arising from the fear (rather than hatred) of the emotional power of women in a context where “tranquil and cool reason ought alone to reign,” and, as such, “it ought not to wound their pride” (64).

Bentham’s exclusion of women appears somewhat contrary to his arguments elsewhere in favor of women’s capacities to exercise the vote. For example, Bentham argues that the abilities that justify male suffrage can just as easily apply to a woman, including moral judgment and intellectual aptitude, though he falls short of call for women’s suffrage in England, citing the “general” and “intense” opposition to it rendering the success of such a proposal too unlikely.\(^\text{189}\)

Williford concludes that Bentham’s exclusion of women from political rights on both these counts are not based on women’s inadequacies but men’s, because “men lack the maturity to work seriously and effectively with women in their midst.”\(^\text{190}\)

In the specific case of Bentham’s conclusions regarding the influence of women as audience members, it is particularly difficult to disentangle whether Bentham considers the root of the problem to be women themselves (that they are actually more subject to the whims of “emotion and enthusiasm”) or men’s prejudiced view of women (that leads them to believe that appealing to them requires appealing to “emotion and enthusiasm”) (PT, 64). It is striking that Bentham argues the presence of women draws out extreme performances of “masculinity” (if one may use that term stereotypically to describe projects that are “brave and strong”) that Bentham considers \textit{dangerous} for good governance. Ultimately, Bentham’s concerns about the genders of the politicians and the audience members appear to rely on his suppositions that many emotions are contrary to good political decision-making and that there may be a relationship


\(^{190}\) Williford, 170.
between visibility and emotions.

Nevertheless, eventually elite women, their servants, and women tourists would get around the 1778 decision by watching from behind a ventilation shaft in the ceiling, an uncomfortable setting that made good observation difficult but would be purposefully replicated in the design of the Ladies’ Gallery in the new House of Commons building after an 1834 fire.\textsuperscript{191} Like the women of the Sotimion, the women of the ventilation shaft, in seeing, and perhaps more importantly hearing due to the difficulties of seeing in the space, without being seen, access a kind of power of anonymity experienced by the inspector in the panoptic prison, albeit only as a consequence of social prejudices that motivate their public exclusion. And while that anonymity precludes their influence over the politicians they watch, it gave them a shared space to develop political knowledge and opinions amongst themselves.\textsuperscript{192} Their clandestine observing through the ventilation shaft was a key stage along a timeline of women’s resistance to official constraints on their political presence that ranged from watching, to discussing amongst themselves, and agitating through the press and politically organizing for suffrage through the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{193}

\textbf{III. How Seeing Socializes the Spectators}

In addition to inverting the typical image of Bentham’s panopticon by putting the most powerful under the watch of the rest of the community, Bentham’s parliament-inspired model differs in its characterization of spectatorship as a two-sided experience that influences not only


\textsuperscript{192} Amy Galvin-Eliot.

\textsuperscript{193} Richardson, “Parliament as Viewed Through a Woman’s Eyes,” 130, 133.
the person who is seen but the person seeing. In fact, in *Political Tactics*, only one of the six arguments that Bentham offers in favor of the public audience in parliament and public reporting more generally relates to its consequences for the behavior of the politicians being watched. Bentham also argues that publicity helps to cultivate habits and dispositions favorable to political discussion and judgment among the rest of society, including those excluded from suffrage and from the in-person parliamentary audience.

As early as *Political Tactics*, Bentham emphasizes how the publicity of contention in parliamentary proceedings has beneficial effects on subjects’ dispositions. Bentham sees the publicity of the example of parliamentary debate as a solution for cultivating individuals’ independent faculties for political judgment and discussion. Bentham insists that it is impossible to remove the “inclination to judge” from human nature (PT, 35). In fact, in response to objections against publicity and against the public’s capacity to judge due to their “ignorance and passions” Bentham argues, “If [the public] should refrain from judging, for fear of judging incorrectly, far from deserving to be charged with ignorance, its wisdom would deserve to be admired. A nation which could suspend its judgment, would not be composed of common men, but of philosophers” (35.) As a result, Bentham pays special attention to the effects of watching, hearing about, reading about, and discussing the speeches and behavior of politicians on the judgments and dispositions of the people.

First, before explaining why publicity has beneficial consequences, it is helpful to examine Bentham’s arguments regarding the negative dispositional consequences of secrecy and obfuscation around the behavior of politicians. Secrecy does not mean a lack of “spectatorship,” since secrecy is itself detected and judged by the people. Secrecy risks destabilizing society by
provoking fear in the populace. Bentham proposes people tend to be generally suspicious of secrecy, writing,

Suspicion always attaches to mystery. It thinks it sees a crime where it beholds an affectation of secrecy; and it is rarely deceived. For why should we hide ourselves if we do not dread being seen? In proportion as it is desirable for improbity to shroud itself in darkness, in the same proportion is it desirable for innocence to walk in open day, for fear of being mistaken for her adversary. So clear a truth presents itself at once to the minds of the people, and if good sense had not suggested it, malignity would have sufficed to promulgate it. The best project prepared in darkness, would excite more alarm than the worst, undertaken under the auspices of publicity. (PT, 30)

According to Bentham, our ability to trust each other is greatly hampered when we appear to conceal something from one another. This instinctive distrust and apprehension toward secrecy as an indication of guilt or malice is a sensible and “clear truth.” As Bentham concludes, secrecy risks corrupting the people’s judgment of the political positions and projects of rulers, rather than preventing them from independently judging at all. Even in his defense of the freedom of association, Bentham sympathizes with concerns regarding secrecy of meetings organized by the people by noting such secrecy also inspires feelings of fear among others (LPPD, 41).

Bentham offers other examples of the perils of government secrecy. While people will usually hear about final parliamentary decisions, unless details of vote counts are disclosed, the people might “conjecture one way or another” about how united support for a particular measure truly was. The ability of small voting minorities to “conspire to spread rumors and make the public think that a vote was more contentious” further compounds the danger of such speculation (PT, 38-39).

In sum, the costs of secrecy are twofold. First, secrecy appears inherently suspicious and fearsome, even if what is hidden is innocent, risking unmerited and destabilizing feelings of distrust and paranoia among the population. Second, the concealment of details of political
decision-making allows other actors to manipulate the public’s judgment, substituting their version of events for the truth.

In addition to avoiding the traps that secrecy sets for public judgment, publicity improves the political judgments of the people. On the one hand, Bentham argues improving the publicity of political decision-making offers epistemological advantages that build cooperation between the ruled and the rulers. By improving the knowledge of the people, it both helps them judge between elected officials and also allows them to communicate feedback and expertise that might be of use to government officials. On the other hand, Bentham suggests publicity of parliamentary debate shapes the spectators’ affective dispositions. He argues people become more comfortable with disagreement, reasoned argument, and even become prepared to push back against established authority – the dispositional requirements for the popular opinion tribunal to serve as a check on government misrule. However, according to his theory of public opinion formation, most of the public ultimately follows the opinions of the most educated and best informed.

First, Bentham highlights how public debate over legislation and politicians’ behavior helps instill trust and public approval of the government by better persuading the public. By seeing their leaders oppose one another, the winning party can persuade not only their opposition but also the people who are watching, and the people can better trust that decisions have been carefully considered. Bentham emphasizes how observing legal forms of resistance in parliament ends up strengthening political authority by improving public trust and approval:

Consider, in particular, how much public deliberations respecting the laws, the measures, the taxes, the conduct of official persons, ought to operate upon the general spirit of a nation in favour of its government. Objections have been refuted, – false reports confounded; the necessity for the sacrifices required of the people have been clearly proved. Opposition, with all its efforts far from having been injurious to authority will have essentially assisted it. It is in this sense that it has been well said, that he who
resists, strengthens: for the government is much more assured of the general success of a measure, and of the public approbation, after it has been discussed by two parties, whilst the whole nation has been spectators. (PT, 31)

While Bentham’s interest in the importance of resistance as a check on government would form much of his later writings on publicity, here he cites the observation of resistance as having laudatory consequences on the success of policymaking and trust in government.194 Vocalized opposition puts the burden of proof on the side of those in support of a given government measures, compelling them to provide better justifications for the policy than they might bother to offer otherwise. As a result, government may rule more clearly and effectively, and the public may be more acquiescent to any sacrifices that they are being asked to make.

The process of proposal, opposition, persuasion, and resolution also improves the communicative relationship between the people and the government in a representative government. Bentham argues the very heart of representative democracy, free and fair elections, is sustained by the publicity of politicians, which helps voters to use their best abilities to judge between candidates. He compares obscuring “from the public the conduct of its representatives” to prohibiting voters “the use of reason” (33). Similarly, Bentham suggests publicizing parliamentary arguments will improve the quality of held beliefs, concluding that “hurtful prejudices” of public opinion will be refuted (31).

Conversely, providing the public with better knowledge of politics also improves the ability of the government to benefit from the knowledge of private citizens. Bentham argues that the vision and knowledge of the public is a crucial corrective to the problem that “wealthy and distinguished” citizens are the people most likely to access formal political power:

A nation too numerous to act for itself is doubtless obliged to entrust its powers to its

194 For a more thorough examination of Bentham’s treatment of publicity and its effects on trust, see Jonathan Bruno, “Vigilance and Confidence.”
deputies. But will they possess in concentration all the national intelligence? Is it even possible that the elected shall be in every respect the most enlightened, the most capable, the wisest persons in the nation? — that they will possess, among themselves alone, all the general and local knowledge which the function of governing requires? This prodigy of election is a chimera. In peaceful times, wealthy and distinguished rank will be always the most likely circumstances to conciliate the greatest number of votes. The men whose condition in life leads them to cultivate their minds, have rarely the opportunity of entering into the career of politics. Locke, Newton, Hume, Adam Smith, and many other men of genius, never had a seat in parliament. The most useful plans have often been derived from private individuals… (33)

Despite his embrace of electoral, representative democracy, Bentham acknowledges the inevitability that those elected will not always be the most intelligent, deserving, or capable of governing but often those with the means to enter politics. As a result, a robust civil society and the work of private citizens are crucial resources for those in power. Publicity not only allows the people to supervise those in power but also allows for them to inform and improve political decision-making. By illuminating politics for the public, Bentham aims to open up the potential for the public’s wisdom, including “local knowledge,” to inform governance. By expanding what the people see and ensuring its accuracy, those governing may receive better feedback and then better understand the problems they aim to resolve through policymaking.

In addition to granting the people and the government epistemological advantages, the character of the parliamentary debate that people observe has consequences for their affective dispositions. Bentham argues “the order which reigns in the discussion of a political assembly will form by imitation the national spirit” (31). By constraining the debates of the politicians, the public audience of parliament also indirectly improves the model of deliberation that the broader society observes and imitates. Bentham hopes that the audience will further incentivize parliament to reward those who behave like “statesmen” over “rhetoricians,” so that observing successful debates will inoculate the public “from the tricks of demagogues, and the cheats of imposters” (31).
Bentham suggests that by observing the examples of a rigorously reasoned parliamentary debates, with opposition respected and disagreements resolved, the people will learn how to better manage their own emotions and conflicts. Bentham argues, “The passions, accustomed to a public struggle, will learn reciprocally to restrain themselves; they will lose that morbid sensibility, which among nations without liberty and without experience, renders them the sport of every alarm and every suspicion” (31). Observing the deliberative process, in which the political assembly reaches a decision after opposition is sincerely expressed and considered, improves people’s abilities to manage their own emotions and to trust one another. As a result of the publicity of political news throughout society, through official reports issued by the government as well as reports from the free press, “a habit of reasoning and discussion will penetrate all classes of society” (31).

Bentham’s concern for tempering individuals’ passions and suspicions of one another should not be mistaken for encouraging docility and obedience. Rather, in his later writings on publicity, Bentham emphasizes the value of observation and communication for cultivating a disposition toward resisting excessive governmental misrule. The freedoms of press and public discussion allow for the possibility of people learning about governmental oppression and becoming motivated to do something about it:

Necessary to instruction – to excitation – in a word to a state of preparation directed to this purpose,\(^{195}\) is – (who does not see it?) the perfectly unrestrained communication of ideas on every subject within the field of government: the communication, by vehicles of all sorts – by signs of all sorts: signs to the ear – signs to the eye – by spoken language – by written, including printed language – by the liberty of the tongue, by the liberty of the writing desk, by the liberty of the post office – by the liberty of the press. (LPPD, 30-31, emphasis in the original)

\(^{195}\) By “this purpose,” Bentham refers to “a state of preparation for the eventual resistance” in the “national mind” (LPPD, 30).
The free flow of political ideas through various media is essential for the possibility of popular resistance. The advantages of established authority render it necessary to help cultivate a vigilant population that not only observes but also threatens to act. As people become accustomed to observing political disagreements, and allowed to participate in such discourse themselves, they will become accustomed to a more antagonistic relationship to established government. As Bentham writes, the desired consequences of the “instruction” of individuals about political ideas, the “excitation” of their “will” to act, and their ability to communicate with each other are “that minds are put and kept in a proper state of discipline” toward preparation for resistance against oppressive governmental authority (30). Nevertheless, with appropriately designed institutions for appeal processes and other forms of legal opposition the people can resist without doing so in an “illegal” or violent manner (PT, 31).

Bentham did not worry that the excitation of the people’s will to resist the government would lead to excessive upheavals because, in his model of public opinion formation, most of the public is influenced by the most informed members of society. Bentham divides the public into three classes – the first, and largest, being those who tend not to pay attention to politics, the second being those who form political judgments but only by following a third class, who able to take the time to form their own opinions (PT, 35). The third class includes people who are more politically engaged and directly informed. Rather than seek to eliminate popular judgment, Bentham argues that public opinion can be improved by ensuring the third class maximal access to trustworthy and accurate information (35). Restricting the gaze of the people on the basis of their ignorance guarantees that they remain ignorant, rendering the denial of publicity a form of control aimed at paralyzing public judgment and participation (36). At the same time, according to Bentham, the disproportionate influence of opinion leaders serves as a quality-control
mechanism improving the overall opinion of the public. To emphasize the “trickle-down” nature of public judgment, Bentham uses a water metaphor strikingly similar to Hobbes’ baptismal font metaphor for the universities, writing of the opinions of the third class, “By rectifying these, you will have rectified the others; by purifying the fountain, you will purify the streams” (35). Bentham argues that, if public opinion errs, it is due to the imperfection of information gleaned by the most influential people in society, rather than simply a lack of reason or an otherwise deluded capacity to judge afflictng the broader population.

While Bentham does not reference the public opinion formation model in his later writings, he does characterize the public opinion tribunal as defined by various subcommittees composed of the different people in society who actually pay attention to different political issues (SAM, 59). In doing so, he also grants a special leadership position to members of the press in the formation of public opinion, conceptualizing a particularly “efficient” “Sub-committees of General Superintendence,” wherein the newspapers editors serves as presidents, correspondents as “Leading Members,” and “customers and readers” as “other Members” (60). As a result, the press plays a crucial role in facilitating the development of the public’s political judgments and dispositions. To better understand the relationship between observation and socialization, it is necessary to examine Bentham’s arguments regarding the press as well as

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197 Bentham’s model of public opinion formation presages contemporary political science research, which argues that elites (members of the executive branch, members of Congress, leaders and officials of interest groups, and commentators and experts from the media, academia, and research foundations) drive media coverage and shape public opinion (Entman 2003; Powlick and Katz 1998; Baum and Potter 2008). In particular, Bentham’s description of public judgment closely resembles Entman’s cascading activation theory, which argues that policymakers highlight issues in the media which are then primarily challenged and developed by elite contestation, ultimately leading to more media coverage and the formation of public opinion (2003).
other features of a free society that he considers essential to the development of a scrutinizing democratic audience.

IV. The Importance of the Press and Public Meetings

As we have seen above, Bentham argues publicity improves governance partly because what people observe influences their dispositions. Nevertheless, in order to make parliament the model of orderly debate, Bentham excludes many individuals from the public audience, and emphasizes that they will develop the skills and habits necessary to scrutinize leaders from reading about politics in the newspapers. As a result, Bentham considers a thriving and free press essential. In this section, I examine his arguments regarding the qualities of a good newspaper industry that are essential to the socialization processes described above. These qualities include his advice for how editors ought to manage the incredible influence they hold in the formation of public opinion. Examining Bentham’s treatment of the press will provide important guidelines for comparing the role of the press in his model to various forms of media today, including the visual media that he may or may not have worried about due to the relationship between seeing and emotion suggested in his exclusionary policies relating to the parliamentary audience.

Nevertheless, despite Bentham’s emphasis on reading, he ultimately connects the freedom of the press to experiences of seeing and being seen through the freedoms of association or public discussion. It is in these face-to-face interactions that the people put into practice the ability to make, reconsider, maintain, and defend the independent judgment with which they may elect and scrutinize those who directly govern.

Bentham sees newspapers as a compelling political form of communication due to their entertainment view. He suggests the relative immediacy and regularity of their publication as allowing readers to rely on them as a consistent form of entertainment, rendering them more
influential than books or pamphlets (45-46). In fact, Bentham suggests its entertainment value is inextricably intertwined with the education it offers (PT, 34). English newspapers replicate the pleasures of memoirs, but, rather than being published “long after the events which they record have happened” and being read by only some members of society, newspapers depict contemporary events as they happen and are freely consumed and discussed by nearly all literate people (34). In fact, the pleasurable effects of newspapers are not limited to the literate, since he suggests other members of society may find themselves conversing with others and hearing about written reports (SAM, 58). Bentham concludes his positive arguments for publicity by referencing an ancient Roman proposal for a reward for the person who were to create “a new pleasure”: “no one has more richly deserved it, than the individual who first laid the transactions of a legislative assembly before the eyes of the public” (PT, 34).

Bentham emphasizes various important qualities of newspapers that would render them useful in supporting the benefits of publicity. First, Bentham emphasizes the importance that newspapers are printed regularly and reach as many as people as possible. Bentham notes that newspapers that were delivered once every twenty-four hours, rather than being so frequent as to erode the public’s “appetite” for the news, would keep it “alive and invigorating: the meal of each day operating as an excitement to look out for that of the next day following” (SAM, 47). Second, in order to maximize their audiences, Bentham argues newspapers ought to seek impartiality, by which Bentham means they ought to cover all sorts of perspectives, even the controversial, including both defenses and attacks of the party or parties dominating political institutions and the opposition (48). Third, he recommends the importance of “moderation” or

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198 Note how Bentham’s approach to “impartiality” differs from the contemporary ideal of “objectivity.”
“good temper,” lest the press provoke “disgust” from readers of both the offended party and those who are “neutral, indifferent or undecided,” “hostility” from the other party, and “prosecutive attacks” through the formal legal system (49). The newspaper’s tempered, second-hand accounts will also “cool” and tame any potential dangers posed by “the passionate harangues of a seditious demagogue,” and the mediated audience will be less easily riled up as they might have been as members of the physical audience (PT, 36). Fourth, Bentham references the visual nature of newspapers in emphasizing the benefit of covering a variety of issues (SAM, 47-48). By covering a variety of topics, the newspaper will maximize its readership and also introduce people to issues that they would not pay attention to otherwise:

Taking up the Newspaper, each person is upon the look-out for the matter of that sort in which he takes a more particular interest. But while he is upon the look-out for that, matter of all other sorts is continually offering itself to his eyes. Little by little, the strangeness and repulsiveness of each wears away, each in some degree or other becomes more and more familiar to him: and even supposing that matters in which he takes no interest at all are regularly passed over without a glance, still of those in which he takes some interest, the interest is in this way, little by little, encreased. (SAM, 47)

A given individual may be either bored by politics or possibly intimidated by it. As he reads his daily newspaper, the more his eyes pass over bits of political news, the more he may become both comfortable with and interested in it. Bentham concludes that the public opinion tribunal, which is divided into groups who are more or less aware and interested in particular issues, has its best shot at attracting more members, and maintaining their vigilance, with the growth of a high-quality newspaper industry.

