The Rhetoric of Sincerity in Early Modern Epistemology

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
University of Toronto

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Abstract

What does it mean to be true to oneself? This dissertation historicizes the question by examining how the epistemological and literary works of Francis Bacon, John Milton, and René Descartes negotiate the relationship between truth and self through the novel concept of “sincerity.” The modern fascination with this ideal has its origins in the well-worn Shakespearean adage, “this above all: to thine own self be true,” but we often forget the original motivation to be sincere so that “thou canst not then be false to any man.” In contrast to the individualism of contemporary “authenticity” culture, in the early modern period being true to oneself was not yet a worthy end in its own right, but a means of being true to others. I examine how and why these authors’ public arguments for new scientific, political, and philosophical epistemologies are staged in a surprisingly subjective voice. I argue that in the process of developing new ways of knowing they deploy a rhetoric of sincerity that draws on their culture’s social understanding of identity, but that anticipates and makes possible the premises of modern authenticity.

Following the Introduction’s discussion of the historical emergence of sincerity, Chapter One considers Bacon’s subjective presentation of his theories for an objective empiricism, and argues that he stages his own suffering as a form of identity for the new
science. Chapter Two examines Milton’s revolutionary political prose, analyzing in particular his appeal to seventeenth-century discourses of zeal, and his presentation of his anger as a model of political enfranchisement. Chapter Three considers the *Discourse on the Method* as a paradoxically anonymous autobiography, and reveals how Descartes frankly presents his own story as a philosophical liberation that is freely available to his reader. In each case, the candour and conviction of the writer exemplifies, is perhaps even constitutive of, the method described. These authors’ arguments for epistemology appeal to a social rhetoric of sincerity, even as their theories lay the groundwork for the authenticity to come. They provide an important corrective to our understanding of early modern identity, and the origins of our own sense of self.
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Introduction: Sincerity to Authenticity

This above all: to thine own self be true
And it doth follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

—William Shakespeare, Hamlet (c.1600)

[It is a] truth recognized by all that one can fall into bad faith
through being sincere.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (1943)

What does it mean to be true to oneself? We take for granted that this question is at the heart of our contemporary culture, and we seek to answer it in our daily lives and in the most mundane of circumstances. But what did it mean to be true to oneself? This study will historicize the question by examining the ways in which early modern writers and thinkers negotiated the relationship between truth and self through the novel concept of “sincerity.” In the process of developing new ways of knowing they deployed an increasingly complex and subtle rhetoric of sincerity. To illustrate the centrality of this rhetoric, its implicit value and changing meaning, consider something as commonplace as the recent revision of the Girl Guides Promise. Since the inception of the Guiding movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, girls from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia all observed similar versions of the following Promise:

I promise that I will do my best:
To do my duty to God,
To serve the Queen and my country,
To help other people, and
To keep the Guide Law.

Between 1994 and 2013, all three organizations revised their Promises. To take the most recent example, after an extensive process of review and consultation, the United
Kingdom Guide Promise was updated in 2013, along with the accompanying Law, to ensure that the values they expressed were relevant and accessible to girls and women in the twenty-first century. The revised Promise came into effect on September 1, 2013 and now reads as follows:

I promise that I will do my best:
To be true to myself and develop my beliefs,
To serve the Queen and my community,
To help other people, and
To keep the Guide Law.

The Promise includes several notable changes that reflect modern, Western values. Whereas before, duty to God, and service to Queen and country were its primary goals, followed by the tenets of helping others and keeping the Guide Law, the new Promise reflects goals that are not only fully secular and distanced from patriotic sentiment, but also strikingly modern in their primary emphasis on individual self-fulfilment and self-definition above any other purpose. Of first order is no longer duty and allegiance to God, Queen or country, but instead to being “true to myself” and developing “my beliefs,” whatever those beliefs may be. The revised Canadian and Australian Promises go further by also removing the reference to the Queen, and the line about helping others. “Keeping” the Guide Law is replaced by “living by” or “respecting” the Law, again with an emphasis not on blind obedience (a word that was notably removed from the accompanying Law), but on the individual fulfilment of a life.

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1 “Welcoming more members with our new Promise,” Girlguiding UK, accessed March 22, 2015, https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/news/welcoming_more_members_with_ou.aspx. The updated promises of all three organizations are very similar, and all have adopted the key phrase “to be true to myself” and “my beliefs” in lieu of any faith-based pronouncements; however, Girlguiding UK opted to replace “country” with “community,” but to maintain the reference to the Queen.
2 In an Australian survey of 1200 adults and 3300 Guide youth, “respondents were particularly concerned with the use of the word ‘God’ to express the first Essence in the Promise, the relevance of the inclusion of the Queen in the second Essence and the appropriateness of the word ‘obedient’ in the law.” When asked to rate ten phrases that might replace the first essence, respondents indicated a clear preference for “To be
The Promise constitutes an increasingly rare modern instance of a collective pronouncement of values and guiding principles, and as such it seems redolent of much older traditions, for example those of medieval guilds and Renaissance confraternities. And in fact, the Promise contains within it both a motto and an ethic that first came into use in the sixteenth century, although the meaning of this motto has changed considerably over time. While its authors and the thousands of women and girls who were consulted on the new phrasing may not have had an allusion in mind, the revised Promise echoes a well-known line from early modern drama. In the first act of Shakespeare’s Hamlet (c. 1600), Polonius counsels his son Laertes, “this above all: to thine own self be true,” a sentiment that has become proverbial in Western culture, to the extent that the original Shakespearean reference has been almost entirely lost from view—it has become what might be called a “dead allusion.” The new Girl Guides Promise evokes the now fairly clichéd truism with which I opened, the ideal of “being true to yourself” that has become a central tenet of the experience of identity in the modern West. However, its Shakespearean origins also embed within it a reference to a sixteenth-century moment when an earlier version of this value was coming into view. The alteration of the Promise is significant because it lays bare how the ideals of self-fulfilment and self-definition are historically contingent and subject to change. The revised Promise reflects one small example of a modern phenomenon I will refer to as the culture of

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3 William Shakespeare, Hamlet in The Norton Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), 1.3.78 (hereafter cited in the text). A “dead allusion” is to allusiveness what a dead metaphor is to figurative language: an allusion that has become so commonplace we no longer recognize it as such.
“authenticity,” but its Shakespearean echo also harkens back to an older value system that may be distinguished under the rhetoric of “sincerity.”

It is my contention that the prose works of Francis Bacon, John Milton, and René Descartes that I discuss in this dissertation are all participating in the transition between these two moral and cultural ideals. Sincerity and authenticity are two terms often used in conjunction, and even thought of as synonymous, but Lionel Trilling distinguished between them in his seminal 1972 book, *Sincerity and Authenticity.* 4 Trilling’s observations influenced a generation of thinkers, for example the American philosopher Charles Larmore, who, following Trilling, argues that the two values may be distinguished on a social basis. As he notes, in its simplest terms, “sincerity … means an absence of hypocrisy or blindness. It is not synonymous with authenticity. Indeed, the latter never signifies a relationship to others that one can also assume toward oneself; it always designates what is, by its very essence, a way of relating to oneself.” 5 Trilling stressed this difference when he observed that in the past there was a moral and social ideal that *combined* the impulse toward truthfulness with others and truthfulness with oneself. Ironically, although it has come to function as a touchstone of the authenticity value, when considered in full Polonius’ well-known maxim exemplifies this social ideal:

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This above all: to thine own self be true
And it doth follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man. (1.3.78-80)
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Polonius’ injunction calls on us to be true to ourselves because it is a *means* of being true to others; there is as yet no suggestion that being true to oneself is intrinsically valuable in its own right. In fact, Polonius’ prescription comes at the end of a long-winded speech

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intended to instruct the young Laertes, about to depart for France, in the particulars of
good moral and civic discipline. In a rehearsal of sensible, albeit platitudinous parental
advice, Polonius exhorts his son to “[g]ive every man thy ear, but few thy voice” (l. 68);
he warns him to be “familiar, but by no means vulgar” (l. 61); and he challenges him to
“[t]ake each man’s censure, but reserve thy judgment” (l. 69). Each of the well-worn
“precepts” that Polonius encourages Laertes to commit to “memory” emphasizes the
individual’s understanding of his role within society and relative to other men (l. 58).
The final maxim that Laertes should, above all, be true to himself thus positions self-
knowledge as a distinctly social practice, a practice that involves being “true” in the sense
of being “constant” to a performance of one’s ideal social identity. Polonius’ speech
mobilizes the kinds of precepts associated with the humanist philosophy of *nosce
 teipsum*, “know thyself,” which, as Rolf Soellner has observed, was culturally instilled as
a rhetorical and pedagogical practice that “stressed the difficulty of knowing oneself, the
obligation to improve oneself, and the need to observe others in order to understand
oneself.” The *nosce teipsum* tradition derived from the Greeks was disseminated in
English grammar schools through the Latin rhetorical and philosophical treatises of
authors such as Cicero, Ovid, and Erasmus. Polonius’ advice to his son is thus grounded
in a social tradition of instruction that is not unlike the mandate of the contemporary Girl
Guides, although their understanding of what it means to be “true to oneself” arguably
differs markedly. To excise Polonius’ maxim from its original dramatic context—and to

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6 Two editors of *Hamlet* explain Polonius’ maxim in this sense. G. R. Hibbard glosses it as “be steadfast,
be constant (*OED* true a. 1c).” *Hamlet* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1.3.78n. Harold Jenkins glosses it
as “be constant, be consistent in your opinions.” *Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1982), 1.3.78n.
provides a potted history of the rhetorical and pedagogical *nosce teipsum* tradition and its relevance to
Shakespeare’s works.
treat it as a celebration of an authentic and private “self” to which we must adhere—is thus to distort its distinctly social relevance and meaning.

As Trilling originally pointed out, and as Larmore echoes, the ideal of being “true to oneself” in the sense espoused by Polonius seems outmoded today, insofar as “we no longer identify ourselves with our social roles fully enough for it to be practicable: sincerity with others and sincerity with oneself seem to be two very distinct and separable things.” “On the other hand,” observes Larmore, “the ideal of authenticity does take centre stage in societies like ours where distancing oneself from prescribed roles has become the rule.”

To stay with the example we have already evoked, the United Kingdom Guiding Magazine published along with their new Promise articulates a classic expression of the authenticity value, which often defines itself in contradistinction to social pressures: “Being true to yourself means following what you believe over what people pressure you to do. This might be related to how you look, dress or act. You need to be comfortable with who you are and not be influenced by others around you. This skill is learned over time.”

The fact that Polonius’ now-famous and oft-cited words about being true “to thine own self” are remembered in a truncated form that effaces their original social impetus itself interestingly underscores the distinction between early modern sincerity and contemporary authenticity culture. What we often forget when we cite Polonius’ lines in a modern context is what “doth follow,” the obligation to fulfil one’s moral and social role that originally served as the motivation for being true to oneself.

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In contrast to the virtue of being sincere with others, the ideal of being an authentic individual is founded on the privileging of an inward self that is thought to exist at the core of our being, apart from any public obligation or ideal to which we aspire. As the Guides enjoin, the skill that girls must acquire over time is “to be comfortable with who you are”: authenticity is the modern task of becoming the person you already are. It espouses the idea that the individual must above all things cultivate, find, or be “true” to him- or herself. Of essential importance is being in touch with one’s own unique inner nature, which is in danger of being lost or denied precisely because of outward pressures to social conformity or role-playing. The value of authenticity pervades many aspects of contemporary culture, ranging from the self-help movement to the discipline of philosophy, where a number of thinkers from different schools have treated the subject.  

The British moral philosopher Bernard Williams noted the centrality of this idea to his thought: “If there’s one theme in all my work it’s about authenticity and self-expression. It’s the idea that some things are in some sense really you, or express what you are, and others aren’t.”  

Perhaps most influentially, in *The Ethics of Authenticity* Charles Taylor describes how this form of individualism has taken on a moral force that is often overlooked in critiques that more naively decry it as an expression of modern narcissism or self-indulgence. At its core, the culture of authenticity espouses what Taylor refers to as “the liberalism of neutrality,” the idea that a liberal society must be neutral on the

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question of what defines a good life. This neutrality has given rise to a powerful moral idea that

everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded in their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfilment. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him- or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its content.\textsuperscript{12}

This understanding of self-fulfilment or “expressive individualism” which has flourished in the West since the 1960s has fallen under heavy critique because of its perceived role in the experience of a cultural decline and a loss of broader social meanings.\textsuperscript{13} Larmore, for example, notes that authenticity culture may lead the sincerity value to a narcissistic extreme: “once one is convinced that such a self exists … one can easily end up seeing in sincerity the demand to heed only ourselves in all that we think or do—in a word, to become authentic.” As he observes, the two critiques typically levelled against the cult of authenticity are ethical objections: first that it leads to “contempt for the expectations of others and, from there, to social anomie,” and second that it inspires “a kind of fatuousness that keeps its adherents, satisfied at being reunited with their true selves, from imagining that it is often better to transcend what one already is.”\textsuperscript{14} Others draw into question the very possibility of such an ideal. Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, argues that the pursuit of sincerity (which he uses in the sense of “authenticity” as it is discussed here) is inherently self-deceiving: we cannot contemplate becoming one with a “true,” inner self without undermining this oneness through the very act of contemplation. It is a

\textsuperscript{14} Larmore, \textit{Practices of the Self}, 11, 5.
“truth recognized by all,” he famously states, “that one can fall into bad faith through being sincere.”

Unsatisfied with earlier critiques, the most recent treatments of authenticity by thinkers like Taylor and Larmore seek to retrieve it from some of its more negative consequences or trivialized expressions. Taylor argues for the continued social dimension of authenticity, noting that our individual achievements are only intelligible against the backdrop of a shared “horizon of significance.” However, I am not finally as interested in either critiques of authenticity that see it as contributing to what has been described as “the malaise of modernity,” or in attempts to recuperate it as an ethical practice, as I am in the historical forces shaping the history of identity that made possible first the early modern value of sincerity, and its later inheritor, authenticity. This study demonstrates how the historical emergence of sincerity can help us to understand the experience of identity as it is represented in the literary and cultural expressions of the seventeenth century, but also how these expressions anticipate the modern value of authenticity. As a number of critics have noted, the notion of authenticity was not possible in Western culture until a particular configuration of ideas had come into place, and these only gained full maturity in the second half of the eighteenth century. The

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15 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 65. For a discussion of Sartre’s concept of “bad faith,” which he sees as a kind of self-deception or obliviousness, see Larmore, *Practices of the Self*, 7-19. In Larmore’s words, “our very nature blocks us from coinciding with ourselves, and bad faith, or at least the kind Sartre is interested in, consists in the desperate attempt to close this gap that is essential to our being. … Whether it seeks to collapse us into the facticity of our way of life or into the transcendence by which we are able to look at ourselves from the outside, the attempt to coincide perfectly with ourselves stands in such contradiction to the sort of beings we are that it can only be a product of bad faith. In reality, since these two ontological dimensions presuppose one another, we always find ourselves, inevitably, at a distance from ourselves.” *Practices of the Self*, 15.


17 The figure often cited as most influential, or reflective, of this mature process is the French writer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau’s rejection of social existence and his call to return to a self-determining “state of nature” located within and based on intuitive feeling laid the groundwork for
most central of the originating ideas that will preoccupy much of my thought is the understanding of a clear distinction between *inner* and *outer* that leads to the sense that the true self is located within, while the false self is that which is external.

This new emphasis on inwardness is often cited as a hallmark of the sixteenth century, although as recent historians of the subject have qualified, inwardness is not an early modern innovation *per se*. Inwardness and self-searching existed in earlier forms—most famously, for instance, in St. Augustine’s painfully inward account of his conversion in the *Confessions* (397-400 AD) (one well-known line can be taken as representative: “Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth”), and perhaps even more than four hundred years before Christianity in the tradition which I have already discussed, embodied by Socrates’ dictum inscribed at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, “Know thyself.” These examples gesture to earlier practices of self-knowledge and self-searching, but neither Augustine nor Socrates likely considered self-knowledge as we do, as a private matter of looking inward to decipher our unique feelings and nature. Augustine’s inward turn revealed not a unified, autonomous self, but rather a soul whose will was fundamentally reliant upon God. And as Charles Taylor observes, “[t]he Greeks were notoriously capable of formulating the injunction ‘*gnothi seauton*’—‘know thyself’—but they didn’t normally speak of the

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18 For an important corrective to the idea that the Renaissance discovered inwardness, see David Aers, “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject’,” in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992), 177-202. Aers claims that the work of many Cultural Materialists and New Historicians writing the history of the subject reduces the Middle Ages to a “homogenous and mythical field” against which “Renaissance” concerns with inwardness and the fashioning of identities can be defined as new.” “A Whisper,” 192.

human agent as ‘ho autos’, or use the term in a context which we would translate with the definite article.”²⁰ Socrates did not think of “the Self” as a noun with a definite article; that is, as a bounded individual with an inner being defined separately from its broader context. Rather, as the philosopher Charles Guignon remarks, the Socratic understanding of “Know thyself” is “to know above all what your place is in the scheme of things – what you are and what you should be as that has been laid out in advance by the cosmic order.”²¹

The cosmic order to which Guignon refers is the premodern understanding of the world in which everything is connected and occupies its proper place. People formerly thought of themselves as part of a larger hierarchy or cosmos, a “great chain of being” in which all matter was imbued with meaning and purpose. The most memorable description of this worldview was coined by the German sociologist Max Weber, who suggested that premodern peoples lived in an “Enchanted garden,” a world governed by mysterious and meaningful forces.²² In this older system, the historian Mircea Eliade writes, “the world … has a structure; it is not a chaos but a cosmos, hence it presents itself as creation, as the work of the gods … the cosmic rhythms manifest order, harmony, permanence, fecundity. The cosmos as a whole is an organism at once real, living, and sacred.”²³ In premodern societies, human beings understood themselves as part of a larger totality, and as a result identity was more fluid and integrated with the broader system in which it participated. In such a context, self-knowledge was valuable not as a means of “being yourself” as we now understand it, but as a means of cultivating...

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²⁰ Ibid., 113.
those aspects of the self that lived up to one’s ideal function in the hierarchy, and of
disciplining those that did not. Taylor observes that modern freedom was achieved
through the discrediting of these older orders. This process, which has been called the
“disenchantment” of the world, gave rise to individualism and self-determination, but at
the price of the loss of a sense of magic and of meaning that, according to Taylor, is one
of the primary forces behind the modern experience of malaise.24

Guignon offers a helpful broad scale account of the radical transformation of
Western civilization and the shift from the premodern to the modern worldview that put
into place the concepts that would eventually make authenticity possible.25 Although
such an account is necessarily schematic and thus risks being reductive on many counts,
it is nonetheless a useful means of illustrating both the emergence of sincerity, and the
origins of authenticity. Guignon cites in particular three decisive events that contributed
to the formation of the modern worldview, each of which has been central to my
thinking, and which I treat at greater length over the course of my three chapters. The
first of these concerns what historian J. M. Roberts has described as “the Reformation’s
displacement of so many traditional values by the one supreme value of sincerity.”26 The
teachings of the reformers led to a radical shift in the understanding of religious life.
Martin Luther’s doctrine of *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia* articulates a new
understanding of salvation that is no longer achieved through external works in the world,
but solely by the sincere act of inner contrition and repentance that opens the soul up to
God’s saving grace. The Protestant faith directs the individual to look inward and

25 For Guignon’s more detailed account of this transformation, see *On Being Authentic*, Chap. 3, “The
Modern Worldview.” Guignon is in turn clearly influenced by Charles Taylor’s magisterial account of this
process in *Sources of the Self*.
cultivate an intensely personal, one-to-one relationship with God. While it is important not to overstate the Protestant emphasis on individualism and to acknowledge its continued communal dimension, it is apparent that the turn to religious individualism had an effect on the perception of the external world. As Guignon notes, in a context where people are increasingly concerned with their inner feelings, drives and desires, they are able to draw “a sharp distinction between what is truly them – that is, their individual souls, the seats of their deepest feelings, desires and intentions – and what is only extraneous and transient – their concrete, embodied presence in the world.”

The Christian is enjoined to be *in* the world, but not *of* it. The view that the material world is merely a place of trial through which the individual passes on the way to a greater spiritual one revives and transforms the classical stance of *contemptus mundi*, or “contempt for the world,” while also challenging the traditional notion of an enchanted cosmos imbued by sacred forces.

The second event that helped to shape the modern worldview is a new understanding of the social order as a product of man’s invention—a contractual arrangement that is no longer the preordained and natural ordering of the cosmos, but the result of human agreement. This new understanding of society stands in stark contrast with the premodern worldview in which, as Alasdair MacIntyre observes, “the universe [has] a single fundamental order, an order structuring both nature and society, so that the distinction we mark by contrasting the natural and the social cannot as yet be expressed.”

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private life. As Guignon emphasizes, “social existence is regarded as utterly alien to the real issues of life, a space of artificial existence and self-loss in comparison to one’s private moments alone or within one’s circle of family or friends.” 29 This sense of alienation also leads to the idea that social life is a kind of performance, an outlook perhaps most famously described by Jacques in Shakespeare’s As You Like It: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players. / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts.” 30 People come to experience a divide between what they perceive as their real self and their persona as it is performed for the world.

The third crucial event Guignon cites as influencing the emergence of the modern worldview is the advent of modern science and its creation of a detached, knowing subject who inhabits a newly objectified world. From the scientific point of view, reality is not a cosmos, but a universe, a vast assemblage of material elements that exist in causal interaction. This viewpoint makes possible the idea that the natural world does not reflect a meaningful order governed by a providential plan, but a system of causation. Part-and-parcel with this new understanding of reality is a transformed understanding of the subject who attempts to gain knowledge of it. The scientific understanding of the world necessitates the methodical and objective amassing of empirical data and the formulation of new theories that displace older beliefs. This knowledge is only available to subjects who have divested themselves of inherited prejudices and easy illusions to become detached, impartial observers. In such a system, humans become what Taylor has termed “disengaged subjects,” a centre of experience set apart from the material

29 Ibid., 34.
world that they seek to objectify, know and control. Humans no longer seek to understand their proper place in the cosmos, but to gain mastery over it.

Of course, any such general account is inevitably subject to qualification. In their recent collection of essays, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, Joshua Landy and Michael Saler offer a trenchant critique of Weberian disenchantment, arguing that this historical process was accompanied from the beginning by “a variety of secular and conscious strategies for re-enchantment, held together by their common aim of filling a God-shaped void.” Landy and Saler would describe an account of disenchantment like the one above as an example of the traditional “binary approach” which posits premodern enchantment as an “other” against which to privilege modernity’s rational, secular and progressive attempts to free the individual from enthrallment. They trouble the traditional narrative that modernity banishes earlier sources of mystery and wonder by demonstrating that an important counter-tendency runs alongside it, one that attempts to re-inscribe the world with (non-religious) forms of sacredness, mystery, order.

It is perhaps precisely as such a force of re-enchantment, an attempt to restore a sense of place and of belonging within the cosmos, that the emergence of sincerity can most readily be understood. In contrast to the traditional, scholarly narrative of the emergence of individualism and private self-expression in the early modern period, I argue that sincerity is an example of a response to the new emphasis on inwardness that alienates the individual from the social world. Guignon emphasizes that

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It is because of the split between inner and outer that the issue of sincerity becomes pressing in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. If the social realm is inherently inhuman, the way to humanize it is to be sincere in our dealings with others: we need to say what we mean and mean what we say.\footnote{Guignon, \textit{On Being Authentic}, 35.}

Sincerity is best defined as a reaction to social changes that placed growing pressure on the individual. Its rise in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represents a moment on the cusp between old and new value systems. In an increasingly "disenchanted" world where the individual is thrown back on him- or herself, sincerity signifies a grasping after a sense of connectedness. Polonius’ exhortation that if you are true to yourself you cannot then be false to any man is a dictum that at once acknowledges the newfound sense that the individual must necessarily be guided by the inward self that informs their experience, but that still seeks to define the self in relation to its greater social context and to reinforce social bonds. Being true to oneself is not yet seen as a worthy end in and of itself, although the grounds for this later ideal are being laid.

I examine the contours of early modern sincerity, and the historical forces shaping its emergence, in more careful detail in Chapter One. In particular, I trace its roots in the response to a culture of dissembling and social performance, and, most importantly, to the Reformation’s new privileging of private affect. However, for the moment I want to emphasize that sincerity and authenticity can be understood not so much as antithetical values, but as two different historical responses to the same inward turn. Both values are predicated on modern constructions of interiority, but they can be distinguished by the \textit{direction} of the movement they exhort. Sincerity calls for the externalization of what is inwardly felt. Trilling aptly defined it as “a congruence between avowal and actual
feeling,” and thus it involves a movement outward, toward an honest performance of self in the social realm.\footnote{Trilling, \textit{Sincerity and Authenticity}, 2.} Or, as Taylor’s discussion of the religious origins of interiority suggests, in its Protestant guise sincerity might be rather be described as a movement inward, but inward in order finally to go upward, towards the maker who gives the soul meaning.\footnote{Taylor makes this point in relation to his discussion of Augustine, whose self-reflexive project is nevertheless deeply qualified. What Augustine’s inward turn leads him to discover is that “this activity which is mine is grounded on and presupposes something higher than I, something which I should look up to and revere. By going inward, I am drawn upward.” \textit{Sources of the Self}, 134.} In either case, the sources of moral obligation are located outside the self, and the imperative is to demonstrate accountability to them. Authenticity, on the other hand, involves a deeper movement inward for its own sake, once the value of inwardness has been fully unmoored from its religious ties. It is the exhortation to “become what you are” or be “true to yourself,” the self that one already is, but has yet to locate, or has in some way denied, precisely because of outward pressures or roles that should be eschewed. Authenticity is a value predicated on the modern understanding of the self as a unified source of agency. The individual is empowered to cultivate a new kind of garden within.

But it turns out this is a hard row to hoe. If authenticity is a secular practice that comes to operate within an earlier, primarily religious form, what is drawn into question is the legitimacy of the self as the solitary source of authority and meaning. As Guignon notes, “When the ‘God within’ comes to be thought of simply as God’s being me, then the context of ideas in which the practice of inward-turning and expressing the true self originally made sense undergoes a profound change. What is lost, among other things, is the notion of an authoritative source of direction and insight I can turn to in order to learn
Moreover, there is also the possibility, as noted earlier, that authenticity culture might produce not a well-manicured garden, but rather the weeds of fatuousness or narcissism, or worse. It is for these reasons, despite its good intentions toward a greater inclusivity, that the new Girl Guides Promise has seemed to some to have a curiously hollow ring. In a fully secular and postcolonial context, the Guides are obliged to fall back on the ironically shared mantra of a solitary practice of “be[ing] true to myself” and “develop[ing] my beliefs”—a communal pronouncement of values so neutral as to seem potentially self-defeating. Taylor helpfully articulates one of the main challenges of such a neutrality: once the liberalism of authenticity is elevated to a moral ideal, what can result is “an extraordinary inarticulacy about one of the constitutive ideals of modern culture. Its opponents slight it, and its friends can’t speak of it.” In a context where discussions about collective moral aims are implicitly discouraged in order to preserve the inalienable right of being “true to oneself,” the risk is that “the ideal sinks to the level of an axiom, something one doesn’t challenge but also never expounds.”

This dissertation seeks to articulate the history of sincerity, the precursor to the modern value Taylor argues has lost its voice. The historical distinction between sincerity and authenticity serves as a compelling framework for approaching the prose works I discuss, how I should live my life.”

36 Guignon, On Being Authentic, xii.
38 Taylor, Ethics of Authenticity, 18, 17.
all of which I argue are standing at a crossroads in the transition between these moral and cultural ideals—or perhaps more accurately, that are actively participating in the advent of sincerity, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the authenticity to come. Guignon’s outline of the historical shift from the premodern to the modern helps not only to illustrate the emergence of sincerity, but also to provide a rationale for the scope of my study. The three seminal figures I address, and the discourses they represent—religious, political, and philosophical—may broadly be seen to map on to the three major events to which Guignon attributes the emergence of the modern worldview (the Reformation, the social contract, and modern science). In Chapter One, I examine Bacon’s co-option of Protestant discourses in his arguments for a new empirical science in the *Novum Organum* (1620); in Chapter Two, I address Milton’s theories of enfranchisement in his revolutionary political prose; and in Chapter Three, I discuss Descartes’ inauguration of rationalist philosophy in the *Discourse on the Method* (1637). My approach to these texts and discourses is distinctly literary. My discussion focuses not directly on these new epistemologies, but rather on their surprising rhetorical presentation in an intensely subjective voice of sincerity. Each of the authors I address stages their own self-revelation and confession in unexpected places and in unexpected ways. Their self-representation is distinctly at odds with our modern expectations. These are not the typical “ego documents” attributed to the period, the diaries, autobiographies, and self-portraits so often cited as evidence of a Burckhardtian “awakening” to private subjectivity and individualism.  

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39 For a classic articulation of this idea, see Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). Trilling emphasizes the extent to which the link between individualism and autobiography is a critical commonplace: “The impulse to write autobiography may be taken as virtually definitive of the psychological changes to which the historians point. Which is to say—
epistemologies—scientific, political, and philosophical—and yet, as I reveal, these theories are insistently presented in a first-person voice of confession and affect.

Furthermore, as I seek to demonstrate in each case, this strategy of ethos is not digressive or ornamental, but essential to the arguments of Bacon about empirical science, Milton about revolutionary politics, and Descartes about rationalist philosophy. These authors do not attempt self-representation for its own sake; rather, in each case they deploy ethos both as a methodological and a persuasive device. They employ an affective rhetoric of sincerity as a basis from which to make their arguments, and as a means to persuade their reader to take up the task.

The way that these authors use their self-representation can tell us something both about the early modern experience of identity, and the origins of modern identity. As Taylor has noted, “Doctrines which are supposedly derived from the sober examination of some domain into which the self doesn’t and shouldn’t obtrude actually reflect much more than we realize the ideals that have helped constitute this identity of ours. This is eminently true … of the representational epistemology from Descartes to Quine.” The very fact that these works are polemical texts with persuasive ends suggests that they represent a model of sincerity more readily identified with Polonius’ social ideal. Sincerity is used by these three authors as a performative and rhetorical device with an audience in mind (whereas authenticity, as the argument goes, is inherently self-regarding: the only audience that matters when practicing authenticity is oneself). This is

Although one rather dreads saying it, so often has it been said before, so firmly is it established in our minds as the first psycho-historical concept we ever learned—that the new kind of personality which emerges (the verb is tediously constant in the context) is what we can an ‘individual’: at a certain point in history men became individuals.” Sincerity and Authenticity, 24-5. The formative influence underlying all of these arguments is nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt’s description of the emergence of the individual in The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (London: Phaidon Press, 1965).

40 Taylor, Sources of the Self, ix.
why I have titled my study “The Rhetoric of Sincerity.” In their prose, Bacon, Milton, and Descartes make recourse to sincerity and affect as part of their rhetorical technique, but their self-representation could not be accused of falling prey to the kind of solipsism that has been criticized in modern authenticity culture. By contrast, they affirm their participation in a culture of sincerity that involves an obligation to a community. They reflect—indeed, they shape—their period’s new emphasis on inwardness and individualism, but affirm the individual’s ties to the social realm. In their work, sincerity is transformed into an objective practice that is actively staged for the reader’s identification.

Charles Taylor’s magisterial Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity has informed my thinking in many respects. In particular, his history of the subject provides a helpful schema by which to account for the kind of self-representation I consider. Taylor’s careful charting of the rise of inwardness traces its development from the unification of the subject in Plato, through the inward turn of Augustine, to the disengagement inaugurated by Descartes and intensified by Locke. However, the final figure that Taylor considers represents not a culmination of this trajectory, but a separate thread. When Taylor arrives at Montaigne, he describes a form of identity that differs markedly from the Cartesian stance of disengaged self-mastery and rational control. When he set out to reflect on himself in his Essays (1580-95), Montaigne may have intended, like Descartes, to uncover the foundation of his true, underlying nature, but what he famously encountered was instead a terrifyingly unstable and capricious self: “My spirit,” he writes, “playing the skittish and loose-broken jade … begets in me so many extravagant Chimeraes, and fantastical monsters, so orderlesse, and without any
reason, one hudling upon an other.” As Taylor emphasizes, Montaigne’s response was not to seek what is universal or exemplary about human nature, but only to observe and catalogue the diverse and ever-changing circumstances of his own individual being.

What results are two very different models of identity:

Descartes is a founder of modern individualism, because his theory throws the individual thinker back on his own responsibility, requires him to build an order of thought for himself, in the first person singular. But he must do so following universal criteria; he reasons as anyone and everyone. Montaigne is an originator of the search for each person’s originality; and this is not just a different quest but in a sense antithetical to the Cartesian.

Taylor’s reading proposes an opposition or divergence in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth century between two models of individualism, a Montaignean idiosyncratic self, and a Cartesian universal self (and indeed, Descartes is one of the three authors I address). Whereas the Cartesian quest is for scientific order, universal knowledge, and instrumental control, the Montaignean project distances itself from general categories, and seeks a free understanding of the self apart from universal interpretation. If Montaigne’s work explores an idiosyncratic self defined by its “unrepeatable difference,” in the works I examine I am tracing another “Cartesian” strain: a singular, but exemplary self who exists in relation to a community. The works of epistemology I treat provide a unique opportunity for addressing how these two models of identity coexist in the period. Furthermore, it is possible to suggest that something of the Cartesian model is affirmed even in the case of works ostensibly written in the “Montaignean” mode. Even when reading texts more readily presented as private ego documents, such as autobiographies, memoirs and diaries, recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized that they do not necessarily anticipate our modern understanding of identity. Instead, scholarship has

42 Ibid., 182, emphasis added.
increasingly focused on the way that early modern people often imagined themselves in terms of inherited models, and in formulaic or in public ways.\textsuperscript{43}

I have tried to underscore how this difference in the understanding of identity is reflected rhetorically in the works I examine. Each of my chapters reveals how the authors I address rhetorically make their subjectivity available for the reader’s identification. Each author writes about himself in a voice that is at once subjective and objective, private and collective. Each also appeals to the idea of historical chance, and of functioning as a truth-speaker or seer at a particular moment in time. In presenting themselves as models, Bacon, Milton and Descartes explore (and exploit) the relationship between the general person and an individualized “I,” even at the level of grammar. Chapter One begins by discussing Bacon’s inauguration of his great philosophical Instauration with an exordium in which he curiously presents himself in the third person. Bacon offers himself up as a model and guide, and stages his own private suffering as a form of identity for the new science, an identity that he frames in terms of Protestant discourses of martyrdom, affect, and sincerity. He employs a modesty topos that presents his work not as a product of talent, but as a “birth of time” for which he functions as a kind of prophet, poised at a key moment in history. I end by exploring how a similar strategy of anonymity and sincerity is at work in the \textit{New Atlantis} (1627), Bacon’s most persuasive attempt to convert his reader to a new world of scientific learning. In Chapter

Two, I reveal how in his early political prose Milton appeals to seventeenth-century discourses of zeal and plain speaking, and stages his own sincere anger as a model of political enfranchisement in the fraught moments before the English Civil War. Milton begins his famous autobiographical passage in *The Reason of Church Government* (1642) in a third-person voice that slowly shifts into the first person, and that invites his reader to identify with his experience. Like Bacon, Milton at first portrays himself as a prophet, but his prose increasingly de-emphasizes the idea of divine inspiration, privileging instead his own personal conviction as an individual but representative “someone [who] may perhaps be heard” bearing witness to revolution. In my final chapter, I devote considerable attention to the paradoxically anonymous status of autobiography in the *Discourse on the Method*. Descartes begins his *Discourse* with a generalized statement that unifies all men through their rational capacities, and my reading reveals how his self-representation performs a complicated mediation between commonness and individuality. Descartes’ assertion of rational equality means that he cannot claim to have special qualities that have led him to his new philosophical method; instead, he declares that it is “accident,” or historical chance that has placed him on the path that led to his discovery. As Taylor emphasizes, Descartes reasons “as anyone and everyone”: his anonymous account frankly and openly presents his own story as a philosophical liberation that is freely available to his reader. My study thus contributes to recent revisionist accounts in the field of early modern studies that seek to complicate the more traditional narrative of the emergence of individualism and private self-expression in the period.

And yet, because these are works of epistemology, they do not simply reflect the early modern understanding of identity, but also actively *shape* and *transform* it.
Through their theories, Bacon, Milton and Descartes participate in the emergence of the modern worldview. As I try to demonstrate, their sincerity serves not only as a rhetorical technique, but also as a foundation of their epistemologies, which centre on new forms of first-person knowing and conviction. The Self with a capital “S” and definite article occupies a privileged position not only in these authors’ persuasive rhetoric, but in their very methods. In each case, the candour and conviction of the writer exemplifies, is perhaps even constitutive of, the liberation of the method described. The fact that the self functions as a central form of proof demonstrates how these works are already looking forward to newer constructions of identity that will eventually culminate in authenticity culture and its premises of self-validation and self-fulfilment. While the ethic of authenticity only comes to fruition near the end of the eighteenth century, as Taylor notes, it “builds on earlier forms of individualism, such as the individualism of disengaged rationality, pioneered by Descartes, where the demand is that each person think self-responsibly for him- or herself, or the political individualism of Locke, which sought to make the person and his or her will prior to social obligation.” 44 The authors I treat are central to the trajectory that leads to authenticity.

Part and parcel with this epistemology of individualism is a new valuation of private affect that is characteristically modern. I emphasize in each chapter that the conviction of the private passions is fundamental to the argument the author makes. It has often been observed that an important feature distinguishing between premodern and modern societies is their attitude toward feelings. In a premodern context the emotions are seen as forces to be controlled and sublimated. Guignon notes that “[f]or this older outlook, what is important is not how you feel at any moment, but rather that you

cultivate your feelings so that you will come to feel the right way about the right sorts of things at the right time. Feelings are not givens we have to deal with. They are raw materials we have to work over and discipline in order to make them properly functioning components of a self that is itself a properly functioning component of something greater than itself.”

The new celebration of feelings that characterizes modern culture is part of the process of internalization that began with figures such as the authors I address. Of course, it should be acknowledged that the authenticity culture inaugurated in the eighteenth century was highly critical of the disengaged rationality represented by a figure like Descartes. An important step in the emergence of authenticity is Romanticism’s turn against enlightenment instrumentalism, and its privileging of innate feeling over rationality. However, my readings of Bacon, Milton and Descartes Interestingly depart from this conventional trajectory by affirming the extent to which affect serves a privileged function even in these earlier texts. I devote considerable attention to Protestantism’s role in this new valuation of affect in Chapter One, and I trace its manifestation in Bacon’s emphasis on his suffering in his arguments for the discipline of a new scientific empiricism, and in Milton’s legitimation of the force of his anger in his political arguments. Even in the case of Descartes, the figure traditionally most identified with abstract rationalism, I offer a reading in keeping with recent revisionist accounts that have focused on the role of the passions in his thought. I employ three physiological terms that make the link between rhetoric, epistemology and affect explicit. In Chapter One, I argue that Bacon’s argument for objective empiricism paradoxically appeals to a subjective “language of the heart,” a Reformation discourse that privileges affect over reason, heart over head. In Chapter Two, I reveal how

45 Guignon, On Being Authentic, 21.
Milton’s political writing deploys a “language of the stomach,” a Puritan discourse that exhorts the externalization of an emphatic and angry personal conviction as a primary form of proof. Finally, in Chapter Three, I emphasize how Descartes’ narrative presentation of his philosophy constitutes a “language of the mind” at work, a language that draws on his understanding of the passion of générosité, the subject’s felt experience of their capacity for autonomous reasoning that defines philosophical enquiry as an ethical practice. Nonetheless, part of my point is that although the individual passions are newly freed from constraint and valued to the extent that they even function as a form of proof, they are also made available as an objective practice. Each author offers up his affective experience as a model for the reader’s identification. When compared against our modern tenets of identity, the selves represented in the prose of Bacon, Milton and Descartes affirm both difference and sameness. They represent a moment on the cusp between two value systems. Their rhetorical presentation appeals to the early modern value of sincerity, even as their theories lay the groundwork for the modern authenticity to come.
Chapter One: Bacon, the New Science, and Sincerity

Now I, in thrall to an undying love of truth, have committed myself to the hazards, hardships, and loneliness of the open road and, trusting for support to the Lord’s help, I have kept my mind proof against the shock and marshalled ranks of opinion, against my own inner hesitations and misgivings, and against obscurity and darkness of things, and the disembodied imaginings that beset us round, so that at last I can bring to generations present and future guidance more reliable and sure. Now if I have made any progress in this business, the reason why the way was opened to me rested in nothing other than a true and legitimate abasement of the human spirit.

—Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620)

The principal thing, that which [God] especially requires—to bring a sincere heart.

—John Calvin, *Commentaries on Micah* (1559)

In 1620, at the height of his political career, Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor and Baron Verulam, published the preliminary efforts toward what he considered to be his life’s calling, his massive, unfinished scientific programme, the *Instauratio Magna*. The *Instauratio*, or *Renewal*, was the inauguration of nothing less than a wholesale renovation of human learning. It was intended to make a decisive advance in knowledge through the reconstruction of philosophy and its methods. Bacon was particularly invested in reforming the practices of learning: he calls for throwing off the constraints of Aristotelian and scholastic logic, so that “the sciences [may] be sought not arrogantly in the narrow cells of human wit but humbly in the wider world.”¹ In place of disputation and syllogism he champions empiricism, aided by his new method of induction. But strangely, in the midst of these entreaties for objective and empirical knowledge, Bacon inserts a series of highly subjective and personal self-revelations. In fact, the work’s

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proposals often seem to stem from this very singular vantage. As Bacon will repeatedly emphasize, the *Instauratio Magna* is the culmination of a providential moment in European history; it is “a birth of time,” and Bacon represents himself as a lone figure who has been chosen as the brave bearer of this new message. This self-presentation is clearly established at the outset of the 1620 volume, which begins with a brief, magisterial exordium that explains the broader aims of the *Instauratio*. In place of a title, the work opens directly with an elaborate headpiece, and offset ornamental text in bold capitals (Fig. 1):
FRANCIS
OF VERULAM
REASONING THUS WITH HIMSELF
CONCLUDED THAT
it would be in the interest of the living
and of those yet to come
to hear his words

Delivered in what Bacon’s editor Graham Rees dubs a “vatic third-person” (*OFB*, xlvi),
the exordium’s pronouncements draw the reader into the almost conceited self-assurance
of an ego that centres and grounds the text. The reader is positioned in the midst of
Bacon’s own reasoning subjectivity—as Michael Silverthorne alternately translates,
“These are/ the thoughts of/ Francis Verulam.”² Bacon’s confidence and inner
conviction is reinforced through a biblical echo noted by Rees. The key phrase in the
original Latin—“FRANCISCVS / DE VERVLAMIO / SIC COGITAVIT; /
TALEMQVE APVD SE / rationem instituit, quam Viuentibus & / Posteris notam fieri,
ipsorum / interesse putauit” (2)—is “apud se,” which often occurs with this sense in the
New Testament, for example at John 6:61: “sciens autem Iesus apud semet ipsum quia murmurarent de hoc discipuli eius dixit eis hoc vos scandalizat” (“When Jesus knew in
himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?”).³
Not only does it allude to the epistemology of biblical prophets, but, as W. A. Sessions
has noted, the exordium is also a deliberate imitation of Julius Caesar’s autobiographical
commentary, *The Gallic War*, also written as a third-person narrative.⁴ Caesar’s
commentaries are a particularly fitting model for Bacon. Not only were classical

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³ See textual note, *OFB*, 2, ll. 1-7n. In a similar vein, Robert A. Erickson observes that “For a biblical
character, something ‘said in the heart’ is something that is really meant. It is the truest and most sincere of
human expressions. When Esau says ‘in his heart’ that he will slay his brother, he means it (Gen. 27:41).”
⁴ W. A. Sessions, “‘Child of Time’: Bacon’s Uses of Self-Representation,” in *Betraying our Selves: Forms of Self-representation in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Henk Dragstra, Sheila Ottway, and Helen Wilcox
commentarii “an established form of apologetic history… written and published by (or for) a public figure to affirm his achievement and defend his actions,” but as William Batstone and Cynthia Damon explain, “the word itself contains a reference to memory (the root -men-, also present in mention, memento, comment and, contracted, in amnesia).” The recollections of the Roman general are thus a suitably magisterial and public form for Bacon’s own representation of his thoughts, and gesture to the intriguing means by which the exordium straddles the gap between private and public, subjective and objective.

Bacon’s strategy is in part conventional. He is clearly making an appeal to ethos—the authority derived from the speaker’s self—one of the three modes of persuasion (along with logos and pathos) discussed in Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric. In appealing to his character, Bacon is following Cicero’s dictum that in classical oratory the opening portion of a speech is the place to establish one’s credibility with an audience. But Bacon’s performance of self over the course of the Instauratio elaborates this oratorical tradition in ways that extend well beyond establishing his credentials for speaking. The reader is repeatedly confronted with Bacon’s subjectivity, which appears at times confident, as here, but more often as humbly resigned to suffering and forbearance in the name of scientific advancement. As the exordium demonstrates, Bacon is a master of appropriating and assimilating cultural genres and motifs, and in this chapter I will argue that the genre to which he makes most frequent recourse is the Augustinian confession. In the process, Bacon reveals a paradox: while the practice of his intensely rational empiricism requires the subjugation or cleansing of all affect, the promotion of this new epistemology leads Bacon to deploy what I will call “a language of the heart,” that is a

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specifically Reformation, religious discourse that privileges affect over reason, heart over head. My argument falls into four parts. My first section explores the role of these confessional passages in Bacon’s philosophical and scientific treatises, revealing the paradox of a “subjective empiricism” at the heart of his persuasive strategy. Next, the second and third sections seek to contextualize Bacon’s use of a confessional rhetoric in terms of a new cultural emphasis on an ethics of sincerity. Section II addresses the secular origins of sincerity in relation to an instrumental early modern culture of “Self-fashioning” and social performance. Section III explores the roots of sincerity in Protestant discourses of self-examination and affective piety. My final section will return to Bacon’s Instauratio and the Novum Organum to consider how his rhetoric is particularly informed by a Protestant language of the heart, a language that inspires his most intimate and imaginative appeal for scientific conversion, the New Atlantis (1627). In Bacon’s work, self-representation becomes a key rhetorical strategy by which to engage the reader’s participation in a task that might otherwise appear insurmountable.

