

MACHIAVELLI AND HOBBS:
THE FOX AND LION ON AMBITION

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The Fox and Lion on Ambition

by
Philip Brain

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Abstract

Politics has forever been at the very heart of human life, and humans have forever been at the heart of politics. Until the day comes, if indeed it comes, when artificial intelligence and computers govern us, we are compelled to govern ourselves and each other. For however long we seek society, we need some among us who are willing to undertake the tasks of government and to lead. This desire—to rule, to govern, to lead—is ambition. Thus, in the study of politics and political philosophy, when one asks the question, “Who is to rule?” one must also remember to consider “How is this ruler to acquire this power and hold it?” Especially if we are to live in a society in which we choose our leaders and in which we have ourselves the opportunity to seek political office, we must consider what ambition is and in what ways it may be turned to the help of our political community. Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes point to similar and dissimilar perspectives on these questions of ambition.

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Dedicated to Dr. Michael Cusick

*who ignited my interest in nobility and
set me on my path to philosophy*

Preface

This thesis undertakes a consideration of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, with a particular eye toward what these writers have to say in these works about ambition and its place in a political community. I was drawn to this question and these writers' relations to it my Sophomore year. I was struck by how apparently paradoxically similar and dissimilar these writers were in this regard. On the one hand, I found a sad picture in *The Prince* of a world consumed by violent ambition, in which those with a desire to rise to power enacted cruel and terrible suffering on all those around them and their subjects. On the other hand, I found an equally sad picture in *Leviathan* of a world stripped of ambition, devoid of aspiration and human excellence. In each case, the political community seemed depressing and cold but, strangely, due to apparently opposite answers to the same question regarding the role of ambition in politics. While those first impressions of each work are valuable and informative in their own way, I will argue that there is more than meets the eye, not just to these authors' opinions of ambition but also to their own personal ambitions.

Due to my complete lack of any knowledge of Italian, I consulted Harvey Mansfield's translation of *The Prince*, in which he seeks to translate the work literally. On the rare occasion I sought insight into a particular word, I consulted the *Cambridge Italian-English Dictionary*. Of course, no translation was used for *Leviathan*.

My analysis takes each work one at time and proceeds through each semi-chronologically but more thematically. Part One deals with *The Prince*, Part Two with *Leviathan*, and the Conclusion seeks to bring the earlier insights together into a clear comparison of the two

works along several significant points of interest.

Part One begins with Chapter One, in which I consider Machiavelli's definition of ambition. I broaden the exploration of his definition by articulating three apparently different kinds of ambition present in *The Prince* which are important to understand his philosophy. I also consider his treatment of fortune and virtue, which are the two components necessary to come together for the fulfillment of ambitious designs. While this consideration of definitions does set a ground-floor for understanding the meaning of Machiavelli's perspective on ambition, this chapter also poses significant challenges to the impression of Machiavelli as a fervent supporter of the virtue of political ambition. In Chapter Two I consider where ambition belongs in politics, according to Machiavelli. In this consideration, I conclude that there is a present need for ambition, given the state of Italian politics, and that the traditional understanding of Machiavelli's stance on ambition becomes increasingly inadequate here, failing to touch how he suggests the need to subtly constrain and limit and direct ambition toward particular ends. In Chapter Three I seek to strike at the heart of Machiavelli's writing and consider his message not about ambition but to the ambitious reader. I present an argument that the traditional understanding of Machiavelli's message—brutal and cold and calculating—serves the particular purpose of motivating his reader to pursue ambitious designs in politics, as is needed, but also that he simultaneously points out to his reader, if he is willing and able to read closely, that the paths of private and philosophic ambition are safer and the latter more fulfilling.

Part Two begins with Chapter Four, in which I similarly seek to articulate Hobbes's definition of ambition. Here, I continue to a discussion of the subsequent problem of ambition, which raises the question not only of Hobbes's opinion of the purpose of politics but also of life. In short, ambition appears to be a problem to Hobbes because of the risks of instability it creates, which stands in opposition to Hobbes's opinion that the purpose of life and politics is merely stability. In Chapter Five I present Hobbes's solution to this

problem of ambition, his commonwealth, its character, and the path to its realization as a new political order. Given his position on the purpose of politics and life, Hobbes's regime is singular in its focus on the provision of stability, and that means as complete an elimination of ambition from the political community as possible. In Chapter Six I consider Hobbes's own ambition. Hobbes expresses an interest not just in the practical elimination of ambition but in an extermination of ambitious desires from the hearts of men, largely through the writing and teaching of *Leviathan* itself. Strangely, however, he recognizes ambition as a natural quality of human character, and thus his project shifts from insignificantly ambitious to profoundly so, undertaking not just a reformation of the political order but a reformation of the human spirit through his new doctrine.

While this consideration of ambition and its proper role in politics is a timeless one—and particularly so for democracies in which ambition dictates who seeks to lead—it bears particular relevance today. As America reels from the impact of a President who treated politics as a game of personal ambition writ large, we must consider what is ambition and in what ways it may be rendered useful rather than harmful to the political community. This comparison of Machiavelli and Hobbes offers some potential lessons in these regards.

Part I

Machiavelli's *The Prince*

Chapter 1

What is Ambition?

1.1 Ambition Defined

If one is to understand what Machiavelli has to say about ambition, one must first understand how he defines it. The exploration here is cursory and merely foundational, but what deeper exploration follows in sections and chapters below I hope will vindicate it. Machiavelli begins *The Prince* and its Dedicatory Letter by writing, "It is customary most of the time for those who desire to acquire favor with a prince to come to meet him with things they care most for." This would seem to be an ambitious act, the "desire to *acquire* favor with a prince" (emphasis mine).¹ How else is ambition usually understood than the desire to acquire political power? In the following chapter, "How Many Are the Kinds of Principalities and in What Modes They Are Acquired," Machiavelli unsurprisingly discusses some basics about the *acquisition* of different states. "All states...have been and are either republics or principalities," and all of them may be "acquired" by various means.² Thus, once again, acquisition seems to be the goal of ambition. In Chapter IV, Machiavelli credits the loss of Alexander's Persian territories to his successors' "ambition."³ Machiavelli does not make crystal clear what he means by this, but he is likely

¹The Prince, 3.

²The Prince, 5-6.

³The Prince, 17.

referring to the Wars of the Diadochi: power struggles among Alexander's successors.⁴ With each of these appearances of ambition, the end of the desire seems to be some sort of political power, but this is not the only sort of ambition present in *The Prince*.

In Chapter III Machiavelli discusses "Mixed Principalities" which are large states enlarged by additions to the state's political mass, like imperial acquisitions. Many such additions are acquired, Machiavelli seems to think, by men of a city inviting in foreigners to "willingly change their lords in the belief that they will fare better."⁵ The end of this desire of these inviters then seems to be not necessarily political power *per se* but better rule. One might contend that "fare better" is a reference to the inviters' desire to fare better in efforts to throw a foreigner out and become prince as a local liberator, but the Italian *megliorare* carries more of a connotation of merely improving conditions or ameliorating troubles.⁶ Thus, "fare better" seems to mean its most basic sense of living better. This desire to acquire is directed to an end other than the acquisition of political power: in this case, the acquisition of better rule and conditions.

The common thread of these ambitions, however, is simply a desire to acquire—different ambitions aimed at different ends of acquisition. Ambition thus seems to be defined by Machiavelli simply as a desire to acquire. This may seem to some as too simple or broad a definition. After all, one might question, isn't ambition a distinctly political desire? However, one can simply think of it in this way: a political ambition is simply a desire to acquire political power in particular. For those mentioned in Chapter III, the desire to acquire is not particularly directed toward political power but more so simply better rule itself. Thus, there may be many different *types* of ambition, political ambition simply being one among others. Whatever it may be directed toward, Machiavelli also writes in Chapter III, "Truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to

⁴Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, Books XVIII, XIX, XX.

⁵*The Prince*, 7-8.

⁶Cambridge Italian-English Dictionary.

acquire."⁷ It is the *desire to acquire* which is so particularly "natural and ordinary." While ambition could be defined more narrowly, I do not believe that sort of definition would capture fully the sorts of ambition Machiavelli is interested in writing about or the particular character of his own ambition.

Ambition may well be natural, but it is worth noting that Machiavelli writes in Chapter V that in hereditary principalities where the bloodline of the prince is eliminated the people "are used to obeying...and do not know how to live free."⁸ These men therefore will not be able to find a man among them suited for leadership. Thus, Machiavelli seems to suggest that political ambition at least may be suppressible with the fitting regime. He also asserts that this is not an issue in republics, suggesting that *political* ambition is more abundant in such a regime.

In Chapter IX, Machiavelli emphasizes that not only are there many ways to lose an acquisition but many people who will seek to make you lose it. Acquisition then seems to be perpetually tenuous, potentially suggesting to the politically ambitious that perhaps seeking some particular sort of government may make their acquisition a little more reliable. Such acquisitions, he also seems to indicate in this chapter, are more like acquisitions of support than of power. One must constantly dodge the great and appease the people in order to stay in 'power,' possibly signaling to some readers who may be on the fence about political ambition that it is not a life which grants what it promises, even in success.

1.2 The Three Types of Ambition

To enhance this definition of ambition for closer interrogation, I divide ambition into three types: political, private, and philosophical. Political ambition may be the type most

⁷The Prince, 14.

⁸The Prince, 21.

commonly associated with *The Prince*, but the other two are not mere inventions. All three may be found within Machiavelli's writing, and all three are necessary to elucidate in order to understand his perspective on ambition.

Political Ambition

Political ambition is intuitively defined as the desire to acquire political power. It is without doubt the most obvious and common sort of ambition discussed in *The Prince*, but below are some clear references regardless. Political ambition is obviously discussed in the Dedicatory Letter and Chapters I, IV, and IX. In Chapter XVI Machiavelli addresses his reader, "Either you are already a prince or you are on the path to acquiring [empire]," suggesting that the book is at least partially written to those with political ambition.⁹ In Chapter XVIII Machiavelli discusses men who "have known how to get around men's brains with their astuteness; and in the end they have overcome" others.¹⁰ Machiavelli is thus describing not only men with political ambitions but apparently discussing the conflict between them and offering recommendations for how to succeed. Machiavelli continues this in Chapter XIX when he writes that "whenever one does not take away either property or honor from the generality of men, they live content and one has only to combat the ambition of the few which may be checked in many modes and with ease."¹¹ Chapter XXVI is famously written as a direct address to Machiavelli's reader and a call-to-arms for Italian unification. He addresses his readers and urges them to take up this cause, suggesting that victory is certain and glory is without doubt; whoever takes up the cause of Italian unity—perhaps you, the reader—will be met with universal and fanatical support.

⁹The Prince, 64.

¹⁰The Prince, 69.

¹¹The Prince, 72.