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199 It’s important to note that Bentham considers representative government to be a guard against demagoguery by design, since the people themselves only vote on their representatives rather than specific measures. He also proposes the argumentative competition within the deliberative assembly serves to refute the demagogue’s arguments, “reduce” his “exaggerations” “within the limits of truth,” “ridicule” “his desire of momentary popularity,” so that “the flatterer of the people will finish by disgusting the people themselves” (PT, 36).
In addition to playing an important role in the formation of public opinion, the press also plays an essential role in its expression. Bentham calls the newspaper “the only constant acting visible” instrument of the public opinion tribunal (SAM, 45). He conceptualizes newspaper editors’ powers as akin to those of judges in the judicial system, deciding each case that would be considered for judgment (45) and ultimately condemning individuals to moral or social censure (62-63). As seen in the first section of this chapter, individuals who have suffered oppression and abuse may turn to the press to shed light on wrongdoing, while hopefully maintaining their own privacy. Considering the unique power that members of the press would have over the rest of the public opinion tribunal, how ought they exercise it?

First, Bentham emphasizes the duty of the newspaper editor to make sure that the paper’s reporting and any editorial statements are based on “exact truth” (44). Second, Bentham argues for the importance of maximizing “usefulness of the newspaper for publicity and public instruction,” by having high standards for proving the “mischievousness of misdeeds,” and bringing these to the “view” of the people “without exciting alarm and disgust” (53). Under the exercise of these high standards, newspaper editors should “embrace every occasion to show” that “morality and happiness” depend on the renown for the actions of the official and unofficial “judicatories,” “the greatest degree of equality consistent with security in the case of the external instruments of felicity in all their shapes – in particular, power and the matter of wealth in all its shapes,” and an emphasis on “compensation to all sufferers by a misdeed” over punishment, as compensation acts as punishment in itself (53). When the press recommends or documents punishment, it ought to be in proportion to the severity of a wrongdoing, to better serve as a deterrent example (53). While the expressions of the press do not capture the entire judgment of the public opinion tribunal, Bentham argues they have incredible influence over the shape of
public opinion and ought to respect the importance of truth and moderation.

Despite the importance of spectatorship of the government for socializing a democratic citizenry, Bentham does not consider it sufficient. Bentham also highlights the importance of face-to-face interactions for the development of individuals’ political skills and their contributions to public opinion. Being in each other’s presence stirs our desires to converse with each other, which may turn to political discussions (SAM, 58). As a result, Bentham argues, residents of towns are more likely to be aware of the political issues and happenings of the day, whether through public or private conversations with others, than residents of the countryside (68-69). Bentham similarly laments the effects of physical distance on the public opinion tribunal, writing that it poses a disadvantage that weakens its capacity for collective action compared to the power of the official judicial system (71-72). But he hopes that changes in communications and trade help bring people into immediate exchanges with each other, such as via water carriage (71-72).

Bentham argues that “the liberty of the press, and the liberty of public discussion by word of mouth” are “intimately connected” to each other and “to every thing that can, with any propriety be termed good government” (LPPD, 4). Although Bentham justifies the exclusion of many individuals from the physical audience of parliament, in his later writings he emphasizes how the importance of opportunities to see and be seen to shape a populace that wields the democratic power of public opinion. Bentham suggests that the capacity to assert independent judgment in front of an audience is an essential component of the democratic disposition that checks established authority, but this capacity can only be practiced in experiences of seeing and being seen in a communal space. Nevertheless, it is worth underscoring that this process of socialization is not reducible to encouraging forms of performativity or dissimulation; Bentham
insists that each person’s contribution to public opinion is determined by a “real and inward affection – not the opinion and affection declared and avowed,” for that is what determines a person’s action, which ultimately checks misrule (SAM, 45).

For example, Bentham criticizes the Spanish Cortes’ proposal to require all public meetings be licensed by the government, which would become law before Bentham’s letters were ever received (xvii –xx). Although the government allowed election meetings, without the proliferation of all kinds of public associations and opportunities for engagement with others, people would lack “the necessary mental discipline,” and the electors, being “strangers to all instruction, to all excitation, to all political correspondence…will meet and act like puppets, obsequious to this or that official shewman’s hand” (34). Bentham suggests that practice appearing before one another in group settings and political discussions, whereby individuals gain necessary self-confidence in their capacity for making their own political decisions, is a crucial component of the socialization process. Bentham calls that “mental exercise” the “instrument of independence by which alone the man is distinguished from the puppet” (34). Of course, a good example of parliamentary debate, as Bentham argues would be accomplished by his recommendations relating to publicity, inspires the quality of “order” throughout other social meetings, such as “clubs and other inferior assemblies” (PT, 31).\(^{200}\)

Although Bentham appears to worry about the effects of people watching demagogic speeches in parliament, and praises the capacity of written reports to “cool” such speeches before they are shared with most people, he is not without faith in the people’s capacity to calmly and skeptically watch such orators. He praises the preexisting if limited practices of political

\(^{200}\) That said, it’s noteworthy that Bentham looks to the social clubs of civil society for methods of improving parliament, as discussed above.
publicity and liberty in London for shaping a population that responds moderately to rhetoricians:

How often, in London, amid the effervescence of a tumult, have not well-known orators obtained the same attention as if they had been in parliament? The crowd has ranged itself around them, has listened in silence, and acted with a degree of moderation which could not be conceived possible even in despotic states, in which the populace, arrogant and timid alternately, is equally contemptible in its transports and its subjection. Still, however, the regime of publicity – very imperfect as yet, and newly tolerated, – without being established by law, has not had time to produce all the good effects to which it will give birth. (32)

Bentham goes on to blame riots on the imperfect and inadequate British policies regarding publicity; rather than cite a defect in the people’s temperament, he emphasizes officials’ failures to sufficiently persuade the people of the benefits of legislation before implementing it. It is worth underscoring a few implications of the passage quoted above. First, Bentham acknowledges that rhetorical, impassioned speeches that gain the rapt attention of spectators can appear anywhere, not just in parliament. Second, even as he acknowledges the potential for violence within these instances, he expresses faith in how the limited and legally bound practices of publicity have accustomed people to respond calmly to such oratorical displays. Third, he distinguishes between the political liberties in London to the experiences of “despotic” communities that, lacking the liberties of press and public discussion, fail to cultivate habits necessary for non-violent political confrontations. Fourth, Bentham offers this example to prove that enhancing publicity could only further improve the political habits of the people, comparing the process to childbirth.

To conclude this section, I want to recall Bentham’s vision for the women of the Sotimion as well as the actual practice of women observing parliament from its ventilation shaft. Bentham’s hypothetical project and women’s historical practice (of which he may or may not have been aware and he may or may not have supported) both represent opportunities for seeing
and being seen by fellow women who share in some experience, albeit out of sight from the broader society that marginalizes them. Both are the products of forms of political, economic, and social inequality, but they also offer experiences that the rest of society denies to these individuals. Janet Semple compares the Sotimion’s residents’ democratically controlled coffee room to a “exclusive gentlemen’s club.”\textsuperscript{201} Amy Galvin-Elliot proposes women’s use of the ventilation shaft, while preceding the women’s suffrage movement, gave them space to develop together “an emerging female political subjectivity that the popular culture thinking on femininity denied.”\textsuperscript{202}

Accessing an asymmetric use of surveillance over men was a common and important feature of these two different experiences, but it was less about the effects on the men seen and more on the epistemological advantage it granted to the women seeing. At the same time, the political import of the social interactions within these spaces should not be ignored. Bentham’s Sotimion imagines a self-governing community that women otherwise lacked, either in civil society or in politics, save, perhaps, the ventilation shaft, until the development of women’s social clubs and the suffrage movement in the mid to late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{203} Again, while it is not clear that Bentham would have supported the women’s use of the ventilation shaft, its resemblance to both the Sotimion coffee room and the free associations that Bentham so passionately defends in his later writings suggest some normative foundations for building an argument beyond Bentham’s: the democratic value of spaces of private yet collective experience,

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{201} Semple, \textit{Bentham’s Prison}, 293.
\item\textsuperscript{202} Amy Galvin-Elliot, “Out of ‘Site,’ Out of Mind? The Hidden Ladies of the Ventilator.”
\end{footnotes}
particularly on behalf of the vulnerable, as a refuge from social prejudice that nevertheless holds promise of the development of political possibilities.

V. Conclusion

Bentham’s designs for the Sotimion and parliament approach political spectatorship in manners that contrast with the panoptic power typically associated with the 19th century reformer. Although Bentham mobilizes the power of public opinion to censure the powerful and empower the people against government misrule, he acknowledges how its excesses can harm the vulnerable. With the Sotimion, Bentham responds to the forms of inequality that subordinate women in society and put them at risk of manipulation and abuse by secretive medical services, while offering the refuge from the public eye that render those shadowy practices appealing in the first place. Rather than a disciplinary inspection tower, Bentham provides residents the power to control who gets to see them and when.

Whereas the panoptic gaze is asymmetric and passive, Bentham’s parliamentary model of spectatorship is reciprocal and interactive. The politicians who are under the public’s watch are affected precisely by seeing who sees them, resulting in forms of performativity that can be conducive or threatening to good governance. Additionally, Bentham considers the way that seeing is itself a process that shapes those who see, not just those who are seen.

However, while Bentham defends liberties necessary for scrutinizing the actions of the government, he does not think publicity of policymakers’ actions or arguments is sufficient in itself to prevent misrule. Rather, the value of these freedoms is intertwined with the possibility of popular resistance to formal authority, and Bentham argues for efforts to develop among the ruled contentious dispositions toward government to help prevent and punish misrule.
Conveniently, Bentham suggests, the observation of democratic deliberation helps people cultivate these very dispositions.

    Yet both models call into question the efficiency of mere observation for the exercise of power. For the Sotimion, a woman’s observation of her visitor would mean little without her ability to refuse him. Similarly, the power of public opinion means little without the electoral system and other methods for punishing and rewarding political leaders.

    While the public eye is clearly a burden on the vulnerable, it appears less so for the powerful. To the extent to which being seen impacts politicians, Bentham suggests, it does so on the basis of inspiring particular kinds of performances influenced by the identities of those who watch them. Regardless, that public audience is only a component of a larger public opinion tribunal that relies on the investigatory efforts of the press and of members of the community putting themselves at risk to reveal misrule. Additionally, the people’s observation of the parliamentary model is not enough to cultivate the necessary democratic habits for scrutiny and independent judgment: face-to-face interactions among one another are also important.

    In these ways, Bentham contrasts greatly with Hobbes’s approach to spectatorship, which privileges the discretion of the state and emphasizes the importance of dissimulation. Bentham counters that since the public will always judge, the publicity of government can improve the public’s trust and compliance, and the right audience can improve the character of political deliberation. He asserts that actions stem from the true inner opinion of an individual rather than what they may say publicly. Concluding his letters to the Spanish licensing policies that resemble Hobbes’s theory, Bentham insists that censorship will ultimately fail to prevent free communication:

    By degrees, a sort of language will come into use; a language that will be sufficiently understood for any such purpose as that of giving expression to complaint and
indignation, yet will not be sufficiently understood for any such purpose as that of affording a tenable ground for the infliction of punishment.

Yes, in every apartment defiled by this liberticide yoke, the instrument of thralldom, the parchment or paper on which it is written, should be hung up on high, hung up in some spot universally conspicuous, with an appropriate accompaniment for pointing men’s attention to it. By a single glance directed to this instrument of tyranny eulogy might thus be converted into satire; satire which, be it what it may, can never be too severe. (LPPD, 51).

Bentham insists on the capacity of individuals to develop their own forms of communication in the face of government oppression. Even a visual aid, reminiscent of the kind Bentham recommends in parliament, meant to enforce the rules is not immune from reinterpretation by the eyes of the people. The ability to look and reinterpret asserts the independence of the individual and calls into question the true effectiveness of efforts to shape the people. However, Bentham’s combination of spectatorship with participatory mechanisms show that looking and reinterpreting is insufficient to overcome government misrule. Spectatorship is a valuable tool within representative democracy, but it works together with other institutional mechanisms. Nevertheless, British women’s use of the ventilation shaft illustrates how political resistance to official policies relating merely to observation can be a part of the history of democratic empowerment beyond Bentham’s models.

Despite the strengths of Bentham’s models, he neglects to adequately answer numerous crucial concerns. Although Bentham acknowledges how the public opinion tribunal tends to unjustly respect the wealthy and powerful and condemn the poor and powerless, he fails to show how that tendency might be corrected. I also have not sought to mobilize the complexities of Bentham’s thought offered in this chapter to refute other studies that have illuminated the oppressive nature of Bentham’s approaches to prison or poor relief. For example, Bentham’s National Charity Company’s “pauper community” functioned by turning some of the residents into guardians of other more suspicious members and Bentham emphasized the need to instill a
habit of hard labor by connecting it to morality. Due to the incomplete nature of Bentham’s designs for the Sotimion, it is unclear how he envisioned wealthy residents and poor residents who traded labor for their stay would relate to one another in their democratic coffee room, particularly considering his insistence on the separation of “prostitutes, unwed women, ‘loose women,’ female brothel-keepers, and procuresses” from other women of child-bearing age in his plans for the National Charity company. Clearly Bentham’s sensitivity to certain issues of public scrutiny did not render him completely respectful of the autonomy of all the members of the community equally.

Despite Bentham subjecting the politically powerful to sight, he maintains the importance of reading as opposed to watching for many members of the political community, specifically marginalized members. In doing so he appears both elitist and fearful of emotion as a threat to reason. In other words, his approach to literally seeing is a bit ocularphobic insofar as it is suspicious of affect. Yet, his position appears a bit contradictory, for he praises the ability of the public of London to calmly react to potentially demagogic orators on the streets and blames riots on failures of government rather than the people themselves.

Additionally, despite the emphasis Bentham places on the press, he is perhaps too optimistic about both its financial success and the respect from the government that such success assures. Bentham argues the English government could be willing to “subject itself to the odium of destroying the press,” but the fact that it would lose 500,000 pounds a year in taxes on those newspapers prevent it from doing so (SAM, 73). From the twenty-first century standpoint, government antagonism toward the press may be less of an issue than the industry’s ongoing

205 Ibid., 169.
struggle to figure out a sustainable digital business model. At the same time, platforms such as Facebook and Google increasingly play Bentham’s crucial newspaper editors, determining whose eyes pass over what stories, while denying that they are media companies.\textsuperscript{206} Unlike newspaper editors in Bentham’s time, contemporary platforms use asymmetric surveillance of their users and non-users alike in the process.\textsuperscript{207} As a result, it is quite possible that modern media along with members of the public are moving further away from the ideal of “impartiality” that Bentham upheld for both the parliamentary audience and the best newspapers. Partisanship and polarization may serve to severely challenge the adequacy of Bentham’s approaches for today.

Nevertheless, Bentham’s thought highlights the complexities of the myriad of relations among the government, the people, and entities of civil society on which democratic power precariously rests. The models of the Sotimion and parliament stand as striking images of the conditions that may merit privacy or publicity. They offer inspiration for theorizing about how surveillance might be used to counteract other forms of political, social, and economic inequalities, rather than reaffirm established power, while also acknowledging the importance of experiences that may go beyond but include spectatorship, like face-to-face interactions. Bentham’s defense of associations shows how a pluralist society and the freedom of public political meetings can be conducive to the cultivation of habits necessary for the democratic


citizen. He shows how political participation and scrutiny of those in formal power are essential parts of representative government, even if elections remain the most powerful tool by the electorate to hold authority accountability.

Bentham’s model of spectatorship includes some wariness of visual experience, and while he acknowledges the advantages of the socioeconomic and political elite in the realm of public opinion, he expresses elitism and maintains a discriminatory approach to politics. In this next chapter, Adam Smith’s approach to spectatorship challenges Bentham’s insinuation that the problems of spectatorship lie in the visual or emotional, and further brings out the role that forms of inequality play in determining how different people experience seeing and being seen. Smith also suggests a more thorough model of how the spectator engages in active judgment. At the same time, Smith nevertheless problematizes some of Bentham’s hope that scrutiny can be maximally directed at the elite, for the experience of being seen is apt to exacerbate their power. Smith directs our attention further toward the ways in which scrutiny that ought to be directed to the powerful may instead be directed at the vulnerable and marginalized.
Adam Smith opens the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* with a simple yet grand observation: “How selfish soever man may be supposed there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render his happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it” (*TMS* I.i.1.1, 9). Our desire to see each other, especially each other’s good fortune, serves as the starting point for Smith’s moral philosophy. Our capacity for sympathy, a term Smith uses to refer to the resonance of our feeling with others’ feelings, whether they are joyful, resentful, or grieving, is premised on our sociable interest in others, which is motivated not by utility or simple self-interest, but because of the unique pleasure we feel by observing their happiness.

Just as we take pleasure in seeing the happiness of others, we also desire to be on the other end of spectatorship: “to be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation” (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.iii.2.2, 50). Our desire for attention and fellow-feeling propels our economic ambitions: seeing that others more easily sympathize with joy than with sorrow, “we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty” and strive for much more wealth than we need for necessities to ensure that others observe us with sympathy (I.iii.2.2, 50). In fact, Smith argues very sense that others are more likely to empathize with him amplifies the rich man’s joy in his wealth. However, these desires to be seen with sympathy underpin not only our commercial activity but also our moral and political
actions. Consequently, desires of seeing and being seen help provide the basis of both Smith’s moral philosophy and his economic theory.

Smith’s account of the impartial spectatorship, arising out of intersubjective experiences of spectatorship that underscore the agency of spectators in interpreting and evaluating the behaviors of those they watch, offers a resource for considering how central observation, including visual experiences, and emotions are in forming good moral and political judgments. Rather than being antithetical to moral judgment, watching is a part of the development of introspection, comparison, and evaluation by which people develop moral thought, which in turn shapes how they react and judge what they see.

However, our particular interest in seeing the happiness of others results in the unequal distribution of attention and fellow-feeling throughout society. Socio-economic inequality facilitates a predisposition of the public audience to revere the most powerful and wealthy and ignore or disdain those living in poverty. As a result, not everyone experiences being seen the same way. By more closely examining Smith’s approach to actual spectatorship, we illuminate his sensitivity to the problems posed by commercial society and economic inequality.

Political theorists have examined the relationship between observations, including Smith’s emphases on the faculty of sight and theatricality, and Smith’s model of the conscience, the impartial spectator. Theorists have also compared Smith’s theory regarding the development of conscience and Michel Foucault’s theory of the disciplinary power of

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surveillance in forming the non-violent individual of modern political communities. However, the imperfect match between Smith and Foucault elides Smith’s concerns regarding the fallibility of actual spectators, which is related to how different individuals experience their gaze. In Smith’s account, actual spectators fail to serve as an adequate resource for holding the politically and socially powerful accountable and for criminal justice. Instead, actual spectators are apt to unjustly scrutinized marginalized members of the community.

By examining of the model of actual spectatorship within Smith’s account, this chapter underscores Smith’s sensitivity to what Michelle Schwarze and John Scott call “spontaneous disorder.” Whereas Schwarze and Scott focus on “psychological disharmony” that arises when society fails to punish injustice or unjustly condemns innocent individuals, causing them and spectators to feel “ungratified resentment,” I emphasize the specific effects of socioeconomic inequality in experiences of seeing and being seen within Smith’s moral psychology. Smith’s characterization of the “impartial spectator” as a resource that tempers each person’s partiality and reminds him of fundamental human equality (III.1.3-5, 111-112; III.3.4, 137) contrasts with his analysis of the disproportionate trust and admiration spectators display toward the wealthy and the disproportionate scrutiny they apply to the poor.

