

◀ BOOK SYMPOSIUM ▶

Jeffrey Edward Green, *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 296 pp., ISBN: 9780195372649

Jeffrey Green's *The Eyes of the People* (EOP) poses the question of what popular empowerment might mean in twenty-first-century liberal democracies. It diagnoses and takes critical aim at the widespread assumption that popular power must relate to the legislative capacity to determine the laws and norms shaping political life. Whereas leading paradigms of democracy—deliberative, aggregationist, and pluralist models—all equate popular sovereignty with self-legislation, Green argues that it is both possible and desirable to conceive of popular sovereignty in nonrepresentational terms.

Specifically, EOP argues that popular empowerment might involve the conditions under which leaders appear on the public stage and not just familiar, representational aspirations that the government's laws and policies accord with the underlying preferences of an electorate. That is, rather than worry only about the content of what leaders do and say, Green's theory calls for greater attention to the *form* in which political communication is disseminated. Specifically, Green defends the ideal of *candor*, which he defines as the norm that leaders not be in control of the conditions under which they appear on the public stage. According to this definition, press conferences in which leaders extemporaneously field questions are more candid than monologic public relations events, leadership debates where candidates are cross-examined are more candid than prerehearsed stump speeches, and interviews where journalists have the opportunity to aggressively challenge the assertions of leaders are more candid than those in which follow-up questions are not allowed. Although candor overlaps to some degree with more traditional democratic values like publicity and transparency, it is different in at least one key respect: candor is committed first and foremost to regulating the person of the leader, not the information that the leader produces. While one might expect that, *ceteris paribus*, more candor will lead to more plentiful and more accurate information, there are cases when this is not necessarily the case. For example, a contentious leadership debate, where leaders aggressively challenge each other, might be less informative than a more sober and dispassionate questioning from moderators, but it is



precisely the imposition of risk and uncertainty upon leaders that defines the ultimate rationale for candor.

In justifying candor and the novel conceptualization of popular empowerment upon which it rests, Green makes three sets of claims. First, Green argues that his theory is better than existing paradigms in attending to an obvious, if neglected, feature of everyday political life: namely, that most citizens most of the time are spectators of politics, not decision makers. Even if this circumstance is regrettable, since ideally citizens would be actively engaged in authoring the conditions of public life, it is one of *EOP*'s central contentions that citizens' spectatorial relationship to politics is still susceptible to moral analysis: that it is possible to distinguish forms of spectatorship that are more democratic and conducive to popular empowerment than other alternatives. Green defends the ideal of candor, the norm that leaders appear in public under conditions they do not control, as definitive of the morally superior, popular-empowering form of spectatorial experience. Candid public appearances satisfy both the egalitarian interest in having leaders (whose authority is never fully legitimate) endure special burdens as a condition of their empowerment as well as the aesthetic interest in generating public events that are more genuinely eventful and, so, worthy of being watched.

Second, *EOP* makes the case for reconceiving the people, or *demos*, in a democratic society as an ocular being (the mass spectator of political elites) rather than in terms of its traditional formulation as a vocal, legislative being (the bearer of substantive preferences for what laws and policies the government ought to be enacting). While not dismissing the possibility that some individuals and groups might achieve representation through effective political organization, *EOP* continually returns to the patent inaccuracies, needless myopia, and ultimate complacency of imagining the substance of the people as a decisional, intentional, legislative voice. In proposing such an ocular reconceptualization of the people (i.e., as a entity that does not speak but rather watches), *EOP* aims to re-imagine this central democratic notion in terms that would make it more vital, less metaphysical, and better in tune with the lived experiences of ordinary citizens in their everyday lives.

Finally, at the methodological level, *EOP* conceptualizes its key notions of candor and the reinterpretation of the people as an ocular entity as a *recovery* of an older, mostly forgotten or rejected "plebiscitarian" alternative in democratic thought. Through critical engagement with earlier plebiscitarian theorists like Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Joseph Schumpeter – as well as through selective appropriation of like-minded insights from influential protoplebiscitarian thinkers like Shakespeare and Benjamin Constant – *EOP* mines the history of political thought to

offer a novel alternative for conceptualizing popular empowerment in the twenty-first century.

