CHAPTER 8

ANTI-POLITICS OF FAME AND IDENTITY

Don Quixote, Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance on his old nag, resplendent with homemade buckler, pot helmet, makeshift lance, on a chivalrous mission for the fair Dulcinea the farm girl—few can match, let alone outdo, Cervantes’s coruscating satire of the fancies and pretensions of chivalric and feudal honor. Of course, Cervantes was not alone in questioning the nature of romantic love and aristocratic honor, and the force of this general critique has culminated in the view that claims for honor are at least quaint, if not atavistic. That one would duel to defend one’s honor is now considered so strange as to be incomprehensible.¹

We are all now Don Quixotes, according to Peter Berger (1984), who, in “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honour,” argues that the new world is liberated from the charms and mystifications of honor:

Modern man is Don Quixote on his deathbed, denuded of the multicoloured banners that previously enveloped the self and revealed to be nothing but man: “I was mad, but I am now in my senses; I was once Don Quixote of La Mancha, but I am now, as I said before, Alonso Quixoan the Good.” The same self, deprived, or if one prefers, freed from the mystifications of honour is hailed in Falstaff’s “catechism”: Honour is a mere scutcheon. (Berger 1984, 152; footnotes removed)
This new world is in important respects informed by the approach that sought to solve the problem of leaders who were moved by the desire to seek glory and honor. The solution proposed, a form of Hobbesian dispersed leadership that we have discussed above, has been remarkably successful in inaugurating a new politics of peace and prosperity. Yet its very success, evident in all aspects of modern life, reveals with greater clarity the larger implications of such initiatives, especially its unintended effects that reintroduce honor into contemporary politics, albeit in new terms.

In this chapter we examine two of these major unintended consequences—fame and identity politics—to see the challenges they present to modern leaders. Fame is a form of honor uncoupled from excellence or virtue, or, in contemporary terms, “all publicity is good publicity.” Of course, fame was known in classical thought, where it was considered a mercurial, feverish, and contemptable perversion or shadow of true honor. Fame without excellence that gave it weight, measure, and proportion was nothing more than the infinite reflections in a house of mirrors. The contemporary world, by contrast, because of the demystification and democratization of honor, is less censorious of fame. In accommodating fame, however, it has given rise to new leaders such as the celebrity who competes with and challenges modern political leaders.

The second unintended consequence of Hobbes’s dispersed leadership has been “identity politics” that complicates the way leaders and followers understand, communicate, and show respect to each other. The origin of this form of politics can be traced to the political elevation of the individual that is the distinctive feature of dispersed leadership. But this elevation came at the cost of stripping away or denying any inherent worth or dignity to individuals. Consequently, in the various attempts to ennoble individualism, in the form of Kantian “dignity” and “respect,” Hegelian “recognition,” and existentialist “authenticity,” we find an important source of modern identity politics as a new politics of honor. Yet as we will see, each of these attempts repudiated the previous, and did so by resorting to the transpolitical principles to defend individual worth and dignity.

Though fame and identity politics represent opposing trajectories in modern politics, neither has been able to extinguish the other, so that both coexist and, in their confrontations, complicate modern leadership. Indeed, in important respects, they have combined to reinforce certain modern impulses, such as the questioning of excellence, the role of reason in public deliberation, and the importance of leadership, with a common terminus in modern anti-politics.
The modern celebrity is in important respects a creature of Hobbesian dispersed leadership that effaced the classical distinctions between the \textit{politikos} or statesman, \textit{demagogos} or demagogue, and \textit{tyrannos} or tyrant. As we have seen, in classical thought, the statesman was a magnanimous leader with exceptional abilities who eschewed small advantages to perform great public acts for the distinction bestowed by citizens who admired his virtue, excellence, and public service. Hobbes’s hero, on the other hand, appears to be everyone who authorized the founding of the new state. Hobbes questions magnanimity altogether with his suggestion that tyranny is merely a term of personal disapprobation, so that there may be no real or substantive distinction between the tyrant and the statesman. As he observes, “And when the same men shall be displeased with those that have the administration of Democracy, or Aristocracy, they are not to seek for disgraceful names to expresse their anger in; but call readily the one Anarchy, and the other, Oligarchy, or the Tyranny of the Few” (L 699).\footnote{A similar approach questions the motives of anyone who wants to pursue public service or political office. It is a short step from such doubts or suspicions to the contemporary “anti-politician” sentiment that “they’re all alike” and that “all politicians are in it for themselves.”} Such an approach questions the motives of anyone who wants to pursue public service or political office. It is a short step from such doubts or suspicions to the contemporary “anti-politician” sentiment that “they’re all alike” and that “all politicians are in it for themselves.”\footnote{A similar approach questions the motives of anyone who wants to pursue public service or political office. It is a short step from such doubts or suspicions to the contemporary “anti-politician” sentiment that “they’re all alike” and that “all politicians are in it for themselves.”}

