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LOOKING FOR AN HONEST MAN

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Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011)

David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy: The Mask of Power, from Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

> This art of dissimulation reaches its peak in man: here deception, flattery, lying and cheating, slander, false pretenses, living on borrowed glory, masquerading, conventions of concealment, playacting before others and before oneself, in sum, the constant fluttering about the flame of vanity, is so much the rule and the law that almost nothing is more incomprehensible than how an honest and pure desire for truth could arise among men.
>
> Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense"

> Is it not a shame that philosophers should be in doubt about moral questions on which even peasants have no doubts at all?
>
> Cicero, *On Duties* 3.19

Among the astonishing variety of sources mentioned in Martin Jay's new book on lying in politics the reader will find ancient Greek philosophical dialogues, pamphlet controversies between eighteenth-century philosophers, post-structural literary theories and, resting easily among the likes of these, a familiar old joke. "How can you tell when a politician is lying?" Jay asks. "He moves his lips" is the answer my grandfather used to give, and that is the punch-line that Jay recounts here. But my grandfather told the joke as part of a syllogism whose unstated premise was "lying is bad" and whose common-sense conclusion was that politics is corrupt. Jay is not satisfied with that conclusion. His book, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics*, puts forward a very different argument: He assumes that politics is worthwhile, suggests that it is unavoidably linked to lying, and concludes that lying must not be as bad as we think it is. There are a host of complications and caveats, so many that one could spend a whole review admiring the virtuosity involved in constructing such a rich pastiche of historical episodes

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and texts touching on mendacity. But the frisson that the book provokes comes almost entirely from its willingness to flirt with the endorsement of vice, so any serious engagement with it cannot avoid responding in some way to that flirtation.

The book begins with a playful trick—not a lie, but a temporary withholding of information with strategic intent. Jay quotes a stirring sentence condemning lying in politics and then reveals that the sentence comes from a program published by the Nazi Party, the same one that would eventually engage in massive propaganda campaigns. Of course, as he recognizes, the horrible ugliness of Nazism had almost nothing to do with that particular hypocrisy. Also, Jay admits, the Nazis were too extreme to be typical of anything in politics. Nevertheless he introduces them as the first and therefore defining case of the phenomenon he wants to discuss in his introduction, that of "railing against the 'lies' of one's opponents while privately granting to oneself the right to commit one's own in the name of a higher cause than truth-telling" (3). From this example he moves directly to the so-called "noble lie" from Plato's *Republic*, thus bringing the Nazis together with "their favorite philosopher" to demonstrate that professed lovers of truth can be liars themselves.

Only after tarnishing moralisms against lying in this way does he bring into view his real object of inquiry. It is the typically American "dream of transparent politics," a dream that stems from "the powerful legacy of ruthless Puritan self-examination and insistence on interpersonal transparency" (7). We still teach the dream to our children whenever we retell the familiar fable about George Washington as a boy, heroically unable to lie to his father about having cut down a cherry tree. An illustration of boy Washington and his tree graces the cover of Jay's book, and captures the simple moralism that he means to undermine. When Jay finally turns to the story in the introduction he points out its source—the popular 1806 edition of Mason Locke Weems's *Life of Washington*—and quickly comes to his point: Weems "in fact made up the anecdote, or more accurately, plagiarized it from an earlier story by James Beattie" (8). As with the Nazis so it is much closer to home, we learn. Campaigns against lying are often waged by liars, and the professed love of truth is no guarantee of truthfulness. It is clear from the introduction that we will not be allowed to take comfort in the reassuring truths we learned in school, or from our grandparents.

Jay's book comes at a good moment for thinking about truth and politics. Older studies, such as Hannah Arendt's important 1967 *New Yorker* essay "Truth and Politics," were still very much shaped by reflections on the totalitarian propaganda of the Nazis and the Soviets.[1] Today the topic is no less important, but our political culture raises new obstacles to truth and new fears about its elusiveness. Many

[1] H. Arendt, "Truth and Politics," *New Yorker*, 25 Feb. 1967, 49–88.