These commitments not only differentiate *EOP* from mainstream perspectives in democratic theory, which assume that the people are empowered only insofar as its voice is represented within the laws and policies of a political system, but they also distinguish Green from other innovators of the idea of popular sovereignty such as Habermas (who imagines popular sovereignty as requiring deliberation), Rancière (who recognizes that any moment of popular sovereignty is only a partial and temporary disruption of the constitutive marginality of ordinary citizenship), and Lefort and Rosanvallon (who conceive of the people as an empty space). What makes Green's account different from this latter group of thinkers is not simply that he is more radical in calling into question the idea of representation, but that he introduces the idea of ocular empowerment as a modality of popular sovereignty. Given the importance of the idea of ocular power to Green's theory, and given that other scholarly receptions of the book over the last five years have not always highlighted this aspect of it, this symposium aims to make ocular power the centerpiece of the discussion. Richard Avramenko's contribution probes the idea of ocular power, critically investigating the mechanics of its formation and maintenance. Lars Tønder challenges the boundaries of Green's conception of ocular power, suggesting that seeing and being seen are not as separable as Green supposes. Green's response then aims to elaborate the project of *EOP* with precisely these questions regarding ocular power foremost in mind.

Hearing with the Gaze: Jeffrey Edward Green's *The Eyes of the People*

Richard Avramenko, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Jeffrey Green's *The Eyes the People* is a fine piece of scholarship. His central argument is that the people, or as he calls them, citizen-spectators, are not powerless because they do not make their political voices heard in their average, everyday lives. The problem is that for 250 years, democratic theorists have "been incapable of conceiving of popular power other than as a vocal force" (64). That is, if people are not making their voices heard, then they are uninvolved – they are not participating in politics. For Green, this is an error. People need not participate (vocally/legislatively) to be involved. In fact, involvement for the majority of Americans is not active, but rather is best described as a "political experience" (50) based on watching or spectating. It is the experience of this "ocular force" (133, 139, 148, 154) that Green analyzes in *EOP*.

One of the more illuminating aspects of this book is Green's method. To analyze experience is, of course, phenomenology, and analyzing human experience in its average everydayness was exactly the task Heidegger proposed and pursued in his *Being and Time*. Whether called phenomenological hermeneutics, the existential analytic, or ontology, Green is to be congratulated for reminding (or even alerting) our discipline of the fruits this method can yield, even when brought to bear on a topic as well-worn as democratic theory. The effort to put forth an "ontology of popular power" (65) that actually comports with the "phenomenology of the democratic experience" (7) or with the "phenomenology of everyday political life" (31) is no easy task and can often fall on deaf ears. We might, as Zarathustra says, have to "first smash their ears, that they may learn to hear with their eyes" (Nietzsche 2005: 15).

The reason Green's effort might fall on deaf ears is the seemingly absurd idea that "the People's *gaze* represents an empowered form of vision" (128). The claim is comparable to a passage in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* in which Augustine says, "the shaft of rays from our eyes, to be sure, is a shaft of light. It can be pulled in when we focus on what is near our eyes and sent forth when we fix on objects at a distance" (Augustine 1982: 38).¹ There is, it seems, for both Augustine and Green, a kind of power that shoots out of the eye onto the object observed. In terms of science, of course, this is absurd. The eye receives light. The eye depends on light. One might even say that the object observed rules the eye. Factually speaking, to claim that the eye, or the people's gaze, has a power of its own is absurd.

Green's method, however, is not factual. Rather than pointing out the risibility of Augustine's claim, Green's approach asks what more can be said about the power of the eye. Take, for example, two statements describing a situation: (1) "The mother is watching her child play with her food," and (2) "The mother is glaring at her child playing with her food." The statements are not merely describing different psychological states on the part of the mother. From a strictly empirical standpoint, there is no difference between the two statements. For the child, however, because of her relationship with her mother, the difference is glaring. The shaft of rays from her mother's eyes – though factually nothing – are meaningful. The power of the mother's glare is not nothing. One *can* speak meaningfully about an "ocular force."

What must be determined is whether one can talk meaningfully about this ocular power in political life, for this is the central claim of Green's book.² For the sake of illustration, let me return to the power of the mother's eye, which, I suppose, we could also call the "stink eye" or the "dirty look". When a mother shoots a look at a child, the child

need not reason through the look. Between looker and looker, there is a precognitive, practical understanding. Nothing is said, and the child understands this nothing-said. Moreover, they are face-to-face. They are in an I-and-thou situation, one-on-one. In the plebiscitary politics Green espouses, a political leader is the looker, the people the looker. Yet the situation is quite different: first, the political situation is not a one-on-one situation; second, it is not clear that the looker in this instance is in a position to be struck by the meaningful gaze, so to speak (and this is certainly so if the leader is on TV); and third, one wonders if its possible for a leader and the people to have a precognitive, practical understanding of one another.