Such a reevaluation of the magnanimous is achieved, as we have seen, by reconceiving honor as an “opinion of Power” (L 10, 156). But to the extent that the value of power was determined by the “buyer”—everyone else—rather than the “seller,” one’s power and therefore honor was ever changeable and uncertain. As fluidity or flux characterized power and honor, both were now in effect uncoupled from virtue or excellence, denying the classical distinction between honor as reputation for excellence and fame as mere reputation or being notable for its own sake (as the ambiguous term “notoriety” suggested). The liberation of fame from its bad reputation—because there is no bad publicity—was accompanied by its elevation as perhaps the preeminent source of power. Power as the present means of acquiring future apparent goods was derived from “Natural Power,” such as “eminence of the faculties of body and mind.” More significant was “Instrumental power,” such as “riches, reputation, friends and the secret workings of God, which men call good luck,” and, above all, other individuals who combined were the greatest source of power. “Reputation of power is power,” according to Hobbes, “because it draweth with it the adhaerence of those that need protection” (L 10, 150). Moreover, as an instrumental power, it
"is in this point, like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds" (L 10, 150). But if the worth of someone is his "Price," "a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another," then perceptions, however well founded or ill, are more important than any sense of "true" power. This means all power now had a twofold aspect, specific sources such as natural and instrumental power (faculties of body and mind, as well as power acquired from these such as riches, reputation, and friends), and opinions about these powers. And, to the extent that opinions do not necessarily have to be correct or accurate assessments of power (because there is no "absolute" price), fame now had the potential to be the greatest source of power, albeit of a fleeting or mercurial nature. Fame, how to get, keep, and augment it, was therefore the new game in town.

Fame’s new authority, because of its liberation from shame, was accompanied by a concerted attempt to question and thereby undermine the importance and dignity of politics altogether. Hobbes’s entire project can indeed be described as the most far reaching and ambitious initiative to depoliticize politics. He does so in a number of interrelated and mutually reinforcing ways. Above all, he removes moral debates about the good life from the province of politics. The question of the nature and justice of the regime in classical politics, the perennial struggle between rich, poor, and virtuous diagnosed by Aristotle as the essence of political contests, is now undermined and defused by redefining it as a subsidiary consideration of the size of the executive (one, few, many) (L 19, 239–40). This approach transforms the state into an uncontested locus of authority that is endorsed by all to secure political peace and stability. Consequently, the state can no longer be a forum for contests over the good life; indeed, it is tempting to say that politics is now a matter of administration, a well-oiled machine whose purpose is a technical exercise in ensuring a contented life. Hobbes’s proposal to fix the authority of the state in contract and agreement means, as we will see in our subsequent discussion of patriotism and nationalism, that politics will no longer have any close connection to land, language, ethnos, or history, denying patriotic commitments to defend and sacrifice for one’s country. Finally, Hobbes’s comprehensive attempts to modify, limit, and redefine theology is in effect his endeavor to remove any transcendent aspects from political life. The Leviathan state is a sort of god, and therefore there is no pious or theological foothold outside the state to challenge its sanctity and legitimacy. Taken together, all these initiatives deny politics and political life any specific honor, dignity, or grandeur. When combined with anti-politician sentiments, this approach makes politics questionable, a source
of instability and danger rather than a stage to display human excellence. Such a depreciation and ultimately deprecation of politics is completed by Hobbes's elevation of other contending lives. As Hobbes notes in his famous account of the penury and danger of the state of war, almost all the good things in life derive not from politics but from science, farming, and industry (L. 13, 186). Such a focus on industry accounts for Hobbes's attempt to rehabilitate trade, commerce, and exchange from its traditionally low place. Money and therefore commerce, according to Hobbes, is the “lifeblood” of the Leviathan, allowing him implicitly to elevate it over the martial and political that have historically claimed the apex of all societies. As a result, Hobbes's anti-politician and anti-politics approach becomes the new lodestar for subsequent modern liberalism and constitutionalism. It informs, for example, Montesquieu's teaching on republicanism, and Locke’s endorsement of comfortable self-preservation, and The Federalist Papers’ attempt to channel individual ambition through a constitutional architecture to animate and energize the modern commercial republic.