I. “Reasoning Thus With Himself”: Bacon’s “Subjective” Empiricism

The programme Bacon had assigned himself was indeed daunting. The 1620 volume presents an overview of each part of the Instauratio, and a good idea of the work’s massive scope and scale. The opening exordium in the style of Caesar’s autobiography is followed by a more personal epistle dedicatory to James I, and then a longer preface that distils the work’s central themes. In the following Distributio operis, the six-part plan and prospectus of the whole of the Instauratio, Bacon envisions his project unfolding in a hexameral schema, modelled after the Creation account. Printed in 1620 along with these
four preliminary sections is the work that Bacon intended as the second part of his Instauration, the *Novum Organum, or Directions Concerning the Interpretation of Nature*, which presents the method for his new science. Bacon takes on another great tradition by attempting to replace or supersede Aristotle’s *Organon* (or instrument) with his own central text of philosophical method, although the second book of the *Novum Organum* remains incomplete. Similarly, Bacon skips over the first part of the *Instauratio*, the survey of existing knowledge, explaining that “The Partitions of the Sciences” has yet to appear, but can be fulfilled by *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), for which he was presently at work on a revised and expanded Latin version, *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623). The final texts of the volume, the *Parasceue (Preparative to a Natural History)* and *Catalogus (Catalogue of Particular Histories)*, are preliminaries to Part III, “Phenomena of the Universe,” for which he would eventually complete only two of the six natural histories he planned. For Part IV, the interpretation of the observations of Part III using the method of Part II, he completed no more than an introduction, the *Abecedarium nouum naturae* (1622); for Part V, a collection of “anticipations,” or preliminary theories of the philosophy to come, he managed only a preface. Bacon is frank about the fate of Part VI, the culmination of his entire project in a repository of the new philosophy: “in truth completion and a successful conclusion to this last part lies beyond my power and expectations … the outcome will be a matter for the fortune of the human race, and a thing perhaps which men in their current situation and state of mind may not be readily able to grasp or size up” (45). Clearly, Bacon had set himself a sizeable task, and not merely that of completing the ambitious

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6 For a succinct overview and helpful chart of the parts of the *Instauratio* completed in 1620 and those as yet unfulfilled, see Graham Rees’ introduction to *OFB*, xix-xxii.
project—which he himself was the first to admit was unlikely in his own lifetime—but more importantly, of persuading the reader first encountering his extraordinary endeavour to embark with him upon this ongoing project. He is all too aware that it will be a challenge to convince his reader to “be of good hope, and not imagine or suppose that my Instauration is limitless and beyond the capacity of mere mortals, when in fact it is really a lawful end and termination of limitless error” (25).  

Bacon acknowledges the necessity that his plan “makes allowances for mortality and human frailty, seeing that its completion is not confided entirely to a single age but to a succession of them” (25). The Instauratio is thus in many ways a fragmented work-in-progress. Provisional and incomplete, it anticipates the efforts of future generations that must take up the task.

Bacon must also have been acutely aware that his suggestion that the Instauratio was the “termination of limitless error” flew in the face of generations of scholarship. His attack on antiquity and Scholasticism risked offending upholders of the old regime whose prejudices would not be easily overcome. As a humanist and rhetorician, Bacon was sensitive to the challenges of compelling argument. Brian Vickers has astutely revealed Bacon’s literary and rhetorical arts and the fact that so much of his life’s work was dedicated to the task of persuasion. As he notes, “one cannot ascribe Bacon’s remarkable hold over men’s minds in the seventeenth century and after to any other source but his ability as an imaginative writer. Bacon himself defined ‘the duty and office of Rhetoric’ with a clear grasp of the psychology of persuasion: ‘to apply Reason

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7 This was in fact precisely the reaction of many of his contemporaries, including his honoured dedicatee and hoped-for patron, James I, who reportedly pronounced the work “like the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” Letters and Life of Francis Bacon, in The Works of Francis Bacon, vol. VII., ed. James Spedding (London: Longman, 1861-1879); 168, fn.
to the Imagination for the better moving of the Will'.”

Foremost in Bacon’s mind was the need to obtain support and patronage for his project. One of his rationalizations for his lifelong attempts to gain political favour and high office was that he would be able to secure the influence and financial support necessary to pursue his philosophical endeavours. His *Instauratio*’s programme was a costly enterprise that required researchers, libraries, laboratories and research institutes. In his private memoranda of 1608, Bacon lays out his design to establish a place in which to direct “wyts and pennes,” and lists a number of aims, including the commissioning of a history of experiments in all the mechanical arts; salaries for four individuals to undertake this work; the founding of a college for inventors; a library; allowances for travellers, experiments, intelligence, and correspondence with foreign universities; and the provision of furnaces, vaults, terraces for “Insolacion,” and various kinds of work houses. It is no surprise, given the resources required, that Bacon spent his political career trying to ingratiate himself to monarchy. Both *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and the *Instauratio Magna* are elaborately dedicated to James I and make direct and indirect appeals for support.

Faced with the challenge of making not only James, but also his reader receptive to his radical renewal, Bacon must make his project both accessible and compelling. In so doing, he resolves to lay his own thoughts bare and provide a behind-the-scenes look at the project’s inception. The exordium opens on the regal Francis of Verulam in the midst of musing on the central problem of the *Instauratio*: “Since he knew for a fact that the human intellect was the author of its own difficulties,”

He thought that every effort should be directed to seeing how the commerce between the Mind and Things (to which scarcely anything on Earth or, at any

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rate, earthly things can compare) could be entirely restored, or at least put on a better footing. (3)

As he does often in his work, Bacon portrays the new science as ushering in the restoration of a fallen culture. However, this salvation will happen not only through the innovation of a new empirical method, but just as crucially, by preparing the mind for its reception. Bacon’s goal in the prefatory materials to the *Instauratio Magna* and in the first book of the *Novum Organum* is to ready the mind for his new method, to re-shape subjectivity and its relation to the objective world. But as he is well aware, this conversion will be hard-won. There is no hope that errors that have so far flourished with age will be corrected if the mind is left to its own resources, or to the help of “dialectic” (3). Human reasoning is so arbitrary, “corrupt,” and “recklessly abstracted” that the only course left is to “undertake a wholesale Instauration of the sciences, arts and all human learning, raised on proper foundations” (3). However, after setting out this central intention, the latter half of the exordium digresses from scientific objectives to elaborate at length on the herculean and solitary effort that will be required of him for this personal trial:

Nor did he fail to see that this experiment of his might be a solitary undertaking, and how desperately difficult it may be to get others to put their trust in it. Yet did he not think to fail it or himself but determined to try and set out on the only way open to the human mind. (5)

The task may be daunting and lonely, but he has resolved on the only route that will lead out of the fruitless labours that currently entangle men. The emphasis on the value of hard work and the motif of journey is extended by an allusion to Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. The contemplative way is analogous to the two paths of active life: the first is arduous and difficult but “ends up in open country,” whereas the other “at first sight free
and easy, leads into the mountainous wilds” (5). Bacon’s own personal struggle is thus extrapolated into a broader moral maxim. The exordium represents an interesting contradiction: it is intensely solipsistic in its focus, yet the man presented to the reader is in many senses not the singular Francis Bacon, but a plural, third-person self who will serve as a collective model and guide. In this self-conscious performance, Bacon stages himself as a father and prophet speaking for his own culture. The reader is invited to identify with the introspections of “FRANCIS OF VERULAM” as he reasons with himself. Bacon concludes the exordium with a confession about his motivations to publish. As he has found no one else who has “put his mind to similar thoughts,” and is uncertain when these things might occur to anyone else, he must make public at once as much as he has been able to complete (5). He insists that “his haste was not born of ambition but of concern”—or as others have translated, “anxiety”—that “if the fate of all humans should overtake him, there would still remain some plan and specification of what his soul had grasped, and so that there would also remain some sign of his sincere concern for the well-being of the human race” (5). Publishing is characterized as an act of conscience, and of prudence. Bacon employs the language of personal suffering and sincerity to establish himself as a kind of prophet figure for the new science. His revelation does not belong to him; he is merely the medium, and so he must pass it on for the good of his fellow man—and with some urgency, as he was in his sixtieth year. He

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10 “Evil one may attain easily and in abundance: smooth is the way and it dwelleth very nigh. But in front of virtue have the deathless gods set sweat: long is the way thereto and steep and rough at first. But when one hath reached the top, easy is it thereafter despite its hardness.” Hesiod, Works and Days, trans. A. W. Mair (Clarendon: Oxford, 1908), 11, cited in OFB, 4, ll. 9-10n.

concludes by affirming that this work is the highest ambition, and one that is its own reward (5).

The language of earnest self-sacrifice introduced in the exordium is taken up with even greater force in the *Instauratio*’s preface. After lamenting the current, dire state of natural philosophy, Bacon again turns to personal self-revelation—although now in a first-person voice more intimate than grandiose—with a striking passage that elaborates on the humility topos. He confesses:

Now I, in thrall to an undying love of truth, have committed myself to the hazards, hardships, and loneliness of the open road and, trusting for support to the Lord’s help, I have kept my mind proof against the shock and marshalled ranks of opinion, against my own inner hesitations and misgivings, and against obscurity and darkness of things, and the disembodied imaginings that beset us round, so that at last I can bring to generations present and future guidance more reliable and sure. Now if I have made any progress in this business, the reason why the way was opened to me rested in nothing other than a true and legitimate abasement of the human spirit. (21)

Through this profession of modesty, Bacon makes himself into a suffering pilgrim-figure for his new endeavour. And significantly, his humility is integrally linked both to his new method, and the means of disseminating it. He claims it is what distinguishes him from those before, who “having briefly glanced at things, examples and experiences, as if discovery were nothing more than an intellectual exercise, instantly summoned up their own spirits as to show them oracles” (21). In contrast, “I, engaging purely and unceasingly with things, do not abstract my intellect further from them than to allow (as with sight) their images and rays to come into focus” (21). Bacon’s philosophical empiricism is focused through the lens of the humble and objectively perceiving individual. Philosophical inquiry is no longer confined to individual flights of fancy, but nor is it merely the passive amassing of objective data. Bacon’s inductive reasoning
imagines a new kind of relationship between the object and the perceiving, thinking, feeling subject. He further adds that this humble position will also serve to convince his reader:

And the same humility that I use in discovering, I also use in teaching. For I do not seek either by victory in debate, appeals to antiquity, any arbitrary claim to authority, or even by cloaking myself in obscurity, to dignify or commend any of my discoveries with any majesty... I have not (I say) sought nor do I plan to ensnare men’s judgements by force or fraud; instead I want to lead them to the things themselves and their interconnections, so that they can see for themselves what they possess, what they may assert, and what they may add and contribute to the common good. (21)

Bacon refers here to both his new scientific method, and the aphoristic prose style he has chosen to represent it. But he also comes close to transparency about the instructive value of his autobiographical mode: conversion to this new “faith” will happen at an individual and experiential level, and the humble and confessional tone he has chosen complements and undergirds this stance. By making things “plain for all to see” Bacon claims to have “solemnised a true, lawful and enduring marriage between the empirical and rational faculties (whose protracted and inauspicious divorce and mutual rejection has caused so much upset in the human family)” (21). He will return to this metaphor in the ninety-fifth aphorism of the *Novum Organum* when he rejects both the ant-like empirics who can only doggedly store up data, and the spider-like rationalists who spin fanciful, subjective cobwebs from their own “entrails.” The proper task of philosophy, like the bee, takes the middle path: it busily collects knowledge from the field, but its special gift is to convert and digest it. An alliance between the experimental and the rational faculties—between outer world and inner mind—yields the true honey of learning (152).
As the prefatory materials to the *Instauratio* make clear, the autobiographical mode plays an important role in Baconian theory, both as a rhetorical tool, and a newly revised position from which to make scientific observations. In this chapter, I aim to ask why it is that England’s pre-eminent advocate of empiricism substantiates his claims with the subjective. Bacon scholars have noted his rhetorical strategies of self-representation. Graham Rees observes that in the *Instauratio* Bacon “elaborately stag[es] himself as a modest, lone traveller assailed by the outward gales of opinion and inner misgivings,” and that this isolation will be turned to advantage in the *Novum Organum* itself.\(^\text{12}\) W. A. Sessions has most fully explored the role of subjectivity in Bacon’s work, arguing that Bacon makes his “staged autobiography” a key strategy: “As the language of his calculated asides reveals, Bacon gives his methodical text—a work he sees as offering nothing less than his solution for what he saw as the chaos of modern Europe—a confessional frame. He invents an Augustinian sincerity that not only provides a voice for the new science and its human dialogic figuration but gives that voice a literary tradition.”\(^\text{13}\) These arguments can be seen in light of recent Bacon scholarship that has focused on the role of rhetoric in the writing of the new science. Critics have increasingly revised earlier accounts that took at face value Bacon’s emphasis on plain speaking in *The Advancement of Learning*, acknowledging instead the degree to which his prose style is influenced by contemporary theories of rhetoric and persuasion.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^{\text{12}}\) OFB, Introduction, xlviii. See also notes to pg. 2, ll.1-7n.; pg. 20, ll.4-36n.; pg. 170, ll. 18-32n.

\(^{\text{13}}\) W. A. Sessions, “‘Child of Time’: Bacon’s Uses of Self-Representation,” 97. My reading takes its impetus from Sessions’ excellent chapter, to which I am indebted. Sessions astutely reveals an autobiographical rhetoric at work in Bacon; however, where his brief essay falls short is in fully accounting for why the subjective mode would have been an appealing rhetorical tool for Bacon. I hope to supplement his findings through a broader examination of sincerity as a new moral category in the period, and to explore how it finds its way into Bacon’s work through a Protestant language of affect.

\(^{\text{14}}\) Richard Foster Jones demonstrated the degree to which Baconian empiricism had a material impact not just on the matter of science, but on the *language* of science, in particular the plain speech advocated by
Sessions sees Bacon as a master rhetorician giving an identity to his project and seeking
to “convert the reader to a brave new world of technology.”¹⁵ I would like to develop
these observations of Bacon scholarship by more broadly addressing the question of why
this particular positioning in terms of ethos would have carried such rhetorical force in
the period. What was it that made Bacon feel that a confessional tone was the ideal voice
for his radical new project? In addressing this question, I will contextualize Bacon’s use
of the autobiographical mode in terms of an early modern cultural movement first taking
place in the sixteenth century. I want to argue that Bacon’s work registers and
participates in the advent of sincerity, an epistemic shift whose origins are both religious
and secular. In what follows, I will test the extent to which this paradigm of sincerity can
illuminate our understanding of Bacon’s rhetoric of the self. In light of my argument, I
hope to reveal that his use of the subjective is not simply, or straightforwardly, a
propagandist effort, but also the result of a new cultural emphasis on the subjective
experience as a site for knowledge and authenticity.

II. “Of Simulation and Dissimulation”: Self-Fashioning and Sincerity

Bacon’s Augustinian confessions are substantially informed by his period’s growing
imperative for the open expression of personal conviction and feeling. In a seminal work,
Lionel Trilling identified this shift as the advent of a new moral category, “the state or

quality of the self which we call sincerity.” Trilling succinctly but aptly defined sincerity as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling,” and argued that this quality has become so naturalized it appears deceptively universal to our understanding of human character. Nevertheless, Trilling observed that this was not always the case, remarking in the critical idiom of another era that it may seem absurd to debate the sincerity of a Beowulf or Achilles, but most appropriate to apply this standard to Goethe’s Werther or an Austen heroine—a point that still usefully illustrates the historical contingency of this aspect of the moral self. To judge that a person is sincere or insincere, to desire to be “true” to oneself, to connect outer speech with inner feeling, are distinctly modern concerns predicated on constructions of interiority. The sixteenth century in particular was fascinated by the exploration of this new ideal. The famous first sonnet of the *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) sequence, for example, is a testament to honest feeling: Philip Sidney’s muse bids him to forego hackneyed and inauthentic forms of expression and instead “look in thy heart, and write.” While he may strive for originality, Astrophil’s appeal to his heart is in fact typical of a new vocabulary for expression and introspection being made available in Sidney’s period. In 1593, a striking image of Sincerity appeared in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, one of the most influential emblem books of early modern Europe. Recommended for the use of painters, sculptors and poets, the entries of the *Iconologia* direct the representation of abstract virtues and vices, or human sentiments and passions. Each virtue is provided with a textual description of an allegorical figure proposed by Ripa to embody the concept, including the type and colour of its clothing.

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and various symbolic objects and the reasons why they were chosen, often supported by reference to classical precedent. Sincerity is to be depicted as:

a woman dressed in gold, who holds in her right hand a white dove, while, with her left hand, she proffers her heart in a gracious, beautiful gesture. The dove and the white clothing represent sincerity in its pure form, without any falsity of appearances or artifice. The proffered heart represents integrity,
since, when a man’s will is without vice, he does not conceal the recesses of his heart but rather makes them visible to all.\footnote{18}

The third edition of 1603 is an expanded version, this time illustrated by numerous woodcuts, including a representation of Sincerity (Fig. 2). A woman dressed in white stands directly facing the viewer, her open arms outstretched at either side; in her right hand sits a dove, while in her left, raised up for all to see, she offers her heart. Her level gaze meets that of the spectator, as if acquiescing to inquiry. The image is one of serenity, probity and transparency. It reflects the presence of a newly felt value not just in Italy, but also in the wider European culture of the late sixteenth century. Similar representations are familiar in English iconography. In his \textit{A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne} (1635), George Wither provides English verses for engravings originally produced by the Dutch Crispin van de Passe for Gabriel Rollenhagen’s \textit{Nucleus Emblematum Selectissimorum} (c. 1611-13). Included is a plate that depicts a hand-held heart, listed in the accompanying index under “Sincerity” (Fig. 3). The explanatory verse, while not notable for its literary merits, clearly illustrates the period’s commonplace that “A Heart with Hand-in-hand, united thus, / Makes here an Emblem not unknowne to us”; in fact, the image is so familiar that “’tis not hard for any Vulgar wit, / Without a Comment, to interpret it.” Wither does go on to explain that “Hand and Heart together should agree; / … what we in outward shew expresse, / Perform’d should be, with inward heartinesse.”\footnote{19} The appeal for the open expression of thought and

\footnote{18 Cited and translated in John Martin, \textit{Myths of Renaissance Individualism} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 103. Martin regrets that while the sources for many of Ripa’s emblems are known, the origins for his “Sincrítà” are unclear. He conjectures that Ripa may have been inspired by Piero Valeriano’s \textit{Hierogliphica} (1556) in which a man wears his heart on a chain around his neck as a model of honesty in language, 104.}

feeling is associated with a new understanding of identity in which the heart was increasingly seen as the centre of the individual’s moral and religious being. For Trilling the ideal of the exposed heart was a hallmark of modern expression and modern values; he argued that sincerity became “a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years.”

Proof of its modernity is the evolving definition of the word. “Sincere” entered the English language at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and was first used chiefly in the literal sense of its Latin root *sincerus*, meaning “clean, pure, sound.” It was applied primarily not to persons, but to things, both material and immaterial. In its first sense it referred to something that was “Not falsified or perverted in any way,” be it true or sincere religion or doctrine, or a veracious

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historical account (O.E.D. 1a-c). It might also be used to denote something “Pure, unmixed; free from any foreign element or ingredient,” for example, sincere or unadulterated wine, or “angels… arraide in sincere white” (O.E.D. 2a-d). As it later came to apply to persons, the word at first metaphorically described a life that was morally sound; however, it soon took on its modern sense of denoting a person characterized by “the absence of all dissimulation or pretence” (O.E.D. 4).

It is not surprising that sincerity should come to focus on transparency of motive. A new emphasis on the individual possessing a self, an inside that may be referred to, inspired the attendant anxiety that this self could be hidden from the world. Hamlet—the quintessential early modern example—is a play suffused by the theme of sincerity. I have already discussed the play’s most trenchant expression of this new value in the achievement by Polonius—an otherwise comic character—of a single transcendent piece of Shakespearean advice: “This above all: to thine own self be true.”

However, the play does not so much laud the ideal of sincerity, as rather obsessively worry about the possibility of its performance, the discrepancy between inside and outside and the difficulty of making them match up. Hamlet insists that the intensity of his grief knows not “seems”; if there is any disparity between his outward behaviour and what he feels it is that he experiences not less but more inner turmoil—he has “that within which passeth show” (1.2.85). This and Polonius’ maxim are affirmations of the longing for sincerity in a play deeply troubled by the attempts individuals must make to read one another in the social world. The efforts of both Hamlet and those around him to “pluck out the heart of [his] mystery” represent a widespread early modern concern (3.2.336). As John Martin

observes, “one of the most striking features of Renaissance notions of the self was an explicitly layered quality, which represented a sense not only of inwardness or interiority but also of mystery about what Renaissance writers, drawing on a long tradition, imagined as their inner selves.” 23 As early as the fourteenth century, this concern was evident in the writings of Petrarch, whose Secretum examined his enigmatic soul after the model of Augustine’s self-searching. But in the sixteenth century this interest took on a new cultural valency. The reformers expanded the language of inwardness by encouraging believers to examine their mysterious inner workings. This vocabulary extended to a secular context, for example in the writings of Montaigne, who observed: “I, who make no other profession, find in me such infinite depth and variety, that what I have learned bears no other fruit than to make me realize how much I still have to learn.” 24 This central interest in the mysterious core of identity is echoed in the works of many of the most influential Renaissance authors. However, as Martin and other recent historians of the subject have pointed out, the notion of interiority was not an original innovation per se. Medieval theologians and writers, especially from the twelfth century onward, also emphasized a sense of inwardness, for example in terms of inner contrition in the practice of penitence. 25 The central difference, argues Martin, is “the way in which men and women in the Renaissance began to conceptualize the relation between what they saw as the interior self on the one hand and the expression of one’s thoughts, feelings, or beliefs on the other.” 26 Of significance are Renaissance discourses that increasingly broach the connection between the often-conflicting exigencies of inner

24 Cited in ibid., 1321.
25 See my Introduction, p. 10, 18n. for more on this qualification.
desire and outer world. A new cultural emphasis on individualism and agency resulted in increasingly elaborate social negotiations—both in the form of dissimulation, and its sister response, an increasingly felt need for sincerity.

Peter Burke’s anthropological history of early modern Italian culture explores the key role of dissimulation in the period. Burke notes that “Italy was a ‘theatre society’…where it was necessary to play one’s social role with style, fare bella figura, to work hard at creating and maintaining as well as saving ‘face’.” He describes a Mediterranean world in which life was conducted on the public square through a series of highly ritualised performances. Religious life was centred around the theatre of public processions, pageants and sermons; duels were stereotyped rites for conducting disputes that need not necessarily entail actual violence; and love and politeness were similarly formulaic. Burke proposes that it might be useful to speak of a ‘sincerity threshold’ which varies from one time and place to another (cf. Trilling, 1972). We might say that the sincerity threshold is higher in the West than (say) in China and Japan, and higher in northern Europe than in the south; and also that is has been raised at various times, notably in the eighteenth century.

He adds that contemporaries were often self-conscious about the theatrical quality of their interactions: “paradoxical as it may seem on the surface, sincerity cultures need a greater measure of self-deception than the rest, – since we are all actors – while ‘theatre cultures’, as we may call them, are able to cultivate the self-awareness they value less.”

27 Peter Burke, The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 10, 13. Although he acknowledges the pitfalls of cultural stereotype, Burke distinguishes between the “cultural styles” of Northern and Southern Europe, finding the phenomenon of theatre to be more pronounced in the Mediterranean. While Burke may be right that that Italian culture celebrated a slightly more exaggerated expression of social performance, his schematization may still be too reductive. John Martin has noted conversely that sincerity was an important concern in Italy as well. See Martin, Myths of Renaissance Individualism, 38, 103-122. I would also add that studies of dissembling and social negotiation in the English tradition—most famously, Stephen Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning—amply illustrate that the notion of a “theatre culture” is
The popularity of Baldassare Castiglione’s famous *Book of the Courtier* (1528), which extended far beyond its native Italy, testifies to the resonance of theatricalism in early modern culture. Castiglione praised the quality he called *sprezzatura* (“negligence”), the ironically calculated and practiced cultivation of an appearance of effortless spontaneity and grace.\(^{28}\) In England Sir Thomas Hoby’s 1561 translation, *The Courtyer*—along with two other popular English translations of Giovanni della Casa’s *Il Galateo* (1558; trans. 1576) and Stefano Guazzo’s *La Civil Conversazione* (1574; trans. 1581-86)—inspired an Elizabethan vogue for courtesy literature. These Italian works shaping the ideal courtier, soldier and scholar in turn incited an English tradition in works such as Henry Peacham’s *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622). The intense focus on courtesy and social performance gestures to the experience of identity in the early modern “theatre culture”—or as Burke prefers, “honour culture”—as one of bifurcation: individuals often found themselves obliged to erect a public façade that might not reflect their inner convictions or beliefs.

John Martin has similarly emphasized early modern dissimulation, although along different methodological lines. Whereas Burke makes a synchronic and professedly “anthropological” study attuned to the particularities of social gesture, speech, and ritual, Martin advances a diachronic account of intellectual history by tracing the roots of dissimulation to the ancient virtue of prudence. This classical ideal was inherited from Aristotle, who viewed prudence (*phronesis*) as the practical reason that served to guide ethical choices. In late Antiquity, authors such as Augustine linked prudence to the

Christian concept of Providence. As Martin explains, “the two terms prudentia and providentia both derived from the Latin providere (‘to foresee,’ ‘to take precaution,’ ‘to provide for’).” By the Middle Ages prudence had become a key Christian value. No doubt Edmund Spenser had it in mind as he set out to “fashion a gentleman” in his Faerie Queene (1596), as it was considered one of the four cardinal virtues, alongside temperance, fortitude, and justice. In his Summa Theologiae (The Essentials of Theology), Thomas Aquinas represents prudence as the central discipline by which to hold the passions in check: “Prudence…is a virtue most necessary for human life. For a good life consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds, it matters not only what a man does but also how he does it; to wit, that he do it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion.” However, Martin argues that during the Italian Renaissance prudence underwent a transformation at the hands of humanist scholars who returned to Aristotle’s works outside of a theological context. Prudence became less a Christian and providential virtue, and instead a strategy that emphasized the individual’s will. And most significantly, Martin argues, it was in the work of Machiavelli that “prudence was divorced entirely from ethics.” Machiavelli famously argued that seeming rather than being good is crucial to the political success of a prince, and advocated that “a wise ruler” (uno signore prudente), does well to learn “how to be a fine liar and hypocrite (simulatore e dissimulatore).” The prudential stance became a central strategy by which to negotiate life at court. For Martin, the reconceptualization of prudence indicates a new valuation of the individual subject. A previous system in which the virtues

29 Martin, “Inventing Sincerity,” 1323. See also his expanded version of this article in Myths of Renaissance Individualism, Chap. 3.
30 Cited in ibid., 1323.
functioned to contain the passions and to cultivate an ethical response is superseded by a new one in which the individual will is given precedence and private emotions serve as motivation and not hindrance. An internal agenda replaces an external one.

Certainly there is much in both Bacon’s works and his life that serves to illustrate early modern role-playing and dissimulation. In his lifelong capacity as a royal servant, minister and adviser, he was keenly attentive to political negotiations for power and to the cultivation of methods for rising in life. Chief among the skills he practiced was self-concealment, a fact he gestured to in a maxim included in his 1594 collection of sayings: “I had rather know than be known.”32 His moral philosophy demonstrates an indebtedness to the thought of Machiavelli, for which he had a strong admiration. Many of his Essays (1625)—for example, “Of Negotiating,” “Of Suitors,” “Of Followers and Friends,” and “Of Ceremonies and Respects”—are concerned with prudential stratagems for personal advancement. Bacon shared Machiavelli’s instrumentalism in his approach to affairs of state, and while some of the Essays express high moral sentiments, many would also seem to value pragmatism over morality, or at the very least to acknowledge its necessity. One essay in particular, “Of Simulation and Dissimulation,” most strongly demonstrates the Italian author’s influence, even its title directly echoing the passage from The Prince cited above. The essay is interestingly equivocal. It opens with the observation that “dissimulation is but a faint kind of policy,” because it requires a superior understanding and heart to know when to tell the truth and to follow through. It is the “weaker sort of politiques that are the great dissemblers.”33 Those who have good

judgement and can discern what should be laid open and what should be concealed are hindered by a “habit of dissimulation,” but those who lack judgement must default to it as the safest and wariest way. Bacon observes that the ablest men have all had sincerity and frankness in their dealings, and a reputation for reliability, which serves them to great advantage because, when required, their reputation for good faith allows their dissimulation to pass undetected. That is, although he begins by criticizing dissimulation, Bacon swiftly acknowledges its place in the political milieu. His position is largely that of Machiavelli, in that it does not advocate dissimulation as a general practice, but stresses that an astute political leader may legitimately contradict his word when necessary and must cultivate the skills to do so. Bacon moves on to distinguish between the “three degrees of this hiding and veiling of a man’s self” (350). The first is “closeness, reservation, and secrecy,” when a man does not reveal himself. Bacon lauds secrecy as “the virtue of a confessor,” because the secret man invites disclosure. Further, he does not make himself vulnerable by thoughtless or indiscrete revelations. His appraisal of the next kind of hiding, “Dissimulation, in the negative”—when a man lets fall signs that he is other than he is—is somewhat more ambivalent. He acknowledges that dissimulation is often a necessary follow-up to secrecy: it is sometimes not enough to be secret, we must show an opinion one way or another. As for the third form, “Simulation, in the affirmative”—when a man actively and expressly pretends to be that which he is not—Bacon judges it more culpable, and less politic, except in very rare instances. Generally speaking, it is “a vice rising either of a natural falseness or fearfulness.” Despite his reservations about these strategies, Bacon concludes by weighing their advantages and disadvantages. Simulation and dissimulation are useful
techniques to “lay asleep opposition” and make use of surprise, to reserve an honourable retreat should an enterprise fall through, and to discover better the mind of another. On the side of disadvantage, they may inspire doubt on the part of others and deprive a man of one of the principal tools for action—“trust and belief.” Ultimately, none of his objections or praises are mounted on moral grounds; rather, Bacon rationally considers the degree to which methods of dissembling assist or impede political expediency. Frankness, honesty and sincerity are considered only insofar as they are methods, and not as fundamental human values or virtues.

Of course, this preoccupation with advancement and expediency does not extend to all of the Essays. In “Of Truth,” when Bacon passes from theological and philosophical truth to the truth of “civil business,” he argues that straightforward, honest dealing is the “honour of man’s nature” and the mixing of falsehood is like “allay in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it” (342). In “Of Wisdome for a Man’s Self” he similarly criticizes men who are “great lovers of themselves” and cautions that we must use our reason to distinguish between “self-love” and “society” (386-87). Here he is attuned to the needs of the collective over and above those of the individual. Wisdom for a man’s self is like “the wisdom of rats, that will be sure to leave a house somewhat before it fall.” Bacon’s language seems to directly echo Polonius when he advises “be so true to thyself, as thou be not false to others; specially to thy king and country” (386)—Polonius, as we have seen, bases his counsel of sincerity to Laertes on a similar deference to the greater good: “to thine own self be true / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man” (1.3.78-80). For Perez Zagorin, despite such qualifications, the weight of proof seems to favour individual
stratagem: “the essays as a whole convey the unmistakable impression that he was more intent on the means men could employ to attain their ends than on the worthiness of the ends themselves.” However, it might be instructive to shift the focus from morality to the productive tension engendered by these contradictory perspectives in the Essays, and what they have to tell us about the formation of early modern identities. The seeming contradiction in Bacon’s thought gestures to competing models for self-presentation and self-practice in the period. Theories of subjectivity in the discipline of English literary criticism have frequently emphasised the calculated masking of the private self and the Shakespearean understanding of the “world as a stage,” but the later period equally demonstrates the rival desire for the expression of authenticity through a laying bare of the inward self. In many ways, prudence and sincerity are reciprocal forces. The increasing emphasis on individual dissimulation may be understood in the context of large-scale historical shifts taking place during the period. Rapid urbanization and increasing social mobility meant that individuals found themselves thrust into new contexts—as a result of the changing class structure, and also in terms of religious persecution or exile in a time of intense schism. At the same time, for the upper classes, life at court increasingly revolved around the powers of a duke or king, rendering social interaction more fraught. These new possibilities inspired a cultural fascination with

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34 Perez Zagorin, Francis Bacon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), 146. For a broader discussion of this tension in Bacon’s thought, see Chap. 4 of Zagorin’s book. He argues for a contradiction in Bacon’s moral philosophy as it is presented in The Advancement of Learning, De Augmentis Scientiarum, and the Essays. Bacon reflects the values of Renaissance civic humanism when he defines the moral good as the greater good and advocates for sublimating individual self-interest to the service of the vita activa. However, his thoughts on civil knowledge have a more practical focus on the techniques of self-presentation and self-advancement through concealment, secrecy and dissimulation. Zagorin argues that “[t]here is a definite and unresolved paradox … in Bacon’s moral attitude. When he contemplated individuals apart from society, he found their foremost virtue to be a concern for the common good as their standard of action … when he looked at men as they interacted in society, his standpoint became largely one of moral neutrality … He saw them then as self-centered creatures incessantly competing for the goods of position and power, and he ministered to their desires by the methods he recommended.” Francis Bacon, 146. My point is that such a contradiction tells us something about the changing experience of early modern identity.
techniques for social negotiation. But the vagaries of the social arena also produce a certain fatigue. John Martin notes, “Sincerity…was both the dream of transparency and the wish for connectedness in a setting dominated by the uncomfortable sense that one could never trust one’s fellow courtiers, open up to them, or reveal one’s thoughts to them. Inevitably, for some, this was more than they could bear.”

The ideal of sincerity no doubt arose in part from a growing disillusionment with the social pressures of early modern life. Increasingly, the sixteenth century evinces a desire for more genuine forms of self-expression. This is why Burke concludes his study of Renaissance Italian social practices with a coda about the decline in the emphasis on ritual by the early modern period—a change that he insists is not exclusive to Italy. Burke suggests that a salient feature of modern western culture is its dismissive attitude towards ritual—reified in the common phrase “mere ritual,” or “mere pageantry”—and that the early modern period was “extremely important in the articulation and the development of the propensity to repudiate ritual.” He provides a host of examples, both secular and sacred, that are all part of “the gradual rise of the ‘sincerity threshold’ and the replacement of a ‘theatre culture’ or ‘honour culture’ by a ‘sincerity culture’.”

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35 Martin, Myths of Renaissance Individualism, 106. In the case of Renaissance Italy, Martin finds that shifting cultural attitudes are demonstrated by the contrasting perspectives about dissimulation and sincerity to be found in Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier (1528), written in the first half of the century, and Guazzo’s Civil Conversazione (1574), written in the latter half. Castiglione was hopeful that the courtier could exert a constructive influence on his prince through artful social negotiation. However, “Italian society had, over the course of the sixteenth century, become increasingly a society of courtiers, and Castiglione’s optimism about the court as a political and cultural institution had gradually given way to a growing pessimism about the new political realities of Italy,” and thus Martin finds Guazzo is much less interested in the cultivation of sprezzatura and social performance; rather, his text is “the first widely-read secular work in Italian explicitly to emphasize sincerity as an important value in social life,” 108, 106.

36 Burke, Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy, 225, 235. Burke distinguishes his argument from the long-held sociological assumption that ritual has declined in modern societies, which has recently been brought into question by the recognition that all societies are equally ritualised, but sometimes lack the objectivity to understand their rituals as such. Rather, his focus is on changing attitudes to ritual. See Chap. 16, “The repudiation of ritual in early modern Europe.”
III. “Prompte et Sincere”: The Language of the Heart

But without a doubt, the most significant factor influencing attitudes about ritual—and the major force that shaped the virtue of sincerity—was the Reformation. The principles of *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia* placed new emphasis on individual activities, and privileged private devotion above public rites. Protestant discourses called for sincerity and self-searching in the practices of piety. The rejection of hypocrisy was central to the Reformers’ articulation of the justification by faith and not works. Luther argued that “God judges according to your inmost convictions; His law must be fulfilled in your very heart, and cannot be obeyed if you merely perform certain acts. Its penalties do indeed apply to certain acts done apart from our inmost convictions, such as hypocrisy and lying.” Because the law is “spiritual” and not “corporeal,” Luther emphasizes that “no one keeps it, unless everything you do springs from your inmost heart.”37 This call for sincere faith also extended to its expression in language. Calvin desired above all that “the profession of the tongue” should always express “the true sentiments of the heart.”38 William Bouwsma notes that this value “ranked higher among his priorities than outward obedience to the law. The virtue that most distinguished his beloved David, Calvin emphasized, had been not his perfection but his honesty [*sinceritas*].”39 The centrality of this value to Calvin’s thought is strikingly represented by his personal emblem, in which he portrayed a hand holding forth a heart, encircled by his expressive motto: *Prompte et Sincere* (“Promptly and Sincerely”) (Fig. 4).

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39 Ibid.
Calvin reads his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, surrounded by his other works, including — prominently placed behind him — his *Commentary on the Psalms*, the scriptural book that he particularly praised as a model of sincerity. Embroidered on the tablecloth is his personal emblem, a hand offering a heart, encircled by his motto, *Prompte et Sincere.*
Bouwsma argues that for Calvin the solution to the hypocrisy he feared was the practice of self-examination. Calvin felt we must “learn seriously and inwardly to scrutinize ourselves lest any hypocrisy lurk within.” He cautions that this is a difficult task as “the human heart has so many crannies where vanity hides, so many holes where falsehood lurks, is so decked out with deceiving hypocrisy, that it often dupes itself.” There is some irony in the fact that this process is relatively predetermined. Calvin is quite explicit about the state of the soul to be found within:

First, by comparing the righteousness of the law with our life we learn how far we are from conforming to God’s will. And for this reason we are unworthy to hold our place among his creatures, still less to be accounted his children. Secondly, in considering our powers we learn that they are not only too weak to fulfill the law, but utterly nonexistent. Calvin here articulates two fundamental tenets of his faith: the doctrine of original sin, and the principle of justification by faith alone. Self-examination in light of the law must be constantly practiced by the Christian, but only so that he may discover “his calamity, poverty, nakedness, and disgrace.” Through the acceptance of sinfulness and powerlessness, the soul prepares itself to receive God’s saving grace. It is no mistake that Calvin’s personal emblem of sincerity portrays not just an exposed heart, but a hand-held heart. The image is not only one of transparency, but for the Protestant it is also crucially a gesture of submission, an offering to God. Calvin wrote to his friend William Farel in 1541: “But when I remember I am not my own, I offer up my heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord.” The insistence on the outcome of self-examination reflects a fundamental shift in the understanding of human anthropology, a new theological

40 Cited in Bouwsma, John Calvin, 179-80.
41 Ibid.
emphasis on the bondage of the will that would have a profound impact on the emerging discourse of sincerity not just as a virtue of honesty, but also one of affect.

In an influential essay, Bouwsma has compellingly described this shift as an encounter between “The Two Faces of Humanism,” the central conflict within Renaissance humanist thought between the contrasting ideologies of “Stoicism” and “Augustinianism,” founded on the principles of divine immanence and transcendence respectively. While these two poles between which humanists vacillated were by no means clearly understood as defined or singular movements, they nonetheless represented the availability of antithetical and competing world visions. In its most fundamental terms, Bouwsma articulates their opposition as

the difference between the biblical understanding of creation, which makes both man and the physical universe separate from and utterly dependent on God, and the hellenistic principle of immanence, which makes the universe eternal, by one means or another deifies the natural order, and by seeing a spark of divinity in man tends to make him something more than a creature of God.  

Stoicism saw in man a divine essence or seed, identified with his reason, and determined that it was through this faculty that the nature of the divine order and God’s wishes could be discerned. Man most fully realized his existence by exercising his distinctive quality of reason over other aspects of his nature. Stoics felt that human life was ideally concerned with the pursuit of rational enlightenment, and the sublimation of the rebellious body and the passions through the power of the will. In this context the will was not an independent faculty, but rather “the faithful and mechanical servant of reason,” and so in the Stoic understanding it followed that “to know the good is to do the

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good.” The difficulties posed by the body were to be controlled through a cultivated indifference to worldly and physical impulses.

After a period of waning medieval influence, the revival of Augustine’s theology of justification in the Renaissance proposed a very different understanding of creation. As Calvin noted, he was “not [his] own”; rather, the reformers saw man as fundamentally a creature of God. Their anthropology was based on a principle of difference: in place of a Stoic theory of divine immanence, “Augustinian humanism saw man, not as a system of objectively distinguishable, discrete faculties reflecting ontological distinctions in the cosmos, but as a mysterious and organic unity.” The result was a retreat from the traditional soul-body distinction: original sin pervaded all aspects of man. The idea that his reason could give access to God was not only presumptuous but erroneous; such knowledge was available only through Scriptural revelation. And because, in this fallen state, no faculty was intrinsically superior, Bouwsma concludes that

Augustinianism tended to replace the monarchy of reason in the human personality with a kind of corporate democracy. The primary organ in Augustinian anthropology is not so much that which is highest as that which is central; it is literally the heart (cor), whose quality determines the quality of the whole.”

In this new understanding of man’s more complex and mysterious fallen nature, the will took precedence over the intellect. No longer a dutiful servant of reason, it was seen to be a much more powerful and independent force than the Stoics allowed. The evidence

44 Ibid.
45 Bouwsma discusses this revival in terms of the humanization of Augustine, and in particular his personal appearance in Petrarch’s Secretum, which Bouwsma contrasts with his virtual absence from Dante’s Divine Comedy only a generation before. For Bouwsma this marks a “watershed between medieval and Renaissance culture.” Petrarch’s work “gives eloquent testimony to the need of an anguished man of the fourteenth century not only for abstract wisdom but for a direct encounter with another human being in the past whose spiritual experience, as an individual, might be a source of nourishment for himself.” “The Two Faces of Humanism,” 44.
46 Ibid., 45.
of sin in the world was proof that it was insufficient to rely on the rational powers alone.

In spite of his protracted agonizing, Augustine’s conversion was finally effected by his will and not his intellect. Most significantly, this new ontology had profound implications for the valuation of human emotion:

The will, in this view, is seen to take its direction not from reason but from the affections, which are in turn not merely the disorderly impulses of the treacherous body but expressions of the energy and quality of the heart, that mysterious organ which is the center of the personality, the source of its unity and its ultimate worth. The affections, therefore, are intrinsically neither good nor evil but the essential resources of the personality; and since they make possible man’s beatitude and glory as well as his depravity, they are, in Augustinian humanism, treated with particular respect.48

Religious experience was characterized as affective rather than intellectual. Calvin claims: “the assent which we give to the divine word … is more of the heart than the brain and more of the affections than the understanding.”49 Melanchthon also contradicted the traditional denigration of the affections as “weakness of nature,” privileging instead the place of the heart: “And why do we not use the word ‘heart’ instead of ‘will’ [voluntas]?” he asked, “For the Scriptures call the most powerful part of man the ‘heart,’ especially that part in which the affections arise.”50 Bouwsma observes: “[Melanchthon] saw the consequence of control over the affections (if such control were truly possible) would be not rationality but insincerity, the presentation not of a higher and rational self to the world but of an inauthentic self.”51

The importance of emotion to the experience of Protestant faith is attested by the emblem tradition of the seventeenth century, where the image of a smoking heart becomes a central means for representing subjectivity. In the Puritan George Wither’s

48 Ibid., 47.
49 Cited in ibid.
50 Cited in Martin, “Inventing Sincerity,” 1332.
51 Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism,” 47.
emblems, cited above, the heart repeatedly features as a model of inner torment. One plate, entitled “Where strong Desires are entertain’d, / The Heart ‘twixt Hope, and Feare, is pain’d,” represents a smoking heart, suspended between “great Hopes,” represented by a fastened anchor, and “no lesse Feares,” the continual threat of a bended bow (Fig. 5). The allegory describes the state of a Protestant soul, “payned inwardly with secret Fires.” However, Wither emphasizes the positive value of such emotions when kept in balance: hope repels despair, and fear is the sentinel that guards against carelessness. In another plate Wither is more explicit about the theological significance of the affections as a safeguard against hypocrisy. The image of a smoking heart on a pedestal raised up toward the light of God is entitled, “The Sacrifice, God loveth best, / Are Broken-hearts,
for Sin, opprest” (Fig. 6). Wither laments that no age has had people who “professe / Religion, with a shew of holinesse” like his own. The verses offer a scathing indictment of corrupt clergymen who hypocritically make a show of trivial acts of charity, but fall short of true faith and good intentions. These men come to God with many sacrifices, “But, he such gifts despises: / For, neither gifts, nor workes, nor any thing / (Which we can either doe, or say, or bring,) / Accepted is of God; untill he finde / A spirit humbled, and a troubled-minde. / A contrite Heart, is that, and, that alone, / Which God with love, and pitie, lookes upon.” Not only does the emblem represent the critique of hypocrisy central to the Protestant reform, but it also emphasizes the new valuation of the human passions—the “troubled-minde” and “contrite Heart” are representative states of the ideal Protestant soul.

By overturning the restraint called for in the Stoic tradition, the reformers gave new legitimacy to the expression of emotion. This affective ideal, coupled with the importance of honest self-searching, came increasingly to be articulated under the rubric of sincerity. But unlike Martin’s exploration of the Renaissance transformation of prudence, in which the individual passions were similarly freed from constraint and given new precedence, although the virtue of sincerity placed an emphasis on the unique quality of the individual sinner and their agency in self-searching, this was at once a profoundly qualified independence. As Bouwsma notes, Augustinian humanism may have freed the will from obedience to reason, but “this only meant the bondage of the will to the affections of the heart. And this meant that man can only be saved by grace, not by knowledge; for knowledge can at best reach only the mind, but grace alone can change
the heart.” In the Protestant context, man can only explore his own mysterious state and his own particular emotions in the hopes of stirring the will and ensuring his receptivity to grace. His sincere utterances are both a part of this discipline and the potential signs of his election.