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212 In this manner I follow Marshall, who writes, “the impartial spectator can be seen as a more reliable witness of the public” and proposes “one of its primary roles is to counteract the presence of the public view” (189).
As a result, Smith’s model of actual spectatorship foregrounds the “impact of economic inequality on politics,” a blindspot that Green acknowledges in his own work on ocular democracy. Smith’s account attends to not only the way that the wealthy and politically powerful experience the gaze of spectators, but the ways in which the people themselves are the objects of others’ gazes. Contrary to exerting a supervising influence over those with greater social status or political power, public spectators are subject to their influence. According to Smith, the advantages of the financially and politically powerful are not merely material or institutional but distinctly ocular, facilitated by a tendency of most people to admire, trust, and even emulate them in their pursuits for happiness and success. Smith’s approach illustrates how the seemingly “passive” activity of “seeing” includes active engagement, interpretation, and moral and political judgment. It also highlights how an audience can simultaneously be an

216 Green, The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship.
217 See also Eun Kyung Min, “‘Regarding the Pain of Others’: A Smith-Sontag dialogue on war photography and the production of sympathy.” Adam Smith Review Vol 9. (2016), 170-200, 192-193. I depart from Fonna Forman-Barzilai’s comparison of Smith to Foucault, she provides a helpful and thorough examination of Smith’s revisions to TMS in light of criticisms that his “impartial spectator” affirmed moral conventionalism, including drawing out his preexisting commentary on the asymmetrical admiration of the wealthy and its adverse effects on moral culture in Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy, especially Chapters 3 and 4. For further examination of Smith’s concerns regarding economic inequality and the corruption of morality and well-being, see Dennis Rasmussen, “Adam Smith on What Is Wrong with Economic Inequality,” American Political Science Review Vol. 110, No. 2 (May 2016), 342-352. This chapter goes beyond Rasmussen’s and Forman-Barzilai’s arguments by examining the political implications of Smith’s insights regarding the asymmetric trust of the wealthy and powerful. Of course, as both authors acknowledge, Smith ultimately accepts the costs of the disposition to admire the wealthy as outweighed than the benefits it offers for the sake of social order (TMS VI.ii.1.20, 225-226). While I am not interested in affirming Smith’s own conclusion, his anxieties are crucial for us to explore in pursuing a more democratic politics. Eun Kyung Min, “A Smith-Sontag Dialogue on War Photography and the Production of Sympathy,” n.d., 33.
object of the gaze of the person they watch. The extent to which their watching presence affects him depends on his character and his understanding of how they see him. It is one thing for the public to fail to scrutinize the powerful; it is another for the powerful to know they are watched but not scrutinized. Smith’s reliance on the impartial spectator to guide moral judgment is connected to his suspicions that a public audience is not an effective resource for disciplining the actions of the powerful.

But examining Smith’s theory of the prejudicial perspective of a typical spectator in an unequal society does not merely tell us something about watching those in power. According to Smith, the scrutinizing force that Green hopes the democratic gaze may impose on the powerful is more likely to be felt by marginalized people, such as the poor. Dennis Rasmussen draws a connection between Americans’ neglect of the poor and Smith’s insights on the “distorted” sympathy in a socioeconomically unequal society that exacerbates the misery of impoverished people by closing them off from the possibility of sympathetic attention.219

However, in addition to highlighting the obscurity of indigent people, Smith also examines the unjust scorn they often face from the rest of society. The scrutinizing power of public spectatorship, both from the state and from ordinary people within society, may be disproportionately directed at marginalized members of the political community rather than at those in power. Embedded within Theory of Moral Sentiments is an account of the harms that forced public exposure perpetuates against individuals. By examining how ordinary people are themselves subject to spectatorship, we better understand the conditions of their experience as members of the democratic audience. Additionally, Smith’s philosophy can complement

219 Rasmussen, “Adam Smith on What Is Wrong with Economic Inequality,” 350-351.
Foucauldian critiques of surveillance by providing a normative basis for why society ought to commit to respecting individuals’ abilities to control the terms of their own visibility.

First, I address the intersubjective nature of Smith’s account of spectatorship, wherein what we see affects how we experience being seen. I highlight the overlooked visual character of Smith’s moral philosophy to show how Smith’s emphasis on self-command is tied to the difficulties involved in the relationship between sight and imagination. I acknowledge the therapeutic effects that actual spectators can have on a person, including how they can positively inspire the person’s impartial spectator. That said, even in Smith’s account of psychological harmony, he acknowledges the distinction between the impartial spectator and actual spectators, setting up the two different kinds of pathologies of actual spectatorship.

Second, I examine Smith’s discussion of the tendency to trust and admire the wealthy, illustrating the unique advantages the wealthy and powerful have over their social audience. I examine the political implications of this tendency insofar as it renders public spectatorship, such as the kind advanced by Green, an inefficient and even dangerous mechanism for accountability. Smith views a person’s reliance on public opinion as potentially incentivizing them to seek success using immoral and illegal means. However, if Smith considers spectatorship unable to discipline the wealthy and powerful due to their privileged social rank, it is possible he would still consider it a potential resource for deterring crime within the rest of the community. I address this possibility by examining Smith’s continued skepticism of the deterrent force of the threat of publicity as well as his sympathy for public humiliation and the destruction of reputation for both the true criminal and the innocent person accused of committing a crime.

Finally, I draw out Smith’s concern for the emotional distress caused by public exposure by examining three different personal experiences detailed within TMS: the case of the person
accuracy of a crime he did not commit, the case of the impoverished individual, and instances where individuals desire private confession and consolation, particularly those who are innocent but may still feel socially-induced shame, illustrated through Smith’s striking comparison of those who break promises made under duress to rape survivors. These three cases illustrate the problem that actual spectators may not only fail to adequately relate to individual’s suffering, but they may even exacerbate it.

Within TMS, Smith offers an account of spectatorship that suggests that it is not only insufficient for holding the powerful accountable, but it is apt to harm the vulnerable, who are most at risk of suffering the harsh scrutiny of the public. His account of the harms of forced public exposure provide the basis of a normative defense of the importance of privacy even in the most open and frank cultural communities. But considering his arguments for the therapeutic effects of social interaction as well, the desire for privacy cannot be satisfied by isolation but by the freedom to pursue private relationships and community.

I. Actual Spectatorship in the Development of Moral Judgment and Emotional Regulation

Smith illustrates the intersubjective origins of our notions of moral judgment using a hypothetical example of a man who grows up alone and is brought into human society. Smith describes our development of aesthetic and moral judgments as a process of reciprocal seeing others and being seen by them. Alone, a person might feel passions such hunger or anger, but he does not think reflexively about these passions. Nor does he have any notion of whether he is beautiful or ugly, for he is not “naturally” the object of his own thoughts (III.1.3, 110). It is the individual’s reactions to others that provoke his interest in their reactions to him. However, Smith describes these interactions without reference to linguistic communication. Smith writes,

Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behavior of those he lives with, which always
mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind. (III.1.3, 111)

Seeing the faces of others as they look at us inspires self-reflection about our own characters. Whereas the Foucauldian model of discipline and surveillance emphasizes forms of asymmetrical inspection, Smith’s model does not function without reference to our audience as an object of our own gaze. It is not merely in being seen that we become self-conscious but in being able to see the extent to which others relate to what we are feeling and approve or disapprove. Despite the invisibility of our moral characters, we imagine them as beautiful or deformed as reflected in the facial expressions of others. Smith purposefully blurs the line between aesthetic and moral judgments by drawing a comparison to how judging others as beautiful or ugly on the basis of their appearance awakens our own sense of vanity (III.1.4, 111-112).

To further explain how we develop our sense of moral judgment, Smith offers examples of our emotional responses to visual experiences such as theater, surgeries, childbirth, torture, public punishments, and face-face interactions more generally, as well as reading histories, romances, philosophy, and books of casuistry. Although he does not explicitly distinguish between seeing and reading, Smith’s discussions of face-to-face interactions highlight an important aspect of experiences of seeing and being seen: the way our observations of others shape how we experience being seen. While our imagination allows us to empathize with those we observe, we can never fully enter into their exact feelings. According to Smith, anticipating the limits of our spectators’ imaginations compels us to engage in self-command to various degrees in order to best evoke sympathy from an observer who can never quite feel what we feel.

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220 Note that Smith appears to invoke the mind’s eye here.
While self-command can be understood as relating to verbal communication, it includes necessarily visual forms of expression as well.

In order to examine the consequences of distinctly visual experiences on us as both spectators and agents watched by spectators in Smith’s account, I start this section with a brief overview of the Smith’s commentary on sight. According to Smith, sight allows us to interact the world with more immediacy than verbal language, lending it a potentially unique affective force. Novelty also helps visual experiences be particularly striking to the eye. Nevertheless, imagination and its limits play an essential role in Smith’s account of sight. Because of the limits of our imagination and sympathy with respect to what we see, Smith emphasizes the value of “self-command” in experiences of being seen. Because we feel greater pleasure in “seeing” the good fortune and joy of others, we can be anxious about the extent to which we reveal our suffering (I.iii.2.1, 50). However, self-command is not equivalent to emotional repression. Instead, engagement with an audience, made of friends, strangers, or even enemies that, while demanding some self-command from the individual, also genuinely soothes the distress and call forth the person’s impartial spectator. Nevertheless, Smith does not equate the impartial spectator to actual spectators, setting up his concerns for the “spontaneous disorder” that arise within society and that comprise the rest of this chapter.

**The Affective Power of Sight: Immediacy, Novelty, Context, and Imagination**

First, Smith associates sight with a relative immediacy of comprehension compared with other forms of communication. In his own take on the “Molyneux Question,” Smith concludes the young man’s success in coming to grasp his new sense of sight illustrates the superiority of sight over language for representing the tangible world (Smith, ES, 60-62, 156-221 See Chapter 1: Introduction.
Smith focuses on the relative immediacy with which he could comprehend what he saw compared to the time it takes for people to learn a new language: “In this language of Nature, it may be said, the analogies are more perfect; the etymologies, the declensions, and conjugations, if one may say so, are more regular than those of any human language. The rules are fewer, and those rules admit of no exceptions” (ES, 68, 160-161). Although language can and often does play a role in experiences of spectatorship, seeing allows for an immediate consumption of events, actions, and even people’s feelings, when expressed through facial expressions or body language. According to Smith, we can grasp more easily and more accurately that which we see than that which we read or hear. While Smith emphasizes the distinctiveness of visual sense perception, both of reality and mediated imagery like paintings, over other forms of communication, the experience of the man born with cataracts also illustrates the interpretative activity that we engage in whenever we see. Nevertheless, the immediacy of sight does pose some problems with respect to how it influences what grabs our attention. Smith suggests that because of the affective immediacy of what we see, we are often more curious about visually striking events such as thunder and lightning rather than, say, the interior lives of other human beings, such as “associations of our Ideas, the progress and origins of our Passions” (Lecture 17.ii.v.19, 93). Problems relating to human experience can be difficult to communicate visually.

Second, Smith suggests novelty is an important factor when sight to moves us powerfully. Seeing something new immediately grabs our attention, whereas, when we read about it, we only gradually come to abstractly conceptualize or visualize it mentally (Lecture 12, section 157, 65). Conversely, familiarity may erode the affective force of what we see. Smith highlights the intensity with which people may initially react to sights of corporeal gore, but unless what we see is attended by a sense of danger and anxiety of death, we are eventually
desensitized to these images (I.ii.1.9-11, 30). Smith offers the example of surgeries, where sensitive individuals may “faint and grow sick” when they first see them, but after witnessing many more, they became able to watch indifferently (I.ii.10, 30).

However, just because people can become accustomed to surgeries doesn’t mean people become insensitive to all sorts of depictions of physical suffering. Narrative and context, which can be communicated visually, shapes our emotional responses to what we see. Smith argues that while it is difficult to imagine the bodily pain others feel, the situations in which they find themselves are likely be imbued with other emotions with which we can sympathize: humiliation, fear, anger, and grief. Smith juxtaposes our desensitization to surgeries to power of Greek tragedies’ depictions of physical pain to move the audience time and time again. The difference between these examples lies not in the kind of experience (visual) but in the accompanying narrative contexts (I.ii.1.11, 30).222 When we react to someone physically suffering, Smith argues, “We sympathize with the fear, though not with the agony of the sufferer. Fear, however, is a passion derived altogether from the imagination, which represents, with an uncertainty and fluctuation that increases our anxiety, not what we really feel, but what we may hereafter possibly suffer” (I.ii.1.9, 30). When we respond emotionally to someone’s suffering, we respond less to the precise visual detail of what we are able to see and more to the overall sense of the person’s emotional state in light of the context in which he finds himself.

Because of the importance of the imagination, our reaction to what we see may not be so different from other forms of observation, such as our reaction to what we read, insofar as it often hinges on knowledge communicated about context and the inner emotions of the people we observe that evokes in us an impassioned, sympathetic response. Sometimes we communicate

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222 Min, “Regarding the Pain of Others,” 184.
these emotions to each other visually. Nevertheless, even if that is the case, ultimately, it is the extent to which we allow ourselves to enter into others’ experiences that facilitate affective responses to what we see. For example, Smith argues that when we see dead bodies, it is not anything that they can communicate to us but our imaginations that project our own assumption of what it would be like to be conscious of the loss of life that they have experienced (I.i.2.1, par. 13, 12-13). Therefore, the affective force cannot hinge merely on sight alone, but on the imaginative acts with which we engage when we see, sympathizing with the person we observe, or not.

The Limits of Imagination and the Virtues of Self-Command and Humanity

Though imagination is crucial for facilitating the sympathetic understanding of each other’s experiences, it is also important to grasp how the limits of the imagination shape our experiences of seeing and being seen. Imaginative sympathy can be circumscribed by both the general difficulty of comprehending the inner life of another person as well as the spectator’s tendency to feel more pleasure from the display of happiness than of grief of pain. The fellow-

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223 See also Min, “Regarding the Pain of Others,” 181 and Griswold, Adam Smith and the Virtues of the Enlightenment, 90. Griswold calls this “projective imagination” and explains how this does not mean other instances of sympathetic imagination are projective and self-centered as such. I would add Smith’s discussion of our reaction to the dead is projective because the dead by definition cannot express themselves in any way to us. That said, knowing the context of a death can radically affect the way spectators respond to the sight of a dead body, as Smith explains in his moving description of the sympathetic sorrow and resentment that people feel for a person unjustly murdered: “His blood, we think, calls aloud for vengeance. The very ashes of the dead seem to be disturbed at the thought that his injuries are to pass unavenged” (II.i.3.1.5, 71). Smith’s commentary on the role of imagination in affecting how we see also brings to mind the “Kuleshov effect” in film montage. Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov illustrated how cutting to a close-up of the inexpressive face of a Russian actor after a bowl of soup, a smiling child, and a dead body, created the impression in a spectator that the actor was expressing hunger, happiness, and grief, respectively. For more on the Kuleshov effect, see Peter Kenez, Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
feeling we feel when we see others’ happiness is always pleasant, whereas, “it is painful to go along with grief and we always enter into it with reluctance,” even if we ultimately feel pleased by our approval of the person’s feelings about his predicament (I.iii.1.9, 46 including Smith’s footnote). Furthermore, spectators exercise discretion in determining whether or not a person’s sentiments or expressions of them are appropriate given the circumstances in which he finds himself.\(^\text{224}\) However, spectators should not rely solely on their personal reactions; rather, they call on their senses of what an impartial spectator would think of another’s situation and behavior.

Emotions are a crucial part of the spectator’s development of moral judgment. Smith suggests someone who lacks feelings for oneself and others fails to be capable of the virtues of humanity or even the introspection on which judgment rests (VI.iii.15-18, 243-245).\(^\text{225}\) In this section, I go into greater detail about the role that actual spectatorship plays in developing a community’s cultural norms around morality and emotional expressiveness. Even though Smith argues that commercial society tends to be quite tolerant of emotional expression, he suggests people still often need to display self-command over their outward emotional expressions. Nevertheless, in such communities the spectators' abilities to demonstrate sensitive sympathy for the feelings of others are more valued. That the person who sees and the person who is seen exercise different kinds of virtues and different expressions of emotions is reflective of the limits of our imagination in truly grasping the feelings of others, particularly painful emotions. However, actual spectators can serve a therapeutic role that makes it easier for someone who


\(^{225}\) See also Clark, “Conversation and Moderate Virtue,” 203-204 for a slightly different point on the importance of both sets of virtues (self-denial and humanity) for Smith.
suffers to express themselves calmly. In this manner, the cultivation of habits of “self-command” stem from seeing those who watch us and imagining how we appear to them.

Because of the moral role of spectatorship as well as the influence of material factors and environmental circumstances, different communities prioritize different habits and skills. Smith connects “frank, open, and sincere” cultures, wherein people “give way, in some measure to the movements of nature,” to broadly prosperous commercial societies (V.2.11, 208). When people have satisfied their own needs, they may be more able to express concern for the well-being of others. As a result, people feel more comfortable revealing their vulnerabilities to each other in search of consolation and aid. The typical members of a generally prosperous society are less stern-faced and more emotionally expressive: if they “complain when they are in pain, if they grieve when they are in distress, if they allow themselves either to be overcome by love, or to be discomposed by anger, they are easily pardoned” without others judging those expressions as marks against their characters, so long as they respect “justice and humanity” in the process (V.2.10, 207).

Nevertheless, commercial society embraces both the virtues of self-denial, tempering the outward expression of inner feelings, and the virtues of humanity, the empathetic sensitivity to the feelings of others (I.i.5.1-3, 23-24). The limits of the imagination give rise to the importance of self-denial, or self-command on the part of the person being seen, and the importance of the

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226 Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 36. See Chapter 2 for her more thorough analysis of Smith’s treatment of various communities and his avoidance of attributing social development to differences in mental capacities among people as well as his criticism of the tendencies of people to consider their own ways of life superior than others’.

227 Nevertheless, inequality within the community may render some people even more insensitive to the misery of others. For example, Pitts highlights Smith’s argument that slaves are treated even worse in prosperous societies since masters are better able to ignore the reality of the misery of slaves’ lives (*A Turn To Empire*, 31, citing LJ A.iii.111).
virtues of humanity on the part of the spectator. Smith argues we are equally admiring of a person who can express fortitude and tranquility in the face of adversity and the spectator who overcomes the limits of his own imagination and his preoccupations with himself to express deep feelings of sympathy for the sentiment of others (I.i.5.2, 24). By understanding that the spectator cannot fully grasp his suffering, the person who exerts self-command empathizes with the limits of their sympathy, whereas the sympathetic spectator overcomes the apparent limits of the imagination. However, the process is interactive; imagining or feeling the responses of spectators can actually have a therapeutic effect on the person suffering which aids their exertion of self-command.

Smith argues that moral spectatorship is the basis of general principles of justice. Although we tend to refer to general rules of right and wrong as though they are logically deduced external standards, Smith emphasizes the true origins of such rules are our affective reactions to what we observe (III.4.11, 161). Further, he emphasizes the particularity of observation (whether visual or otherwise) is essential to the stirring of sympathy, arguing

Commiseration for those miseries which we never saw, which we never heard of, but which we may be assured are at all times infesting such numbers of our fellow-creatures, ought, they think to damp the pleasures of the fortunate, and to render a certain melancholy dejection habitual to all men. But first of all, this extreme sympathy with misfortunes which we know nothing about seems altogether absurd and unreasonable. (III.3.9, 139)

Smith goes on to call such commiseration at the obscure reference to general suffering “artificial commiseration” that is most likely unattainable and only superficially affected by those who claim to feel it (III.3.9, 140). Our empathetic imagination often fails to function abstractly; rather we may best feel empathy can in response to concrete knowledge, by seeing or
reading or hearing about, the suffering of others. Nevertheless, the intersubjective nature of moral judgment means that variable moral systems also shape the judgments of our impartial spectators, mediating our feelings (VII.ii.1.47, 293). In this manner, spectators play an important role, but not the only role, in the execution of justice within a community.

