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DISARMING, SIMPLE, AND SWEET: AUGUSTINE'S REPUBLICAN RHETORIC

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Just as the property of roundness—by virtue of which all lines drawn from the center of a circle to its circumference are equal—is the same in a large dish as in the tiniest coin, so the importance of justice is not diminished when small matters are performed with justice.

—Augustine *De Doctrina Christiana*¹

Augustine of Hippo is usually not invoked in discussions of rhetoric and deliberative democracy. His views on scriptural rhetoric and language have received extensive comment, but his alleged "otherworldliness" has led interpreters to wonder whether he has anything at all substantive to say about politics.² Furthermore, his early career as a teacher of rhetoric in Rome and his later position as a bishop in the Christian church would seem to make him an unlikely source for democratic and republican thought. Thus, it would appear farfetched to claim that Augustine can contribute to the burgeoning scholarship on "deliberative democracy," which came of age in the 1980s and has been called the heir to the tradition of "radical" democracy, rooted in Rousseau's distrust of representative institutions.³

1. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 4.99. Hereafter cited in the text.

2. The standard works that attribute to Augustine the view that politics is simply due to sin, *propter peccatum*, include Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), and R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

3. See the summary article by James Bohman, which includes an extensive bibliography of this field: "Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (1998): 400–425. On Augustine's general trust of representative institutions, see my "A Headless Body Politic? Augustine's Understanding of Political Representation," *History of Political Thought* 20, no. 4 (1999): 549–74.

Although many authors writing in this tradition have more recently come under the influence of Aristotle and Madison, and made their peace with representative institutions by viewing them as facilitating, rather than hindering, deliberation, their world and that of Augustine appears as far apart as ever.

Augustine's general political views, and his rhetorical idiom of moderate (*temperata*) glory, do not obviously lend themselves to the concerns of deliberative democrats for issues such as "public reason" with its attendant considerations about political justification of policy proposals that requires free public reasoning of equal citizens, the institutionalization of "public reason" in parliamentary procedures, and finally, constitutionalism, which considers the "background understandings and social conditions in deliberative practices."⁴ The concept of "public reason" is the most common (although perhaps not the most illuminating) area of these three in which one can look to Augustine for guidance, because one's understanding of "public reason" determines the limits of what kinds of arguments can be put forth in political speech. Religious views do not always pass muster for deliberative democrats because such views are seen to "impose" moral views on others and fail to fulfill the democratic requirements of reciprocity and reasonableness.⁵ I will address some of these concerns, in particular Augustine's political rhetoric and the standards of reasonableness he affords to it. However, I will also consider the relationship between his understanding of rhetoric and the basis of politics (which relates to the deliberative democrats' concern with constitutionalism) because of the fundamental *difference* between modern constitutionalism and Augustine's understanding of politics as a composite of poetic and persuasive activities that takes place within what he calls a moderate (*temperata*) style of rhetoric. Augustine's views are all the more informative because they are so distant from our own; he forces us to question the rationalist premises from which modern political life is derived. For instance, Iris Young argues that contemporary deliberative democrats are restrictive because they are too coolly

4. Bohman, "Survey Article," 413. On the other hand, Joshua Mitchell points to the necessity of learning from Augustine to illuminate the difference between speech and "talk," or useless prattle, in democracies, and the effect that difference has on the possibility of virtue in a liberal democracy. Mitchell, "The Use of Augustine, After 1989," *Political Theory* 27, no. 5 (1999): 694-705.

5. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement: Why Moral Conflict Cannot Be Avoided in Politics, and What Should Be Done About It* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 65. On these issues, see the symposium on Rawlsian liberalism and Augustinian politics in the *Journal of Peace and Justice Studies* 8, no. 2 (1997): 1-73.

rationalistic in a way that excludes communication through other modes such as "testimony, rhetoric, symbolic disruptions, storytelling and cultural- and gender-specific styles of communication."⁶ Contestation about the fundamental assumptions about politics and rhetoric from within that debate enables us to consider Augustine's alternative views on rhetoric, deliberation, and the purposes of politics.

The links between Augustine and the issues of deliberative democracy can be seen in some recent scholarship on Augustine, which suggests that Augustine had a more positive view of political life than earlier modern interpreters noticed. While some have argued that his understanding of political language is "postmodern" in the sense of deconstructing political myths that hide domination, others have argued on the basis of the analogy he draws between ethics and musical harmony that his political rhetoric can provide the basis of a robust democratic politics and rhetoric.⁷ Some interpreters, among them John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, draw an analogy between Augustine's "musical" ethics, which is based on his understanding of love of God and of neighbor, and his political views, with Pickstock characterizing his political ethics as democratic. Similarly, Michael Oakeshott concludes his *On Human Conduct* by comparing his own ideal constitution of a conversational *societas* with Augustine's model of speech:

And since men are apt to make gods whose characters reflect what they believe to be their own, the deity corresponding to this self-understanding is an Augustinian god of majestic imagination, who,

6. Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 129. See Bohman, "Survey Article," 410.

7. More positive accounts can be found in John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 380–434; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); and Peter Burnell, "The Status of Politics in St. Augustine's *City of God*," *History of Political Thought* 13, no. 1 (1992): 13–29. Comparisons between Augustine and postmodernism include Milbank's discussion of the *City of God* as a "counter-genealogy" of Roman paganism; Robert Dodaro, "Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 77–94; and J. Joyce Schuld, "Augustine, Foucault, and the Politics of Imperfection," *Journal of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2000): 1–18. On Augustine's musical democratic deliberations, see Catherine Pickstock, "Ascending Numbers: Augustine's *De Musica* and the Western Tradition," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998), 185–215. I have given a more sustained account of Augustine's essential attitude toward politics in *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

when he might have devised an untroublesome universe, had the nerve to create one composed of self-employed adventurers of unpredictable fancy, to announce to them some rules of conduct, and thus to acquire convives capable of "answering back" in civil tones with whom to pass eternity in conversation.⁸

For this group of interpreters, Augustine's understanding of love of God and neighbor necessitates a political model according to which political society is conceived as a series of deliberations and articulations by political actors who seek out the various sympathies of their partisan positions; and like a musical composition or a conversation, the activity of their seeking is the very constitution of their political society.