The Psalms were particularly valued as a model for the self-scrutiny and suffering associated with sincerity, especially as it is practiced in language. They were a special favourite of Luther’s; in his Preface to his translation of the Psalms, published in 1528 following his 1522 German edition of the New Testament, he lavishly praises them, stating that “No books of moral tales and no legends of saints which have been written, or ever will be written, are to my mind as noble as the Book of Psalms.” Despite the fact that they belong to the Hebrew Bible, Luther understands the Psalms Christologically, and in fact, he argues that the book “could well be called a ‘little Bible’ since it contains, set out in the briefest and most beautiful form, all that is to be found in the whole Bible, a book of good examples from among the whole of Christendom and from among the saints” (38). What Luther finds uniquely attractive about the Psalms is that they provide “a faithful record of what the saints did and said: how they communed with God

52 Ibid., 49.
53 Martin Luther, “Preface to the Psalms” in Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings, 37. The Psalms were an exceptionally important book for Luther. It is telling that he claims his famous “tower experience” in an Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg where he first conceived his understanding of justification by faith, took place during the time when he was also engaged in his second series of lectures on the Psalms in 1518. Although Luther’s dating of this event is widely debated by scholars, it is significant that in recollecting the origins of his new faith at the end of his life in 1545, he associated it with the time at which he was studying the Psalms. See Luther’s “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings,” 10-12, and Dillenberger, Introduction, xvii.
54 The theological significance of David and the Psalms as a model for spiritual practice in the sixteenth century is made possible by the reformers’ reconceptualization of the understanding of “one gospel” or “one covenant.” For pre-Reformation exeges, Old Testament figures were subject to theological interpretation only insofar as they prefigured the new covenant. However, Barbara Pitkin notes that “For exeges such as Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, and Beza … David functions as a ‘type,’ not in the sense of being an empty figure of things to come, but as an example of beliefs and teachings that remain the same under the new covenant.” “Imitation of David: David as a Paradigm of Faith in Calvin’s Exegesis of the Psalms,” Sixteenth Century Journal XXIV/4 (1993): 848.
and prayed to Him” (38). In comparison, other books “depict holy men all with their tongues tied; whereas the Book of Psalms presents us with saints alive and in the round. It is like putting a dumb man side by side with one who can speak: the first is only half alive” (38). As the most subjective of all the biblical books, the Psalms’ frank personal expressions of soul-sickness are deeply attractive to Luther, and he particularly attributes this quality to their emphasis on “speech … the most powerful and exalted of human faculties” (38). Luther emphasizes not reason, but language as the quality that distinguishes man from animals. But a further excellence is the kind of language represented: the Book of Psalms “preserves, not the trivial and ordinary things said by the saints, but their deepest and noblest utterances, those which they used when speaking in full earnest and all urgency to God. It not only tells what they say about their work and conduct, but also lays bare their hearts … it enables us to see into their hearts and understand the nature of their thoughts” (38-39). The Psalms serve as an important model of sincerity in language, and significantly, this is a language of the heart. In a striking passage, Luther most clearly articulates this expressive virtue in terms of emotion:

The human heart is like a ship on a stormy sea driven about by winds blowing from all four corners of heaven. In one man, there is fear and anxiety about impending disaster; another groans and moans at all the surrounding evil. One man mingles hope and presumption out of the good fortune to which he is looking forward; and another is puffed up with a confidence and pleasure in his present possessions. Such storms, however, teach us to speak sincerely and frankly, and make a clean breast. For a man who is in the grip of fear or distress speaks of disaster in quite a different way from one who is filled with happiness; and a man who is filled with joy speaks and sings about happiness quite differently from one who is in the grip of fear. They say that when a sorrowing man laughs or a happy man weeps, his laughter and his weeping do not come from the heart. In other words, these men do not lay bare, or speak of things which lie in, the bottom of their hearts. (39)
Calvin also shared an affinity for the Psalms, which occupied a privileged position in his life and thought. Over the course of his career as a reformer he engaged in a twenty-five-year-long project of versifying, translating, preaching and lecturing on, writing about and interpreting the Psalms. Much like Luther, he saw their chief value as providing a model for spiritual practice. By exhibiting their own thoughts and affections, the psalmists provoke the believer to engage in a similar process. And as Calvin emphasizes in his Preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms* (1557), this is specifically an affective exercise:

I am wont to call this book, not without cause, ‘The Anatomy of all the parts of the soul,’ for not an affection will a man find in himself, an image of which is not reflected in this glass. Nay, all the griefs, sorrows, fears, misgivings, hopes, cares, anxieties, in short, all the troublesome emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated, the Holy Spirit has here pictured to the life. The other scriptures contain the commands which God enjoined His servants to bear to us. But here are the prophets themselves talking to God, because they lay bare all their inmost thoughts, invite or hale every one of us to examine himself in particular, lest aught of the many infirmities to which we are liable, or of the many vices with which we are beset should remain hidden. A rare and surpassing benefit, when, every lurking-place having been explored, the heart is brought into the light cleansed from hypocrisy, that most noisome pest.

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55 For the importance of the Psalms to Calvin, see Pitkin, “Imitation of David,” 845-49. She observes that “toward no other book of the Bible did [Calvin] direct the full range of his theological, rhetorical, administrative, and even artistic energy” (845). Calvin was a central force behind the introduction of Psalm-singing into the reformed worship, and oversaw the Genevan Psalter project. He preached and published numerous sermons on the Psalms (1546-54), and notably, it was the only Old Testament text he preached from the Sunday pulpit. He commissioned, oversaw and wrote Prefaces to several editions of metrical Psalms by Clément Marot (1542-43) and Louis Budé’s French translation of the Psalms (1551). He lectured on the Psalms over the course of several years in the mid-1550s and out of this came his *Commentary on the Psalms*, published in Latin in 1557 and French in 1558.

56 The uniquely personal nature of Calvin’s Preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms* demonstrates that he took this idea to heart. As his editor T. H. L. Parker notes, the Preface is, “apart from the letters, the most intimate of all his writings.” John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Arthur Golding (1571), rev. and ed. T. H. L. Parker (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1965), 12. Calvin saw his own experiences, and particularly his struggles in Geneva, in terms of David’s life, and in turn felt his own experiences helped him to better read the Psalms. These perceived parallels led him to digress at length in the Preface’s famous autobiographical passage; the subjective experience of the Psalms prompts Calvin to make his own striking self-revelation.

Like Luther, Calvin particularly emphasises that insincere speech is a form of hypocrisy to be avoided at all costs. In his commentary on Psalm 15, Calvin notes that one of the three essential qualities David requires of the Godly is “sincerity in their talk, that they speak nothing guilefully or captiously.” He glosses the Psalm’s phrase “To speak in the heart” as “a strong figurative expression, but which better expresses David’s meaning than if he had said, From the heart. For he denotes such a concord and harmony of the heart and tongue, as that the speech should be the lively image of the inward affection.” 58

For Calvin, David’s phrase constitutes the refusal of an instrumental relationship between feeling and expression; rather, he sees the two as coterminous. Sincere speech literally emanates in the heart. While he acknowledges the figurative power of the metaphor, Calvin does not need to schematize it in terms of tenor and vehicle because tenor is vehicle: the heart and tongue of a true believer express the same thing.

Throughout his Commentary on the Psalms Calvin is insistent that faith cannot be concealed in the heart, but must manifest itself in language. 59 His emphasis on speech raises the question of why it is not enough to believe inwardly, especially if God sees into the heart. Why must sincerity be explicitly linguistic? Randall Zachman suggests that Calvin’s attitude towards the expression of faith evolved over the course of his career. In his first edition of the Institutes, Calvin is wary of hypocritical professions, to the extent of preferring private and silent prayer to spoken prayer, but his experience as a pastor led him to recognize increasingly expressions of pious affection—in the form of prayer and

58 Ibid., Comm. Ps. 15:2.
59 This importance is attested by Calvin’s strong objection to “Nicodemites,” would-be Protestants who (as Nicodemus came to Jesus by night) hid their inner convictions and continued observe the Roman Catholic worship for fear of persecution or loss of social status. Calvin argued: “we see that there is no true religion in the hearts of men, except a confession is made, for there ought to be a consent between the heart and tongue.” Comm. Jeremiah 10:11, cited in Randall C. Zachman, Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 352.
song—both as a means of stimulating more ardent piety in the individual believer, and inciting it in those around them. The mutual communication and stimulation of piety, particularly through the act of communal singing, became for Calvin the primary purpose of public worship, and led him to appreciate the function of church rites and ceremonies. Calvin often returns to the proverb that language is the image of the mind, and as such it is one of the principal means of establishing community: “By language, we know, not only words, but also feelings are communicated. Language is the expression of the mind, as it is commonly said, and therefore it is the bond of human society. Had there been no language, in what would men differ from brute beasts? One would barbarously treat another, there would indeed be no humanity among them.” Calvin conceives of language as the rhetorical glue that will unite his congregation in a collective practice of the heart. In this context, the Book of Psalms’ unique representation of the psalmists’ sincere utterances takes on great significance. Luther equally recognizes their rhetorical force; he finds that “when the Psalms speak of fear or hope, they depict fear and hope more vividly than any painter could do, and with more eloquence than that possessed by Cicero or the greatest of the orators.” By revealing their direct addresses to God, the saints “speak … in a tone that doubles the force and earnestness of the words themselves. For when a man speaks to another man on subjects such as these, he does not speak from his deepest heart; his words neither burn nor throb nor press so urgently as they do here.”

60 Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*. See chap. 11, “The Manifestation of Piety in the Church,” and chap. 12, “The Revelation of the Thoughts of the Heart.” For further illumination on this subject, see Paul Stevens’ argument about the relationship between fellowship and grace in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*: “The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the individual sinner not only through believing but through doing, and doing in the very specific sense of bearing witness not only to one’s own suffering but to the heartwork and ‘answerable’ holiness …, that is, to the authenticity, of others.” “Bunyan, The Great War, and the Political Ways of Grace,” *Review of English Studies* 59 (2007): 713.

61 Comm. Jeremiah 5:15, cited in Zachman, 381.

62 Luther, “Preface to the Psalms,” 40.
(40) The ability to speak in and from the heart is especially important for those who would preach or instruct. Calvin says that David “speaks from his personal feeling and experience as a believer. This is very necessary in one who would be a teacher; for we cannot communicate true knowledge unless we deliver it not merely with the lips, but as something which God has revealed to our own inmost hearts.”

The Reformers recognize a language of personal emotion as the highest form of cultural eloquence. Through the force of individual outpourings the collective fabric is reinforced. Luther concludes his “Preface to the Psalms” by emphasizing their importance as a shared practice. When a man reads the Psalms, he is assured that “he is in the company of the saints, and that all that has happened to the saints is happening to him, because all of them join in singing a little song with him, since he can use their words to talk with God as they did” (40). In the Psalms man has “a beautiful, bright, polished mirror which will show you what Christianity is. Nay, You will see your own self in it, for here is the true γνῶθι σεαυτόν [Know thyself], by which you can know yourself as well as the God Himself who created all things” (41). As is often the case in the early modern period, men look into mirrors to see not an individual self, but an ideal self. The Psalms function, as in the speculum principis tradition, as a mirror which will both reflect back the faults of the beholder, and provide her with an ideal image towards which to aspire. Luther’s comments are telling of the tension and reciprocity between individualism and collectivism that the Psalms represented as a model for identity.

Stephen Greenblatt has aptly described this dynamic at play in the Psalms: “the concerns of the whole society are reached only by way of the individual; the primordial penitential

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63 Comm. Ps. 91:1, cited in Zachman, 351.
experience takes place at the level of the isolated, suffering soul. The soul may be said, of course, to embody humanity as a whole, but such representative status only heightens the importance of the individual.”

Through the Psalms, early modern men and women engaged in a collective practice of individualism: the subjective experience was transformed into an objective social identity. In a new context of interior faith, the sincere expression of personal feeling became a marker of cultural authenticity and authority.

IV. “Many shall go to and fro”: Suffering, Salvation, Science

The relationship between individualism and collectivism central to the Psalms and to his culture’s construction of identity is most interestingly taken up by Bacon in his scientific endeavours. As we have seen, Calvin claimed that the experience of assent to the divine word “is more of the heart than the brain and more of the affections than the understanding.” Bacon too was clearly aware of the role played by the emotions in moving the will. As he asserts in the *Novum Organum*, “The human understanding is no dry light, but receives an infusion from the will and affections; whence proceed sciences which may be called ‘sciences as one would.’ For what a man had rather were true he readily believes … Numberless in short are the ways, and sometimes imperceptible, in

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65 Bacon was certainly influenced by the Psalms; during an illness, he himself translated seven of them, which he published in 1625 as *The Translation of Certaine Psalmes into English verse*, dedicated “to his very good friend Mr. George Herbert.” Brian Vickers notes that “This translation of the Psalms evidently had some special value to Bacon, for it figures in his last will and testament as the first of his ‘Legacies to my friends…’.” *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, 707-08.
which the affections colour and infect the understanding." Bacon is of course emphatically arguing against the contamination of the intellect by the affections. This limitation of human nature is an example of the “Idols of the Tribe,” part of his exposition of his famous doctrine of the Idols—the dangerous illusions, weaknesses and prejudices, both internal and external, that currently beset the human mind and prevent it from true objectivity. Nevertheless, it is apparent that, like the Reformers, Bacon acknowledges the power of emotion to reach the intellect. His attempt to prepare the mind of the reader in the first book of the Novum Organum—both by smashing false intellectual idols, and also by furnishing the means of hope in their wake—demonstrates Bacon’s acute awareness that his renewal of learning is first and foremost not an undertaking of abstract, disengaged science, but a persuasive task entirely subject to human fallibility. This fallibility, and the means of combating it, is most often represented through a religious vernacular. John Channing Briggs notes that implicit in his discussion of the Four Idols is “the notion that opposition or resistance to the new sciences is really a form of heresy— if not an explicit religious heresy, at least one that profoundly corrupts and indicts the inner being of those who embrace it.” As he emphasizes in his Preface to the Instauratio, and the Novum Organum itself, Bacon’s goal is to reject the idolatrous tendencies of the current philosophy through a “true and

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67 The four kinds of idols are Idols of the Tribe, the general weaknesses and vanities of human nature; Idols of the Cave, the faults of the particular individual; Idols of the Market, the shortcomings and inaccuracies of human language; and Idols of the Theatre, the misguided dogmas of received philosophy. See OFB, 79-109.

legitimate abasement of the human spirit” (21). Scientific pursuits must not be motivated by superstition or vanity, the desire for power or fame, or the easy gratification of comforting conclusions. Instead, the discipline of self-effacing inquiry must be practiced through a rigorous method of induction, a method that Briggs and others have noted approaches the zeal of religious self-denial. Also often noted is that Bacon stages a version of this discipline through his formal choice of the Solomonic aphorism in the *Novum Organum*. When encountering Bacon’s aphorisms, the reader is obliged to defer continually the impulse toward premature conclusions; reading is an exercise in assembling fragments that requires judicious and resigned engagement. Briggs notes, “The new sons of science must follow the Apostle Paul’s example of humility in I Corinthians: they must strive to endure all things … Without self-denying, perfective suffering, the new learning’s revelation that knowledge is power threatens to plunge its practitioners into perdition, as did the proud knowledge that cast down Lucifer and Adam.” Bacon thus discursively links his Renewal of philosophy to a Reformation rejection of hypocrisy; much like the Protestant call for sincerity, he advocates a stringent and disinterested practice of empiricism. Above all, this method is to be inculcated in the individual, to whom Bacon directly appeals.

It is perhaps a contradiction that Bacon’s call for dispassionate empiricism should so directly employ a language of religious suffering; nevertheless, it is clear he shares the Reformers’ understanding of affect as an essential tool for oratory and persuasion. Although he denounces the threat that the affections currently pose to the practice of objective science, he skilfully co-opts this weakness into the service of his own ends.

When he confesses in his Preface that he has committed himself to the “hazards,

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69 Ibid., 181.
hardships, and loneliness of the open road,” despite the “shock and marshalled ranks of opinion” and his own “inner hesitations and misgivings,” confiding his trust in “the Lord’s help,” Bacon is speaking a language of the heart. He is also appealing to a cultural value of solitary suffering often articulated in terms of journey. As noted earlier, there is some irony in the fact that the Protestant critique of hypocrisy and call to self-examination in practice fell back on the drama of prescribed experience. In the case of Calvin, William Bouwsma describes how he assigned “the role of the repentant sinner, to be played self-consciously and self-critically” through two principle parts: the Christian life as warfare, and the Christian life as journey or pilgrimage. Both metaphors emphasize a process of development or progress, and both represent conflict, but significantly an internalized conflict, in which priority is placed on forbearance in suffering. Calvin channelled his own experience of exile into a metaphorics of spiritual journey. He depicted the church as a tent; the children of God must carry their shelter with them wherever God commands: “our life is like a journey … and it is not God’s will that we should march along casually as we please, but he sets the goal before us, and also directs us on the right way to it.” This is an arduous path, but with God’s help the pilgrim will eventually reach his goal:

let each of us proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey. No one shall start so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be but slight. Therefore let us not cease so to act that we may make unceasing progress in the way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slightness of our success … Only let us look toward our mark with sincere simplicity and aspire to our goal…71

The arduous and solitary journey lent itself well to the overtly individualized and self-consciously affective understanding of piety. In turn, Bacon takes up the metaphor as a

70 Bouwsma, John Calvin, 180-88.
71 Comms. Jer. 5:4-5; Institutes, III, vi, 5, cited in Bouwsma, John Calvin, 186.
call for the individual rigors of the philosopher. Not only does he represent his own struggle in terms of journey, but the metaphor extends beyond self-presentation to signify scientific practice. He elaborates on the daunting nature of his method with a passage redolent of classical and biblical wandering:

Now to the human intellect reflecting on it, the fabric of the universe looks in its construction like a labyrinth, where we find everywhere so many blind alleys, such deceptions and misleading signs and such oblique and intricate convolutions and knots of nature. But the journey has always to be made through the woods of experience and of things particular, guided by the uncertain light of the senses which sometimes flares up and at others dies down. Even those who (as I have said) present themselves as guides on the journey are themselves ensnared in the thickets, and add to the number of errors and errant souls. In such difficult circumstances we must then lose faith both in the naked force of human judgement and even in chance success. For these difficulties cannot be overcome by any amount of genius or repeated gambling on the results of experience. No, our tracks must be guided by a clue, and a sound policy must secure every step of the way right from the very perceptions of the senses. (19)

The works of nature appear to the mind as an intricate and mysterious labyrinth; however, it is necessary to embark on the arduous passage through the “woods of experience,” recalling both the selva oscura or “dark forest” of Dante’s Inferno and the motif of romance wandering. But whereas the Christian pilgrim is guided by God on the straight and narrow path, the new philosopher must be governed by empirical method. Bacon himself will serve as a prophet and guide: “I pour forth most humble and hearty prayers to God the Father, God the Word, and God the Holy Ghost that, having in mind the afflictions of the human race and the pilgrimage of this our life in which we wear out

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72 The metaphor of journey through the dark forest appears again in the 82nd aphorism of the Novum Organum: Bacon cautions that proper experience is not “the groping of benighted men trying steadfastly to feel their way to the right road by luck, when they would have been much wiser and better to wait for day, or strike a light, and then set off.” Men have “gone off course altogether,” either by “deserting experience entirely, or by getting caught up in it and running up and down as in a labyrinth; whereas a properly established order leads by a direct road through the woods of experience to the open ground of axioms.” OFB, 131.
days short and evil, they will think fit through my hands to endow the human family with new mercies” (21-23).

It becomes readily apparent that Bacon’s language has if not an explicitly, then an implicitly religious cast. Religious parody, and in particular, a Protestant discourse of affective individualism is central to his rhetoric: the appeal to a personal sense of humility and suffering is a means of authorizing his project and converting his reader to the task. Near the end of the first book of the *Novum Organum*, after he has denounced false idols and argued for objective experiments, Bacon returns again to his revelation of personal sincerity in the ninety-second aphorism, his overture to his penultimate section which will address the matter of hope. He acknowledges that “by far the greatest obstacle to the advancement of the sciences … lies in men’s despairing belief that the job is impossible” (149). Even serious men of good judgement cling to the idea that the sciences are inherently cyclical: human fallibility and nature’s obscurity limit discovery to a process of “times and tides” that can never proceed beyond a certain point. In the face of such pessimism, Bacon determines that “now it is time to speak of hope, especially as I make no vain promises, and do not seek to force nor ensnare men’s judgements, but to lead them by the hand of their own accord.” The best form of hope will be the particulars laid out in his “tables of discovery” in the second and the fourth part of his *Instauration*, “as this is not hope alone but like hope fulfilled.” But, acknowledging that something more might be required, he resolves “I must press ahead with my programme for making men’s minds ready, a programme in which revealing the grounds for hope plays an important part” (149-151). Bacon understands his is a rhetorical project, and so he proceeds to offer his most bold self-presentation:
Accordingly, I must open and lay out my conjectures which make hope in this business probable, just as Columbus did before his epic voyage across the Atlantic, when he gave reasons why he believed he could discover new lands and continents beyond those known then, reasons which, though rejected at first, were afterwards vindicated by his experiment, and were the origin and cause of vast consequence. (151)

The journey motif is extended through the powerful symbolism of Columbus and his New World discovery, to which Bacon brazenly compares himself. This association leads the way for his first and most provocative grounds for hope in the next aphorism: both geographic exploration and scientific discovery are the Providential fulfilment of biblical prophecy. He argues: “we must not forget the prophecy of Daniel concerning the last ages of the world: that Many shall go to and fro and knowledge shall be increased, which manifestly hints and signifies that it was fated (i.e. Providence so arranged it), that thorough exploration of the world (which so many long voyages have apparently achieved or are presently achieving) and the growth of the sciences would meet in the same age” (151).

Bacon refers to a passage in Daniel 12:4, a version of which is also famously featured on the engraved title page of the 1620 Instauratio Magna (Fig. 7). The title page is a powerful iconographic staging that unites and mobilizes several of Bacon’s most important rhetorical devices. On it, Bacon’s name and the work’s title, in elaborate font, appear suspended between two massive columns across a background expanse of sky. The eye is drawn out between the pillars towards a limitless horizon, on which a tiny ship appears. In the foreground, another much larger ship is passing through the columns, and gathered in the water around it are visible the tiny heads of inquisitive sea creatures who gaze up at its arrival, seemingly in welcome. Below the columns, at the base of the plate
is the phrase from Daniel, altered slightly from the Vulgate version: “Multi pertransibunt & augebitur scientia” (“many will pass through and knowledge or science will increase”). The image figures multiple layers of historical, political, and religious significance that would have been readily available to an early modern audience. The columns are the Pillars of Hercules, which according to Roman mythology, were built by the Greek hero
at the Strait of Gibraltar to mark the edge of the then known world. As a warning to sailors, they bore the motto *Non plus ultra*, “nothing further beyond.” In the sixteenth century, Charles V of Spain adopted and subverted the image of the columns and the view of the ocean beyond by affixing his revised motto, *Plus ultra* (“further beyond”). This visual denial of the original proscription became a symbol for the glory of the Holy Roman Empire and the Spanish expansion in the New World. Bacon in turn appropriates Charles’ recognizable geopolitical image as one that he can readily convert to an exhortation for philosophical advancement. In the first lines of his Preface to the *Instauratio* he makes reference to the “baleful pillars set up against the sciences,” lamenting the fact that “men are not encouraged by the desire or hope of getting beyond them” (11). In earlier times, when men could only navigate by the stars, they could “coast along the shores of the Old World or cross lesser and Mediterranean seas,” but in order to cross oceans and discover the New World, they required the mariner’s compass, “a more trustworthy and certain guide.” By analogy, the sciences have thus far been discovered by “use, meditation, observation and argument,” but more hidden aspects of nature require better methods (19-21). But, in another layer of parody, Bacon’s own emblem to some extent again reverses the outward movement of “*plus ultra*,” or at least shifts its emphasis, by visually underlining the importance of return. The direction of the ship’s bow and the full set of its sails clearly indicate that it is returning through the pillars on its homeward journey, presumably bearing the fruits of its discovery. In this sense, the image, like so much of Bacon’s rhetoric, is one of redemptive hope. The emblem is a visual realization of the desire for increase or “*augebitur*,” Bacon’s understanding of an Instauration that will repair the past by looking to the future.
But as much as he looks to the future, Bacon’s rhetoric is deeply anchored in the present. As he is at pains to emphasize, the explorations of geography and of science are ordained to meet at this particular moment in history. It is critical to seize the opportunity: “even if the breath of hope blowing from that new continent were much weaker and less perceptible, yet I have decided that (unless we evidently wish to be mean of soul) we must make the attempt” (173). Until now, men have been held back in their progress by a reverence for antiquity, and for the authority of those who uphold it. Bacon cleverly seeks to invert this understanding of time: “the dotage and old age of the world should be taken for antiquity in its right sense, and ought to denote our times, and not the springtime of the world when the ancients lived” (133). In relation to the present age, antiquity may be chronologically older, but in terms of intellectual maturity, it represents the infancy of knowledge. His own time, the inheritor of all previous learning, is finally poised for great things: “surely it would be a disgrace to mankind if, while the expanses of the material globe, i.e. of lands, seas, and stars, have in our times been opened up and illuminated, the limits of the intellectual globe were not pushed beyond the narrow confines of the ancients’ discoveries” (133). 73 Perhaps his most forceful claim to timeliness is the modesty feint he introduces in his epistle dedicatory to James I and reiterates throughout the Novum Organum: “my work (as I have often said) springs rather from good fortune than from great skill, and is rather a birth of time than of talent” (185). Bacon appeals humbly to his role as a prophet and disciple in the fulfilment of “the

73 Perez Zagorin notes that in contrast to most of his contemporaries who considered time and human history either as a process of steady decay or as a process of cyclical change destined to repeat the same events, Bacon’s thought was permeated by a historical perspective which supported “a full-blown conception of progress.” He finds that “Bacon…saw in the historical-temporal process itself a potentiality for growth, renewal and the expansion of knowledge that fortified the future kingdom of man.” Francis Bacon, 203-04.
blessedness of Your Majesty’s times,” but his repeated emphasis on himself as a conduit is itself significant (7). He grounds his discovery not just in his particular moment, but through the cultural figures with whom he compares himself, like Columbus and elsewhere Alexander the Great, and most importantly, through his own self-figuration as a contemporary man suffering for the new science. His rhetorical brilliance is to recognize a language of subjectivity and suffering as a powerful cultural touchstone. His own identity and his own sincere struggle are offered as an example to the reader:

I believe that men can take some heart from my own example; and I say this not to show off but because it helps to say it. If you lack confidence, look at me, of all men of his time the one most engrossed in affairs of state, not in very good health (which exhausts so much of my time), yet in this matter plainly a Trailblazer following no man’s footsteps and, intimating nothing of this business to any mortal man, yet one who has set out steadfastly on the right road and submitted his mind to things, and has (I believe) carried this business some way forward. (171)

Bacon is at pains to emphasize his status as a “Trailblazer” following in the footsteps of none. This is the basis for his affinity with Alexander the Great, a likeness he insists is not born out of vanity, or a pretention to greatness, but their mutual ability to intervene in history, to “ma[k]e less of things thought to be great” (155). He and Alexander share a bold claim to originality; his project to regenerate the sciences is one that “no one (I judge) will claim has been done or thought of before” (155).

In light of Bacon’s rhetoric of individualism and sincerity, his emblematic title page yields additional layers of meaning beyond its immediate imperialist connotations. The yoking of political and scientific expansion is readily apparent by analogy with Charles V’s emblem, transformed through the Daniel prophecy. But an added persuasive element is that the emblem figures a solitary ship as it returns to the fold. The image of the single ship passing through is in keeping with Bacon’s efforts to inculcate his scientific
discipline at the level of the individual. As Sarah Hutton notes, to a contemporary audience, the pillars of Hercules would also have connoted the Greek hero and his Twelve Labours.  

Erasmus provides one of the period’s most familiar expositions of the Labours of Hercules is in his *Adagia*, explaining that it pertains to works of great effort, requiring noble altruism and selfless labour. To Erasmus Hercules’ labours signify “something great and manifold which needs the strength of Hercules” but also “of a kind to bring the greatest advantage to others, and little or no profit to the doer except a little fame and a lot of envy.” The allusion thus becomes another means of modelling the practice of humility and earnest industry required of the new scientist as he journeys through the “woods of experience” in pursuit of progress. The frontispiece iconographically embodies Bacon’s understanding of the relationship between the individual and their culture, one that is profoundly marked by the humanist ideology of the *vita activa*. For Bacon the individual is always in the service of the collective; as he is aware, the Daniel prophecy stipulates *multi pertransibunt*, “many will pass through.” Accordingly, the emblem depicts not one, but two ships, and although they are separated by a vast expanse of sea, it nevertheless conveys the certainty that they will be received home through the same strait. Bacon appeals to the perspective of the individual, as it is through the efforts of the individual that the needs of the collective will best be served.

The metaphor of journey is such a powerful one for Bacon because it represents his hopeful understanding of progress—history as telos—but also because in the religious vernacular of his period it is a favourite metaphor for the experiences of the individual.

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In his work, journey simultaneously connotes outward, scientific progress and inward, subjective practice; as such, it is particularly suited to the realization of a new “marriage between the empirical and rational.”

The recurring metaphor of journey and its redemptive fulfilment of the Daniel prophecy is also Bacon’s most explicit illustration of the end of knowledge as a kind of salvation—both personal and cultural. Bacon’s understanding of time as a process of continual growth and expansion led him to envision a future instauration of the sciences in which his culture could be restored to some degree to its pure condition before the Fall. The explicitly religious nature of his rhetoric in the *Novum Organum* is ostensibly at odds with his insistence elsewhere about the separation of divinity and natural philosophy. Along with many thinkers of his time, Bacon defended the pursuit of knowledge as in no way presenting a threat to faith. In *The Advancement of Learning* he represents religion and science as complementary but separate disciplines: natural philosophy reveals a better understanding of the manifestation of God’s glory, while theology interprets scripture in a search for the meaning of God’s inscrutable will. Nevertheless, he maintains that they should remain discrete in their respective pursuits of God’s Word and Works; to combine them leads to “an heretical religion, and an imaginary and fabulous philosophy.”76 However, the *Novum Organum* seems to defy this separation, both in terms of its figurative language, and in the governing trope of redemption through knowledge: “Let the human race only be given the chance to regain its God-given authority over nature, then indeed will right reason and true religion govern the way we exert it” (197). Briggs argues that in the *Novum Organum* “Bacon’s religious metaphors

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seem to be more than casual exploitations of the familiar religious vernacular … The new natural philosophy is connected to religion as a subordinate yet powerfully complementary instrument.” Bacon claims that “natural philosophy after the Word of God is the best medicine for superstition and most highly recommended food for faith. And so to religion natural philosophy is rightly given as her most faithful servant, the former manifesting God’s will, the latter His power” (145). Briggs concludes that in this striking alliance, science’s purpose is “nothing less than to reverse a major consequence of the Fall: to restore man’s mastery over nature to ‘its perfect and original condition’ … The new sciences aspire to remake an Eden for human knowledge in tandem with Divinity’s repair of man’s moral condition.”

The legacy of this powerful dream of recovery is evident in the poet Abraham Cowley’s encomium to Bacon included in Thomas Sprat’s History of the Royal Society (1667). Cowley absorbs and re-iterates both Bacon’s vision of salvation, and his rhetoric of individual self-sacrifice. Bacon is likened to Moses as a liberator of philosophy, who led his “wandring Predecessors” out of the “long Errors of the way” and

    led us forth at last,
    The barren Wilderness he past,
    Did on the very Border stand
    Of the blest promis’d Land,
    And from the Mountains Top of his Exalted Wit,
    Saw it himself, and shew’d us it. 78

The proposal that the sciences offer the means for cultural deliverance is most fully realized in Bacon’s only attempt at narrative fiction, his prose utopia, the New Atlantis (1627). It is also the text in which Bacon perfects his rhetoric of individualism.

77 Briggs, “Bacon’s Science and Religion,” 176, 177.
and sincerity. Literary form offers the unique advantage of first-person narration, a means of realizing a fictional voice and identity through which the reader may imaginatively experience a conversion into Bacon’s new world of learning. Written near the end of his life around 1624, after he had produced all of his major works, the narrative converts Bacon’s most important themes into fable. In this utopian text, the motif of salvation and progress in a new world of learning beyond the seas introduced in the *Instauratio*’s title page is made literal in the story’s conceit. It begins with a group of European sailors lost in a remote part of the Pacific. After sailing from Peru, their winds change direction, “so as we could make little or no way,” and they are carried so far off course that after a year of wandering, “by which time our victuals failed us,” they “gave ourselves for lost men, and prepared for death.” The beginning is an allegory for cultural stasis and hunger as the mariners find themselves adrift in “the greatest wilderness of waters” (457). But just as Luther argues that “the human heart is like a ship on a stormy sea driven about by winds blowing from all four corners of heaven,” but that “such storms … teach us to speak sincerely and frankly,” so in their moment of crisis they are able to “lift our hearts and voices to God above, who ‘showeth his wonders in the deep’; beseeching him of his mercy, that as in the beginning he discovered the face of the deep, and brought forth dry land, so he would now discover land to us, that we might not perish” (457). In this recapitulation of the Genesis account their prayers are answered, and they discern land on the horizon, and finally gain entrance into “a good haven,” the port of New Atlantis, or Bensalem (457). The inhabitants greet them forthrightly, although with formality and caution, but the mariners are soon permitted to

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79 Francis Bacon: The Major Works, ed. Brian Vickers, 457 (all references to the *New Atlantis* are from this edition and hereafter cited parenthetically in the text).
disembark and are received into “the Strangers’ House” where they are treated with every
generosity, and their sick are cured. The reader would find it hard to miss the religious
reverence with which the mariners perceive the new world they encounter, which appears
to them as a kind of divine paradise. Upon receiving Bensalem’s hospitality, they are left
“confused with joy and kindness” remarking amongst themselves they have come into a
“land of angels” and are “cast into some divine pool of healing” (462-3). They have been
set “on land, as Jonas was out of the whale’s belly,” in this place “beyond both the old
world and the new … a kind of miracle hath brought us hither” (461). They profess, “It
seemed to us that we had before us a picture of our salvation in heaven” (463). Their
sense of deliverance is emphasized in their initial exchanges with the Governor of the
Strangers’ House, from whom they first learn the terms of their stay, and about the
reclusive society and its “laws of secrecy touching strangers” (466). The mariners’
fervent promise to obey his commandments is underlined with an allusion to Psalm
137—“our tongues should first cleave to the roofs of our mouths, ere we should forget
either his reverend person or this whole nation in our prayers” (463)—a reference to the
Israelites’ promise of remembrance that most explicitly establishes Bensalem as a New
Jerusalem.

Bacon is at pains to emphasize that the Bensalemites share the mariners’ Christian
perspective. Their first communication is a scroll bearing a seal depicting cherubim’s
wings and a cross. The mariners must affirm their Christianity before they are allowed to
disembark. The Governor of the Strangers’ House, “by vocation … a Christian priest,” is
eminently pleased that the sailors’ first request is to know how the culture converted to
Christianity (462). He obliges them with a detailed account of the miraculous apparition
of a Pillar of Light and “an ark or chest” containing the Scriptures. The mariners learn secondly that Bensalem is unknown to the world at the behest of its great lawgiver King Solamona, who “reigned in this island, about nineteen hundred years ago” and established their “interdicts and prohibitions … touching the entrance of strangers” (469-70). Like the biblical Solomon, he had a “large heart” and was dedicated to preserving his kingdom in its “happy and flourishing estate,” and so sought to avoid the “commixture of manners” that might threaten its perfection (470). But of his excellent acts, “one above all hath pre-eminence,” the foundation of an order or society they call “‘Salomon’s House’; the noblest foundation … that ever was upon the earth” (471). Also referred to as the “College of the Six Days Works,” it is dedicated to “the finding out of the true nature of all things (whereby God might have the more glory in the workmanship of them, and men the more fruit in the use of them)” (471). As he does in the Novum Organum, Bacon invokes biblical authority to support his programme for the sciences. In particular, he alludes to a favourite scriptural passage in support of a natural history, which describes how Solomon “spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.” For this reason, the Governor explains that although some think that Salomon’s House bears the name of its founder King Solamona, “a little corrupted,” he in fact intended to name it after “the King of the Hebrews,” whose works of natural history, although lost to Europeans, have been preserved in Bensalem. By intentionally confounding the biblical and historical Salomon/Solamona in their

80 “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart,” I Kings 4:29.
81 I Kings 4:3. Vickers notes that in place of “hyssop” (from the Septuagint, the Vulgate and English versions) Bacon preferred “moss” from the Protestant Latin translation by Tremellius and Junius. Francis Bacon: The Major Works, xl. See also 471n.
82 Bacon’s spelling of “Salomon” is influenced by the English Calvinist edition of the Scriptures, the 1560 Geneva Bible. Vickers, Francis Bacon: The Major Works, xl.
mutual pursuit of science, Bacon realizes his ideal understanding of a divinely sanctioned and institutionally supported natural philosophy. Bensalem also pursues an idealised form of imperialism motivated by learning. As an exception to their laws restricting travel, every twelve years a mission of three fellows of Salomon’s House is sent out for the purpose of obtaining knowledge of other countries, and in particular “the sciences, arts, manufactures, and inventions of all the world” and “books, instruments, and patterns in every kind” (471). Bensalem trades “not for gold, silver, or jewels; nor for silks; nor for spices; nor any other commodity of matter; but only for God’s first creature, which was Light: to have light ... of the growth of all parts of the world” (472). Inspired by biblical precedent, established by the king, and central to the state, Salomon’s House is the “very eye” and “the lanthorn of this kingdom” (464, 471). It is recognizable as exactly the sort of research institution Bacon outlines in his 1608 private memoranda, the Commentarius Solutus. Its central pride of place demonstrates that the island is Bacon’s vision of the ideal polity governed by science.

However, Bensalem is not idealized beyond the point of recognition. Of note is a repeated narrative strategy of comparison by which aspects of Bensalem are found to be at once like, but not like the European world: Bensalem has a fruit “like an orange” but of a more scarlet colour and possessed with healing properties (459); their parchment is “somewhat yellower than our parchment, and shining” (458); their cloth is “of an excellent azure colour, far more glossy than ours” (458). Such details continually frame the experience of Bensalem in terms of improvement on European culture. This familiarity is reciprocal; the Bensalemites recognize the mariners’ customs—for example, they greet them with European languages, and they understand their repeated offers of
gifts in exchange for kindness, although they politely refuse as it is frowned upon in Bensalem that public servants be “twice paid” (459). They also rely on European learning as an essential resource, although presumably to improve upon its more primitive findings. The Bensalemites are thus established as a purer, more enlightened version of Europeans. Most importantly, their shared Christianity is a crucial point of contact that renders the Bensalemites recognizable and sympathetic to Bacon’s reader. These textual strategies of proximity and difference establish Bensalem as an image of futurity in keeping with Bacon’s ideas about progress in the *Novum Organum*. David Colclough makes a compelling argument that in the *New Atlantis*, Bacon imagines not so much an ideal polity in the tradition of More and Plato, as “a representation of the Baconian future, in a fruitful ‘trading’ relationship with the textual past.” Colclough sees the text as “an allegory for the new knowledge, suggesting ways of understanding the past and the future, at the same time as describing the kind of society that would result from Bacon’s reforms.” In this reading, the *New Atlantis* is not a playful, ironic meditation on the model commonwealth, but Bacon’s proleptic vision and dream of a future world he believes can be. It is his illustration and incitement towards the progress to be found beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

This future salvation is to be realized through a strategy of assimilation—both of the mariner who is selected to have privileged knowledge of Bensalem, and by extension, of Bacon’s reader. Over the course of the narrative, the mariners are brought “into their bosom, as was enough to make us forget all that was dear to us in our own countries” (472). In an attempt to preserve its official secrecy, Bensalem has established a policy

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that visitors should be offered strong incentives to stay, including a living furnished by
the state, and boasts that in its history, “not one ship … ever returned” and only thirteen
individuals have chosen to be sent home in Bensalemite ships (470). A powerful
conversion is being effected, and as is typical of Baconian rhetoric, this conversion will
take place at the level of the individual. Like the Instauratio, one of the primary means
of seducing the reader is through the sincerity of a first-person appeal. But in the New
Atlantis, the reciprocity between individual and collective is signalled by the narrative
slippage between the first-person singular and first-person plural. The narrative is
focalized through the perspective of one of the mariners, who is at first closely identified
with his fellow crew members. This collective position is signalled from the narrative’s
first words: “We sailed from Peru, (where we had continued by the space of one whole
year), for China and Japan, by the South sea; taking with us victuals for twelve months”
(457). The opening lines demonstrate that the account owes as much to the plain style of
early modern travel narrative as it does to the nascent utopian genre; however, they make
no conventional attempt to establish the narrator’s particular credentials. His singular but
anonymous voice is instead representative of his crew, who themselves are of no
particular nationality. The mariners initially experience Bensalem communally: when the
narrator addresses his crew and advises good behaviour, “Our company with one voice
thanked me for my good admonition” (462). When they are invited to ask questions, they
do so collectively—to the extent that their joint speech is placed in quotations: “We
answered; ‘That we humbly thanked him that he would give us leave so to do … But
above all’ (we said), …‘we desired to know…’ ” (463). But as the narrative progresses,
this communal position is narrowed to an increasingly exclusive representation. The
Governor of the Strangers’ House offers to speak “with some few of us: whereupon six of us only stayed” (462), and the group becomes more select when only two of the company are invited to attend the Feast of the Family (472). Once the narrator begins to describe his conversations with the Jew Joabin, the pronouns shift from the collective “we” to the increasingly private “I” of the latter part of the narrative. But nevertheless, this “I” remains anonymous, and the change is subtle enough as not to be immediately noticeable. In much the same way that Bacon’s third-person “FRANCIS OF VERULAM” serves as both a particular ego, and a collective model and guide, the New Atlantis’ narrator is at once an intimate and singular voice, a symbol for his fellow crew members, and a cipher into which the reader may interpolate their own identification with the narrative.

The exchange between the narrator and the Father of Salomon’s House that concludes the work is still more intimate. The “I” of the narrative is selected by his crew and invited into the Father’s presence for a private interview. The conversation is presented as a communion between priest and believer: “God bless thee, my son; I will give thee the greatest jewel I have. For I will impart unto thee, for the love of God and men, a relation of the true state of Salomon’s House” (480). The father, a true orator like Bacon himself, explains that his relation will follow a specific order, and gives his partitio: he will describe the goal of their foundation, the apparatus and instruments for their experiments, the different employments and functions to which their fellows are assigned, and finally, the ordinances and rites they observe (480). What follows is an extensive catalogue of every variety of experiment pursued by Salomon’s House: the text gives way to a list that bears little in common with the narrative which precedes it. The mariner’s previous conversations establish the context of the culture, but the feeling is
that they are largely a pretext for Bacon’s true interest, which is this description of Bensalem’s scientific activities and the dramatic scene of blessing which concludes the narrative. Brian Vickers notes that “the transition between the voyage narrative and the description of Salomon’s House, which constitutes the work’s real substance, owes something to the form of the sacred dialogue … in which the author describes how a divine spirit reveals to him some portion of hidden wisdom” (786). The Father’s account is a form of apocalypse, an “uncovering” or “disclosure” to certain privileged persons of things normally hidden from the majority of humankind (“apocalypse, n.” O.E.D. 2). Through these visions, God reveals to a chosen prophet or apostle a portion of his unseen intentions. Bacon goes so far as to identify the Father with the apocalyptic images of God in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4—two of the very few times God qua God is represented in Scripture. The Father’s majestic arrival in a richly jewelled “chariot” or sedan-chair “gilt, and adorned with crystal; save that the fore-end had panels of sapphires, set in borders of gold, and the hinder-end the like of emeralds of the Peru colour” (479) recalls God’s battle chariot at Ezekiel 1:26 in which he is depicted on “the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone” or his appearance at Revelation 4:3 “to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.” The comparison—Bacon’s closest brush with blasphemy—is perhaps oblique, but it is clear that apocalyptic revelation provides a powerful reinforcement for his understanding of scientific and social progress. Through their visions, the prophets reveal God’s justice as taking place in the future; the genre’s intention is to reveal God’s ultimate purpose, “to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1). This notion of futurity is at the heart
of Bacon’s interest. Apocalypse foresees coming events, especially those connected with the end of the present age, a notion that dovetails with Bacon’s own sense of his philosophy’s radical break with the past. Once again, he formulates his understanding of a divinely ordained, providential world of new science, a world he believes must come to pass. The eschatological predictions of apocalypse are transformed into his futuristic representation of a paradise of scientific enlightenment.

The narrative ends rather abruptly as the Father stands to grant his final blessing: “I, as I had been taught, kneeled down; and he laid his right hand upon my head, and said; ‘God bless thee, my son, and God bless this relation which I have made. I give thee leave to publish it for the good of other nations; for we are here in God’s bosom, a land unknown’” (488). This final act represents the text’s reification of its own persuasive purpose, the conclusion towards which the mariner, and the reader, has been ineluctably led from the beginning. As W. A. Sessions notes, Bacon’s utopia differs from his predecessor More’s in that the reader is engaged not through unresolved Platonic dialogue, but monologic and quasi-religious conversion: “Bacon’s reader is being taught to enter a specific history and become a communicant of a society that forms a collective Faber Fortunae, a model of a new Christian church and a new mystical Body. The dialectic has been officially resolved… His is a ‘model’ of a higher reality that is being presented as truth, not a choice of options.”

The blessing signals the ultimate divinization of science into which the narrator is received, along with the reader, who is made to experience it with him. Like all good Christians, the mariner is given leave to publish what he has learned, “for the good of other nations”; he is ordained and appointed as a missionary charged with the duty of spreading the word—presumably the reason we

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84 Sessions, Francis Bacon Revisited, 153.
are now reading his written account. The individual’s representative status is made explicit; he is positioned as a privileged site for collective knowledge, a conduit for the culture’s wider experience.

Many have found this invitation to publish odd, given the strict codes of secrecy surrounding Bensalem, and in particular, the activities of its most safely guarded institution, Salomon’s House. In general, this secrecy has frustrated critics; so much of what we are told about Bensalem remains fragmentary or ambiguous. In contrast to the detailed account of Bensalem’s scientific pursuits, the narrative provides very little information about its political and economic systems, its geography, or its moral philosophy. Bacon’s own secretary and editor, William Rawley, draws attention to the work’s failings in this regard, noting in his preface that “His Lordship thought also in this present fable to have composed a frame of Laws, or the best state or mould of a commonwealth; but foreseeing it would be a long work, his desire of collecting the Natural History diverted him.” Rawley was compelled to affix a note at the end of the text: “The rest was not perfected” (488). Bacon self-consciously crafts the *New Atlantis* in the model of the “best state” genre, choosing his title after Plato’s *Timias* and *Critias* and directly alluding to More’s *Utopia*, but nevertheless, the text is notable for its relative lack of engagement with political and moral philosophy. David Colclough astutely suggests that “to attempt to read the *New Atlantis* as a utopia in the Morean mould and to search the text for a system of, or even a series of *sententiae* about, ethics or politics, is misguided. Bacon’s response to the textual tradition of Aristotle, Plato and More consists here in a manipulation of certain formal features to very different ends from theirs.