Private Ambition

Private ambition is the desire to acquire private gain, namely wealth. This ambition is complicated, however, by its attendant desire for security—in order to be able to embark on such commercial efforts as are necessary—and certain guarantees that even under conditions of general peace and security whatever one earns one will keep and be able to dispense with as one pleases. This is a less obvious ambition in *The Prince*, but it is present here and there. In Chapter III one might see a hint in the direction of private ambition with those who desire not to acquire political power but simply better rule for themselves. This might be inspired by a number of different maltreatments, but one sees in Chapter XIX—as well as very similar suggestions in Chapter IX—that Machiavelli urges a prince to avoid disturbing or violating the *property* of his people. Many people have no interest in taking your power for themselves; they simply want to be left their own business and property. Later in this chapter Machiavelli writes of the Roman people that they simply "loved quiet."¹² One might question to what degree this stands as an ambition and whether perhaps it is simply a feature of men that they like to possess more things for themselves. However, ambition is the desire to acquire, regardless of the object, and if "men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony," this desire for acquisition is no passive or weak desire but an extremely strong one.¹³ Not only does Machiavelli recommend leaving people and their property alone, but he suggests that a prince ought to encourage his people to pursue private gain and honor those particularly skilled in trades. "He should inspire his citizens to follow their pursuits quietly, in trade and in agriculture and in every other pursuit of men, so that one person does not fear to adorn his possessions for fear that they may be taken from him, and another to open up a trade for fear of taxes."¹⁴ Thus, Machiavelli seems

¹²The Prince, 76.

¹³The Prince, 67.

¹⁴The Prince, 91.

to be recommending to princes not only to leave people alone but to cultivate private ambition in certain ways. While Machiavelli brings *The Prince* to a close with an "Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians," he is not exclusively interested in the politically ambitious in this chapter.¹⁵ Though he does emphasize the potential glory for the prince, he also reiterates just how much good this would do for the Italian people. In doing so, Machiavelli may be addressing the privately ambitious—as well as the politically ambitious—and urging them, who otherwise care little for politics, to consider political change something potentially valuable to them. This does generate a sort of confusion: is private ambition actually private or political? In the end, it seems even those who have no real interest in politics cannot avoid it. Political influence is a necessity even for those of purely private ambitions, and Machiavelli's political recommendations may reflect an indulgence of that necessity.

Philosophic Ambition

A more comprehensive argument for this type of ambition and its presence in *The Prince* will follow, but first it seems necessary to establish a basic foundation for proceeding as I will. It may be intuitive to assume that philosophical ambition is the desire to acquire knowledge both about self and about the world, not unlike Socrates. Though, like private ambition, this is complicated by an attendant desire for security in which one can actually spend time in study, contemplation, and writing. This, at least to some limited extent, ties the intuitive philosophical ambition to politics. This complication of philosophical ambition will be of great importance later.

Machiavelli hints to this inquisitive side of *The Prince* in the Dedicatory Letter, writing, "No greater gift could be made by me than to give you the capacity to understand...all that I have learned."¹⁶ Two important suggestions lie within this comment.

¹⁵The Prince, 101.

¹⁶The Prince, 3.

Firstly, Machiavelli seems to assert that one must possess a certain "capacity" to understand certain things. Even if Machiavelli thinks teaching to be as Socrates muses in the *Symposium*—like pouring wine from one chalice to another—a chalice has a particular capacity by its nature which no amount of instruction may change.¹⁷ Secondly, Machiavelli seems to suggest that greater than the ability to imitate great men is to be able to "understand" and possess knowledge clearly. To have both these ideas laid out in what seems essentially to be Machiavelli's statement of purpose for this book seems to be rather significant and to demand a considerable amount of attention. Some of the later suggestions Machiavelli seems to make toward this understanding of *The Prince* are considerably quieter, though others still are somewhat loud and clear. Throughout the work, Machiavelli pairs fortune and virtue and so attention may be called to instances in which he breaks this pattern and substitutes a new item into either's place in the pair. In Chapter XI he refers to "fortune and wisdom," seemingly suggesting that Machiavelli's definition of virtue may be alternatively understood as wisdom.¹⁸ In Chapter XIII he seems to back up this suggestion by writing, "He who does not recognize evils in a principality is not truly wise, and this is given to a few."¹⁹ This reiterates the association between politics and philosophy or wisdom, though differently than before. Here, it is not that philosophy is *tied up* in politics but that wisdom and correct understanding of the world are especially useful in politics.

In Chapter XV Machiavelli writes that he "departs from the orders of others" and seeks to "go directly to the effectual truth of the thing rather than the imagination of it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth."²⁰ Given Machiavelli's interest in the ancients, it does not seem much of a stretch to recall Plato's *Republic* as perhaps the principal example of the

¹⁷Symposium, 175d.

¹⁸The Prince, 46.

¹⁹The Prince, 57.

²⁰The Prince, 61.

so-called imagined regimes. Thus, Machiavelli is perhaps relating his own project to Plato's, only setting himself apart from him as of a different kind. Machiavelli too may be a sort of philosopher, only a different sort than Plato. Further, as much as Machiavelli may outwardly claim that his work is one dealing with politics simply as they are, without any sort of philosophy or theorizing about them, the work itself contradicts this. Throughout, he urges imitation as the key to success, and yet he himself does not seek to imitate. He seeks instead to depart from the way things have been done and thought of, just as a philosopher, importantly, seeks to question the ordinary understandings of things.

In Chapter XIX Machiavelli makes his exclusive—and thus significant—reference to "philosophy" in his discussion of Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, "Marcus the Philosopher."²¹ "Only Marcus lived and died honorably," Machiavelli writes, giving a description he offers to no other man of whom he writes in *The Prince*. Whatever tentative ideas may be formed about Machiavelli's opinion of the philosophically ambitious life, it is at least hopefully clear by this point that Machiavelli does discuss it to a degree which is worth consideration. Closer attention will be given below about what it is exactly Machiavelli has to say about such men and such a life.

1.3 Fortune and Virtue

To better understand Machiavelli's writing about ambition, we must understand what he writes about those things he deems the two principal contributors to its fulfillment: fortune and virtue. Machiavelli's apparent and commonly accepted position is that fortune and virtue are meaningfully separable and that virtue might enable a mastery of fortune. In Chapter I Machiavelli seems to support the former portion of this understanding, writing that certain types of regimes may be acquired "either by fortune or by

²¹The Prince, 75.

virtue," implying their separability and independence.²² One, it seems, may be virtuous *without* fortune. In Chapter III Machiavelli discusses the foresight of the Romans, which allowed them to address so many issues early enough that they could be kept well under control. "When one recognizes from afar the evils that arise in a state (which is not given but to one who is prudent), they are soon healed."²³ Prudence, therefore, it seems may allow one a certain diagnostic foresight. Prudence may seem a virtue, but Machiavelli seems to frame it as a matter of fortune in a few ways. First, he writes that this foresight is something "given" to certain men. Useful or 'virtuous' as it may be, virtue loses its apparent distinction from fortune if it also includes traits "given" to someone.

In Chapter VI Machiavelli purports to discuss men who gained their power "by their own virtue and not by fortune." He discusses these men—Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus—so that you may better learn to *imitate* them, being "unable...to attain the virtue of those whom you imitate."²⁴ Since Machiavelli refers to his work in the Dedicatory Letter as a "volume" of "the actions of great men," imitation would seem an easy thing to learn from *The Prince*.²⁵ Machiavelli, it may seem, is thus offering to teach the reader virtue to some extent. However, Machiavelli does seem to qualify such imitation as being necessary because men are "unable...to attain" the virtue of these great men, suggesting that there may be some *limit* on different men's virtues. Further, Machiavelli remarks of these men who acquired their states "not by fortune" that "one does not see that they had anything else from fortune than the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased. Without that opportunity their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated."²⁶ It was fortune, then, that provided the opportunity to do just about whatever these men pleased. Of course, virtue may have been necessary to see and seize such opportunities, but, however virtuous they may

²²The Prince, 6.

²³The Prince, 12.

²⁴The Prince, 22.

²⁵The Prince, 3.

²⁶The Prince, 23.

have been, it would have come to naught without the proper opportunities for virtue's display and manifestation. This does not mean that the men were not virtuous or that any other person could have done just as they did, if placed in the same circumstances. Instead, this only means that virtue is not as all-powerful as Machiavelli seems to suggest on the surface. Instead, fortune is a very strong influence on one's success or failure, no matter how virtuous one might be.

In apparent support of the ordinary understanding, that virtue trumps fortune, presented above, Machiavelli in Chapter VII writes that men who acquire their state purely by fortune are destined to lose it by the same, lacking the necessary virtue to know how to hold onto it. However, there are a few clear issues with what he writes in Chapter VII. First of all, he claims that among the princes by fortune are those "who from private individual attained the empire through corrupting the soldiers."²⁷ Machiavelli has certainly read Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* because he mentions it at the end of Chapter XIV—a passage to which we will return—and so Machiavelli must know that this description of the fortunate prince sounds rather a lot like what was "written of Cyrus by Xenophon."²⁸ Though perhaps not a completely private individual, being the heir of Persia, he was a foreigner before the Median army whose loyalty he stole right out from under his uncle by his own corruption of them.²⁹ And yet, Cyrus was among the four princes by virtue just discussed in the previous chapter. This may be another important break for Machiavelli from the ancients like Xenophon, but even if one were to take issue with this argument for Cyrus's not technically being a private individual, surely Septimius Severus—a general but a private individual by any means before his ascension—would fit this description, "corrupting the soldiers." Machiavelli seems to say that Severus is an excellent example of virtue in Chapter XIX, but he based his power in the satisfaction of the soldiers' bloodlust and their support for his march on Rome: an undeniable

²⁷The Prince, 26.

²⁸The Prince, 60.

²⁹Education of Cyrus, Book IV, Chapter 1.

corruption of their sworn obedience to the capital.³⁰ It is not clear how corruption of soldiers resembles fortune, and the multiple contradictions to this description invite some wonder. It could be that fortune is a stand-in for things ordinarily understood as vice which Machiavelli is not yet willing to openly call virtue, as he does later in *The Prince*. However, let us look at Cyrus. That which was called his virtue before was heavily dependent on fortune—real fortune, not this confused stuff. Now, what is called his fortune is really a particular talent and acumen quite necessary to his success, which is also looked down on. Machiavelli thus is not yet willing to call it virtue. Therefore, there is some lack of clarity. Machiavelli seems compelled to call some things virtue and others fortune, each of which may not be quite so.