Deliberation is embedded within a political society, which Augustine defines as a "rational multitude which is associated by a communal concord [*concordi*] of the things it loves [*diligit*]."⁹ He defines political society in terms of a concord that simultaneously constitutes the underlying unity of society that is glimpsed only implicitly by partisans, as their encounters with common objects of love are themselves constituted by their deliberations, much like speeches are composed word by word, and music is composed tone by tone. The relationship between rhetoric and politics for Augustine is a close one, and his insights into rhetoric in general as well as political rhetoric specifically offer us insights into deliberative democratic political practices and their limitations. Augustine shows how small matters reveal a lot about large matters.¹⁰

I

We need to consider Augustine's understanding of language and rhetoric before turning to its political implications, because the purpose and limits of language illuminate the ability of human beings to weld together a community. Augustine articulated and practiced a mode of rhetoric that recognizes that language can never do anything more than communicate and make persuasive arguments concerning partial truths that are perpetually

8. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 324.

9. Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.24. Hereafter "*City of God*."

10. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1970), 6.10. Hereafter cited in the text. See also Luke 16:10-11.

subject to misunderstanding. Human being's relationship with language provides a model of political life because language constitutes a world of signifiers, whose meanings derive from agreement, and that, in Jean Bethke Elshtain's words, "both moves and one is moved by."¹¹ We move and are moved about in a world of language and of politics; and how we use and learn language, for Augustine, illuminates how we speak, deliberate, and act in political life. He describes the spoken and written word within a broader discussion of signification (which also includes bodily gestures) (*De Doctrina Christiana* 1.5, 2.3). Signs such as words signify things, including both physical objects or abstractions like justice, and even other signs. Their purpose is to communicate thoughts and emotions from one mind to the next. They are also ambiguous because they can have many meanings and because those meanings derive from agreement or convention: "People did not agree to use [them] because they were already meaningful; rather they became meaningful because people agreed to use them" (2.94). The claim that language is based on convention should not be taken too far because the function of language is natural and the means by which human beings interact among the plurality of experiences and things of creation. In a similar vein, Augustine elsewhere describes custom as a kind of second nature: "For it is not for nothing that custom is called a sort of second and fitted-on nature. But we see new senses in the judging of these kinds of corporeal things, built by custom, by another custom disappear."¹² Customs, including those that govern language and politics, constitute the particularly human way of engaging with the world and of making a home within it. Thus, Augustine draws a strong link between a child's self-identity and the language he learns to find his way through the world (*Confessions* 1.18). Furthermore, if language were simply natural, that is, if there were a permanent and exact correlation between signs and the things signified, humanity would possess a common language. Yet Augustine understood the story of the tower of Babel as teaching that the common language that humanity built was always a fabrication that falsely appeared to human beings as natural, and God introduced the confusion of languages to remind human beings of the impossibility of any human fabrication that accurately mimics God.¹³ The convention of language and the art of

11. Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 31.

12. *De Musica*, in *Writings of Saint Augustine, Fathers of the Church*, vol. 2, trans. Robert Catesby Taliaferro (New York: Cima Publishing, 1947), 6.7.19.

13. However, Augustine believed that nonverbal signs like facial expressions, glances of the eye, gestures, and the tone of one's voice constitute a kind of natural language common

rhetoric are positive goods in their own right, and he recommends that Christians embrace them (*De Doctrina Christiana* 2.101).

While language is the means by which human beings find their way within creation, language can also be the occasion of sin, and of domination in particular. He writes that superficial rhetorical style led Roman rhetoricians to be more concerned with the show of verbal skill rather than with justice, and to think that it was more contemptible to drop the "h" from "human" (*homo*) than it was to hate another human being: "Such a man will be most vigilantly on guard lest by a slip of the tongue he drop an 'h' and murder the word 'human': yet worries not at all that by the fury of his mind he may murder a real human" (*Confessions* 1.18). The emphasis on style over proper purpose also meant that speech became nothing more than the means to flatter emperors and to perpetuate the ideology of domination within the Roman empire (6.6).

The limitations of language and the problems of Roman culture illuminate the limitations of political life. Language binds people together in community, but its limitations also show the darkness that divides human beings from one another in what Hannah Arendt called the "web of relationships" and "space of appearances," in which language can serve as intentional and unintentional means of domination. For instance, Augustine laments how friendships, "our one true solace in human society," can be ripped apart by simple misunderstandings (*City of God* 19.6). He also laments the uncertainty that a judge faces when determining the guilt or innocence of an accused; the accused may proclaim innocence while actually being guilty, and the accusers and witnesses may be lying. The judge, and political actors in general, are caught in a tragic web of darkness brought about by the inability of language to communicate the truth of things with finality. The fallenness of the human condition gives it a tragic element because ignorance is unavoidable and human society compels judgment (19.6).¹⁴

to all nations. *Confessions* 1.8. Contemporary research seems to corroborate this view. See Paul Eckman, "Facial Expressions and Emotion," *American Psychologist* 48 (1993): 384-92.

14. See Paul Cornish, "Augustine on the Roman Republic" (paper presented to the American Political Science Association, Boston, 1998), 12; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 181ff. The limitations of language are not meant to indicate that Augustine regarded human beings as nonpolitical, but the reverse. As Rowan Williams has argued, "Augustine's condemnation of 'public' life in the classical world is, consistently, that it is not public enough." Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*," *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 68.