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major news organizations have consciously discarded the aspiration to present a nonpartisan view of the news, and the Internet seems to provide no common version for everyone. Political campaigns and public-relations offices operate on principles virtually indistinguishable from those of advertising agencies. The anxieties that these facts provoke are evident in one of the most watched shows on television, *Mad Men*, which concerns itself almost entirely with the question whether a life composed of lies can be good.

Like today's most skillful pundits and politicos, and like the television show, Jay has a real appreciation for the virtuosity that can be found in lying. In this way his interest in lying is different from the familiar realist one with which it might at first be confused. The realist accepts, with a resigned sigh, the Machiavellian insight that lies, half-truths or secrets may be necessary sometimes, that lying may occasionally be the best of a bad set of options. The realist can make such admissions while still recognizing the corrosive effect that lies, even small ones, can have in public life. His freedom from conventional morality allows him to weigh the pros and cons of lying in a cold and calculating manner. Jay, in contrast, takes us beyond that world-weary wisdom and into quite another register; at his most provocative he introduces the thought that lying might actually be "part of what makes politics valuable" (18). Numerous times in the book he raises "the Straussians" so that he can distinguish his interest in mendacity from their tolerance of esotericism. But the Straussian line on lying, I believe, is that it may sometimes be prudent or necessary, which is actually a milder and less celebratory stance than this effort to speak of mendacity's "virtues." Both positions fit the moment, however, in treating as naive the simple distaste for lying in politics that most people still feel.

Is that conventional feeling really so simple-minded? Part of the problem in defending it is that honesty's spokesmen have not always made their case persuasively. Jay devotes the culminating part of his chapter on lying to the well-known eighteenth-century debate between Immanuel Kant and Benjamin Constant over the question whether lies are ever justified (66–75). As even Kantians acknowledge, it is hard to side with Kant in that particular exchange. Constant, with the recent history of police informers in France in mind, had put to him this test case: a known murderer is knocking at your door asking where to find your friend, whom you are hiding and whom he openly intends to kill. Is it morally justified to lie to the murderer? Kant bit the bullet and denied that it was, offering the chillingly cold explanation that "truthfulness in statements that one cannot avoid is a human being's duty to everyone, however great the disadvantage to him or to another that may result from it."[2] But, as

[2] I. Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy," in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, ed. M. Gregor (Cambridge, 1996), 612.

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Jay points out, Kant allowed himself to craft careful loophole-filled statements that were quite deceptive when he deemed it necessary. When he was made to promise King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia that he would stop writing about the controversial subject of religion, he promised to do so "as your faithful subject," knowing full well that the king would soon die and that Kant would then, as subject to a different king, be free to write about religion without formally violating his word. With this famous example of Kant's own craftiness in mind we could easily dismiss his uncompromising answer to Constant as yet another example of hypocritical moralism. Some commentators have tried, however, to read Kant more sympathetically. Michael Sandel, for instance, recently pointed out that there is a principled distinction between Kant's true but evasive promise and an outright lie; in feeling the need to tell an evasive truth rather than simply lie, Kant implicitly acknowledged the wrongness of lying.[3] Instead of seeing only hypocrisy, then, we might admire Kant's effort to find ways to avoid lying even when faced with political constraints as clear and dangerous as royal censors. But Jay does not entertain possible vindications of Kant's behavior; he seems to agree with the commentators he cites who regard Kant's stance against lying as an "absurdity." Nor does he consider whether it is fair to let the case for honesty end with Kant's peculiar defense of it, or whether Constant's pragmatic argument for balancing multiple moral principles against one another really points the way towards seeing mendacity as having virtues of its own. He is content to follow Hans Saner in seeing in Kant's position a sign that a strict rule against lying is simply not "a comfortable bedfellow of the political" (74).