Returning to Chapter VII, he writes, "Cesare Borgia, called Duke Valentino by the vulgar, acquired his state through the fortune of his father and lost it through the same, notwithstanding the fact that he made use of every deed and did all those things that should be done by a prudent and virtuous man." Therefore, it seems that Cesare—if we are to judge him at all by the nature of his actions—was in every way a virtuous and politically competent man undone by fortune, suggesting a weakness of virtue in the face of misfortune. Machiavelli even proposes that Cesare was so competent in laying "great foundations" that he is worth studying for a new prince, and he passes off the blame for his ultimate failure onto fortune rather than any lack of virtue. "And if his orders did not bring profit to him, it was not his fault, because this arose from an extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune."³¹ Machiavelli goes on to detail Valentino's actions and in doing so seems to show how at each turn he was very much on the right track but never quite successful. Machiavelli lays out four distinct things that Cesare should have done to secure himself: eliminate "all those" troublesome bloodlines, win over the gentlemen of Rome, "make the College of Cardinals as much his as he could," and acquire enough

³⁰The Prince, 78.

³¹The Prince, 26-27.

empire to resist a first attack.

Of these four things he had accomplished three at the death of Alexander; the fourth he almost accomplished. For of the lords he had despoiled he killed as many as he could reach, and very few saved themselves; the Roman gentlemen had been won over to himself; in the College he had a very large party; and as to new acquisition, he had planned to become lord of Tuscany, he already possessed Perugia and Piombino, and he had taken Pisa under his protection.³²

It seems from this, instead, that Cesare had only accomplished one of the four: the winning over of the Roman gentlemen. The empire he planned to acquire but did not yet have. In the College, he may have had a large party, but when it came time to elect a new pope, Machiavelli writes that "though he could not make a pope to suit himself, he could have kept anyone from being pope."³³ This is good, but it is not a commanding control, and Machiavelli only calls his a "large party," not as large as he could possibly make it. The really interesting one is the elimination of troublesome bloodlines. Machiavelli writes that all such bloodlines must be eliminated, and yet Cesare only eliminated all those he possibly could: close but no cigar. The suggestion made above seemed to be that Cesare did everything virtuously and yet came to a bad end due to fortune undoing it all. This instance of failure seems rather to suggest that even if one does everything to the very maximum of one's ability, one may yet come short. It is not that fortune *undid* Cesare who otherwise did everything right. Cesare failed to complete Machiavelli's strange chore list. But, Cesare did work to the correct ends and took them as far as "he could reach." The trouble for Cesare was not an undoing at the last moment by fortune but a fundamental inadequacy of his own virtue. He understood—for the most part

³²The Prince, 31.

³³The Prince, 33.

correctly—the tasks to be undertaken and pursued them as best he could, but he unfortunately lacked the virtue, the wisdom, the ability to carry them as far as they needed to go. It does not need to all be undone by some twist of fate for fortune to rear her head; she may show herself where virtue is lacking, even in the personal deficiencies. In the end, Cesare's most decisive failure seems to have been his allowance of the election of Julius II—a man whom Cesare had wronged in the past—in the belief that Cesare might find forgiveness. This belief in the forgiveness and charity of others is a significant feature of Christian thought, and so, however competent Cesare may have been in so many ways, it was Cesare's latent Christianity and his tethers to ordinary modes and orders that brought his ultimate downfall. This may indicate the necessity for something higher than political action for politics to realize its end, some philosophical break from those Christian ideas which constrained Cesare.

In Chapter XIII Machiavelli returns to discussing the diagnostic skill which was called prudence in Chapter III. He writes, "He who does not recognize evils as they arise in a principality is not truly wise, and this is given to few." For example he offers the Romans who hired the Goths—the chapter being about the trouble with auxiliary soldiers—which weakened Rome and set her on the path to collapse.³⁴ Two interesting things seem to appear here. First, Rome was the pinnacle example of this apparent virtue in Chapter III; "The Romans, seeing inconveniences from afar, always found remedies for them and never allowed them to continue so as to escape a war."³⁵ This seems to suggest a point by Machiavelli that even the most gifted or virtuous of regimes is sure to slow down or trip up. Of course, this is a different Rome than the republic, but that only invites the question of how there came to be a new Rome which supplanted the republic. It too must have tripped up somewhere along the way. Secondly, Machiavelli says that this "wisdom...is given to few," seemingly suggesting both that it is *wisdom* which

³⁴The Prince, 57.

³⁵The Prince, 12.

enables correct or virtuous rule and that *wisdom* is something given rather than earned: a matter of fortune at the very heart of virtue. That said, one can of course more or less fully fulfill one's capacity for wisdom, according to effort and help. It may be that certain capacities are given, but that does not mean one's capacities cannot be more or less fulfilled according to greater or lesser development. Again, though, the value of "wisdom" seems a possible suggestion that extra-political pursuits are needed for politics to fully reach its goals.

Machiavelli returns to Chapter VI's subject, imitation of the great, in Chapters XIV, XVII, and XIX. In Chapter XIV Machiavelli seems to double down on the readily-apparent message of Chapter III: imitate the great. He writes of Scipio that he sought to imitate Cyrus, "and whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation brought him, how much in chastity, affability, humanity, and liberality Scipio conformed to what had been written of Cyrus by Xenophon."³⁶ In other words, it seems Scipio is an imitation success story! Yet, in Chapter XVII he writes, "Such a nature in time would have sullied Scipio's fame and glory if he had continued with it in the empire; but while he lived under the government of the Senate, this damaging quality of his not only was hidden, but made for his glory."³⁷ Once again, Scipio is held up as a success story but this time with an important caveat; it was the fortune of his situation which allowed his success. One might contend that Machiavelli isn't ruling out that in another time perhaps Scipio himself, due to his apparent virtue, would have behaved differently in a different circumstance. However, Machiavelli attributes his behavior to his "nature," seemingly suggesting that it would

³⁶The Prince, 60. There is plenty to be said about whether Xenophon's Cyrus is actually chaste, affable, humane, and liberal and whether Machiavelli believes any of that either, but regardless I think his subsequent comments on Scipio do *enough* to illuminate the problems of this passage. Further, if it is a misunderstanding on Scipio's part, this would only emphasize the need for some greater philosophic knowledge or understanding for the practice of good politics.

³⁷The Prince, 68.

not have changed in different circumstances but only led to failure. Once more this indicates the power of fortune in determining both our natural capacities for virtue and its development. In the story presented by Xenophon, it is very easy to come away with the picture described by Machiavelli, and it may be that Xenophon's writing misled Scipio. However, also present in Xenophon's writing is a very different presentation of Cyrus: one in which he is cold, calculating, and selfish, rather than affable, humane, and liberal. Therefore, Scipio's imitation of Cyrus was not a necessary result of Xenophon's writing but a reflection of Scipio and his tendencies. It may be Scipio's nature or capacity for wisdom or prior education which led him to believe this exoteric presentation of Cyrus, thus bolstering the notion that there are certain base capacities and tendencies which are built upon with education.

Returning to Chapter XIX and the complicated teaching about Severus, Machiavelli warns the reader about imitation of this man. He credits the failures of a number of emperors as due to their attempts to imitate Severus while lacking "as much virtue as would allow them to follow in his footsteps." Instead, he recommends, "take from Severus those parts which are necessary to found his state and from Marcus those which are fitting and glorious to conserve a state which is already established and firm."³⁸ So, Machiavelli seems to say, instead of just imitating one man which so many failed to do, imitate him and also gain the reputation of his apparent antithesis! Machiavelli makes a greater challenge than the one at which many men he writes of failed, and he seems to make it out to be something quite doable, issuing no reminders to the reader about the role of fortune and the needs of the time which change and are rather difficult to divine. It was Severus's especially brutal times which called for his sort of cruelty and militarism. However, it is only Marcus's appearance that Machiavelli advises imitating. How to fill in the gaps of actual political behavior in times which are not as brutal as Severus's is thus unclear, unless of course all times ultimately call for men like Severus. In that case,

³⁸The Prince, 82.

the original dilemma remains: how in the world one is supposed to be as Severus while acquiring the reputation of Marcus? Machiavelli offers little clear help.

Chapters XVIII and XXV go right to the heart of this issue of what sort of virtue is fit for the times. In Chapter XVIII Machiavelli writes that a prince "needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him." Such a tall order might prompt one to inquire how one can have such a spirit which is fit for all times and one. According to some, it may be by reading Machiavelli and following his apparent advice. According to Machiavelli, it seems it is something one must simply *have*. One must "remain with a spirit built so that" one can change as he says.³⁹ One must not *build* one's spirit so that one may adapt, but rather one must *have* a spirit simply *built* in a particular way. It may be that a spirit may be, just as with virtue or wisdom above, built through education or guidance to fulfill its capacity. As to whether such a spirit exists, Chapter XXV may yield some answers. In this chapter Machiavelli declares that no "man [may] be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to this." Instead, if a man "would change his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change," suggesting that it is incredible fortune which may allow a man's character to change with the times. The fortune, in other words, stays the same.⁴⁰ If it is fortune which determines whether a nature may change, it is fortune that determines one's nature, which it seems may be thought of at least as a base capacity. Returning to Machiavelli's seemingly sarcastic discussion of his greatest gift to Lorenzo—granting him the *capacity* to understand what Machiavelli himself has learned—this obviously cannot be done. It is fortune which commands a man's nature. If Lorenzo had the capacity to understand what Machiavelli does, instruction could be made, but no instruction is possible where the chalice is already overfull. If fortune is such a powerful force in an active life like the political one, Machiavelli's emphasis on it

³⁹The Prince, 70.

⁴⁰The Prince, 100.

may point to the possibility or desirability of other sorts of life not so vulnerable to her whims. It may point to some extra-political life or pursuits, in other words.

Earlier in Chapter XXV, Machiavelli notes that when he thinks about the balance between fortune and virtue, he has been in part inclined to the opinion that fortune governs all. "Nonetheless, so that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it *might be true* that fortune is arbiter of half our actions, but also that *she leaves* the other half, or close to it, for us to govern" (emphasis mine).⁴¹ In other words, Machiavelli is offering a concession so as not to question Catholic dogma, and he immediately vacillates repeatedly about it. Thus, Machiavelli has offered a far from convincing closing testimony on behalf of virtue in the face of fortune. Nonetheless, he mounts the rhetorical barricades to declare that fortune may be domesticated by virtuous modes designed to redirect it. He exhorts the reader to channel fortune by virtuous modes: dikes and dams to constrain the river *fortuna*. All that taming of fortune by virtue may yet be possible, despite fortune's determination of one's nature. I do not mean by all of this to suggest that virtue is a sham and there may be no learning of it. Returning to what was noted about the Dedicatory Letter, Machiavelli remarks that "No greater gift could be made by me than to give you the capacity to understand...all that I have learned."⁴² Fortune and one's nature may determine an upper limit—a capacity—and set one down some particular path, but it is not as though one cannot be tutored toward the height of one's limit. Further, maintaining the appearance of all-important virtue may be an incredibly useful rhetorical tool for Machiavelli if he should desire to motivate confident individuals to seek to pursue their lofty goals. It may well be that fortune is domesticable if only to some limited extent—and how that may be done will be discussed in Chapter Two—but it seems by all the testimony above that it is fortune which will determine whether there are those of such a nature and of such opportunities to be capable of such virtue as to do it.

⁴¹The Prince, 98.