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85 Francis Bacon: The Major Works, 785.
Expectations are raised in the reader, and deliberately … disappointed. As in all his work, in the *New Atlantis* Bacon masterfully appropriates a cultural form and adapts it to his own ends. He is primarily interested in depicting a culture governed by science, and the work is in many ways an elaborate set piece to dramatize the pursuits of Salomon’s House. It is a persuasive work with a relatively single-minded goal of presenting a culture with a scientific institution at its heart.

Critics perhaps also strain too much to read the work as an allegory for Bacon’s scientific theories or methods. For example, Bronwen Price is troubled by a contradiction she identifies between the conversational means by which the narrator learns of Bensalem, and Bacon’s experimental method as it is exemplified in the pursuits of Salomon’s House. According to Price, the difficulty is that “the narrator relies primarily on discursive information for his understanding, rather than immediate observation or empirical evidence. For all the experimental, inductive method that Salomon’s House seems to uphold in its quest for ‘Light’, its activities are ‘revealed’ to the narrator in a largely conversational, rather than practical, form.” Price attempts to resolve this interesting contradiction by concluding that through these textual ambiguities, Bacon is “ensur[ing] that the reader remains active and alert, being encouraged to examine the different positions from which knowledge is presented, rather than simply accepting them”; the reader is “placed in an interrogative position, prompted

87 Although critics have questioned his reliability, it seems perhaps simplest to take at face value Rawley’s assessment of the work: “This fable my Lord devised, to the end that he might exhibit therein a model or description of a college instituted for the interpreting of nature and the producing of great and marvelous works for the benefit of men, under the name of Salomon’s House, or the College of Six Days’ Works.” *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, 785.
to … venture beyond the limits of what we are told.” But this seems too complicated. Price perhaps misses out on the most important implications of the persuasive strategy at work in Bacon’s first person, discursive account. The text implicates rather than alienates: the narrative attempts not to cultivate the reader’s interrogative, sceptical stance, but rather to disarm them of it through a personal account—a powerful and recognizable model of religious catechism and conversion that promises science as salvation. In the *New Atlantis*, Bacon acknowledges his culture’s affinity for myth, story, and personal identity. He turns from philosophical treatise to first-person confession as a way to imaginatively incite his reader to action.

Sarah Hutton more convincingly suggests that “the *New Atlantis* is, above all, an instrumental text. Although it is designed to communicate Bacon’s ideas, it is not so much a descriptive or prescriptive text, but a persuasive one.” For Hutton the text functions less as an allegory of Bacon’s theories than as a means of calling his audience to action. As such, it functions as a companion piece to the *Sylva Sylvarum*, the work of natural history with which it was printed. Hutton is quite right, but she interprets the rhetoric of the *New Atlantis* primarily in terms of the political through a reading of the title page of the *Sylva Sylvarum*, in which the Pillars of Hercules are again depicted, but with a view of the *mundus intellectualis* in place of the *Instauratio Magna*’s returning ship. Hutton concludes that the *New Atlantis* “bespeaks the political circumstances of its creation. It is a fiction adapted to the aspirations of those whom Bacon would persuade. The story presents a vision of Bacon’s programme put into effect and allied to a vision of empire” (54). However, Bacon is not speaking exclusively to James I in the hopes of

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89 Hutton, “Persuasions to Science,” 49.
patronage, and the appeal to contemporary discourses of imperialist expansion is not the only way that he seduces his reader. The *New Atlantis* is a populist text; unlike the *Instauratio Magna* and the *Sylva Sylvarum*, it is written in the vernacular and thus accessible to Bacon’s broadest English audience. It was one of his most influential and widely read works, and was reprinted with the *Sylva Sylvarum* at least fifteen times in the seventeenth century, in addition to multiple Latin and French translations. Above all, the *New Atlantis* bespeaks the religious and social contexts that inform its production, and the rhetoric of individualism and conversion is equally, if not more centrally, important. Although the text rehearses Bacon’s favourite motif of a new empire of knowledge, its most profound appeal is not to the political, but to religious tropes co-opted in the name of science. The text is an individual call to action, and Bacon chooses a genre, and a voice that will identify it as such. He does not appeal to empirical modes of learning, as he does elsewhere, but to rhetorical, literary and parabolic kinds of knowing. Most fundamentally, he resorts to a religious epistemology in which faith is not dependent on full disclosure. The *New Atlantis* is a narrative of quasi-religious revelation and conversion, and as such it makes its most fundamental appeal to the reader through the Augustinian confessions of a first-person narrator whose persuasion is founded not on science, but sincerity.

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Chapter Two: Milton, Politics, and Personal Zeal

When God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in mans will what he shall say, or what he shall conceal ... Which might teach these times not to condemn all things that are sharply spoken or vehemently written as proceeding out of stomach, virulence and ill nature ... no man can be justly offended with him that shall endeavour to impart and bestow ... those sharp, but saving words which would be a terror, and a torment in him to keep back.

—John Milton, The Reason of Church Government (1642)

You are Physitians to the State, and these are Purging times, let all Malignant Humours be purged out of the Ecclesiasticall, and Politique Body.

—Francis Cheynell, Sions Memento, and Gods Alarum (1643)

In 1641 John Milton heeded a sense of personal calling to assist his country as it struggled to “enfranchis[e] her self from this impertinent yoke of prelaty” and set aside his course of private study to enter into the debates over episcopacy and Caroline church government that had erupted in the tense period between the calling of the Long Parliament and the outbreak of Civil War. At this moment which inaugurates his twenty-year-long political prose-writing career, Milton professes his distaste for the vulgar task of controversy, famously offering a picture of himself as a reluctant polemicist, forced from the “quiet and still air of delightfull studies” into “a troubl’d sea of noises and hoars disputes” in which he is obliged to trade in “hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk, and … [to] be fain to club quotations” from scripture and Church history.¹ But in point of fact, contrary to this self-presentation Milton seems more than a little at home in the mud-slinging world of public controversy, and scholars have also long noted a difference that sets his five contributions to the antiprelatical debates apart: he does not do a very

good job of “clubbing quotations.” That is, Milton’s polemics differ from his contemporaries’ in their failure to advance theoretical arguments against prelacy supported by a sustained engagement with doctrinal principles or evidence from patristics and scripture. In place of reasoned, systematic persuasion, Milton’s prose often gives way to the striking intensity of his highly figurative and highly personal and confessional language—a language that is distinctive for the degree of its vehemence and scurrility.

So, for instance, in his first contribution to the debate, his May 1641 pamphlet Of Reformation, some three pages into his discussion of the democratic appointment of bishops in the early church, Milton suddenly professes that “it were tedious to course through all [of Cyprian’s] writings which are so full of the like assertions,” and instead embarks on a personal and expressive passage that articulates the degree of his anger at the people’s present state of exclusion:

Thus then did the Spirit of unity and meeknesse inspire and animate every joynt, and sinew of the mysticall body, but now the gravest, and worthiest Minister, a true Bishop of his fold shall be revil’d, and ruffl’d by an insulting, and only-Canon-wise Prelate, as if he were some slight paltry companion: and the people of God reedeem’d, and wash’d with Christ’s blood, and dignify’d with so many glorious titles of Saints, and sons in the Gospel, are now no better reputed then impure ethnicks, and lay dogs; stones & Pillars, and Crucifixes have now the honour, and the almes due t

2 Arthur Barker finds that “there is little theology in the anti-episcopal pamphlets.” In the case of The Reason of Church Government, Barker argues that Milton’s “fundamental … thesis, that Scripture provides an exact form of church discipline to which the nation must perforce submit,” is “ultimately untenable.” Milton and the Puritan Dilemma (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1942), 37, 23. The Yale editor Don M. Wolfe notes, “one searches in vain for Milton’s New Testament sources that trace the full range of Presbyterian hierarchy. His only source is I Peter 5, a chapter of vague generalizations.” In comparison with “the patient array of argument for Episcopacy in Certaine Briefe Treatises” (the tract to which he was responding), or with Calvin’s Institutes or Hooker’s Ecclesiastical Polity, “Milton’s Church Government is a weak, almost irrelevant document for his purpose.” CPW, 1:199.

3 For a detailed account of this dynamic, see Lana Cable’s chapter on “The Rhetorical Agon of Milton’s Antiprelatical Tracts,” where she argues that Milton’s rational, factual arguments often devolve into affective, imagistic rhetoric. Carnal Rhetoric: Milton’s Iconoclasm and the Poetics of Desire (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), 52-89.
and surfeited Priest scruples not to paw, and mammock the sacramental bread, as familiarly as his Tavern Bisket. And thus the people are vilifi’d and rejected … (1.547-48)

Milton’s mounting rage is rendered palpable through his characteristic proliferation of tag-teaming hendiadys (“gravest, and worthiest,” “Saints and sons,” “revil’d, and ruffl’d,” “ethnicks, and lay dogs,” “bulwark and barricado,” “paw and mamock,” etc.); his spitting sibilance (“whilst the obscene, and surfeited Priest scruples … the … sacramental Bisket”); and his contrasting images of purity and degradation absurdly culminating in a mock transubstantiation in which the symbolic body of Christ is violated in a vulgar tavern scene. The tract’s conclusion famously extends this imaginative intensity to a fevered pitch as Milton envisions an imminent millennial moment when the people will be exalted and it will be the bishops’ turn to suffer a violent subjection:

They … shall be thrown downe eternally into the darkest and deepest Gulfe of HELL, where under the despightfull controule, the trample and spurne of all the other Damned, that in the anguish of their Torture shall have no other ease then to exercise a Raving and Bestiall Tyranny over them as their Slaves and Negro’s, they shall remaine in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and downe-trodden Vassals of Perdition. (1.616-17)

In both passages Milton draws on a range of biblical and colonial discourses of impurity and enslavement to channel a surprisingly acute desire to exclude and subject; he imagines a future in which the people will no longer be marginalized as “impure ethnicks” and instead the bishops will become “Slaves and Negro’s.” As Paul Stevens observes of the early prose, “the rhetorical resources of scripture, the Apocalyptical visions of damnation and the Levitical imperatives of purity and pollution, allow Milton ample scope to articulate and legitimize a range of extreme emotions.”

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the degree to which Milton’s harsh censure of the bishops is informed by his own deeply personal sense of having been “Church-outed by the Prelats” (1.823).

Much has been written about the intensity of Milton’s vituperative satire, and early examinations of the prose were quick to note the apparent conflict the violence of his rhetoric presents for his more straightforward rational claims. K. G. Hamilton analyzes the rhetorical amplification of his long Ciceronian sentences and finds that “there is a danger that the emotional overtones of the language, the piling up of images and powerfully evocative associations, will eventually swamp altogether the purely logical statement of Milton’s argument.” For Hamilton, this failure of dialectic results in “ratiocinative emptiness,” “a complex but static expression of the strength of his own conviction, rather than a reasoned statement or an imaginative apprehension of the basis of that conviction.”

Stanley Fish, on the other hand, transforms Milton’s ostensible shortcomings into a rhetorical sleight of hand, arguing that contrary to the expectations its title engenders, *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), Milton’s fourth contribution to the debate, intentionally evokes and then discards “the machinery of rational discourse” as a fallen tool of worldly prelatical argument, inferior to the godly intuition of Presbyterianism. Milton’s tract becomes a “self-consuming artifact” whose “elaborate rational machinery operates only to emphasize how independent truth is of the validation

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6 K. G. Hamilton, “The Structure of Milton’s Prose,” in *Language and Style in Milton*, ed. Ronald David Emma and John T. Shawcross (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1967), 327, 329. Keith W. Stavely is more damning of Milton’s “millennial melodrama,” whose “exalted ‘poetic’ texture” he argues serves only to provoke his reader into a righteous frenzy: “A writer whose goal is to see in the prejudices of his audience the human expression of divine wrath has no need for logical procedure or even for elegant rhetorical planning. He need only convince his audience, by the devices of diction, imagery, and syntax … that their hostilities do indeed partake of the grandeur of God’s wrath.” *The Politics of Milton’s Prose Style* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975), 23, 2, 33.
that reason and rational structures can confer.” According to Fish, “rather than reason or reasoning, we have resonance.”  

Despite their contradictory views about its effectiveness, these two arguments represent the longstanding consensus that Milton’s early prose is unique in style and tone, and it should be noted that this is in part certainly intentional. Milton is frankly impatient with the tedious rehearsals of antiquity and obscure learning, the “marginal stuffings” that preoccupy the episcopal apologists (1.822). But the failure of dialectic does not interest me so much as what serves in its stead: Milton’s rhetorical animus clearly originates beyond the bounds of reason and evidence. Rather than critique his stylistic force or rational failings in the tradition of Hamilton, or explore his formal subversion of the rational, as Fish’s reader-response argument qualifies, this chapter offers to historicize Milton’s reasons for resorting to “the strength of his own conviction” as sufficient proof at this fraught political moment, and to examine the persuasive style that results. Lana Cable writes insightfully about the contest between detached, rational description and metaphorical, sensuous representation in Milton’s early prose, arguing that it is through the ascendancy of the latter that the texts’ moral arguments are made: Milton’s “carnal rhetoric” ultimately privileges the sensuous over the rational. Cable focuses more narrowly on Milton’s figurative language, but her analysis implicitly recognizes the intensely subjective and personal nature of his prose when she observes that “writing these tracts is a Milton who, at this stage in his literary career, quite ingeniously equates moral conviction with affective intensity; a Milton who, in his poetic

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8 Thomas Corns notes that Milton’s prose demonstrates “a surprisingly robust and perhaps even anti-intellectual populism, at least at the level of argument, although the exposition is characteristically demanding of its reader.” *John Milton: The Prose Works* (New York: Twayne, 1998), 25.
and religious desire to realize Truth as it were ‘on the pulses,’ finds the cool rationality of
his intended polemical task too enervating for such realization.” To the assessment that
Milton’s metaphorical style continually effects an “equating of sensuousness with
Truth,”9 I would also add his equating of personal feeling with objective argument,
private identity with public purpose. This “carnal rhetoric” is profoundly incarnated in
the mind and body of John Milton, the poet-turned-polemist, and as such, the arguments
are frequently presented not only in a language native to his poetic sensibilities, but also
in a first-person voice that is surprisingly subjective and confessional.10 For this reason,
if the antiprelatical tracts are not remembered for the excesses of their style they are
excerpted for their unusual and lengthy autobiographical passages that at first glance
appear strikingly out of place in the midst of political debates over church reform. These
passages are among the best known of Milton’s prose, and have proved particularly
useful for biographers and scholars interested in his early literary aspirations and poetic
theories. The Yale editor, Don M. Wolfe, finds that although they are “marred by
polemic extravagances,” the last two pamphlets, The Reason of Church Government and
the Apology for Smectymnuus (1642), “nevertheless provide two memorable self-portraits
that trace Milton’s vision of himself as a great national poet. These portraits … make
[them] an invaluable record in the growth of Milton’s thought” (1.193). Wolfe’s
comments and those of the critical tradition cited above evoke two major strains in the
antiprelatical tracts that will interest me over the course of the chapter. In place of
rational arguments against episcopacy, Milton frequently resorts to two closely-related
forms of proof: first is the force of his own conviction, an affective and often vehement

9 Cable, Carnal Rhetoric, 72, 66.
10 Hamilton aptly notes, “he wrote prose not with his intellect alone but with his whole self.” “The Structure
of Milton’s Prose,” 305.
style fuelled by an animating anger, and second is the association of that anger with his own identity, as it is continually staged through strategies of *ethos* and self-revelation. In the context of his political moment, Milton’s rhetoric of personal zeal was perhaps a more persuasive force than the failed dialectic that Hamilton laments. My interest is to explore why a voice of confession and of outrage would have been so animating for Milton and his contemporaries. I would like to demonstrate how a voice of zealous plain speaking carried particular cultural resonance, but also how Milton characteristically expands beyond the bounds of Puritan convention to create a confessional style that is uniquely his own. I will argue that Milton employs a “language of the stomach”; that is, a Puritan discourse that privileges emphatic and angry personal conviction as a primary form of argument. Milton combines the resources of nonconformist preaching and classical rhetoric to emphasize the essential fact of congruence between a speaker and his outward performance; in his work, a self-revealing response of anger becomes a key demonstration of authenticity, and a call to arms.

My argument is divided into four parts. I begin by exploring Milton’s use of a voice that is by turns angry and confessional in the antiprelatical tracts, to suggest that this expressive persona constitutes not merely satiric excess or autobiographical “digression,” but performs a central pragmatic and rhetorical function. My second section seeks to historicize Milton’s voice of personal and purgative anger within the context of his period’s rejection of “lukewarme professours,” or “cold neuters.” My third section expands on the second to establish the externalizing force of zeal as another, more urgent form of the early modern value of sincerity discussed in Chapter One, and draws a link between expressions of zeal and the period’s corporeal understanding of identity.
Section four more fully explores the politics of confession in Milton’s prose, and establishes that, for Milton, this value is explicitly stylistic. To begin, the twin forces of anger and *ethos* are perhaps most famously evoked in the autobiographical passage that opens the Second Book of *The Reason of Church Government Urg’d against Prelaty* (January 1642), where Milton begins by directly addressing the matter of his zealous style.

I. “To venture and divulge unusual things of my selfe”: Milton’s Expressive Politics

*The Reason of Church Government* is Milton’s fourth contribution to the antiprelatical debate, but the first pamphlet in which he presents his name on the title page and publically announces his identity, and as such it is famously concerned with strategies of self-presentation. At the beginning of his Second Book, Milton diverges from his subject of Presbyterian church governance to provide a lengthy autobiographical account. However, although the passage is the most famous of Milton’s autobiographical “digressions,” it is not initially presented in personal, but rather in general terms. The passage begins in the third person with a long philosophical meditation concerning the “mortal life of man” and his heavy burden of spiritual knowledge. Despite its anonymity, the prose manages nonetheless to convey a sense of intense inner psychology: the sinuous and abstruse progress of the syntax imitates the mind’s fitful workings as the long opening paragraph winds its way towards its chosen metaphor, the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30), a favourite scriptural passage Milton was frequently to relate to his own
life experiences and poetic promise. Here, the biblical injunction is explicitly framed as a psychological struggle in which man must confront the spiritual burden of his “entrusted gifts”:

Remembring also that God even to a strictnesse requires the improvement of these his entrusted gifts, [man] cannot but sustain a sorer burden of mind, and more pressing than any supportable toil, or weight, which the body can labour under; how and in what manner he shall dispose and employ those summes of knowledge and illumination, which God hath sent him into this world to trade with. (1.801)

Man possesses “certain pretious truths of such an orient luster as no diamond can equall,” which he is enjoined to give freely, but the “great Marchants of this world” (metaphorically, the English Prelates) suppress their distribution, fearing they will undermine the market for the “fals glitter of their deceitfull wares wherewith they abuse the people, like poor Indians with beads and glasses” (1.801-2). Fearing the plain truth will undermine the market value of their ceremonial practices, the bishops license the press and stifle the activities of plain and honest lay-speakers. By extending the parable’s economic metaphor, Milton denounces a corrupt and hypocritical spiritual economy in which the masses are gratified with “fleshly doctrines” and “stirre[d]… up to persecute with hatred and contempt all those that seek to bear themselves uprightly in this their spiritual factory” (1.802).

Although he has not yet identified himself as the subject, Milton is clearly thinking of himself among the persecuted. Central to his discussion is the image of the speaker who stands alone “against what opposition, or danger soever” and the figure with whom he identifies is the prophet Jeremiah who laments his role as the voice of divine wrath:

“Wo is me my mother, that thou hast born me a man of strife, and contention” (1.802, cf.

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11 Cf. Milton’s treatment of the parable in his Sonnet 16 on his blindness (“When I consider how my light is spent,”) and in the Letter to a Friend enclosing a copy of Sonnet 7 (“How soon hath time”).
Not for the first time in the antiprelatical tracts, Milton appeals to the figure of the individual truth-speaker, the zealous voice of sincerity amidst the crowd. He elaborates on the plight of the biblical prophets and “the irksomnesse of that truth which they brought [that] was so unpleasant to them, that every where they call it a burden” (1.803), drawing attention to the semantic ambiguity of “burden,” used in the English Bible for the Hebrew word massā, literally translated as “lifting up (of the voice), utterance, oracle,” but generally taken in English to mean a “burdensome or heavy lot or fate.” The burden of the oracle, the weight of the Word, is painful to the speaker, but Milton insists that it will not be held in. The text introduces a purging impulse drawn from biblical precedent: like the mysterious book of Revelation which the great evangelist John was made to eat, the divine word “though ... sweet in [the] mouth, and in the learning,” is “bitter in [the] belly; bitter in the denouncing” (1.803, cf. Rev 11:9-10).

No man wants to displease,

But when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in mans will what he shall say, or what he shall conceal. If he shall think to be silent, as Jeremiah did, because of the reproach and derision he met with daily, and all his familiar friends watcht for his halting to be reveng’d on him for speaking the truth, he would be for’t to confesse as he confest, his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay. (1.803, cf. Jer 20: 9-10)

Out of this comparison, Milton arrives at a striking defence of vehemence. Jeremiah’s example

might teach these times not suddenly to condemn all things that are sharply spoken, or vehemently written, as proceeding out of stomach, virulence and ill nature, but to consider rather that if the Prelats have leav to say the worst

that can be said, and doe the worst that can be don, while they strive to keep to themselves to their great pleasure and commodity those things which they ought to render up, no man can be justly offended with him that shall endeavour to impart and bestow without any gain to himself those sharp, but saving words which would be a terror, and a torment in him to keep back.

(1.803-4)

The passage is striking in part because it is curiously at once intensely personal, and yet also a general, third person description of the plight in which many puritans currently find themselves. But given the intensity of the language, and the fact that Milton has come under personal critique for his vituperation, it seems unmistakable that he represents his own feelings. Drawing on his period’s idiom of religious persecution, Milton suggests it is him who cannot control “what he shall say, or what he shall conceal.” Like Jeremiah he cannot forebear, he must speak the truth about the bishops because the “sharp, but saving words” of God are in him; it would be a “terror, and a torment” far greater than the fear of persecution to hold the Word back.

The insistently embodied language with which Milton describes his experience has interesting connotations. In claiming that his rhetoric does not proceed “out of stomach,” he suggests in the early modern sense that he is not personally motivated by “anger, irritation; malice, ill-will, [or] spite,” but impelled by the transforming power of the Word (“Stomach, n. 8c O.E.D.). The divine word may be “bitter in his belly; bitter in the denouncing,” but this is a privileged form of anger set apart from self-interest.13 This now obsolete sense of “stomach” is one of a variety of connotations and meanings the organ possessed for the expression of thought and emotion in the early modern period. Jan Purnis has noted that although in the period both “heart” and “stomach” had a range

of related figurative meanings connected to emotion and inwardness, many of the heart’s associations have prevailed, whereas the stomach’s are now unknown or obsolete. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that “stomach” could be used like “heart,” “bosom,” or “breast” “to designate the inward seat of passion, emotion, secret thoughts, affections, or feelings” (*O.E.D. 6a*). Expressions such as “to utter (the bottom of) one’s stomach” (“to disclose one’s inmost thoughts”) or “to fish out the bottom of a person’s stomach” (*6b*), gesture to the understanding of this organ as a hidden locus or repository of subjective experience. “Stomach” could also be used to refer generally to a person’s “temper [or] disposition” (*7a*), or to a particular state of feeling or passion, be it “Spirit, courage, valour, bravery” (*8a*), “pride, haughtiness; obstinacy” (*8b*), or commonly, in the sense that Milton uses it above, “anger” (*8c*). Over the course of the chapter I will emphasize that, despite his protestations here to the contrary, Milton’s language so often does proceed out of figurative and literal stomach, both because the antiprelatical tracts make use of a language of personal anger as a mobilizing force of authenticity, and also because, as this passage demonstrates, Milton’s language for this anger is insistently articulated through bodily metaphors for the purgation of an inward temper and conviction that must be voiced. I will explore some of the ways that this passage’s zealous, confessional rhetoric, and its contrasting images of inwardness and externalization are central to Milton’s persuasive strategy.

However, Milton does not simply re-iterate a Puritan rhetoric of prophecy; he adapts and expands it to his own distinctively confessional style. In the sentence that immediately follows the conventional discourse of martyrdom finally turns personal, a

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14 For a detailed account of the word’s various early modern senses, and a broader discussion of its role in the period’s expressions of emotion, see Purnis’s “The Stomach and Early Modern Emotion,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 79.2 (Spring, 2010): 800-818.
change reflected in the abrupt shift into the first person, and the admission that Milton speaks of himself among the persecuted. He suddenly confides: “For me I have determin’d to lay up as the best treasure, and solace of a good old age if God voutsafe it me, the honest liberty of free speech from my youth, where I shall think it available in so dear a concernment as the Churches good” (1.804, emphasis added). The injunction of the parable of the talents is echoed and transposed into a more personal and private register, but the shift to reflecting on the comforts of old age seems somewhat at odds with the imminent danger that has just been under discussion. The self-consciousness of Milton’s next sentence perhaps betrays his implicit uneasiness about this contradiction: “For if I be either by disposition, or what other cause too inquisitive, or suspitious of my self and mine own doings, who can help it?” (1.804). Nevertheless, he forges on in dramatizing his future pangs of conscience if the English church should come under “heavy oppression” while God has given him the ability to reason against this fate:

I foresee what stories I should heare within my selfe, all my life after, of discourage and reproach. Timorous and ingratefull, the Church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies: and thou bewailst, what matters it for thee or thy bewailing? when time was, thou couldst not find a syllable of all that thou hadst read, or studied, to utter in her behalfe. Yet ease and leasure was given thee for thy retired thoughts out of the sweat of other men. Thou hadst the diligence, the parts, the language of a man, if a vain subject were to be adorn’d or beautifi’d, but when the cause of God and his Church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listen’d if he could heare thy voice among his zealous servants, but thou wert domb as a beast. (1.804-05)

In this remarkable passage, Milton draws on the power of dramatic conventions to stage his first of two inner dialogues or soliloquies, this one in which his future self remonstrates himself for having failed to use his God-given “talents” to fight oppression which has triumphed while he continued in the “ease and leasure” of study afforded him
by his father’s wealth and the “vain” pursuit of poetry (likely in a bid to mollify his Puritan readers, who would not have thought highly of his previous literary pursuits). In the second soliloquy he imagines his bitter self-recrimination if the anti-episcopal cause should be won without his aid and, after the fact, he should hypocritically benefit from “the almes of other mens active prudence and zeale”: “Dare not now to say, or doe any thing better than thy former sloth and infancy, or if thou darst, thou dost impudently to make a thrifty purchase of boldnesse to thy selfe out of the painfull merits of other men: what before was thy sin, is now thy duty to be, abject, and worthlesse” (1.805). The defence of his vehemence is mounted on the basis of the enabling power of the Word, for which Milton is merely a conduit, but with a sudden change in register and grammatical person, his claims for lack of agency are brought into question. Having “determin’d” to ensure his future conscience, in the space of one sentence he moves from passivity to self-determination, and dramatizes this process through soliloquy, the device most associated with his period’s insistence on interiority. Beyond the matter of the bishops, Milton’s sense of identity seems to be at stake: whether the cause should be won or lost, by speaking out he asserts “what a privilege I have gain’d; with good men and Saints to clame my right of lamenting the tribulations of the Church, if she should suffer … But if she lift up her drooping head and prosper … I have my charter and freehold of rejoicing to me and my heires” (1.805-06).

The claim to his “charter and freehold” is an act of self-constitution that not only denies the religious determinism Milton has previously been asserting, but also seems removed from the more pressing fears of persecution he claims to face as one of God’s “selected heralds of peace.” The concern about timeliness voiced in the soliloquies
carries some irony given that Milton’s first public foray into the debate comes relatively late. By January of 1642 when Milton was announcing himself in The Reason of Church Government, his atmosphere was far from the “reproach and derision” faced by his exemplar Jeremiah, or the very real persecution of his predecessors Burton, Bastwick and Prynne in 1637. The rapid decline of episcopal political influence had begun over a year earlier in November 1640, when fifteen thousand Londoners presented the newly reconvened Long Parliament with the Root and Branch petition, which called to abolish episcopacy “with all its dependencies, roots and branches.” Over the course of 1641, the courts of Star Chamber and High Commission, the agents respectively of Charles I’s arbitrary power and Archbishop Laud’s ecclesiastical canons, had been abolished (1.129); Laud had been imprisoned for treason (1.87); the Earl of Strafford executed (1.89-91); and thirteen of the bishops impeached by the House of Commons (1.129). In December 1641, just before Milton published his tract, rather than Puritan persecution, it was the bishops who signed a petition protesting the violent rioting of apprentices in the streets of Westminster that prevented their access to Parliament, and declaring decisions made in their absence to be void (1.178-80). The petition was regarded as a treasonous attempt to subvert parliament, and the matter came to a head with the arrest and imprisonment of the petitioning bishops on December 30, effectively excluding their influence from the House of Lords (1.180).\textsuperscript{15} Milton himself makes reference to these key events at the end of the tract as he celebrates “their haughty looks,” “justly immur’d … within strong wals” (1.860).

\textsuperscript{15} The Yale Prose Works notes that “Of the remaining twenty-two bishops, twelve were now in prison, seven at liberty, three in retirement. No more than three or four ventured to vote thereafter. By the end of 1641, then, the bishops ceased to influence legislation in the House of Lords. On February 7 the Lords assented to the second Bishops’ Exclusion Bill.” \textit{CPW}, 1.180.
Given these discontinuities, Paul Stevens has concluded that “[i]n the context of the Bishops’s abject state … Milton’s deployment of the rhetoric of the persecuted, begins to look disconcertingly theatrical.” In fact, this performative quality pervades the preface and extends to Milton’s discussion of his literary calling, where he represents himself no longer as a prophet, but now as a beleaguered poet. He insists that if he sought praise for “ostentation and wit of learning” he would not be writing out of his own season, when he has not yet completed his studies and while the “careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times” and the hurried nature of polemical writing make literary attempts unfeasible (1.807). Most memorably, he dramatizes his poetic identity in opposition to the oft-quoted metaphor for the activity of prose writing:

I should not chuse this manner of writing wherin knowing my self inferior to my self, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand. And although I shall be foolish in saying more to this purpose, yet since it will be such a folly, as wisest men going about to commit, have only confest and so committed, I may trust with more reason, because with more folly to have courteous pardon. For although a Poet soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him might without apology speak more of himself then I mean to do, yet for me sitting here below in the cool element of prose, a mortall thing among many readers of no Empyreall conceit, to venture and divulge unusual things of my selfe, I shall petition to the gentler sort, it may not be envy to me. (1.808)

In a simultaneously self-asserting, self-effacing gesture that has by now become familiar, Milton’s claims to left-handedness suggest both disdain for a work inferior to the higher genres to which he aspires, but also modesty on the part of the young artist whose “green years” do not necessarily qualify him to answer learned opponents such as Archbishop Ussher and Lancelot Andrewes (1.806). The lines also demonstrate the same reflexive impulse introduced in the soliloquies. Milton objectifies himself by suggesting that a true

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self, drawn by “the genial power of nature” to the task of poetry, knows himself superior
to another self, the Milton now obliged to write in the dust and heat of polemic
controversy. Stephen Fallon has aptly noted that his famous admission that “I have the
use, as I may account it, but of my left hand” itself performs an act of bifurcation,
suggesting that it is the second “poetic I” of the sentence who furnishes the first “prose-
writing I” with the left hand metaphor. In the last sentence the poetry-writing self gains
ascendance despite, or perhaps because of, being referred to in the third person and
unapologetically soars above with his fancies while the prose-writing self is left
uncomfortably “below in the cool element of prose” and on display before “readers of no
Empyreall conceit.” Which of these selves is being revealed, and which is in control and
embellishing the passage is decidedly unclear. Milton’s self-representation is calculated
to perform the act of peeling away layers of selves to expose a true inward self, who is in
fact constructed in the act of writing. It is the art of creating and unveiling this personal
voice, at times angry and righteous, while at others frankly confessional, that becomes a
dominant motif in the prose.

The conflicting degrees of agency in Milton’s performance of self are largely the
result of generic tensions between the self-effacing rhetoric of martyrdom familiar to
Puritan preaching and the self-assertions more appropriate to the Ciceronian orator.


\[18\] Barbara Lewalski notes that in the antiprelatical tracts Milton “claims several roles, varying the mix as
genre and rhetorical purpose dictate: scholar, humanist critic, rhetorician, teacher, patriot, satirist, reformist
poet, prophet, and bard. In his polemic he uses the various resources of learning, reason, passion, ardor,
delight, invective, metaphor, and sublimity available to those several roles.” The Life of John Milton: A
Critical Biography (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 121. In an argument similar to mine, Paul
Stevens has suggested that these disparate roles do not always easily co-exist. He finds that the prophetic
status through which Milton asserts his identity is paradoxically founded on scriptural allusions which deny
man any agency. What results is a discontinuity generated by “two authoritative but contradictory models
of self-construction, the one, rooted in the Protestant rediscovery of the living Word, which denies the self-
Milton structures *Church Government*, his longest and most formal pamphlet, around the patterns of classical oration, and he intends the preface to the Second Book to fulfil the role of the penultimate “digression” which Cicero permitted before the peroration. But he elaborates the digression to inappropriate lengths by classical standards, and gives it pride of place as a centrepiece between his two books. The digression is also concerned with the matter of ethical proof, the persuasive appeal of the speaker’s character. In the following pages Milton provides the famous account of his education and poetic theories and contracts with his audience to produce a literary work “doctrinal and exemplary to a Nation” (1.815). But Milton is not solely motivated by ego or preoccupied by personal aspirations when he begs leave to “venture and divulge unusual things of my selfe”; in terms of classical taxonomy, the preface may be designated as *digressio*, but its concerns are central rather than peripheral to the tract. Both Milton’s ethical and prophetic selves are calculated demonstrations of his sincerity: his goal in dramatizing himself is to emphasize that he acts according to his conscience, and not for self-serving reasons. The force of his expressive prologue culminates in his insistence that “neither envy nor gall hath enterd me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only” (1.806).

What I find of particular interest, especially in the wake of his extended soliloquies, is the degree of self-consciousness in Milton’s outward performance of internal conviction, a performance that is able to draw on and assimilate multiple and even potentially contradictory models of identity—both classical and Christian.

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19 Milton observes all the seven sections designated by Cicero for an oration (*exordium*, *narratio*, *propositio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *reprehensio*, and *peroratio*); the Preface is intended to fulfill the eighth possible digression to come before the peroration, but the Yale prose editor notes that “The digression, which Cicero considered best near the end, comes in the middle. It contains ideas on literary and critical topics, is only vaguely related to the rest of the essay, and Milton must have known it was much too long by classical standards” *CPW*, 1.740-41.
Milton’s adversaries were well aware of his performative posturing, but rather than dismiss his theatricality, as the anonymous Modest Confuter does in response to Milton’s third tract, his Animadversions, when he accuses that “there is thrust forward upon the Stage … a scurrilous Mime, a personated, and (as himself thinks) a grim, lowring, bitter Fool,” I want to take seriously the role played by ethos and anger as performances of conviction that are central to the argument of the antiprelatical tracts and to Milton’s political moment. There are three traditional explanations for Milton’s expressive tendencies, each of which has already been addressed in some measure. First is that Milton represents himself as a prophet figure in the tradition of protestant martyrdom. The preface draws on a contemporary language of personal zeal characteristic of Puritan polemic; however, as we have seen, the preface’s strategies of inwardness and self-revelation extend well beyond a conventional Protestant understanding of identity. Second is that Milton is operating in the classical tradition and making a standard appeal to ethical proof: by revealing himself, he attests to his character and demonstrates his fitness for speaking. However, as Milton’s editors note, “The preface … is much too long merely for ethical proof. It seems certain that in writing at such length, and, for the first time, signing his words, Milton wished to tell the public that a new poet was about to arise, even though he was not yet ready for his inspired task” (1.742). This leads to the

20 The Confuter is responding to Milton’s defense of his use of the “two most rationall faculties of humane intellect anger and laughter.” Milton claims that he finds “a lowring smile” and “grim laughter” to be useful rhetorical tools: “this veine of laughing … hath oft-times a strong and sinewy force of teaching and confuting.” CPW, 1.663-64.
22 The classic essay on this subject is John Diekhoff’s “The Function of the Prologues in Paradise Lost,” PMLA 57 (1942): 697-704.
third explanation for Milton’s self-revelations, that he is styling himself as a poet, and perhaps even voicing latent anxieties about his as-yet-unfulfilled poetic vocation.\(^{23}\)

However, I wish to resist the tendency to read the autobiographical passages as private ego documents, wrested from their surrounding polemical context as they are so often excerpted in Milton prose readers. I attempt to identify how Milton’s performance of self is not “digressive,” but rather central to a strategy of sincerity in a debate that is fundamentally rooted in liberty of conscience.

In the same way that an examination of Milton’s autobiographical passages in isolation does not adequately account for their political import, Paul Stevens has inversely shown that political readings of his zealous rhetoric do not paint a full picture because they fail to account for autobiography. Drawing his terms from discourse analysis and from M. H. Abrams’ classic *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Stevens makes a claim for the “expressive,” as opposed to the “pragmatic,” significance of Milton’s rhetoric of violence—that his harsh language is as much or more about self-expression and self-constitution as it is an exhortation to any immediate political action. Stevens argues that “the articulations of violence in the anti-prelatical tracts do constitute a series of political speech acts but the *perlocutionary* force of those acts is far less arresting than their primary, *illocutionary* power. That is, they call attention to themselves less as a series of directives than as a set of utterances both performing and measuring the intensity of Milton’s struggle for a specific sense of being.”\(^{24}\) Stevens convincingly demonstrates that this is a more nuanced way to read Milton’s vehement language, and to approach the fraught question of his toleration, especially in his closet drama *Samson*


\(^{24}\)Stevens, “Intolerance and the Virtues of Sacred Vehemence,” 253-54.
Agonistes, a text whose final suicide-massacre has been interpreted as a celebration of religious violence with contemporary resonances in the wake of the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001. Not all of Milton’s writing is directly political, says Stevens; it also has aesthetic and personal ends, an important qualification to a reading of Samson as terrorist propaganda, and more broadly, to historicism’s tendency to “flatten out important rhetorical or formalist distinctions and treat all articulations as consciously direct or indirect political speech acts.”25 At its core, Stevens’ argument is founded on a well-known feature of the antiprelatical tracts, and of Milton’s oeuvre more generally: that it is so insistently autobiographical in nature. Stevens stresses the extent to which, in Milton’s mind, identity and politics are inextricably linked in a “mutually enabling identity of self and community.”26 But whereas Stevens’ corrective presses on the expressive rather than pragmatic nature of Milton’s anger, I emphasize that this insistence on self-expression in turn leads us back to the pragmatic, albeit via an alternative route. For Milton the illocutionary realization of identity and personal voice is in itself a political rhetoric with perlocutionary effects; not, as Stevens rightly reminds us, as literal exhortation to violence, but perlocutionary insofar as the vehement articulation of personal conviction is a political model of enfranchisement Milton wants others to follow. Forms of self-revelation and individualism are always tied to and working in the service of Milton’s larger political agenda; as John Diekhoff aptly noted in an edition of Milton’s autobiographical passages, “We must not forget his habit of transmuting his personal into national needs, of identifying himself with his cause and his cause with the

25 Ibid., 247.
26 Ibid., 261.
nation’s.” In this light, the distinction between expressive and pragmatic begins to break down. Personal conviction and high authority—Machiavelli’s understanding of virtù—is politicized in Milton’s figure of the zealous individual as a self-defining, political agent rooted in liberty of conscience, and this virtue is in turn aestheticized and promulgated through the autobiographical and angry style of the antiprelatical tracts. For Milton the expressive is pragmatic. He comes closest to laying this strategy bare in his famous and strangely tautological statement from the Apology of 1642 that “I conceav’d my selfe to be now not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was perswaded” (1.871). I will return this intriguing sentence in my third section, but first I want to consider Milton’s inspiration for his personal language of “incorporation,” and his inverse understanding of the cleansing of the corporate body, as it is formulated through Puritan discourses of zeal and plain speaking.

II. “These are Purging times”: Puritanism and Zeal

When the soliloquies of Milton’s Prologue defend his decision to speak out in anger by staging his intense sense of shame at the prospect of “sloth and infancy” in the presence of “other mens active prudence and zeale,” the revelations may trade on private subjectivity, but their vocabulary is typical of the period’s call to arms. “Infancy” derives its etymology from “in—, ‘not’; plus fari, ‘to speak’; speechlessness” (1.805, 29n.), and together “infancy” and “sloth” are common synonyms for the period’s articulation of a

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key failure of proper action and discourse: the state of lukewarmness.\textsuperscript{28} Milton evokes the principal terms of the debate again in his fifth pamphlet, the \textit{Apology} of 1642, which he opens by recapitulating the matter of personal calling and defending his ardent style:

\begin{quote}
I resolv’d… to stand on that side where I saw both the plain authority of Scripture leading, and the reason of justice and equity perswading; with this opinion which esteemes it more unlike a Christian to be a cold neuter in the cause of the Church, then the law of \textit{Solon} made it punishable after a sedition in the State. And because I observe that feare and dull disposition, lukewarmnesse & sloth are not seldomer want to cloak themselves under the affected name of moderation, then true and lively zeale is customably dispareg’d with the terme of indiscretion, bitternesse, and choler, I could not to my thinking honor a good cause more from the heart, then by defending it earnestly, as oft as I could judge it to behoove me, notwithstanding any false name that could be invented to wrong, or undervalue an honest meaning. 

(1:868-69)
\end{quote}

In a language that rehearses many of the catchwords of nonconformist objection to the established church, Milton denounces the “cold neuter” whose “lukewarmness” hypocritically parades as moderation, and asserts the heat of “true and lively zeal” which earnestly springs “from the heart” as an antidote. Like his fellow Puritans, his rhetoric defies the strictures of an affected restraint, and justifies the surrender to anger as an expression of righteous zeal. The \textit{O.E.D.} gestures to the complicated biblical origins of zeal:

\begin{enumerate}
\item In biblical language, rendering Latin \textit{zelus} (or \textit{aemulatio}), Greek \zetlos, denoting ardent feeling or fervour (taking the form of love, wrath, ‘jealousy’, or righteous indignation), with contextual tendency to unfavourable implications (emulation, rivalry, partisanship). \textit{(O.E.D. “Zeal, n.” 1)}
\end{enumerate}

\textit{Zelos} has both positive and negative meanings in scripture, and is translated into a range of words in the King James Version, including emulation, envy, fervent mind,

\textsuperscript{28} “Infancy, n.” 5. Obs. “In etymological sense: Inability or unwillingness to speak; speechlessness; silence.” \textit{OED Online}. “Sloth” derives from Romans 12:11, which enjoins the believer to be “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”
indignation, jealousy and zeal.29 In the Gospels’ sole account of Jesus’ use of force, as he fashions a whip and drives the money changers from the temple, his disciples recall the Psalmist’s *cri de coeur*, “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,” and understand it not as an outburst of anger, but the energy of a righteous act (Jn 2:15-17). In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul praises this godly emulation: “ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Cor 7:11). But in Romans, Paul worries about the distinction between righteous zeal and self-righteousness, warning that the people of Israel “have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:2-4). Paul’s anxiety about the righteousness of zeal is repeatedly cited and debated in the literature of the revolutionary period.

Along with early Church fathers and classical writers, Paul also frequently uses *zelos* in a negative sense by pairing it with the related concept of *phthonos*, a hostile envy (see Gal 5:20-21).30 Aristotle, on the other hand, distinguishes *zelos* from *phthonos*, and uses it only in its positive meaning of an honourable emulation or rivalry that strives after the excellence it lacks: “Emulation [*zelos*] is a certain distress over the apparent presence of honorable good things … not because they belong to another but because they do not

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29 *Zelos* is used in a positive sense in John 2:17; 2 Cor. 7:7, 7:11, 9:2, 11:2, but is used in a negative sense in Acts 5:17; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:20; and James 3:14.
also belong to oneself. Thus emulation [zelos] is both proper and concerns proper things, but envying [to phthonein] is both contemptible and concerns contemptible things.”

Following Aristotelian precedent, the Church of England clergyman and theologian Robert South (1634-1716) found the key difference between emulation and envy to lie in action:

the emulator is impatient of a superior, not by distressing or maligning another, but by perfecting himself. So that while that sottish thing envy sometimes fills the whole soul, as a great dull fog does the air; this, on the contrary, inspires it with a new life and vigour, whets and stirs up all the powers of it to action. And surely that which does so (if we also abstract it from those heats and sharpnesses that sometimes by accident may attend it), must needs be in the same degree lawful and laudable.

South understands the principal quality of zeal to be energy: while phthonos is essentially passive, zelos is active and vigorous, leading to our modern understanding of zeal as “intense ardour in the pursuit of some end; passionate eagerness in favour of a person or cause; enthusiasm as displayed in action” (O.E.D. “Zeal, n.” 4).

It is the positive valuation of zeal as an ardent indignation and spur to action that seventeenth-century Puritans found so enabling. Thomas Kranidas, the authority on the subject, has argued that “Milton was heir to a rhetorical tradition of zeal, of inspired truth-telling that could include displays of outrage and intolerance, unreasonable passion, and coarseness. But under that crudeness lay the heart of Puritan zeal and in a real sense the power of Puritanism, the energy of a focused belief system that liberated and

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31 Rhetorica 2.11, cited in Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 104. Martin Luther notes that “sharpe chidings and bitter wordes are as necessary in every kind of life, as any other vertue els. Yet notwithstanding this anger must be so tempered, that it procede not of any envie or malice, but onely of a fatherly affection and Christian zeale … And these kindes of anger are good, and are called in the Scripture zeales or jelousies. For in chastising my brother, my childe, my scholer or subject in this sort, I seeke not hys destruction, but his profite and welfare.” A commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians (London, 1577), 167.
empowered the individual.” In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton devotes a chapter to this central practice of Christian life. “An eager desire to sanctify the divine name, together with a feeling of indignation against things which tend to the violation or contempt of religion, is called ZEAL,” he explains, citing Psalm 69:9-10, Psalm 119:139, Romans 12:11, and figures who exemplify the virtue, such as Lot, Moses, Phinehas, Elijah, Jeremiah, Christ, Stephen, Paul and Barnabas (6.697). Milton is conscious of the potential for abuse, and offers some qualifications: “ignorant and imprudent zeal is … opposed to true zeal,” as is “zeal which is too fervent,” and “hypocritical and boastful zeal” (6. 698). Nevertheless, his ardent style in the antiprelatical tracts, and his elaborate apologias in defence of his zeal are evidence that, like South, the young Milton at least is willing to overlook the occasional “heats and sharpnesses” that may attend this Godly calling. For Milton, an excess of heat is preferable to the alternative: “opposed to the zealous is the lukewarm,” he notes, “as, for example, in Eli, I Sam. 2:29 and 3:13, and in the Jewish leaders, John 12:43, and in the Laodiceans, Rev. 3:15, 16” (6.560).