DODOS AND DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY

The egalitarianism implicit in Hobbes's dispersed leadership was in time reinforced by the increasing political salience and influence of democracy with the result that both combined and transformed the way leaders and leadership were acknowledged and deployed in modern liberal democracies. To see how democracy in particular transformed honor and therefore leadership, it is instructive to turn to Tocqueville, a preeminent theorist of modern democracy. In Democracy in America, Tocqueville (2000) compares honor in feudal and aristocratic Europe, and especially France, with honor in democratic America. Though honor is found in democracies and aristocracies, Tocqueville argues that it “presents another face” in democracies: “Not only are its prescriptions different; we are going to see that they are less numerous and less clear and that one follows its laws more loosely” (Tocqueville 2000, 596). Aristocratic honor is a complete and detailed code in which all was foreseen and ordered in advance; a fixed and always visible rule for human actions. Because it represented particular needs and was felt by fewer people, honor was peculiar and powerful (598). In contrast, in democracies, all citizens are always on the move, and society modifies itself every day and therefore constantly changes its opinions and needs. As a result, “In such country one glimpses the rule of honor; one rarely has the leisure to consider it” (596). Because of such mixture, ranks are confused,
and society, a single mass, can never agree on what is permitted or not in advance. True, there are common opinions, but they never present themselves at the same time, in the same manner and with equal force. “The law of honor exists,” according to Tocqueville, “but it often lacks interpreters” (596). Being ill defined, and therefore imperfectly known, it is difficult to apply firmly and certainly. Public opinion pronounces with hesitation; “sometimes it comes to contradict itself; often it holds itself immobile and lets things be” (597). Though ranks differ in aristocracies, they are fixed, with each person occupying a place he cannot leave. There is no hope not to be seen, and therefore blame or praise is unavoidable. By contrast, in a democratic state all citizens are confused in the same crowd and constantly act on each other, so that public opinion has no hold; its object disappears at each instant and escapes it. Honor will therefore always be less imperious and less pressing there, for honor only acts in public view (598). Thus, Tocqueville’s assessment of honor in democracies in a “single formula”: “it is the dissimilarities and inequalities of man that have created honor; it is weakened insofar as these differences are effaced, and it should disappear with them” (599). Tocqueville therefore suggests that democratic equality is instrumental in destroying the extreme, passionately held, and fundamentally hierarchic notions of aristocratic honor that allowed individuals the means to judge and evaluate each other. The fragmentation in democracies of the common understanding of what is proper for each office and therefore what duties, responsibilities, and manners are required of each person means that what should be praised or blamed, or indeed what is expected, becomes fundamentally uncertain. The consequence of this uncertainty is a residual conception of honor, a weak, confused, and protean expression of democratic praise and blame destined perhaps for oblivion as equality assumes ever-greater influence in democratic life.

Still, democracy does have a conception of honor that has important consequences for modern leaders. Relieved of the ossified codes, rules, and expectations of aristocratic honor, democrats are free to act as they wish, unconstrained by imposed duties and obligations. Democracy therefore allows individuals to be truly themselves, without affectation, pose, or pretense. The democratic dislike of form and formality—the casualness of democracy—is the natural expression of the democratic freedom that is shared equally by all. Because it does not insist on honor and ceremony, it permits, and indeed requires, a certain honesty or authenticity from all citizens. The result is a paradoxical view regarding honor. Honor is acknowledged and considered to be valuable, so that in a democratic spirit it is mandated that all should
share it equally. Yet to share equally something that is valuable only when possessed unequally depreciates its worth. This democratic puzzle has been described as the Dodo principle. In Lewis Carroll’s (1976) *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice and her bird colleagues try to dry themselves after their swim by racing around a lake. After half an hour, when they are quite dry again, the Dodo Bird suddenly calls out,

“The race is over!” and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, “But who has won?” This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, “Everybody has won, and all must have prizes.” (Carroll 1976, Ch. 3)

To require a race and yet to insist everyone is a winner is democracy’s honor dilemma. At its source is the question of whether honor can be uncoupled from excellence. Competition reveals difference in ability and thereby presumably excellence, so that all contests will acclaim participants but inevitably distinguish and thereby honor winners over losers. But the principle of equality denies such distinctions, assuming (at best) that everyone is excellent. Democracies seek to resolve this tension by making all winners. But such a solution, giving predominance to the democratic principle of equality, tends to conceal rather than conclusively resolve the core question, as we can see in all aspects of modern democratic life. It is especially prominent in the major public policy debates that presume or are designed to foster excellence. It also accounts for a curious proliferation of awards and prizes in modern democracies. It is especially important, however, for political leadership in democracies.