⁴²The Prince, 23.

As articulated several times, this does not mean that virtue does not exist. Instead, one's capacities for particular virtues may be a matter of fortune, but one can still make smart or stupid decisions. Virtue matters, but it isn't nearly as malleable as Machiavelli seems to make it out to be on the surface. And fortune is not as easily conquerable as he seems to suggest either. Instead, the political life is extraordinarily vulnerable to the power of fortune. There is a sort of deficiency within political ambition: a desire to control attended by a lack of power. This weakness of the political life in the face of fortune may point to other sorts of lives which may not be so susceptible to it, perhaps like the philosophic life which requires only study and wisdom. One must be fortunate in one's capacities for wisdom and thought, but one must not have the assistance of fortune almost all the time in the outsmarting of many other people out to get you. Political ambition's desire for power and inability to acquire it fully points to a higher end: philosophy, perhaps, if it can deliver.

Chapter 2

Where Does Ambition Belong in Politics?

2.1 The Present Need

The Present State of Italy

To understand Machiavelli's opinion of the place of ambition in politics, one must first understand the political turmoil of Italy in his day and his perception of its roots and its solution. Not only the French but the Spanish too have invaded the peninsula. In the north, Milan is lost to the French, regained, and lost yet again: a turn of events Machiavelli deems truly extraordinary.¹ In the south, Naples is lost to the Spanish and then nearly torn apart by Ferdinand and Louis: as two wild dogs at the leg of some fallen prey. The peninsula finds itself so woefully unprepared to resist—though seemingly well-prepared for conquest—that Louis finds he can conquer by chalk rather than combat, as the Italians marked their homes available for quartering.² Italy, Machiavelli writes, "has been overrun by Charles, taken as booty by Louis, violated by Ferdinand, and insulted by the Swiss."³ This complete failure of defense may be attributed to many

¹The Prince, 9.

²The Prince, 49.

³The Prince, 53.

things, but Machiavelli seems to point to a couple factors in particular. First, he maligns the common Italian political practice of holding cities by fostering parties within them, like the Guelphs and Ghibellines. "I do not believe divisions ever do any good; on the contrary, when the enemy approaches, of necessity divided cities are immediately lost."⁴ Further, not only are Italy's cities divided within themselves but against each other; Venetians rival Milanese, Florentines spar with Pisans, and so on. Apparently singularly, though, Machiavelli writes, "The present ruin of Italy is caused by nothing other than its having relied for a period of many years on mercenary arms."⁵

The Problem of the Church

All these problems, Machiavelli seems to say, are due to Christianity and her church in Rome. For one, she is a disruptive and destabilizing influence on politics. In recent times, as soon as the church began to rise to a level of temporal greatness and drive the Holy Roman Empire from Italy, division soon followed. Think of the Guelph and Ghibelline divisions which so handicapped Italy's unity; this was a partisan divide between support for the church and for the Holy Roman Empire. Machiavelli may attribute to the Venetians the stoking of partisan divides, but it was the church which instigated such disunity. From such division, the independent cities and republics were forced to see to their own defense, but having only "priests and the other citizens [without] knowledge of arms, they began to hire foreigners."⁶ It seems Christianity, through her priests, cultivates an ignorance of arms by teaching that men ought not live by the sword.⁷ There seems a moral imperative within Christianity to turn away from bloodshed, and it is this

⁴The Prince, 84.

⁵The Prince, 49.

⁶The Prince, 52.

⁷The Bible, Matthew 26:52. I find it worth noting here that this passage does not say that those who do not live by the sword will not die by it, but it may be taken to imply such a meaning by its imperative to put away arms. Regardless, Christ's teaching of peace and of turning the other cheek is well-known enough.

which led to Italy's reliance on foreign and mercenary arms which has so completely ruined her. Not only did the church instigate such division and ignorance of arms, but it brought about the invasion of those foreigners who exploit such weaknesses. In order to get men for his son, Pope Alexander VI enabled Louis's invasion of the peninsula by dissolving his marriage.⁸ Once in Italy, his Catholic faith compelled Louis to provide the Vicar of Christ with those soldiers he sought for his son. He then ceded Romagna to Cesare and, perhaps by his Catholic trust and fraternity, Naples to Spain, thus dividing Italy more thoroughly and deepening her wounds. Thus, it is no wonder that Machiavelli criticizes the French allowing the church to come to greatness in politics.⁹ It was the church—and Christianity it seems—which brought about Italy's division, indolence, her invaders, and their particularly destructive behavior. It was the church which deprived Ludovico of Milan against all odds.¹⁰ It was the church that disrupted the apparently well-regulated affairs of Italy under the Romans.¹¹ And it was the church which promoted notions of trust and forgiveness which brought many ills, such as Louis's provision of arms to Cesare.

It may be that the church was so successfully disruptive of Italian politics because it holds a number of distinct political advantages over the other states of Italy. For one, Machiavelli repeatedly harps on the efficacy of colonies as a means of holding influence in disparate regions and the importance of a prince going to live in places should he wish to hold them. The church does precisely this, sending missionaries, priests, bishops, and Cardinals everywhere it has some influence or might desire some. The church also has solid orders truly believed by many men, even princes, and it is after all the continued

⁸The Prince, 27-28.

⁹The Prince, 16.

¹⁰The Prince, 9.

¹¹The Prince, 46.

"persuasion" of orders which enables their effectiveness.¹² Machiavelli even says of "Ecclesiastical Principalities" that "only these principalities are secure and happy."¹³ Though Machiavelli admits them to be a product of God not fit for discourse, he goes on to discuss them anyway, seeming to suggest they are replicable, which is no wonder given the similarities between the Kingdom of God, Rome, and the Turk: foresight, prudence, colonies, and a religious authority vested within rather than without the state.

Beside the church's direct disruptions of Italian politics and regardless of whatever advantages it might possess in politics, Machiavelli seems to believe it has indeed been a very poor influence on the politics of everyone else. For one, Christianity preaches the importance of trust which Machiavelli criticizes harshly in politics. For Liverotto—a man so untrustworthy he tricked and murdered his father and stole his state—it was his trust of Cesare Borgia which lost him his state.¹⁴ Naples and Milan, mentioned above, were lost due to reliance on mercenaries and failure to control the great, both symptoms of trust—obviously misplaced—in either of those parties.¹⁵ Such trust is symptomatic of a trust in God and his church. Christianity also preaches the importance of mercy. But mercy, as the church teaches, would have brought the ruin of a man like Agathocles who used cruelty so well to avoid so many later disorders.¹⁶ Conversely, it is the Catholic Ferdinand who by his religion "cloaked" his "wretched" "act of pious cruelty" which he can never cease pursuing again and again.¹⁷ It may be that this cruelty provided Ferdinand with a great opportunity to distract the nobility and centralize power. However, this cruelty is also endless, offering no opportunity for peace because all are sinners. Christianity invites political behavior—while occasionally clever—which is ultimately impractical. And, it is the Christian teaching of forgiveness which prompts

¹²The Prince, 45, 24.

¹³The Prince, 45.

¹⁴The Prince, 37.

¹⁵The Prince, 96-97.

¹⁶The Prince, 38.

¹⁷The Prince, 88.

Cesare to allow the election of an enemy as pope, "deceiving himself" that "new benefits will make old injuries forgotten."¹⁸

The Value of Political Ambition

In order to address these tremendous problems in Italy which are so deeply rooted both in the role of the church and in Christian teaching more broadly, new modes and orders seem to be necessary in Machiavelli's view. In Chapter VI, new modes and orders seem chiefly to be political organizations and constitutions.¹⁹ However, we saw how the modes and orders of hereditary principalities shape the characters of the men who live in them.²⁰ Thus, these new modes and orders must also reshape men and their beliefs, which is quite important to keeping them in the persuasion of the political forms of the new modes and orders, as Machiavelli describes in Chapter VI.²¹

For one, Italy is clearly in need of new military orders, but there are innumerable areas in need of such reform which will be discussed more later. What is undeniable, Machiavelli seems to believe, is that the introduction of new modes and orders is a path most fraught with danger and challenge. In Chapter VI on the great founders he writes, "It should be considered that nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders."²² Think of Hiero who risked everything and lost a great deal to establish his new orders. It seems one simply must in turn possess significant political ambition to pursue such dangerous paths. Who else would be willing to be like Romulus and murder his brother? Who else would do as Hiero did and kill his compatriots and destroy his "old friendships"?²³ Who else but the rampantly politically ambitious? The introduction of

¹⁸The Prince, 33.

¹⁹The Prince, 24

²⁰The Prince, 6

²¹The Prince, 24

²²The Prince, 23.

²³The Prince, 25.

these new modes and orders Machiavelli seems to think so vital requires men of great political ambition for their introduction.

It was Agathocles after all who, driven by his desire to acquire power, freed Syracuse from the invasion of the Carthaginians. In this story from Chapter VIII one finds a distinct parallel between the story of Syracuse and of the present state of Italy, with Machiavelli wittily using *the* famed invader of the peninsula as a striking analogue to the contemporary French and Spanish. The suggestion thus seems to be that Italy needs a man like Agathocles, a man reviled by nearly all and who achieved his own ends and those of Syracuse, "without faith, without mercy, and without religion." It may be that Agathocles "acquired empire, but not glory" because among Machiavelli's readership, the modes and orders of Agathocles are long dead, and Christian modes dictate politics and "do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men."²⁴ There are, of course, pagans of yore with good reputations in Christian Italy, but these are usually pagans whose behavior seems to contemporary observers to comport with Christian values: men like Scipio, Socrates, and Vergil, to name a few from Dante's work. One can secure a lasting reputation if one can either conform to present modes and orders—if they last—or found new, durable ones. Now Italy is ripe for such a man to introduce new modes and orders. It is destabilized, volatile, and vulnerable: in need of new leaders, new modes, and new orders. In Chapter XXVI—the apparent call to arms of *The Prince*—Machiavelli writes, "It appears to me that so many things are tending to the benefit of a new prince that I do not know what time has ever been more apt for it."²⁵ Now is the time for men of political ambition to bear new modes and orders into Italy.

²⁴The Prince, 35.

²⁵The Prince, 102.