The final example of Revelation’s lukewarm Laodiceans was a critical commonplace during the 1630s, 40s, and 50s. Kranidas explains that polemics of the period make frequent recourse to it as one of five key biblical passages employed to exhort the rejection of Anglican moderation in favour of decisive and outspoken calls for civil and ecclesiastical reform. Psalm 69, cited by Milton above, bolstered Puritan notions of singular election in the face of Church establishment and popular opinion: “I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are

34 For an extended discussion of the widespread use of these five passages in seventeenth-century Puritan polemics see Kranidas, *Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal*, 4-6.
fallen upon me” (Ps 69:8-9). But more often than not, Puritan politics negatively reinforced the value of zeal by denouncing those who failed to heed the call. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 is a victory hymn that celebrates the Israelites’ defeat of their Canaanite adversaries—especially the singular courage of the woman Jael who kills their general—and condemns the inhabitants of Meroz, Israelites who failed to join in their people’s cause: “Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty” (Judg 5:23). The passage inspired Milton’s friend and Smectymnuan ally Stephen Marshall’s popular February 1642 sermon to the House of Commons, Meroz Cursed, remembered for its uncompromising advocacy of Root and Branch violence. The spur to action was also aided by Elijah’s denunciation of Israel’s apostasy in 1 Kings 18:21: “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23—“He that is not with me is against me”—further reinforced the sense of urgency. Marshall insists, “the Lord acknowledges no Neuters. [God] curses all them who come not out to helpe him, as well as those who came to fight against him … it is a certaine rule, for it is Christs rule, he that is not with me, is against me.” At this highly partisan moment, equivocation was not an option; “halting” and “neutrality” became terms of opprobrium.

Milton makes notorious use of the fifth and most powerfully influential text that shaped and gave a name to the discourse of lukewarmness, Revelation 3:16, in Of Reformation when he likens the office of episcopacy to a case of divine food-poisoning:

And it is still Episcopacie that before all our eyes worsens and sluggs the most learned, and seeming religious of our Ministers, who no sooner advanc’t

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35 Stephen Marshall, Meroz Cursed, or A Sermon Preached to the Honourable House of Commons at their late Solemn Fast (London, 1642), 22-23.
to it, but like a seething pot set to coole, sensibly exhale and reake out the
greatest part of that zeale, and those Gifts which were formerly in them,
settling in a skinny congealment of ease and sloth at the top: and if they keep
their Learning by some potent sway of Nature, ’tis a rare chance; but their
devotion most commonly comes to that queasy temper of luke-warmnesse,
that gives a Vomit to GOD himselfe. (1.536-37)

With characteristic cheek, Milton elaborates the scriptural reference with metaphors from
cookery and digestion that demonstrate his understanding of the inherent connection
between the stomach and the passions, and that link the individual’s self-constitution with
God’s constitution of his Church. In Revelation Christ pronounces to St. John of Patmos
on the last of the seven churches of Asia Minor, the wealthy and complacent Church of
Laodicea: “unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write … I know thy works,
that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art
lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev 3:14-16).
Milton develops the passage’s oblique reference to Galenic physiology, which posited
that heat was necessary for “concoction,” the term most commonly used for the digestive
process begun in the stomach, whose Latin etymology literally means “to boil together”
(“Concoct, v.” O.E.D.). In anatomical treatises and literature of the period the stomach
was often figured in culinary and domestic terms as a pot heated by the liver which cooks
the body’s food, converting it into “chylus,” which the liver then transforms into the
blood that nourishes the body and regulates the humours.\(^{36}\) In elaborating the scriptural
passage with the image of the pot, Milton might have had in mind the Castle of Alma

\(^{36}\)Thomas Vicary’s *A Profitable Treatise of the Anatomie of Mans Body* describes the intimate relationship
of the liver to the stomach, which “should be plycable to the stomacke, like as a hande doth to an apple, to
comforte her digestion; for his heate is to the stomacke as the heate of fyre is to the Potte or Cauldron that
hangeth over it.” In his *Directions for Health*, William Vaughan notes “Our stomake is our bodies
kitchin,” and Joshua Sylvester’s translation of Du Bartas His Divine Weekes and Workes describes the
stomach as “That ready cook concocting every Mess.” Cited in Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in
Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton*
episode in Book 2 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, an episode that also addresses the stomach’s central role in the fashioning of character, especially Book 2’s virtue of temperance. Playing on the common metaphor of the body as a castle (most familiar from the title of Thomas Elyot’s popular 1536 medical treatise, *The Castel of Helth*), Spenser’s allegory leads Guyon and Arthur on a tour of the body’s three vital organs, beginning with the alimental tract. The stomach is described as the body’s kitchen, “a vaut ybuilt for great dispence, / With many raunges reard along the wall; / And one great chimney, whose long tonnell thence, / The smoke forth threw. And in the midst of all / There placed was a caudron wide and tall, / Vpon a mightie fornace, burning whott, / More whott, then Aetn’, or flaming Mongiball.”37 Unlike Spenser’s stomach, an efficient domestic space replete with a “great chimney” to serve as a “vent for humours” or “fumosities” of the body (“chimney,” *O.E.D.* 6b), the bishops are evidently unable to regulate their inward constitution. Throughout his tract, Milton repeatedly figures the betrayal of true inward worship as a disease written on the body. He denounces the externalization of a formal prelatical system in which “inward acts of worship issuing from the native strength of the SOULE, run out lavishly to the upper skin, and there harden into a crust of Formallitie” (1.522). Just as Spenser notes that the allegorical cooks responsible for concoction must “remove the scum, as it did rise,” the bishops’ hypocritical surface worship is likened to the disgusting skin on a congealed and tepid dish that sickens and nauseates God; their lukewarmness makes it impossible that they be accepted into the body of Christ, and by extension, his Church.38

38 Ibid., 2.9.31.7. The image may also allude to the Parable of the Boiling Pot in Ezekiel 24:3-11, in which case the bishops would be the “scum”: “Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and
The image of God vomiting over the bishops is remembered as one of Milton’s most visceral and shocking, but widespread Puritan use of Revelation 3:16 helps to contextualize his scurrility and apparent impropriety. The strength of the scriptural language was itself thought to demonstrate Christ’s revulsion toward lukewarm Christians. Kranidas notes that “Modern delicacy has obscured the original force of this passage ... and specifically of the Greek word ἐμεω, emeo, which is translated ‘vomit’ (in the Rheims Bible) or ‘spew,’ a synonym. The King James ‘spew’ was usually read as ‘vomit’ up to the mid-seventeenth century.” Puritans read the passage as a forceful admonition to those who would be “neuters” or tow the “lukewarm” Anglican line. My particular interest is to explore how Revelation 3:16 served to articulate the period’s call to anger by analogy with the stomach. The metaphor of the stomach was a potent means of naturalizing the desire to purge the body politic and ecclesiastic; however, as we see in Milton’s treatment, in the early modern imagination it was also strongly linked to self-fashioning, and was thus central in shaping the angry tenor and confessional style of the debate.

whose scum is not gone out of it!” (Ezekiel 24:6). In Animadversions Milton responds to the Remonstrant’s slur “that scum may be worth taking off which followes” by asserting “Spare your Ladle Sir, it will be as bad as the Bishops foot in the broth; the scum will be found upon your own Remonstrance.” The foot in the broth was “a well-known proverb based on the belief that bishops spoil whatever they meddle in.” CPW, 1.672, 34n.

Kranidas, Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal, 7.
In the seventeenth century, the Book of Revelation was often seen as a source of arcane instruction, full of secret allegories with direct relevance to contemporary events. Luther identified the papacy with Antichrist, and his claim that history helped him to unlock the mysteries of Revelation was influential for generations of Protestant interpreters who followed. In the 1640s and 50s sermons and pamphlets stirred up social and political unrest through millenarian readings of Revelation that cast England as an elect nation and predicted a golden age to be realized after the defeat of Rome and the full reformation of the English Church. Early exegetes who influenced this millenarianism were Thomas Brightman, a Bedfordshire minister whose massive commentary, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or Revelation of the Revelation* was published posthumously in 1609, and after him Joseph Mede, a Cambridge don and teacher to Milton, whose *Clavis Apocalyptica, or The Key of the Revelation* first appeared in 1627. Both texts were translated, reprinted and cited throughout the Civil War and Interregnum period. Brightman’s literal and historical exegesis of Revelation’s prophecies draws the analogy between the Church of England and the lukewarm Laodicean Church, and contrasts it with the Reformed Churches of Geneva and Scotland, antitypes of the

41 Bernard McGinn notes that medieval exegetes attempted to make connections between historical events and the symbols of Revelation, but after Luther “history took on a new and more important role in classic Reformation commentary [of Revelation]. The Protestants’ need to demonstrate the evangelical claim that the papacy itself … constituted the institutional embodiment of the Antichrist was at the heart of this new historicization.” “Revelation,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987), 534.

favoured Church of Philadelphia. His extended commentary of Revelation 3:14-22 was particularly influential in articulating the Puritan attitude towards Anglican moderation. Brightman argues that the English Church has renounced the “Antichrist of Rome, and [is] risen out of that death as cold as yce wherein [it] lay before,” and yet “hott it is not, as whose outward regiment is as yet … Antichristian & Romish. In the degrees of cleargie men, in elections & ordinations, & the Whole administration of the Church-censures.”

“The … tempering of pure doctrine and Romish regiment,” Brightman laments, “maketh this lukewarmnes, whereby wee stand just in the middest betweene cold and hott, betweene the Romish and the Reformed Churches; of both which wee make a medly.”

Brightman may have been another inspiration for Milton’s image of the boiling pot:

“Now hee calleth that man cold, who can well indure that the duteties of godliness should lie dead, & out of request … Hee calleth him hott, who boyleth with heate and fervency of Spirit, in his due and full regard of Gods worship, being like to boyling water, that seetheth and boyleth (as we say) in the Pott, with a certaine restles motion” (166). As Brightman notes in his aside, the boiling pot as a figure for religious zeal was a commonplace of the period—the O.E.D. even cites “zeal pot” as a compound noun, notably used a century later by American Founding Father John Adams to describe his own attempts to moderate his ardency (O.E.D. “Zeal, C2.”).

Brightman insists,

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43 Thomas Brightman, The Revelation of S. John illustrated with an Analysis & scholions. Wherein the Sence is opened by the Scripture, & the event of things fore-told, shewed by Histories (Leyden, 1616), 168 (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text).

44 Adams wrote to his wife, “I cannot avoid exposing myself before these high folks; my feelings will at times overcome my modesty and reserve, my prudence, policy, and discretion. I have a zeal at my heart for my country and her friends, which I cannot smother or conceal; it will burn out at times and in companies where it ought to be latent in my breast. This zeal will prove fatal to the fortune and felicity of my family, if it is not regulated by a cooler judgment than mine has hitherto been. Colonel Otis’s phrase is, ‘The zeal-pot boils over.’” Familiar letters of John Adams and his wife Abigail Adams, during the Revolution: with a memoir of Mrs. Adams, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1875), 23.
wee must not think, that to bee hot is vitious in this place, as if it were an
inconsiderate zeale, as the case standeth with the habits of moral vertues,
wherein both the extrems, straying from the mediocritie, either in excesse or
defect, are faults & vices … but it is a matter of commendation, as being the
onely vertue, from which both coldnes and lukewarvenes swerve.” (166-7)

As Kranidas notes, Puritan faith does not adhere to the Aristotelian notion of a golden
mean; in religion “mediocritie” is the negative principle of lukewarmness.45 Brightman’s
exegesis of Christ’s “I would thou wert cold or hot” demonstrates the intensity of Puritan
hatred toward the middling state. Although lukewarmness may appear preferable to
coldness because of its closer proximity to heat, “the mediocritie therefore is worst of all,
which indeed is honoured of the world, because of that shew it maketh of a certaine
moderation and peaceablenes. Which God notwithstanding in his account setteth behinde
the extremes that border on both sides of it” (169). Brightman goes so far as to claim that
“Christ preferreth the blinde Papists before those Angels … who being bewitched with
ambition and covetousness, doe scornfully reject holy reformation” (169).46

By contrast, Anglicans maintained the ethical ideal in matters of faith. In his
Christian Moderation (1640), Milton’s polemical opponent Joseph Hall, Bishop of
Norwich, attempts to recuperate Revelation 3:16 for the Church’s position:

Far be it from us to allow lukewarmness in the matters of God; a disposition,
which the Almighty professeth so much to hate that he could rather be
content the angel of the church of Laodicea should be quite cold, than in such
a mambling of profession. And indeed what temper is so offensive to the
stomach as this mean? Fit only for a medicinal potion, whose end is ejection,
not for nourishment. Those, whose devotion is only fashionable, shall in vain
hope to be accepted. It is a true word of St. Austin, “There is no love where
there is no zeal.47

45 Kranidas, Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal, 11.
46 Matthew Newcomen preached in a 1642 sermon, “And it is a true observation of some, that the nearer
any are to a conjunction in matters of Religion, and yet some difference retained, the deeper is the hatred;
… a Formalist hates a Puritan worse then doth a Papist.” The Craft and Cruelty of the Churches
Adversaries, (1643), 15, cited in Kranidas, Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal, 11.
But after this opening concession, Hall is quick to enjoin that fervency must be tempered by moderation: “We must be zealous; we must not be furious. It is in matter of religion as with the tending of a still; if we put in too much fire, it burns; if too little, it works not: a middle temper must be kept. … we must be soberly fervent and discreetly active” (6.446-7). The brunt of Hall’s tract is concerned with the discipline of zeal by “discretion and charity,” to be exercised through his twelve “Rules for Moderation in Judgment” (6.447-90). The eighth rule, “To keep opinions within their own bounds; not imputing private men's conceits to whole Churches” (6.472), gives some sense of what provoked Puritans to anger. Hall complains that upstart individuals “swim against the stream” and spread controversial opinions about Church doctrine and ceremony, a situation worsened by pamphlet printing: “to say truth, the freedom and ease of the press hath much advanced this itching and disturbing humour of men” (6.472-3). In response, “So much the more need there is for those that sit at the helm, whether of Church or State, to carry a vigilant eye and hard hand over these common telltales of the world; and so to restrain them”—a reference to the Star Chamber licensing decree of 1637 (6.473). Against the proliferation of dangerous voices, Hall posits the calming tones of the establishment:

Surely, as the Church is a collective body, so it hath a tongue of her own, speaking by the common voice of her synods; in her public Confessions, Articles, Constitutions, Catechisms, Liturgies. … if any single person shall take upon him unauthorized to be the mouth of the Church, his insolence is justly censurable; … as it is the best harmony where no part or instrument is heard alone, but a sweet composition and equal mixture of all: so is it the best state of the Church where no dissenting voice is heard above or besides his fellows, but all agree in one common sound of wholesome doctrine. (6.473)

Hall privileges the sage and harmonious voice of the mother Church over the fiery voices of personal conviction alarmingly emanating from pulpit and press. His praise of a church without dissenting voices stands in stark contrast to the triumphant millennial
vision that concludes *Of Reformation* in which the lay members of the church will celebrate their exaltation as a choral priesthood of all singers, through which “amidst the Hymns, and *Halleluiahs of Saints* some one may perhaps bee heard”—namely, the singular voice of the poet and reformer John Milton (*CPW*, 1.616). For Hall, the official church represents the unity and restraint that have evolved out of a more primal state:

> The form of tongues in the first descent of the Holy Ghost was fiery and cloven; and that was the fittest for the state of the first plantation of the gospel, intimating that fervour and variety which was then both given and requisite: now, in the enlarged and settled estate of his evangelical Church, the same Spirit descends and dwells in tongues, cool and undivided: *Cor unum, via una; One heart, one way.* (6.474)

In response to patronizing enjoinders to decency and decorum, Puritans looked to a figure like Brightman to justify their rejection of a “cool and undivided,” officially sanctioned speech in favour of a rhetoric of personal inspiration.

Brightman himself re-iterates and models this language of inspiration. In a passage that strongly recalls Milton’s own apologia in *The Reason of Church Government*, he prefaces his exposition of the Laodicean epistle with a lengthy self-defence:

> I must put away from me by all earnest intreatie, the unjust suspicion which some men may raise against me, & the offence which they may take at my words. It was not truly any distempered affection of my hart, that hath set me on worke to seeke out an odious application of this Epistle. … I am not greived through envie either at the wealth, or yet at the honours of any man. (158)

That is, Brightman is not motivated by *phthonos*, but by consuming zeal: “I have not with dry eyes taken a survay of this Laodicea. I could not but poure forth teares and sighes from the bottom of my hart, when I beheld in it, Christ himself loathing of us, and provoked extremely to anger against us. Wherefore let no man blame me for speaking that, which not so much mine owne minde, as the duetie of a faithful Interpreter
constraineth me to utter” (159). Having thus prepared the ground for his most provocative exegesis, Brightman will now finally “come to the matter”: “The Counterpaine (I say) of Laodicea, is the third reformed Church, namely: Our Church of England” (159). Brightman will not turn away from his conviction that the Laodicean pastors are “prudent and moderate men in the matter of Religion, such as we call at this day statists, or moderate and direct Protestants of State … commonly known to bee lukewarme professours” (167). Against their deficiency, he asserts the value of “heate or zeale … an affection, that doth pursue after the love of holiness with a great vehemency of minde, which is as it were a certaine holy violence, such as is described, Matt. 11.12. The defect whereof, either that so coldnes, which is more remote, or this of lukewarmenes, which is nearer, is here found fault with, as being a sinne against God” (167).

By 1640, Brightman’s lauding of zeal as “a certaine holy violence” was not understood figuratively. Puritans came to see him as a prophet who had predicted the corruption of the English Church, and took literally his injunction to “Forsake … thy lukewarmenes: Purge out all thy Romish leven” (199). Revelation 3:16 served not only as an exhortation to ardency, but as a spur to real and immediate political action, conveniently justified through the naturalizing principle of the body:

48 Kranidas discusses the widespread influence of Brightman’s work in the first half of the seventeenth century. He notes that Brightman’s work remained influential through the 1620s and 30s, and although it was suppressed during the Anglican censorship, by the 1640s it was widely known and praised by Puritans. Jeremiah Burroughs referred to him as “That famous light in former times, 30 or 40 yeers since” (qtd. in Kranidas, 14), and Thomas Edward’s Gangraena quotes from him at length on the subject of lukewarmness. The trope of the lukewarm English church was “[b]y no means a rare figure, [it] was used by Milton’s occasional colleagues Edward Calamy and Stephen Marshall, and by Henry Burton, Lewis Hewes, John Lilburne, men whose visibility confirms the ascription as commonplace.” Kranidas, 15.
As it fareth with meates, those that bee either hot or cold, are retained by the stomache, because of the excessive qualitie, which maketh them to bee felt, and provoketh the stomache to receive them gladly; but that is lukewarme, because it hath a heate which is neare to the stomachs heate, and with which it is best acquainted, is neither perceived & felt when it goeth in, neither is therefore when it is entred in, concocted, but remayneth without working, and at last being troublesome with the long stay of it, is cast out of dores with loathing, like an unprofitable guest. (Brightman 170)

Michael Walzer has observed that it was seventeenth-century English Puritans who brought the word “purge” into the vocabulary of revolution.49 He suggests that they took the idea from Ezekiel 20, where the prophet promises the Babylonian exiles a new Exodus and a new wilderness: “Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness … so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you … them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn [but] they shall not enter into the land of Israel” (Ezek 20:36-38). So, for example, in a 1643 sermon delivered to the House of Commons, Sions Memento, and Gods Alarum, Francis Cheynell, a member of the Westminster Assembly, casts England as a “Christian Zion” who must rouse and deliver herself out of “Antichristian Babylon,” and stirs up zeal against “treacherous Reconcilers” who, “under colour of Pacification, and some pretence of a moderate Reformation,” would compromise on matters of Church reform.50 Cheynell draws on a range of bodily metaphors to explore the separation of dross from pure. He suggests that “two Nations, two manner of people” struggle in the “bowels” of both his scriptural sources and the Kingdom: “O let us pray that either Babylon may be separated, expelled out of the bowels of Sion, or Sion delivered out of

Babylon” (1). Like the Israelites, the English must steel themselves for this hard labour: “let us blow off the ashes from our zeal, let us enflame our hearts with sad but fervent devotion … O let us remember to joyn Zecharies zeal with Jeremies tears … to awaken and enflame your zeal and indignation against Babylon” (2). Cheynell conflates the expression of zeal with the open body of the nation labouring at once to expel Babylon and to birth itself: “let every pore of our body be a weeping eye, a crying, a praying mouth, to beg a safe delivery for our labouring Mother” (1).

Walzer’s focus is on the internal purging of backsliding Israelites, a fitful political progress he traces through references to the Exodus story in revolutionary narratives across history. He claims to read Exodus as a secular and political history of liberation and nation formation that pervades Western political thought, a process he refers to as “Exodus thinking.” But Edward Said has cautioned that any approach to the Old Testament Law as a political model must account for another equally significant purging effected by the text, one to which Walzer seems curiously oblivious: the dispossession of the Canaanite people who already inhabit the Promised Land.51 Cheynell’s use of Old Testament proof is a primary example of what Paul Stevens, in response to Walzer, terms “Leviticus thinking,” a process that relies on Old Testament discourses of impurity and transgression to define the community against an unclean “other.” In Leviticus, God refines and elaborates his Covenant with Israel through his proscriptions against sexual impurity that mark the community as a holy people separate to God: “Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and

the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants” (Lev 18:24-25). Stevens notes, “The closing metaphor is important because it defines sexual transgressions not simply as contrary to the will of Yahweh but as unnatural. As the body vomits out the alien, the unhealthy or unclean, so the land vomits out the sexually impure. The principle of obedience in Israel’s occupation of the land is being naturalized.” In the 1640s discourses of impurity become central to discussions of Root and Branch reform. Samuel Faircloth’s sermon *The Troublers Troubled, Or Achan Condemned* (1641) compares ecclesiastical practices to the Achan episode in Joshua, and concludes that “Achans … is a trouble of pollution and infection” (2), and this infection is imputed to the entire community and across generations (16); even infants, he stresses, are guilty as members of the same people (20). Faircloth notes the apostle’s warning in 1 Corinthians 5 that “the execrable accursed thing of incest in one of the members, had infected the whole lumpe of the Church and every member of it” (16). In order for Israel, and England by analogy, to be “cured,” Achan cannot be imprisoned, banished or fined; rather, “he and all his Followers stoned, Tents, and Garments and Wedge utterly to be consumed, and burnt to ashes, in a word all that he hath to be wholly extirpated, and annihilated” (23-4).

Milton’s first foray into the antiprelatical debate, *Of Reformation*, most directly participates in these discourses of contagion and purgation. The governing image of the pamphlet paints the true members of the English Church as the mystical body of Christ

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52 God reinforces the point in the next verses: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit [any] of these abominations … That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that [were] before you.” Leviticus 18:26-28.

53 Paul Stevens, “‘Leviticus Thinking’ and the Rhetoric of Early Modern Colonialism,” *Criticism* 35 (Summer 1993): 449.

54 Although he does not directly cite it, Faircloth’s early modern audience would have instantly recalled the prophet’s instructions about how to respond to “fornicators” among them: “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.” 1 Corinthians 5: 6-7. The call to purge the “old leaven” was another commonplace of the period (cf. Brightman’s use of it, cited above on p. 132).
that has been infected by prelacy; as the Yale editors note, the metaphors that treat episcopacy are most often ones of “nausea, disease, and deformity” (1.519, 1n.). In a striking reversal of the purgation principle, the re-ingesting of Popish practices is likened to the Church consuming her own vomit: having rejected the tenets of Roman Catholicism, England has returned to them like the curious dog of Proverbs 26:11, “stumbl[ing] forward … into the new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry, attributing purity, or impurity, to things indifferent, that they might bring the inward acts of the Spirit to the outward, and customary ey-Service of the body” (1.520). The bishops are portrayed as “Ulcers of the Kingdome” sapping resources from its veins (1.591); in order for England to be healed, she must “cut away from the publick body the noysom, and diseased tumor of Prelacie” (1.598). The tract’s disgust culminates in the comical fable in the style of Menenius Agrippa, in which the bishops are characterized as a “huge and monstrous Wen little lesse then the Head it selfe, growing to it by a narrower excrescency” (1.583-4). Although he evokes Agrippa and retains his playful tone, Milton substantially alters the well-known tale, which describes a mutiny by the members of the body against the belly, which they perceive to idly profit from their labours, only to discover it is the source that feeds them. Annabel Patterson has noted that in place of the body of state, Milton’s fable is “evidently, an image of the Long Parliament,” and the

55 “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.” Proverbs 26:11. In the Apology, Milton will again denounce the bishops for having “started back from the purity of Scripture which is the only rule of reformation, to the old vomit of your traditions, now that ye have either troubl’d or leven’d the people of God, and the doctrine of the Gospell with scandalous ceremonies and masse-borrow’d Liturgies.” CPW, 1.912.

Wen “Milton’s representation of the Anglican bishops in the House of Lords.” The original tale naturalizes the centrality of the aristocratic stomach to the political order: it nourishes the compliant members in return for their service to it. Although it claims to merit its place as an “ornament, and strength” to the Head and Body, Milton’s prelatical “Wen” is in no way a nourishing or natural member of parliament; rather, the learned philosopher who knew all the body’s “Charters, Lawes, and Tenures” denounces it as an unnatural excrescence:

> Wilt thou (quoth he) that art but a bottle of vitious and harden’d excrements, contend with the lawfull and free-borne members, whose certain number is set by ancient and unrepealable Statute? head thou art none, though thou receive this huge substance from it, what office heartst thou? What good canst thou shew by thee done to the Common-weale? … thou containst no good thing in thee, but a heape of hard, and loathsome uncleannes, and art to the head a foul disfigurment and burden, when I have cut thee off, and open’d thee, as by the help of these implements I will doe, all men shall see. (1.584)

The office of prelacy must be surgically excised and exposed as a corrupt and repulsive practice. Although his precedent for the tale is classical, Milton reveals the broader biblical origins of his language of purity when he asks of the bishops a few pages earlier, “Have they not been as the Canaanites, and Philistims to this kingdom?” (1.580).

Cheynell similarly enjoins parliament: “You are Physitians to the State, and these are Purging times, let all Malignant Humours be purged out of the Ecclesiasticall, and Politique Body. O let the Excrements be expelled, the vitall, and integrall preserved in health and strength” (19). Old Testament proof becomes a powerful means to justify violence against the impure: Cheynell is unflinching in his assessment that in contrast with Jewish Zion, “Christian Zion shall [not] be delivered upon such easie termes from

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Antichristian Babylon … our deliverance will cost blood. This is cleare to any man that hath studied the booke of the Revelation” (8).

As Cheynell’s comment suggests, it is through the convergence of “Leviticus thinking” with the prophecies of Revelation that the purgative value of zeal finds its most potent expression. Brightman draws a direct analogy between the Old Testament land vomiting out the Canaanites and Christ’s spewing of the Laodiceans:

> How horrible a thing is it to bee spued out of Christ mouth with a certayne loathing of us & rising of his stomach against us? The land did once of old spue out the Canaanites, & they were utterly overthrown. Will their evill be lighter whom not the earth, but Christ himselfe shall vomit out? Wherefore, let us in good earnest use the prescribed remedy. Wee have need of zeale to the intent wee may attayne to a full reformation. (208)

The powerful appeal of Revelation 3:16 for English Puritans can be attributed to its potent combination of several features. First, the text invoked the parsing and purifying Levitical imperatives of the Law, but transposed into and fulfilled by the body of Christ, an even more powerfully naturalizing corporeal body than that of the Promised Land. The passage also provided the opportunity for a direct analogy between the lukewarm “Angels” of the Laodicean Church and the corrupt prelates of the English Church, to be contrasted with the Reformed “Philadelphian” Churches of Geneva and Scotland. Finally, the historical interpretation of Revelation’s apocalyptical and millenarian prophecies bolstered the Puritan position and intensified the sense of urgency in the period leading up to the Civil War.

III. “Proceeding out of Stomach”: The Language of Conviction

But there is a further reason why Revelation 3:16 was particularly energizing, one that is more fully revealed in another important reading of the passage, Henry Wilkinson’s *A
Sermon Against Lukwarmenesse in Religion (1641). Brightman’s influence is evident in many of the central elements of Wilkinson’s sermon. Wilkinson praises “such a one [who] hath his heart warmed with the love of Christ, by which he boyles (as it were like seething water) with a desire of doing good, or with indignation to vindicate the honor of Christ” (3). Wilkinson himself might be seen to exemplify this “mixt Affection of love and anger” by which the biblical prophets were “transported with sacred zeale” (13-14): as he explains in the address to the House which prefaces his sermon, although it was his “hard lot” to be suspended for preaching it in Oxford on 6 September 1640, Parliament released him in December, restored him to his priestly functions, and ordered the sermon’s immediate publication. Like Brightman, Wilkinson distinguishes lukewarmness from the “Mediocrity” praised in the case of the “morall virtues,” and demonstrates the requisite revulsion at the “loathsome filthy condition” of the lukewarm: “God will not looke at his vomit any more: what lesse to be indured in the stomache, than indigested meate? What lesse to be imbraced, than vomit? What more to be loathed?” (2-3).

However, beyond these similarities, Wilkinson and Brightman may be distinguished by a difference of emphasis. Whereas Brightman’s earlier commentary is concerned with a historical exegesis of Revelation that stresses the analogy between the Laodicean “Angels” and the English prelates, and denounces the lukewarm ecclesiastical organization of the Church, the “tempering of pure doctrine and Romish regiment,” Wilkinson’s sermon discusses lukewarmness more emphatically as an individual
condition of moral failure. Printed in the critical year of 1641 when polemics competed for individual hearts and minds (and stomachs) on the question of Root and Branch reform, the sermon denounces lukewarmness as a deeply personal failing that may extend to the general congregation: it opens by noting that although at Revelation 3:16 Christ “direct his speech chiefly to the Ministers of that Church (for so some understand the word Angel to involve the whole company of Ministers) yet it is to be understood as having relation to the people committed to their charge” (1). Wilkinson professes his purpose to demonstrate the best and worst of all Christians, and “the worst is the lukewarme professour, who seems better than he is; the best is the zealous professour, who is better than he seemes” (4). The comparison reveals his fundamental understanding of lukewarmness as a form of hypocrisy, a point that he reiterates throughout the sermon. Christ’s “I would thou wert cold or hot” (Rev 3:15) is read as an admonition against false-seeming: “I would thou wert either what thou dost make a shew off, or else, that thou didst not make a shew of what thou are not” (4). It is the pretence of Laudian ceremonialism that most offends Wilkinson:

These lukewarme Men can be content to afford Christ a cap and knee, but they will not give him their heart, nay they are very scrupulous in mint and rue, and very exact in the Ceremony; and (as if Religion were a Comedy) they will in voice and gesture act divine duties, though in their hearts they renounce; and in their lives deny the parts they play … Why will they take so much paines to personate, and act a Christian and not to be one? Why doe they taste of heavenly mysteries and not digest them? (11)

The failure to “digest” the heavenly mysteries, to incorporate them into inward identity, results in outward show and pretence. In response to the “politick Christian, the reserved professour, that never shewes himselfe but at halfe-lights” and who “observes some rules of Matchiavel,” Wilkinson insists, “Since there be so many deceits and impostures in our
profession, it concerns us to examine what temper we are: Wee must feel our owne pulse, and try how it beates; we should see whether our zeale be such as God will accept … Let us set before us our owne selves” (32-33). The emphasis on self-examination cuts to the heart of the Puritan rejection of the Anglican via media: lukewarmness, the language of propriety, is seen as a form of insincerity, one that is particularly pernicious when practiced by officials: “those that should handle the word … as of sincerity, doe … sophisticate the word, 2 Cor. 2.17” (35). As a remedy to “sophistication,” Puritans recognize sacred zeal as a voice of authenticity. As Cheynell observes, these are “winnowing times, when the chaffe is in some measure separated from the wheat, the secrets of many hearts are discovered, and those that are approved made manifest” (24).

In the context of revolutionary England, zeal became both a personal spiritual activity and a mode of political conduct.

Wilkinson’s sermon reveals what is perhaps the most potent appeal of Revelation 3:16 for Puritans: its image of the stomach is influential not just because it naturalizes the purging of the body politic, but because, as I suggested earlier, in the period the stomach played a key role in articulating subjectivity. The relationship between the material body and intellectual or emotional experience has been the subject of much recent work on identity in the early modern period.60 Scholars have emphasized that pre-Cartesian ontology did not distinguish between subjective and embodied experience such as our modern understanding does; in fact, the period insistently relied on humoral theory to articulate psychological experience in corporeal terms. Although much of our vocabulary

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for emotion and inwardness—“temperament,” “humour,” “spirit,” “sanguine,” “phlegmatic,” “choleric” and “melancholic,” to name a few—is inherited from Galenic medicine, we implicitly understand these terms to be dead metaphors, whereas in the early modern period, such associations between physiology and psychology were alive and well. The Puritan language of lukewarmness, and indeed the language of the scriptural text it is based on, is indebted to Galenic medicine’s understanding of the body’s connection to the passions. When he entreats believers to examine their own “temper,” and feel their own “pulse,” Wilkinson aptly illustrates the period’s conflation of the physiological and psychological. Brightman and Wilkinson are both fundamentally aware that at Revelation 3:16 “God’s speech ... is by way of similitude, taken from Meat, and the Stomack” (Wilkinson 2), and the fact that they choose to explicate the passage through a language of physiology demonstrates their understanding of the profound connection between bodily regulation and the constitution of identity.61

In particular, Michael Schoenfeldt has suggested that for the early modern individual it was not so much the heart or mind, but the stomach that functioned as a central locus of ethical judgment and spiritual interiority. He argues that “the consuming subject was pressured by Galenic physiology, classical ethics, and Protestant theology to conceive all acts of ingestion and excretion as very literal acts of self-fashioning.” The stomach was “at the center of an organic system demanding perpetual, anxious osmosis with the outside world,” a process to be managed through therapies of ingestion and purgation. Digestion was the paradoxically mundane and spiritual activity by which “something

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61 Brightman is careful to observe the limits of the concoction parable’s comparison of God’s and man’s faculties: “wee must take heede that wee wrest not similituds beyond their scope; as if here wicked and open sinners did constantly remayne in Christ, as cold meates do in the stomacke. For such kinde of men, were never in Christ.” 170.
alien is brought into the self and something alien is excreted by the self,” a process of ethical judgment which “require[d] the individual to confront on a daily basis the thin yet necessarily permeable line separating self and other.”[^62] The stomach is thus the ideal metaphor for the confrontation between private conviction and public world: as a porous membrane that requires constant ethical management, it is a site upon which liberty of conscience is staged.

A similar principle operates in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton is at pains to elaborate a materialist philosophy in which digestion serves as both the unifying principle of the cosmos and a function of individual moral choice. Like God at Revelation 3:16, the angel Raphael also teaches by way of the stomach, although his lessons are both parabolic and *literal*. Through his elaborate description of man’s and angel’s mutual capacity to “concoct, digest, assimilate, / And corporeal to incorporeal turn,” a digestive process which also involves earth, sea, air, moon, and sun which “sups with the ocean,” Raphael illustrates the reciprocity of all beings on a great “scale of nature” in which “the grosser feeds the purer.”[^63] Milton’s monism is notable for its radically equalizing potential: all beings are created from “one first matter all” with the ability to eventually be “sublimed” (5.472, 483). Schoenfeldt observes, “What Catholicism claims to do institutionally – transform bread into flesh – is instead the prerogative of individual digestion – a transubstantiation fully available to a priesthood of all eaters.”[^64] However, unlike the value of zeal, which rejects the virtue of the golden mean, in *Paradise Lost* Milton emphasizes that this potential will be achieved through the exercise of

[^64]: Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 140.
temperance. After the Fall, itself explicitly figured as an act of greedy appetite, the Angel Michael promises Adam that in the face of newfound suffering and death, “if thou well observe / The rule of not too much, by temperance taught / In what thou eat’st and drink’st, seeking from thence / Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight” (11.530-33), he may begin to repair the effects his dietary transgression have put into motion and learn to achieve “A paradise within thee, happier far” (12.587).

Whereas Milton’s epic emphasizes that what is brought into the body must be governed by temperance, his early prose stresses the dross that must be vigorously rejected in order to regain equilibrium. In the Apology, he appeals to the stomach to respond to the anonymous Modest Confuter’s smear of his character, including the accusation that he was “vomited out” of a dissipated university career into a “Suburbe sinke about London” (1.884). Resolving that he cannot allow his character to remain “unpurg’d from these insolent suspicions” (1.883), Milton appropriates his opponent’s slanderous metaphor:

Of small practize were that Physitian who could not judge by what both she or her sister [Cambridge and Oxford], hath of long time vomited, that the worser stuffe she strongly keeps in her stomack, but the better she is ever kecking at, and is queasie. She vomits now out of sicknesse, but ere it be well with her, she must vomit by strong physick. (1.884-85)

The universities must be purged of their corrupt prelates with their “liking of doltish and monastick Schoolemen” (1.718), and it is not his London neighbourhood, but rather the Confuter himself who has “a worse plague in his middle entraile” (1.885). Crucially, in opposition to this impurity, Milton posits his own bodily discipline. In response to the

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65 Referring either to his graduation or, possibly, his rustication from Cambridge. CPW, 1.884, 85n.
66 In Animadversions he notes that “the Universities, that men looke should be fountaines of learning and knowledge, have been poysond and choak’d” under the governance of Anglican priesthood. CPW, 1.718.
Confuter’s charge that he frequents playhouses and bordellos and “Where his morning haunts are I wist not,” Milton advises they are rather

… where they should be, at home, not sleeping, or concocting the surfets of an irregular feast, but up, and stirring … often ere the sound of any bell awake men to labour, or to devotion … to reade good Authors, or cause them to be read, till the attention bee weary, or memory have his full fraught. Then with usefull and generous labours preserving the bodies health, and hardinesse; to render lightsome, cleare, and not lumpish obedience to the minde, to the cause of religion, and our Countries liberty, when it shall require firme hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations, rather then to see the ruine of our Protestation, and the inforcement of a slavish life.

Milton illustrates again the connection between corporeal discipline and inward character, and offers a version of the temperance and self-determination he will later envision for Adam and Eve. He also directly ties his individual conduct to his “Countries liberty” and to the Protestation Oath issued by Parliament on 3 May 1641, an important articulation of freedom of religious conscience.67

In the antiprelatical tracts Milton repeatedly suggests that his individual identity is inherently tied to his cause. In the Apology he feels compelled to defend himself because “I conceived myself to be now not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuad’d, and whereof I had declared openly to be a partaker” (1.871, emphasis added). Milton understands himself to be a part of the true cause, but that truth is itself validated by the “I” who is persuaded of it: the cause is a projection of

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67 The 1641 Protestation bound its signers to defend “the true Reformed Protestant Religion, expressed in the Doctrine of the Church of England, against all Popery, and Popish innovations,” and asserted the “rights and liberties of the subjects, and every person that maketh the protestation, in whatsoever he shall do in the lawful pursuance of the same.” Ctd. in CPW, 1.94 and John Milton: The Major Works, 178n. The oath was an attempt to quell conflict by securing loyalty to the official church, and to protect Parliament against the machinations of the court. However, its wording paved the way for controversy and debate. Henry Burton responded with The Protestation Protested, which argued that the oath did not go far enough in outlawing “popish” church discipline, and, on the basis of the oath’s own wording, defended the right of individual congregations to organize separately from any state church. The Yale Prose Works notes that this articulation of religious freedom became the basis for broader discussions of political liberty against tyranny during the Civil War. CPW, 1.96-97.
his own conviction. Again, Milton resorts to corporeal metaphors. Like the ouroboros, the serpent that creates itself by consuming its own tail, he is “incorporate” into his cause, but he is also a “partaker” of it: he is both ingested and ingesting in a mutual consuming that renders self and cause coterminous. As he remarks in *Of Reformation*, “A Commonwelth ought to be but as one huge Christian personage, one mighty growth, and stature of an honest man, as big, and compact in vertue as in body; for looke what the grounds, and causes are of single happiness to one man, the same yee shall find them to a whole state” (1.572). Milton’s analogies between the natural body and the body politic contrast sharply with Thomas Hobbes’ understanding of the state as an abstract entity distinguishable from both rulers and ruled. Within Hobbes’ social contract, individual identities are subsumed under the consent to a sovereign’s rule. The bodies that make up the armour on the famous frontispiece of his *Leviathan* (1651) serve as a metaphorical representation of the means by which the people relinquish power to the artificial person of the state—it is no mistake that they face inwards, with no visible facial features. For Milton, the relationship between body and state is literal: each individual is a participating member in, and a representation of the whole. As a result, the cultivation of identity is central to Milton’s national project, and what we see in the angry and emetic practices of the antiprelatical tracts is a negative valuation of the same principle of choice he will come to celebrate in his epic’s affirmation of a cultivated and controlled appetite.

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68 Quentin Skinner explains that in Hobbes’ social contract theory “The true subject or bearer of sovereignty … is neither the natural person of the monarch nor any corporate body of natural persons, but is rather the artificial person of the state.” By contrast, the republican understanding of the *civitas liber* is founded on the analogy between individual and state: “Free states, like free persons, are … defined by their capacity for self-government. A free state is a community in which the actions of the body politic are determined by the will of the members as a whole.” *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 3, 26.
In Milton’s work, the individual’s discerning digestive acts are afforded a place of
privilege.

Like Bacon’s personal call to the humility and self-discipline of the new scientist,
for Milton the call to reform the body politic is a highly individualized act of conscience.
The naturalizing impulse of vomiting the lukewarm taken from scripture by extension
also naturalizes the purging of righteous anger. Revelation 3:16 functions as a speech act
which both commands believers to be zealous, and itself performs an act of zeal.
Through the stomach, the passage powerfully married literal and rhetorical acts of zeal:
purgation came to denote both the cleansing of the collective body politic, and the
zealous externalizing of personal conviction—“those sharp, but saving words which
would be a terror, and a torment … to keep back” (1.804). In the period, it became
acceptable to demonstrate conviction through angry speech; in fact, anger became a mark
of authenticity at a highly partisan moment. Protestant sincerity—the imperative to make
inner self manifest—transforms into the more violent externalizing force of zeal in the
polemical prose of the 1640s. In Milton, what replaces the language of the heart
discussed in Chapter One is a language of ardency, of emphatic conviction. A language
of the stomach.

IV. “One who could not write in a dull stile”: Sincerity and Style

The analogy between physical and rhetorical subjectivity gestures to the fact that zeal is
fundamentally a form of ethical proof based on the speaker’s own convictions and
passions, a proof that is personally energizing, mobilizing, and self-authenticating.
Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Apology, where Milton provides the longest
and most candid defence of his “tart rhetorick in the Churches cause” (1.901). Having responded to the Confuter’s attack on his character, Milton turns to the charge that “Violence hath been done ... to the person of a holy, and religious Prelate” (1.897). In order to “satisfie any conscionable man” concerning his style of writing, of which the Confuter “utterly disapproves,” Milton argues at length for the reasons why his vituperation is warranted. He invokes first the authorities of classical instruction and biblical precedent. If it were a matter of oratory, he would have little trouble citing tenets and examples from the best rhetoricians to establish that “a vehement vein throwing out indignation, or scorn upon an object that merits it, were among the aptest Ideas of speech to be allow’d” (1.899). But because “the Religion of it is disputed, and not the art,” he will refrain from profane examples. Having “all gifts in him,” Christ was able to indoctrinate “in what sort him best seem’d,” and this often involved “bitter and irefull rebukes,” if not to instruct, then at least to leave “excuseless those his wilfull impugners” (1.899-900). Those who would modify the parts of the Law they perceive to be “writ obscenely” are “fools … who would teach men to read more decently then God thought good to write” (1.902-03). From these examples Milton can conclude: “And thus I take it to be manifest, that indignation against men and their actions notoriously bad, hath leave and auctority oft times to utter such words and phrases as in common talke were not so mannerly to use” (1.903).

69 The Yale Prose Works notes that he may have in mind Aristotle’s precept: “For emotion, if the subject be wanton outrage, your language will be that of anger; if you speak of impiety or filth, use the language of aversion and reluctance even to discuss them.” The Rhetoric of Aristotle, III, vii; ed. Lane Cooper (New York: D. Appleton, 1932), 197, cited in CPW, 1.899, 19n. 70 Tellingly, Milton originally wrote “speak” in place of “read.” He includes an erratum on the final page of the pamphlet: “For speak correct it read.” CPW, 1.903, 33n.
But above these external authorities, Milton ultimately privileges his own emotional prerogative. He proceeds to elaborate a full-blown theory for the role of the passions in instruction and reform, a theory that is based on the public expression of private emotion. What was all in Christ is “divided among many others the teachers of his Church”: some are inclined to be “severe and ever of a sad gravity,” while others were “sent more cheerefull [and] free,” so that each may appeal to those who are similarly tempered, or moderate those of the opposite complexion (1.900). Since no man should be “forc’t wholly to dissolve that ground work of nature which God created in him,” he argues, no man should feel constrained to suppress his peculiar passion:

the sanguine to empty out all his sociable livelinesse, the cholerick to expell quite the unsinning predominance of his anger; but that each radicall humour and passion wrought upon and corrected as it ought, might be made the proper mould and foundation of every mans peculiar guifts, and vertues.

(1.900)

In contrast to Bishop Hall’s argument for “one heart, one way”—namely, “tongues cool, and undivided”—Milton asserts that each individual must necessarily follow his own “radicall humour.” We hear an echo of Wilkinson’s exhortation for each man to examine his own “temper,” but Milton’s point is not only to validate zeal as a response to hypocrisy. Expression need not always be vehement; it is one means of broaching the gap between false exteriors and true interiors, and it happens to be the most natural to Milton. If an expression is true to the writer’s character, it is acceptable because it is sincere. But neither is this a purely expressive theory of sincerity: Milton is not necessarily advocating the form of release the Romantics would come to identify as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” Rather, each humour must be “wrought upon and corrected as it ought,” and put into service as a public virtue, and to this end
Milton suggests his own particular humour might be best suited to the task at hand. While some were “indu’d with a staid moderation, and soundnesse of argument to teach and convince the rationall and sober-minded,” in times of opposition, the “coole unpassionate mildnesse of positive wisdome is not anough to damp and astonish the proud resistance of carnall, and false Doctors” (1.900).