The concept of "the political" brings us to the real heart of the book. Jay devotes a full chapter to exploring various ways in which twentieth-century thinkers have defined that concept so that he can then investigate how each definition might relate to lying. He treats six alternative definitions of the political: the *antagonism* of Carl Schmitt; the *agonism* of Chantal Mouffe's more recent work; the *contractualism* of classical liberalism; the *governance by the wise* of Plato and, Jay says, Straussian thinkers; the *republican virtue* of Machiavelli, Harrington, Rousseau and Habermas; and the *aesthetic politics* of Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Rancière, and Claude Lefort. The grouping of theorists into these categories obviously raises a host of questions, but Jay elaborates each perspective in confident prose and leaves one with the sense of having been led by an experienced guide through some of the main currents of twentieth-century political thought. And the question of how reliable the categorization of theorists is seems not to be of tremendous importance for the overall argument, because not much is made to hang on the differences between the categories. Jay shows

[3] M. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (New York, 2009), 134–8.

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that when Schmitt tried to define the essence of the political realm, he was trying to clarify the way in which liberalism threatened to colonize it with a purportedly antipolitical ideology. And he shows Arendt doing something analogous but distinct in her effort to save politics from the corruptions of "the social." But he regards these particular battles from a distance. He does not have to choose among the conceptions of politics he identifies because his main point is that all of them point to an "affinity" between politics and mendacity, and therefore that lying must be "somehow inherent in that realm of human endeavor we have come to call politics" (84).

The links that Jay finds between the first four conceptions of politics and lying can be summarized briefly enough. Insofar as politics is a realm of warlike antagonism, there would seem to be no reason not to use lying as one weapon in the war. Insofar as politics is an agonistic contest that stops short of war, diplomatic deception would seem to be a part of it. If politics is about making and keeping contracts, and therefore depends on at least the appearance of trustworthiness, it would seem naturally to give rise to the bourgeois hypocrisies that Benjamin Franklin described and that Judith Shklar defended. If politics is about good governance by wise elites, it might often serve the public good to manage the unwise through "noble" lies. None of these arguments is especially surprising or controversial.

When Jay comes to the final two conceptions of politics, however, the links to lying need more explanation. His argument about republicanism leans heavily on Hannah Arendt's essays on truth and politics. Arendt argued that "truth carries with it an element of coercion" because it demands to be recognized as the *end* of an argument rather than just a part of one.[4] "Politics," writes Jay in glossing her view, "always keeps open the possibility of future persuasion, whereas truth demands to be recognized once and for all" (160). Since republican politics prizes the activity of persuasion, it cannot help but view assertions of truth as threats. Even Thomas Jefferson's beloved statement in the *Declaration of Independence* about self-evident truths is only compatible with republicanism, Arendt argued, because he unwittingly acknowledged the true character of those truths—as opinions—when he wrote, "*We hold* these truths to be self-evident . . ." Republican politics—all true politics, on the Arendtian view—is the realm of *opinion* rather than truth. When you assert an opinion you are *acting* in Arendt's sense of the word, trying to start something new. Jay points to a passage in which Arendt suggested that lying is a surer way of starting something new (the falsehood) than telling the truth, since the truth refers to something that already exists. Arendt distinguished this sort of lying from the government-controlled

4 H. Arendt, "Truth in Politics," in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. P. Baehr (New York, 2000), 555, quoted at 160.

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mass deception practiced by totalitarian regimes, and she insisted that there were areas in which lies were intolerable, such as science and the judiciary, but what Jay emphasizes is that she also supposed that creative lying could be an example of political action. As Jay sympathetically sums up her position, "while it would be disastrous to politicize everything, it would be no less a loss to human freedom to extirpate the uncertain realm of *opinion, rhetoric, and, yes, mendacity* that we call 'the political'" (163, emphasis added).