2.2 The Eventual Change

The Problem of Political Ambition

Just as this moment is one ripe for political ambition and the introduction of new modes and orders, it may well be that other times may not only be less ripe for it but that political ambition could prove destructive. After all, political ambition is disruptive and can threaten to undo the modes and orders of a time, just as did the temporal or political ambitions of Alexander VI upset the state of affairs in Italy.²⁶ Machiavelli seems to attribute the collapse of Alexander the Great's empire after his death to nothing other than the "[difficulties] which arose among [his successors] out of their own ambition."²⁷ Additionally in this chapter, Machiavelli notes that many disruptions of order arose in Roman-held France and Spain due to their pseudo-feudal character, but no such disorder was able to stand up to the modes and orders of Machiavelli's much-exalted Rome which slowly subjugated these territories.²⁸ It is to the ambitious great that Machiavelli—in Chapter IX—attributes the greatest dangers of destabilization, because these are the men who seek to wield power over the people and oppress them.²⁹ Others, like the privately ambitious and the people, only want to be ruled well and so are more likely to leave things as they are unless it is actively troublesome for them. In Chapter XIX Machiavelli seems to point to the dangers posed by armies who, by their bloodlust and cruelty, can be turned to upset a political order with the force of their arms—just as Septimius Severus did in Rome.³⁰ It is political ambition which Machiavelli suggests can make a state and new modes and orders, but it is also political ambition which can unmake any and all progress. For Machiavelli, seeking the introduction of some *new* modes and orders, it goes almost without saying that this would imply a desire that such innovations are not

²⁶The Prince, 46.

²⁷The Prince, 17.

²⁸The Prince, 18-19.

²⁹The Prince, Chapter IX.

³⁰The Prince, 76.

immediately upset. Machiavelli's criticism of current or past states of affairs seems repeatedly to be grounded in their instability or in other words their failures to withstand assaults—from within or without—of great political ambition. Fortresses are good when they *work*, in other words. To that end, it seems worth inquiring just what Machiavelli seems to think such proper modes and orders would look like or how they might be brought about.

The Value of Private Ambition

"And truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire," writes Machiavelli in Chapter III.³¹ It is with this that one gets a first glimpse of Machiavelli's proper modes and orders; if ambition cannot be removed and political ambition can pose such a threat, ambition must be accommodated or distracted to other ends than politics for a state of affairs to survive. Private ambition—the *desire to acquire* wealth and broadly to be left alone by political men—then offers an enticing opportunity to distract men of ambition from disrupting political orders. Machiavelli in Chapter XVII warns the prince against interfering with "the property of his citizens and his subjects, and from their women," seeming to suggest that men with property and women are likely to be content and not come against a prince or a political order when they are left to enjoy their peace.³² He makes this teaching clear shortly thereafter in Chapter XIX, writing, "Whenever one does not take away either property or honor from the generality of men, they live content and one has only to combat the ambition of the few."³³ Machiavelli also advises the prince in Chapter XXI to "inspire his citizens to follow their pursuits quietly." Thus, Machiavelli seems to suggest that such private ambitions may be *cultivated* rather intentionally. However, it is also in this passage that Machiavelli seems to encourage

³¹The Prince, 14.

³²The Prince, 67.

³³The Prince, 72.

the prince not only to inspire such men but to appeal to them, to "take account of those communities, meet with them sometimes."³⁴ Opportunities for and the cultivation of private ambition thus not only distracts men from political ambitions but seems to offer some amount of leverage over the politically ambitious. However, this still leaves that humor found "in every city"—the great, the politically ambitious, "the few."³⁵ One may thin its numbers through private ambition and constrain its behavior by the leverage gained by those propertied men, but it does not seem one may eliminate or distract *all* the politically ambitious by this mode.

The Value of Republican Institutions

In Chapter II Machiavelli promises, "I shall leave out reasoning on republics because I have reasoned at length with them another time. I shall address myself only to the principality."³⁶ This is a promise Machiavelli by no means keeps throughout *The Prince*, and it should be marked as notable whenever he does breach his promise to the reader. As to the strength of modes and orders to resist the usurpations of the politically ambitious, Machiavelli in Chapter V seems to offer a rather favorable account of republics. For most of the chapter, he's rather cagey about just what kind of state he is discussing, preferring to use the descriptions of living by "their own laws" or "living free," but by the end of the chapter he seems to refer to them simply as "republics." In order for a prince to "hold them," Machiavelli recommends three methods but then quickly narrows the lineup, saying, "Truly there is no secure mode to possess them other than to ruin them." He writes, "Anyone who becomes patron of a city accustomed to living free and does not destroy it, should expect to be destroyed by it; for it always has a refuge in rebellion the name of liberty and its own ancient orders which are never forgotten." But, if

³⁴The Prince, 91.

³⁵The Prince, 39, 72.

³⁶The Prince, 6.

the prince is bound to be destroyed by this republic unless he destroys it, this would suggest a power latent in republics, suggesting that the ruination itself must be a difficult task. Thus, Machiavelli seems to suggest that the republic possesses comparatively resilient orders in the face of the politically ambitious who might seek new ones. Republics, because they offer broader access to political power, cultivate broader interest in preserving the republic. There are loads of politically ambitious men, because politics is accessible to comparatively loads more people than in rigid oligarchies or monarchies. Even if the many are simply privately ambitious, this ambition is attended, as said above, by particular political interests. By offering these men—who do not principally desire political power—a limited influence in protecting their interests, they are likely to become attached to the republic's preservation. "In republics there is greater life, greater hatred, more desire for revenge; the memory of their ancient liberty does not and cannot let them rest, so that the most secure path is to eliminate them or live in them." One may think this a contradiction with the earlier suggestion that Machiavelli recommends only one mode for secure possession of a republic. However, in this closing remark of the chapter he says only "the most secure path" without any reference to possession or acquisition. For those outside a republic, the durability of her modes and orders may result in an ability to project strength and thus constitute a threat to one's own modes and orders. Thus the elimination of the republic is the "most secure path." For others, simply living in a state of such virtuous modes and orders is most secure.³⁷ It also follows that from such passions to defend the republic, the problem of mercenary and auxiliary arms is less likely to arise; a native army—which Machiavelli seems to prize so highly—is much more likely to bloom. There may too be great political ambition in a city in which political power is so accessible, at least comparatively to other regimes. This political ambition may also inspire a great distrust of and hatred for outsiders which may be a particular cause of the republic's security.

³⁷The Prince, 20-21.

These virtuous modes and orders may be more resistant to the fortunes of politically ambitious men, but Machiavelli also seems to portray republics—on the surface at least—as beneficial for these men. For one, republics seem to offer a regulation of other politically ambitious men. Intuitively, republics are designed to offer political opportunities to the ambitious, thus potentially neutralizing some more destructive behaviors of those who might seek power. Further, in Chapter VI Machiavelli notes that one of the greatest challenges to the introduction of new modes and orders is their long-term survival. "The nature of peoples is variable; and it is easy to persuade them of something but hard to keep them in that persuasion."³⁸ Republics seem to possess orders more able to hold men "in that persuasion" as they never forget their liberty or "ancient orders."³⁹ Therefore, republics offer incentives to many actors—liberty to the people, opportunity to the great—not to seek destruction of the regime.

For the privately ambitious, the benefits of a republic are made quite clear in Chapter V. Such a state provides "liberty" or perhaps promises that one may be simply left alone to a greater degree than in other states. As Machiavelli writes, "the most secure path is to...live in them."⁴⁰ Institutions generally seem to offer a particular benefit to those who seek to be left alone to quietly pursue their interests. In Chapter XIX Machiavelli remarks on one of "well-ordered and governed kingdoms in our times," France. "In it are infinite good institutions on which the liberty and security of the King depend," such as the "parlement and its authority," which grants the great some modicum of authority to both satisfy and keep them in check.⁴¹ However, not only does this satisfy and check the great—the politically ambitious—but the King too, for his "liberty and security" depend on this institution. The French *parlement* may not be an entirely republican institution, but it offers another potential tool for republicanism—institutions—which may keep the

³⁸The Prince, 24.

³⁹The Prince, 21.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹The Prince, 74.

politically ambitious reliant on some other body and hold their ambitions in restraint. It is not as though republics are perfectly tame. Quite the opposite, they are extremely animated within and filled with spirit. "In republics there is greater life, greater hatred, more desire for revenge." What is important is that such passions are directed toward the gratification of the people rather than their abuse. It generates a political culture and behavior which is self-regulating in the pursuit of political power. It is not simply peaceful but extremely ambitious, though regulated and moderated, and this is what makes its suppression so challenging for aspirant individuals.

Chapter 3

What is Machiavelli's Message to the Ambitious?

3.1 To the Politically Ambitious

To the politically ambitious, Machiavelli promises, right on the surface of the text, exactly what these men most desire: political power and how to get it.

Now, this seems an apt point at which to deal with the possible objection that *The Prince* was written directly to Lorenzo de Medici—to whom the Dedicatory Letter is addressed—and so the work cannot be properly understood as a broader address to others besides him. However, when Machiavelli directly addresses Lorenzo in the Dedicatory Letter simply as "you" rather than "your magnificence," he uses the singular and informal Italian pronoun. In Chapter III, he uses this same pronoun again, describing the situation in which "you" may find yourself in the acquisition of a new principality.¹ Later in this chapter, though, he addresses the reader regarding what "you" will find in the text, using the formal or plural version of the pronoun. "I will speak of Louis and not of Charles, as the steps of the former, because he held his possession in Italy longer, may be seen better. And you will see that he did the contrary of the things that should be

¹The Prince, 8.

done to hold a state in a disparate province."² Thus, as Machiavelli directly addresses his reader—or readers, according to possible plurality of this address—regarding the actual teachings to be found in the book, he shifts to a different pronoun than that which he uses to address Lorenzo. This discrepancy seems to suggest that Machiavelli is addressing the teachings of his book to either a larger or at the very least a different audience than Lorenzo. This is perhaps not to be taken as too surprising given the tone Machiavelli takes in the Dedicatory Letter which seems under the surface rather insulting of Lorenzo, suggesting he lacks a capacity to understand what Machiavelli knows and has such venerable and ambiguous "other qualities" besides "fortune" that they need not even be named.³

In his address to the politically ambitious, Machiavelli seeks to *teach* the reader how best to achieve the political ambition of acquiring and holding power. In Chapter VI arises the famous topic of the imitation of great men. This theme recurs throughout *The Prince*, and Machiavelli puts forward for imitation men like Agathocles, Hiero, and the complementary pair of Severus and Marcus. Besides the teaching of imitation, Machiavelli proffers direct advice on the management of the state, relations with inhabitants, methods of acquisition, and more; don't steal from the people, abstain from liberality and mercy which cause great problems, and refrain from building fortresses when such would do you damage rather than help. Do not rely on foreign arms nor mercenaries—he repeats quite frequently—but arm your citizens for these are the only truly reliable arms you may find. He offers criticism of Louis's invasion of Italy and notes the ways it could be done better: useful to anyone else seeking to invade Italy or defend it.

²The Prince, 13.

³The Prince, 3-4. Besides these points, there is plenty of evidence outside *The Prince* that Machiavelli's address to Lorenzo in the Dedicatory Letter may be itself not so serious as he makes it seem. For one, it is often reported that he was tortured at the hands of the Medici family, but for this I have no particular source. More particular to Lorenzo, Machiavelli did write a rather amusing letter to his friend, Luigi Guicciardini—older brother of the famed Francesco—on December 9, 1509. In it, he relates an unfortunate encounter with a prostitute whose smile he likened to "Lorenzo de Medici's, twisted on one side and drooling since she had no teeth to keep the saliva in her mouth," and who was so ugly and repulsive he was prompted to vomit.