Smith’s calls the virtues of the spectator “virtues of humanity” (I.i.5.1-2, 23-24). Spectators are admired for expressing their fellow-feeling with the sufferer. “The weakness of sorrow never appears in any respect agreeable, except when it arises from what we feel for others more than from what we feel for ourselves” (I.iii.1.15, 49). In other words, spectators feel freer to express their sorrows than the person who actually suffers. While a sufferer painfully struggles to contain his emotions, spectators find pleasure in succumbing to their feelings of sympathetic sorrow, congratulating themselves for their virtuous sensibility. Smith refers to the “friends of Socrates” who “all wept when he drank the last potion,” in response to his acquiescence to his fate (I.3.1.14, 48). In such instances, sympathetic spectators are proud of their ability to feel for another’s suffering, even though they can’t feel those feelings directly. As a result, Smith argues the spectator “is under no fear that [his expression] will transport him to any thing that is extravagant and improper; he is rather pleased with the sensibility of his own heart, and gives way to it with complacency and self-approbation” (I.3.1.14, 48). The sympathetic sensations of sorrow, such as mourning for family and friends who have died, “outwardly wear the features

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228 See also Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, 148. Frazer also emphasizes Smith’s emphasis on reactions to particular cases (*The Enlightenment of Sympathy*, 102-111).
229 However, as Marshall notes, Smith maintains that it is still “painful” to empathize with another’s feeling of grief, citing TMS I.iii.1.9, 46. Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*, 182.
230 Yet, Smith does not consider this to apply to shedding tears while watching a tragic play, which other spectators are likely to consider it a display of “excessive tenderness” that represents “effeminacy and weakness” (I.iii.1.9, 45).
of pain and grief,” but “are all inwardly stamped with the ennobling characters of virtue and self-approbation” (III.3.15, 143).

The emotional freedom of the spectators appears to provide an important basis to resolving issues of justice because they may be able to persuasively express the affective urgency of a situation better than the victim can. That said, as mentioned above, entering into unpleasant feelings such as resentment and anger in order to engage with the injustices can be difficult.\textsuperscript{231} Smith argues it is much easier for spectators to sympathize with moderate expressions of emotion, or even the calm bearing of misery without outward emotional expression.

Knowing the resistance that spectators feel towards empathizing with our misery, we seek to conceal the intensity of our emotional distress in order to better invite the fellow-feeling of others as well as their approval of our expressed sentiments: “The wretch whose misfortunes call upon our compassion feels with what reluctance we are likely to enter his sorrow, and therefore proposes his grief to us with fear and hesitation: he even smothers the half of it, and is ashamed, upon account of this hard-heartedness of mankind, to give vent to the fulness of his affliction” (I.iii.1.9, 46). Sensitivity to the insensibility of others encourages skills of self-command, so that people who suffer seek to gain a sense of dignity and honor in front of others. Spectators are “more apt to weep and shed tears” for sufferers who maintain their composure, appearing “to feel nothing,” than sufferers who “give way to all the weakness of sorrow” (I.iii.1.14, 48, also paragraphs 10-13, 47-48).\textsuperscript{232} By exhibiting steadfastness in the face of adversity, the individual inspires admiration in his audience, which counters the fear and shame.

\textsuperscript{231} Schwarze Scott, “Spontaneous Disorder,” 466-467.

\textsuperscript{232} That said, Smith says we are more lenient with those whose misfortunes are further removed from their own control and whose suffering is connected to another’s misfortune, such as a son who grieves his father’s death (I.iii.1.15, 49). However, this doesn’t discount the spectator’s preference for calm composure over displays of grief.
he may feel in exposing his circumstances to them. Smith argues both the greatest “heroes of ancient and modern history,” such as Socrates and Sir Thomas More, and the “greatest criminals” garner incredible respect and admiration from the public when they face execution with a calm and steady demeanor (VI.iii.5-6, 238-239). Yet, if the person facing public execution sheds “one single tear…he would disgrace himself for ever in the opinion of all the gallant and generous part of mankind” (I.iii.1.15, 49). Although some spectators may still feel compassion for him, “they would have no pardon for the man who could thus expose himself in the eyes of the world” (I.iii.1.15, 49).

**The Therapeutic Effects of Actual Spectators**

It is important to distinguish self-command from a lack of emotions or emotional repression. Self-command ceases to be a virtue when there are no feelings or passions to command, feelings and passions that ground the virtues of humanity that are important for the spectator (VI.iii.15-18, 243-245). Alternatively, those who merely repress their feelings, particularly anger, out of self-interest are more likely to just express their passion at a more opportune moment. Smith argues anger can be “inflamed by the restraint, and sometimes (long after the provoked given, and when nobody is thinking about it) burst out absurdly and unexpectedly, and with tenfold fury and violence” (VI.concl.4, 263). Whereas self-command can help a person stir the sympathy of a spectator, repression of emotions may simply exacerbate suffering and lead to a misdirected and potentially violent expression.

Fortunately, spectators have an interactive effect in the sufferer’s cultivation of self-command by providing an emotionally therapeutic role that helps individuals display self-

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233 See also Clark, “Conversation and Moderate Virtue,” 203-204 for a slightly different point on the importance of both sets of virtues for Smith.
command. Interactions with others, whether they are friends, strangers, or even hostile enemies, have an actual effect on the feelings of the person that helps temper their public expression of emotions. As a result, actual spectators can have a positive relationship with the development and stirring of an individual’s impartial spectator.

First, expecting our friends to embrace us more easily than strangers, we calm our emotions according to the perspective of whomever we find in our presence and “always endeavor to bring down our passion to that pitch, which the particular company we are in may be expected to go along with” (I.i.4.9, 23). Smith argues even the mere presence of an “assembly of strangers” or an acquaintance will be enough to assuage our feelings (23 and 205-209). Whether the individual faces circumstances of vulnerability and emotional distress or of good fortune and joy, Smith proposes she seek out others: “Society and conversation, therefore, are the most powerful remedies for restoring the mind to its tranquility, if at any time, it has unfortunately lost it; as well as the best preservatives of that equal and happy temper, which is so necessary to self-satisfaction and enjoyment” (I.i.4.10, 23). Alternatively, those who “brood” in isolation may “have more humanity, more generosity, and a nicer sense of honour, yet seldom possess that equality of temper which is so common among men of the world” (I.i.4.10, 23).

By interacting with others, we practice a habit of taking on their perspectives, through which we learn how to view our injuries and achievements with a sense of proportion that moderates our immersion in our own distress. As a result, actual spectators can help inspire our impartial spectator. Smith argues that by interacting with others and divulging our feelings while reflecting on their outside perspectives, sympathy actually subdues and mediates our passions:

But the man who, in relating to some other person the injury which has been done to him, feels at once the fury of his passion cooled and becalmed by sympathy with the more moderate sentiments of his companion, who at once adopts those more moderate sentiments, and comes to view that injury, not in the black and atrocious colours in which
he had originally beheld it, but in the much milder and fairer light in which his companion naturally views it; not only restrains but in some measure subdues, his anger. The passion becomes really less than it was before, and less capable of exciting him to the violent and bloody revenge which at first, perhaps he might have thought of inflicting. (VI.concl.4, 263)

While the individual moderates his feelings in order to evoke sympathy from a spectator, even the spectator’s most minimal comprehension helps to soothe his frustration, and he can begin to view his own suffering with less intensity, taking on the distanced perspective of an observer. Admittedly, we still temper our expression of our emotions, in order for an unaffected spectator to empathize with us, but we also come to feel our emotions less intensely in the process. Even the most minimal kind of validation, such as the attention of others that acknowledges the existence of our reaction, helps our passions wane from the furious to the frustrated but composed. Anger remains, but in a calmer, more bearable form. Smith’s reliance on visual metaphors continues; in interacting with others, we come to view our distresses with their eyes, which, due to their distance, brings us closer to the measured judgment of the impartial spectator. The sympathetic spectator validates our emotional responses while also helping to lessen the overall impact of whatever has disturbed us.

Second, actual spectators do not necessarily need to be compassionate to have an emotionally therapeutic effect. By imagining the judgments of an indifferent or even hostile spectator, like an enemy who would delight in one’s suffering, a person can draw himself out of stewing in his misery and seek to show himself as overcoming it:

Are you in adversity? Do not mourn in the darkness of solitude, do not regulate your sorrow according to the indulgent sympathy of your intimate friends; return, as soon as possible, to the day-light of the world and of society. Live with strangers, with those who know nothing, or care nothing about your misfortune; do not even shun the company of enemies but give yourself the pleasure of mortifying their malignant joy, by making them feel how little you are affected by your calamity, and how much you are above it. (III.3.39, 154)
Here, without benefitting from any expressions of kindness of spectators, the simple practice of considering the perspectives of others can help temper a person’s feelings of distress. When Smith refers to the usefulness of interacting with “enemies” he evokes our desire for attention in terms of a desire to be the object of “envy” of other people. We may not feel the joys of care or love, but our suffering is softened by the pleasure we take in the envy and disappointment of others who may wish to see us wallow in misery.

By making our audiences an object of our own spectatorship, our desire to present ourselves to them in certain ways changes the feelings that take precedence in our minds. If our engagement with others goes well, then the actual spectators can help stir our inner impartial spectator. Smith proclaims, “The man within the breast, the abstract and ideal spectator of our sentiments and conduct, requires often to be awakened and put in mind of his duty, by the presence of the real spectator” and help nurture our sense of self-command (III.3.38, 153-154). The presence of strangers can help remind us of the perspective of the impartial spectator even better than the presence of friends, who are particularly concerned with our well-being.

Smith suggests that actual spectators can remind stir our impartial spectator and remind us of human equality. Reflecting on ourselves through the perspectives of others reminds us that we are only equal to all other people, who should be treated justly, chastening our self-love (II.ii.2.2, 83). In Smith’s discussion of Hume’s example of sacrificing the world to avoid the scratching of one’s own finger, Smith repeatedly includes the clarification that an individual would consider such a great sacrifice of others “provided he never saw them” (TMS, III.3.4-5, 136-137). Smith argues that we would still sacrifice our own small interest to prevent them from being harmed, out of an aspiration to be noble and honorable, notions that imply gaining the respect of others (III.3.4, 137). Nevertheless, Smith emphasizes the perspective of impartial
spectator rather than those of actual spectators, arguing the impartial spectator reminds us “that we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it; and that when we prefer ourselves so shamefully and so blindly to others, we become the proper objects of resentment, abhorrence, and execration” (III.3.4, 137). Insofar as our interactions with others evoke the perspective of our impartial spectator, engaging with others tempers our partiality and reminds us to embrace others as equal to us.\(^{234}\)

Despite the aforementioned instances where there is a productive relationship between actual spectators and the impartial spectator, Smith ultimately distinguishes between the judgments of the impartial spectator, the judgments of a wise spectator, and the judgments of other actual spectators. Indeed, for Smith a major benefit of a well-developed impartial spectator is a person’s independence from the whims of other people. For the ideal virtuous individual, or the person truly in touch with his impartial spectator, the quality of his audience matters more than quantity. Such an individual is happier earning the “well-weighed approbation of a single wise man…than all the noisy applauses of ten-thousand ignorant though enthusiastic admirers” (VI.iii.31, 253). The more our inner impartial spectators motivate us, the less we rely on the

\(^{234}\) Smith’s qualification raises the question, would “seeing” all of these people fundamentally change the “passive feelings” of a lack of concern for them? Considering his emphasis on how some kind of concrete observation impacts our feelings of sympathy (III.3.9, 139), we may speculate that “seeing” would make a difference, though it’s not clear how much weight to put on Smith’s use of the term “seeing” in this passage. The relationship between observation and moral judgment as it relates to this passage has been the center of contemporary cosmopolitan theory, see Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, especially her discussion of how development in travel and media distinguish our world’s from Smith’s (149). See also Eun Kyung Min, “‘Regarding the Pain of Others’: A Smith-Sontag Dialogue on War Photography and the Production of Sympathy,” *Adam Smith Review*, Vol. 9 (2016), 169-200. John Durham Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition*, 120-121; Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).
opinion of others and the happier and more virtuous we can be. However, the role of the impartial spectator in reducing our reliance on the judgments of others suggests the possibility of disjuncture.

Despite the numerous therapeutic possibilities involved in social interactions in an “open, frank, and sincere” commercial society, Smith expresses anxious skepticism of the powers of actual spectatorship (V.2.11, 208). Because of the disproportionate ease with which people imagine and sympathize the joys of others, people are “eager to look” at the wealthy and powerful (I.iii.2.1, 51), and apt to not only ignore but unjustly scrutinize the poor and marginalized. As a result, the wealthy and powerful experience the public audience as a source of empowerment rather than a source of discipline.

Conversely, Smith is sensitive to how the unjust judgment of actual spectators, instead of awakening individuals’ impartial spectators, can induce undeserved feelings of shame and self-doubt. In this manner, Smith suggests a defense of privacy particularly in an “open” and “frank” civil society. Such privacy appears to be particularly important for individuals undergoing emotional and material distress. By accessing private spaces for sympathetic discussion, individuals also protect their impartial spectators from being clouded by the mistaken judgments of actual spectators.

In the following sections, I examine these two different strains of Smith’s criticisms of actual spectatorship. First, I examine the uniquely “ocular” dimension of the power of the most economically, socially, and politically privileged members of society. Spectators are apt to admire them, and as such, emulate them, resulting in what Smith calls the “the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (I.iii.3.1, 61). After examining this

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235 See also Marshall, The Figure of Theater, 189.
corruption of sentiments, I examine the political implications of spectators’ admiration: actual spectators are an insufficient resource for encouraging good governance or for holding the powerful accountable for their actions. Not only is actual spectatorship insufficient for preventing political abuse, but Smith considers it insufficient for addressing issues of criminal justice as well. Third, I reconstruct an account of the forced harms of public exposure embedded within TMS, which address the problems of how we more often apply the public scrutiny that ought to be directed to the powerful to the impoverished and marginalized, when do direct our attention to them.

II. “Eager to Look” at the Wealthy and Powerful

While everyone desires to be beloved, we do not distribute our love or sympathy equally. According to Smith, our struggle to deserve love and attention, and to be unafraid of revealing ourselves to others, primarily manifests in economic striving, due to the inclination we observe in each other to admire the wealthy and spurn the poor. Smith emphasizes we are especially “eager to look” upon the wealthy man of distinction (I.iii.2.1, 51). Consequently, enjoying an audience, by which I mean having an audience and experiencing that audience as a source of pleasure and, perhaps more importantly, power, is a benefit asymmetrically conferred onto those already materially, politically, and socially advantaged.  

Our predisposition to revere the rich and powerful grants them immense influence over their audience. The wealthy individual possesses an intrinsic advantage at commanding the attention of others. As Smith writes, “In a great assembly he is the person upon whom all direct their eyes; it is upon him that their passions seem all to wait with expectation, in order to receive that movement and direction which he shall impress upon them” (I.iii.2.1, 51). As a result, Smith

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236 See also Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*, 186-187.
proposes that the stability of the social order is founded upon the admiration of the fortunes of the successful (I.iii.2.3, 52). Our eagerness to look upon those most fortunate in our society does not oppress or discipline them but empowers them; our gaze renders us – both our reason and our moral sentiments – submissive to the proclamations of those most materially advantaged. For them, to be seen and to hold an audience is to gain control over others, rather than cede it to them. In this manner, Smith’s conceptualization of public spectatorship directly opposes Green’s formulation that the people can exert a kind of power over their leaders just by watching them; instead, those in power are more likely to influence their opinions and judgments in the process.

Seeing the Great and the Corruption of Moral Sentiments

Although Smith is content to accept that the wealthy and powerful will rule,\textsuperscript{237} he expresses anxiety over the corrosive effects of the tendency of most people to admire them. He worries that our “eagerness” to watch the powerful, and our tendency to empathize with them, means that the bad behavior of the great may spoil the rest of society. Precisely because they are admired and trusted by much of society, the great can get away with abusing their positions and violating mores and laws; additionally, by watching the wealthy and powerful, the rest of society may seek to emulate them to replicate their apparent happiness and success.\textsuperscript{238} Even though the middle and lower social classes of society cannot rise “above the law,” rendering their success reliant on maintaining the good opinion of others, their equals, they are susceptible to emulating the actions of the great (I.iii.3.5, 63). As much as Smith insists that we desire both actual praise


\textsuperscript{238} Rasmussen, “Adam Smith on What Is Wrong with Economic Inequality,” 349, citing TMS I.iii.3.7, 64.
and true praiseworthiness, observing the immoral actions of the powerful may persuade the rest of society to ignore their inner impartial spectators.

Smith characterizes the power of the wealthy in profoundly visual terms. Smith points to an aesthetic basis of the admiration of the wealthy by highlighting the pretty luxuries they possess and dress themselves with. Observing the tendencies of most people to asymmetrically and unfairly trust, forgive, and adore the wealthy over the innocent impoverished individuals, Smith argues we consider two different options for fulfilling our preeminent desires for the “respect and admiration” of our fellow human beings: “acquiring wealth and greatness” or living with wisdom and virtue (I.iii.3.2, 62). He uses highly visual motifs in calling these two different ways of living, “models” and “pictures,” the former “more gaudy and glittering in its colouring…forcing itself upon the notice of every wandering eye” and the latter “more correct and more exquisitely beautiful in its outline…attracting the attention of scare any body but the most studious and careful observer” (I.iii.3.2, 62). If we are motivated primarily by the quantity of our admirers, we will find the majority of people admire and worship the wealthy and powerful, as opposed to the wise, even if they do not gain anything from them (I.iii.3.2, 62).

According to this analysis, the social and political advantages of the wealthy and powerful is not merely in their distinct material powers, as in what they can do for other people in reward for their support or what they can do to people as punishment for their disapproval, but simply in appearing strikingly appealing or intimidatingly successful.

To better understand how being seen exacerbates the power of the most fortunate of society by rendering them more attractive or intimidating to the spectator, we can compare the sight of them to Smith’s discussion of the different effects that beholding a beautiful object: first,

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as when an individual with a calm disposition sees beauty, he “leans forward and stretches out
his neck, with his eyes fixt on the object,” and feels “affection…mixt with some degree of desire
and hope towards the object and thus inclines draws nearer towards it,” and, second, as when an
individual, surprised by such beauty, “rather inclines to draw back…of a reverential awe and
respect, that gives one a fear of displeasing,” in admiration (Lecture 13, pages 68-69). Like our
responses to great beauty, we can feel either attracted to the wealthy in adoration or intimidated
by them with deference and even fear.

According to Smith, we take pleasure in seeing the happiness of others and the happiness
of the great may seem particularly spectacular. If we want to be happy, wouldn’t we do well to
emulate them? The poor man’s son, who confuses luxury with satisfaction and spends his life
working for riches and power, only to realize he failed to find inner peace and happiness, learns
the hard way that this is not the case (IV.1.7, 181).\textsuperscript{240}

The effects of socioeconomic inequality on spectatorship cast a shadow on the
therapeutic promises of actual spectatorship in a prosperous society discussed in the previous
section. The phenomenon by which people mistake wealth and financial ambition for
praiseworthiness and success is a particular example of where the inner impartial spectator can
serve as a corrective to the tendency to rely on the judgments of others. For all people, the
wealthy, the poor, and the in between, the inner impartial spectator ought to serve as a reminder
of that we are only equal to all other people, who should be treated justly, chastening our self-
love (II.i.2.2, 83).

\textsuperscript{240} As Rasmussen notes, Smith repeatedly calls this superficial response to wealth deceptive and
delusional, “Adam Smith on What is Wrong with Economic Inequality,” 350.
The predisposition of many members of the public to revere the wealthy and powerful can have consequences for their own moral behaviors. The prejudices of the public audience renders Smith skeptical that spectators could be a resource for political accountability. Indeed, rather than relying on public spectatorship as a resource for accountability, Smith suggests that unless an individual has his own strong sense of right and wrong, the weight of public opinion and the desire for power is apt to encourage, not discourage, political corruption.

The Political Implications of Being Seen Without Scrutiny

According to Smith actual spectatorship fails to serve as a mechanism for political accountability for two reasons. First, the receptiveness of the social audience varies for people of different social ranks: the great, the middling, and the impoverished. Second, actual spectatorship is relatively impotent if the individual upon whom we gaze lacks a developed impartial spectator or sense of propriety (let alone virtue). In fact, people who rely on public opinion for their success may even be more likely to pursue immoral means of securing their power.

These two insufficiencies importantly intersect. When it comes to the question of encouraging political responsibility, Smith casts powerful individuals who do not abuse their positions as motivated first and foremost by their inner impartial spectators. Additionally, instead of disciplining the most powerful, who are at risk of abusing their powers, actual spectators are under the influence of these individuals, as discussed above. Rather than encouraging the great to behave, the spectators are apt to allow their sentiments to be corrupted by the bad behavior of the great. When it comes to affecting the agent’s sense of responsibility, Smith believes the presence of spectators can only exacerbate the feelings of remorse for those who already recognize, regret, and hope for redemption of the wrongs they have committed.