But notice here the word "yes" that Jay inserts prior to the word "mendacity." The single-syllable affirmative is a form of rhetorical amplification. It is crucial to the rhythm of the sentence; it heightens the tension by delaying a cadence; it calls attention to what follows and gives the impression that the next word—mendacity—is an unwelcome but necessary truth, one that requires an extra act of will and an extra dose of intellectual courage to affirm. Because Arendt's view of politics is one that Jay seems to find congenial, the force of the whole book rests, ultimately, on this affirmation that mendacity must be included next to opinion and rhetoric as part of a truly republican politics. And yet it is precisely here that an objection both commonsensical and of deep theoretical significance must be registered: the need to live in the uncertain realm of opinion and rhetoric does not necessarily imply the need to accept, much less endorse, lying. The sort of republican politics that Arendt admired among the American revolutionaries was highly rhetorical, but to speak of the revolutionary councils and town meetings primarily as sites of creative lying would mischaracterize them. Arendt may have allowed herself, in a few moments of exploratory thought provoked by Rahel Varnhagen, to play with the idea that lying could be a form of political action. But there was nothing in her republicanism itself that compels us to give the point much weight. She may have been right that "seen from the viewpoint of politics, the truth has a despotic character," but she did not thereby prove that lies are less despotic. Indeed—and this is a crucial point—lies pose as truths and so do not avoid whatever despotism may be inherent in claims to truth. What a republican politics of the kind that Arendt admired requires are modes of speech that preserve the possibility of continued mutual persuasion—neither truths nor lies, but opinions.

It is odd that in a book otherwise so hostile to Plato, Jay does not press harder against the very Platonic impulse to tie the realm of opinion to that of falsehood. Opinion is not demonstrably true, so it must be false—here is an argument from the pages of Plato's dialogues, an argument *against* rhetoric. But even Plato did not really denigrate opinion so thoroughly; even he saw at least the seeds of truth in opinions, as in his image of the "divided line" in the *Republic*, or when he showed Socrates finding mathematical principles implicit in the uneducated mind of a slave boy in the *Meno*. His student Aristotle expanded upon the potential in opinion and opened a whole world of prudence and deliberation in which falling

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short of philosophic truth could not be taken as a sign of untruth; this accounts in part for his rehabilitation of rhetoric. Other rhetoricians followed Aristotle's lead. Cicero defended oratory as having links with "the probable." When Giambattista Vico revived the rhetorical tradition after the Cartesians tried to leave it behind, he too insisted upon the dignity of mere opinion and of the rhetoric based upon it. No one in the long rhetorical tradition so closely wrapped up with republicanism reduced the political realm of probable beliefs and opinions into a world of lies; their intellectual task was to resist precisely this reduction. Indeed, one of the best recent works on rhetoric goes so far as to argue that rhetoric is actually best understood as the art of disclosing facts.[5] In the history of political thought, the close linkage of opinion with falsehood is a move made by the anti-rhetoricians, by Plato at his most impatient, by Descartes and by Hobbes. These were also the antirepublicans. When Jay participates in their intellectual move to link opinion and rhetoric with lying, he succeeds in being provocative, but he also risks undermining the integrity of the republican conception of politics that he seems to admire.

If opinions can be contrasted with lies, so too can symbols and myths. These fictions are central to the last way of understanding the political that Jay treats. Here, the myth of unity and harmony found in common talk about a "people" or a "nation" is the subject. If the everyday sociology of politics reveals little more than contests about who gets what, the more elusive meaning of politics can be found in the fictions that live in our imaginations and in our language. We speak as though political contests concern not individuals or groups trying to get their way but instead an effort to represent a single imagined entity known as the electorate. Similarly, when citizens speak to one another as if they are equals, they are joining together in a myth that ignores obvious social inequalities. Equality and democracy both seem to require a certain laxness with regard to the truth. Jay remarks that this conception of politics therefore draws attention to "the cumulative effect of the aesthetic moment in politics in creating an environment in which a premium is not placed on veracity" (173). Since Lefort, Ankersmit and others demonstrate that this aesthetic moment is virtually inevitable in modern politics, Jay concludes that "it [is] very hard to hope for a politics fully purged of looseness toward the truth" (173). He rightly admits, though, that this looseness, this element of fiction and symbolism, should not be conflated with "outright mendacity" (172). Poets and novelists, as well as inspiring orators, would insist upon this clarification. Politics often concerns the future, and we touch the future more through imagination than through knowledge. This is why political speech