The uncertainty found among friends and among people under the same laws is worsened among strangers:

For if two men, each ignorant of the other's language, meet, and are compelled by some necessity not to pass on but to remain with one another, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, even though both are human beings. For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other, they are completely unable to associate with one another despite the similarity of their natures; and this is simply because of the diversity of tongues. So true is this that a man would more readily hold a conversation with his dog than with another man who is a foreigner. It is true that the Imperial City has imposed on subject nations not only her yoke but also her language, as a bond of peace and society, so that there should be no lack of interpreters but a great abundance of them. But how many great wars, what slaughter of men, what outpourings of human blood have been necessary to bring this about! (*City of God* 19.7)

This passage illuminates the dependence of community on language by showing the effects of the lack of a common language, both in making it impossible for two people to communicate and also by showing the evil of striving to forge some kind of community among different language communities by violence. This statement illuminates the collective action problem associated with the ambiguity of signs; their conventional nature makes their meaning uncertain, which makes it particularly difficult to conduct politics in which action necessarily assumes fixed and often abbreviated meanings. Augustine was aware of the difficulty that fixed and abbreviated meanings hide practices of domination, and he strove to articulate a rhetoric that was meant to be as free as possible of such practices.

From a general consideration of language, we turn to see that the purposes of rhetoric illuminate his particular understanding, not only of political rhetoric, but of politics itself. While Augustine, like Cicero, thought rhetoric was best used for just purposes by virtuous people, he thought it misleading to characterize rhetoric as an art, if by art one means a set of principles that one learns in the abstract and then applies to concrete situations. For Augustine, the reverse is true in rhetoric specifically and in language in general. One learns the rules of rhetoric through the specifics of the human language and not by applying rules. Just as one best learns

to walk by practice and imitation rather than simply by learning the rules (*De Doctrina Christiana* 2.134–35), the rules of rhetoric are best discovered by watching and imitating eloquent orators who “observe the rules because they are eloquent; they do not use them to become eloquent” (4.11; see also 4.21). The same is true generally for learning languages, as Augustine’s example of a child learning language through imitating those around him shows. Politics for Augustine has this same character. Its conventions and the means of communicating the just and appropriate arise through the specifics of a culture, so the attempt by deliberative democrats to articulate the appropriate rules of engagement ahead of time has its logic reversed because such rules consist of nothing more than abbreviations of preexisting customs and practices. Because of this “embedded” character of language and politics, Augustine stresses that, above all, the orator himself must be virtuous because his actions will persuade people of the truth of his words more effectively than the words themselves can do (4.151). The orator provides an *exemplum* for others to imitate, both in eloquence and in virtue.¹⁵

Augustine provides his most extensive treatment of rhetoric in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, a treatise on rhetoric for Christian preachers and teachers. While it is intended for people wishing to teach and exhort audiences to love God and neighbor within an ecclesiastical setting, it is possible to derive insight into political rhetoric from this treatise. Rhetoric has three purposes, and each purpose is associated with a particular style (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.74–143). First, teaching entails the presentation of facts and evidence, and it is accompanied by a “restrained” (*summis*) didactic style that attempts to engage listeners’ rationality. However, the orator must also use two other types of rhetoric in order to maintain his audience’s interest, and to engage the other faculties of their souls, including the passions.

An orator can also delight and charm an audience with the moderate (*temperata*) style; this rhetoric is usually used in praising or blaming someone or something (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.104, 111–17). It is characterized by ornamental eloquence meant simply to arouse the delight or perhaps the indignation of an audience, but it is not meant to rouse it to action because the beauty of the speech is meant to receive attention. While noting that all scriptural eloquence is meant ultimately either to teach or to move people to act toward salvation, Augustine provides the

15. See also Augustine *De Trinitate* 8.6.9 and *City of God* 5.14.

example of Paul's moderate ornamental style in listing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, where the graceful flow of phrases, balanced by other phrases, imitates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (4.111-17, quoting Romans 13:6-16). However, the purpose of the moderate style is not simply aesthetic. Rather, the act of praise, for instance, is an act of glorification; it is an act of remembrance that expresses a community's identity and, in Augustine's terms, its common objects of love. The moderate style of rhetoric is thus the type of rhetoric in which persuasive activities are embedded but is itself not intended to persuade, but rather to glorify.

Finally, the grand style is used to move listeners, especially antagonistic ones, to act: "But if listeners have to be moved rather than instructed, in order to make them act decisively on the knowledge that they have and lend their assent to matters which they admit to be true, then greater powers of oratory are required. In such cases what one needs are entreaties, rebukes, rousing speeches, solemn admonitions [*coercitationes*], and all other things which have the power to excite human emotions" (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.15; see 4.76-79 and 118-25). The grand style differs from the moderate style in purpose; in terms of eloquence, though, they differ on account of the latter's greater heartfelt emotion, and less so on account of rhetorical ornaments. Augustine followed classical rhetoric by including coercion within the grand style. He cites Cicero's threefold purpose of rhetoric to instruct listeners (by the restrained style), to delight them (by the moderate style), and to move them (by the grand style), where moving listeners is also "a matter of conquest [*flectere victoriae*]" (4.74, citing *De oratore* 69). Augustine borrows Cicero's military language of force to illuminate the difficulty in transferring the force of the argument to engaging people's wills: "The reason why it is a matter of conquest is that it is possible for a person to be instructed and delighted but not to give assent" (4.76). Even so, Augustine recommends mixing styles in order to gain the maximum effect of rhetoric in persuading audiences (4.104, 134).