MODERN CELEBRITY

The democratic ambiguity regarding honor, valuing it as recognition of excellence yet demanding its equal distribution, reinforced in subtle yet important ways by the anti-politician and anti-politics impulse of dispersed leadership, sustains modern fame. The predominance of fame has influentially shaped the language and concepts for understanding the nature of leadership and the relationship between leaders and followers. As a form of power, it has in effect effaced the possibility of seeing honor as an acknowledgment...
of leadership excellence and sacrifice for the common good. Fame has also
given greater authority to new forms of leadership that vie with modern
political leaders. It has dignified those who are merely “famous,” making
possible the new leader, the “celebrity.” A celebrity is a personification of
fame—someone who is famous for being famous. The celebrity thereby
inverts all aspects of honor as founded on excellence. Though a “star” far
removed from the common public, a celebrity is “popular” and therefore a
close, even familiar and intimate presence in our lives. True, the celebrity
as “A-lister” may lapse into haughtiness and contempt, seemingly returning
to or reviving the pernicious hierarchies modern honor sought to replace.
Yet celebrity is everything feudal honor is not. Its sparkle and fluidity sig-
nal its transient insecurity. And its very precariousness seems generous and
democratic—promising everyone the chance of a place in the sun, even if
briefly. Though seemingly denying excellence, celebrity is more accurately
and generously indifferent to it because its gaze is actually drawn to novelty.
It will therefore be easily bored, celebrating the unusual and distinct rather
than the excellent. It will instantly bestow the promise of international
reputation, and just as quickly relegate one to yesterday’s news. For some
the noise, flux, and blindness to excellence of modern fame is a product
of modern technology fueled and sustained by commercial society and
therefore can be safely consigned and limited to the gossip columns and
entertainment industry where it thrives. Yet the ubiquity and influence of modern celebrities are such that
political leaders now have to compete with individuals who are better known
and often more popular. They therefore have no choice but to accommo-
date celebrities as an unavoidable fact of modern politics. The close links
between Hollywood and Washington are well known, and being a celebrity
has proven to be a political asset, as the careers of Ronald Reagan, Arnold
Schwarzenegger, and Donald Trump attest. But the phenomenon is not
unique to democracies. Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez befriended US
filmmaker Oliver Stone and actor and activist Sean Penn, who celebrated
his achievements, while funding a film factory and production house Ville
de Cine or Cinema City to break the “dictatorship of Hollywood.”
The rise
and influence of the modern celebrity has meant that techniques employed
by them—the principles of marketing—have in effect come to dominate, if
not oust, politics understood as the royal art. Modern product marketing,
including “brand” management and advertising, have increasingly been
adopted as essential for political success. “Messaging,” “signaling,” and var-
ious forms of marketing campaigns in a world of “optics,” “image,” “look,”
“signals,” and “narrative” point to political marketing and the consequent personalization of politics, where individual “brands” become much more powerful, and newsworthy, commodities. Advertising and marketing thereby become the mainstay of political campaigning in modern politics, constituting the bulk of the ever-increasing costs of political campaigns, with its attendant challenges to political transparency, accountability, and risks of political manipulation.

POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Dispersed leadership and democratic egalitarianism have made fame a powerful force in contemporary politics. Yet the distinctive aspects of dispersed leadership that justified fame also provoked attempts to rehabilitate a more substantial notion of individual honor that countered it. As became clear to succeeding thinkers, there was something unattractive in the Hobbesian individual whose honor or worth had no inherent source and absolute value, so that its price was determined by others. This sere conception of the individual that sustained fame therefore prompted a series of initiatives to retrieve human dignity and rehabilitate individual worth. Consequently, different aspects of humanity—the ability to be a lawmaker, the idea of mutual recognition, and even the potential for radical authenticity—became the new foundations for both individualism and modern honor. But an unintended consequence of these attempts was a new form of “identity politics” that political leaders now confronted in addition to the politics of fame. We examine the influential concepts of “autonomy,” “recognition,” and “authenticity” that have come to shape the language of identity politics to see how they sought to repair the diminution of individual honor, dignity, and worth that was the price paid for Hobbes’s defense of the primacy of the individual. In doing so, we see how identity politics presents new rhetorical challenges to modern leadership.

RECOVERING AUTONOMY AND DIGNITY

The increasingly powerful calls to respect and recognize the autonomy and dignity of individuals and groups testify to the primacy and political salience of “identity” in modern politics. Though the question of identity has always been essential and unavoidable in politics, there seems to be something fundamentally different about contemporary identity politics.11 For some,
identity has been too often ignored and is therefore an important and
missing aspect of contemporary politics that needs to be acknowledged to
remedy injustices. Yet for others identity politics poses profound challenges
to the success and commendable achievements of modernity. The specific
concepts of autonomy and dignity, recognition and authenticity have been
influential in contemporary identity politics. To understand their political
salience, especially for leaders who need to persuade their followers, it is
instructive to turn in the first instance to their origin in modernity, where
we find the new conception of the individual. As we have seen, Hobbes's
elevation of the subject comes with the high price of the denial of inherent
honor, dignity, or worth. Confronted with this grim assessment of individual
worth, subsequent thinkers attempted to recover a richer notion of individual
worth. One of the earliest and most influential of these was Kant's restoration
of individual dignity and autonomy. Kant agrees in important respects with
Hobbes's political thought, acknowledging in the Groundwork for the Meta-
physics of Morals that most people are driven by their inclinations to seek
happiness, and to that extent they use each other (and sometimes themselves)
as means to their ends, so that everything has a worth determined by their
exchange price. Yet this undeniably heteronomous, hypothetical world of
necessity could not accommodate Kant's deepest longing confirmed by his
experience that rational beings had a sense of duty and therefore morality
that pointed to a deeper sense of human freedom. “There have always
been philosophers,” according to Kant, who have “ascribed everything to
a more or less refined self-love” (406, 19). Indeed, he says it is impossible
to rely on experience to demonstrate that all actions are not based on self-
love, because motives are based on inner principles that are not seen (407,
19). Yet he found it intolerable to think that rational beings were not free
to be moral. He therefore proposed a specific use of rationality to show
how rational beings are free to choose duty and therefore “good will” over
inclination and happiness. Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative
defends individual “autonomy” to legislate a universal moral law, thereby
confirming the infinite worth and dignity of rational beings who always
treat each other as ends and not means.