This advice is dependent on Machiavelli's apparent endorsement of virtue's ability to conquer fortune and his presentation of politics as a sort of science. The notion that Machiavelli regards his work as scientific rather than theoretical or philosophical is an obvious impression one might gather, particularly from the perhaps very famous opening passage of Chapter XV, "Of Those Things for Which Men And Especially Princes Are Praised or Blamed." He writes, "It remains now to see what the modes and government of a prince should be with subjects and with friends...It has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it." Thus, Machiavelli seems to be suggesting very plainly that he is not interested in political theorizing. He is interested in doing politics as it naturally *is*. He rejects the philosophical question of what 'ought to be,' instead opting for the scientific determination of what 'is.' Thus, he can advise his readers how to play politics correctly according to its nature. Therefore, they *can* be instructed in the virtue of knowing how to do politics. This of course is little different from what political theory essentially is, but Machiavelli has presented it in a way that makes it seem completely neutral, perhaps in order to lower the guard of many readers.

The first component of his message to the politically ambitious is this apparently emphatic endorsement of virtue. In Chapter VIII Machiavelli discusses "Those Who Have Attained a Principality through Crimes," beginning with Agathocles. Agathocles "became king of Syracuse not only from private fortune but from a mean and abject one." Thus, Machiavelli introduces him as a man who cannot be said to have relied on his own good fortune for the acquisition of his power. Instead, he "always kept to a life of crime at every rank of his career; nonetheless his crimes were accompanied with such virtue of spirit and body that when he turned to the military he rose through its ranks to become praetor of Syracuse." He then "decided to become prince and hold with violence and without obligation to anyone else that which had been conceded to him by agreement." He assembled the Senate, then ordered his soldiers to murder all the prominent men of

Syracuse, securing his power. It was by his great virtue that he rose through the ranks of the military and secured his position indefinitely. "Whoever might consider the actions and virtue of this man will see nothing or little that can be attributed to fortune."⁴ Machiavelli seems to promise in the story of Agathocles that no matter how low one's fortune, if one has the virtue one can achieve great things. In Machiavelli's account of Nabis, one finds a similar praise of virtue. In Chapter IX Machiavelli discusses "The Civil Principality" and "Nabis, prince of the Spartans." In the chapter, Machiavelli advises ensuring the support of the people for you against the great, and Nabis, it seems, did just that. He "withstood a siege by all Greece and by one of Rome's most victorious armies, and defended his fatherland and state against them: and when danger supervened it was enough for him to secure himself only against a few, which would not have been enough if he had a hostile people." But those who successfully found on the people, do not merely rely on them passively for support. "But when a prince who founds on the people knows how to command and is a man full of heart, does not get frightened in adversity, does not fail to make other preparations, and with his spirit and his orders keeps the generality of people inspired, he will never find himself deceived by them and he will see he has laid his foundations well."⁵ In other words, by holding the people on his side, Nabis exemplified tremendous virtue. Thus, Machiavelli seems to say that if one has the virtue to keep the people and secure oneself against the great, one can overcome any enemy, even the greatest of Roman armies. Virtue, he seems to promise, allows one to overcome any enemy and any unfortunate upbringing, allows the conquest of fortune itself, with tremendously successful and powerful men as examples to the politically ambitious. Machiavelli thus offers to the confidently politically ambitious a sense of promise and deserving.

The second component of his message is that one cannot achieve power alone, that

⁴The Prince, 34-35.

⁵The Prince, 41.

one needs "friends." At first this may seem a little counter-intuitive as *The Prince* is loaded with overtones of independence and a spirit of do-it-yourself-ism. However, Machiavelli's apparent concept of friends may not be so incompatible with this individualism. In Chapter VI, "Of New Principalities That Are Acquired through One's Own Arms and Virtue," Machiavelli closes with a discussion of independence. One must "examine whether these innovators stand by themselves or depend on others; that is, whether to carry out their deed they must beg or indeed can use force." Given the title of the chapter's reference to "One's Own Arms" and the order of the list, former corresponding to former and latter to latter, it would seem that the one who begs is the one who stands alone, while the one who can use force is the one who depends on others: one's own arms being, in fact, other people. He continues, "In the first case," or that of the beggar, "they always come to ill and never accomplish anything; but when they depend on their own and are able to use force, then it is that they are rarely in peril." One who "depends on one's own" could well be the one who is independent, but it falls again in the latter position of the list, mirroring those who depend on others. Further, the ability to use force would seem to correspond to having one's own arms. Thus, since Machiavelli nowhere seems to suggest that the prince should form a one man army, it seems that one must rely on others in order to acquire force. "From this it arises that all the armed prophets conquered and the unarmed ones were ruined."⁶ Perhaps the most obviously "unarmed prophet" of all would be Christ who did, however, depend on many good friends and disciples. Nabis, our prince of the Spartans, makes a return cameo in Chapter XIX, "Of Avoiding Contempt and Hatred," a chapter broadly about conspiracies and conspirators. The prince, Machiavelli writes, "should have two fears: one within, on account of his subjects; the other without, on account of external powers. From the latter one is defended with good arms and good friends; and if one has good arms one will always have good friends." This latter portion of the statement would seem as though

⁶The Prince, 24.

good arms may make good friends, for the loyalty which makes good friends would be compelled by one's good arms. However, his statement that "one is defended with good arms and good friends" makes the two seem independently helpful to one's defense. It seems then that good arms may themselves be good friends: loyal commanders and soldiers, disciples if you will. "And things inside will always remain steady, if things outside are steady, unless indeed they are disturbed by a conspiracy; and even if things outside are in motion, provided he has lived and ordered as I have said, as long as he does not forsake himself he will always withstand every thrust, as I said Nabis the Spartan did."⁷ Thus, while Machiavelli does seem to impress the importance of reliance on others, this is intertwined with force. Good friends are "one's own." There is not simply a reliance but a sort of ownership and power. The politically ambitious man is not a one man army and must have good friends, but he must make them his own and his own alone. Thus, he recommends reliance on others while emphasizing the independent power in proper reliance. For an example, one might look to Ferdinand, who relied on other noblemen in his campaign of pious cruelty but who, in doing so, actually consolidated his power over those dependencies.

The third component of this message is that institutions may make the most reliable and best of "friends." Returning to the passage from Chapter VI articulated above, Machiavelli continues just after the discussion of armed and unarmed prophets, "For...it is easy to persuade [people] of something, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion. And thus things must be ordered in such a mode that when they no longer believe, one can make them believe by force."⁸ Thus, Machiavelli seems to suggest that one may order a state in such a way that those who do not believe may be compelled by force. However, it is worth reminding here that Christ, armed only with his disciples and *promises*

⁷The Prince, 72.

⁸The Prince, 24

of damnation and salvation, conquered Rome. It is the church, after all, of which Machiavelli says, "They are sustained by orders that have grown old with religion, which have been so powerful and of such a kind that they keep their princes in the state however they proceed and live."⁹ Machiavelli's attack on the church is largely motivated by its political formidability. Yet the attack is also motivated by the church's feebleness in the face of disbelief. Thus, one must not simply rely on those modes and orders which happen to be believed but organize the state and its orders such that men may be compelled to "believe." And if one cannot compel belief in the heart, one may yet be like "Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus," who used their arms to "make their peoples observe their constitutions."¹⁰ One must not only have arms to compel obedience, but systems according to which their application is determined: "constitutions," perhaps. When it comes to enforced observance of the prince's constitution, Machiavelli discusses in Chapter XIX the French *parlement*: not a legislative parliament but simply a law court. Machiavelli places the *parlement* first among those "infinite good institutions on which the liberty and security of the king depend." This institution was conceived to check the "ambition of the powerful and their insolence" and to "secure [the people]," while distancing any decisions from the King's person so as to absolve him of blame. However, Machiavelli refers to the decisions as though they are made according to the King's "favor," suggesting that they are ultimately his own merely handed down by appointed magistrates. Thus, the *parlement* serves as a valuable institution for the enforcement of the prince's vision. "This order could not be better, or more prudent, or a greater cause of the security of the king and the kingdom."¹¹ Thus, when Machiavelli speaks of ordering a state in such a way as to compel observation of the prince's constitution and ensure his security, he is at least in part referring to the institutions of the state; the *parlement* is one such "institution" or "order" which does just that. Thus, Machiavelli seems to promise the prince a way

⁹The Prince, 45.

¹⁰The Prince, 24.

¹¹The Prince, 74.

to circumvent human fickleness with institutions, though one must of course have an institution of arms to ensure their enforcement, should things go awry.

The fourth component of this message is not to make enemies of the privately ambitious or the people for they may make terrible foes. I attach the label of private ambition to "the people," because Machiavelli seems to attach political ambition to the great. In Chapter IX it is the great who desire power to oppress and the people who desire not to be oppressed, simply to be left to their devices. The following is a passage which has been brought forth a number of times above, but I remind the reader of it here. In Chapter XXI Machiavelli urges the prince to "honor those who are excellent in an art" and "inspire his citizens to follow their pursuits quietly," without giving cause to fear arbitrary taxes or violations of property. He should even meet with the guilds of the tradesmen and artisans sometimes, taking account of them and their interests.¹² Not only will such activities bolster the city by increasing its economic weight, but it makes a friend of the people and those who are only so ambitious, when left alone, to chase coin and property rather than political power. It is also important because such men, while not having particular political ambitions, may do great damage to the prince should they come to hate him. Machiavelli endorses the *parlement* in part for its ability to insulate the prince from the potential hatred of the people. It is not simply the great, who desire the prince's job, that the prince must fear but the people too. In Chapter IX he impresses the importance of the support of the people, because "a prince can never secure himself against a hostile people, as they are too many; against the great, he can secure himself, as they are few."¹³ In Chapter XX he reiterates this notion. He writes, "Therefore the best fortress there is, is not to be hated by the people, because although you may have fortresses, if the people hold you in hatred fortresses do not save you; for to peoples who have taken up arms foreigners will never be lacking to come to their aid."¹⁴ Thus, it is

¹²The Prince, 91.

¹³The Prince, 39.

¹⁴The Prince, 87.

not the people precisely that one must fear but the foreign powers their rebellion may invite. However, it is still the people who must be held loyal, for it is their discontent and rebellion which invite the destruction that cannot be stopped. The loyalty of the people thus seems to be of great importance to the prince's security, and Machiavelli has provided advice for how one should behave and order the state to best ensure this, promising a sense of invulnerability to the aspiring prince.