Augustine explains these styles as suitable for Christian preachers but does not deal extensively with their other uses, despite his self-conscious borrowings from such Roman writers as Cicero and Quintilian, for whom these styles were to be used in public forums. He recognizes that these styles may be used in nonecclesiastical settings, and he mentions forensic rhetoric, the rhetoric suitable for public forums, in particular (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.97). All three styles are suitable to forensic rhetoric, but their use should be tuned to their appropriate purpose. For example, it is appropriate to use restrained rhetoric when dealing with financial matters, a

common topic for forensic rhetoric, because such a topic is mundane. On the other hand, grand rhetoric is appropriate for graver matters, such as when lives are at stake, but such rhetoric should be more restrained in comparison to that utilized in ecclesiastical settings by Christian preachers, for whom the salvation of souls is at stake. Thus, political rhetoric also mixes styles, but should be more moderate than that found in an ecclesiastical setting. However, the distance between political and ecclesiastical settings is not so far apart because he observes that finances deal with justice, and as seen in the epigraph used at the beginning of this essay, it makes little difference whether one speaks of justice about mundane matters like finance or of grander issues because both deal with justice. Further, Augustine provides an example of his own use of rhetoric to resolve a civil case in which he tried to convince the townspeople of Caesarea to cease their barbaric tradition of splitting off into factions and killing each other (4.139). He used the grand style to move them to stop, and he takes as evidence of his effectiveness the fact that he moved them to tears, which is a more reliable indicator of the effectiveness of the grand style than applause, as tears tend to signify a greater and more lasting change in the will. Political rhetoric differs both in degree and in kind from Christian rhetoric. Christian rhetoric deals with the salvation of souls, according to which all three styles are mixed together and where the grand style is utilized to move obstinate souls whose sins preclude them from accepting God's grace. Political rhetoric, on the other hand, is more restrained because its direct goal is not the salvation of souls, although it is about political justice, which deals less directly with the salvation of souls.¹⁶

We should note Augustine's view of scriptural rhetoric before turning to consider political rhetoric systematically. He long rejected scripture because he viewed it as inelegant compared to the writings of the Greek and Roman poets and philosophers; it was not until he encountered the books of the Platonists, who taught him about the difference between idea and matter, and his teacher Ambrose, who taught him the difference between figurative and literal meanings of scripture, that he regarded scrip-

16. Despite the *City of God* being Augustine's preeminent political work, it is no less restrained than his sermons. Its use of the grand style can be understood in light of the fact that the work's purpose is in part pastoral, and in part poetic in the sense that he intended it to be a monument for future generations set against an old civilization. As St. Jerome said, Augustine was the "second founder of the Christian faith." Jerome, Epistle 195. Its purpose went well beyond serving as a *livre de circonstance* or as something resembling the policy document of a modern political party.

ture as anything more than a collection of inelegant and vulgar stories for the common people (*Confessions* 3.5). Soon though, he became the first Christian writer to reflect systematically, not only on the content of scripture, but on its beauty and on its ability to serve, not only as *a* but as *the* model of rhetoric.¹⁷

Without reducing scriptural rhetoric to political rhetoric, and without implying that the purposes for reading scripture directly govern political rhetoric, we can draw out some implications of Augustine's approach to scriptural rhetoric for his understanding of political rhetoric. First, reading and hearing scripture is intended to transform the reader and audience, and to reorient their spiritual and moral lives within the horizon that scripture provides. Brian Stock shows how, for Augustine, the reading self is very much a text on which the words of scripture write when the self reads reflectively. The self understood as a kind of text receives its definition from the text it reads, and is always subject to revision, rereading, and ascent to understanding.¹⁸ Ecclesiastical communities reflect upon the meaning of scripture, but it is anachronistic to draw too sharp a line between figurative and allegorical meanings of the text: "Instead, the terms describe the biblical text as it is read by persons who are themselves undergoing the process of spiritual transformation that God is using the text to help bring about. *Allegoria* and *figura* highlight two distinctive and, from Augustine's point of view, necessary tensions in this process of transformative reading tensions between preservation and novelty, and eternity and temporality."¹⁹

Augustine's integration of scriptural interpretation, including its literal and figurative dimensions, with classical rhetoric illuminates the role that religion plays in his political thinking. While the division between literal and figurative meanings is simplistic, Augustine spent a considerable

17. See J. Cavadini, "The Sweetness of the Word: Salvation and Rhetoric in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," in "*De Doctrina Christiana*": *A Classic of Western Culture*, in *Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity*, vol. 9, ed. D.W.H. Arnold and P. Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); E. L. Fortin, "Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric," in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought, Collected Essays*, vol. 1, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 79–94; and the essays in J. McWilliam, ed., *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992).

18. Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 111, 278.

19. David Dawson, "Figure, Allegory," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald et al., O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 365–66.

amount of time combating restrictive literal interpretations of scripture by pointing out, as Paul did, that restricting one's understanding of scripture to literal meanings kills the spirit of the word (see *De Doctrina Christiana* 3.20). While one normally begins with a literal reading of scripture, Augustine soon shows that both literal and figurative meanings are to be understood as consistent with the findings of natural reason. What scripture presents as contrary to nature, such as what appear to be direct commands from God or seemingly immoral acts (when considered in the light of reason), Augustine argues that these must be read as figurative and in accordance with reason (3.33, 42). Further, just as he warns against following academic fads that appear to prove scripture wrong, so too does he warn Christians to avoid speaking ignorantly about scientific topics such as astronomy, biology, and geology in such a way that undermines the rationality inherent in scripture:

Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn. The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of the faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men.²⁰

Scripture, then, stands above philosophical discourse as well as political discourse, although as Word of God, it informs human beings' scientific, political, and moral understandings by giving them the fullest account of human being's relationship, not only with God, but with each other and the world, as his "literal" interpretation of Genesis shows. Thus, scripture does not contradict natural reason, and one can even use the techniques of pagan rhetoric to gain a good understanding of its meaning (*De Doctrina Christiana* 2.16-42). However, rhetorical uses of scripture are to be done prudently and with reference to good morals as intelligible to natural reason.²¹

20. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 41, trans. John Hammond Taylor, S.J. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 1.19-39.