Kant in the Groundwork argues that morality requires that we follow
rules or “imperatives” that are “categorical” or “pure,” based on a priori
reasoning, rather than hypothetical reasoning that relies on “anthropology”
or specific circumstances of individuals. There is for Kant only one cat-
egorical imperative, namely, “Act only according to that maxim whereby
you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (421,
30). He then provides in the *Groundwork* three separate representations of the categorical imperative, intended to “bring an idea of reason closer to intuition . . . and thereby closer to feeling” (436, 41). The first is the suggestion that the categorical imperative, because it requires maxims that are to be willed as universal laws, is sufficient as a moral principle. An examination of the subsequent formulation based on humanity as an end in itself shows how Kant implicitly confronts and repudiates Hobbes’s insight into the nature of honor as a measure of power, and the worth of individuals as being determined by their usefulness to others.

The argument based on humanity draws on Kant’s distinction between subjective ends that rest on incentives, and objective ends that depend on motives valid for every rational being. Subjective ends, because they are determined by the character of the individual, are relative and hypothetical, incapable of providing any universal principles. In searching for an objective end that can be a categorical imperative, Kant argues that man and every rational being “exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will” (428, 35). Therefore, unlike objects that have only relative value as means, there are limits on the arbitrary use of rational beings who are ends in themselves and therefore objects of respect. “Persons,” according to Kant, “are therefore, not merely subjective ends, whose existence as an effect of our actions has a value for us; but such beings are objective ends, i.e., exist as ends in themselves” (428, 36). That rational nature exists by itself therefore gives rise to the practical imperative “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means” (429, 36). This principle, which is a “supreme limiting condition of every man’s freedom of action,” is for Kant derived from pure reason and not experience (431, 38). Kant outlines how all previous attempts at discovering the principle of morality failed because obedience to law, to the extent that it is tied to an interest or constraining force, meant that all actions were due to interest (one’s own or another’s) rather than duty. Contrary to these approaches, Kant calls his categorical imperative “the principle of the autonomy of the will, in contrast with every other principle, which I accordingly count under heteronomy” (433, 39). With this concept of “autonomy,” Kant repudiates Hobbes’s core argument that there is no inherent dignity in anyone, or that one’s worth is determined by others.

Kant concedes that there is a fundamental truth to the Hobbesian insight into politics and, importantly, his view of the nature of honor. At the same time, he finds this Hobbesian world intolerable—because it denies...
freedom, morality, and the possibility of immortality. As we have seen, Kant's response is to turn to human reason to determine nonempirical or "pure" insights not only for humans but for all rational beings. This yields the categorical imperative, which demonstrates our autonomy and therefore the infinite dignity and worth of individuals, who should not be treated only as means but as ends. But perhaps what is most telling in Kant's rehabilitation of individual dignity and honor is that it is a "transcendental" claim. Kant concedes that the entire moral edifice of autonomy, of dignity and respect, and its political consequences presuppose or are founded on a notion of two worlds, a phenomenal world of necessity and a noumenal world of freedom whose existence can only be asserted or postulated and not demonstrated. It would therefore seem that Kant's defense of human morality and dignity by means of his conceptualization of autonomy requires a commitment to a world beyond this phenomenal world, a commitment to transcendental freedom that can only be hoped for or desired.

RECOGNITION

Recognition is another key concept used in identity politics. Its theoretical provenance can be traced to seminal formulations of Hegel, who makes recognition central to his thought. Significantly for our discussion, in developing his concept of recognition, Hegel confronted and repudiated important aspects of Kant's moral and ethical thought. We can see this especially in the two different critiques of Kant that justified Hegel's new conception of recognition. The first is a direct challenge to the categorical imperative that founds Kant's conception of an individual autonomy that warrants dignity and respect. The categorical imperative, according to Hegel, if it is to avoid the charge of abstract formalism, needs to consider the "alien" or variable and contingent inclinations that give moral decisions their substance and meaning. The unconditional necessity of acting on moral laws can only amount to a form of preaching if it is not given substance and context by institutional and individual circumstances. Related to this is Hegel's challenge to Kant's epistemological claim that we can only know appearances or the phenomenal world and never the "thing-in-itself" or the noumenal. Hegel rejects such limitation of knowledge as "subjectivism." For Hegel, the individual's perception of the world is not merely a subjectivist construction, as Kant suggested, but is always reciprocal and mutually constitutive of the subject's consciousness. Apperception of objects informs the self-consciousness of the subject and in doing so reveals the complex and
manifold relations between all things. For these moral and epistemological reasons, Hegel replaces Kant’s individualistic Moralität with his concept of Sittlichkeit or “ethical life.”