The fifth component of this message is the advice to reject Christianity. When Machiavelli rebuffs the importance of mercy or notes that princes simply cannot observe their faith or promises not to discuss holy men like Moses, and does so anyway, it seems not only to be a criticism of the church or the pope but an attack on Christian values themselves. He endorses men like Cesare Borgia for their virtuous murders of men like Liverotto and Remirro de Orco. Who but an anti-Christian man would dispute the value of mercy and urge men to seek to be feared rather than loved? Further, he seems always to be promoting pre-Christians as models of virtue which appears very un-Christian like Agathocles, Hiero, Marcus and Severus. It seems he is not simply interested in a new politics but a dethroning of Christ, the Prince of Peace, and his values in politics. He is seeking to break the mold of Christian politics with scientific advice of how things simply must be done which completely devalues mercy and keeping the faith. The advice to the prince seems to be that Christianity is simply incompatible with politics and must be abandoned; it gets in the way of good government.

The final component of this message is Machiavelli's exhortation: the "Do it, and you're cool!" component of *The Prince*. While Machiavelli promises a great deal above to the politically ambitious, even on the surface one can see something missing that many politically ambitious men desire. In the story of Agathocles, Machiavelli seems to praise his virtue but also pointedly notes that "one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes

can enable one to acquire empire but not glory."¹⁵ The politically ambitious may well be discouraged by such an account, because it is the fame—the ability to live on through impactful actions and the memories of people—which is power's promise of eternal life. No doubt some only desire power, but many are likely to aspire not just to power but to the fame it offers. Agathocles seems a repudiation of that possibility. However, Machiavelli more than makes up for this in his final exhortation in Chapter XXVI. He writes,

Here may be seen extraordinary things without example, brought about by God: the sea has opened; a cloud has escorted you along the way; the stone has poured forth water; here manna has rained; everything has concurred in your greatness. The remainder you must do yourself. God does not want to do everything, so as not to take free will from us and that part of the glory that falls to us.¹⁶

Thus, Machiavelli has deftly addressed Agathocles's shortcoming most damning of his fame: his being "without religion." Of course, Agathocles was not Christian but pagan, but his actions were also very un-Christian. He is remembered, by those who do remember him at all, as a wicked, cruel, and evil man. But, Machiavelli—by recounting these Old Testament events of the story of Moses—has promised a divine favor to the politically ambitious, the promise that this political effort—along with the intrigues and betrayals and deceits it might require—is ordained by god and sure of glory. In the end, it is religion which secures belief and religion which ordains the just in the eyes of the believer. Machiavelli does discourage obsession with reputation and love throughout *The Prince*, because one must do certain bad things which may tarnish one's popular perception. However, these actions are regarded as bad because of Christianity. Machiavelli, in part by dismissing the legitimacy of the Old Testament (those events being

¹⁵The Prince, 35.

¹⁶The Prince, 103.

"without example"), is promising the prince that this is a new day in which the prince may have the best of both worlds. Those old miracles are irrelevant. The new prince may record them in his own history, legitimizing his actions. By promising the politically ambitious God's favor and divine justice, Machiavelli has beautifully concluded his assurance-laden message to the politically ambitious that despite the dangers and difficulties, all things are possible with virtue and good "friends" including God, even glory in the memories of men. In Chapter XXI Machiavelli seems to offer an example of this promise panning out in Ferdinand's great reputation earned through pious acts of cruelty which granted him the very important appearance of deep Christian conviction.

Machiavelli's project thus appears to involve exhortation and advice to the politically ambitious in the instruction of virtue. From this, these men may take their lessons in virtue, upset the political orders, and throw off the shackles of Christianity and subservience to God, the only remaining power distinct above kings and princes. Machiavelli also seems to promise that in following his advice, such men will be doubly free from any philosophic musings, dealing with politics simply as it is rather than as it ought to be. Now this promise's veneer may be quite thin, and the vulnerability of politics to fortune may shine through to some. However, in promising so, Machiavelli offers a sort of liberation, not only power, but total spiritual, philosophical, and personal independence: power over all, without the dictates of gods or philosophers.

However, Machiavelli's story may leave a lot to be desired, regarding the promise of political ambition. Above, the myriad shortcomings of virtue in the face of fortune, both with regards to character and the unpredictability of politics, were made very clear. Virtue is inadequate to overcome fortune in the realm of politics. From Cesare's religiosity, to the need for wisdom in politics, to Lorenzo's incapacity to understand Machiavelli's guidance, what Machiavelli promises to the politically ambitious demands some amount of philosophic independence from the times. One cannot abandon the Christian mode of seeing and interacting with the world without some ability to think differently,

more ambitiously than to simply accept contemporary mores. The political promises and the political guidance all points to the necessity of philosophic independence, of new thought, of new philosophy. Yes, Machiavelli provides some guidance, but he also reminds his reader in Chapter VI of the limitations of imitation, that it can never truly touch greatness. I explore this very positive promise to the politically ambitious, only to apparently strike it down, because it remains important that Machiavelli does seem to offer so much to the politically ambitious. If Christianity is to be broken with, if Italy is to be revived, if politics is to begin operating more closely to his vision, then men need to be motivated to pursue such opportunities, especially those men who may be ambitious enough to try and not philosophical enough to see Machiavelli's subtle criticism of such simple political ambition. Despite the advice that one should never remain neutral in a dispute, Machiavelli himself admits that there's no way of telling how it might turn out to take one side or the other, that nothing is certain in politics.¹⁷ While some may see that the weaknesses of the promise of politics point instead to philosophy, the apparent promise is likely to be the one taken away by most.

3.2 To the Privately Ambitious

For the reader who may be neither philosophically or politically inclined, Machiavelli seems to offer an endorsement of a third mode of life. Throughout the book—in Chapter IX and XX, for two examples—one sees the priority Machiavelli places on satisfying the people and dodging and taming the great. "I will conclude that for a prince it is necessary to have the people friendly; otherwise he has no remedy against adversity."¹⁸ Without a friendly people, he has no real army. Fortresses may not protect him. In Chapter XIX Machiavelli introduces the satisfaction of the army as a pressing political

¹⁷The Prince, 90.

¹⁸The Prince, 41.

demand for some which dictated their careers, failures, and successes. One might argue that in Chapter XVII he advises—famously—it is better to be feared than loved, and this must be a suggestion to wield power as one may please. However, he yet says that one must also avoid hatred and gives rules which one "must" follow, including abstention from subjects' property and killing only with "suitable justification and manifest cause." There appears to be in Machiavelli's writing about political ambition a sort of puzzle. He appears to promise great power and at times even great love and honor, but he also suggests that to maintain honor and reverence one must be a sort of slave to the people and to realize one's real, independent power one must become offensive to them, putting one's power in jeopardy. Political ambition thus seems to be a trap, promising power but offering servitude to the people. One could be like Ferdinand, masterfully leaping from one distraction to the next, consolidating power, but there are problems even with this. First, all of one's time becomes consumed by avoiding counter-pressure from others whose size as a majority is threatening; it is hardly the sort of *real* power that the politically ambitious crave. Second, to execute this as perfectly as one must, one has to be truly exceptionally skilled. Machiavelli leads his reader on to think that he can do what he likely cannot. And third, Ferdinand's maneuver, as mentioned above, has also created the need for perpetual and unsustainable violence.

Given that I have considered the privately ambitious to broadly be composed of "the people," and given that most of them could not read, how could Machiavelli be addressing them? While what he says of the privately ambitious might be relevant to any of them that might be reading, he need not be writing directly to them. The advantages offered to the privately ambitious are characteristics latent in Machiavelli's advice to those politically ambitious men who might shape the modes and orders of the states, and they are certainly advantages apparent to any wise or seriously inquisitive and educated men who might take up *The Prince*.

The first component of Machiavelli's message regarding the privately ambitious is

his suggestion of the great vulnerability of the prince. For one, we might return to our old friend, Nabis, king of the Spartans, whom Machiavelli praises so highly. He even says in Chapter XIX that "Even if things outside are in motion, provided he has lived and ordered as I have said, as long as he does not forsake himself he will always withstand every thrust, as I said Nabis the Spartan did."¹⁹ And yet, Machiavelli here lies to the reader. Nabis did not "withstand every thrust," unless Machiavelli is making a dark joke about his assassination which may have been a death by stabbing in which he may have withstood many thrusts. Machiavelli must know this is a lie, because Nabis was assassinated as part of an effort in the Aetolian War, a war which Machiavelli discusses in Chapter III. The goal of the book as stated plainly on the surface in the Dedicatory Letter seems to be to help the reader to come to understand all that Machiavelli has learned, but this sleight of hand—this silent contradiction of an important component of Machiavelli's promise to the politically ambitious—indicates dishonesty on Machiavelli's part. Machiavelli seems to have chosen to lie to the careless or misinformed or even politically ambitious—and thus hopeful—reader about the promise of political ambition. This allows him to maintain his promise to and motivation of the politically ambitious on the surface while signaling to others that the prince is not so invulnerable as he may seem. This fiction about Nabis's fate is placed quite notably in Chapter XIX, on conspiracies and conspirators. The tone of the chapter is that as long as you follow his advice, you will be safe, as Nabis was, but, seeing this to be a fiction, another reader may well conclude that conspiracies, assassins, and plots work quite well, even against a prince who has good arms and friends as Nabis did.

This is the second component of this message: that the prince is truly beholden to the people and the privately ambitious men, not the other way around. It is the great who are easily checked by the prince, Machiavelli repeatedly assures, but the people must be feared and kept close. Thus, Machiavelli offers so much advice to the prince

¹⁹The Prince, 72.

regarding the great danger of a hateful people and potential ways of avoiding their ire. He reiterates this in Chapter XVII, urging the prince that if he is to be feared he must avoid cultivating hatred, in principle by abstaining from the property and persons of his subjects.²⁰ It is the hatred of the people which must be avoided, it seems, and Machiavelli quite openly suggests this is due to their great number and ability to generate tremendous unrest. It is an important question, however, why those who are privately ambitious might be interested in upsetting the prince when they may have no political ambition of their own. It is the opportunity a rebellious people offers to foreigners that is truly dangerous. This is sensible, given Machiavelli's frequent emphasis on the necessity of having one's own arms. This army, I think, must be a citizen army, because the only times Machiavelli discusses soldiers as a class apart from the people are in his discussion in Chapter XIX of imperial Rome, which had a professional army, and of mercenaries or foreign arms. Otherwise, it is always a discussion of the people and the great and an emphasis on having one's own army. Thus, it makes sense that a rebellious people would give confidence to an ambitious foreigner, seeing as the prince would be lacking a good deal of his arms. It is not merely that the great invite the foreign invader in but that the great are enabled by the people in such efforts. It is also worth returning to the discussion of foreign invaders in Chapter III. Machiavelli claims those who invite foreigners in do so to *migliorare* or "fare better," which as was discussed, implies a simple improvement of conditions rather than improved odds of political success.²¹ Thus, foreigners are not necessarily invited in by the politically ambitious but perhaps often by the privately ambitious who want not to rule but be ruled better. Given that the invitation of a foreigner would have to come from a man of some substance and influence in a city—for no peasant is writing a Duke—this seems to suggest that it is not only the people that populate the men of private ambition but perhaps also some men

²⁰The Prince, 67.