21. Augustine generally regards reason and faith as issuing in compatible moral norms.

Even so, scripture provides a simple down-to-earth model of rhetoric that is not generally available to classical rhetoric because scripture is intelligible both to philosophical elites and to the uneducated, which creates an egalitarian basis for communicating moral truths in a democratic culture. He notes that while scripture's wisdom transcends that of the philosophers, its "vulgarity" and simplicity actually humbles the proud, and he points to the fact that uneducated fishers and carpenters were able to draw from it to transform their moral and spiritual world:

It is incredible that a very few men, of mean birth and the lowest rank, and no education [*ignobiles, infimos, paucissimos, inperitos*], should have been able so effectually to persuade the world, and even its learned men, of so incredible a thing. . . . But if [sceptics] do not believe that these miracles were wrought by Christ's apostles to gain credence to their preaching [*praedicantibus*] of His resurrection and ascension, this one grand miracle suffices for us, that the whole world has believed without any miracles. (*City of God* 22:5; see also 16.2)

Such people were "untrained in the liberal arts and untaught in the learning of the pagans, not skilled in grammar, not armed in dialectic, not puffed up with rhetoric" (*City of God* 22.5). In this sense, the Apostles constitute the *exempla* for Augustine's virtuous rhetoricians, who persuade primarily by their actions and gestures, and secondarily by their words. Their lack of education, their mean birth, and low rank made them plebs. The ability to testify to moral and spiritual truth puts everyone on a more equal footing with regard to the ability to live an upright moral life. The virtues of such uneducated human beings are not restricted to obedience and moderation, as they are in Plato's *Republic*, for example.²² As Elshtain has noted about the way the "language of Christianity" affected peoples' lives,

The things Christ held dear and cherished—forgiveness, succor, devotion—helped to forge the terms of their own lives, that and the fact that the Christian rhetoric Augustine at first found inelegant

See Frederick J. Crosson, "Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine's *Confessions*," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 27–38, and John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), chap. 6.

22. For example, see Plato *Republic* 431c–3.

and even vulgar was simple and direct—told in the language of the people, cast in the forms of everyday speech, speech that communicated, speech with a liberatory moment that reached out to incorporate into a new community—the *koinonia*—those who were severed from the classical polis, women and the poor.²³

As these passages and the discussion on the virtue of orators indicate, the communicability of scripture depends not so much on the ability to make rational arguments as it does on the ability of orators to serve as *exempla* by living upright and wholesome lives and their ability to speak simple, direct, and perhaps even vulgar truths. We now turn to consider how this simple and sweet speech embeds itself into political life.

II

Despite the seemingly antipolitical rhetoric one finds in works such as the *City of God*, Augustine was concerned about the relationship between rhetoric and the “minor things” because even the minor things, such as politics, include considerations about justice. Augustine’s rhetoric in that treatise is meant, through all three types of rhetoric, to tame the political ambitions of his readers and to harness them to virtue. His rhetoric appears immoderately antipolitical because he considered most of his audience’s passion for political glory as inordinate and deformed, and his rhetoric is meant to illuminate goods that transcend politics and to demonstrate how political glory is insufficient to secure the complete happiness that Roman statesmen implicitly sought by way of their ambitions. Augustine shows how the inordinate ambitions of his audience degenerate into the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*) if the goals of these desires are taken as the greatest human good. He disarms their inordinate ambitions by utilizing what can be described as a dialectic of excess over excess, which warns them of the extremes to which their excessive ambition leads and thus shows them the incoherence of their ambitions. In his own terms, he utilizes a grand style intended to persuade, to shame, and to move his audience, by stripping down their inordinate ambitions to prepare the way for a more substantive political teaching. In so doing, he provides some clues to indicate that he does not deny the goodness of political life altogether. His

23. Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 29.

purpose and hope is to give his readers nothing more than a Platonic education in recognizing the limitations of political life with the hope that they can return to their political duties with moderated ambitions and expectations of the happiness political life may bring.²⁴

Augustine's audience consisted of pagan philosophical and political elites who blamed Christianity for Rome's collapse. The former he tried to convince that Christianity taught nothing more than what is intelligible to natural reason, or at least could not be denied by human reason; the latter were composed of those who sought all glory from politics. For this latter group, Augustine attempted to show why their inordinate love of glory led to domination, and then he attempted to "deconstruct" and then harness that love of glory to virtue.

His strategy toward those dominated by the lust for domination is straightforward and the most familiar. It consists in what Milbank calls his counter-genealogy of pagan ethics; it consists in showing his audience that political life in general, and their beloved Rome in particular, are nothing more than one sorry and senseless bloodletting after another. He does this by quoting their own authors back at them (thus implying that Rome's greatest minds such as Sallust and Cicero were capable of providing Rome with its own internal critique). He also appeals to their shame (at least for those who, unlike Nero, still possess some shame) (*City of God* 5.19). For these readers, he shows how Sallust, the great Roman historian who celebrated Roman glories, himself admitted that the love of liberty that had governed the republic at the beginning had quickly given way under the empire to the lust for domination (3.14, 5.12). This lust was rooted in and justified by their beloved civil theology, which included numerous examples of Jupiter's and Juno's own lusts (5.12, quoting Virgil *Aeneid* 1.279–85).

Thus far, Augustine's rhetoric simply unmask the pretensions, not only of his audience's particular political leanings, but of the entire constitutional order. While this strategy might be commendable as a general, though incomplete, theoretical critique, it must be supplemented by a more positive account of political life if it is to be used in political deliberations; otherwise, deliberation is destroyed by the assumption that all political opinions are *necessarily* simple ruses for domination: that the entire political process itself is such a ruse put on by one faction, or that an empire is nothing more than piracy on a grand scale, to cite an example used by

24. Explained in greater detail in Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, chap. 1.

Augustine (*City of God* 4.4) and Cicero (*De republica* 3.14.24). Augustine understood the implications of extending this strategy too far, so he hinted of his own positive view of politics within his discussion of glory.