[5] M. Kochin, *Five Chapters on Rhetoric: Character, Action, Things, Nothing and Art* (University Park, PA, 2009).

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cannot be sorted simply into truths and lies. Dreams and hopes are neither; nor are fears. These political emotions are based on imagination and so they are expressed in a language of images. We certainly need to be able to distinguish more and less plausible images, but it seems misleading to link the activity of imagining itself so closely to mendacity.

Even if we were to accept the argument as a whole—that all of the major ways of thinking about the political seem to require lying in one form or another—we would find ourselves up against a worry that Jay himself raises with considerable sophistication at various points throughout the book. While he defends lying as inherent to politics, he would like to stop short of defending lying in other parts of life. In particular, he would like to be able to defend the importance of truthfulness in the press, the courts, and academic life (177–9). But to make such distinctions is to presume that politics is an insulated sphere of human activity. In fact, as Jay acknowledges, the boundaries of the political are "leaky" and not much hope should be placed on our ability to patrol its borders. "And as a result," he remarks, "no unequivocal defense of political hypocrisy or mendacity will ever be fully convincing" (179). He therefore ends the book not by praising mendacity's virtues (as the title and introduction promise to do) but by warning against "the search for perfect truthfulness" (179).

Here on the last page he reveals how close he is to Arendt in his own view of politics. What he prizes above all is a pluralism of opinions and the give-and-take of political contests. The real threat he identifies in the conventionally American obsession with lying is the way that it leads us to delegitimize the partial truths voiced by our political opponents, and thus to subvert any chance of real political activity between us and them. When an opponent of the current president's health care proposal voiced his opposition as an accusation of mendacity—"you lie!"—he thereby eliminated the space for a republican politics between him and the other side. The same happened when opponents of the previous president's foreign policy voiced their opposition as an accusation of mendacity. Jay's argument against trading charges of mendacity is sharp and important, and deserves a hearing beyond the world of intellectual history. But his diagnosis of what lies behind that mode of politics is contestable. Is it really the simple American hope that politicians should try to avoid lying to us? Or is it, rather, the all too familiar assumption that truth in politics is a simple thing? Often we rush to accuse one another of lying because that is easier than thinking that differences of opinion might be due to the complexity of the issues and the existence of plausible perspectives on both sides. We are not so much naive as lazy. More patience with partial truths and partisan opinions, which arise in any serious debate, would make our politics healthier. More tolerance for lies, which make serious debate impossible, would not. That is one sort of tolerance that we already have too much of.

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David Runciman's *Political Hypocrisy* focuses on a vice closely related to lying but distinct from it. We accuse our politicians of hypocrisy much more often than we accuse them of lying. And the delight that we take in seeing hypocrites exposed does not come simply from our love of truth. We also enjoy the way that catching hypocrites confirms our equality. The hypocrisy we hate most consists not only of pretense but also of superiority; we hate *pretension*. A part of us would like to admire our leaders and so we do feel disgust when we see prominent individuals revealed. But another part of us, believing in the democratic idea of equality, cannot help but feel vindicated when we see that our leaders are what they are supposed to be—no better than the rest of us.