Does publicity, or the threat of an audience, help discipline those who would abuse their
power, commit crimes, and harm others? Smith relies more on the influence of the impartial spectator to motivate the individual towards justice than any pressure imposed by actual spectators. Smith suggest actual spectatorship is impotent, and, in some cases, dangerous. Smith’s suspicions of publicity indicate that the weight of public opinion may even incite individuals to manipulate and deceive others in order to maintain or gain authority rather than encourage self-control and ethical behavior.

According to Smith, our desire to achieve the approval of others may incentivize us to indulge in immoral activities. The more that individuals’ professions rely on public opinion, the more they are susceptible to such behavior, or “acts of intrigue.” Smith compares mathematicians and scientists, whose work is independent from public opinion, to poets, whom he calls susceptible to factions and to the use of “the arts of intrigue” to win over public approval (III.2.20-23, 124-126). Consequently, if we consider the similarity of politics to the arts with respect to the competitors’ interests in public opinion, then Smith’s arguments imply that in the realm of politics, instead of disciplining individuals, the pressure of public opinion may exacerbate the insecurity that leads a person into intrigue, partisanship, and deceit. Further, when we are unsure of our own value, we put even greater weight on others’ judgments of us (III.2.24-25, 126). Smith suggests such insecurity induces people to pursue unfair means, such as bribery, sacrificing true praiseworthiness for the sake of actual praise of others (III.2.24-25, 126).

Smith is explicitly concerned with our admiration of the great permits their indulgence in unethical behavior and crime:

“In many governments the candidates for the highest stations are above the law; and, if they can attain the object of their ambition, they have no fear of being called to account for the means by which they acquired it. They often endeavor, therefore, not only by fraud and falsehood, the ordinary and vulgar arts of intrigue and cabal; but sometimes by the perpetration of the most enormous crimes, by murder and assassination, by rebellion
...and civil war, to supplant and destroy those who oppose or stand in the way of their greatness.” (I.iii.3.8, 64-65)

Political leaders, perhaps burdened by the weight of public opinion while also aware of their influence over their audience, see the possibility of getting away with abusing their power. They may pursue both illegal and immoral means by which they can improve upon their greatness, mistaking their social and political superiority for true respect, love, and happiness. Rather than awaken their sense of responsibility, the public audience permits their wrongdoings, ranging from mild factionalism and lying to violent murder or even civil war.

While Smith is largely content that our predisposition to respect the fortunate buttresses social and political order, he is careful to distinguish just how unreliably actual spectators hold them accountable for abusive acts. While reason or political philosophy may teach, “kings are the servants of the people,” to be followed or challenged as the public good requires, this scrutinizing approach does not come to us naturally (I.iii.2.3, 53). Smith argues the arousal of our passions must cooperate with our reason to fortify resistance to the wrongful actions of a powerful individual:

To treat them in any respect as men, to reason and dispute with them upon ordinary occasions, requires such resolution, that there are few men whose magnanimity can support them in it...The strongest motives, the most furious passions, fear, hatred, and resentment, are scarce sufficient to balance this natural disposition to respect them: and their conduct must, either justly or unjustly, have excited the highest degree of all those passions, before the bulk of the people can be brought to oppose them with violence or to desire to see them either punished or disposed. (I.iii.2.3, 53)

Our predisposition to revere the powerful buttresses their superiority such that we can barely recognize their flaws and wrongdoings, let alone criticize, investigate, or censure them. The problem is not merely that a sentimentally driven admiration for them overwhelms our reason but that it equally overwhelms our emotional responses to their words and actions. “Fear,
hatred, and resentment” – these feelings compel us to rebuke or resist the powerful when necessary.

Because actual spectators are unreliable judges, Smith emphasizes the role of a person’s inner impartial spectator to censure the powerful person and discourage him from a life of corruption. The man of rank’s desire to be beloved remains important, but here his desire is oriented toward earning the love of one’s impartial spectator in light of one’s own actions and sense of honor. Nurturing our love of nobility is essential to counteract the dangerous self-interestedness that society’s natural trust of the powerful may allow.241 Smith emphasizes the internal sense of self-worth rather than a fear of any consequences actual spectators might bring to bear on the corrupt person, as spectators are unlikely to scrutinize the wealthy and powerful.

Although Smith claims that those who abuse their power usually end up punished, he emphasizes the individual’s psychological suffering of remorse and guilt is the most powerful punishment that ought to discourage such behavior (TMS, I.iii.3.8, 65). Even in the face of actual praise from the people and what appears to be glory, the unjust individual, suffers from shame provoked by his inner impartial spectator. Attention from others becomes an evil, as “he invokes in vain the dark and dismal powers of forgetfulness and oblivion,” seeking to forget his own actions, only to realize that as he knows too clearly what he does that others must remember as well (I.iii.3.8, 65). Confronting celebration and praise, whether the admiration of his equals and the educated, or the “innocent, though more foolish” adoration of the masses, his impartial spectator brings upon him “the avenging furies of shame and remorse” (I.iii.3.8, 65). In other words, even when actual spectators shower upon him undeserved praise, his impartial spectator

241 Ryan Patrick Hanley, Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 147-149.
is never deceived and condemns him when the public adores him. It is not real spectators that hold him accountable, but his own conscience; as Smith writes, “while glory seems to surround him on all sides, he himself, in his own imagination, sees black and foul infamy fast pursuing him, and every moment ready to overtake him from behind” (I.iii.3.8, 65). Despite receiving the praise of actual spectators, his impartial spectator reminds him that he is truly blameworthy and that his glory is truly infamy, which may be worse than receiving no attention at all.

A disjuncture between the praise of the actual spectator and the shame of his inner impartial spectator creates the corrupt person’s emotional distress. Consequently, Smith acknowledges that ill moral and political judgment of spectators has the power to awaken a sense of responsibility, but only if the individual has a well-developed impartial spectator. That said, Smith argues that those who are susceptible to using unfair means to achieve success care more about attaining the praise of others than actually deserving that praise, implying a lack of self-assured integrity (III.2.24, 126). Therefore, people who are most apt to abuse power and engage in political corruption are also the least likely to be thwarted by the threat of publicity.

**Spectatorship and Criminal Justice**

While Smith denies public opinion as a forceful constraint on the actions of the powerful, he acknowledges people among the lower classes are more dependent on the judgments of “their neighbors and equals; and without a tolerably regular conduct these can never be obtained” (I.iii.3.5, 63). Whereas the wealthy may more easily find themselves above the law, “inferior and middling stations of life, besides can never be great enough to be above the law, which must generally overawe them into some sort of respect for, at least, the more important rules of justice” (I.iii.3.5, 63). Smith exhibits faith in the moral character of the masses, including the poor, while considering the emulation of the great as the primary cause of their moral corruption.
If spectatorship fails as a mechanism for political accountability because of the failure of people to scrutinize the wealthy and powerful, would it be consistent with Smith’s thought to turn to it as a mechanism for deterring crime among the rest of society, who are not so privileged? While Smith does not systematically answer this question, there is evidence that he is also skeptical of spectatorship when it comes to issues of criminal justice, both because of its ineffectiveness and because of moral or psychological harms it may perpetuate regarding the theatrical exposure of both guilty and innocent individuals to public shame.

First, Smith expresses skepticism that the threat of public spectators to could deter an ordinary criminal; an individual who refrains from committing a crime or regrets a crime he commits does so primarily out of his own conscience – “the daemons, the avenging furies, which in this life, haunt the guilty” and drive them to despair or even suicide (III.2.I.9, 118-119). However, “profligate criminals,” whom Smith claims lack such a sense of shame, do not fear their guilt being discovered and publicized:

Profligate criminals, such as common thieves and highwaymen, have frequently little sense of the baseness of their own conduct, and frequently no remorse. Without troubling themselves bout the justice or injustice of the punishment, they have always been accustomed to look upon the gibbet as a lot very likely to fall to them. When it does fall to them, therefore, they consider themselves only as not quite lucky as some of their companions, and submit to their fortune, without any other uneasiness than what may arise from the fear of death; a fear which, even by such worthless wretches, we frequently see, can be so easily, and so very completely conquered. (III.2.I.11, 120)

Smith claims that people who usually commit crimes do so without a sense of moral conscience. They do not fear being discovered, exposed, or punished. He proposes they are not even afraid of death. It seems little can be done for these individuals, other than to discover and prove their guilt, and remedy the injustices they have done to others. Neither corporeal punishment nor public shaming deters these kinds of criminals.
However harsh his commentary on “profligate criminals,” Smith is not completely without compassion for the convicted. He further criticizes punishments designed to publicly shame convicted individuals. Smith underscores the unique kind of reputational harm provoked by being placed in a pillory rather than being publicly executed because, by its very nature, the pillory prevents the person from presenting himself with fortitude – that admirable appearance of self-command (I.iii.2.10, 60-61). The man in the pillory knows he cannot provoke any sympathy, only contempt, in those watching. At least Smith sympathizes with him “because he suffers the worst of all miseries: theatrical exposure.”

Smith's point regarding the misery of “theatrical exposure” (as Marshall puts it) in criminal punishment arises in his broader discussion of social ranks. He particularly highlights instances of gentlemen, “to whom dishonour is the greatest of all evils,” being subjected to the physically humane but more powerfully humiliating punishments (I.ii.2.9, 60). However, it is clear that the humiliating nature of these punishments affects all people, as Smith concludes his discussion by asserting that

Human virtue is superior to pain, to poverty, to danger, and to death; nor does it even require its utmost efforts do despise them. But to have its misery exposed to insult and derision, to be led in triumph, to be set up for the hand of scorn to point at, is a situation in which constancy is much more apt to fail. Compared with the contempt of mankind, all other external evils are easily supported. (I.iii.2.12, 61)

Smith argues that human beings and their commitment to goodness can endure most misery, except misery compounded by the contempt of spectators. With this declaration Smith concludes both his specific argument about the humiliating nature of certain public punishments and his broader argument concerning social ranks, including the socially induced shame impoverished people are likely to feel.

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242 Marshall, The Figure of Theater, 192, citing the same passage.
In addition to public spectatorship being ineffective and harmful as a criminal punishment or deterrent, Smith’s account suggests another crucial problem in criminal justice is the inevitability that innocent people will at times be convicted of crimes they did not commit and truly guilty parties may end up getting away with their crimes. Although he hopes for the unjust conviction of an innocent man accused of a crime to “happen very rarely in any country” (TMS III.2.11, 120), Smith admits it continues in “well-administered states.” He suggests an even more persistent problem may be that “the established opinion of the innocence” of a person’s manners may actually get truly guilty parties off the hook (III.5.8, 167). Public opinion then, which as we can see can suffer from unjust prejudice, can serve to protect true criminals from being held accountable.

Consequently, punishment designed for public shaming has important consequences for innocent people as well. Smith calls the “undeserved loss of reputation” the “greatest” of “all the external misfortunes,” for men and women (III.3.19, 144-145). When the judgments of actual spectators err from the truth, actual spectators can harm individuals, exacerbate preexisting suffering, and have a countertherapeutic effect on the person’s impartial spectator.

As a result, Smith’s skepticism that spectatorship can ensure accountability or a disciplinary effect in criminal judgment also forms the basis of an account of the harms of forced public exposure of individuals. Just as social prejudices can render spectators excessively deferential to the powerful, their mistaken scrutiny can cause undue harms on various ordinary members of society, including the vulnerable and marginalized.

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IV. Being Seen with Scrutiny: Harms of Public Exposure

By the final part of TMS, the other-oriented pleasure we derive from “seeing” “the happiness of others” (I.i.1.1, 9) becomes a more worrying desire “to feel how each other is affected, to penetrate into each other’s bosoms, and to observe the sentiments and affections which really subsist there” (VII.iv.27, 337). Smith warns that this desire can be so strong “that it often degenerates into a troublesome and impertinent curiosity to pry into those secrets of our neighbours, which they have very justifiable reasons for concealing” (VII.iv.27, 337). Our desire for others to share themselves with us can extend far beyond what they want to reveal. We seem to exercise a kind of coercion when we “pry into those secrets” of others. But what may serve as the “justifiable reasons for concealing” something about our lives?

Answering this question requires recourse to the implications Smith’s draws from his opening claim on the pleasure we derive in seeing each other: because we feel greater pleasure in “seeing” the good fortune and joy of others, we can be greatly anxious about the forced exposure of our suffering (I.iii.2.1, 50). Smith argues that when we find ourselves in misfortunate circumstances we may also wish for privacy, anticipating that others will not adequately sympathize with us. Smith articulates a sensitivity to the anxiety of public exposure from the first edition of his work, writing, “Nothing is so mortifying as to be obliged to expose our distress to the view of the public, and to feel, that though our situation is open to the eyes of all mankind, no mortal conceives for us the half of what we suffer” (I.iii.2.1, 50). Yes, our awareness of the insensitivity of others to our feelings helps “discipline” us to develop virtues of self-command, but Smith is clear that this social process poses difficulties for the individual’s well-being.

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244 This passage, VII.iv.27, is present in all six editions of the work.
245 Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, 85-86.
Although life in poverty is the specific kind of “misery” that Smith discusses in this section, he begins with this broad claim that, in our most miserable and vulnerable moments, to be compelled to expose our suffering to others, particularly when others are less compassionate than they ought to be, is to compound our pain, rather than alleviate it. We anticipate, perhaps correctly, that even by opening up, no spectator could fully sympathize with our suffering. In the case of the impoverished person, it is not merely that the real spectator cannot relate to the person’s poverty, but that she will tend to look at it with disdain and resent how the sight of the poor disturbs her own pleasant state of life (I.iii.2.1, 51). As a result, by revealing his misery the individual also puts himself at risk of feeling undeserved blame for his situation.

In sum, at the heart of Smith’s anxiety about actual spectators is not merely a failure of people to adequately sympathize with an individual’s suffering but also the tendency of actual spectators to blame that individual for his distress. In the following section, I examine three important sections of TMS that help illustrate the harms of public exposure and the desire of an individual to control what they reveal about themselves to others. First, I examine the psychological suffering of the innocent man deemed blameworthy or guilty of a crime he did not commit, which offers the basic framework of Smith’s articulation of the problem of public exposure: the harmful effects of feeling undeserved blame and socially induced shame. Second, I further examine Smith’s comments on the difficulties of life in poverty. Finally, Smith further explores the fear of undeserved public shame in his discussion of the origins of the Catholic practice of confession, comparing the debates of the guilt of a person who breaks a promise made under duress to the shame associated with surviving rape.

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246 See also Marshall, The Figure of Theater, 185.
“Justifiable Reasons for Concealing”

When qualifying his praise for our tendency to trust open and frank individuals over those who seem unnecessarily reserved, Smith notes that our desire for others to share themselves with us can extend far beyond what they want to reveal (VII.iv.28, 337). By further examining Smith’s approach to actual spectatorship, we find three different situations that spur and offer “justifiable reasons” to seek refuge from the public audience. While each of these examples are embedded within distinct contexts of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, all three exemplify a concern that, in our roles as spectators, Smith thinks we more readily empathize with those who are happy or those who suffer distress with powerful self-command (I.iii.10-14, 47-48). As a result, those who suffer may also be most at risk to experience public visibility without its attendant reward of fellow-feeling. Actual spectators can exacerbate rather than soothe an individual’s misery. The independence of Smith’s impartial spectator also comes through in these cases, as a well-developed impartial spectator is also a resource of “self-satisfaction” that is necessary condition for exercising true virtue, particularly in the face of “social corruption.” However, moments of disjuncture between the harsh judgments of actual spectators can threaten the fortitude of the individual’s inner impartial spectator.

Smith’s account of the psychological experience of the innocent individual wrongly judged guilty of a crime he did not commit is the last passage Smith added to *TMS* examined in this manuscript. It is worth starting with because it most straightforwardly encapsulates Smith’s concerns for the harms perpetuated by actual spectators on an individual as well as the

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247 I do not intend to imply that these are the only circumstances that may justify privacy, only that these are the most relevant examples within *TMS*.

248 Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*, 190.

implications these harms have for moral autonomy. Public exposure is particularly harmful when prejudiced spectators who judge an individual’s character inaccurately subject the individual to undeserved blame.

Smith calls the “undeserved loss of reputation” the “greatest” of “all the external misfortunes,” for men and women (III.3.19, 144-145). His account of the person accused of a crime that he did not commit serves as a particularly stirring example of an undeserved loss of reputation. The innocent man feels “violent resentment” against the mistaken judges of his conduct.²⁵⁰

However, in addition to spurring his feelings of resentment, the mistaken judgments of actual spectators have powerful consequences for how the innocent man sees himself and the strength of the impartial spectator to whom he ought to appeal for consolation. Faced with the harsh judgment of others, the innocent person feels anxious and begins to doubt and shame himself: “Though perfectly conscious of his own innocence, the very imputation seems often, even in his own imagination to throw a shadow of disgrace and dishonor upon his own character” (TMS III.2.11-13, 119-121). Despite knowing he is innocent and feeling “just indignation” toward others, his view of his own character is obscured. When society decides the innocent individual is worthy of blame, mistaken actual spectators overwhelm his impartial spectator and he doubts his own character and experiences. Smith’s discussion of his unique form of anxiety and suffering is particularly moving:

We scarce dare to absolve ourselves, when all our brethren appear loudly to condemn us. The supposed impartial spectator of our conduct seems to give his opinion in our favour with fear and hesitation; when that of all the real spectators, when that of all those with whose eyes and from whose station he endeavors to consider it, is unanimously and violently against us. In such cases, this demigod within the breast appears, like the demigods of the poets, though partly of immortal, yet partly too of mortal extraction.

²⁵⁰ Schwarze and Scott, “Spontaneous Disorder,” 473.
When his judgments are steadily and firmly directed by the sense of praise-worthiness and blame-worthiness, he seems to act suitably to his divine extraction: But when he suffers himself to be astonished and confounded by the judgments of ignorant and weak man, he discovers his connection with mortality and appears to act suitably rather to the human, than to the divine, part of his origin. (III.2.32, 131)

The innocent man’s faith in his conscience and in his abilities to evaluate himself is only so strong. While moral sentiments and a developed “impartial spectator” allow him to understand true blameworthiness and praiseworthiness, he cannot so easily disregard the reactions of actual spectators. Even though he knows he did not perform that act of which he has been accused, he must confront that others consider him to be capable of such a violation, and that is enough to induce him to doubt his own goodness (III.2.11, 119). Importantly, Smith insists that truly good people are more disturbed by such false accusations than people who are habitually guilty of the same “smaller offenses or greater crimes,” calling into question the disciplinary efficacy of such public condemnations on the truly guilty (III.2.13, 121).

When Smith later discusses the value of surrounding oneself with strangers rather than friends, he proposes, “The propriety of our moral sentiments is never so apt to be corrupted, as when the indulgent and the partial spectator is at hand, while the indifferent and impartial one is at a great distance” (III.3.41, 154). Considering the case of the innocent man, Smith’s claim appears in a different light – the partial and flawed judgments of real spectators that wrongly censure the individual can also alienate his impartial spectator and corrupt his sentiments. In this instance, actual spectators’ desires to publicly denounce and shame the perceived criminal causes undeserved emotional distress and has a counterproductive effect on the moral fortitude of innocent people. When the innocent man attempts to call forth his impartial spectator by relating to real spectators, his senses of his moral capacity and his self-identity falter and fade. Smith intimates that God may be the only truly reliably sympathetic spectator; even the impartial
spectator may fail. Smith suggests that religious faith that, at the end of his life, justice will be served provides the last source of comfort to the wrongly judged individual (III.2. 12, 120-121; III.2.32, 131-132).251

Nevertheless, there are other circumstances wherein individuals find themselves subject to undeserved public shame much like the innocent man. Smith argues individuals living in poverty are vulnerable to unique anxieties in facing a public audience. Smith highlights the power of socioeconomic inequality to “distort” sympathy and also exacerbate the misery of impoverished people by closing them off from the possibility of sympathetic attention.252 However, in addition to highlighting the obscurity of indigent people, Smith also examines the unjust scorn they often face from the rest of society when others do pay attention to them.