Augustine also recognized the constructive elements of the love of glory, and he used the complexity of that love as a means to elevate his audience's intention toward virtue and away from the libidinous desire for domination. He observes that the love of glory improves desires in two ways. At a minimum this love prevents shameful acts. He quotes Horace on how to curb the lust for domination:

To curb the lust for domination, [Horace] sang:
 Wider will be your realm if you conquer
 Greed in your heart, that if to distant Gades [Spain]
 Libya you should join, and the two Punic peoples
 Give to one master.
 (*City of God* 5.13, quoting *Odes* 2.2.9–12)

It also suppresses the love of base things such as wealth: "So also these despised their own private affairs for the sake of the republic, and for its treasury resisted avarice, consulted for the good of their country with a spirit of freedom" (*City of God* 5.15). Augustine repeats this observation elsewhere: "Nevertheless, they who restrain baser lusts, not by the power of the Holy Spirit obtained by the faith of piety, or by the love of intelligible beauty, but by desire of human praise, or, at all events, restrain them better by the love of such praise, are not indeed yet holy, but only less base" (5.13). Augustine observes that the love of praise, as a part of the love of glory, can perform a form of social sanction in preventing people from engaging in shameful acts.

The love of glory, however, also accompanies the love of virtue. Quoting Sallust again, Augustine writes: "Praise of a higher kind was bestowed upon Cato, for he says of him, 'The less he sought glory, the more it followed him.' We say praise of a higher kind; for the glory with the desire of which the Romans burned is the judgment of men thinking well of men" (*City of God* 5.12, quoting Sallust *The War with Catiline* 54.6). This leads Augustine to warn his readers that virtue is not to be sought for the sake of glory, although he adds that virtue can be sought by means of glory. Augustine elsewhere provides examples of Roman noble deeds that serve as models of sorts for Christians to follow (5.18), which also suggests that the love of glory can motivate virtuous deeds in addition to restraining shameful

desires. One might also point to the example of Regulus as a Roman who practiced virtue and loved and received due glory (1.24). Glory is indeed a good (but not the highest good), and so can be sought viciously and can be transformed into the lust for domination. Augustine cites Sallust, who claims that glory can be gained either by virtue or by vice: "For glory, honor, and power are desired alike by the good man and by the ignoble; but the former," he says, "strives onward to them by the true way [*vera via*] while the other, knowing nothing of the good arts, seeks them by fraud and deceit" (5.12, quoting Sallust *The War with Catiline* 11.1-2; see also *City of God* 5.19). Furthermore, Augustine regarded the love of glory as more conducive to the common good than the self-interested pursuit of wealth, for example, because glory can be shared more easily.

Just as the language of utility serves as the primary idiom of contemporary moral and political discourse, the language of glory structured moral and political discourse in Rome. Augustine writes of the Romans: "Glory they most ardently loved: for it they wished to live, for it they did not hesitate to die" (*City of God* 5.12). He quotes the historian Sallust's assessment: "They were 'greedy of praise, liberal with money, desirous of great glory, and happy with riches honorably gained'" (5.12, quoting Sallust *The War with Catiline* 7.6). Glory is proclaimed in the opening words of the work: "Most glorious is and will be the city of God" (*City of God* 1.pr.). However, Augustine's use of the idiom of glory is more than a mere concession to the particular vices of his contemporaries. Augustine's transposition of the idiom of glory is based on a more general view of human anthropology and the function of glory in community and politics. He defined glory as clear knowledge together with praise (*clara cum laude notitia*).²⁵ Glory is the combination of love and knowledge; and praise, through the moderate style of rhetoric, is the means of expressing it. The bond between love and knowledge, between will and intellect, implies that politics is about more than the utilitarian calculation of interests among autonomous agents who attempt to maximize the most advantageous contractual relations among them.²⁶ He accepted the idiom of glory because he accepted the ancient view that politics is about more than just persuasion (although it certainly includes it), but politics is also a poetic activity in which

25. "Answer to Maximinus the Arian," in *Arianism and Other Heresies*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1995), 2.13.2.

26. Paul J. Griffiths argues that Augustine's philosophical anthropology requires the use of the language of praise and thanks. Griffiths, "The Gift and the Lie: Augustine on Lying," *Communio* 26 (Spring 1999): 29.

community is bound together by affection and the memories of its achievements. The idiom of moderate glory complements his view that virtuous rhetoricians and teachers serve primarily by their being *exempla*, and secondarily by their rational demonstrations, as praise constitutes the appropriate response to such *exempla*. By securing a kind of immortality through memory, glory is the appropriate means by which a political community compensates for the brevity of each individual's mortal existence. Over the yawning gap of forgetfulness and the "sphere of demise and succession where the dead are succeeded by the dying," a society has nothing besides glory to tie one generation to the next: "What else but glory should they love, by which they wished even after death to live in the mouths of their admirers?" (*City of God* 5.14). Glory is the means by which a city, and not only Rome, strives for immortality, and how its heroes utilize the city to ensure their own glory. However, for Augustine, only a few Romans were able to bind glory to virtue, partly because only a few Romans knew of an adequate judge of glory. Augustine spent a considerable amount of space in the *City of God* arguing that only God can be the perfect judge of one's glory, but in keeping with the principle articulated in the statement that serves as the epigraph of this chapter, his description of political life and his conception of a *populus* suggests that one can find numerous partial judges who can bestow glory but whose nature as *partial* judges necessitates that such glory will always be subject to deliberation and contestation. Thus, the bestowal of glory is necessarily set within a process that extends indefinitely into the future.