As a description of the position of the looker, *EOP* is very helpful. Green's evocation of candor puts the looker in a position to be struck by ocular power. Leadership debates (182), investigations and trials (187), and presidential press conferences (194) all situate the looker in the ocular firing range. Presumably these are publicly aired so that the leader, perhaps through the blogosphere or opinion polls, can be attuned to what Heidegger calls the "mood" (*Stimmung*) that envelops the looker and looker. If not publicly available, the leader is only confronted by the gaze of other debaters, or the elite of the press corps – which hardly constitute the people. Candor, we might say, lets the "mood assail" (Heidegger 1962: 129). Forced to be candid, the leader must also have a precognitive, practical understanding of her speech and deeds, lest she provoke the "second sight" of the people, as Homer calls it.³

Less clear in *EOP*, however, is how the ocular power of the people manifests. While easy enough to imagine the gaze of a mother making a child shrink back, it is more difficult to envision the ocular power of 300 million people. For the individual, Green hints at the phenomenological power: individuals can discern whether a leader's appearance is meaningful; without candor, no meaning can be espied. Green, however, hints that there is something more to collective ocular power. His ocular model, after all, aspires to elevate the voiceless voice of the people to "a meaningful concept of a collective identity within contemporary political life" (27). And what is this collective identity? For Green, it is the millions of citizens on the sidelines, perhaps watching the evening news, without time, inclination, or perhaps even the capacity to participate in politics in the manner so many democratic theorists demand – town hall debates, public discourse, office holding, and so on. Yet the reader is left wondering how the collective ocular power is kindled? In other words, can we speak meaningfully about the power of the collective gaze?

Let me put this in analogous terms. A person has voice. She can speak, she can vote, she can shout, she can sing. As a singer, she can sing a solo

and make herself heard. But she can also join a choir. The choir is not just 40 voices simultaneously singing. They come together to form something more than 40 soloists. At mass, the choir fills the cathedral with more-than-ness. A good choir does more than merely send vibrations through the air. Thus, in asking whether we can speak meaningfully of the power of the collective gaze, I am asking whether there might be such a thing as a “gaze choir”?⁴ Is there this kind of ocular more-than-ness in *EOP*? In other words, if Joshua and his people can shout down the walls of Jericho, how might the people coalesce such that they can stare down the walls of elite hegemony with their ocular power?

A final related point: even if there is such a thing as a gaze choir, what might happen to the ocular power of the people should one or two voices sing out of tune? The mother’s look, for example, might well lose its power if the father, watching the same child play with her food, looks on approvingly. In other words, if the eye of the people is not similarly directed, what then? If, politically speaking, we turn to the gaze of the people to keep the powers that be in check, what if our gaze, our *opsis*, is out of tune? My fear is that it will become a collective *auto-opsis*, an autopsy.

Seeing and Being Seen: A Response to Jeffrey Edward Green’s *The Eyes of the People*

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The chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception ... , is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity ... *Activity = passivity.*

– Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (emphasis in original)

My aim in this reply is to examine what I take to be the central assumption behind Green’s contribution to contemporary democratic theory – that vision entails a passive mode of power, which typifies “the modern experience of being-ruled” (40). Regardless of whether or not Green is right to say that “vision” has become more important than “voice”, this assumption seems crucial for how we might conceptualize the agency afforded to citizens who, as Green suggests, associate politics with press conferences, presidential inaugurations, and other types of spectatorship. Is Green right to say that these citizens embody a political power that “does not realize itself in terms of active participation” (37)? Or does such an account elide a fundamental aspect of visual perception, namely, that the eye participates in what it sees, engendering a mode of empowerment

that, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in the above epigraph, makes it difficult to distinguish between seeing and being seen, ruling and being ruled?