Most instructive for Milton is the example of Luther, who managed both to offend his own “friends and favourers” with the “fiercenesse of his spirit,” and yet to receive such contempt from his opponents when he attempted “lenity and moderation” that he resolved “never to runne into the like error” (1.901). When called before Charles V to answer for those works that were “sharply written,” Luther refused to “retract or unsay any word therein” and, like Milton, defended himself as being “of an ardent spirit, and one who could not write in a dull stile” (1.901). Luther’s vehemence is crucial for Milton because he proves that it is not only Christ and the prophets who may employ a “sanctifi’d bitternesse against the enemies of truth” (1.901). Luther “not of revelation, but of judgement writ so vehemently against the chief defenders of old untruths in the Romish Church”; his example “may stand for all,” and proves that “inspiration” is not the “only … warrant” for zeal (1.901, emphasis added). Milton now revises the tension generated in his preface to the second book of The Reason of Church Government between the agency of the classical rhetor, and the prophet determined by the burden of the Word. He is no longer a Jeremiah figure unable to control “what he shall say, or what he shall conceal” (1.803). In place of the earlier discontinuity between two disparate models of self-construction, Protestant and classical, Milton now rejects the prophetic status that denies man agency, and privileges his own nature and instincts above any
received model. It is a personal and warranted choice to write in a vehement vein, such that even the authority of Luther is ultimately jettisoned: “if at other times he seeme to excuse his vehemence, as more then what was meet, I have not examin’d through his works to know how farre he gave way to his own fervent minde; it shall suffice me to looke to mine own” (1.901, emphasis added). Milton asserts his own ability to judge the propriety of his “sanctifi’d bitternesse” and to write in the style that his nature dictates.

As it happens, this style is both vehement and figurative, as he demonstrates in the exalted passage he inserts into his defence, and prefaces with the parenthetical entreaty “(that I may have leave to soare a while as the Poets use)”:

then Zeale whose substance is ethereal, arming in compleat diamond ascends his fiery Chariot drawn with two blazing Meteors figur’d like beasts, but of a higher breed then any the Zodiack yeilds, resembling two of those four which Ezechiel and S. John saw, the one visag’d like a Lion to expresse power, high autority and indignation, the other of count’nance like a man to cast derision and scorne upon perverse and fraudulent seducers; with these the invincible warriour Zeale shaking loosely the slack reins drives over the heads of Scarlet Prelats, and such as are insolent to maintaine traditions, brusing their stiffe necks under his flaming wheels. (1.900)

The depiction of the “invincible warriour Zeale” recalls the Son mounting the “chariot of paternal deity” (6.750) in Raphael’s account of the war in Heaven in Book 6 of Paradise Lost, and, as the scriptural references indicate, is derived from the apocalyptic manifestations of God at Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4. In Paradise Lost, as here, the image is a spectacle of dazzling power. The Son rides forth on the third day of a senseless war in which the angels’ powers are evenly matched, not to engage in combat, but to demonstrate the insignificance of the rebel angels in the face of God’s glory—and indeed, they turn tail and throw themselves from Heaven rather than face him. The revelation of the Son’s glory is figured through the chariot, a force of energy like God’s
whirlwind in Ezekiel, which moves without help—“it self instinct with Spirit”—and the onomatopoeic description as it “forth rushed with whirlwind sound” insists on its overwhelming drive (6.749-52). The chariot in Milton’s Apology is a similarly figurative demonstration of zeal’s “power, high authority and indignation” (1.900). The image of a personified Zeal driving over the necks of the prelates is brutal, but it is also a richly literary rendering of the personal energy and authority generated by zeal, and suggests that Milton’s ends are more rhetorical than they are directly violent. Just as Raphael’s fictional accommodation of the Son’s chariot, “by likening spiritual to corporeal forms,” allows him to represent “what surmounts the reach/ Of human sense” (i.e. Christ’s power), the Apology’s figuration animates and illustrates the function of zeal in the debates of the period (5.571-73). 71

Milton’s richly literary rendering of zeal itself exemplifies Luther’s claim that those of an “ardent spirit” cannot write in a “dull stile” (901), and as it turns out, the issue of style is front and centre to his treatment of zeal. Throughout the antiprelatical tracts he insists on the correspondence between the speaker and his style: the strength of his inward quality will reveal itself in his discourse, whereas the bad style of his prelatical opponents exposes their corruption. In the Apology in particular, he repeatedly rejects the Modest Confuter on this basis, defending his refusal to let his Smectymnuan friends “lye at the mercy of a coy flurting stile; to be girded with frumps and curtall gibes, by one who makes sentences by the Statute, as if all above three inches long were confiscat” (1.873). Milton not only derides the Confuter’s short sentences, but suggests there is an

71 Milton similarly reflects on the role of poetic figuration in Of Reformation when he laments “if we could but see the shape of our deare Mother England, as Poets are wont to give a personal form to what they please,” and proceeds to personify England as a woman in mourning weeds, with ashes on her head and “teares abundantly flowing from her eyes” at the sight of her many children exposed to danger because “their conscience could not assent to things which the Bishops thought indifferent.” CPW, 1.585.
analogy, even a causal relationship, between his smug, insulting prose and his office of prelacy: “certainly this tormenter of semicolons is as good at dismembering and slitting sentences, as his grave Fathers the Prelates have bin at stigmatizing & slitting noses” (1.894). The echoing sibilance and repetition of “slitting” reinforces the equivalence between torturous rhetoric and political torture. Milton’s language is characteristically scathing, but if he has been “more warme then was meet” then “perhaps it is worthier pardon to be angry, then to be cooler” in response to such degenerate affectation (1.873).

He believes in the ability of his writing to disabuse his readers of

the conceit that all who are not Prelaticall, are grosse-headed, thick witted, illiterat, shallow. Can nothing but Episcopacy teach men to speak good English, to pick & order a set of words judiciously? Must we learn from Canons and quaint Sermonings interlin’d with barbarous Latin to illuminate a period, to wreath an Enthymema with maistrous dexterity? I rather encline, as I have heard it observ’d, that a Jesuits Italian when he writes, is ever naught, though he be borne and bred a Florentine, so to think that from like causes we may go neere to observe the same in the stile of a Prelat. (1.873-74)

In response to satiric representations of Puritan ignorance, Milton denounces instead the prelates’ style, which, despite their pretensions to learning, is destined to be “ever naught.” Because they are lacking in their inward lives, the lukewarm apologists of prelacy will be revealed in the pallid quality of their “supposed art” (1.874). By contrast, Milton posits that true eloquence can spring only from inward character:

For doubtlesse that indeede according to art is most eloquent, which returnes and approaches nearest to nature from whence it came; and they expresse nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading, which may be call’d regenerate reason. So that how he should be truly eloquent who is not withall a good man, I see not. (1.874)

72 Milton refers to the Confuter’s “grave Fathers the Prelates” because he believed the Modest Confutation to be either the work of Joseph Hall or a collaboration between Hall and one of his sons. CPW, 1.863.
Again and again, Milton invokes the relationship between idealized expression and the ethical quality of the speaker. He praises him “whose mind so ever is fully possest with a fervent desire to know good things,” and with the desire to impart that knowledge to others, because “when such a man would speak, his words (by what I can expresse) like so many nimble and airy servitors trip about him at command, and in well order’d files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places” (1.949). This understanding of the moral self as the basis for speech informs his famous metaphor in the autobiographical passage that “he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himselfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things” (1.890). Milton espouses classical notions of virtue, but his choice of metaphor also betrays his understanding of the self as a rhetorical performance, a poem to be written and sung to the world, and in this performance sincerity and transparency are paramount.

Milton’s linking of style and self recalls my discussion in Chapter One of the Reformers’ understanding of the essential correspondence between feeling and expression. Calvin made frequent recourse to the proverbial understanding that language was the image of the mind, and maintained that faith cannot be concealed in the

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73 In his rhetorical study of the sermons of Hugh Latimer, Pierre Janton finds that Latimer understands the orator’s sincerity to be an essential form of persuasion, and makes the same key point that Milton reiterates about true eloquence being derived from the congruence between a speaker’s actions and speech: “Au temps de Latimer, gens de lettres et gens d’Eglise ont conscience qu’on ne nourrit pas les âmes avec des formules; ils déplacent l’emphase de la forme sur le message et plus encore, sur la sincérité de l’orateur, l’harmonie de ses actes et de ses paroles. Telle est à leurs yeux la véritable eloquence.” [In Latimer’s time, men of letters and of the Church were conscious that the soul could not be nourished with formulas; they displaced the emphasis from the form to the message, and even more, to the sincerity of the orator, the harmony between his actions and his speech. In their eyes, this is the true form of eloquence], L’éloquence et la rhétorique dans les Sermons de Hugh Latimer (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 163, (translation my own).
74 See Chap. 1, pgs. 67-69.
heart, but must manifest itself in speech. Milton and his nonconformist contemporaries take the Reformists’ imperative for sincerity in language and place it in a more explicitly aesthetic register: in the debates over the bishops, style is the litmus by which sincerity is judged, and, Puritans maintained, the style required of the times is a forceful one. Milton understands his vehemence to be a form of ethical proof by which he summons the ability of his inward strength to “damp and astonish” the bishops (1.900); as he asserts, “this office goes not by age, or youth, but to whomsoever God shall give apparently the will, the Spirit, and the utterance” (1.875). Through his rhetoric, he participates in the period’s formulation of an opposition between the coarsely passionate, plain-speaking conviction of zeal, and the pedantic, pharisaical affectation of lukewarmness.

In its more explicitly aesthetic guise, zeal’s claim to the unmediated performance of an inward conviction or truth is also an example of what the sixteenth and seventeenth century commonly referred to as plainness. To speak “plain” was to speak sincerely or truthfully, and Kenneth Graham has noted that the understanding of plainness as a claim to truth pervades a range of early modern writing, including the native plain style of sixteenth-century poetry, the Baconian plain style of seventeenth-century science, and the plain style of Protestant poetry and preaching. In a classic essay on the subject, Richard Foster Jones identifies the period’s recourse to a “moral sense of simplicity,” an anti-

75 Peter Auksi examines Milton’s early prose in terms of the rhetorical tradition of nonconformist writing, and comes to a similar conclusion that Milton is operating within a Reformation theory of decorum that placed a central emphasis on the speaker’s ethical quality: “For generations of Christian Reformers and their audiences there … existed a … Christian formulation of decorum that stressed the possibility and necessity of congruence … between the speaker and his discourse: the inward nature of the agent would perforce express itself in the quality of his outward acts, his ‘outward gesture.’ On this fact of congruence the first Reformers had placed their faith in ethical proof as a major weapon in the persuasion and conversion of stony hearts.” “Milton’s ‘Sanctifi’d Bitternesse’: Polemical Technique in the Early Prose,” Texas Studies in Literature and Language 19.3 (Fall 1977): 368.

rhetorical movement that rejected the sophistry associated with rhetoric, especially in the case of Puritan religion, where the attack on eloquence as a sign of hypocrisy became conventional. The source of this conviction is most forcefully articulated in the Reformation doctrine that the plain sense of scripture offers certain truth that will be revealed through the inward workings of the Holy Spirit. Milton makes the “plainness and perspicuity” (1.566) of scripture that is available to all a central theme throughout his tracts, and contrasts it with the dissembling of the prelates, who confuse matters with their additions of patristic interpretation:

in thus calling for Antiquity, they feare the plain field of the Scriptures, the chase is too hot; they see the dark, the bushie, the tangled Forrest, they would imbosk: they feel themselves strook in the transparent streams of divine Truth, they would plunge, and tumble, and thinke to ly hid in the foul weeds, and muddy waters, where no plummet can reach the bottome. (1.569)

The plainness of scripture and its ability to give access to the “transparent streams of divine Truth,” an internal certainty that requires no external proof or exegesis, gives rise to the early modern understanding of the authority of conviction that serves an important political function. The opposition of hollow official forms through plain and simple expressions of personal conviction is central to what Graham calls the “anti-formal character of plainness.” Citing Stephano Guazzo’s *The Civile Conversation* (1581), he describes plainness as

a blunt integrity that speaks its mind and refuses to flatter, preferring “sinceritie and playne dealing” to the “fond seeming” of public conventions. Thus it is itself skeptical of convention, and, like its synonym *sincerity* (a new

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78 Thomas Corns notes that this emphasis on truth in plainness is “characteristic of a feature of this tract: the way in which the argument is often carried, not by logical exposition, but by a driving Puritan aesthetic that values plainness and purity and deprecates adornment as something vile and excrescent.” By extension, traditional or patristic interpretative additions to the gospel are equated with additions to the pristine structure of the primitive church. *John Milton: The Prose Works*, 21. 
word in the period), implies the superiority of inner to outer, of heart to
tongue, and denotes a state in which the two are in perfect agreement.\textsuperscript{79}

Graham emphasizes two aspects of this “private plainness”: first is a response of
emotional withdrawal and self-sufficiency originating in Stoic patience and Christian
asceticism. Second is plainness’ to attempt to justify itself, and to affect the world from
which it withdraws, through the expression of anger. In so doing, plainness may “draw
on such traditional justifications of anger as the Herculean heroic tradition, the \textit{saeva
indignatio} of Juvenalian satire, and the Thomistic \textit{ira per zelum}.”\textsuperscript{80} I have already
discussed the last of these traditions at length, but Milton’s defences of his zeal in the
antiprelatical tracts can be situated within the broader tradition of plainness, and will
become a consistent feature of his rhetoric. He appeals to plainness again in the \textit{Defense
of Himself} (1655) when he defends his vehemence on the basis of “the example of the
gravest authors” (Herodotus, Seneca, Plutarch, Moses, et al.) who “have always thought
that words unchaste and plain thrust out with indignation signify not obscenity, but the
vehemence of gravest censure” (4.744).

Whereas sincerity demands the congruence between inward feeling and outward
performance, that there should be no dissembling or hypocrisy in the outward gesture,
sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plainness interestingly places this moral imperative in
a more explicitly stylistic or rhetorical register. Plainness asserts that there is no
distinction between form and essence—plain style should be artless, formless, a perfect
congruence between word and deed, language and feeling. Of course, there is some irony
in Milton’s insistent appeal to the value of plainness; as his passage personifying the
warrior Zeal demonstrates, his language is anything \textit{but} plain. His early prose is notable

\textsuperscript{79} Graham, “Plainness and the Performance of Love in \textit{King Lear},” 443, 441.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 441.
for its elaborate Ciceronian periods and exalted figurative passages. But whether or not his style is actually plain, Milton’s polemic makes a rhetorical performance of the claim to truth found in plainness. As he emphasizes in *Of Reformation*:

> wherever I have in this Booke plainly and roundly (though worthily and truly) laid open the faults and blemishes of Fathers, Martyrs, or Christian Emperors; or have otherwise inveighed against Error and Superstition with vehement Expressions: I have done it, neither out of malice, nor list to speak evil, nor any vaine-glory; but of more necessity, to vindicate the spotlesse Truth from an ignominious bondage, whose native worth is now become of such low esteeme, that shee is like to finde small credit with us for what she can say, unlesse shee can bring a Ticket from Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley; or prove her selfe a retainer to Constantine, and weare his badge. (1.535)

Milton purports to present an unmediated voice that is a truthful and angry expression of his zealous conviction, and overtly opposes this with the tradition of blind martyrology that has preceded him. He takes a calculated risk in criticizing icons such as Bishops Latimer and Ridley and Archbishop Cranmer who were lauded as martyrs for Protestant Reformation in England. But such daring only serves as further proof of his conviction. Graham stresses “the paradoxical nature of the public tradition of private plainness” in early modern England:

> the plainspeaker adopts the public form of disavowing public forms, and, assuming that they believe his angry and true speech, his auditors break the rules for him. Thus anger and the anti-formal truth of withdrawal both attempt to justify themselves as privileges by a persuasive performance of the conviction that lies at their heart.  

Milton’s plain-speaking denunciation of English martyrology directly precedes the passage in which he draws on Revelation 3:16 to characterize the bishops’ lukewarmness as giving a vomit to God. The defence of his plain speaking thus in part serves as a preparative for his shocking figuration, while also allowing Milton to directly contrast his own “plainness” and “roundness” with the “sluggishness” of the bishops who have

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81 Ibid., 445-46.
“exhaled” their former zeal. The proximity of the descriptions prompts a comparison between the blunt but truthful character of his inward sincerity and their hypocritical “ease and sloth at the top” (1.536). Speaking “plainely” is established as a form of private and personal externalization of conviction analogous to the public externalization or “spewing” of the lukewarm bishops unceremoniously rejected by God and the Church. Whereas sincerity is a discourse of ethics, in the true sense of the word’s root in ethos (a congruence between the self and its performance), plainness is in part a discourse of aesthetics (a congruence between an idea and its transparent and forceful expression). Milton performs both through his language of zeal, a language which emphatically opposes the hollow ornament and formalism of prelacy by speaking “plainely and roundly,” and which he insistently links to his personal identity and voice as an individual prophet witnessing the unfolding of history and the fulfilment of apocalypse. The period formulates an aesthetic of plainness and sincerity that is rooted in anger as a form of ethical proof. In Milton’s early prose the performance of sincere conviction becomes a primary form of evidence.
Chapter Three: Descartes, Philosophy, and “Franchise”

My present aim, then, is not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own ... I am presenting this work only as a history or, if you prefer, a fable in which, among certain examples worthy of imitation, you will perhaps also find many others that it would be right not to follow; and so I hope it will be useful for some without being harmful to any, and that everyone will be grateful to me for my frankness.

—René Descartes, Discourse on the Method (1637)

In the primitive uncouth ages, before there were any quarrels in this world and when speech was the naïve and spontaneous expression of the passions of the soul in all their sincerity, there was, in fact, in persons of greater intelligence a force of quasi god-like eloquence which poured forth from zeal for truth and an abundance of feeling.

—René Descartes, Correspondence (1628)

In 1637 the anonymous publication of a work in French entitled A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences marked a decisive moment in the history of Western thought. René Descartes intended his Discourse, his first published work, as an introduction to his thought, which proposed a radical departure from the prevailing Aristotelian philosophy and its methods. The Discourse outlines his philosophical and scientific programme, and serves as a preface to the essays on optics, meteorology, and geometry that follow, described by Descartes as examples of his method in practice. But despite the fact that he chooses not to identify himself on his title page, Descartes does not provide an impersonal presentation of his method; rather, the Discourse is famously written as a confessional, first-person account of his intellectual formation. It is frequently referred to as an “intellectual autobiography.” Descartes himself calls it “the story of my mind,” an intimate story in the tradition of an Augustinian conversion narrative, albeit an oddly anonymous
conversion. This seeming contradiction serves as the central problem or question of my chapter: why would Descartes write *A Discourse on the Method* in the form of an autobiography? And perhaps more intriguingly for my purposes, what are the implications of his choice to write a paradoxically anonymous autobiography? The *Discourse* provides Descartes’ personal account of the experiences that led to his radical break with inherited learning, but ultimately his narrative declines to differentiate him from the universal potential of the rational subject who serves as the inspiration for and basis of his *cogito*. When it is examined from the vantage of its rhetoric, Descartes’ first-person narrative account of his method presents a host of contradictions and complications. This tension is indicated from the very outset of the *Discourse*, which in fact does not begin with autobiography at all. Before Descartes can embark on the story of his education, his travels, and his epiphany in the “stove-heated room,” he opens with a paragraph whose rhetorical complexity has long fascinated commentators.

The first sentence of the *Discourse* is notoriously slippery: “Good sense is the best distributed thing in the world: for everyone thinks himself so well endowed with it that even those who are the hardest to please in everything else do not usually desire more of it than they possess.”¹ The reader is hard pressed not to hear this as a wry dose of irony about self-satisfied and self-deceiving human nature. The expression is proverbial, and the tendency to read it satirically is further supported by the likeliness to

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¹ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols., trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 1.111 (references to Descartes’ works in English translation are from this edition and hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number and identified where necessary as CSM; volume 3, containing a selection of Descartes’ correspondence translated by Anthony Kenny, is cited as CSMK). The CSM translations are based on the standard edition of Descartes’ works, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 12 vols., ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1965), 6.2 (references to Descartes’ works in French are from this edition, and hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as AT). CSM contains running marginal cross-references to AT, and all English quotations have been checked against the original.
hear it as a direct echo of Montaigne’s essay “Of presumption,” where he observes that
“It is commonly said that the fairest division of her favors Nature has given us is that of
sense; for there is no one who is not content with the share of it that she has allotted him.”
Montaigne’s approach is characteristically skeptical and self-effacing, and so he playfully
elaborates, “I think my opinions are good and sound. But who does not think the same of
his?”2 But to the reader’s surprise, Descartes’ following sentence swiftly deflates any
conspiratorial sense of a shared irony between author and reader and reveals that he
intends his opening statement about the equal distribution of “good sense” quite literally:
he flatly states, “In this it is unlikely that everyone is mistaken.” Rather, the maxim is
curiously cited as proof (”temoigne,” witness, AT, 6.2) that “the power of judging well
and of distinguishing the true from the false – which is what we properly call ‘good
sense’ or ‘reason’ – is naturally equal in all men” (1.111). In the Latin version of the
Discourse “good sense” is translated as bona mens, a term that Ian Maclean notes is
glossed in Descartes’ Regulae ad directionem ingenii (Rules For the Direction of Our
Native Intelligence) (c. 1628) as “universal wisdom,” “the faculty of judgement which
will allow us, if properly employed, to reach wisdom.”3 And it is specifically the
problem of proper use to which Descartes applies himself: “The diversity of our opinions
does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others but solely because we
direct our thoughts along different paths and do not attend to the same things” (1.111).

The difficulty in coming to a consensus and parsing out the “true from the false” arises

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Montaigne’s Essays were certainly known to Descartes, and Ian Maclean suggests they may have served as
a model for the autobiographical essay entitled “the story of my mind” he was known to be planning as
early as 1628. Maclean notes, “like Descartes, [Montaigne] was a legally trained gentleman of leisure, who
engaged in a broad range of reflections (including an assessment of his own education) and recorded them
in a deliberately informal way.” A Discourse on the Method, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford UP,
2006), xxv.
3 Maclean, Discourse, 5n.
not because of deficiencies in human ability, or any skeptical reservations about the possibility of attaining truth, but because the faculty of reason is directed in too many different ways.

Several generations of Cartesian scholars have puzzled over the interpretive challenges of the opening sentence and its slippage between irony and seriousness. A further mystifying factor is that the proverbial assertion that all are satisfied with their allotment of “good sense” does not seem to follow logically as proof of the equal distribution of reason. Commentators have gone to great lengths to explicate the elliptical opening of the Discourse on the Method, but my own sense is that Descartes’ objective is chiefly rhetorical, perhaps even at the expense of the logical. Rather than straightforwardly defeating the irony of the Montaignean proverb that many are deceived about their possession of good sense, Descartes might be said to capitalize on its satirical energies while layering it with a further ironic reversal: despite the self-deception of his philosophical colleagues who smugly pursue the traditional Aristotelian programme, they do in fact possess the necessary sense. What they lack is the direction to apply it correctly. As he asserts, “it is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to apply it well.” What is required to lead out of the many paths of error is a method, the method which Descartes proposes, but equally central are the patience and humility that will

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4 For example, in the notes to his edition Étienne Gilson acknowledges that Descartes’ use of the expression introduces “une nuance d’ironie,” but tries to diminish it by justifying the Cartesian logic. Discours de la Méthode: Texte et Commentaire (Paris: Vrin, 1925), 83-4. David Simpson argues that the undercutting of the familiar sentence is part of a “technique of arrestation” which disrupts the reader’s sense of security and competence, and alienates them from a controlling authorial presence, a “shaming” technique through which Descartes necessitates a heuristic practice of self-discovery independent of “custom and example.” “Putting One’s House in Order: The Career of the Self in Descartes’ Method,” New Literary History 9.1 (1977): 8-101. More recently, Richard Strier has discussed the sentence’s ambiguity as part of a negotiation between authorial pride and the humility necessitated by a universal method. “Self-Revelation and Self-Satisfaction in Montaigne and Descartes,” Prose Studies 29.3 (December 2007): 405-426. See also a version of this essay in The Unrepentant Renaissance from Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 207-247.
facilitate its adoption: “The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues; and those who proceed but very slowly can make much greater progress, if they always follow the right path, than those who hurry and stray from it” (1.111).

Thus far, the account of good sense has been entirely impersonal; the first paragraph of the Discourse makes no use of the first-person singular, and its aims are emphatically democratic and collective rather than private. It is only in the second paragraph that Descartes as speaker emerges. On the point of introducing his new method, Descartes must find a way to broach his proposal and to become an “I” with the authority to do so. To this end, he introduces an elaborate humility topos that follows out of the statement about slow progress along the “right path”: “For my part, I have never presumed my mind to be in any way more perfect than that of the ordinary man; indeed, I have often wished to have as quick a wit, or as sharp and distinct an imagination, or as ample or prompt a memory as some others” (1.111-12). Despite this profession of modesty, Descartes is quick to clarify that the distinctions he makes involve only different faculties of mind—such as wit, imagination, and memory—not the capacity of reason itself, “for, as regards reason or sense, since it is the only thing that makes us men and distinguishes us from beasts, I am inclined to believe that it exists whole and complete in each of us. Here I follow the common opinion of the philosophers who say there are differences of degree only between the accidents, and not between the forms (or natures) of individuals of the same species” (1.112). Descartes is fully invested in his egalitarian premise of rationality. In order for his method to be universally applicable, it cannot depend on any special aptitude. And yet, he must find his way out of the contradiction arising between theory and narrative practice. He must find a way to
disengage himself and to account for his discovery of the method, and he does so through a strategy of humility that turns on the concept of “accident,” a term he borrows from the scholastic vocabulary, but redefines as a matter of historical chance:

I say without hesitation that I consider myself very fortunate to have happened upon certain paths in my youth which led me to considerations and maxims from which I formed a method whereby, it seems to me, I can increase my knowledge gradually and raise it little by little to the highest point allowed by the mediocrity of my mind and the short duration of my life. (1.112)

Because he cannot claim to have special qualities that have led him to his method, Descartes cites good fortune, which has placed him on the path that happened to lead to his discovery. He has been cultivating the concept of the path or journey from the outset, and it will become a recurring trope throughout his text. John Lyons has most clearly articulated this rhetorical strategy at work in the Discourse:

If the Cogito can be considered the foundation of Cartesian metaphysics, Accident seems to be the foundation of Cartesian rhetoric. It is the concept that mediates between commonness and individuality. It permits the anonymous author of the Discours to assert his right to speak out. Whereas the previous passage on bon sens establishes the public as having timeless qualities in common with the speaker, the “good fortune” (heur, augurium) of happening upon certain paths establishes the speaker’s difference on a historical basis.  

Like the two other authors I have examined, Descartes exploits the humility topos, but his strategy of modesty is more centrally tied to his epistemological premise itself. Unlike Milton, who compares himself to the reluctant prophet Jeremiah, Descartes cannot claim his argument is a matter of divine calling as this would undermine the very foundation of

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5 John Lyons, “Subjectivity and Imitation in the Discours de la Méthode,” Neophilologus 66 (1982): 509. Lyons has written a number of articles analyzing the Cartesian ethos in the Discourse, and I am indebted to his work, which has importantly informed my thinking. However, my own interest is to explore how Descartes’ strategies of ethos evolve in his later ethical writings and resolve some of the tensions Lyons identifies in the rhetorical presentation of his metaphysics. Whereas Lyons sees the articulation of the cogito as predicated on the negation of the “full” subject of the autobiographical narrative of preparation, I am interested in how Descartes’ rhetorical and ethical thought seeks to recuperate a central role for this subject.
his method, which relies on a universal potential that cannot be the result of a personal
gift. In fact, he is careful to insist in the introduction that his work is not divinely
inspired: rather, it is among the “purely human occupation[s]” that are of “worth and
importance” (1.112). 6 Descartes’ concept of historical chance—significantly, “heur” in
the original French 7—echoes, and is very likely influenced by, Bacon’s similar claims in
the Novum Organum that his argument for a new empirical method is a “birth of time”
rather than of talent. 8 Like Bacon, Descartes proclaims it is “beaucoup d’heur”—that is,
both luck and good timing—which placed him on the paths that led him to this moment
in time and to his method. But whereas Bacon’s appeal to humility is central to his
persuasive strategy, which attempts to inspire and enable other experimenters to follow in
his steps at a key historical moment, Descartes’ humility is even more fundamental to his
epistemological assumptions. Put otherwise, Descartes is obliged to perform more
rhetorical footwork to authorize his speaking and negotiate the contradiction between his
personal account of his discovery and his opening premise of rational equality. A
rhetoric of humility is necessitated by the very nature of a universal method for
“Correctly Conducting One’s Reason.”

Given the rhetorical complications occasioned by his first-person account, why
would Descartes not opt for a more impersonal presentation of method? Rather than
altering his approach, however, Descartes’ persists in his confessional style—indeed, he

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6 In glossing this phrase, Ian Maclean observes “Descartes consistently separates philosophy from theology
or any grace-inspired speculations, and criticizes those who mix them together.” Discourse on the Method,
6n.
7 “Mais je ne craindroy pas de dire que je pense avoir eu beaucoup d’heur, de m’estre rencontré dés ma
jeunesse en certains chemins, qui m’ont conduit as des considerations & des maxims, dont j’ay formé une
Methode…” AT, 6.3.
8 See my discussion of this Baconian trope in Chap. 1, p. 79ff. Descartes was certainly familiar with
Bacon’s work. During his time in Paris from 1625-1628, he travelled in learned circles, and would have
been exposed to the ideas of some of the most innovative modern thinkers, including Bacon’s Novum
Organum, which had appeared in 1620. Cf. Maclean, Discourse on the Method, xv.
intensifies it. The humility claim leads directly into his famous appeal to the reader’s own responsibility. He concedes that it is possible he may be self-deceived like those he refers to in his opening statement, that what he takes “for gold and diamonds is nothing but a bit of copper and glass” (1.112). Nevertheless, he will be glad to place the power of judgement into his readers’ hands and “reveal … what paths I have followed, and to represent my life in it as if in a picture, so that everyone may judge it for himself” (1.112). Most importantly, this strategy of self-effacement informs his famous claim that, like Montaigne, he does not seek to instruct, but only to present his own experiences as in a “history” or a “fable”:

My present aim, then, is not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own. One who presumes to give precepts must think himself more skilful than those to whom he gives them; and if he makes the slightest mistake, he may be blamed. But I am presenting this work only as a history or, if you prefer, a fable in which, among certain examples worthy of imitation, you will perhaps also find many others that it would be right not to follow; and so I hope it will be useful to some without being harmful to any, and that everyone will be grateful to me for my frankness. (1.112)  

I hope to explore several aspects of this fascinating statement of intent, but most specifically my interest centres on Descartes’ profession that all should be grateful to him for his “frankness.” The original vernacular is “gré de ma franchise,” a term with multiple and interesting connotations, and that recurs elsewhere in Descartes’ oeuvre. “Franchise” is variously translated in English versions of the Discourse as “frankness,” “candour,” or in a 1649 translation as “liberty,” a word whose connotation perhaps gestures most directly to the agency seemingly on offer in Descartes’ construction of a

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9 Montaigne’s influence is again audible: he asserts in “Of Repentance” that whereas “Others form man; I tell of him, and portray a particular one, very ill-formed” and “I do not teach, I tell.” (“je n’enseigne poinct, je raconte.”), Complete Works of Montaigne, 610, 612.
frank and open relationship with his reader. As Lyons has astutely observed, “it is difficult to see how the reader could evaluate and appreciate the anonymous author’s sincerity. In such a context the older sense of the term ‘franchise’ seems to impose itself – that which limits sovereign authority.”

In fact, Descartes’ use of “franchise” carries a range of denotations and connotations. Early dictionaries reveal the word’s evolving and complex meaning. Jean Nicot’s *Le Thresor de la langue francoyse* (1606) notes that *franchise* is an old word that “Vient de Franc, et signifie liberté, Libertas, comme, Il a acquis franchise.” In its earliest uses in both English and French the word signified primarily freedom, immunity, or privilege of varying senses; for example, freedom from servitude or subjection, spiritual freedom, or legal immunity and the right to own property. It could also designate a geographic site of asylum or sanctuary (for example the Church’s right of franchise), or the right or privilege to vote in public elections (*O.E.D*. I, 4-5 *Obs.*, 6). However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that “franchise” also had a secondary, now obsolete sense “[a]s an attribute of character or action,” which signified “Nobility of mind; liberality, generosity, magnanimity” or “Freedom or licence of speech or manners” (*O.E.D*. II. 7-8. *Obs.*), from which we no doubt derive our modern “frankness.” Much like the word “sincere,” which originally denoted that which was clean, pure, or

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unadulterated, but came to refer to transparency of motive or speech, in both English and French *franchise*’s earlier meaning of freedom gave rise to its later senses of liberality or openness of character and expression. So, the 1694 first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* lists in addition to the expected senses of “Exemption, Immunité” and “Liberté,” that *franchise* “signifie aussi, Sincerité, Candeur. Parler-avec franchise. une trop grande franchise. c’est un homme plein de franchise.” [“signifies also sincerity, candour. Speaking with frankness. Too great a frankness. He is a man full of frankness”]. By the later nineteenth century, Émile Littré’s literary dictionary of classical French reflects on the distinction between *franchise* and its synonym, *sincérité*: “La sincérité ne trahit jamais la vérité; la franchise la dit ouvertement. L’homme sincère l’est avec lui-même aussi bien qu’avec les autres; l’homme franc ne l’est qu’avec autrui; la franchise est la sincérité considérée à l’égard d’autrui.” [“Sincerity never betrays the truth, whereas frankness says it openly. The sincere man is so with himself as well as with others; the frank man is so only with others; frankness is sincerity with regard to others”].

The social function of *franchise* as an ideal of behaviour with regard to “l’autrui” (others) significantly informs my examination of Descartes’ use of a confessional voice in the *Discourse on the Method*. My particular interest is the means by which his use of the word simultaneously denotes *both* its modern and older senses—personal frankness or sincerity, and the extension of franchise, or agency to the reader. As such, the premise of “*franchise*” comes to perform an important rhetorical negotiation of Descartes’

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simultaneously private and collective argument. The opening of the *Discourse* makes a complex mediation between particularity and generality, intimate confession and anonymity. In the chapter, I seek to attend more broadly to the unique, and perhaps contradictory form of an “anonymous autobiography” that negotiates the paradox of arguing for a general theory of consciousness that requires an emptying out of all particularity through a rhetoric of an individual, autobiographical “I.” I attempt to uncover the motivations behind Descartes’ autobiographical rhetoric by examining the meaning and value of “franchise” in his writing and thought, as it is revealed in some of his theories of rhetoric and eloquence, and as these theories are later fulfilled by his ethics, which Descartes explores through a psychophysiology of the passions. I will argue that while Descartes’ philosophy strives for a universal theory of the rational subject, his rhetoric conversely privileges a language of the private and affective mind at work which will function as a model and guide for his reader. My discussion falls into four parts. I begin by further exploring the implications of an “anonymous autobiography” both for Descartes’ philosophical rhetoric, and for theories of the autobiographical genre. In the second section, I seek to contextualize Descartes’ confessional style by turning to some of his ideas about eloquence and persuasion, which centre on the sincerity or “franchise” of the rhetor as an ideal of language. In my third section, I discuss Descartes’ central methodological emphasis on perceiving “clearly and distinctly,” in order to suggest that in the domain of rhetoric, this epistemology of self-evidence translates into the communication of that force of conviction to the listener. In the last section, I turn to Descartes’ final work, *The Passions of the Soul*, in order to reveal how the principle of *franchise* informs his later ethics, and in particular the
articulation of his central ethic of générosité, the passion of self-recognition that Descartes believes drives philosophical enquiry as an ethical practice.

I. “He is best made known by Himself”: Descartes’ Autobiographical Philosophy

An anonymous English translation entitled *A discourse of a method for the well-guiding of reason, and the discovery of truth in the sciences* was printed in London in 1649 by Thomas Newcombe. The prefatory matter, addressed “To the Understanding READER,” opens by overtly commenting on Descartes’ choice to publish his work anonymously:

> The Great Descartes (who may justly challenge the first place amongst the Philosophers of this Age) is the Author of this Discourse; which in the Originall was so well known, That it could be no mans but his own, that his Name was not affix’d to it: I need say no more either of Him or It; *He is best made known by Himself*, and his Writings want nothing but thy reading to commend them.  

Although the translator means primarily to humbly assert that the work will speak for itself beyond the apparatus of his preface, his choice of words (“He is best made known by Himself”) has interesting implications for my discussion of Descartes’ use of an anonymous first-person voice as a method of persuasion. The translator clearly understands the essay, and Descartes’ self-representation therein, as a model for practice, “by the Rules whereof we may Shape our better part, Rectifie or [sic] Reason, Form our Manners and Square our Actions, Adorn our Mindes, and making a diligent Enquiry into Nature, wee may attain to the Knowledge of the Truth.” And importantly, he is aware of the role the individual reader will have to take up in achieving Descartes’ project: “Our Author also invites all letterd men to his assistance in the prosecution of this Search;  

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15 *Descartes in Seventeenth-Century England*, vol. 1, emphasis added.
That for the good of Mankinde, They would practise and communicate Experiments.”

“Every man” is “obliged to the furtherance of so beneficial an Undertaking,” and he
furnishes his “Englished” version so that “it may serve for an innocent Divertisement to
those, who would rather Reform themselves, then the rest of the world; and who … will
study to finde out in themselves, and restore to Posterity those lost Arts, which render
Antiquity so venerable; and strive (if it be possible) to go beyond them in other things.”

He concludes by praising the pursuit of philosophy as a personal virtue for those “who
seek the knowledge, and labour for the Conquest of themselves; Who have Vertue
enough to make their own Fortune; And who prefer the Culture of the Minde before the
Adorning of the Body.”

Descartes’ translator demonstrates that his contemporary readers were well aware
of the agency he extended them through his “franchise.” The preface serves as a record
of the powerful response engendered by Descartes’ persuasive methods.16 Indeed, as the
opening of the Discourse makes clear, despite his profession that he does not seek to
instruct, Descartes’ writing performs careful rhetorical work—work that he may have
deeded necessary, given the conditions that informed his publication. Descartes did not
originally intend to publish a book resembling the Discourse; rather, at the behest of his
Parisian friends, he was planning a comprehensive account of his world system based on
mechanistic principles, which he had entitled The Universe (Le Monde). He had been
engaged in this work throughout the late 1620s and early 1630s and was nearing its

16 Ian Maclean notes that for the general public the Discourse had a powerfully enabling and democratizing
effect: “its radical programme, which did not require philosophical and ‘scientific’ training but only the
employment of ‘good sense’, appealed to those who had not received formal education, notably women,
who felt empowered by his promotion of the image of the well-reasoning individual. By the mid-1650s, in
Paris, ‘the free use of reason’ was associated with various radical views, some of them feminist, and
Descartes was seen as its champion and a liberator from prejudice: ‘Cartesiomania’ broke out.” Maclean,
Discourse, xxi-xxii.
completion when he encountered a major setback: news reached him in 1633 that Galileo’s *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* had been officially condemned by the Inquisitors of the Roman Church. *The Universe* was based on a Copernican cosmology that had already been censored by the Inquisitors in 1616, but the official and public condemnation of Galileo’s work on the grounds of its heliocentric theory caused Descartes to immediately abandon his plans to publish. He had never been especially enthusiastic about print, due likely in part to an aristocratic distaste for its association with trade, and in part because of his notoriously private and reclusive nature.

In April of 1634, he wrote a formal letter to his friend and mentor Marin Mersenne explaining his decision to withhold *The Universe* that Ian Maclean argues he likely intended as a quasi-open declaration of his position on the Galileo affair for circulation in Paris. In it he stated “I desire to live in peace and to continue the life I have begun under the motto ‘to live well you must live unseen’.”

In Part Six of the *Discourse*, Descartes writes in evasive terms about his suppression of this earlier work:

> It is now three years since I reached the end of the treatise that contains all these things. I was beginning to revise it in order to put it in the hands of a publisher, when I learned that some persons to whom I defer and who have hardly less authority over my actions than my own reason has over my thoughts, had disapproved of a physical theory published a little while before by someone else. I will not say that I accepted this theory, but only that before their condemnation I had noticed nothing in it that I could imagine to be prejudicial either to religion or to the state, and hence nothing that would have prevented me from publishing it myself, if reason had convinced me of

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17 CSMK, 3.43; cf. AT, 1.285-6. See Maclean, ed., *Discourse*, xxxvi-xxxvii for a discussion of this letter, which is more formal in nature than the regular correspondence between Descartes and Mersenne, and repeats points from their previous correspondence, leading Maclean to conclude it was intended as a public statement of Descartes’ position. In it, Descartes writes: “Doubtless you know that Galileo was recently censured by the Inquisitors of the Faith, and that his views about the movement of the earth were condemned as heretical. I must tell you that all the things I explained in my treatise, which included the doctrine of the movement of the earth, were so interdependent that it is enough to discover that one of them is false to know that all the arguments I was using are unsound. Though I thought they were based on very certain and evident proofs, I would not wish, for anything in the world, to maintain them against the authority of the Church.” CSMK, 3.42.
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it. This made me fear that there might be some mistake in one of my own theories, in spite of the great care I had always taken never to adopt any new opinion for which I had no certain demonstration … That was enough to make me change my previous decision to publish my views. For although I had very strong reasons for this decision, my inclination, which has always made me dislike the business of writing books, prompted me to find excuses enough for deciding otherwise. (1.141-142)

The passage is carefully hedged, and demonstrates the extreme circumspection Descartes deemed necessary in revealing his ideas for the first time. However, he did finally cede to pressure from his friends and contacts in the philosophical community to disclose his ideas in the form of the *Discourse on the Method*, along with examples of his findings in optics, meteorology, and geometry. There is evidence that as early as 1628 he had been planning an autobiographical essay entitled “the story of my mind” (*L’Histoire de mon esprit*). Part One of the *Discourse* may have been adapted from this earlier work, and may be one reason Descartes opted to write in the vernacular. Although the Galileo controversy forced him to suppress *The Universe*, Part Five of the *Discourse* gives an overview of its contents, eliminating any elements that would commit him to the theory of the earth’s movement, including a chapter on tides. Descartes thus feels obliged to write a work of a very different and less “scientific” character than that he had originally intended. As he claims in another letter to Mersenne written shortly before the publication of the *Discourse*, he only refers to his discovery of the method, rather than stating it formally: “I have not been able to understand your objection to the title,” he writes, “for I have not put *Treatise on the Method* but *Discourse on the Method*, which

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18 The autobiographical essay is mentioned in a letter written by Guez de Balzac to Descartes on 30 March 1628, AT, 1.570. Although it was aimed at his personal friends, Descartes was clearly aware of a broader readership for the *Discourse*, which may also have informed his choice to write in French, a decision he comments on at the end of the *Discourse*, “And if I am writing in French, my native language, rather than Latin, the language of my teachers, it is because I expect that those who use only their natural reason in all its purity will be better judges of my opinions than those who give credence only to the writings of the ancients.” CSM, 1.151.
means *Preface or Notice on the Method*, in order to show that I do not intend to teach the method but only to discuss it."  

Descartes thus opted for a combination of personal revelation and practical demonstration over a more prescriptive style. The result was a generically unique treatment of the experiences that led him to his method, a matter of some disappointment to his friends, who were eager to engage more directly with the principles of his physics. A modern critic like Michel Beaujour has similarly puzzled over how to categorize Descartes’ *Discourse* and *Meditations*, as well as works such as Montaigne’s *Essays* and Cardano’s *De vita propria*, alongside writing that more obviously conforms to the “rhetorical-logical” kinds of scientific and philosophical prose, such as the encyclopedic *speculum* and the impersonal treatise on method. In particular, Beaujour notes that literary self-portrayal is central to “the many [Renaissance] works that purported to do over, or to supplant, the Aristotelian *organon*, from Agricola to Ramus, Bacon, and Descartes.” And this, he concludes, is no surprise given that with the rejection of inherited methods the only possible object of study is the knowing subject who writes: “self-portrayal is inherently involved in epistemological speculation because it questions the validity of the procedures that program its own dialectical invention, as it attempts to map out a new field of inquiry: the individual thinking object, and the very process of thinking.” And significantly, Beaujour also emphasizes the responsibility of the writer in terms that resonate with my discussion in Chapter One of Bacon’s attempt to inculcate a practice of humility and earnest industry both in himself and in the new scientist who will follow after him: “the epistemological evolution of Renaissance science can be read … as an elaboration of new methods conferring upon the individual scientist as philosopher a

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19 CSMK, 3.53; cf. AT, 1.349.
personal responsibility for his inferences, and for testing—logically or experimentally—their validity.”

The individual’s self-discipline becomes central to the process of re-building knowledge from scratch. It is for this reason, Beaujour suggests, that rhetoric’s traditional emphasis on *ethos*, the speaker’s projection of a persuasive persona, is particularly compatible with the epistemological upheavals of the early modern period:

Cardano’s display of self-righteousness is *ethos*, and so is Montaigne’s low profile. Natural judgment (which is being tested in the *Essays*) derives its authority solely from the subject’s credibility. The writer will be deemed reliable only insofar as he is seen examining himself and testing his own beliefs, displaying himself in the act of clearing the deck … Ethos confers authority and persuasiveness upon the Cartesian *cogito* and method. Between *speculum* and method, self-portrayal appears to be a guarantee of epistemological reliability, just as much as it is a record of actual cognitive procedures.

*Ethos* is thus offered as a “methodological touchstone” by those early modern theorists of epistemology who attempt to re-build knowledge independently, from the ground up.

Beaujour astutely reveals how ethical self-presentation becomes a source of both methodological and rhetorical credibility, but in Descartes’ case, *ethos* serves not only as a means of authorizing the writer’s discoveries, but as a model and guide that may equally apply to the *reader*. By contrast, Montaigne’s introspection skeptically distances itself from received learning, but in no way assumes that the self into which he retreats should be exemplary. As Beaujour himself notes in an aside, “[o]nly with Descartes’ *Discourse* and *Meditations* will a first-person epistemological discourse openly claim universal exemplarity … the “I” in Descartes is very different from Montaigne’s “I” in the *Essays*. So different, in fact, that the *Discourse on the Method* was published

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21 Ibid., 188.
anonymously.”