For Hegel, the rehabilitation of a richer notion of individual honor took the form of recognition. Subjects in seeking to satisfy their desires consume objects, canceling the independence of objects and confirming their inner nullity. Such a process yields short-lived satisfaction and as an expression of individuality does not realize freedom. Consciousness of freedom is only achieved, according to Hegel (1977), when consciousness, in seeking to satisfy desire yet unable to control another consciousness, results in mutual renouncing of coercion and in reciprocal recognition: “Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.”

This is the “Notion of Spirit” according to Hegel, so that “What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I.’”

These insights into self-consciousness are examined in detail in Hegel’s famous discussion of struggle between the lord and bondsman or master and slave in Phenomenology of Spirit (B IV, A, 178–96). Hegel’s recognition therefore acknowledges the truth of the Hobbesian struggle for honor that requires a checking of its violence. Yet with the dialectic of mutual recognition, Hegel answers Hobbes’s denial of honor and Kant’s subjectivist recovery of autonomy and dignity. In doing so, he justifies the comprehensive ethical state that provides the conclusive solution to the need of individuals for dignity while acknowledging the supreme dignity of the state.

AUTHENTICITY

As we have seen, the primacy of the individual in modern thought has resulted in repeated attempts at redefining who or what is an individual. Hobbes’s protean individual whose worth is determined by others is replaced with Kant’s universal rational individual whose autonomy justifies infinite dignity and worth in the noumenal world, who is in turn supplanted by the Hegelian individual whose worth depends on mutual recognition and the ethical state. The final such attempt at redefinition we examine is the authentic individual. Authenticity brings to mind familiar formulations of being “real” or not fake and therefore being true to oneself, sincere, honest, whole, showing integrity. Yet modern authenticity is fundamentally
different from these descriptors precisely because it claims to transcend social and ethical codes. To be authentic is rather to find one’s own way, to be spontaneously creative in devising one’s own self and life. Consequently authenticity is characterized by becoming, self-transcendence, and self-creation. Unlike power, autonomy, and recognition, which can be traced to seminal or unique formulations, the idea of authenticity can be found in a range of thinkers but especially in the writings of the “existentialist” philosophers, who rejected any essentialist or foundational conception of the individual self. Rousseau’s seminal critique of the bourgeois as someone always in contradiction with himself, floating between his inclinations and duties—a “nothing”—inaugurated more radical critiques of modern individualism, especially evident in the writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre.

But the uniqueness of the individual and the impossibility of devising rules or principles for being authentic meant these authors were compelled to understand authenticity through a via negativa, that is, by exploring inauthentic forms of being. Though the Hobbesian subject’s struggles over power appeared to resemble the creativity of authentic individualism, the seemingly limitless deference to power and consequent definition by others made such an individual essentially inauthentic. Similarly, to the extent that Kantian individualism endorsed autonomy, it appeared to approximate self-constitutive authenticity. But at its core, the universalism of the categorical imperative denied essential individual uniqueness and therefore rejected individual authenticity. Finally, though agreeing with Hegel that the honest individuals who deferred to the prevailing Sittlichkeit subjected themselves to self-alienation, they denied that authenticity could be achieved through Hegel’s recognition. Recognition denied authenticity by subjecting creativity and identity to the authority of the “Other.”

Authenticity is therefore the extreme end point or radical conclusion to a trajectory in modernity that seeks to preserve the primacy of the individual while recovering or returning to it the dignity and honor it lost but deserves. It culminates in the seeming apotheosis of the ineluctably sui generis individual who at the same time, and in the spirit of Hume, does not seem to exist as an “I.” Yet it is not simply the opacity of each individual that makes it difficult to recognize when someone is being authentic. More pressing is the way individual authenticity appears ever susceptible to disfigurement by its unavoidable entanglement with others, so that the apparent uniqueness of each seems to defy any moral, institutional, or organizational structures to encourage and sustain it. How can authentic
individuals live in society? Inconclusive answers to these questions mean that, though authenticity is the final articulation of the modern attempt to ennoble the individual, in practice it seems to endorse a tragic view of life where “hell is other people.”