III

We now turn to unfold what goods political rhetoric aims to secure. That is, what kind of justice is implied by Augustine's comment about rhetoric securing justice in both small and large matters? One finds that Augustine reasons about politics and deliberation in terms analogous to his view of language as something that we move but that simultaneously moves us. This claim is not obvious, as Augustine appears to lend himself to the morally neutral view of procedure when he reinterprets Cicero's definition (given through the voice of Scipio) of a *populus* as an assemblage bound by the objects of its loves, whereas Cicero's Scipio had defined it as a "multitude associated by a consensus of right and by a community of interest" (*City of God* 2.21, quoting Cicero *De republica* 1.25.39):

A people is a community of a rational multitude which is associated by a communal concord [*concordi*] of the things it loves [*diligit*], then in order to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love. Yet whatever it loves, if only it is a community of rational creatures and not beasts, and is bound together in communal concord as to the objects of love, it is not absurdly called a people; and it will be a superior people in proportion as it is bound together by higher things, inferior in proportion as it is bound together by lower. (*City of God* 19.24)

Many commentators such as Herbert Deane and R. A. Markus have viewed Augustine's reformulation as the transition from classical virtue-based politics toward the modern instrumentalist social contract teaching. This view has been challenged on the ground that better objects of love beget a more virtuous *populus*.²⁷ In fact, Augustine explicitly identifies what we would call the morally neutral state, and the principle of self-interest on which it is based, as a ruse for domination:

Let provinces be subordinate to governors not as directors of morals but as lords of their possessions and providers of their pleasures; and let them not honour them in sincerity but fear them in servility. Let the laws penalize the damage a man does to his neighbor's vineyard rather than the damage he does to his own life. Nor should a man be led into court unless he harms another's property, home, health, or is a nuisance or impediment to someone against his consent. Otherwise, let each one do what he will with his own either in the company of his own people or of anyone else who is willing. (*City of God* 2.20)

Augustine viewed what we would call neutral laws, based ostensibly on the protection of self-interest, as a veil for domination.

Conversely, Augustine's skepticism of a politics of self-interest and the morally neutral state did not lead him to equate concord with "correct conclusions" or consensus as the goal of political deliberation. If love of neighbor is allowed to flourish and domineering modes of speech are at least restrained, then partial political opinions, like the groups that fit together

27. Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, chaps. 2 and 3.

to form society, relate to one another as parts of a song or a discourse relate to one another and to their whole.

Augustine compares political order to the beauty and arrangement of the Psalms: "For the rational and moderate harmony of diverse sounds insinuates the compact unity of a well-ordered city" (*City of God* 17.14). The order that the city represents is a harmony of its parts: "For each single human being, like one letter in a discourse [*sermon*], is as it were the element of a city or kingdom, however wide is the occupation of land" (4.3). Each individual, with his own goodness, is a part that helps to constitute the whole, but who, conversely, contains the "whole" within him. Augustine chooses to compare the whole to a discourse, which becomes senseless and incomplete when it lacks its parts, just as a Psalm would lack harmony if it lacked the full amplitude of notes and words that comprise it.²⁸ He articulates a political ethics whereby he viewed the political process as embedded in terms similar to the way human beings are embedded in a web of language, so that like language a *populus* is constituted, not by pre-existing abstract rules that stand apart from practice, but rather as an indefinite series of deliberations and articulations that its particular actors invoke without seeing fully the totality of its meaning. These comparisons of the city with music and speech reflect his willingness to consider actual historical cities, full of the virtuous and the reprobate, as capable of bringing the multitude of individual potentials to a kind of conversational perfection.²⁹ This "perfection," however, does not consume its parts, as does aggressive nationalism or collectivism, for example. Love of God and neighbor mean that the part and whole relate dialectically, like a musical series and like language, and as a result of human being's participation within creation in general, which Augustine characterizes in terms of constant beginnings (*City of God* 12.21).

Yet the ongoing nature of the song indicates that the whole (e.g., the *populus* of Rome, indeed of any nation) is never fully present to its con-

28. Elsewhere, he calls individual human beings the elements and seeds (*elementa et semina civitatum*) of cities. See Augustine *Expositions on the Psalms* 9.8.

29. The perfect freedom associated with the musical analogy of part and whole resides, of course, in the mystical city of God: "In the heavenly city then, there will be freedom of will. It will be one and the same freedom in all, and indivisible in the separate individuals." Augustine *City of God* 22.30. Commenting on this passage's articulation of the relationship between a *populus* and its constituent parts, Milbank observes that "not only, therefore, is there a structural parallel between 'whole' and the unit: in addition, the 'whole' is in some sense present within the unit, because the unit exists in a position fully defined by the unfoldings of an infinite sequence." Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 405.

stituent parts. Thus, political activity in general can only indicate a sympathy or *concordia* that never fully appears, and political deliberation in particular is what Oakeshott called the "convincing exposure of a sympathy, present but not yet followed up, and the convincing demonstration that now is the appropriate moment for recognizing it."³⁰ In other words, just as learning the rules of rhetoric involve making implicit practices explicit or just as Augustine's *City of God* attempted to make explicit what Roman philosophers already discovered and what Roman culture was already intimating, deliberation involves making explicit and exposing the intimations of common objects of love (*City of God* 19.24) already found within the tradition of behavior within a republic. To repeat a previous point, this model of deliberation shows that the deliberative democrat's project of establishing preexisting norms and rules for deliberation to be the result of reversed logic. Augustine's model finds the norms in the practice, and its "fairness" is internal to the process itself because the musical ethics on which it is based necessitates that process to be open-ended, like a song or a language, to enable "losers" on one policy issue to regroup, as it were, and to initiate changes and become "winners" on another.

Augustine uses affective language in his definition by stating that a *populus* is bound in concord, and indicates that he saw a *populus* as a kind of political friendship. Human beings seek to become like or to imitate the objects they love or prize. Just as one becomes more godlike by imitating Christ, and just as one's soul is dispersed into the flux of the world when one inordinately pursues worldly goods, so too do political societies increasingly resemble the objects their people love. Behind this statement about politics is Augustine's principle that people are drawn to and imitate what they prize, and praise what they prize with the moderate style of rhetoric.