However, Beaujour does not follow this statement to its logical conclusion, and to the most significant role played by ethos in the Discourse. Instead of authoritatively presenting his method, Descartes employs a narrative whose objective is to inspire imitation on the part of his reader. As he asserts in the opening of the Discourse, he does not “presume to give precepts,” but only to present his own “fable” or “history” which the reader may or may not deem “worthy of imitation.” The reader is posited as a kind of interpreter or close reader who must come to understand the moral of Descartes’ story on his or her own terms. Rather than passively adopting his precepts, readers are enjoined to re-construct the process of discovery for themselves through a practice of identification. Descartes’ rhetoric and theory is thus fundamentally heuristic; ethos is offered both as a methodological touchstone, and a cipher into which the reader may interpolate his or her own experience.

Specifically, the reader may interpolate herself through the trope of the path, a technique that brilliantly negotiates the distinction between Descartes’ own story and the reader’s identification. In the opening paragraphs, the figure of the path is repeatedly stated: the limitations of current learning are occasioned because “we direct our thoughts along different paths,” but progress will be achieved by those who patiently “follow the right path,” as Descartes himself has done by fortuitously happening “upon certain paths” from his youth (1.111-12). However, within Descartes’ rhetorical practice, it is fundamentally the reader’s choice whether to follow the same path he has chosen. He

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22 Ibid., 187-8. For more on this distinction, see my discussion in the Introduction, p. 21-22.
23 John Lyons has argued that the path is a key concept in Descartes’ rhetorical mediation between his own discovery of method and the reader’s identification: “The relationship between history and method is fundamentally a problem of the relationship between author and reader, between a historical difference which can be transformed into an ahistorical sameness … path provides a concept permitting the expression both of authority (difference) and exchange (potential sameness) … Though open to all, and therefore fully compatible with the notion of method, the path in question is that historically travelled by a subject otherwise like all individuals.” “Subjectivity and Imitation,” 509-10.
will frankly “reveal … what paths [he] ha[s] followed” and represent his life “as if in a picture,” but this only “so that everyone may judge it for himself” (1.112). The reader is invited to identify with his story, but is in no sense obliged to. The particular paths that are presented involve Descartes’ own encounters with experiences outside of himself, first by exploring the world of book-learning, and subsequently by travelling through “the book of the world.” Descartes’ autobiography proper begins somewhat abruptly in medias res with an account of his education and intellectual formation. He had entitled his earlier autobiographical essay “the story of my mind,” and the anonymous narrative of the Discourse presents him in exactly such terms, as if he were a pure mind unmoored from any particulars of situation. The contingencies of birth and upbringing are not mentioned; rather, from his childhood he was “nourished upon letters” and was “extremely eager” to pursue humanistic studies because of his conviction that “by their means one could acquire a clear and certain knowledge of all that is useful in life” (1.112-13). However, the opening sentence describing his upbringing by “letters” and his childish faith in their seeming clarity and certainty is directly followed by the disaffection of his coming of age: “But as soon as I had completed the course of study at the end of which one is normally admitted to the ranks of the learned,” Descartes confides, “I completely changed my opinion.” Rather, he found himself “beset by so many doubts and errors that I came to think I had gained nothing from my attempts to become educated but increasing recognition of my ignorance” (1.113). He considered the causes of his condition and concluded that that the fault could not lie with his school, which was “one of the most famous … in Europe,” nor could it be his own lack of dedication or limited intelligence, for he had pursued not just the standard curriculum, but even works
considered more “abstruse and unusual,” and his fellow students did “not regard [him] as inferior.” Finally, the difficulty was not attributable to any deficiencies of his age, which was “as rich in good minds, as any before it” (1.113). Having thus dispelled himself, his school and his era, Descartes concluded that the source of the problem could be none other than learning itself and that there was no body of knowledge that met with the expectations he had been given.

In the rest of Part One, Descartes proceeds to make a systematic analysis of the school curriculum and the various disciplines he studied, finding each of them lacking.\footnote{Descartes attended the Jesuit Collège de la Flèche, where he received the standard humanistic education modelled on the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). His account of the curriculum in Part One of the Discourse outlines his training in classical languages and literatures, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and scholastic natural philosophy, mathematics, metaphysics, and ethics.}

In particular he focuses on the practice of reading within the humanist programme. He claims that he does not entirely dismiss the value of what he learned; he understands that the study of Greek and Latin is necessary for reading the works of the ancients, whose charming fables “awaken the mind” and whose histories can help to “shape one’s judgement if they are read with discretion” (1.113). Reading good books is “like having a conversation with the most distinguished men of past ages,” but this encounter with the past can only take him so far:

But I thought I had already given enough time to languages and likewise to reading the works of the ancients, both their histories and their fables. For conversing with those of past centuries is much the same as travelling. It is good to know something of the customs of various peoples, so that we may judge our own more soundly and not think that everything contrary to our own ways is ridiculous and irrational, as those who have seen nothing of the world ordinarily do. But one who spends too much time travelling eventually becomes a stranger in his own country; and one who is too curious about the practices of past ages usually remains quite ignorant about those of the present. (1.113-14)
Reading is analogous to travelling on the basis of its capacity to expose the reader to other times and places—both experiences are presented in terms of their ability to transport the individual away from himself and from the familiar. But within Descartes’ analysis, both reading and travelling are finally only useful as foils against which “we may judge our own [customs] more soundly”; their encounters with alterity can only gain meaning upon a homecoming to the present and to the self. But the reader undertakes this process of negative learning at the risk of becoming entirely estranged from his own present place and time, of becoming “a stranger in his own country.” What is more, Descartes goes on to suggest that it is not only the reading of the ancients, but the practice of reading in general that exposes the reader to this dangerous potential for self-alienation:

Moreover, fables make us imagine many events as possible when they are not. And even the most accurate histories, while not altering or exaggerating the importance of matters to make them more worthy of being read, at any rate almost always omit the baser and less notable events; as a result, the other events appear in a false light, and those who regulate their conduct by examples drawn from these works are liable to fall into the excesses of the knights-errant in our tales of chivalry, and conceive plans beyond their powers. (1.114)

A certain degree of misrepresentation is inherent not only to fictive fables; in the case of even the most faithful histories, the writer necessarily makes omissions so that events appear in a falsely idealized light. Reading is thus dangerous not only because it draws the reader away from himself, but because the reliance on the representations of others distorts reality and threatens to make him overly confident in his own abilities. The reference to the “excesses of the knights-errant in our tales of chivalry” introduces the genre of romance alongside those of fable and history already evoked. In so doing,
Descartes likens the experience of reading to the seductive dangers of romance erring and illusion in which the loss of identity is a central theme.

Descartes dismisses each of the subjects he studied in turn. Only mathematics is a source of “delight” because of the “certainty and self-evidence of its reasonings,” and because of the firmness of its foundations: “I was surprised that nothing more exalted had been built upon such firm and solid foundations” (1.114). By comparison, the moral writings of the ancients are nothing more than “proud and magnificent palaces built only on sand and mud” (1.114). As for the philosophy he learned, although it has been cultivated for centuries by the best minds, instead of teaching him to distinguish truth from error, it offers only a variety of disputed opinions that attest mostly to the philosophers’ egotism and their skill as dialecticians (1.115). Having found his studies fundamentally lacking, Descartes presents as a logical conclusion his choice to abandon altogether the learning of the schools in favour of his own unmediated experience of the world:

That is why, as soon as I was old enough to emerge from the control of my teachers, I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth travelling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it. For it seemed to me that much more truth could be found in the reasonings which a man makes concerning matters that concern him than in those which some scholar makes in his study about speculative matters. (1.115)

Descartes describes his travels through the world in almost desperate terms as the pursuit of a cure for his sense of personal angst and instability: “And it was always my most earnest desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false in order to see clearly into my
own actions and proceed with confidence in this life” (1.115). And yet, the narrative has not staged a sense of faith in the efficacy of travel as a means for achieving the intellectual and moral assurance Descartes craves. It is curious that he should present travel as a viable alternative to the study of letters given that it has already been rejected through the earlier metaphor likening it and reading as similarly dangerous forms of self-estrangement. The figurative relationship between travel and learning is in fact reiterated, now in inverted form, through the figure of the “book of the world.” Descartes thus presents his experiences with two different but related encounters with outward example—first temporal and intellectual “travel,” and then physical travel. It therefore comes as no great surprise when Descartes concludes that the experience of travel is lacking in much the same way that letters were:

It is true that, so long as I merely considered the customs of other men, I found hardly any reason for confidence, for I observed in them almost as much diversity as I had found previously among the opinions of philosophers … and so I learned not to believe too firmly anything of which I had been persuaded only by example and custom. (1.115-16)

John Lyons argues that the effect of this narrative circularity is that the reader experiences the second instance of disappointment as the return to a previously established and now familiar refrain. The repeated pattern of hope and disillusionment establishes a sense of anticipation in the reader, drawing them into closer proximity to Descartes’ own experience. And so the reader is led to concur with his final resolution to abandon the “example and custom” of both the world of book learning and the “book of the world” and instead look only into himself:

25 The anxious tone is even more apparent in the French: “Et j’avois toujours un extreme desir d’apprendre a distinguer le vray d’avec le faux, pour voir clair en mes actions, & marcher avec assurance en cete vie.” AT, 6.10.
26 Lyons claims that “Anticipation, circularity, and repetition … allow the reader to be in some sense fused with the enlightened subject of the Discours.” “Subjectivity and Imitation,” 514.
But after I had spent some years pursuing these studies in the book of the world and trying to gain some experience, I resolved one day to undertake studies within myself too and to use all the powers of my mind in choosing the paths I should follow. In this I have had much more success, I think, than I would have had if I had never left my country or my books. (1.116)

After having outlined his theory of negative learning through alterity, Descartes’ narrative thus enacts this very process through his own experiences of leaving first his books and then his country, both of which are central in initiating the progress toward his success, but that must ultimately be jettisoned in favour of a positive internal experience. There is some irony in the fact that Descartes’ critique of the mediacy and unreliability of fables and histories as a means of learning should be transformed into exactly such a mediating lesson for the reader, and yet, the conclusion of Part One suggests that this is precisely his aim. In the final sentences Descartes asserts that “Thus I gradually freed myself from many errors which may obscure our natural light and make us less capable of heeding reason” (1.116, emphasis added). The sentence’s shift in pronouns is significant: through his own story of deliverance, Descartes finds a way out of the errors that collectively obscure “our natural light.”

27 His personal experience has become a history or a fable with a moral potentially accessible to all.

This notion of the private revelations of the “I” serving as a collective and exemplary fable interestingly contradicts many of our generic expectations of autobiography. The essence of autobiography is often taken to be the expression of a unique existence, to the extent that John Sturrock has claimed that “the writer’s urge to

27 Richard Strier has also noted the significance of this modulation, and the fact that it directly reproduces the French construction, “Self-Revelation and Self-Satisfaction,” 415. The French states: “Et ainsi je me delivrois peu a peu de beaucoup d’erreurs, qui peuvent offusquer nostre lumiere naturelle, & nous rendre moins capables d’entendre raison.” AT, 6.10, emphasis added.
establish his singularity is an inaugural topos of the genre.”

Sturrock cites as two classic statements of this generic promise the preface to Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and his appeal to “Listen! For I am such and such a person. For Heaven’s sake do not confound me with anyone else,” and the opening of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, where he claims that

> I have formed an undertaking for which there has never been a model, and whose execution will have no imitator. I wish to show my fellow-creatures a man in all the truth of nature; and that man will be me. Me alone. I feel my heart and know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen; I dare to think I am not made like any of those who exist. If I am not better, at least I am other.”

Sturrock concedes that Rousseau may be an extreme example because he professes not just the uniqueness of his life, but of his very *nature*; nevertheless, his claims point to what Sturrock takes to be the primary motive behind autobiography:

> The writer’s singularity is at once a premise and an end of autobiography … In reflecting on his life, the autobiographer traces the purposeful, seemingly anticipated course of his own separation out from others, his escape from among the great mass of the anonymous. Anonymity means the death of autobiography. If we ever read a book called “The Autobiography of an Anonymous Man,” it will be a cheat, since we shall be reading the work of someone determined to abolish his anonymity by the presumed singularity of authorship … the anonymous autobiographer can but give us the story of how he has lost his anonymity.”

Sturrock finds this process of singularization to be particularly apparent in the works of philosophers who assert not only their lives, but their very ideas to be new or original, and so he takes as evidence for his generic discussion the works of Descartes, Leibniz, Vico, Freud, and Sartre. As it concerns Descartes, however, while in one sense the process of singularization apparently central to the autobiographical impulse is clearly

30 Ibid., 27.
recognizable in his resolution to free himself from “example and custom” and rely only
on his own experience, Sturrock’s statement above might nevertheless also lead us to
another conclusion—one to which he seems curiously unaware—that the Discourse on
the Method is a “cheat,” because an “Autobiography of an Anonymous Man” is precisely
what it provides.

Sturrock is a theorist of autobiography, not a philosopher, and his approach is
necessarily biased towards his own discipline: his goal is to address what he takes to be
the fundamental impasse between the autobiographer’s claims to a unique or singular life,
and the literary theorist’s impulse to do away with singularity in the name of a formal or
generic model. However, contradictions and elisions result from his trans-historical
archive, and his assumption that a Romantic model of subjectivity such as Rousseau’s
Confessions should readily apply to a pre-modern author like Descartes. Sturrock is so
focused on his theoretical premise that autobiography is a “record of singularization” in
tension with attempts to broadly theorize the genre that he overlooks the lack of
singularization that is one of the most oddly distinctive characteristics of Descartes’
account of himself. Ironically, despite his sensitivity to the theorist’s tendency to do
violence to the individuality of the text, Sturrock’s theory of singularization itself
becomes a kind of generic procrustean bed that cannot accommodate Descartes’ unique
form of “anonymous autobiography,” which involves a draining out of singularity. 31

31 Sturrock does concede that “Descartes was equivocal towards his singularity,” and that “there is a
cleverly managed egalitarianism in the Discourse,” acknowledging the famous opening proposition that
good sense is “naturally equal in all men.” But he does not fully confront the implications of this radically
equalizing statement for his argument about genre. For Sturrock, this innate “good sense” serves only as
“the most promising point of departure for the story of his singularization”; he sees Descartes as interested
in asserting man’s equal capacities only so that he may trace “by what singular path or process René
Descartes has elevated himself above the crowd of those identically endowed. The moral of his fable is
that we are not born singular but that we can rise to singularity, and do so by being singularly
Descartes declines to exhort or compel his reader to see as he does, but rather encourages them to undergo a similar experience to his own, and thus to discover for *themselves*. To this end, the anonymity of his story is essential to the reader’s identification with the “I” who speaks. On one level, it is certainly right to highlight Descartes’ radical departure from mainstream and inherited learning, but on the other hand, this singularity is rhetorically and philosophically achieved through an anonymous and equalizing potential, a path of singularity that is fundamentally available to *all* readers. Within an account of the historical progress of learning, Descartes’ work may be a record of singularization, but rhetorically and epistemologically, it is a paradoxically general singularization.

Other Cartesian scholars have more productively focused on the tension or contradiction between theory and representation in Descartes’ metaphysics—what Dalia Judovitz terms the distinction between the “philosophical” and the “empirical,” or “literary” subject. A survey of some of this scholarship reveals both the resonances and, as I will argue, the limitations of this distinction. Judovitz, for example, explains that within Descartes’ thought

the foundation of subjectivity as a philosophical construct is inseparable from its literary representation as an autobiographical, historical narrative entity. The philosophical subject is represented according to, and derives its verisimilitude from, literary conventions. The situation that the reader faces is one in which the philosophical subject also functions as an empirical, historical, and sometimes autobiographical subject. Thus two different projects coincide in the use of the ‘I’ in Cartesian discourse, the philosophical and the literary.32

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Judovitz contends, however, that Descartes does not acknowledge the literary character of his subject, but rather fosters “the illusion of an autonomous philosophical position.”

Unlike his contemporary Montaigne, who understands the self as inherently mediated and constituted through representation and thus endlessly variable, Descartes assumes that the subject may be a stable and knowable philosophical entity based on mathematical principles that transcend discourse. Whereas Montaigne’s examination of himself through the practice of writing the *Essays* leads only to proliferation as his mind “like a runaway horse … gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another,” Descartes strives for the certitude of a universal metaphysical subject. In “Of Repentance” Montaigne famously claims “I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being: I portray passing.”

Descartes’ self-representation, on the other hand, is not a fleeting attempt at self-portraiture for its own sake; rather, his self-portrayal is the first step in a philosophical project of establishing a new, universal standard for judging truth.

Several other scholars similarly address the challenges of defining the Cartesian subject, especially as it is constituted through narrative or fable. John Lyons has stated that “the ‘I’ of ‘J’étais alors en Allemagne…’ is not the same ‘I’ as that of the ‘Je pense,

33 Ibid., 5.
35 The complete passage reads: “I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being: I portray passing. Not the passing of one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences, and of irresolute and, when it so befalls, contradictory ideas: whether I am different myself, or whether I take hold of my subjects in different circumstances and aspects. So, all in all, I may indeed contradict myself now and then; but truth, as Demades said, I do not contradict.” *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, 610-11.
donc je suis,” and he argues there are in fact not two, but three definitions of the “I” in the Discourse, “the autobiographical subject, the ethical subject, and the metaphysical subject.” Jean-Luc Nancy has claimed that “The Discours is the fable of the generality of a singular and authentic action.” He notes that autobiography is the only genre available to the writer who rejects the authority to teach, and that the exemplarity of Descartes’ story may be found solely in the frank and open revelations of the “I”:

[T]he Discours has essentially only one exemplarity, and the fable only one morality, which is frankness. It is through frankness that Descartes distinguishes himself from all those who deal in doctrines and precepts. Because he proposes no teaching of truth, his work must be taken as a fable; and that is also its whole lesson. Just as La Fontaine’s ‘The Wolf and the Lamb,’ for example, is the fable of the right of the most powerful, the Discours is the fable of frankness.

But, Nancy also cautions that the person who frankly recounts his story does so not in the name of the empirical singularity of one life among others (the modern value of sincerity will never be more than a psychological and literary by-product of the ontology articulated here) … what is at stake here can be only the life—by its own principle exemplary—of him who is through himself the truth, not that of him who exposes his truth.

The great irony is that Descartes’ foundation of truth through the articulation of the cogito would seem to involve the negation of the very autobiographical subject who has led him to it. Both Lyons and Judovitz emphasize the emergence of a new subject in the final parts of the Discourse—no longer the autobiographical and ethical subject of the first two parts, but rather the philosophical subject of Part Four who is finally fully formal and impersonal:

The Cogito is … not merely a positive gesture of founding certainty but also, perhaps even more, a strongly negative gesture more forceful because the reader can appreciate the destruction that it requires. What vanishes in the

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36 Lyons, “Subjectivity and Imitation,” 516.
Cogito is the autobiographical “I” of the narrative of preparation. Although the Cogito permits certainty about the existence of the subject, the latter is no longer the subject, the “person” we have known. The subject of the Cogito has no body, no past, no relationship to others, no project or method, no location in historical space. The Cogito is a momentary and solitary act. It can take place only in the present; I think, therefore I am, but I cannot affirm that I was nor that I will be.

In Judovitz’s view, the emergence of this impersonal subject involves a fundamental paradox insofar as Descartes’ account of subjectivity through the *cogito* is predicated on the negation of the empirical subject who served as its foundation. For Lyons, it is the force of this negation—a pattern that has already been established through the turning away from both the world of book learning and the “book of the world”—that lends credence to the metaphysical solitude of the *cogito*.

The scholars cited here have addressed the many challenges and complexities of the metaphysical subject of the *Discourse* when it is examined through the lens of representation or narrative. However, I now want to turn the tables to examine how Descartes’ later thinking comes to contend more fully with the relationship between the *cogito* and the mechanized body from which it is supposedly entirely distinct. If, as Lyons and Judovitz assert, Descartes’ metaphysics is ultimately an account of a subject thinking in the present with “no body, no past, no relationship to others … no location in historical space,” then why should Descartes so insistently have recourse to an intimate, autobiographical or confessional voice in his *Discourse* and *Meditations*? What space, if any, remains for the private or “empirical” subject within his metaphysical arguments? What role does affect play in Descartes’ theory and rhetoric, and how is it related to the subject and to the body? I will begin to address these questions by further contextualizing why the strategy of *ethos* is so central to Descartes’ language and thought.

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38 Lyons, “Subjectivity and Imitation,” 520.
and how he might have come to it. To do so, I need to turn first to his ideas about eloquence and persuasion and then to his ethics, both central means by which he believed he might promulgate his ideas, and that inform, I believe, the language and strategy of “franchise” in the *Discourse*. In so doing, I will take up where the metaphysical and rhetorical scholarship cited here leaves off, by examining the privileged role afforded to the affect of the private subject in Descartes’ theories of persuasion, and in his ethical thought, especially in his final work, *The Passions of the Soul*. Discussions of Cartesian subjectivity have emphasized his metaphysical writings at the expense of his later works on ethics and the passions, where his thinking about the interaction of mind and body evolves. Descartes comes to contend with the operation of the body and soul as a “substantial union.” The evolution of his thought from his earlier metaphysics to his later ethics demonstrates how, over the course of his career, he implicitly grapples with the discontinuity evoked here between the “philosophical” and the “empirical” subject.

II. “This candour of a mind elevated above ordinary mortals”: Eloquence and *Franchise*

I have examined some of the persuasive strategies and tensions generated by the first-person narrative presentation of the *Discourse*, but how is it that Descartes came to value the confessional voice as central to his rhetoric? Within a discussion of the Cartesian first-person rhetoric, it is important to acknowledge that far from overtly attempting to demonstrate *ethos*—one of the three central forms of Aristotelian proof—as a part of his persuasive technique, Descartes is generally thought to have rejected the rhetorical tradition of Renaissance humanism in which he was thoroughly steeped at the Jesuit
Collège de la Flèche.\textsuperscript{39} Descartes is most often associated with the decline of the
classical rhetoric prized by his age, so much so that this has come to be a commonplace
of both Cartesian studies and the history of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{40} We have only to note his remarks
in the \textit{Discourse} to account for his skepticism about the value of his rhetorical studies:

\begin{quote}
I valued oratory and was fond of poetry; but I thought both were gifts of the
mind rather than fruits of study. Those with the strongest reasoning and the
most skill at ordering their thoughts so as to make them clear and intelligible
are always the most persuasive, even if they speak only low Breton and have
never learned rhetoric. (1.114)
\end{quote}

Descartes’ key emphasis here, as elsewhere in his thought, is on the “clear and
intelligible.” He is ready to admit his fondness for his humanistic studies, and that
oratory has “incomparable powers and beauties” and poetry a “quite ravishing delicacy
and sweetness” (1.113), and yet these are finally presented as childish pleasures,
something the young man will outgrow once he “emerge[s] from the control of [his]
teachers” (1.115). Descartes’ goal was to establish a method for the pursuit of knowledge
grounded in the rational certainty of mathematics. The seductive ornamentation of
\textit{elocutio} and the posturing of scholastic disputation are both seen as impediments to the
search for certainty and truth. A philosophy founded on the assumption of a rational
equality between all persons and on the self-evidence of incontrovertible mathematical
principles would seem to do away with the need for audience adaptation, and for the

\textsuperscript{39} The fifth year of Descartes’ scholastic education would have been devoted to Ciceronian eloquence. For an account of his rhetorical training, see Henri Gouhier, \textit{La Pensée Métaphysique de Descartes} (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1969), 97-99.

\textsuperscript{40} For an account of Descartes’ role in this process of attrition, see Hugh M. Davidson, “The Decline of Rhetoric in Seventeenth-Century France,” in \textit{The History and Philosophy of Rhetoric and Political Discourse}, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham, Md: The University Press of America, 1987), 1:56-82.
dialectics of rhetoric, which Descartes felt properly belonged to the domain of the
probable, not the certain.41

Descartes famously rejected eloquence and claimed that his writing was without
ornamentation. Peter France notes that the primary emphasis in the rhetorical theory of
the period was on elocutio or style. He explains that “in the early seventeenth century it
was customary to regard rhetoric as an ornamental art, whose main function was to clothe
the naked body of speech in various pleasing frills so as to make it acceptable to polite
society. Descartes had no time for this sort of thing—or so he affirmed.”42 In a letter to
his friend the French ambassador Hector-Pierre Chanut, Descartes reflected on his desire
to present his philosophical ideas as pure and unadorned:

[J]e les ai fait sortir en public sans être parés, ni avoir aucun des ornements
qui peuvent attirer les yeux du peuple, afin que ceux qui ne s’arrêtent qu’à
l’extérieur ne les vissent pas, et qu’ils fussent seulement regardés par
quelques personnes de bon esprit.43

[… I have published them before they were ready and before they had any of
the embellishments that may attract the gaze of the public. For I wanted my
writings not to be seen by those who attend only to external things, but to be
considered only by certain people of good sense.] (CSMK, 3.298)

In contrast to the purity of his own representation (“sans être paré,” unadorned,
undressed, unprepared), accessible only to those of “bon esprit” (good sense), Descartes
often denounces the obfuscation of his opponents and their tendency to paint over their
impoverished reasoning with showy rhetoric. For example, he dismisses Gassendi’s Fifth

41 As Thomas Carr has asked, “[w]hat room is left for the use of vivid figures of speech when clear
expression of thought is prized? Can appeals to the imagination or emotions in order to move an audience
to action be reconciled with the primacy of pure thought? Is it necessary to take into account the individual
characteristics of particular audiences if a universally valid method can compel consent? The renewal of
rhetoric in the hands of the Renaissance humanists seems aborted by Descartes’ new philosophy.” Thomas
M. Carr Jr., Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric: Varieties of Cartesian Rhetorical Theory
(Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1990), 4.
43 Correspondance, 8 vols., ed. Charles Adam and G. Milhaud (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1936-56),
7.199 (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number and identified as AM).
Set of Objections to the *Meditations* on the basis of their rhetorical affectation: “in ne se veut pas lui-même servir de cette *candeur philosophique*, ni mettre en usage les raisons, mais seulement donner aux choses le fard et les couleurs de la rhétorique”\(^{44}\) [“he himself, so far from being philosophically honest or being prepared to employ any argument at all, simply wants to indulge in rhetorical display” (CSM, 2.242)]. Gassendi persists in amusing the reader with “des feintes et des déguisements de rhétorique, au lieu de nous payer de bonnes et solides raisons” (*Alq.*, II.790) [“rhetorical tricks instead of reasoning” CSM, 2.243)]. Descartes thus constructs an opposition between the simple “candour” or nakedness of true philosophy and that which is externally clothed or painted with false rhetoric. However, despite his aspiration towards what Henri Gouhier has described as “une philosophie sans rhétorique,”\(^{45}\) as we have seen, there is ample evidence of the subtle and persuasive tactics Descartes employs in his writing, especially in the opening of the *Discourse*. Descartes may have rejected formal Ciceronian eloquence, but many studies have shown that he was keenly aware of the importance of persuasion for the communication of his ideas.\(^{46}\) The challenge remains that although Descartes’ *oeuvre* contains many examples of his repudiation of formal rhetoric within the context of his philosophical discussion, there is less evidence of his actual positive theories of language and persuasion. What little Descartes does say about eloquence centres around his ideal of a “candeur philosophique” referred to above, a notion that is deeply imbricated with his epistemology, and that was to become central to his style.

\(^{44}\) *Œuvres Philosophiques*, 3 vols., ed. Ferdinand Alquié (Paris: Garnier, 1963-73), 2.790, emphasis added (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number and identified as *Alq.*).

\(^{45}\) See Gouhier’s third and fourth chapters, “La communication de la philosophie” and “La résistance au vrai dans une philosophie sans rhétorique” in *La Pensée Métaphysique de Descartes*, 63-112.

Descartes’ most extended discussion of his rhetorical theory is contained in a Latin letter he wrote in 1628 to an unknown correspondent in defence of his contemporary and friend Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac’s 1624 *Lettres du sieur de Balzac*. Balzac was known during his lifetime as *l’Unico eloquente*, and the publication of his popular letters marked an important reform to the French language that brought the eloquence of the sixteenth-century humanists into the salons and court. Balzac is often referred to as the “Malherbe of prose,” and is thought to have achieved for the genre what the latter did for the reform of French verse. Peter Shoemaker explains that

> [i]f the French language has become a paragon of clarity, purity, and elegance, it is in no small part … due to the efforts of the man known to his contemporaries as the *unico eloquente*. This, by and large, is the role that literary history, from the seventeenth century onward, has assigned to Balzac. By applying the principles of the best Ciceronian Latin to French vernacular prose, he naturalized eloquence, laying the groundwork for the flourishing of French as the dominant language of the European literary elite from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.\(^47\)

In Balzac’s understanding, eloquence performed an important social and moral as well as aesthetic function; as Thomas Carr notes, he “held a Ciceronian view of eloquence in which matters of state, moral questions, and even philosophic issues belong to the domain of eloquence.”\(^48\) And for Balzac, the letter was a genre eminently suited to his age, and the ideal medium through which to realize the Horatian dictum to “please and instruct,” poised to take up in the stead of the Latin orations of antiquity.

However, despite Balzac’s acknowledged role in reforming French prose, history has not always regarded him kindly. Shoemaker observes that “[s]ince the seventeenth century, … Balzac … has played an ambivalent role in literary history as the

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\(^47\) Peter W. Shoemaker, *Powerful Connections: The Poetics of Patronage in the Age of Louis XIII* (Newark, Del.: Delaware UP, 2007), 57.

personification of French eloquence in all of its glory and superficiality.”

Although his mastery of style is often credited with introducing a new clarity and precision that would characterize the neoclassical style of the later seventeenth century, Balzac’s letters were nevertheless strongly criticized in his own period and afterwards for their affectation and empty rhetoric. This ambivalence is demonstrated by the great French literary critic of the nineteenth-century, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, in his influential *Port-Royal*. Sainte-Beuve acknowledges that “Balzac a joué un grand rôle et a gardé un rang éminent dans notre prose: il en a été le Malherbe … Il a régularisé la langue et, autant que cela se peut, certaines formes du beau qui ont prévalu [Balzac played a great role and continues to occupy an eminent place in our prose. He was the Malherbe of prose … He regularized the language and, to the extent that it is possible, certain lasting aesthetic forms.]”

However, as Shoemaker notes, Sainte-Beuve counters his praise with uneasiness about Balzac’s artificiality, characterizing him as a rhéteur (rhetor) and a phraseur (phrasemonger). His chief concern is with the outward form of language (une manière toute extérieure, toute rhétoricienne):

[Le] mal de Balzac … demeure plus répandu qu’on ne croit. Jamais … la phrase et la couleur, le mensonge de la parole littéraire, n’ont autant prédominé sur le fond et sur le vrai que dans ces dernières années”

[Balzac’s malady … remains more widespread than one might think. Never before … have pretension, rhetorical color, and the falsity of literary language held sway over substance and truth as they have in recent years.]”

At first glance then it may seem unlikely, even paradoxical, to yoke a writer who is chiefly remembered as a proponent of studied eloquence with Descartes, who, as I have emphasized, emphatically rejected this tradition. And yet, we find Descartes entering

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49 Shoemaker, *Powerful Connections*, 57.
50 Cited and translated in Shoemaker, 57.
51 Ibid., 58.
into the controversy in praise his friend in his letter of 1628, entitled “Jugement sur quelques Lettres de Monsieur de Balzac.”52 Descartes begins by noting that Balzac’s letters give him such satisfaction that not only can he find nothing to criticize in them, but that he has difficulty judging which elements to single out for praise. As he notes, “[e]lles ont, en effet, cette pureté de langage, qui est comme la santé dans le corps de l’homme: on a d’autant plus raison de la croire excellente, qu’elle ne se fait pas du tout sentir” (AM, 1.31). The letters have a purity of language akin to health in the body: their excellence is attested by the very lack of any distinguishing symptoms. This metaphor naturalizing the “purity,” “elegance” and “grace” of Balzac’s seamless blending of sound and sense is followed up with another comparison to a woman’s perfect beauty, which Descartes argues does not consist in any particular traits, but in the ideally proportionate “accord et l’harmonie de l’ensemble” [“agreement and harmony of the whole”] (1.31).

Other authors, by contrast, although perhaps still worthy of praise, possess a less perfectly harmonious style, with defects that distinguish them from Balzac’s mastery and against which Descartes begins to define the contours of his ideal rhetoric. His dispositio is organized around two complementary elements of eloquence: first he turns his attention to stylistic techniques or elocutio, and then to persuasive strategies, or inventio. Descartes lists four instances in which elocution may fall short. Some authors have “un heureux choix des mots, une savante ordonnance des périodes, un libre flux, une profusion des paroles” [“a favourable choice of words, wisely arranged, liberally and profusely flowing”] (1.32). But although this copious style—which Morris Croll identifies with Ciceronianism, although Descartes conspicuousely does not name it as

52 AM, 1.30. I cite the French translations of Descartes’ original Latin letter from Adam and Milhaud’s Correspondance; the English translations are my own.
such—may satisfy the ear, ultimately it cannot make up for “la pauvreté du fond” [“a lack of content”], and a wandering organization “qui s’égare et se disperse,” and which tires the patience of the attentive reader (1.32). By contrast, “la sécheresse et la demi-obscurité du style” [“dry, semi-obscure style”] of the second type of writer—Senecan, in Croll’s estimation—alienates the reader from their otherwise sound and noble ideas. A third kind of writer strives for a compromise between these two extremes of elaborate but empty prose, and dry and plodding sense by adhering to “la vraie règle du discours, qui est d’exprimer simplement les choses” [“the true rule of discourse, which is to express things simply”] (1.32). Even so, their austere style fails to please: “ils ont une telle austérité, que les délicats ne les goûtent points” [“they have such an austerity that those of good taste cannot abide them”] (1.32). Finally, and most damningly, Descartes rejects those writers who employ a litany of silly conceits as if they were jugglers or performing monkeys, including puns, inflated and pretentious vocabulary, fantastical imaginings, false reasoning, and other such “bagatelles” [“trifles”] that fail to please readers of an even slightly serious nature (1.32). Descartes’ examples thus demonstrate that an inflated style cannot compensate for a lack of content, but dry although sensible content also cannot serve alone. Only Balzac’s Lettres are found to possess the perfect marriage of style and sense. In them, “les arguments gardent toute leur force sans que rien ne les énerve ou les étouffe; et la dignité des maximes qui ont assez de poids pour se soutenir par elle-mêmes, n’est pas rabaissee par la pauvreté de l’expression” [“the arguments retain their force, without being overwhelmed, and the dignity of the ideas, which have enough strength to stand alone, is yet not diminished by a poverty of expression”] (1.33).

That is, Balzac achieves “un … hereux accord du fond et de la forme” [“a happy concord of substance and style”] (1.33), although Descartes seems careful to preserve the priority of the argument itself over stylistic concerns, which should ideally function as a complement that neither overwhelms nor diminishes the key message.

Having treated Balzac’s elocution at length, Descartes turns to his method of persuasion. He claims that Balzac has need of subtle persuasive technique because his letters often treat “de sujets non moins relevés que les harangues mêmes que prononçaient en public les orateurs anciens” [“subjects no less worthy than those public speeches of ancient orators”] (1.33). And yet, Descartes evokes the Greeks and Romans not as the example of an ideal eloquence, but rather for his explanation of its loss. He paints a striking picture of a prelapsarian eloquence that existed in the heroic age before the orators of antiquity, and that had its origins in the transparent and forceful expression of the sincerity of the speaker’s soul. At the heart of Descartes’ notion of a genuine persuasion is the speaker’s communication of their personal conviction that they speak the truth:

Aux âges primitifs, antérieurs à la civilisation, avant qu’il n’y eût encore de querelles en ce monde, et lorsque la parole était l’expression naïve et spontanée des émotions de l’âme dans toute leur sincérité, l’éloquence des esprits supérieurs avait comme une force divine, dont la source était dans le zèle de la vérité et dans un grand bon sens. (AM 1.34)\(^54\)

[In the primitive ages prior to civilization, before there were any quarrels in the world, and when speech was the naïve and spontaneous expression of the passions of the soul in all their sincerity, the eloquence of superior minds had a divine force that originated in a zeal for truth and an abundance of feeling]

\(^{54}\) The original Latin reads: “[P]rimis & incultis temporibus, antequam ulla fuissent adhuc mundo dissidia, & cùm lingua candidae mentis affectus non invita sequebatur, erat quidem in majoribus ingeniis divina quaedam eloquentiae vis, quae ex zelo veritatis & sensûs abundantiâ profluentes.” AM, 1.34.
Within Descartes’ rhetorical theory, true eloquence is achieved when a “zeal for truth” is coupled with great “feeling.” The speaker must not only communicate the truth, but the force of their sincere conviction that they speak the truth. This external demonstration of an internally perceived truth is for Descartes finally the only authentic form of eloquence. And, in keeping with the rhetorical theory of his period, Descartes argues that this primal sincerity had a powerfully civilizing effect: “c’est elle qui a retiré des forêts les hommes à demi sauvages, établi les lois, fondé les villes: le don de persuader conférait en même temps la royauté” [“it brought half savage men out of the forests, established laws, founded cities: and the gift of persuasion also conferred authority of rule”] (1.34).

However, in his view this Edenic form of speech is an emphatically lost ideal, for he immediately turns to an account of how the political speeches and debates of the Greek and Roman demagogues spoiled it through abuse. In place of truth, these base men did not hesitate to make recourse to sophisms, verbal tricks, and hollow rhetoric to win over their audiences [“n’espérant pas emporter en loyal combat et avec les seules armes de la vérité la conviction de l’auditoire, [ils] avaient recours à des sophisms, à des embûches, avec des mots vides de sens”] (1.34). And worst of all, they cared more about persuasion than they did about the truth of their arguments, and so they took special pride in defending unworthy causes [“ils mettaient leur gloire principalement à soutenir avec leur artifice les plus mauvaises causes”]. As a result, they became known as skilful advocates [“d’habiles avocats”] only while earning an equal reputation as dishonest men [“malhonnêtes gens”] (1.35).

In contrast to the deceptive orators of antiquity, Balzac alone manages to combine “l’élégance et les ornements du dernier siècle … et la majesté de l’éloquence d’autrefois”
[“the elegance and ornamentation of the previous age … and the majesty of ancient eloquence”] (1.35). Although he concedes that Balzac might occasionally have need to decorate his work with paradoxes, or to avoid certain “dangerous truths,” Descartes is at pains to emphasize that the true source of his eloquence is to be found in the strength of his character and his honest sincerity which does not flinch from the truth: “ses écrits ont néanmoins une généreuse franchise, qui indique que rien ne lui est plus insupportable que le mensonge.” [“nevertheless, his writings possess a generous candour that reveals that nothing is more intolerable to him than falsehood”] (1.35-36). Balzac does not labour under a servile fear of power; rather, he is willing to expose both his own faults and those of others: “[il] déclare franchement le bien et le mal, en lui comme chez les autres” [“he frankly declares the good and the bad, in himself as well as in others”] (1.36). Most importantly, Balzac’s sincere speech is consistently informed by his love of truth, coupled with a natural “générosité” or magnanimity:

L’amour de la vérité et une certaine générosité naturelle font qu’il ne peut garder pour lui ses sentiments à cet égard. Mais cette franchise d’un esprit élevé au-dessus du commun, ce caractère digne de l’antique, la postérité équitable en sera convaincue, quand même de jaloux mortels se refuseraient maintenant à admettre chez un personage vivant un genre de vertu si sublime

[Love of truth and a certain natural generosity mean he cannot keep his feelings to himself. But this candour of a mind elevated above ordinary mortals, this character worthy of antiquity, posterity will judge fairly, although jealous mortals may refuse to admit such a sublime virtue in someone still living] (1.37)

Descartes’ most potent statement about eloquence is thus a tribute to the “franchise d’un esprit élevé au-dessus du commun,” a personal candour which distinguishes Balzac from other men, and which for Descartes is the only authentic form of persuasion.
Yet, the Balzac that Descartes praises seems strangely at odds with the *Unico eloquente* known to literary history. Descartes does not readily acknowledge Balzac’s reputation as a prose stylist; rather, he bases his praise of Balzac’s style on a purity of language whose excellence is demonstrated by its very *lack* of any distinguishing features. As Thomas Carr suggests, the subject of Descartes’ praise is perhaps not so much the true Balzac, but rather “a Balzac revised and corrected along Cartesian norms.” The strain of maintaining this pretence is occasionally revealed in glancing moments when Descartes struggles to accommodate Balzac’s *elocutio* to his own sincere ideal, for example, in the following equivocal sentence: “le plus admirable, à mon sens, est qu’un trop grand souci de l’art ne brise pas l’élan de sa nature ni la fougue de son style, et qu’avec l’élégance et les ornements du dernier siècle, in garde la vigueur et la majesté de l’éloquence d’autrefois” [“the most admirable, in my view, is that too great a concern for artfulness does not break the force of his nature nor the fierceness of his style, and that with the elegance and ornamentation of the last century, he maintains the vigour and majesty of ancient eloquence”] (1.35). In the very midst of his encomium, the grounds of Descartes’ praise in fact begin to expose some of the key differences between the two men. Whereas Balzac maintained great faith in the moral and social role of a civic eloquence, as his letter makes amply clear, Descartes was not interested in the humanists’ ideal of a public virtue inspired by the rhetorical tradition of the ancients. As Croll aptly noted, it is significant that Descartes makes no mention of any classical models in his discussion of style; instead, the Greeks and Romans feature only as the

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55 Carr notes that critics have long questioned the accuracy of Descartes’ assessment of Balzac, and argues that the uneasiness with the version of Balzac that Descartes presents is attributable to “a fundamental divergence between the attitudes toward rhetoric of the two friends, a divergence Descartes could not address directly in his apology and that thus surfaces only to the extent that he transforms Balzac’s eloquence to conform to his own ideal.” *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric*, 15.
corrupters of the purity of eloquence.56 In idealizing an Edenic state of language that pre-
dates the ancients, we see Descartes striving to go beyond them. In place of imitation, he
insistently praises a language of the everyday, perfected by long use: “des pensées du
plus haut vol … sont exprimées en perfection avec des termes qui se trouvent dans la
bouche de toute la Cour, et qu’un long usage a polis” [“the most exalted ideas … are
perfectly expressed in an everyday language of the Court, that has been perfected by long
use”] (1.33). Whereas Balzac maintains the importance of a civic eloquence inherited
from and modelled on antiquity, Descartes consistently asserts that his philosophy has no
need of such eloquence. The truth of his method and his frankness in explaining it will
serve in place of any rhetorical skill.

III. “Clearly and Distinctly”: Évidence and the Rhetoric of Conviction

Descartes’ faith in the self-evidence of his ideas and the importance of their unmediated
expression is closely related to his epistemology itself, which centres on an understanding
of distinct and immediate perception. At the core of his method is the identification of
truth with the principle of incontrovertibility, or what he terms évidence, a form of
intuition in which only ideas that are perceived by the mind with absolute clarity and
distinction may serve as a new foundation for truth. For Descartes certainty is
established when a matter under consideration presents itself to us so clearly as to be
undeniable. As he asserts in his Rules for the Direction of the Mind, “All knowledge
[scientia57] is certain and evident cognition” (CSM, 2.10). Descartes’ method is

57 Cottingham et. al. gloss knowledge as “Lat. scientia, Descartes’ term for systematic knowledge based on
indubitable foundations.” CSM, 2.10n.
fundamentally a reaction against the dialectic of the scholastic philosophy of his period, which he felt was only able to contend with syllogistic arguments based on the probable, rather than certain. As a result of such unsure foundations, even if some truth were achieved, Descartes felt it was so mixed with error as to be almost impossible to distinguish between the two:

I observed with regard to logic that syllogisms and most of its other techniques are of less use for learning things than for explaining to others the things one already knows or even, as in the art of Lully, for speaking without judgement about matters of which one is ignorant. And although logic does contain many excellent and true precepts, these are mixed up with so many others which are harmful or superfluous that it is almost as difficult to distinguish them as it is to carve a Diana or a Minerva from an unhewn block of marble. (CSM, 1.119)

In Part Two of the *Discourse* Descartes describes the experience that led him to resolve that the only route out of this confusion is to eschew all received knowledge and to place his faith only in that which can be incontrovertibly established as certain. During the winter of 1619 while serving in the army of the Catholic Elector Maximilian, duke of Bavaria, in Germany he found himself sequestered in winter quarters, “shut up alone in a stove-heated room” (1.116). Out of this day of intense meditation, Descartes comes to his realization that the unstable edifice of knowledge has been built by the hands of “various different craftsmen” and with faulty methods. Instead of patching up “old walls built for different purposes,” or building on “old foundations,” he resolves that it is preferable to demolish what he has inherited and to unify knowledge through mathematical principles, under the guidance of a “single architect,” the solitary reasoning of “a man of good sense” (1.116-17).

But Descartes also recognizes that he is “like a man who walks alone in the dark,” and so he resolves to “proceed so slowly, and to use such circumspection in all things,
that even if I made but little progress I should at least be sure not to fall” (CSM 1.119).

In order to guide him, he develops his four precepts for combating error. The first rule is intended as a safeguard against hasty or premature conclusions based on prejudice. He resolves “never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgements than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt it” (1.120). Second, he will “divide each of the difficulties I examined into as many parts as possible and as may be required in order to resolve them better.” Once the problem has been divided into its constituent parts, his third rule is to conduct his thought in an “orderly manner, by beginning with the simplest and most easily known objects in order to ascend little by little, step by step,” and by thus proceeding to move from one self-evident truth to the next, eventually achieving “knowledge of the most complex” (1.120). Finally, as a safeguard against error, and to maintain his focus, he will “make enumerations so complete, and reviews so comprehensive, that I could be sure of leaving nothing out” (1.120). Descartes’ precepts are thus a means of distinguishing his findings from the uncertainty of scholastic reasoning and for establishing évidence.58

But as it regards the communication of his ideas, as I have already suggested, the association of truth with the immediacy of clear and distinct perception seems to undermine the role of persuasion in Descartes’ theory and practice. Within an

58 Ian Maclean notes that his contemporaries would have recognized some of the procedures of traditional philosophy in his emphasis on division, definition and enumeration; however, “Incontrovertibility (évidence, evidentia) in the traditional sense is a feature of propositions derived from the senses which form the basis of syllogistic demonstration, whereas for Descartes it is to do with the immediacy of mental perception which is not reducible to logical form, and which is ‘clear and distinct’ of itself.” Discourse on the Method, 1.
epistemology of évidence, truthful ideas should presumably impress themselves upon a subject with the sudden clarity of inward conviction that requires no outward ornamentation, audience adaptation, or affective force to help them gain acceptance. If, as Descartes suggests in the opening of the Discourse, “good sense” is evenly distributed among all men, and clear and distinct ideas manifest themselves in the mind as a form of sudden intuition, then truth should be universally and uncomplicatedly recognized by all. Persuasion would seem to be reduced to the straightforward communication of truth so that it may act on others in the same way it has acted on the speaker. And this does seem to be Descartes’ overt position in many of his statements about rhetoric. For example, in a July 1645 letter to the Dutch philosopher Henricus Regius he asserts of his opinions: “I consider them to be so certain and evident that whoever rightly understands them will have no occasion to dispute them” (CSMK, 3.254), or in the passage from the Discourse cited above: “Those with the strongest reasoning and the most skill at ordering their thoughts so as to make them clear and intelligible are always the most persuasive” (CSM, 1.114, cf. p. 191). Peter France has perhaps most aptly summed up the Cartesian position on rhetoric in stating that “Descartes’s first and constant notion of persuasion is one in which he will state the truth firmly and clearly and everyone will agree.”