Runciman begins and ends his book with our preoccupation with hypocrisy. Like other theorists, notably Judith Shklar, he warns against indulging too much in the hypocrite hunt. He believes that hypocrisy is part and parcel of pluralistic liberal society. In such a society we have to be civil to many different sorts of people and thus hide or at least minimize our disagreements with them; civility, politeness and tolerance all have more than a hint of hypocrisy in them. Thus David Hume blandly said of hypocrisy that "the common duties of mankind usually require it," and Benjamin Franklin happily admitted in his *Autobiography* to changing his message to suit his audience so as to make his way in the world. As Shklar wrote somewhat admiringly, Franklin "could describe his pretenses with perfect self-confidence and good humor" and without embarrassment.[6] Franklin saw both a political and a social function for hypocrisy: the political function was to facilitate persuasion, which democracy requires. It is not possible to be persuasive to a whole variety of people without sometimes changing your tune to suit their ear. The social function was to facilitate commerce. Success at business requires maintaining a good reputation, and it is not possible to maintain your reputation among a diverse set of clients without playing a variety of roles to suit their tastes and whims. Both democracy and capitalism, then, seem to call for hypocrisy, and Runciman, like Shklar, Hume and Franklin, accepts this fact without much hand-wringing.

What is refreshing in Runciman's account is the way that he goes beyond those authors. He argues that we should try hard to distinguish different sorts of hypocrisy from one another and to say which are beneficial and which are harmful. With that goal in mind, he finds it useful to turn to a different set of thinkers than the ones theorists interested in sincerity and hypocrisy often consult. Shklar's thought was shaped largely by her reading of Montaigne, and Ruth Grant, in another important book on the topic, turned to Machiavelli and

[6] J. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 72, 74.

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Rousseau—all thinkers outside the tradition of liberalism.[7] Runciman asserts that the liberal tradition itself contains more subtle and more useful insights into the fine distinctions between types of hypocrisy than the antiliberals, who tend to treat hypocrisy as a homogeneous phenomenon. He begins in the seventeenth century with Hobbes and follows the theme through Mandeville, American Revolutionary writers, Bentham, the Victorians, and then Orwell, landing in the end at the 2008 American presidential campaign.

Whether or not one wants to accept the judgment that Hobbes was a liberal, the seventeenth-century royalist is a good place to begin on this topic because of his deep and fascinating treatment of political representation as a matter of theatrical role-playing. Runciman skillfully takes the reader through the complexities of chapter 16 of *Leviathan* and emerges with the lesson that role-playing, or the wearing of masks, is unavoidable in any system that relies on the rhetoric of representation to justify rule. He then translates the lesson into the modern era. Consider a politician whose career depends on being seen as a representative of his constituents. The standard dilemma that he faces is whether to follow his own principles or the wishes of his constituents when the two collide. Any solution seems to invite the charge of hypocrisy. If he disregards the polls he seems to admit that he was only pretending to represent the people, while if he follows the polls he seems to only have been pretending to have principles of his own. No amount of toying with the definition of the word "representation" can evade the basic puzzle, as we can tell from the fact that so many elected politicians know the problem not from theory or books but directly from experience. Representative government offers democracy but keeps rule in the hands of a few; it makes a promise it cannot keep, and so invites politicians to be hypocrites and citizens to be disappointed. It can even be argued that one fundamental purpose of representative government is to create and maintain these dissatisfactions so as to stimulate a watchful citizenry and an insecure group of rulers.

Runciman concludes from this line of thought that politicians in representative systems cannot avoid the "tricky" work of showing themselves to be both like us and different from us, and so cannot avoid wearing masks. That sort of role-playing is in fact necessary to our politics. And because it is necessary, the most dangerous sort of hypocrisy for us is the sort that would interfere with the role-playing—the sort that demands sincerity while enjoying the benefits of living in a society built on wearing masks. "If there is an enduring lesson from Hobbes on hypocrisy," Runciman writes, "it is this: it does not matter whether or not our politicians are all wearing masks, if that is what is needed to make our form of politics work. What does matter is if people are hypocritical about *that*" (44,

[7] R. Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics* (Chicago, 1997).