To get some traction on this issue, let us consider Green's analysis of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, a play that Green sees as foundational for his own argument because it links the "central meaning of plebiscitary democracy" to the "empowerment of the People in its capacity as spectator" (131). The play's attention to plebiscitary power and spectatorship is particularly evident in act 2, where Coriolanus, elected by the Roman Senate to become the next consul, must appear publicly in the "gown of humility" (2.3.41) so as to please the people. If I understand Green right, this sequence of events is uniquely relevant for the ocular model of democracy because it shows how the people, as a spectator, can assert its power passively rather than actively. According to Green, the people's passive power of vision is further expanded in act 3, where Coriolanus is forced to reappear in public in order to recant his statements about the people's mob-like character. As Green sees it, this reappearance confirms the people's role as a passive spectator that "supervises" and "inspects" (134). Moreover, it leads to a situation where the government of Rome can benefit from "the spontaneous and unscripted appeal of a historical individual under conditions of pressure and intensity" (137).

Green is undoubtedly right to highlight the many parallels between this historically informed situation and the one that defines many contemporary Western-style democracies. Still, I wonder whether his interpretation of *Coriolanus* misses how a playwright like Shakespeare might want us to envision the relationship between the leader and the people, something that in turn may change how we conceptualize the power of vision, creating a more active mode of empowerment than the one suggested by Green himself. To see how this might be the case, we need to shift our analytical gaze from the actions of Coriolanus and the people to the conditions that enable both of them to act in the first place. In second act of the play, for example, we learn that Coriolanus must appear publicly because he is expected to show, "as is *manner*, his wounds" to the people (2.1.261; emphasis added). Later, in scene 2 of act 2, where Coriolanus expresses his reluctance to follow the usual script of public appearance, two of the tribunes insist that Coriolanus has no other choice than to step forward because the people demands a "jot of *ceremony*," and because all consuls must adhere "to the *custom*" (2.2.166, 168; emphases added). And finally, right before Coriolanus solicits votes from a smaller group of plebeians, the play characterizes the power of the people as a "no power to do," which, as one citizen says, creates the expectation that if Coriolanus indeed shows his wounds, "we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them" (2.3.5–8). This expectation defines much of what fol-

lows in the play: “Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude, of which we, being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members” (2.3.10–13).

“Monstrosity,” “ingratitude,” and putting “our tongues into those wounds and speak for them” – these phrases do not depict a situation in which one entity (“the people”) supervises and inspects another (“the leader”); rather, they point to a multilayered process that empowers both sides of the relationship, crossing the line between “active” and “passive” modes of power. Further evidence of this crossing can be found in the wounds that Coriolanus suffered during the campaign against the Volsian army. Although a modern reader might think that this experience is too private to be shared, this is not the case in Shakespeare’s world, where the wounds play a central role, linking the fate of Coriolanus to the fate of the people, creating the medium needed for each side to “see” and “be seen” by the other. As Shakespeare’s play makes evident, the conditions for this visibility are neither fixed nor transparent: the wounds of Coriolanus are indeed seen, but only from a distance, where they appear through a cloud of frames, customs, and practices of circulation. Even Coriolanus himself is unsure whether the wounds really matter. Thus, when one citizen says “we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them,” we should not read Shakespeare as suggesting a one-directional relationship between an “active” leader and a “passive” people. Rather, it might be better to say that Shakespeare envisions a chiasmic relationship between them, one in which the appearance of the wounds is crucial for both the leader and the people. What matters, you might say, is not who is “active” and who is “passive” but rather how both sides belong to and feed off a multilayered process that allows each of them to shine forth more powerfully than before, making them concurrently active *and* passive, seeing *and* being seen, ruler *and* being ruled.

As already indicated, I believe that a particularly good way to approach this confluence of the active and the passive goes through the work of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Augmenting the participatory elements of Green’s ocular model of democracy, foregrounding a framework closer to Shakespeare’s account of the relationship between the leader and the people, Merleau-Ponty’s work is particularly helpful because it allows us to see how the confluence of the active and the passive can open up for new, more participatory modes of democratic engagement.⁵ According to Merleau-Ponty, we can begin to see how this might be the case by noticing three aspects of the relationship between seeing and being seen: (1) seeing and being seen are two aspects of the same spectatorial context, making it impossible to define the power of one without also defining the power of the other; (2) as

aspects of the same spectatorial context, seeing and being seen rely on the visual frames and affective contexts that underpin and sustain the very appearance of a spectacle; and (3) given their shared reliance on the appearance of a spectacle, seeing and being seen are not ontologically separate but instead emerge from a two-way process that allows for a continuous shifting of places, making them two sides of the same coin.⁶ The seer, you might say, is complicit in what is seen. Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in a discussion of a painting by Cezanne, to see the painting is to be “reached” by it and then to resume “the gesture through which it was made” (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 55).