Concors means literally "with heart," which implies a close solidarity and like-mindedness within a society. It can be defined as meaning "of the same mind," "united," and "harmonious." It is the root of *concordia*, which means "mutual agreement," "concurrence of feeling," "friendship," "harmony," and "state of peace and amity between opposing parties." Augustine elsewhere calls peace among human beings an ordinate concord (*ordinata concordia*) (*City of God* 19.13), and he approvingly quotes Scipio's comparison of *concordia* of a city with the *harmonia* of musicians: "What musicians call harmony in singing, is concord in the city" (2.21, quoting Scipio *De re publica* 2.42.69). He speaks of it elsewhere when he points out that the Roman

30. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 57.

empire would have been more humane had the nations (*gentes*) entered by agreement or concord (*concorditer*) rather than through compulsion, which indicates that each particular nation, perhaps through some form of federalism, could have helped to constitute the Roman empire through a common like-mindedness (*City of God* 5.17). Further, concord depends on justice, as Augustine equates it with the health (*salus*) of the *populus* (19.24).

Augustine's analogy between the deliberative process and music and language suggests that the deliberative process is an ongoing and open-ended conversation. Looking to the so-called constitutional level, the concord or sympathy of a political society as a whole also has the character of an ongoing conversation whose contours and identity undergo constant revision. For instance, at several times Augustine consoles his Roman readers that despite the sack of Rome and all the difficulties it was enduring, Rome itself endures. Augustine argues that Rome remained a people even when it underwent its internal transformation from a republic to a decadent empire: "But what this people loved in its early and in subsequent times, and by what moral decline it passed into bloody sedition and then into social and civil warfare, and disrupted and corrupted that very concord, which is, so to speak, the health of the people, history bears witness" (*City of God* 19.24). A people remains a people even when concord breaks down, when the body politic becomes unhealthy but is not yet dissolved. This remained true even after the invasion of Rome by Alaric: "The Roman Empire has been shaken rather than transformed, and that happened to it at other periods, before the preaching of Christ's name; and it recovered. There is no need to despair of its recovery at this present time. Who knows what is God's will in this matter?" (4.8). Concord is a condition for the health of a people, but the existence of a minimum of concord does not affect the status of Rome as a people, "so long," Augustine concludes, "as there remains some sort of [*qualiscumque*] gathering of rational beings united in fellowship by a communal accord about the objects of its love" (19.24). The *populus* of Rome was a higher entity than the particular claimants to its title in the civil wars, and this entity included all Romans. Yet, as our discussion about parts and wholes shows, the whole of Rome, or any other political society, is not separate from its parts in the sense that the parts are absorbed into the whole; rather, Augustine seems to suggest that political societies form a whole in a fluid manner analogous to the way language, as based on convention and agreement that moves and is moved by its participants, forms a whole with respect to the very words that constitute it. In asserting their partisan claims, participants catch glimpses of

the whole, which can only become present through engagement with other participants, and analogously through dramatic imitation and praise of *exempla*. Simultaneously, participants constitute the whole by engaging in the ongoing conversation.

Augustine's musical understanding of parts and whole in a republic led him to appreciate a system of trading offices among parts. This is seen in two ways. First, no part of a republic possesses the totality of virtue. Augustine observes that virtuous leaders made Rome superior by defeating Rome's wealthier neighbors in war (*City of God* 5.12). This observation reflects Augustine's view that political regimes are spoiled by luxury and idleness that result from inordinate private wealth. The rulers who made Rome virtuous themselves became even more vicious than the people they ruled (1.30), which was a result of their corruption in political office. This indicates that Augustine considered undue reliance on one part of the regime as destructive to the political society. Second, the needfulness of trading offices can be seen where Augustine frequently contrasts a ruler whose lust for rule is so great that he is unable to share rule with others, to a virtuous, worshipful ruler who is "not afraid to have partners" (5.24). As a result, a good ruler would not mind sharing rule because he sees himself sharing virtue with others. Because his interests lay elsewhere, Augustine never gave a systematic exposition of the differing parts of a republic, but he does speak in favor of people choosing their own leaders, their role in decision making, and of the Roman office of dictator, which was charged with dealing with emergency situations.³¹ Like Aristotle's or Cicero's understandings of republicanism, offices need to be rotated, and there must be a proper balancing of different parts or factions within political society.

IV

Augustine, the practicing rhetorician and bishop, who was involved with civil as well as ecclesiastical cases, understood political deliberation in terms analogous to the way he understood language itself. Human beings find themselves embedded in a world of conventional language and nonverbal signs that seem to transcend those particular customs; yet these very customs

31. Augustine *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.6.14–15; Augustine *City of God* 3.17, 10.3; see also Epistle 213.2.

are under constant revision and rearticulation. One learns language and the rules of rhetoric by imitating great examples; one does not learn them by memorizing abstract rules prior to practice. Similarly, political deliberations are not set within preexisting abstract rules, but those very rules are discovered over the course of deliberations. Thus, in politics as in rhetoric, virtue is crucial for Augustine because it draws people's attention toward those things that a *populus* prizes. Further, the *populus* utilizes the idiom of moderate glory, conveyed by the moderate style of rhetoric, to infuse the *populus* with knowledge and love for another, and to teach it that its totality is never fully present to it, just as no part of a discourse or a song is fully present to a single letter or note.

Augustine's ethics of love, and his analogy of the way human beings are embedded in language and politics, remind us that politics is an ongoing and often tumultuous activity. They suggest that attempts to construct and institute a priori rules governing "public reason" undermine politics and are not true to political experiences. Yet in agreement with the goals of deliberative democracy, his political attitude also supports a meaningfully pluralistic political life that contains competing and contesting viewpoints that can maintain their sympathy and concord because the political process remains open so that "losers" on one issue can "win" further down the series, in terms analogous to the way that Augustine advocates multiple voices in a discourse or a song. Finally, by reminding us that the totality of a *populus* is never fully present to its constituent parts, he reminds us that the disarming and simple words we use in political deliberations are distantly related to the sweet word on which they are based.