RHETORIC AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Our review of the conceptual provenance of autonomy, recognition, authenticity—those influential ideas of identity politics—reveals important aspects about the theory and practice of contemporary identity politics. Theoretically it shows that at the heart of modern identity politics is a core commitment to the primacy of the individual. In each instance we thus find that, where confronted with a limited conception of the individual, each thinker has sought to repair or renovate its character rather than questioning the primacy of the individual itself. Moreover, as is evident from our discussion above, each such attempt to reconceive individualism to endow it with a richer conception of honor has proven inadequate, vulnerable to a subsequent formulation that has in turn been subjected to critique. This trajectory can also be described as destructive, so that autonomy is a repudiation of power, just as recognition is a rejection of autonomy, and authenticity is a refutation of all previous attempts. The modern attempt to redefine individualism to endow it with honor therefore has not only resulted in contending notions of autonomy, recognition, and authenticity, but each attempt at a more comprehensive formulation has resorted to new metaphysical and epistemological resources to substantiate its critique and insight. Autonomy has required the noumenal world or recognition Spirit, while authenticity has posited a radical existenz. In each such attempt to elevate the individual, there has been a commensurate depreciation of politics so that the move from autonomy to recognition and finally to authenticity has resulted in a radically unique individual whose self-creation seems oblivious to others and to political orders and institutions more generally.

The practical import of these theoretical tensions has been an impoverishment in the language and terms of contemporary political contests and therefore new limitations on both leaders and followers. It is not just the way concepts of power, dignity, recognition, and authenticity are used in contemporary politics interchangeably or in combinations, with seeming disregard or lack of appreciation of their theoretical provenance. After all, political struggles will use and improvise tools as they come to hand. But both in scholarly formulations and practical political deployment, the
interchangeable use of these terms reveals a deeper political problem with modern identity politics: the significant disproportion between the language and theoretical architecture of individualism and the onerous work it has to do to achieve political change and reform. Identity politics seems to be the constricted modern vocabulary and armature we now use to contest much bigger and more complex questions that range from the epistemological and metaphysical attempts in understanding who I am, to the political debates about who is a citizen, to larger questions concerning the character of politics and what it says about our notions of justice. To see the nature of the challenge identity politics presents to contemporary political leaders, consider, for example, the way authenticity redefines the role of persuasive speech in politics. Leadership requires respecting the honor and dignity of followers, especially by persuading them rather than simply ordering and directing, so that persuasion and rhetoric can be seen to be essential aspects of leadership. An investigation into the way authenticity reconceives the role of speaker and audience in public deliberations and how it depreciates the role of reason and judgment in evaluating rhetoric shows how identity politics complicates leadership rhetoric.

The first and most obvious challenge authenticity presents to leadership rhetoric concerns the striking contrast between the privacy of authenticity and the very public nature of persuasive speech. Authenticity, as we saw, seeks sustenance from the individual and the private. In contrast, all rhetoric is by definition public speech and, in seeking to persuade, will necessarily look outside the self, taking its bearing from the interests, hopes, and desires of others. This movement toward seeking and understanding the disposition of others shows how rhetoric unavoidably makes us think of ourselves in terms of others, so that in appealing to the interests of others we confront our neediness. In this way, the very nature of communication triggers once more the pretense of being someone else but in this case aggravating inauthenticity by its public display. Authenticity therefore questions the legitimacy of persuasive speech but especially public speaking, which shows itself as necessarily corrupting by forcing us to please others. There is therefore something profoundly unrhetorical or even anti-rhetorical about authenticity that has its source in its essentially private character. If true individuality requires a move away from the public to the private, then all public acts are essentially inauthentic. One of the most public acts—political or persuasive public speech—is the most revealing example of the public humiliation that society inflicts on individuals by insisting that they show
their weakness and neediness in public displays of begging that all pretend
are noble exercises of public service.

We find a comparable challenge by authenticity to rhetoric when we
shift our focus from speakers to the audience in public deliberations. In
trying to see if the speaker is “authentic,” we start with the presupposition
that each one of us is unique. Yet this uniqueness makes any judgment of
authenticity fraught with difficulty. How do I know you are being “you” if
we are all sui generis and by definition special? To meet this challenge, we
have to at least initially defer to the authenticity of each other; we have to
withhold our inclination to judge and in judging distort or even disfigure
the genuine attempts of others to seek their happiness in the wholeness
of individualism and authenticity. So our suspicion of inauthenticity,
provoked by our insights into the nature of authenticity and the forced
public display of rhetoric, has to be in turn forcefully suppressed by that
very same insight. As modern auditors of public rhetoric, we are therefore
always uneasy, caught between deep suspicion of the speaker, “smelling
the rat” of inauthenticity, while at the same time forcing ourselves into a
sentimental disposition that hopes to suppress such suspicions, insisting on
the individuality and uniqueness of the speaker. This sense of debilitating
disequilibrium, vacillating uneasily between doubt and affirmation, makes
us more open to the “ugly”—the “natural,” the crude, unmanufactured—as
somehow more “real” or authentic than the beautiful (which we suspect has
probably had a “makeover”). It also encourages us to avoid public speakers
and formal occasions of public speaking and rhetoric, seeking solace in the
comforting private that releases the tightened strings of our sentiments and
allows us to relax and “be ourselves.”