Green’s justification for not attending to this confluence of the active and the passive is empirical and sociological: in an age like ours, one in which the gap between the rulers and the ruled is greater than ever, ordinary citizens are reduced to spectators rather than participants. This observation is obviously relevant and should be part of any theory of democracy that wants to honor the facts of contemporary politics. But I still worry that the way Green posits a sharp distinction between “active” and “passive” tilts the analysis toward a limited, even uncritical account of the “eyes of the people.” Given what we already have seen, this worry is twofold. Most obvious is how Green’s attention to the visibly seen misses the importance of framing and circulation, precluding an account of how the people’s alleged passivity hides a degree of active participation that makes it more entangled with the political leadership than it may seem at first. As Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* reminds us, there may indeed be times when the people desires to be passive, demanding a “jolt of ceremony” that will put it in the position of a mob-like spectator. But equally important is the opposite possibility anticipated by Merleau-Ponty in particular – namely, that the people’s entanglement with the political leadership endows it with more resources for resistance and reframing than acknowledged by Green’s analysis of late modern democracies. In less overt ways, this possibility also follows from Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, which stresses the need for the people to touch the wounds of its leaders before they can appear as legitimate and powerful. It may be that this touching has been covered up by the operations of a late modern media machine that makes all aspects of democratic politics seem smooth and efficient. Still, if Shakespeare is right, and if the people and the leadership are intimately entangled with each other, then the question is not whether but how to mobilize the entanglement in a more democratic manner than heretofore. To put it in the terms of *Coriolanus*, how might the people’s touch be framed, mediated, and circulated in a manner that augments rather than limits the continuous interactions between the ruler and the being ruled, the seeing and the being seen?

The argument developed in this reply suggests that to answer this question we must first focus on what Green for the most part leaves untouched, attending to the historical specificity of spectacle formation, focusing on how the availability of frames, media, and modes of circulation change in conjunction with the emergence of new techniques of culture, discourse, and vision. It almost goes without saying that in this context the use of Shakespeare for the purposes of conceptualizing the challenges of contemporary democracy becomes rather limited. Indeed, although Shakespeare's regime of visibility resembles the one that historically has been associated with the camera obscura – an optical device that allows the spectator to simultaneously observe and participate in the power of vision⁷ – the difference between Shakespeare's age and ours is that today the power of vision is depicted and put into motion through a flow of images screened on personal devices such as computers, tablets, and smart phones. Unique to these devices is the ability to chop up images of the visibly seen and then reassemble them in ways that neither track chronological time nor acknowledge the traditional coordinates of perceptual experience, including up and down, left and right, front and back.

Moreover, as examples of twenty-first-century techniques of framing and mediation, the devices suggest that our present-day regime of visibility has shifted from an ideal based on authentic representation and moved toward an ideal based on creative discontinuity. Another way of saying this is that authentic representation no longer is an option given the emergence of new media techniques and their implications for framing, mediation, and circulation. This, in turn, changes the task of critical normative thinking: rather than looking for ways to empower the kind of candid and unscripted events that Green favors, the critical normative task today is to mobilize the power of vision creatively, augmenting and pluralizing the freedom associated with a regime of visibility based on techniques of discontinuity and interruption.

It is in the context of this task that a chiasmic conceptualization of the relationship between seeing and being seen may enable us to unearth new, more participatory possibilities for democratic empowerment. As Davide Panagia recently has argued, new possibilities for active democratic empowerment may indeed rely on the chopping up of images that characterize the current regime of visibility – what Panagia calls “the stochastic serialization of moving images” (2013: 2). Such serialization may not guarantee more democracy (as if one could ever reduce democracy to something measurable), but it does suggest that the power of vision can be mobilized in ways that are neither autonomous in the manner posited

by neo-Kantian democratic theory nor limited to the kind of inspection and supervision that Green suggests as the most realistic alternative. Consider, for example, the spectacles surrounding movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring. Despite differences in local contexts, the spectacles associated with these movements could be read as exploiting contemporary media techniques in order to create counter-images that invite the spectator into the frame as an active participant. Exposing the limits of government is part of this invitation, but so is the desire to exploit the gaps latent in the existing series of images. A ballerina on Wall Street's Charging Bull statue or the carnivalesque celebrations at Tahrir Square in Cairo – these images do more than subject governments to inspection and supervision: they mobilize the power of vision to actively displace the present in favor of a different future.