Regarding the impoverished person, Smith explains that actual spectators “turn away their eyes from him, or if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is only to spurn so disagreeable an object from among them” (I.iii.2.1, 51). In this manner, many people are apt to simply avert their gaze, but if their attention is directed to a poor person, they are more apt to react harshly instead of with compassion. The impoverished person is subject either to a painful anonymity that “places him out of the sight of mankind” (I.iii.2.1, 51), adding the feeling of isolation to his miseries, or to a public censuring wherein others unfairly scorn and alienate him from the community. Smith concludes that the impoverished individual is “mortified upon both accounts; for though to be overlooked, and to be disapproved of, are things entirely different, yet as obscurity covers us from the daylight of honour and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of, necessarily damps the most agreeable hope and disappoints the most

251 See also Schwarze and Scott, “Spontaneous Disorder” for a more thorough analysis of Smith’s references to providence and religion.
252 Dennis Rasmussen, “Adam Smith on What Is Wrong with Economic Inequality,” 350-351.
ardent desire, of human nature” (I.iii.2.1, 51). Hiding from society guarantees losing out on the possibility of being attended to but being seen and receiving shame from others rather than compassion introduces another form of emotional distress. Nevertheless, Smith seems to conclude that if and when he is seen by others, the impoverished person is more likely to be censured and shamed than loved.

By nearly opening his discussion of social ranks with a declarative statement on the anxiety of exposure, Smith implies that when we expose what we know to be true misery and fail to find adequate consolation, we may experience shame even worse than the feeling of being hidden from society’s view. Where we hope to find sympathy from others, we come to face to face with only our own vulnerabilities. While we may find comfort in the presence of a private, sympathetic spectator, we are generally skeptical that anyone could truly relate to our misery. Thus, to be forced to reveal one’s own misfortune is an especially painful experience.

In the case of the impoverished individual, because individuals’ self-presentation can be determined by wealth, it can be difficult to engage publicly without also exposing economic struggle. Smith alludes to the uniquely shameful visible evidence of poverty that nevertheless fails to elicit sympathy, writing, “Before a gay assembly, a gentleman would be more mortified to appear covered with filth and rags than with blood and wounds. This last situation would interest their pity; the other would provoke their laughter” (I.iii.2.9, 60). Smith indicates that society tends to view poverty as a less disturbing harm, and actual spectators are therefore less likely to feel sympathy or admiration for the person who endures it. It is worth noting that Smith defines poverty relative to the necessities that people must have in order to appear in public.
without shame, which can vary across time and place according to levels of economic inequality.\textsuperscript{253}

In his discussions of the experiences of the impoverished individual, Smith challenges both religious and secular perspectives dominant in his time that justified the lower status of the poor and sought to keep “poor people poor” on the basis of their supposed moral or intellectual inferiority.\textsuperscript{254} Smith details the disproportionate disdain and shaming directed by many of society at least fortunate among them. Like the innocent individual accused of a crime, the indigent individual faces undeserved blame expressed by his fellows. Smith argues when it comes to the actions of a poor person, a “single transgression of the rules of temperance and propriety is commonly more resented” than the “constant” violations of the wealthy (I.iii.3.4, 63). In fact, it is not merely that we judge the wrongdoings of the poor more harshly than those of the wealthy, but that we “despise” the “poverty and weakness of the innocent” alone more so than we condemn the actual “vices and follies of the powerful” (I.iii.3.2, 62).\textsuperscript{255} In this manner, the impoverished individual is at risk of experiencing the misery of socially induced feelings of anxiety, shame, and self-doubt akin to what the innocent person accused of a crime feels. Although Smith focuses on life in poverty, his broad statement applies to miseries beyond material wellbeing that similarly connect self-worth with how others view us.

\textsuperscript{255} The full quote referenced: “We see frequently the vices and follies of the powerful much less despised than the poverty and weakness of the innocent” (I.iii.3.2, 62). Even if an individual does not experience the direct scrutiny of others, they are apt to witness and internalize such harsh public judgments.
Finally, Smith examines how when people worry they have done something wrong, they long for someone to confide in; he cites this psychological phenomenon as conducive to the Catholic tradition of confession (VII.iv.17, 333). Smith documents how such individuals include those who have committed injustices, forms of deceit, and violations of chastity, which include extreme instances that are also true injustices, such as rape (“where no person can be guilty of them without doing the most unpardonable injury to some other”) as well as less severe breaches of modesty that disproportionately affect women with respect to their public reputation and perceived social worth (VII.iv.21, 335). Notably, Smith casts our drive for confession as instigated by anxieties regarding how the rest of society would view us, instead of, say, a desire to seek absolution from a God who sees all. Individuals seek a sympathetic confidante to assuage the anxiety and fear that comes with not only knowing one has “done wrong” but also merely suspecting oneself as having committed an evil (VII.iv.17, 333). Individuals with a powerful conscience may regret both wrongful actions and experiences that may not have actually been wrongful. For example, Smith refers to an ancient notion of the “piacular” to describe individuals who feel what he calls “fallacious sense of guilt,” in situations where they accidentally or involuntarily are involved in some kind of unfortunate event or wrongdoing. Such individuals could include the most wise and virtuous. These individuals and others may fall into the category of people who might seek private confession and consolation.

While Smith criticizes casuistry rooted in the Catholic practice of confession and suggests the impartial spectator ought to replace it, he does not criticize the desire for

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257 Eric Schliesser, Adam Smith, 127.
consolation that may inspire people to confess. Although people feel ashamed revealing their wrongs, or suspected wrongs, to others, they are comforted by the sympathy of their confidantes. Smith writes, “It relieves them to find that they are not altogether unworthy of regard, and that however their past conduct may be censured, their present disposition is at least approved of, and is perhaps sufficient to compensate the other, at least to maintain them in some degree of esteem with their friend” (VII.iv.17, 333-334). As David Marshall notes, Smith appears to sympathize with the remorseful murderer’s unique pain of sensing himself forever shut out from the possibility of sympathetic spectators, “an anxiety everyone must fear, if not experience.” Confiding with another individual presents the possibility of redemption by gaining an opportunity to show that he now knows better. The individual can see himself as more than the sum of the immoral acts or sentiments he had experienced. Perhaps when an individual feels he has violated what is right, he worries that he has doomed himself to be undeserving of society. To be able to sit with a sympathetic spectator who does not recoil in disgust seems to provide hope that this is not necessarily the case.

Although I do not want to downplay the desire for privacy of those who have directly perpetrated wrongs, because I have touched upon Smith’s sympathy for the public exposure of criminals above, I want to underscore Smith’s nuanced approach to examining the circumstances of people who are themselves the victims of others’ actions but nevertheless anxious about public shaming and thus might desire a kind of private confession; Smith discusses two different categories but connects them: those who break promises they originally only made under the threat of death (VII.iv.9-14, 330-333) as well as people, particularly women, who have been

259 See also Minowitz, *Profits, Priests, and Princes*, 220-221.
raped (VII.iv.13, 332). Smith argues that others may still look down on these people, even though they do not deserve blame that ought to be directed towards the people who mistreated them; by doing so, he illuminates how they may feel shame that can be best soothed by a sympathetic and discreet audience, despite not being guilty of injustice. Such people may not be likely to garner the sympathy of many ordinary spectators, or at least they fear they are not likely to receive such sympathy. Thus, to soothe the suffering and shame they feel, they will benefit more from a single sympathetic and confidential listener than the general public.

Within his criticism of casuistry, Smith compares society’s strong commitment to truthfulness to society’s strong emphasis on women’s chastity. In order to distinguish between casuistry and jurisprudence, Smith examines the case of a man who breaks a promise he originally makes to a “highwayman” under threat of death (VII.iv.9, 330); Smith argues jurisprudence clearly dictates that a coerced promise is invalid to begin with, but notes various casuists throughout history and in his own time rigorously debate whether the man should be censured for breaking his promise anyway (VII.iv.10-14, 330-333). In the middle of this discussion, Smith compares the case of the coerced promise to the public shame actual spectators direct at rape survivors or that rape survivors may feel about themselves. Smith argues that sexual promiscuity offends moral sentiments so much so that “no circumstances, no solicitation can excuse it; no sorrow, no repentance atone for it” (VII.iv.13, 332). He specifies, “We are so nice in this respect that even a rape dishonours, and the innocence of the mind cannot, in our imagination, wash out the pollution of the body” (VII.iv.13, 332). In this manner, Smith implies that survivors of rape, a crime Smith later calls the “the most unpardonable injury” that a person can do to one another, may only be able to rely on a private spectator inclined to respect and sympathize with them and to soothe their misery, a misery that may include undeserved feelings
of shame (VII.iv.21, 335). Importantly, Smith’s discussion of the social censure of rape victims is descriptive; he highlights the tendency of the human “imagination” to attach “the idea of shame” to all “violations of chastity in the fair sex,” even rape, without offering a clear normative evaluation of that tendency (VII.iv.13, 332). Nevertheless, in *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJ), Smith classifies different kinds of harm that the rape survivor experiences, which include “a breach of the liberty of the woman and a great injury to her” as well as “injury done to her reputation,” for which capital punishment “alone seems to be a sufficient compensation” “in all civilized nations” (LJ, ii.131, 120-121).  

If it is plausible that Smith took his notion of the “piacular” from Livy, then it is plausible to connect his argument that “the innocence of the mind cannot, in our imagination, wash out the pollution of the body” to Livy’s depiction of Lucretia’s suicide. Roman soldiers plead with Lucretia not to commit suicide by telling her “it is the mind that sins not the body, and where there has been no consent there is no guilt” (Livy 1912, Book 1 Ch. 58). Whereas Augustine censures Lucretia as “excessively eager for honour,” implying she took “vengeance

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on” herself “for another’s crime,” and concludes that to commit suicide in response to rape is “to deviate from the authority of God’s law by taking unlawful steps to avoid the suspicions of men” (Book I, Ch. 19, 30-31). Smith treats suicide more sympathetically. While he criticizes ancient praise of suicide, he also goes against predominant opinion in his time by arguing that suicide is not criminal but due to a “species of melancholy,” or a “disease.” Smith adds, “victims” of suicide “are the proper objects, not of censure but of commiseration” (TMS, VII.ii.1.34 and n. 36, 287).

Although casuists debate whether or not to condemn the man who breaks a promise made under coercion, jurisprudence makes it clear that “to extort the promise was a crime, which deserved the highest punishment, and to extort the performance would only be adding a new crime to the former” (VII.iv.10, 330). Extending Smith’s original comparison to the instance of rape, jurisprudence ought to be clear that she is innocent and should not be condemned as a violator of chastity, despite mankind’s tendency to do so. Similarly, just as “no man…who had

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263 I thank Ruth Abbey for drawing my attention to how Smith’s discussion of rape compares to Augustine’s discussion of Lucretia in her feedback on an earlier iteration of this material at the Midwestern Political Science Association’s 2018 Annual Conference.


265 I do not use the term “piacular” to refer to the cases I discuss because Smith did not, and, by having some element of coercion, they seem to differ from some of the instances where he did. It is beyond the scope of this paper to directly counter Schliesser’s argument, but I want to underscore how Smith’s commentary on suicide throws into question Schliesser’s argument that Smith would approve of suicide as a praiseworthy “atonement” for the “piacular” feeling as it is depicted in the tragic plays to which he refers (Schliesser, Adam Smith, 125).

266 Note how Smith references “pollution” in his discussions of the man who broke a promise made under threat of death (VII.iv.13, 333) and of the rape survivor (VII.IV.13, 332), just as he also uses “ignominy” to refer to the promise-breaker (VII.iv.13, 332) and women who are seen as violating chastity (VII.iv.19, 335).
gone through an adventure of this kind would be fond of telling the story” of how he made a promise under threat of death (VII.iv.13, 333), no woman would be fond of telling her story.

Within a strong Christian community such as the one Smith examines, all violations of chastity, including those that are consensual and not necessary traumatizing, may inspire an individual to seek private confession, but the case of the rape survivor emerges as a particularly striking example of an individual who would seek a secret outlet to work through undeserved “suspicions of having done wrong” and unjust feelings of shame that would be provoked by public exposure.267

These three examples present individuals who suffer from shame and insecurity as a result of the judgments of real spectators that contradict the judgment of impartial spectators. In all three instances, individuals who deserve sympathetic consolation end up objects of scorn in the eyes of the typical actual spectator. Only a very firm, self-assured nature, with which the individual knows himself to be truly good, or at least, not blameworthy, can resolve the problems of unjust censure. Such a person knows society does not “hate and despise” him, but “another person they mistake him to be” (TMS, VII.ii.4.11, 311). While the impartial spectator can be an important shield against the censure of mistaken spectators, we may have a hard time hearing its better judgment, as the case of the innocent man highlights in particular.

As a result, the three cases show that not only does disproportionate and unjust scrutiny inflict suffering to various vulnerable individuals within the community, the scrutiny also

267 Smith’s discussion resonates with contemporary literature on survivors of traumatic events, including rape. Trauma survivors may experience two different forms of shame – internal and/or external. Internal shame refers to the individual’s own judgment of herself as “devalued,” damaging her self-esteem, whereas external shame refers to a sense that others will look down on her. See Deborah A. Lee, Peter Scragg, and Turner, Stuart, “The Role of Shame and Guilt in Traumatic Events: A Clinical Model of Shame-Based and Guilt-Based PTSD,” British Journal of Medical Psychology 74 (2001): 451–66.
weakens the person’s faith in their own moral character. Although the effect of unjust judgment on the voice of the impartial spectator is explicitly discussed in the case of the innocent man, anyone who lives under incessant suspicion of wrongdoing and immorality is to made to feel like Smith’s innocent man, doubting his moral character and capacities in light of the image of himself projected onto him by others. The embedded account of harms of public exposure sheds light on how social coercion not only harms individuals but also thwarts their own senses of moral judgment. Additionally, when revealing deeply personal and potentially traumatic experiences, a person can feel shame and uncertainty despite her status as an individual deserving of sympathy. Society’s judgments of undeserved blame may have the effect of enervating the individual’s impartial spectator both in its potential as a source of self-confidence and in its role as a resource for personal decision-making.

V. Conclusion

Known for his model of the impartial spectator, Adam Smith’s moral philosophy offers contemporary theorists an alternative basis for considering the relationship between visual experiences, emotions, and moral and political judgments. For Smith, seeing is not purely subjection, because the relationship between those who see and those who are seen is incredibly interactive. The Smithian spectator can be incredibly engaged in the process of interpreting and evaluating what she sees, negotiating her emotional and partial responses with her sense of what an impartial spectator would think, all the while entering into the particular circumstances of the person she observes. Smith even suggests that observations and emotional responses to what we see help inform the general principles of justice that guide our societies, even as moral philosophy also shapes the impartial spectator to whom we turn to help us form not only aesthetic judgments but moral and political ones as well.
Nevertheless, because of the distinctions Smith draws between the impartial spectator and actual spectators, Smith’s account foregrounds the ways in which social, economic, and political inequalities distort actual spectatorship. Smith’s reliance on the model of the impartial spectator to guide judgment is accompanied by his suspicion of individuals’ tendency to associate wealth with success and happiness and poverty with immorality. Although there are aesthetic factors that shape how spectators look at wealth and power, on Smith’s account, the problem is not so much visual experience itself, as it can be crucial to the sympathetic process, but the inequalities in which experiences of spectatorship are embedded. Spectatorship can exacerbate such inequalities, rendering it an insufficient mechanism of political accountability, an ineffective and harmful form of criminal punishment, and a tool that disproportionately intervenes in the liberty and privacy of marginalized members of society.

Because of his acceptance of the political system of his time, Smith was not so concerned that the public served as an overly trusting and admiring audience to the wealthy and powerful. Nevertheless, one of the few substantive principles of the impartial spectator is a call to fundamental equality, which appears striking in light of Smith’s awareness that inequality is apt to corrupt the sentiments of actual spectators. Furthermore, despite acknowledging the stability granted by the admiration of the powerful, Smith expresses anxieties regarding the flaws of such public spectatorship and the possibility of political and criminal abuses of power. These kinds of anxieties take on even more prominence in the context of a democratic society and ought to qualify turns to the supposed force of the “people’s gaze” to affect the actions of those in power. Any effect the people’s gaze will have on the behavior of those they watch will depend both on their capacity to scrutinize that person and for that person to possess a conscience sensitive not merely to public opinion but moral and political ideals.
While Smith does not synthesize his insights on how harshly people judge the poor with his insights regarding the misery of the innocent person accused of a crime, contemporary scholarship supports the notion that the poor people may find themselves more often scrutinized by other members of the community and by government institutions. Although Smith does not address how the state might act as a spectator of the people, we can put his insights in conversation with contemporary forms of state surveillance that reflect prejudice and exacerbate social inequality. State interventions against the privacy of poor people include the moralization of women’s sexual histories and the forced divulging of experiences of sexual violence that they may find psychologically distressing. Unequal experiences of suspicion, censure, and shame debilitate the sense of communal belonging, sovereignty, and equality of individuals upon which a robust democracy depends. In this manner, the moral psychological harms of shame and self-doubt caused by actual spectators contributes to democratic disempowerment. Contemporary forms of actual spectatorship, in the form of state surveillance and public scrutiny, often contradict one of the impartial spectators’ fundamental principles: “that we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it” (III.3.4, 137).

Smith’s sensitivity to the public exposure of the poor is consistent with other research on Smith’s writings on economic inequality more broadly. Although Smith was committed to the impartial execution of the rule of law, he exhibited partiality toward policies that would benefit the working poor and minimize the burden they would have to bear if “things go wrong.” He may have developed a theoretical partiality towards the poor in order to counteract the partiality

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269 Ibid., 111.
270 Ibid., 112-114
towards the wealthy that he observed prevailing in reality, including the influence of merchants over government policies and laws that served to “oppress the poor.”\textsuperscript{272} In other words, Smith may have sought to balance out the asymmetrical advantages of the wealthy in order “to produce more equal treatment of all” and to correct biases by “introducing a countervailing bias.”\textsuperscript{273}

*Theory of Moral Sentiments* shows Smith reflecting on how forms of inequality determine how different kinds of people experience being observed by others.

However, the problems of public exposure are not merely institutional or legal; it is not only the state that disproportionately scrutinizes the poor, but ordinary people who judge, shame, and report others to authorities. Although the lack of privacy rights of the poor is evidenced by regulations and reinforced by case law, Khiara M. Bridges emphasizes it is a problem that cannot be resolved simply through legal change but necessitates changes in cultural discourse and perceptions of poverty.\textsuperscript{274} This is similarly the case with issues surrounding survivors of sexual violence, wherein grassroots movements like #MeToo seek to “de-stigmatize the act of surviving”\textsuperscript{275} and have contributed to increased public discourse regarding rape culture. Entrance into the public stage to change culture, discourses, and policies requires overcoming psychological difficulties; theorizing these difficulties and highlighting them in public discourse may be important to help readjust actual spectators’ reactions to such exposure.


\textsuperscript{273} Schliesser, *Adam Smith*, 203,208.

\textsuperscript{274} Bridges, *The Poverty of Privacy Rights*, 63.

Smith similarly indicates the extent to which a good society relies on the proper social formation of moral character and judgments. However, while he may help elucidate the problems posed by activities of spectatorship, Smith’s emphasis on morality may not be enough. Rather than offer political or institutional solutions, or advocate for substantial changes in cultural discourses, Smith relies on the development of the impartial spectator as a necessary voice to harken all individuals to consider the fundamental equality of each other and to help guide them towards just behavior. In the long run, correcting prejudices, social stigmas, and moral constructions relating to experiences such as poverty and sexual violence, can be crucial to help improve the privacy of individuals and their experiences of visibility, but how ought the awareness of the harms of public exposure influence legal policy or institutional design?