The uniqueness inherent in authenticity points to a deeper challenge
to rhetoric. If authenticity is essentially about our sentiments, our dis-
position, and our feelings, then it is more about who we are rather than
what we say. Such a foundation in an ineluctable “being” seems to make
authenticity impervious to reason, justice, and morality, the standards we
commonly deploy in judging rhetoric. It issues in a rhetoric that works
only on our feelings, one that we cannot engage with in terms that tran-
scend the uniqueness of the individual and thereby raise questions of the
common advantage or the common good. Such a rhetoric will likely rely
on symbols, images, and impressions rather than persuasive speech.37 But
because this possibility potentially subverts the larger ambitions of rhetoric,
reducing it at best to self-expression, “performance art,” or even amusement,
what usually happens is that to preserve rhetoric, it is in effect split into
two. Having sundered the question of the character of the speaker from
the merits and plausibility of what is being said, a new twofold rhetoric,
a rhetoric of authenticity and a rhetoric of persuasion and deliberation,
is proffered. The rhetoric of authenticity serves no other purpose than to
demonstrate the authenticity of the speaker, whatever this may be in each
instance, inevitably vulnerable to the contradictory dynamic we have just
observed, seeking to endorse a self-directed, independent, and “real” person
who is at the same time a needy individual seeking my attention, consent,
and permission. In contrast, the truncated rhetoric of deliberation will appeal
to the reason and judgment of the audience and thereby seem to recover
the idea of rhetoric as persuasive speech. Yet in doing so it will expose its
weakness: it will always be unable to answer the question of cui bono or for
whose interest the proposal should be adopted precisely because it has chosen
to leave unattended the rhetoric of authenticity. Consequently, even when
the one part of the new rhetoric proves to be successful, whether it be the
rhetoric of authenticity or deliberation, it will draw attention to its missing
other half and therefore partial character of its ambitions. Bifurcation of
the rhetoric of authenticity and the rhetoric of deliberation proves to be of
limited success in defending or recovering a comprehensive art of rhetoric,
confirming the formidable challenge that authenticity and therefore identity
politics presents to persuasive speech and therefore modern leadership.

BETWEEN FAME AND IDENTITY

The Hobbesian leadership-honor dynamic has allowed us to see with greater
clarity the origins of the two distinctive and influential features of con-
temporary politics—fame and identity politics—that have had far-reaching
implications for leadership. Dispersed leadership appeared to have solved
the problem of honor by instituting a contractual foundation for politics
that presumed a psychology of power and a politics of rational self-interest
and calculation. It has, in fact, reintroduced a new politics of honor in
the form of two apparently opposed trajectories that gravely challenge the
legitimacy and therefore authority of political leaders. Honor as a measure
of power yielded and liberated fame, itself a source of power uncoupled
from excellence. As a result, fame has made possible the modern celebrity,
simulacra of good leaders who vie with them for attention, legitimacy, and
authority. At the same time, and dissatisfied with the ignoble foundations of


this new approach, there have been attempts to repair the deficiencies of the dispersed leadership approach by restoring dignity to individuals. Yet each such attempt at ennoblement has proven to be insufficient, with subsequent and more ambitious initiatives increasingly appealing to transpolitical and metaphysical principles to defend individual worth and dignity. Contests over identity have therefore reinstated honor into politics, albeit on grounds that challenge the ability of leaders to engage reasonably with such claims. The limits on persuasion imposed by claims for authenticity are indicative of the new onerous demands mandated by this approach.

What is remarkable about these two opposed conceptions of modern honor is that, rather than negating each other, fame and identity politics coexist, combining in a volatile mix of a modernity that celebrates both a fugitive fame and a heroic authenticity. Indeed, in certain important respects these contradictory impulses reinforce each other. Both approaches, for example, are consistent in their response to excellence, at best neglecting it or seeing it as unique, specific to each individual, thereby depreciating the role of reason and persuasion in politics. Both also question the role of leaders, the first in equalizing and dispersing it, the second in radically restricting leadership on the basis of identity. Finally, both culminate in an anti-politics, the one by avoiding the dangers of political contestation, the other by seeking human worth in increasingly abstract, metaphysical realms. Combined, both present formidable challenges to contemporary leaders and their followers. Rather than conclusively solving the problem of honor, dispersed leadership in fact reintroduced it in more complex and unstable forms, confronting leaders and their followers with a modern politics that is shifting, murky, and febrile. It would seem that the ambition to solve the problem of bad leaders by removing the spur of honor did not appreciate sufficiently the centrality, resilience, and reach of the passion of honor in the human soul.