And yet, even Descartes was forced to confront the naïveté of this assumption, and the considerable obstacles presented by both individual prejudice and institutional resistance. Despite his claims for the rhetorical force of the truthful speaker, Descartes

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59 As Henri Gouhier observed, “Si la vérité est évidence, en effet, comment s’imposerait-elle sinon par le seul éclat de cette évidence? La communication des idées claires et distinctes semble n’exiger rien d’autre que leur présence: le secours de la rhétorique est donc exclu.” [If truth is évidence, how else would it impose itself if not by the sudden flash of this évidenced? The communication of clear and distinct ideas would seem to require nothing more than their presence: the aid of rhetoric is therefore excluded.] La Pensée Métaphysique de Descartes, 96.

60 France, Rhetoric and Truth in France, 47.
was not always sure of his own persuasive powers. In a letter to Mersenne from the 25
November 1630, he writes that his conviction about the validity of his proof for God’s
existence outstrips anything demonstrated in geometry, and yet he is not certain he can
convince others of it: “I do not know whether I would be able to make everyone
understand it the way I can.” He worries that he will not be able to win over his reader:
“I will test in my treatise on optics whether I am capable of explaining my conceptions
and convincing others of truths of which I have convinced myself. I doubt it very much”
(CSMK, 3.29). Even in light of clear and distinct perception, Descartes was all too aware
of the impediment of what he called “childhood prejudices.” He recognized the
problem of a potential disjunct between the understanding and the will, or what he termed
the rational *assensio* to an idea, and the *persuasio* of inward emotional conviction.61
Descartes attributes this delay between intellectual assent and the experience of assurance
to deep-rooted opinions received in childhood, and which hamper the adult’s ability to
accept new and seemingly radical ideas. The habit of the childish mind clings to the
dogma of the philosophy of the schools. In fact, Descartes is ready to admit this
contradiction even in himself. At the end of his reply to the sixth set of objections to the
*Meditations*, he recalls the curious position in which he found himself after he came to
his conclusion about the mind-body distinction:

> When, on the basis of the arguments set out in these Meditations, I first drew
> the conclusion that the human mind is really distinct from the body, better
> known than the body, and so on, I was compelled to accept these results
> because everything in the reasoning was coherent and was inferred from quite
> evident principles in accordance with the rules of logic. But I confess that for
> all that I was not entirely convinced; I was in the same plight as astronomers
> who have established by argument that the sun is several times larger than the

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61 For discussions of Descartes’ understanding of the distinction between *assensio* and *persuasio*, see
Gouhier, 91-95; France, 48-50; and Carr, 29-31.
earth, and yet still cannot prevent themselves judging that it is smaller, when they actually look at it. (CSM, 2.296)

Although his mind had achieved the requisite intellectual assent, Descartes admits that it was not met with an accompanying emotional assurance. 62

If a resistance to persuasio is possible even within the philosopher himself, Descartes was forced to acknowledge that a demonstration of his self-evident truths was not enough; the demonstration that would command assensio required the aid of a persuasive argumentation that would stimulate persuasio. And in fact, in his reply to the second set of objections to the Meditations Descartes does address the need to adapt his style to an audience through his explanation of two opposing methods for the exposition of an argument which he terms analysis and synthesis. 63 As he explains, analysis consists in reproducing the means by which the idea under explanation was discovered, in effect allowing the reader to retrace the philosopher’s steps:

Analysis shows the true way by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically … so that if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention to all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself. (CSM, 2.110, emphasis added)

However, this method contains nothing to compel belief in a reader who may be inattentive or resistant to what is proposed. Synthesis, on the other hand, demonstrates a conclusion by way of “definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems and problems” so that the reader, “however argumentative or stubborn he may be,” is “compelled to give his assent.” However, despite its efficacy, in Descartes’ view “this method is not as satisfying as the method of analysis, nor does it engage the minds of those who are eager

62 Gouhier observes, “une assensio irresistible coexistait avec une persuasio hesitante.” [“an irresistible assensio coexisted with a hesitant persuasio”], 91.
63 For discussions of Descartes’ understanding of audience adaptation and his preference of analysis over synthesis, see France, 50, 60; and Carr, 35-37.
to learn, since it does not show how the thing in question was discovered” (2.111). Although synthesis alone was employed by the “ancient geometers,” Descartes proclaims his belief that “it is analysis which is the best and truest method of instruction” for making clear and distinct the primary notions of his metaphysics, and it was his method of choice for composing his Meditations, where he invites the reader in his Preface to “meditate seriously with me” and to be involved in the process of discovery (CSM 2.8). Synthesis is best suited for the demonstration of geometrical truths where the primary notions of the argument are already universally accepted, whereas the fundamentals of his metaphysics may conflict with preconceptions received from childhood. In such cases, a more intimate relationship between author and reader is required to lead them from the beginning, and to provoke the reader’s persuasio in addition to establishing assensio. Although he does not mention his other works, Descartes’ preference of analysis over synthesis clearly informs much of his writing, including his choice to compose the Discourse as an autobiography. By inviting the reader to accompany the anonymous philosopher on his travels through the world of book learning, and “the book of the world,” Descartes primes the reader for the cogito and mind-body dualism outlined in the later books. Through the presentation of an analytical “fable” or “history” that the reader must interpret for themselves, he stages a model for his reader’s practice that is enacted through the very process of reading.

Despite his claims to a philosophy without rhetoric, it is thus evident that Descartes’ writing and thought contends at length with the challenge of persuasion. However, what is perhaps more interesting than his pretence to the rejection of rhetoric is what his overt praise of the absence of rhetoric can tell us about his epistemological
assumptions. In the relationship between Descartes’ hostility towards formal rhetoric and his philosophy’s emphasis on the self-evidence generated by a sense of inward certainty, the clear and distinct ideas perceived by the rational self, we can see another version of the value of “plainness” discussed in my previous chapter. Chapter Two ended by examining plainness as a claim to truth that pervades different kinds of early modern writing, including the native plain style of sixteenth-century poetry, the plain style of Protestant poetry and preaching, and as it most pertains to Descartes, the plain style of seventeenth-century science. Richard Foster Jones’ classic essay on the subject identifies the period’s recourse to a “moral sense of simplicity,” an anti-rhetorical movement which rejected the sophistry associated with rhetoric, especially in the case of Puritan religion, where eloquence was frequently attacked as a sign of hypocrisy. In its Protestant guise, the source of this conviction was articulated through the Reformation doctrine that the plain sense of scripture offers certain truth that will be revealed to the individual believer through the inward workings of the Holy Spirit. I argued that for Milton this understanding of the plainness of scripture and its ability to give access to an internal certainty that requires no external proof or exegesis lends the force of conviction an authority that served an important political function in the religious debates leading up to the English Civil War.

Intuition and conviction serve a similarly central role in Cartesian philosophy and rhetoric, albeit on very different epistemological grounds. Descartes’ praise of Guez de

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65 Chaïm Perelman observes that “L’humanisme de la Renaissance … eût pu préparer un renouveau de la rhétorique au sens large du mot. Mais le critère de l’évidence, que ce fut l’évidence personnelle du protestantisme, l’évidence rationnelle du cartésianisme ou l’évidence sensible des empiristes, ne pouvait que disqualifier la rhétorique.” Rhétorique et Philosophie: Pour une théorie de l’argumentation en
Balzac’s persuasion is mounted on the basis that his frank and sincere speech is fundamentally informed by the strength of his own conviction:

les arguments dont il use d’ordinaire sont si clairs, qu’ils trouvent aisément créance auprès du public, et néanmoins ils sont si solides et si vrais, que plus les lecteurs ont l’esprit bon, plus il est sûr de les convaincre, chaque fois surtout qu’il ne veut prouver à autrui, que ce dont il s’est auparavant persuadé lui-même

[the arguments that he makes are so clear that they are easily accepted by the public, and yet are so solid and so true, that the more readers are of good sense, the more it is certain they will be convinced that in every instance he only demonstrates what he has previously persuaded himself of.] (AM 1.35, emphasis added)

The claim that Balzac seeks only to demonstrate “what he has previously persuaded himself of” interestingly recalls Milton’s self-authorizing statement in the Apology for Smectymnuus that he is “a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was perswaded.”66 Just as Milton authorizes his own position in the political debates of his period by recourse to the strength of a personal zeal that is privileged above any external authority, Descartes’ rhetoric of conviction is fundamentally related to his philosophy’s inward turn. Thomas Carr has suggested that there is a parallel between the philosopher’s activity in seeking the inward conviction of truth (persuasio)—which will function as a complement and reinforcement to intellectual self-evidence (assensio)—and the communication of this force of évidence to others:

What is uniquely persuasive about the eloquent is not just that they speak the truth, but that at the same time they communicate their own persuasio that they are truthful, a persuasion akin to that Descartes required in philosophy. In terms of traditional rhetorical invention one might say that the intellectual proofs grounded in self-evidence are reinforced by ethical ones based on the speaker’s character.67

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66 See my discussion of this phrase in Chap. 2, p. 145ff.
67 Carr, Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric, 33-34.
Descartes is not alone in perceiving the rhetorical force of the speaker’s own persuasio. The appeal to the mimetic quality of the emotions, and the belief that it is possible to provoke the emotions of an audience by demonstrating one’s own genuine feeling is in fact a longstanding technique recommended by rhetoricians. And Susan James has noted that a self-consciousness about the rhetorical usefulness of conviction extends to many seventeenth-century philosophers who adopt this standard rhetorical device. For example, Descartes’ inheritor and disciple Nicholas Malebranche draws attention to the emotional character of learning:

[A] man who is convinced by what he says usually convinces others, as an impassioned man always arouses their emotions; and even if his rhetoric is irregular he will be no less persuasive. This is because his presence and manner make themselves felt, and excite men’s imaginations more strongly than a solider but coolly-delivered discourse which does not flatter the senses or strike the imagination.

James notes the extent to which this rhetorical practice is influenced by the tradition of Christian oratory, especially that of English Puritanism, where the belief prevailed that a preacher in the genuine throes of emotion could elicit the same response in his congregation. And as James suggests, in the case of the preacher he must appear “ardent but artless” in order for the emotional transfer to take place, and “there is consequently an emphasis on sincerity and expressiveness, and on the use of a felt, if

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68 For example, in his Institutio Oratoria Quintilian emphasizes that speakers most effectively stir the emotions of their audience when they first feel the emotions themselves. Institutio Oratoria, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1920-22), 6.2.28-36.


70 For more on the importance of the sincerity of the passions in oratory and preaching, see my earlier discussion of Calvin’s concept of language as the “image of the mind” and as a kind of rhetorical glue that will unite a congregation in a communal affective practice, Chap. 1, p. 67-70.
irregular rhetoric, as opposed to a polished and carefully contrived style.”

Although she does not identify it in such terms, James demonstrates the extent to which the seventeenth-century sincerity and “plainness” I have discussed in my two previous chapters makes its mark on the period’s practice of philosophy. It is “plainness”—or, to use Descartes’ own vocabulary, franchise—which underpins the Cartesian theory of rhetoric and serves as a complement to, or even as a principle undergirding, the epistemology of évidence. If Descartes’ metaphysics is founded on the self-authorizing assurance of the subject, this “inward turn” is accompanied by a rhetorical emphasis on externalizing the private ethos of the speaker. Much as Milton values the force of zeal as a source of religious and political knowing above and beyond outward forms of proof or authority, for Descartes the conviction of the speaker is central both to his epistemology, and also crucially, to the affective rhetoric by which it is communicated.

IV. “Une Généreuse Franchise”: The Passions and Persuasion

It is his understanding of the affective character of learning that prepares the way for Descartes’ later ethical thought. In the works of moral philosophy he writes towards the end of his life, we see him elaborating his earlier rhetorical reliance on affect into a full-blown theory of the passions and their influence on the will. Descartes’ ideas about one passion in particular are of interest to me. I have devoted considerable attention to fleshing out the import of his praise of Guez de Balzac’s “franchise” in the letter of 1628, but in several instances Descartes refers not just to the persuasive force of Balzac’s franchise, but significantly to his “généreuse franchise” (AM 1.35, emphasis added). In

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71 James, Passion and Action, 231.
Descartes’ analysis, Balzac’s sincerity is motivated by a twofold affective principle characterized as “L’amour de la vérité et une certaine générosité naturelle” [“Love of truth and a certain natural generosity”], and a clearer understanding of what he means by the word “generosity” and the love of truth it can inspire will help to gain insight into the persuasive strategy at work in the Discourse, and indeed in many of his works (AM 1.37). Descartes’ reference in 1628 to “a certain natural generosity” is perhaps somewhat imprecisely evoked, but by the time he came to publish The Passions of the Soul in 1649 he had articulated a complex theory of the passions in which “generosity” serves as a central principle. As we will see, within Descartes’ schema generosity is itself constituted by the passions of wonder, joy, and love, suggesting that the concomitant “love of truth” he refers to in the letter is not merely metaphorical or proverbial, but rather it is a literal love and admiration that deeply informs his understanding of scientific knowing.

A discussion of Cartesian generosity and its relevance to the arguments of the Discourse on the Method hinges first on an understanding of the imbrication of Descartes’ ethical and metaphysical concerns. Descartes has not been widely recognized for his ethical thought, to the extent that some might be surprised to discover that he had any ideas about moral philosophy at all. Although Descartes’ oeuvre does not include a systematic treatment of this area of philosophy, recent scholarship has begun to recognize the extent to which his later works on corporeality and the passions are sustained and informed by ethical considerations. What is more, Lisa Shapiro has emphasized that not only the works on the passions, but in fact all of Descartes’ works evince a concern with the conduct of life. Descartes may be chiefly considered as a metaphysician and
epistemologist, and his place in the history of philosophy is secured on these grounds, but Shapiro argues that his writings do not consider these issues abstractly or separately from questions about ethical conduct in the world. As we have seen in the Discourse, Descartes claims that his philosophy is motivated by a desire “to learn to distinguish the true from the false in order to see clearly into my own actions and proceed with confidence in this life” (CSM, 1.115). In order to assist him on his journey towards certainty, in Part Three he even includes what he terms a “morale par provision,” a provisional moral code that will guide him through the initial period of skeptical doubt, and provide a set of practical rules for daily life (1.122-25). In the Preface to the French edition of his Principles of Philosophy Descartes introduces his philosophical system, and the benefit that may be derived from it, to a general audience, and significantly he chooses to frame his work by making explicit the connection between the first principles of philosophy and the practical end of improving the conduct of life:

[T]he word “philosophy” means the study of wisdom, and by “wisdom” is meant not only prudence in our everyday affairs but also a perfect knowledge of all things that mankind is capable of knowing, both for the conduct of life and for the preservation of health and the discovery of all manner of skills. In order for this kind of knowledge to be perfect it must be deduced from first causes; thus, in order to set about acquiring it – and it is this activity to which the term “to philosophize” strictly refers – we must start with the search for first principles. (CSM, 1.179)

Descartes is so emphatic about the practical rather than purely theoretical application of his metaphysics that he asserts “the study of philosophy is more necessary for the regulation of our morals and our conduct in this life than is the use of our eyes to guide our steps” (1.180). His sense of this interconnection finds its best expression in the famous image by which he explains the various branches of learning:

[T]he whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals. By “morals” I understand the highest and most perfect moral system, which presupposes a complete knowledge of the other sciences and is the ultimate level of wisdom. (1.186)

Descartes’ simile proposes an organic and holistic view of knowledge in which “morals” or ethics grows out of the trunk of scientific knowledge or “physics,” which in turn depends on the first principles of metaphysics, in which it is rooted. Shapiro emphasizes the extent to which the image presents metaphysics and ethics as mutually informing: in order to live well we require a better knowledge of ourselves and the world in which we live through the study of science, which in turn requires a knowledge of metaphysics, and thus she concludes that “the study of metaphysics and epistemology is motivated by the overarching ethical concern, just as much as metaphysics informs our ethics. Ethics and metaphysics and epistemology, on this view, are tightly knit.”

Much like the organic image of the philosophical tree and its various interdependent branches, Descartes’ ethics literally grows out of his metaphysics and forms another, later, aspect of his intellectual development. It was his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, daughter of the deposed elector of the Rhine Palatinate, Frederick V, that prompted Descartes to articulate more clearly the relationship between the body and soul he had concluded are entirely distinct in the metaphysics of the *Discourse* and *Meditations*. And it is through his exploration of this interaction that Descartes came to realize his virtue ethics. The Princess Elisabeth was well versed in metaphysics, analytic geometry and moral philosophy. Her learned correspondence with Descartes, which extended from 1643 until 1649, the year before his

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73 Ibid., 447.
death, constitutes a large corpus of fifty-eight letters that is inaugurated by her request in
the first letter that he clarify “how the soul of a human being (it being only a thinking
substance) can determine the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary action,”
given that Descartes has insisted that thinking substance (res cogitans) and extended
substance (res extensa) have nothing in common.74 The first intuition of évidence that
Descartes arrives at in the Discourse and Meditations is his assertion that “I am thinking,
therefore I exist” [“je pense, donc je suis”], and from it he concludes clearly and
distinctly that he exists as a thinker who can be defined entirely without reference to his
body, which in this view becomes a kind of machine governed by the laws of mechanics
rather than the animating force of a soul as it was traditionally understood (CSM, 1.127).
The Discourse and Meditations focus on articulating this key metaphysical argument, but
in the Sixth Meditation Descartes qualifies himself by acknowledging that nonetheless he
is “not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but … I am very closely
joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit” (CSM,
2.56). Elisabeth’s inquiries oblige Descartes to consider more fully what he admits he
has not as of yet addressed in his work, the point of the intermingling or interaction
between the body and soul, which is the passions. His initial explanation that the soul
can cause the body to move, and the body can cause the soul to have “sensations and
passions” through a vaguely defined “union” between them did not entirely satisfy
Elisabeth, nor did his general moralizing about the control of the passions (LS, 65). As a
result of their continued correspondence, which focused increasingly on a cure for
Elisabeth’s own melancholia, and at her eventual insistence that he “define the passions,

74 The Correspondence Between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, ed. and trans. Lisa
Shapiro (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 62 (hereafter cited parenthetically in the
text and identified where necessary as LS).
in order to know them better” (110), Descartes began work on a “little treatise on the passions” which he gave her in 1646, and which he eventually expanded and published as *The Passions of the Soul* (1649). 75

In *The Passions of the Soul* Descartes attempts a systematic natural philosophical treatment of the passions that seeks to articulate more clearly the key physiological explanation Elisabeth had sought. There he asserts that the locus of the interaction between mind and body is the pineal gland, located in the space between the anterior and posterior cavities of the brain (CSM, 1.340). Descartes explains that although the soul is joined to the whole body, the pineal gland is its principal seat, and the place where it most fully exercises its functions because it is here that it may activate or be activated by the animal spirits, the vaporous particles of the blood which circulate through a network of nerves linking the brain with all parts of the body. As they pour through pores on the surface of the gland, the animal spirits may transfer messages from the body to the mind, and conversely the gland may also stimulate the spirits so that they cause movements in the body, or stimulate sense memories. Descartes’ notion of this interaction is complex and at times abstruse, but my principal point of interest is his understanding of the *purpose* of this mechanism. He asserts that the primary effect of the passions is that “they move and dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body” (1.343). For example, fear moves the soul to want to flee, or courage to want to fight. Although the primary function of the passions is thus to “move the soul to consent and contribute to actions which may serve to preserve the body or render it in some way more perfect” (1.376), as Descartes’ discussion extends over the three parts of *The Passions of*
the Soul, it becomes increasingly clear that beyond the expediencies of the body’s preservation, he believes that the passions may also serve a specifically ethical function. He asserts that “the strongest souls belong to those in whom the will by nature can most easily conquer the passions and stop the bodily movements which accompany them,” and in order to do so the soul has at its disposal its “‘proper’ weapons,” namely “firm and determinate judgements bearing upon the knowledge of good and evil, which the soul has resolved to follow in guiding its conduct” (1.347).

A key aspect of this physiological-ethical self-discipline is the function of habit. For Descartes, ethical behaviour is not simply a matter of volition. Although his ethics is strongly influenced by the neo-Stoicism of his period, his theory parts ways with the Stoic emphasis on the sage’s sublimation of the passions to the will. Descartes does not call on us to rid ourselves of our passions; moreover, he does not think it would be feasible to do so. He cautions that “our volition to produce some particular movement or other effect does not always result in our producing it; for that depends on the various ways in which nature or habit has joined certain movements of the gland to certain thoughts” (1.344). This conjunction between corporeality and thought is not a set pattern of responses, but rather it is an individuated experience and the product of a personal history, and thus “we do not always join the same actions to the same thoughts” (1.365-7; 1.375). This, he argues, accounts for all manner of particular aversions, for example to

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76 Descartes’ repeated forays into the ethical function of the regulation of the passions in all three parts of the Passions of the Soul belies his claim in the second prefatory letter that his intention is “to explain the passions only as a natural philosopher, and not as a rhetorician or even as a moral philosopher.” CSM, 1.327. Lisa Shapiro suggests that his remark has historically influenced the reception of the Passions of the Soul as a “principally biological work further promulgating the new mechanist physiology,” in keeping with his Treatise on Man, the fifth part of the Discourse, and the incomplete Description of the Human Body. However, recent scholarship on Cartesian ethics demonstrates that this critical reception is clearly changing. “The Structure of The Passions of the Soul and the Soul-Body Union,” in Passion and Virtue in Descartes, ed. Byron Williston and André Gombay (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 34.
the smell of roses or to the fear of cats, both of which may stem from a childhood
association since lost to memory but preserved as an affective response (1.376).
However, Descartes stresses that over time we may begin to retrain the habitual
connection between a physiological representation and a passion. In order to illustrate
this associative habit-forming he employs a linguistic comparison:

Although nature seems to have joined every movement of the gland to certain
of our thoughts from the beginning of our life, yet we may join them to others
through habit. Experience shows this is the case of language. Words produce
in the gland movements which are ordained by nature to represent to the soul
only the sounds of their syllables when they are spoken or the shape of their
letters when they are written, because we have acquired the habit of thinking
of this meaning when we hear them spoken or see them written. It is also
useful to note that although the movements (both of the gland and of the
spirits and the brain) which represent certain objects to the soul are naturally
joined to the movements which produce certain passions in it, yet through
habit the former can be separated from the latter and joined to others which
are very different. (1.348)

Habits acquired in learning to speak have made us join words with their meaning;
however, in the case of both language and the passions, through effort we may learn to
join a signifier with a new signified. Although the will alone is powerless to alter the
passions, through the regulation of the body it is possible to remedy unproductive
passions and create new associations over time. For example, fear is a physiological state
it is impossible to simply will away; however, if we attend to the “reasons, objects and
precedents” which diminish our sense of danger, we can counteract our fear because our
thoughts of safety are themselves associated with other physiological states, and by
entertaining them we can cause a movement in the pineal gland that alters our passionate
response (1.345). The will is still involved, but it must exert its influence via the
mediating figure of the body. As Erec Koch stresses, within Descartes’ physiology the
body becomes a “sensory or aesthetic machine” and its passions are deemed useful as a
means to “regulate practical and ethical life by imposing valorizations. The task of ethics is to adjust corporal passions so that pleasure and pain are brought into line with the order of good and evil.”77 Through his understanding of habit, Descartes concludes that “[e]ven those who have the weakest souls could acquire mastery over all their passions if we employed sufficient ingenuity in training and guiding them” (1.348). Cartesian ethics is thus articulated through a psychophysiology of the passions; that is, Descartes believes the passions or emotions of the soul are joined in a causal relationship with the body, and that through effort we can train our body’s passions and use them to gain mastery over the will and to behave virtuously in the world.

Generosity is the most central Cartesian passion because it is the passion most properly associated with our understanding of the role of our will in ethical behaviour, and of our ability to exercise it. In article 153 of the Passions of the Soul, Descartes defines generosity as a twofold experience:

True generosity, which causes a person’s self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be, has only two components. The first consists in his knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly. The second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well – that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner. (1.384)

Descartes’ understanding of “generosity” is novel on several counts. His use of the word clearly differs from our modern sense of liberality or largesse, although this kind of giving may follow as a natural consequence of generosity as he defines it. More importantly, it also departs from his own period’s sense of générosité as an ethic of honour and magnanimity associated with nobility of birth, although he does appeal in part

to this traditional concept of the gentleman’s moral code. Finally, it is curious, and significant, that he considers the knowledge of our free will and our resolve to use it well to be a *passion* as well as a virtue. Descartes’ unique conception of *générosité* is crucial to an understanding of his ethics because he believes that to practice it is to follow perfectly the path of virtue. The generous person possesses “complete command over their passions” (1.385), and the cultivation of generosity is “the key to all the other virtues and a general remedy for every disorder of the passions” (1.388).

What Descartes terms “generosity” is at its core a proper self-esteem, and according to him the only thing worthy of establishing our sense of merit is our use of our free will: “I see only one thing in us which could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely, the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. For we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend on this free will. It renders us in a certain way like God by making us masters of ourselves” (1.384). Through an understanding of our free will we come to see that virtue consists in properly defining that which depends on us:

because … passions cannot lead us to perform any action except by means of the desire they produce, it is this desire which we should take particular care to control; and here lies the chief utility of morality … it seems to me that the error we commit most commonly in respect of desires is failure to distinguish adequately the things which depend wholly on us from those which do not depend on us at all – that is, on our free will – our knowledge of their goodness ensures that we cannot desire them with too much ardour, since the pursuit of virtue consists in doing the good things that depend on us, and it is certain that we cannot have too ardent a desire for virtue. (1.379)

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78 In article 161 he acknowledges the origins of the concept: “There is, it seems, no virtue so dependent on good birth as the virtue which causes us to esteem ourselves in accordance with our true value, and it is easy to believe that the souls which God puts into our bodies are not all equally noble and strong (which is why, following the vernacular, I have called this virtue ‘generosity’ rather than ‘magnanimity’, a term used in the Schools, where this virtue is not well known).” However, Descartes is quick to qualify that birth is not the sole determining factor of generosity, and that we may acquire it both by “good upbringing,” and by cultivating the passion in ourselves. CSM, 1.388.
By helping us to determine that which depends on us, generosity fundamentally informs our sense of self and of our proper place in the world. Those who practice it will also manifest behaviours thought to be virtuous. A generous person understands that “any other person can have the same knowledge and feeling about himself, because this involves nothing which depends on someone else,” and so they “never have contempt for anyone,” and treat others with respect (1.384). They do not consider themselves inferior to those who possess greater wealth, honour, intelligence or beauty (1.384), but at the same time they demonstrate a humility born out of the fact that they do not prefer themselves above others (1.85). They are “naturally led to do great deeds, and at the same time not to undertake anything of which they do not feel themselves capable” (1.385). They are always “perfectly courteous, gracious and obliging to everyone” (1.385). Within Cartesian ethics, nobility, wealth and honour no longer confer générosité. As Charles Taylor suggests, Descartes adapts seventeenth-century generosity to locate the source of self-esteem within us: “the ethic of rational control, finding its sources in a sense of dignity and self-esteem, transposes inward something of the spirit of the honour ethic. No longer are we winning fame in public space; we act to maintain our sense of worth in our own eyes.” The inspiration to attain control over the passions is “the agent’s sense of his own dignity as a rational being.”

But how might generosity be acquired? It is significant that Descartes claims generosity is not only a virtuous ideal, but also a passion. He acknowledges that it may seem odd to class qualities like generosity and humility among the passions when they are more commonly thought of as virtues. Although vices are more easily associated

with passion, Descartes insists “I see no reason why the same movement of the spirits which serves to strengthen a thought which has bad foundations might not also strengthen one that is well founded” (1.386). Virtues are simply “habits in the soul which dispose it to have certain thoughts,” and although these thoughts can be produced by the soul alone, “often … some movement of the spirits strengthens them, and in this case they are both actions of virtue and at the same time passions of the soul” (1.387-88). And so in the case of generosity: “if we occupy ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it … we may arouse the passion of generosity in ourselves and then acquire the virtue” (1.388). Just as with all of the passions, generosity must be cultivated through the body. The passionate experience of ourselves as freely willing moves us to use our will on itself, that is to resolve to use our free will well. For this reason Descartes asserts that generosity is produced by a movement of the pineal gland made up of three of the six “primitive” or elemental passions he outlines in Part Two, namely the passions “of wonder, of joy, and of love (self-love as much as the love we have for the cause of our self-esteem” (1.387).

Of the three passions that make up our self-esteem, wonder is the most significant. Descartes not only classes wonder among the six primitive passions from which all of the other passions are made, but he considers it “the first of all the passions” (1.350). What Descartes terms l’admiration or wonder is the passion we feel for things that strike us as new or surprising. It is “a sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider with attention the objects that seem to it unusual or extraordinary” (1.353). Most importantly for Descartes, wonder plays a central role in the pursuit of scientia, or certain knowledge.
It is the passion that makes us responsive to the world around us while also focusing our inward concentration. Unlike the other passions, Descartes claims that when we experience wonder the flow of animal spirits remains centred in the brain rather than moving into the heart or nervous system (1.353). Because wonder is the only passion not accompanied by changes to the heart or blood, it does not provoke a resulting action in the body, and is not subject to the restlessness prompted by the other passions. Wonder is therefore a chiefly intellectual rather than physiological passion, and because it plays a central role in fixing the attention and prolonging thoughts in the soul, it has the power to make us “learn and retain in our memory the things of which we were previously ignorant” and in particular, it “makes us disposed to acquire scientific knowledge” (1.354-55).80 The passions are what direct and sustain all of our actions, including our intellectual pursuits, and so as it concerns the acquisition of knowledge, “people who are not naturally inclined to wonder are usually very ignorant” (1.355).81

Descartes claims that wonder may be joined to either esteem or contempt, depending on whether we wonder at the value or the insignificance of an object, and from here he makes the leap to the passions that arise from our esteem or contempt for ourselves: “generosity or pride, and humility or abjectness” (1.350). Generosity can thus be described in the simplest terms as a form of wonder at ourselves. Through the feeling

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80 Susan James notes that a dependence on the passions in the pursuit of knowledge also inspires attendant anxieties about the possibility for the passions to lead us into error. She suggests Descartes’ attribution of particular physiological characteristics to wonder is an attempt to neutralize the risks associated with the volatile or changeable nature of the passions. *Passion and Action*, 187.

81 As Amélie Oksenberg Rorty notes, “It is the passions that indicate good and harm, and that provide us with a sense of what is important to us. Indeed, it is the emotions that make life interesting. They provide the principles of association of thought, the principles of direction and relevance in thought. They provide the motives for doing this or that science rather than, say, running through the proofs for the existence of God over and over, over and over and over. Because all intellectual thought is equally a realization of that essence, nothing about the mind as such impels us to think one thought rather than another. It is the emotions, and particularly the emotion of wonder, that energize science and give it directions.” “Descartes on thinking with the body,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 386.
of wondering at our individual capacities, we come to understand fully that we have a “free disposition of our volitions,” and it is through this feeling that we are moved to use our will, or freedom, well. The explicit attention to the will in Descartes’ conception of generosity makes it clear why this passion must also play a central role in his metaphysics of mind, which is at its core a direction of the will toward right reasoning. As a passion and a virtue that fixes our attention on our possession of rational autonomy and on our will to use it well, generosity is the passion that can help us to judiciously implement our wonder in pursuit of scientia. In wondering at our will, we become more inclined to use it, and to direct it only toward those ideas we perceive clearly and distinctly. Generosity is at its heart a mixture of intellectual wonder, joy and love that informs our sense of ourselves and animates the pursuit of knowledge and the “love of truth” to which Descartes alludes in his letter in defense of Balzac. In this light, the four rules or precepts he outlines in Part Two of the Discourse on the Method are revealed to be not so much a strict formula or method for conducting scientific and philosophical inquiry, but rather procedures that take into account the psychology of learning and that help us to cultivate our generosity. By suspending our judgment to avoid precipitate conclusions, and subjecting our conduct to enumerations and reviews, we discipline the will and focus the attention or wonder towards a proper philosophy. Lisa Shapiro has argued for precisely such a connection between Descartes’ generosity ethic and his metaphysics as it is presented in the Fourth Meditation, where he places particular emphasis on his will:

82 For more on seventeenth-century philosophers’ understanding of the intimate connection between the emotions and volition, and the consequent idea of knowledge as a kind of feeling, see Susan James’ informative chapter on “Knowledge as Emotion” in Passion and Action, 225-252.
Our understanding that we have a free will and our resolve to use it well, or generosity, is at the center of Descartes’s account of virtue, but this same knowledge provides the key to Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology as evidenced by the method for avoiding error presented in the Fourth Meditation. There… the meditator resolves to use his will well by only making judgments about what is perceived clearly and distinctly. One might well think that just as having the proper metaphysics contributes to virtue, so too might being virtuous contribute to our arriving at the proper metaphysics. … generosity is a seed-bearing fruit, and that seed, if properly cultivated, will grow into the tree of philosophy.⁸³

The cultivation of generosity in the pursuit of scientia was especially important for Descartes given the willful ignorance and vanity he felt plagued scholastic learning. As he asserts over and over in the Discourse, the path toward a realization of évidence is not only a matter of establishing a proper method, but crucially of reforming the minds of those who must embark on this path: “The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues; and those who proceed but very slowly can make much greater progress, if they always follow the right path, than those who hurry and stray from it” (1.111). In The Passions of the Soul he specifically portrays generosity as an ethical provision against the self-delusions of “ambitious people”: “if we occupy ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it – while also considering, on the other hand, the many vain and useless cares which trouble ambitious people – we may arouse the passion of generosity in ourselves and then acquire the virtue” (1.388). The practice of a généreuse franchise was fundamental to Descartes’ rhetoric because the speaker’s zeal for truth is a central proof of their moral purpose and a safeguard against

the self-delusion and sophistry of scholastic philosophy.\textsuperscript{84} Descartes can thus be seen to value the same kind of self-discipline that I argued is central to Bacon’s rhetoric in Chapter One, except that whereas Bacon’s ethic is filtered through a Protestant tradition of affect and self-abnegation—a language of the heart, as I argued—Descartes’ ethics is realized through his psychophysiology of the passions.

The speaker’s demonstration of their zeal for truth, or \textit{générosité}, is a form of self-discipline and a guarantee of moral purpose. However, as I argued earlier in response to Michel Beaujour’s theories about the performance of \textit{ethos} in the \textit{Discourse}, Descartes does more than abstractly present his own generosity as proof of his philosophical honesty or credibility, or even as a virtue he wants others to pursue.\textsuperscript{85} For Descartes generosity is crucially both a virtue and \textit{a passion}, and it is the staging of the passion of generosity in the \textit{Discourse} that will pull his reader onto the same path he has travelled. Descartes understands that his own experience is a way to foster the same realization of self and of \textit{évidence} in his reader. It is through his own \textit{généreuse franchise}—his refusal to teach his method but rather only to reveal the truth of his own experience and to enfranchise his reader to make of it what they will—that Descartes stages an affective, heuristic process whereby his reader experiences the passion of generosity for \textit{him-} or \textit{herself}. Through his own “history or fable” in the \textit{Discourse}, and equally through his account of his experiences in the \textit{Meditations}, Descartes demonstrates how he came to realize the freedom of his will and resolved to use it well—that is, he effectively re-enacts

\textsuperscript{84} Thomas Carr argues along these lines: “A frank and sincere \textit{générosité} informs authentic eloquence, while false eloquence tends toward obfuscation, futile quibbling, if not outright deception … If the disputes and debates so popular among his scholastic rivals do not produce truth, faulty method is not the sole cause; such controversies are often motivated, he would maintain, by vanity and false pride, the opposites of \textit{générosité}.” Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric, 58.

\textsuperscript{85} See pgs. 175-77 above.
his own affective experience of generosity. Descartes’ rhetoric aims to produce in his reader the same judgments of the will affirming évidence that he himself has experienced. Rhetoric in this view becomes a re-enactment of the process by which the mind realizes truth, taking into consideration the affective role of generosity and wonder. In this sense, it might be said that whereas Bacon speaks a language of the heart, and Milton deploys a language of the stomach, Descartes privileges a language of the generous mind at work which will serve as an intimate model and guide for his reader.

In so doing, it might also be argued that he recuperates a central role for the passions of the private subject who seemed under threat of erasure within the metaphysical theory of the cogito. Recent scholarship has increasingly turned its attention from Descartes’ metaphysics to his later writings on corporeality and the passions, which constitute his realization of the last and highest branch of learning, moral philosophy. In devoting more attention to the Cartesian body, scholars have begun to revise earlier accounts that tend to overemphasize the dualism of his metaphysics. As we have seen, in place of the alienated mechanical body, Descartes’ ethical thought foregrounds the importance of corporal sensibility in ethical conduct, and affords the private passions a central role. Although Descartes certainly does not abandon his central metaphysical principle of distinction, he comes to contend more fully with the substantial union of body and soul. In effect, we see the trajectory of his own thought struggling to address the discontinuity between the “empirical” and “philosophical” subject evoked in his metaphysics of mind, and it is his theory of the passions that allows him to bridge the gap. In the metaphysical works, it is Descartes’ rhetoric that most fully anticipates this trajectory. The rhetoric of the Discourse on the Method reveals that it is not so easy for
Descartes to leave behind the empirical subject in favour of a purely abstracted
metaphysical subject because it is the subject’s frank or sincere generosity that constitutes
his ideal philosophical practice, and that informs the confessional, narrative presentation
through which he will inculcate it.
Conclusion

"be so true to thyself, as thou be not false to others; specially to thy king and country. It is a poor centre of a man’s actions, himself. It is right earth."

—Francis Bacon, Essays (1625)

The history of sincerity offers an important qualification to our understanding of the experience of early modern identity. The period’s focus was not simply on the newfound opposition of inner and outer self; rather, it was the relationship between these two places or selves that was worried over, modeled, and explored in the literary and cultural discourses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The ways in which inner and outer self are discursively linked is at the heart of my interest in this study. The authors I have discussed affirm their culture’s emphasis on a rhetoric of sincerity that conceives of an essential correspondence between inward feeling and outward performance. As a new moral precept that requires a congruence between feeling and avowal, sincerity signals a desire to bring private experience and public practice into concordance, to make inside and outside match up. It suggests the extent to which early moderns saw private and public identity as linked, mutually informing and interdependent, or at least, that they often desired them to be so.

Much of the scholarship charting the history of the subject has emphasized the early modern “discovery” of the individual and his or her newfound sense of interiority—be it the Burckhardtian interiority of a newly-awakened, “essential” self or, as new historicist accounts have qualified, a constructed or “self-fashioned” one. In either case, the focus has often been on the privileging of an interior and more authentic realm in the face of social dissembling or performance. As Ramie Targoff has pointed out, historians
of early modern subjectivity often call attention to “the period’s insistent separation of inner and outer selves,” a perspective that rests on “the assumption that the private and public self are entirely discrete and separable agents.”¹ In an argument that is complementary to my own, if different in emphasis, Targoff claims that this assumption contradicts mainstream discourses, which often insisted on the direct correspondence between outward action and inward experience. Her essay examines secular and religious polemics concerning the effect of performance on the inward self. She discusses first antitheatricalist attitudes toward the activity of “personation,” which she emphasizes were based not only on the objection to artificiality or feigning, but the more dangerous possibility that superficial behaviour risked contaminating a person’s inner identity, in effect transforming hypocrisy into sincerity. Just as nonconformist opponents of the theatre feared that actors and spectators might be inwardly corrupted by playgoing, the established church mounted a similar but positively valued argument about the role of communal and performative acts of prayer and church worship in cultivating inner piety.² In both cases, Targoff demonstrates that the boundaries between public performance and internal experience were perceived to be more porous than has been acknowledged. This, she argues, because critics have placed too much emphasis on the more marginal categories of playwrights, sectarian groups, and Catholic recusants, all of whom would have had a vested interest in maintaining boundaries between inner and outer identities.

Whereas Targoff is interested in the internalization of public performances and their effect in shaping private subjectivity, my argument has focused on the insistent

² This point is similar to the argument I make in Chapter 1 about the collective performance of sincerity and the reformers’ emphasis on outward forms of church worship such as prayer and song as an incitement to greater piety. See Chap. 1, p. 67-70.
externalization of the private self in public contexts and the role it is seen to play in public matters. If both arguments make a similar point about the correspondence between public and private identities in the early modern period, they nevertheless differ on the question of agency. Targoff emphasizes anxieties about the permeability of identity, and the prospect (whether positive or negative) that the inner self may be passively transformed. That the authors I discuss are able to self-consciously employ their sincerity as part of their rhetorical technique demonstrates the extent to which this new moral precept had gained currency by the mid-seventeenth century. In the works I address, sincerity is transformed into an objective practice that is actively staged for the reader’s identification.

In performing their sincerity, the authors I treat exercise a greater degree of agency, but nonetheless their presentation of identity is indelibly tied to the social. It is for this reason, as Lionel Trilling noted, that the *raison d’être* of Polonius’ call to sincerity—“to thine own self be true / And it doth follow … Thou canst not then be false to any man”—no longer carries the same resonance in a contemporary context:

> If sincerity has lost its former status, if the word itself has for us a hollow sound and seems almost to negate its meaning, that is because it does not propose being true to one’s own self as an end but only as a means. If one is true to one’s own self for the purpose of avoiding falsehood to others, is one being truly true to one’s own self? The moral end in view implies a public end in view, with all that this suggests of the esteem and fair repute that follow upon the correct fulfilment of a public role.³

Francis Bacon, as we have seen, was responsive to the exigencies of public accountability, to the extent that he echoes Polonius’ counsel almost directly in his *Essays* (1625) when he writes, “be so true to thyself, as thou be not false to others; specially to thy king and country. It is a poor centre of a man’s actions, *himself*. It is

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right earth.”⁴ I have emphasized how Milton similarly conceives himself to be “not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was perswaded, and whereof I had declared openly to be a partaker.”⁵ Descartes too is motivated by his conviction that all men are unified by their rational capacities, and his desire to present his own story as a matter of both personal frankness, and an extension of “franchise” to his reader. Even Montaigne, who as I suggested in my Introduction is in many ways an exemplar of the kind of private self-scrutiny that will eventually come to be central to the modern practice of authenticity, can be found to assert repeatedly that sincerity is not just the grounds of honest self discovery, but of the very basis of social order. Montaigne emphatically rejects “this new-fangled virtue of hypocrisy and dissimulation, which is so highly honored at present.” “Truth is the first and fundamental part of virtue,” he claims, and thus “It is a craven and servile idea to disguise ourselves and hide under a mask, and not to dare to show ourselves as we are. … A generous heart should not belie its thoughts; it wants to reveal itself even to its inmost depths. There everything is good, or at least everything is human.”⁶ Most importantly for Montaigne, sincerity is essential because “We are men, and hold together, only by our word,”

[H]e who breaks his word betrays human society … it is the interpreter of our soul. If it fails us, we have no more hold on each other, no more knowledge of each other. If it deceives us, it breaks up all our relations and dissolves all the bonds of our society.

The imperative for sincerity is the result of a new emphasis on individualism, but it is a discourse that self-consciously positions the individual in relation to their culture at large.

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Sincerity is what gives individuals a “hold on each other” by rendering them answerable to the community.

The fact that the authors I discuss employ the objective presentation of their sincere conviction as a rhetorical practice affirms a key difference in their experience of identity. The insistent recourse to the sincere and self-authorizing “I” in these ostensibly objective and public works undermines the critical assumption that the private and public self are discrete and separable. Private self becomes public practice, suggesting an essential difference in the pre-enlightenment understanding of identity. But while it is not the kind of autonomous identity we might expect, it is nevertheless also clear that individual conviction occupies a privileged status in these authors’ theories, so much so that it becomes a voice and a position from which to assert their epistemologies. As I have tried to show, the works I address bear witness to the extraordinary energy that the liberation from older worldviews imparts. Each of these texts is suffused with the feeling of excitement that accompanies the transformations in thinking wrought by such forces as the Reformation, the foundation of the modern political order, and the discoveries of the New Science. As Charles Guignon observes, from the new scientific outlook, “Humans can remake the world according to a rational plan, and that means they can remake themselves as they wish.”7 In contrast to the premodern understanding of identity where a person’s goal was to fulfil their ideal purpose and place as it was set out for them by the cosmos or God’s will, these authors testify to the emergence of an individual who is newly liberated and empowered to determine his or her own course. Descartes famously writes that our goal is to “make ourselves… the lords and masters of nature,” and Bacon

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similarly stakes his faith in the idea that “Knowledge is power.” Milton’s early prose is imbued with his acute sense that political enfranchisement will empower him as the “some one [who] may perhaps bee heard” amidst the choir of Englishmen celebrating their freedom from religious and political servitude (1.616). In these works, sincerity functions as a rhetoric that is not only persuasive, but essentially energizing and self-enabling. In Bacon’s thought, sincerity becomes the basis from which the scientist may effect a new “marriage between the empirical and rational faculties.” Milton similarly values the force of zeal as a source of religious and political knowing above and beyond outward forms of proof or authority. The conviction of the subject is the very foundation of Descartes’ philosophical theory. My readings of these works of epistemology affirm that these three authors participate rhetorically in the social culture of sincerity, even as their theories anticipate the authenticity culture that is to come. More broadly, “The Rhetoric of Sincerity” has shown that that we can only understand what it meant to be true to oneself in the early modern period if we look outside of the self.

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