We may take inspiration from Smith’s anxieties and blend them with the approach Schliesser attributes to his economic policies. That is, just as Smith may have sought to counteract the advantages of the wealthy in political and economic systems by attending to the well-being of the working poor, we ought to design policies that relate to the surveillance and regulation of the lives of ordinary people in such a manner that they specifically counteract the disadvantages that different populations face when publicly exposed due to the effects of economic inequality and other potential sources of social stigma. As it continues to grapple with implications of twenty-first century technological development, privacy law ought to be sensitive to various forms of psychological and reputational harms of compelled public exposure that affect the moral autonomy of individuals.\(^\text{276}\) The privacy that Smith’s account points toward cannot be satisfied by isolation or public ignorance. Rather, Smith’s account suggests the

importance of private spaces of interactions with others, particularly those who may be more sympathetic than the broader society. Despite the potential hostility of the public, all of these people desire sympathy and love; protecting their control over the terms of how they reveal themselves to others and their access to more discreet and sympathetic audiences are crucial resources for mitigating their suffering. Equalizing the experiences of being seen on the public stage and minimizing the likelihood of individuals being subject to undeserved blame may be essential aspects of the broader goals of empowering individuals with respect to democratic political participation and liberties.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: Toward a Liberal Democratic Approach to Spectatorship

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized a double-sided conception of the notion of political spectatorship, whereby experiences of seeing and being seen are intimately connected. By examining the approaches to spectatorship in the works of Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and Adam Smith, I have highlighted aspects of political societies that may shape the experiences of spectators, including who is observed by what kind of audience and whether those who are seen feel the weight of the scrutiny of spectators, or conversely, are empowered by their influence over their audience. In doing so, I have explored how the weaknesses and dangers of watching others as a democratic resource stem less from the inherent nature of visual experience and more from the social, economic and political realities in which our experiences are embedded. It is important to keep in mind the major historical differences between our time and the societies of Hobbes, Bentham and Smith, who grappled with inequality that was not only economic but protected by aristocratic distinctions. By comparison, contemporary American society is more socially egalitarian with less political and legal barriers to social mobility. Nevertheless, unequal forms of power distort experiences of seeing and being seen by each other in our time as well.

In this conclusion, I summarize the three major generalizable insights offered by the foregoing chapters regarding the history of political thought that remain relevant for contemporary spectatorship. I then outline the liberal ideals of autonomy and pluralism that must be reaffirmed as crucial bedrock for a liberal democratic approach to political spectatorship. I end by reflecting on contemporary issues of media consumption and privacy to put the insights
examined in this dissertation in conversation with contemporary problems of spectatorship. My approach to spectatorship acknowledges that it is an essential component of liberal democratic politics today that demands renewed attention to the ways that social power relations, political authority, and corporations impact the daily experiences of ordinary people.

I. Insights from the History of Political Thought

Seeing as Subjection, Not as Surveillance of the Powerful

Contrary to embraces of the people’s gaze as a sufficient resource of democratic power exercised over political authorities, these thinkers entreat us to consider how seeing may entail various kinds of subjection for the spectators. First, insofar as what we see influences our ideas and our imaginations of what is politically possible and desirable, those who are seen have the potential to impact society. While there is no guarantee that people will support and agree with what they see, appearances on the public stage have the potential to attract public attention and direct it towards different political positions, issues, and values. What we see can emotionally move us toward concerns of justice, but it can also inspire our own personal aspirations, such as Smith’s arguments regarding the morally corrupting nature of people’s disproportionate interest in the wealthy and powerful.

The dangerous political and social consequences of experiences of watching false prophets and orators lies at the foundation of the Hobbesian state. Of course, the Hobbesian sovereign exercises a monopoly over language as a response to the dangers of rhetoric. However, through his discussions of deceptive performances of false miracles and of theatrical performances that result in mass psychogenic illness, Hobbes expresses concerns for how state authority ought to manage public appearances. Besides limiting the members of the community
who are able to appeal to a public audience, the Hobbesian sovereign seeks opportunities to shape the political imaginations of the people themselves in civic assemblies.

However, Hobbes’s account highlights two other features that mediate the people’s experiences of seeing as subjection. First, Hobbes’s criticisms of the scholastics, the Catholic Church, and other religious groups amount to an argument for transferring epistemic authority from religious leaders to the unified sovereign. Bringing religious and political authority under the state also means creating a single unified approach to human knowledge against the supernatural, superstitious, and conflicting doctrines that dominated at the time. Due to supernatural and superstitious beliefs, individuals could not properly interpret what they saw and were more easily deceived by others. Although it may be debated the extent to which Hobbes thought the sovereign should be committed to perpetuating accurate scientific doctrine, it is clear that the socialized understandings of human sense perception and the natural world may affect visual experiences.

Second, Hobbes draws our attention to the spectator who is not alone but a member of a broader audience, affected by the reactions of his fellows to their shared ocular experience, or what I call “horizontal subjection.” Hobbes’ account highlights social experiences of spectatorship and helps draw attention to the way other members of the democratic audience can affect the way people interpret and respond to that which they see. Hobbes’s wariness of watching is tied to his concerns about how other people affect the individual’s independent judgment and raise the possibility of collective experiences that threaten political order.

There may be some ways in which horizontal subjection depends on embodiment, or the physical experience of being amongst a crowd. Hobbes offers two different instances where the judgments of those surrounding us dampen our independent judgment: the false prophet using a
crowd of co-conspirators and the democratic assembly mesmerized at the mercy of the most enchanting speaker. Both serve to justify Hobbes’s antidemocratic approach to experiences of seeing and being seen. However, today’s commenters and political theorists alike reflect on the rise of a virtual counterpart, the Twitter mob, which influences the people’s political judgments. The phenomena of groups of people drawing attention to perceived wrongdoings and seeking social repercussions, such as corporate firings, that pervades online discourse evokes the Hobbesian phenomenon even while bypassing its physical nature. As I will go into greater detail in the final subsection of this chapter, an analogy could be drawn between Hobbes’s concerns about false prophets’ use of horizontal subjection to manipulate others with conspiring audiences to methods of online disinformation.

Besides the dangers inherent in the Hobbesian state management of experiences of spectatorship, even in a more politically free society, watching the wealthy and powerful may exacerbate their power by influencing the spectators. According to Smith, when a community appears to be more interested in, trusting, and admiring of the financially and politically advantaged, people are apt to emulate such successful people potentially at the detriment of developing moral judgment. Smith suggests such tendencies may further empower influential people, as, caring about public approval but seeing the excessive trust that others put in them, they may use deceit and manipulation in order to maximize and maintain their position. When spectators fail to express scrutiny of those that they watch, and instead suggest admiration and empathy, they prove to be an insufficient resource for political accountability. As a result,

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spectatorship may not be only potentially detrimental for the moral characters of the spectators, but also an impotent as a political tool. Rather than a resource for scrutiny, Smith considers the biased spectatorship of the powerful the source of stability in his aristocratic era, that only provocations of the most powerful passions can effectively disturb.

**Symmetrical Spectatorship as a Component of Representative Democracy**

To the extent to which spectatorship can be a resource for scrutinizing and disciplining the powerful, it is only as an element of a larger democratic institutional apparatus that includes forms of democratic participation, such as elections as well as exercises in freedoms of association whereby the people are able to see and be seen by each other. Through my reevaluation of Bentham’s arguments regarding publicity, I argue that spectatorship is at the heart of his model of representative democracy. While Bentham argues that a carefully circumscribed parliamentary audience would improve parliamentary debate by mitigating partisanship, he also praises its effects on those watching. The presence of spectators would improve trust in the quality of press reports of proceedings disseminated to the rest of the British public. In turn, observing political discussions and actions help cultivate the democratic character of the citizenry.

However, spectatorship is only one component of Bentham’s approach to representative democracy. Besides the freedom of the press, which mediates the lively events of parliament to “cool” any potential demagoguery while preserving its entertaining nature, Bentham’s later writings emphasize face-to-face interactions with other individuals, particularly in politically-minded associations, as forming the civic skills required to be a skeptical, independently thinking and willing individual to participate democratically, instead of just watching the decision-making of others. Minimizing state control over the abilities of individuals to appear before one another
within civil society is essential for cultivating the kinds of skeptical spectators that can use democratic institutions to leverage power over their political rulers.

Adam Smith’s model of the impartial spectator can add to Bentham’s approach to representative government by offering an example of how we may engage in spectatorship that is both emotional and reasonable, personal and impartial, and at a distance, yet not purely an experience of subjection for either the viewer or the viewed. Although Smith’s account emphasizes individual judgment, he offers a distinctly sociable account of humanity, whereby the pleasure we derive in seeing the happiness of others provides a foundation for morality. While Smith’s account emphasizes spectatorship as an experience that shapes moral and civic characters of individuals, he intimates crucial political consequences of the phenomenon that I have further developed.

Smith’s complex conceptualization of spectatorship allows for the power of that which we see to move us without simply determining our moral and political judgments; instead, the spectator mediates a variety of emotions and deliberates what a third party would think of the people they observe, taking into account their personal characteristics and the context in which they find themselves. Because we derive our moral and political judgments in part from what we observe, as well as from our sense of the judgments of others, Smith initially faced criticisms that his account was entirely conventionalist. Throughout revisions, he further emphasized how, through communion with the impartial spectator, the wise and virtuous individual has the capacity to disagree with, criticize, and refuse the typical or most popular social judgment. In this manner, even though Smith’s account casts doubt on seeing as an exercise of power over political leaders, his model of spectatorship offers a standard by which to evaluate better and worse forms of spectatorship.
Harms of Forced Public Exposure

While I call into question the sufficiency of spectatorship to exert disciplinary power over political authority, I also draw attention to the ways in which being seen is more likely to be a source of oppression and suffering for marginalized members of the political community. In this manner, vulnerability renders people especially subject to experiences of harmful public exposure. Rather than simply illuminating suffering that must be remedied, exposures of individuals’ vulnerabilities can subject them to unjust blame and censure. Smith’s multifaceted approach that considers the people as both spectators and experiencing the judgments of others, while lacking in institutional specificity, provides the basis for drawing attention away from the experiences of the great to those of the ordinary people. Considering the vulnerability of marginalized people to harmful experiences of being seen illuminates the demand for forms of public interactions that include elements of anonymity and privacy even as our society appears to be ever more committed to seeing and being seen by each other.

Smith shows how our interest in others can “degenerate” “into a troublesome and impertinent curiosity” to encroach upon the privacy of others (VII.iv.28, 337). By reconstructing an account of the harms that forced public exposure perpetuates, particularly against innocent and vulnerable people, I have sought to expand democratic theory’s notion of spectatorship to include the ways in which the people themselves are often under observation. A central aspect of Smith’s account of harmful exposure is the flipside of his skepticism of the power of observation to discipline the powerful: when the poor and powerless are not merely ignored, they are apt to be disproportionately and unfairly scrutinized and censured.

Although Smith provides the inspiration for a normative defense of the importance of privacy, particularly for the vulnerable, his philosophy admittedly lacks institutional solutions.
Bentham’s model of the Sotimion offers inspiration for considering how privacy and ways of avoiding the gaze of others might be mobilized to empower marginalized people. Admittedly, the Sotimion presents a myriad of problems, such as the separation of children from their families in a work-intensive orphanage, an open question regarding how women of different backgrounds would socialize together, and the continued exclusion of women from public life. However, it offers three important benefits for women in a country with major restrictions on reproductive rights as well as commercial participation: a refuge from public shaming regarding their sexuality that includes experiences of community rather than isolation, a legal solution to unwanted pregnancies as an alternative to illegal practices of private doctors that may have been abusive or neglectful, and the harnessing of the power of anonymity through which women could exercise discretion over their visitors and avoid the public eye.

These three institutional qualities may have had the potential to improve women’s autonomy and control over their own lives and social interactions as well as grant them the ability to exercise some amount of oversight and power over others that they were not able to enjoy in the broader society outside of the institution. In sum, the Sotimion represents how privacy can allow marginalized members of societies to (1) enjoy social relationships and the desire to see and be seen by others, while also avoiding prejudicial public scrutiny, and (2) benefit from tools of anonymity to exercise power over others.

A liberal democratic approach to spectatorship recognizes the reciprocal and interactive nature of experiences of seeing and being seen. Although the ability to observe the powerful may be a necessary precondition for accountability, it is not sufficient without attending to the advantages of that the politically, socially, and financially powerful have in influencing how they are seen by the public, let alone the ways in which the prejudices of the typical spectator may
render them deferential to the privileged individuals who dominate the public stage. At the same time, the people are simply not asymmetric spectators but also subject to myriad forms of observation, whether the citizen-spectator is a pregnant woman on Medicaid subject to a litany of intimate questions not asked of women on private insurance in a medical visit\textsuperscript{278} or a Muslim-American who changes her online behavior due to worries about government surveillance in the post-9/11 political atmosphere.\textsuperscript{279} Inequality substantially determines how people experience seeing and being seen.

**II. The Importance of Autonomy and Pluralism for Democratic Spectatorship**

Considering the influence that our observations have on our formation of moral and political judgment as well as the disproportionate ways that different people experience being seen, there are two liberal principles that can help buttress democratic spectatorship: autonomy and pluralism. Green’s negative ideal of candor, which solely accounts for minimizing political leaders’ control of the terms of their own public appearances, is not enough to sustain liberal democracy. It fails to adequately address three major democratic concerns: (1) the distinctly ocular or aesthetic advantages enjoyed by the socially, economically, and politically powerful; (2) how the people themselves are already seen by each other, corporations, and the state; and (3) how the people want to control the terms of their own appearances, both by accessing the public stage and by resisting unwanted and intellectually and morally burdensome surveillance.

\textsuperscript{278} Khiara M. Bridges, *The Poverty of Privacy Rights* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017). I have a working paper that puts Smith’s account of the harms of public exposure in conversation with the lack of privacy experienced by pregnant women on Medicaid as documented by Bridges.

Turning to the ideals of autonomy and pluralism allows us to reorient the approach to democratic spectatorship from a focus on how the audience might passively exercise power over political authority to how individuals’ access to the public stage mitigates both the domination of the powerful over the imaginations of the spectators and oppressive forms of public scrutiny of the vulnerable. Both of these problems suggest that democratic empowerment of the people vis-à-vis political and social forms of subjection demand attending to the ways in which people can exercise control over the opportunities they have to present themselves to others, or not. In this manner, the people’s abilities to freely communicate, assemble, and protest, including through the use of digital media, which help transform spectators into the producers and actors on the public stage, are foundational to liberal democratic politics today.

Autonomy and pluralism can intersect to produce both democratic participation and personal privacy. Nancy Rosenblum refers to the pluralist character of political participation as facilitating “shifting involvements,” which allow individuals to have multifaceted personalities and some measure of privacy by never being completely known by others.280 Shifting involvements are an important feature of liberal democratic spectatorship as well. Individuals ought to have significant discretion over breadth of details about themselves that they share with not only the state but within nonstate organizations in which they participate.

With respect to issues of spectatorship, participation within various associations can serve a variety of purposes. First, as suggested above, the combined effect of pluralist participation results in some measure of privacy, as individuals develop different layers of their identity that prevent them from being whole subsumed by one or another. Second, membership within a particular group association might be toward the purpose of accessing a particular audience of

others, allowing for private social interactions without requiring full public disclosure. Third, some associations may seek outward public display, such as political advocacy groups that organize public protests, influencing the events of the public stage that citizen-spectators can watch. Some of these groups may incorporate practices of anonymity that further protect the personal details of members while also using publicity for political goals.

By participating in multiple different kinds of groups, such as professional career associations, trade unions, political parties, political advocacy groups, and religious organizations, individuals can both influence the images of politics that spectators can watch as well as develop multifaceted identities in various social contexts, allowing for overall privacy without isolation. The liberal character of a political society relies on a pluralist structure in which individuals are able to both enter and exit multiple separate spheres of action. Rosenblum brings in feminist theory to illustrate the importance of freedom to enter and withdraw. Women’s lack of access to spheres beyond domestic life produces tendencies of guilt and self-sacrifice because they see themselves primarily in terms of their personal relationships. From this point of view, a feminist argument for better access to the public sphere articulates a negative liberty of freedom from socially imposed identity rather than a positive “aspiration for freedom for self-cultivation.”

Consequently, liberty in terms of spectatorship and surveillance in a democracy is about access to viewing and participating on the public stage, being seen by the state and community,

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281 Group membership such as this can occur both offline and online. In person meetings would likely occur within a private space, although total anonymity among members might be less assured by virtue of face-to-face interaction, whereas online, members of an online forum may be able to use aliases to maintain anonymity among each other, but, depending on where the forum is hosted, may be subject to data collection by corporations or the state.

282 Rosenblum, 145.
but it also includes the ability to retreat from view. We can defend liberty in positive terms by emphasizing the constructive capacity of individuals to participate in political spectacle and be recognized or represented. However, we can also equally define liberty negatively, by emphasizing the individual’s freedom from her reduction to an identity imposed by her social circumstances or the state’s vision of her.

I emphasize the principles of autonomy and pluralism to help delineate the limits of the philosophers’ arguments offered in earlier chapters. For the sake of shaping the debates of politicians, Bentham excludes women from the public audience of parliament. By doing so, he compounds their already marginalized political status and limits the extent to which they could enjoy political recognition and influence the image of politics that all could see.

At the same time, Bentham’s Sotimion represents a refuge for withdrawal from the pressures from laws and social norms that fused women’s sexuality to their social worth. The Sotimion brings to mind how populations who suffer from legal and social discrimination may be the most in need of escape from state and social forms of surveillance and control. In the United States, legally and socially marginalized populations may be more likely to feel certain harms from “being seen.” However, the demand for the Sotimion reflected larger underlying problems of political, legal, and social obstacles to women’s attainment of full civic equality. Improvements in legal, political, and social recognition not only offers more opportunities for the pleasurable forms of being seen on the public stage, but also appears to offer the individual more discretion and access to privacy without exacerbating experiences of exclusion.

As a result, while a liberal democratic society can be strengthened by respect for refuges from broader public scrutiny that provide spaces social interactions and mutual experiences of seeing and being seen, the need for such refuges often signals underlying exclusionary state and
social practices that require remediation to better empower all people. Thus, while the most vulnerable members of society may be the most at risk of harmful forms of forced public exposure without their private autonomy respected by others, privacy within continued public exclusion is insufficient for long-term democratic empowerment.

Indeed, underlying forms of inequality that render privacy particularly valuable might be eradicated through activism, legislation, or even substantial economic transformation. For example, even Rosenblum’s “shifting involvements” assume open access and certain social preconditions, such as economic capacity.283 Advocacy for such political changes may even require sacrificing privacy for visibility to both improve the status of such people as well as push back against state surveillance. However, this catch-22, whereby the pursuit of equal respect and autonomy, including privacy, appears to require public exposure can be mitigated by affirming the value of anonymity for political mobilization of the most vulnerable members of a democracy.284 Like in the Sotimion, the asymmetric use of oversight and judgment without being seen can be particularly empowering for marginalized members of the community. By highlighting the political potential of anonymity, we gain a fuller picture of the experiences of the people in an ocular or audience democracy: they may be spectators, actors, or stagehands who influence images of politics that all see while maintaining personal anonymity.

If political participation and social change eventually reconfigures the fulcrums that buttress political, social, and economic forms of inequality and render forced public exposure so particularly harmful, a question remains: could society move beyond privacy?

Smith’s account of the harms of forced public exposure helps clarify the enduring nature of the need for individuals themselves to be able to determine the extent to which they are observed and judged by others and in which contexts. Forced public exposure threatens two kinds of harms: the misery of humiliation and threats to moral autonomy. It is precisely because he saw how sympathy, openness, and honesty was becoming more pervasive throughout European cultures that Smith also warned of the potency of our interest in others and appealed to prudence to keep us from trespassing the personal discretion each of us may have with respect to how we share ourselves with each other. Human imperfection ensures that actual spectators will always be at risk of erring in their scrutiny of others and their distribution of blame or praise. The individual’s impartial spectator can suffer accordingly. Therefore, the ability of the individual to retreat from public scrutiny and reflect on her own character and her evaluations of others is crucial to sustain the moral fortitude demanded by a distinctly democratic community that relies on independent judgments of individuals. Nevertheless, even when spectators judge accurately, Smith’s philosophy allows us to question whether even public shaming of those who are truly “blameworthy” is actually desirable for our communities.