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original italics). Through this devilishly convoluted and yet somehow sensible reasoning, Runciman shows how every imaginable position—even the campaign against hypocrisy—can be indicted as an example of hypocrisy. This becomes, in Runciman's Mandeville, a distinction between "first-order hypocrisy" and "second-order hypocrisy" and works its way through his treatment of the other English and American liberals.

The unavoidability of mask-wearing in politics and the hypocrisy of pretending not to wear masks also figure prominently in his conclusion, in which he treats the 2008 presidential campaign as the task of "choosing the right hypocrite" (213). Here Hillary Clinton comes off well, especially in comparison with the second President Bush. Runciman does not accuse Bush of lying or of being a hypocrite in the ordinary sense; instead he complains that Bush did not recognize the fact that he (like all of us) was simply playing a role. Bush's sin was to believe too much in his own opinions and faith; Hobbes would have deemed him a dangerous force in politics, says Runciman. Clinton, on the other hand, saw and used the masks available to her and did not pretend to be true to any authority outside politics (216). Clinton, he judges, was the more honest hypocrite and therefore the less dangerous one.

Needless to say, this sort of defense will not land Runciman a job with Clinton anytime soon. Nor does it entirely satisfy from a theoretical perspective, because it does not give quite enough weight to a concern that he said at the beginning he wanted to give weight to—the ordinary person's disgust with ordinary ("first-order") hypocrisy. In the end Runciman's position is not so different from Shklar's and Franklin's—he wants us to accept much more hypocrisy than we are likely to. Like those theorists, he relies mainly on arguments about the positive functions that certain types of hypocrisy can play in our particular society. One of his key tenets is buried early in the book: "Sincerity and hypocrisy have no inherent value in their own terms; they only have value in so far as they suit the form of politics that they are required to sustain" (43). This is the thought that leads him to engage in such a subtle examination of hypocrisy's place within liberalism. But it also prevents him from engaging with the deepest worry about hypocrisy, which is precisely a worry about liberalism itself. What drives some of the intuitive disgust that many people feel for hypocrisy, and for the sort of liberalism that requires it, is the fear that it might be truly soul-destroying. To feel the force of this position one should read its most uncompromising exponents, such as D. H. Lawrence, who lambastes Benjamin Franklin for destroying his "dark forest" of possibility by pruning and whittling down his soul to the proportions necessary for bourgeois acceptability.[8] If the liberals reply that cutting down the forest is

[8] D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York, 1923), chap. 2.

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necessary for the sake of a comfortable and peaceful life, Lawrence will reply with the key question: is *that* life really worth living? If hypocrisy were truly as corrupting as Rousseau and his heirs have suggested, if the straitjackets of civility, politeness and respectability truly asked us to repress and deny our most authentic selves, could we really insist that peace and comfort are worth the terrible cost to our souls?

I do not mean to give the antiliberals the last word, though. Instead I mean to point to the need for a deeper defense of hypocrisy—and therefore of liberalism. Such a defense would have to confront Lawrence's question directly by showing that the wearing of masks and the playing of roles is not so much a disciplining of the soul as it is a realization of its possibilities. The usual complaint against hypocrites is that they pretend to be something other than what they are. Liberals have to show that anti-hypocrites, too, flee from what they truly are. They have to show that in luring us with the idea of one authentic self, the anti-hypocrites can blind us to our actual many-sidedness, and so undermine our efforts to learn how to live with our *selves*. "We are all patchwork," wrote Montaigne, "and so shapeless and diverse in composition that each bit, each moment, plays its own game. And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others."[9] If Montaigne was right—if the sorts of role-playing that liberal democratic societies seem to require could be lived and endorsed without requiring us to lie to ourselves about ourselves—then we might finally be on our way to showing that the simple-minded search for an honest man is not quite as hopeless in our time and place as the cynics say it is.

[9] Montaigne, "Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. D. Frame (Stanford, CA, 1958), 244.

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