The recent co-optation of these images by more traditional regimes of politics suggests that the democratizing power of vision is fragile and that more work is needed in order to identify the conditions under which it might contribute to active participation in the government of late modern democracies. Thus, I conclude by noting a fundamental agreement with Green: given the increased importance of visual media in contemporary politics, it is imperative that democratic theorists take up the task of theorizing the power of vision. As I have suggested here, in addition to Green's insights, such a theorization may benefit from an engagement with Merleau-Ponty's account of the relationship between seeing and being seen, supplementing the concern for reactive forms of inspection and supervision with attention to chiasmic terms that cross the divide between active and passive, seeing and being seen, ruling and being ruled.

Reply to Critics

Jeffrey Edward Green, University of Pennsylvania

I am thankful to Richard Avramenko and Lars Tønder for their perceptive and forceful comments. In persuasively drawing attention to areas where *EOP* might have extended the scope of its argumentation and its treatment of other authors, both Avramenko and Tønder suggest potential avenues for further research in the topic of "spectatorship democracy". With regard to their specific challenges to *EOP*, I respond here by answering what I take to be the two key questions stemming from their analyses: What does the collective gaze do that an individual gaze cannot? And does *EOP* fail to sufficiently acknowledge the participatory elements of spectatorship?

What Does the Collective Gaze Do That an Individual Gaze Cannot?

Avramenko asks “how the ocular power of the people manifests” according to the theory of *EOP*. In a felicitous analogy, he notes that if the voice of a person resounds differently when joined to a multiplicity of voices in a choir, it is not clear to him what difference there is between the gaze of a single individual surveying political leaders and the gaze of a multiplicity of eyes (e.g., the millions who might tune in to watch a political debate). Specifically, he writes, “in asking whether we can speak meaningfully of the power of a collective gaze, I am asking whether there might be such a thing as a ‘gaze choir’? Is there this kind of ocular more-than-ness in *EOP*?” In response, it strikes me that what a multiplicity of gazes achieves, more than the surveillance of a single individual, is the production of *moments*, special events that reveal leaders to the public in new, unpredicted, and spontaneous ways and, in so doing, potentially enliven and accelerate the pace of ongoing political happenings – since a multiplicity of gazes generates both the motivation of leaders to perform (i.e., it constructs a public stage) and the capacity to effectively record, transmit, share, and interpret such performances when something important occurs (i.e., it transforms the merely remarkable into the eventful). *EOP* argues that candor, in addition to putting critical pressure on political elites, also has this function of promoting *eventfulness*, and it cites with approval Arendt’s belief in the promise of democracy to “make the extraordinary an ordinary occurrence of everyday life” (1958: 197). Avramenko’s comments persuade me, however, that *EOP* might have profited from more closely allying itself with the existentialist tradition with which his reflections bring the book into conversation. In different yet related ways, existentialists like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Jaspers associate the *Augenblick* (the *moment*, conceived literally in ocular terms as the “blink of the eye”) with the *Einblick* (the insight that arises from such special moments) (see Ward 2008; Avramenko 2009: esp. 213–216).

If for them the *Augenblick* is the occasion for profound insight into eternity and the nature of our being, for *EOP* candid moments produce the much more modest, though still real, insight into truths about leaders – for example, their characters, their strengths and weaknesses, their genuine beliefs about issues of the day – otherwise concealed by politics in its stage-managed, propagandistic form. *EOP* perhaps de-emphasizes too much this revelatory aspect of candor, since it repeatedly stresses defining candor first and foremost in terms of the more measurable, less speculative *institutional* criterion that leaders not be in control of the conditions of their publicity. But the revelatory promise is still a vital aspect

of my account of candor, both because *EOP* shares the Arendtian view that eventfulness is a democratic value and because one should expect candor, even when defined institutionally, to generate rather than hinder the production of revelatory moments in which leaders and their speeches and deeds are brought into a brighter, more penetrating light.⁸

Does The Eyes of the People Fail to Sufficiently Acknowledge the Participatory Elements of Spectatorship?