Due to the ways in which political power can be exercised by influencing what people see and by exposing people to public scrutiny, it is essential that we consider what conditions facilitate the development of independent judgment required by democratic spectatorship. Smith’s model shows the value of privacy for both drawing attention to the ways in which public exposure disproportionately harms the most vulnerable and how such violations of privacy can even thwart individuals’ independent moral and political judgments.
III. Threats to Autonomy and Pluralism in Twenty-First Century Spectatorship

Being seen appears to have been especially important to experiences of seeing in seventeenth through early nineteenth century, when one couldn’t watch political, religious, or social events without being there in person, and sometimes within a group of people. While such in-person experiences occur today, more often we experience events through television, the internet, print photography, or other media. Although there are important differences between virtual and physical interactions, aspects of digital media render even mediated spectatorship a social phenomenon. Using applications such as Twitter, Facebook (including Instagram), YouTube, and Reddit, people seek the sense of human connection and being members of a larger community online. The usage of these and other online networks should not be considered any less real or impactful just because such connections do not depend on face-to-face in-person interactions. Of course, often online interactions bleed into physical consequences in the so-called “real world.” As such, if we want to understand spectatorship as a contemporary, social phenomenon, we ought to take seriously the political consequences of virtual, online experiences.

Even though digital technology mediates many contemporary experiences of watching, it embeds watching within both social interactions and digital surveillance. The advertising business model relies on the collection of information about users’ habits and identities to better target them with ads and content that will best appeal to their particular interests.285 As I note in the conclusion to Chapter 3, because a cycle of seeing and being seen propels people’s digital consumption, digital media platforms have a tendency to reaffirm and exacerbate people’s prejudices and preferences, rather than transform them by introducing them to new or different

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topics or ideas.\textsuperscript{286} Thus, companies’ actions both threaten users’ privacy and exert control over what they observe. Even the promise of “shifting involvements” to protect privacy is threatened by digital marketing methods such as identity resolution, through which companies like Acxiom collect both digital and physical footprints and match them to a single individual.\textsuperscript{287}

Digital media differs from the press that figured so prominently in Bentham’s model of representative democracy, as a medium by which people observed and cultivated political preferences. Bentham praises the entertaining power of coverage of political news, while nevertheless insisting that newspapers would best succeed by publishing as many different kinds of topics and political perspectives as possible. Digital media calls into question the easy alliance that Bentham suggests between entertainment and political knowledge. Rather than convert a person only interested in sports to becoming more familiar with and interested in political news, platforms tend to appeal to and exacerbate people’s preexisting preferences by prioritizing grabbing and keeping people’s attention. This includes their political preferences. Bentham also marveled at the possibilities of trustworthy governance when policies are debated while “a whole nation has been spectators” (PT, 31). Because each individual sees different depictions of political reality from others, we may not be so optimistic about the possibility of trust-building through shared observational experience. Additionally, although platforms’ algorithms make decisions about the dissemination of content akin to the decisions made by editors of other traditional media outlets, the details of their functioning are rarely subject to either internal or

external investigation or scrutiny. Unlike traditional media publishers, online platforms are not legally liable for what users share (with notable exceptions relating to federal criminal law and intellectual property law). On the one hand, this allows online platforms to appear a more democratic form of media as users are relatively free to share their own content reaching millions of people. On the other hand, because of the relative dominance of a few social platform sites, many people’s experiences of the internet are predominantly determined by the business decisions of a handful of powerful companies.

It is crucial to emphasize these unique characteristics of digital media because it is by exploiting data collection and marketing strategies that governmental, corporate, and individual actors can use digital media toward political goals that threaten individuals’ autonomy and the pluralist nature of society. In order to illustrate how actors can impact others’ experiences of seeing and being seen using digital media, I first examine the recent Russian disinformation efforts. The disinformation strategies included constructing false identities online and appealing to different audiences throughout the pluralist society, all of which was crucially facilitated by the data collected about users which is a core aspect of digital technology businesses. While this political event has attracted the attention of members of the public and lawmakers alike, it ought not to overshadow other distinctly personal examples of manipulation of others using digital media that impact individuals’ democratic empowerment. For this reason, I then illuminate the way that social inequality extends into the digital experiences for women as well as

impoverished Americans. Finally, I conclude with a call to balance liberals’ wariness of the state with the demand of using democratic politics to empower individuals vis-à-vis forms of inequality that distort spectatorship.

**Disinformation Powered by Data Surveillance**

The data collection model that shapes what people see based on information collected about them was essential to the Russian interference in United States’ 2016 presidential election. The Russian state-supported Internet Research Agency (IRA), which originally spread disinformation domestically, was indicted for creating fake social media personas to attract American audiences, purchase political advertisements, spread divisive political messaging, and pay and recruit real Americans to stage rallies, in order to interfere in election.\(^\text{289}\) Disinformation is a kind of censorship that functions not by blocking access to content but by inundating people with too much information and false information.\(^\text{290}\) The IRA sought to construct audiences by exploiting the pluralist nature of American politics to target different Americans with political messaging attuned to their political preferences and passions.

While the IRA’s efforts often were directed toward messaging that supported Trump and criticized Clinton, the IRA also sought to construct “audiences among specific American identity groups, which could then be used to target them with content and advertising later on.”\(^\text{291}\) The


\(^{290}\) Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, 228-231, 236-245.

IRA created social media accounts to appeal to different types of voters and targeted them with political messaging based on their identities and preferences, including by creating Facebook groups such as “Secured Borders,” “Black Matters,” “LGBT United,” and “United Muslims of America.” Whether it used Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr or other websites, the IRA used memes and posts to target specific American audiences with messages that exacerbated cultural divisions. It abused perfectly legal forms of marketing like selling merchandise online in order to collect further personal information about American and better direct their advertisements to the most passionate devotees of different political causes. The IRA also used bots to amplify the tweets that IRA workers sent from their fake accounts. Lest we make the mistake of associating this strategy with verbal political discourse, it is crucial to highlight that the IRA was particularly successful at reaching Americans through Instagram and only increased its activity on the platform after the election until October 2017, coinciding with Facebook’s disclosures of account activity and shutdowns to Congress. It also disseminated voter fraud claims.

In these ways, the IRA exploited the pluralist nature of American society, facilitated by business models that have little concern for user privacy, with consequences for individuals’ autonomy by sowing distrust and even dampening the vote of certain demographics. It is extremely difficult to measure the actual effects of the disinformation campaign on the outcome

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293 Broderick.
294 Roose, “Russian Trolls Came for Instagram, Too.”
296 Roose, “Russian Trolls Came for Instagram, Too.”
of the 2016 election and on American political culture more generally. Instead, I highlight the IRA’s efforts in order to show how combining surveillance and media consumption facilitates the kinds of strategies through which actors might try to manipulate both the political expressions of the people and what they see about their political environments. By exploiting the pluralist nature of society and corporate data collection about social media users, the IRA threatened individuals’ autonomy and democratic empowerment, particularly individuals who already felt disenfranchised by American policies. In the words of Andrew Fede, an activist who unwittingly accepted help from a group linked to a Russian company (although not formally named in the indictment), for publicizing his own post-election anti-Trump rally, “poorly served communities with legitimate grievances, ‘will not want their voices or may stop coming to rallies,’” for fear of continued efforts of political manipulation. Fede laments, “The Russians accomplished what they wanted to accomplish. They took our freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, a free press – and they used them against us.” Consequently, disinformation and the construction of audiences functions not necessarily to project a particular sense of political reality but to spread enough doubt and distrust that democratic participation appears inherently suspect or foolish.

IRA’s strategies illuminate the role of audience construction in the process of distorting political spectatorship and democratic disempowerment. By using fake social media accounts and bots, the IRA’s strategy is reminiscent of the false prophet who uses a crowd of co-conspirators to deceive “many more” about the false miracle he appears to perform on another.

298 Gordon.
My analysis of Bentham and Hobbes’s accounts emphasize the importance of the people’s ability to trust what they see about the world around them in order to make political judgments. While Bentham sees the parliamentary audience as a resource in favor of the truth to maintain a check on the accuracy of the press, Hobbes helps us focus on the potential for audiences to be epistemologically dangerous. Hobbes argues for the importance of epistemic authority, turning to the power of the sovereign, in order to immunize individuals from the deceit of false prophets and to restrain the ability of dangerous actors from attracting public audiences in the first place.

Admittedly, Hobbes worries more about the dangers of false prophets using visual tricks to “enchant” men whereas political manipulation through social media today illuminates a different danger – democratic disenchantment. Without the ability to trust what they read or see, or that the accounts they are interacting with are genuine political activists, Americans are apt to become even more skeptical of their ability to influence American politics. These problems appear only likely to increase in light of further technological developments. With the rise of deepfake video technology that allows for people to present convincing but false video depictions of actions and speeches, there are calls to better treat mediated photography and video the way that Hobbes treated mediated rumors of performed miracles: with skepticism.299 But as computer science professor Nasir Memon argues, the bigger problem may be that “‘even truth will not be believed.’”300 Warnings of a “post-truth politics” are reminiscent of Hobbes’s concerns that supernatural doctrine prevent people from being able to properly interpret what

they see with their own eyes. While we may want to avoid Hobbes’s dependence on the sovereign, we may find inspiration in his calls for educational reform; improvements in digital literacy programs may help individuals better understand, evaluate, and trust or reject what they see. Nevertheless, democratic societies can put pressure on corporate entities to preempt and mitigate dangers of technological abuse.

American Social Inequality Online

Although the IRA’s disinformation efforts highlight how digital media has the potential to influence a political institution as essential to democracy as legitimate elections and voter participation, we gain a fuller view of the democratic effects of digital media and privacy by considering experiences often relegated to the personal instead of the political. New technologies appear to be important tools for individuals being able to present and express themselves beyond spectatorship, but they also introduce new problems pertaining to violations of privacy and the unjust scrutiny of ordinary people. Assessing ways in which technologies are easily abused in order to exercise forms of social control over other individuals is necessary to consider what kind of changes might be considered in order to prevent such abuses all the while confronting how social power relations may render some members of the community more vulnerable to harms of forced exposure and fear of public presentation than others. Such disproportionate experiences may be useful for considering potential solutions in the future.

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown how asking how thinkers from the traditional canon of western political thought considered experiences of seeing and being seen brings to the fore their writings on the experiences of women. Smith’s comparison of the survivor of sexual assault to the man who breaks a promise made under threat of duress brings to the fore the ways in which social prejudices and personal judgments about others can muddy our judgments of true
questions of justice. Bentham’s Sotimion presents an institutional response to a society’s emphasis on women’s sexuality as the basis of their very livelihood, further impacted by various legal, political, and economic hurdles.

Although all individuals are vulnerable to various harms of manipulation and privacy, highlighting the experiences that disproportionately impact women draw out the deeply personal yet no less political consequences of such violations. Three of the major media platforms that are increasingly under scrutiny for their political power, were founded toward the end of the visual objectification of women: Mark Zuckerberg’s first application, “Facemash” used the ID photos of female Harvard undergraduates to ask users to rank which of two women was more attractive,\(^{301}\) Google developed the image search function in response to text searches for Jennifer Lopez’s appearance in a low-cut dress at the red carpet of the Grammy’s in 2000,\(^{302}\) and the creators of YouTube were inspired by the difficulty of finding online videos of Justin Timberlake’s exposure of Janet Jackson’s bare breast at the Superbowl 2004.\(^{303}\) Women are disproportionately subject to a myriad of privacy invasions that impact their experiences of being seen: domestic abuse through smart technology controlling locks, cameras, and lights.\(^{304}\)


cyberstalking through apps able to secretly record video,\textsuperscript{305} the dissemination of revealing photos of them sometimes by jilted exes but also by unknown hackers,\textsuperscript{306} doxxings (the dissemination of personal information like a full name or home address) by strangers online for reasons as banal such as the sharing of an attractive photo on Instagram,\textsuperscript{307} or harassments and death threats that influence women’s physical lives,\textsuperscript{308} including a recent study showing black women are especially targeted by harassment on Twitter.\textsuperscript{309} Even deepfake videos, which have yet to impact American politics, have already affected women’s lives, with individuals superimposing (predominantly female) celebrities’ faces onto pornographic videos without their consent.\textsuperscript{310}

This litany of experiences bridging the virtual and physical that subject people to feelings of fear, humiliation, disempowerment, insecurity, and the feeling that their bodies do not belong solely to themselves. While the internet offers incredible opportunities for human connection, political expression, and the benefits and pleasures of self-presentation, technology can also be used to perpetuate social inequalities. The instances listed above affect the extent to which women feel free to enjoy the freedoms of expression and participation online and off. It is

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difficult to think of these twenty-first century experiences in the context of this dissertation without recalling Hobbes’s account of the Milesian officials’ use of nudity to socially control women’s passions.

While I highlight these contemporary experiences of women because they are reminiscent of discussions of public scrutiny that I’ve examined in Hobbes’s, Bentham’s, and Smith’s texts, other members of the community are subject to similarly unjust forms of invasions of privacy, social surveillance, and control. These thinkers also highlight the effects of socioeconomic inequality, which is also relevant to digital privacy today, with low-income Americans particularly vulnerable to various kinds of privacy harms that relate to “employment screening, access to higher education, and predictive policing.”

Low-wage workers are subject to employers’ tracking of their movements via GPS devices, “facial recognition technology to ensure employees are smiling enough,” and digital health monitors to decrease health insurance rates.” These digital forms of surveillance complement offline forms of disproportionate surveillance of the poor, including state Medicaid programs that require invasive psychosocial screenings of pregnant people seeking prenatal care. In fact, Americans of low socioeconomic backgrounds worry about physical safety, whether from community violence or from being unfairly targeted by law enforcement, as well as their personal data, which they don’t trust law enforcement to protect.

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312 Mary Madden, “Privacy, Security, and Digital Inequality: How Technology Experiences and Resources Vary by Socioeconomic Status, Race, and Ethnicity” Data & Society Research Institute, September 27, 2017.
314 Madden, “Privacy, Security, and Digital Inequality: How Technology Experiences and Resources Vary by Socioeconomic Status, Race, and Ethnicity,” 91.
While individuals, corporate, and governmental actors need to be held accountable for how they use technology to manipulate or harm others, we must acknowledge the ways in which social power relations impact people’s experiences of seeing and being seen, virtually and physically. In doing so, we must also confront how various corporations’ make politically and personally consequential decisions that impact the United States and the rest of the world.

**Democratic Politics and Corporate Responsibility**

Political scandals have helped drive increased governmental scrutiny over Facebook and other corporate giants in digital technology, ranging from concerns about user privacy addressed by actions such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation to questions about antitrust regulation in the United States. The IRA’s disinformation strategies have been adopted by domestic actors in the US and elsewhere. Additionally, Cambridge Analytica allegedly misused data that had been collected about Facebook users in order to microtarget users with political ads. In the process, it violated users’ privacy by surreptitiously harvesting personal data, including “real names, locations, and contact details,” using an app disguised as a personality quiz, for the benefit of political campaigns. While the main actors in these

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317 Alex Hern, “Cambridge Analytica: How Did It Turn Clicks into Votes? | News | The Guardian,” TheGuardian.com, May 6, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/06/cambridge-analytica-how-turn-clicks-into-votes-christopher-wylie. With online microtargeting, political actors can communicate only to specific individuals, bypassing public scrutiny and deliberation at a “scale, speed, and…capacity to amplify information” beyond similar approaches such as direct mail strategies (Kim et al. 533). See Young Mie Kim et al., “The Stealth Media? Groups and Targets behind Divisive Issue
instances vary, including state authorities as well as private entities, they all illustrate the way organizational and financial capacities give actors great advantages in manipulating what at first glance appears to be a more democratic media environment. They show how being able to observe what attracts eyeballs, essential to the current business models of digital media platforms, is key to different kinds of political manipulation.

As a result, in order to consider how to develop autonomy and pluralism on behalf of individual citizens toward the end of democratic empowerment, we must address not only governmental abuses of power but also the actions of various corporations. David Runciman singles out Facebook, and broaches the political problems presented by its actions by comparing it to the Hobbesian Leviathan. While Facebook does not have legitimate coercive power, Runciman argues it has the capacity to undermine American democracy. It fulfills the people’s desires for personal freedom, and, I would add, seeing and being seen by each other, without granting them political control. Runciman’s comparison suggests a solution: might Hobbes provide inspiration for expanding state control over the corporations?

In light of the ways in which violations of privacy present both political dangers and harms to individuals, it is essential to consider how liberal democratic states may mitigate the vast power that corporations have to opaquely collect, share, and use data to impact the people’s experiences of seeing and being seen. It is also necessary to consider how corporate and political actors can counteract forms of social inequality that render the digital environment more welcoming, navigable, and safe for some more than others. In this manner, Hobbes’s emphasis on state sovereignty and the use of political authority to shape the conditions of


society, including counteracting competing forms of social power, can be a useful insight for contemporary liberals to better reckon with expansive corporate power.

That said, it is important to keep in mind the ways that states themselves are at risk of using technologies to exert control over their own people, which must be prevented by further democratic participation and oversight. For example, the IRA’s methods were first perfected to affect domestic politics before applying such tactics to interference in other countries. Nevertheless, there is a broad spectrum of possibilities of political oversight and regulation of private businesses that still avoids Hobbesian state control over the terms of who and what is seen by the people. Representative democratic institutions may be mobilized to regulate and limit the powers of corporations insofar as they impact the privacy and autonomy of individuals, and this can be done in a way that respects the freedoms of civil society as well, without devolving into state domination. Digital literacy programs can also empower individuals to better exercise their own judgment rather than defer to political or social authorities. At the same time, on their own, individuals can do little to counteract the structural nature of companies’ approaches to data collection, highlighting the continued importance of collective instruments of democratic power.

Adam’s Smith’s model of spectatorship, both with the hope it offers for how we can engage in thoughtful, critical, and reflective, spectatorship and the warnings it gives for our need to respect others’ control over how they are exposed to others, offers a model for the ethical approaches that might be helpful to guide questions of state intervention and pushback against both state and corporate powers. However, as I note in the conclusion to Chapter 4, although we

need such a resource for understanding how to better judge and counter social prejudices and its effects on individuals, we must also turn to legal and institutional solutions for protecting people’s privacy. Just as Smith may have sought to counteract the advantages of the wealthy and powerful, we may consider the ways in which we might use politics and the law to counter rather than reify inequality in terms of people’s experiences of ostracization, exposure, and democratic disempowerment.

While political scandals have attracted enhanced scrutiny of the digital media environment, democratic responses to digital technology must not overlook the various personal and political experiences of ordinary, vulnerable people that range from attempts to dampen their participation to the harms of violations of privacy. Technological changes, such as the spreading of internet connectivity including through mobile devices that allows for more photo and video distribution accessible to ordinary citizens, promise the possibility of empowerment of ordinary people, giving them new tools to draw attention to the ways in which they may suffer at the hands of the powerful. But with photography or video just as with speech, the actions that are taken in response remain determined by how people respond to, interpret, and evaluate what they see and who possesses the institutional power to shape those responses and take action, or not.

Although experiences of spectatorship cannot replace representative democratic institutions, they have been a part of their functioning in theory and practice for centuries. In the digital media environment, our fundamental desires to see and be seen trap us in a transparent web delineated not only by our social relationships but also our aspirations, baser tastes, or whatever has attracted our eyes in the past, tethering our future. Although the decisions behind

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the design and business of these technologies can sometimes appear merely technical, they have political consequences that strike at a deeply personal level of our everyday observations and interactions. To best grapple with prominence of experiences of spectatorship in contemporary democratic politics, we must be wary of easy distinctions between the virtual and the real, the passive and the active, and the personal and the political. Furthermore, we must confront how the abilities to influence what people see, to watch and institutionally respond to the actions of the politically powerful, and retreat from public view, tend to be unequally distributed. Rebalancing these abilities is necessary in order to empower ordinary people and improve the functioning of liberal democracy today. While we cannot depend on the people’s gaze as a mechanism for political accountability, we can push for democratic participation, institutional reforms, corporate regulations, and cultural changes to correct the unequal scrutiny applied to ordinary people and the predominance of the socially, economically, and politically powerful on the public stage.
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