One of the chief ambitions of *EOP* is to show how spectatorship is not without critical purchase: that there are moral criteria for differentiating an empowered from a disempowered form of looking, and that candor (the norm that leaders appear in public under conditions they do not control) helps to define this difference. Tønder, however, argues that this account of spectatorship is still too passive: it is based on a suspect division between seeing and being seen that fails to recognize chiasmic processes of “framing, mediation, and circulation” whereby those who see might be said to participate actively in constituting what they see. It strikes me that Tønder’s challenge is especially forceful, substantively speaking, if it is taken to mean that some of the critical norms I employ in my conception of candor (e.g., unscriptedness) cannot be defined apart from how specific regimes understand such terms, so that there will be historical variety and the potential for evolution in this regard – and, methodologically speaking, if it is taken to mean that the kind of phenomenological analysis I pursue, as a general matter, could be further developed and enriched, especially in light of Merleau-Ponty’s influential contributions, which I unfortunately did not address in *EOP*.

However, if such points become the basis for denying the basic division between the great many who tend merely to watch politics and the select few who ultimately decide matters of great political importance, I would express concern that this otherwise welcome sophistication regarding the subtleties of visual processes runs the risk of blinding us to the reality of power as a scarce commodity that some possess and others lack. Even Foucault’s effort to move beyond a familiar, commodified conception of power (with his notions of disciplinary power and governmentality) did not lead him to reject the more traditional understanding of power as irrelevant (1977). But when Tønder quotes with seeming approval Merleau-Ponty’s lines – “One no longer knows who speaks and who listens ... *Activity = Passivity*” (1960: 264) – and when he himself refers to how both sides [audience and leader] see and are seen, such that there is a reversibility of seer and seen, ruler and ruled, I worry that, however relevant such reflections on interactive processes might be at the individ-

ual level where subjects encounter objects in their field of vision, they threaten to obscure what to me is the most basic feature of ordinary *political* experience: the experience that others beside oneself possess primary decision-making power. Here it is relevant to point out that as much as *EOP* is about defending a progressive ideal (i.e., candor) for improving the spectatorial nature of mass politics, it also is engaged in taking critical aim at a widespread, long-standing tendency within democratic theory to exaggerate the opportunities for ordinary citizens, whether individually or in their collective capacity, to meaningfully shape the direction of public life. I take Tønder's point that I have overlooked aspects of spectators' potential control over what they see as an argument that may be true in its specifics, but that is potentially objectionable insofar as it suggests a happier, more reciprocal civic life than is capable of existing within the liberal-democratic regime.

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►► NOTES

1. Augustine continues: "When [the ray] is pulled in, it does not altogether stop seeing distant objects, although, of course, it sees them more obscurely than when it focuses its gaze upon them. Nevertheless, the light which is in the eye, according to authoritative opinion, is so slight that without the help of light from outside we should be able to see nothing" (1982: 38).
2. Green's claim is that not only can we talk meaningfully about it, but that we ought to, lest the vocal model continue to predominate, which creates "a danger of overly ambitious civic ideals unintentionally disrespecting the ordinary citizen in real-world democracy" (48).
3. "Stand up, try you your eyes, for mine hold with the second sight" (Homer: 414).
4. One is reminded of the Greek root of choir, *choros*, and the power of the *choros* in Greek tragedy, especially as envisioned by Nietzsche in his *Birth of Tragedy*.
5. Among the many thinkers discussed in *EOP*, Foucault and Sartre are closest to Merleau-Ponty. Like Foucault and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty develops his argument through an engagement with the tradition of phenomenology in which perception (and thus vision) is paramount to the conceptualization of

lived experience. Unlike Foucault and Sartre, however, Merleau-Ponty does not see the power of vision as one-directional or tied exclusively to a form of surveillance, but instead seeks to disclose its incompleteness and complicity with the unseen. For Merleau-Ponty, vision is always already pluralistic, as it discloses the world in this or that way.

6. For elaboration of this reading of Merleau-Ponty, see Tønder (2013: chap. 4).
7. On the camera obscura and its importance for visual culture, see Crary (1990: chap. 3).
8. For example, *EOP* argues that “even though plebiscitary democracy grounds itself on institutional candor (putting leaders in public situations that they do not control) rather than psychological candor (the genuineness of the leader), this privileging ought not be conceived as an indifference to generating genuine moments of self-disclosure from leaders. That is to say, even if psychological candor needs to be subordinated to the much more reliable and discernible standard of institutional candor, it is still legitimate to hope that the provision of the latter will yield the former” (137).

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