²¹The Prince, 8.

who would generally be thought to be among the great. It seems then that Machiavelli is suggesting not only the vulnerability of the prince but the considerable leverage held by the privately ambitious—popular or magnificent—in determining his behavior, and now that some men of substance and education may be included in this category, it is possible some men of private ambition may receive Machiavelli's message.

The final component of this message is that such leverage can be converted and made more reliable through institutions. Just as institutions were promised to the prince as a form of protection, they are also depicted as an important tool for those who want only to be ruled well. In Chapter XIX Machiavelli discusses the dependence of the French king on his many institutions, which suggests that institutions may themselves be a point of vulnerability for the prince. If he is dependent on institutions, then he may be weak without their assistance. Thus, if some institutions might be conceived which offer the privately ambitious a say in governance, they may be able to more reliably exercise their leverage and ensure they are left alone by the prince. In Chapter V Machiavelli notes very emphatically just how difficult it is for a prince to come to possess a republic and closes with the recommendation that "the most secure path is to eliminate them or live in them."²² Given the immense difficulty in their conquest, as Machiavelli writes, their elimination must be a very unlikely thing, and to live in a republic seems to promise a pretty reliable security along with the ability of the privately ambitious to exercise influence to acquire better rule without the great personal cost which accompanies rebellion. The point of the influence of privately ambitious men in politics and the recommendation of republican institutions seems to raise a difficult question, "Don't these men then have political ambitions if they seek to dictate the character of their ruler and, by extension, rule themselves?" My answer would be, essentially, yes. Machiavelli's central promise to the privately ambitious is one of political power. It is, though, of a different sort. It is a political ambition to merely be ruled well. There is no presence of glory or

²²The Prince, 21.

fame in Machiavelli's promise to the privately ambitious, only security and privacy.

3.3 To the Philosophically Ambitious

As mentioned at the end of Chapter One, Machiavelli offers an apparently favorable presentation of virtue and the political life, but this only masks the many vulnerabilities of politics to the power of fortune. The political life is deficient in acquiring precisely that which it desires: power. Fortune is simply too powerful to be reliably overcome in politics, but what is needed is a fundamental reorienting of politics which might provide an opportunity to reorient fortune as well. Therefore, Machiavelli leads his reader to wonder what sort of life there may be which could be more complete and promising. The ever-important example of Cesare Borgia may provide a hint in the right direction. It was Cesare's failure to see outside the misguided box of Christianity that brought his ruin: a foolish belief in forgiveness that did him in. Cesare lacked any philosophical ambition to see the world in new ways Machiavelli does have such an ambition. It is not a philosophical ambition like the ancients', because Machiavelli is obsessed with finding a way to order politics to degrees ancient philosophers did not think was possible. To Plato, there could never be perfect political justice, but Machiavelli seems intent on trying to create such a thing. Further, by framing his philosophy as political advice, he further differentiates himself from a writer like Plato by making the political quality of his philosophy very clear, expressing an apparent desire to evangelize his philosophy to reshape politics. In this way, his mission is rather Christlike, but it differs in its temporality. Jesus sought to save souls; Machiavelli seeks to save men. He is trying to provide guidance to better politics which recognizes and indulges the need for sinful and wicked behavior so as to keep peace and order. The success of this mission, Machiavelli seems to think, is less vulnerable to fortune because he has rooted it in a clear-sighted understanding of human nature and desires. Political ambition seeks to supplant other men

and invites all kinds of catastrophe. Machiavelli seeks to accommodate politics to men as they are, no fortune necessary. While the ancients may have seen a political philosophical project like Machiavelli's hopeless, Machiavelli sees in this a greater promise of power and real effect than politics as usual. While the Christians saw his project as evil, Machiavelli sees it as able to finally fill the promises of the church in a way that matters. In the Dedicatory Letter, Machiavelli lays out the metaphor of the painter in which he claims that one can only know the people or the great from the outside; the great can understand the people, while the people can understand the great. However, Machiavelli writes in *The Prince* about both, suggesting that he knows both. Considering this, one can see that Machiavelli positions himself outside of politics, in a way, neither of the great or of the people. And it is this which suggests from the very beginning that Machiavelli's project too might not be *just* political but in some way beyond it, in the realm of philosophy.

On the subject of Machiavelli's opinion of Christianity, his criticism of Christian values is worth interrogating. Machiavelli's criticism seems to be largely directed rather at the church than its values, and he goes about a secularization of some Christian values, while sidestepping the associated theological questions, immanentizing the eschaton. It is the church which has weakened other states in order to protect itself and taught a mode of politics through their priests which has sown discord, violence, and incompetence. Machiavelli's criticism of Christian values, on the other hand, runs shallow. He is critical of caring to be *seen as* liberal because it undermines one's ability to actually be so. "If it is used virtuously and as it should be used, it may not be recognized...In the end it will be necessary, if he wants to maintain a name for liberality, to burden the people extraordinarily, to be rigorous with taxes, and to do all those things that can be done to get money."²³ He is critical of mercy not because he despises kindness but because too often it generates even greater cruelty. "A prince, therefore, so as to keep his subjects

²³The Prince, 63.

united and faithful, should not care about the infamy of cruelty, because with very few examples he will be more merciful than those who for the sake of too much mercy allow disorders to continue, from which come killings or robberies; for these customarily hurt a whole community, but the executions that come from the prince hurt one particular person."²⁴ Mercy, he believes, can only be doled out after some cruelty, but it is not as though cruelty is desirable. It is the cruelty which is merciful, useful insofar as it protects the people from worse sufferings. The prince musn't care too much for seeming Christian, because such a reputation will inevitably be tarnished, but Machiavelli seems to imply that his politics is actually Christian in its roots. Machiavelli seems to believe in many Christian values but wants instead to re-evaluate their application in politics so that they may be better provided. There is no doubt that this is a questioning of Christian values—after all, in Christianity it is no small distinction whether one looks to the ends of an action and ignores its means—but it is not a *fundamental* rejection of those values. Machiavelli's political guidance of getting one's hands dirty, not shying away from the nasty grunt work but facing problems head on, is aimed at providing a better life for the people, as made clear above. That is a secularized Christian preoccupation, saving men but not their souls.

He wants, it seems, to better provide mercy and peace to more people by their abandonment as a definitive rule for the rulers. Like liberality, they may be self-consuming; as one practices them, one becomes less able to practice them further until one is completely run up. Christianity *qua* the Church, then, is the particular problem, because it requires self-defense. It cannot control those states around it and so it must weaken them, by incitement of invasion or teaching of incompetency. Machiavelli thus seeks to supplant the Church in this role of teacher to princes and to do it better, to affect a mode of political order which better provides those things Christianity purports to offer: peace, privacy, mercy, liberality, and so on. His desire is not only to dethrone Christ

²⁴The Prince, 65.

but to usurp his crown as Prince of Peace. Thus, his claim to speak on what 'is' rather than what 'ought' is a dubious one; in attempting to reform politics and undermine Christianity, he is trying to supplant a status quo 'is' with his notion of how politics 'ought' to be conducted. His advice to this end may often be sound, which comports well with what has been said above regarding his desire to give princes and aspirants thereof better tools and strategies for how to navigate politics. Some advice, however, is less than reliable or functionally useless, impossible to follow, and Machiavelli seems to make an effort to provide passages which illuminate this. Regarding fortune and virtue, too, one may see very divergent stories between the surface and close readings. The discrepancies regarding these qualities which go to the heart of Machiavelli's 'teaching' in *The Prince* seem to suggest a quiet criticism of the political life, ordinarily understood.

Machiavelli also considers the general lack of wisdom in politics. He writes that "Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because seeing is given to everyone, touching to few. Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are; and these few dare not oppose the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the state to defend them." If Machiavelli purely means the people by "the many," it is unclear why he would assume that the state would defend them, seeing as he writes so frequently of princes and states who despoiled the many. The many may well break the state in response, as he also suggests frequently, but it is not granted that the many will "have the majesty of the state to defend them" unless, of course, those who head the "majesty of the state" are themselves of the unknowing and ignorant many. This seems to be the most apparent suggestion by writing that these men "have" the state, which itself implies a possession Machiavelli usually reserves for princes who in fact "have" states in the most simple sense. He continues, "So let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by everyone. For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar; the few have a place there when the many have somewhere to lean

on."²⁵ This would seem to suggest that there is no one but the vulgar, but Machiavelli's qualification, "in the world," seems a significant one. However, one may also recall the metaphor of the Dedicatory Letter—regarding mountains and plains, the people and princes—which suggests Machiavelli is of both sorts. Within *The Prince* he writes of the natures of both princes and the people. He is the unique man who stands outside and knows both. Just as Christianity distinguishes between "the world" of the physical and the "ultramundus" of the spiritual or heavenly, Machiavelli seems to be making this distinction in which "the world" is that of simple politics. In it there are only the unwise. Beyond that world there are men like him, the super-political, the philosophical, and it is only these men who can truly know. It may be that another part of what Machiavelli means—looking to the final statement about when the few have a place—is that this is a world populated by regimes in which the many do not "have somewhere to lean on." When one considers what this might be, one could wonder where it is that Machiavelli otherwise uses the language of leaning or perhaps dependence. This is most often used to describe a prince's dependence on some things from arms to institutions. But, while the many may include the prince, the many could not be limited to the prince, and it could be a reference to political institutions which may offer the prince, the great, and the people—the many—all somewhere to lean on. This would suggest that institutions are also useful for philosophers like Machiavelli—men who have an interest to interrogate appearances and beliefs held by the many, even at danger to themselves—for these institutions offer the many somewhere to lean, with which those ignorant may feel safer, less threatened by the wise few who question or reject their views of life. Machiavelli highlights this lack of knowledge among the princes in Chapter XXVI by writing, "everything follows from the weakness at the head," a rather nice double entendre, "because those who know are not obeyed, and each thinks he knows."²⁶ It is not simply the way

²⁵The Prince, 71.

²⁶The Prince, 104.

of things that those who lead do not know the way, but this is a real problem for Italy which has led her into failure and disrepair.

It is this knowledge lacked by princes and the rest of the many, this ability to touch things and people as they are, which Machiavelli seems to value. In the Dedicatory Letter Machiavelli writes that he finds "nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly as the knowledge of the actions of great men," that "no greater gift could be made by me than to give you the capacity to understand...all that I have learned."²⁷ Thus, it is knowledge for which Machiavelli cares, and politics is greatly lacking in this knowledge. In Chapter XIX Machiavelli discusses Marcus Aurelius, "the philosopher," who "lived and died honorably." Other men throughout are said to be deemed honorable, but none are deemed *by* Machiavelli as living and dying honorably. Machiavelli credits this to his fortunate position as inheritor of the Imperium which allowed him a liberty from the whims of the soldiers and the people which plagued other emperors. This unique description and Machiavelli's credit for it seem to suggest that the good life which Marcus lived is one generally at odds with the political life. Marcus was an emperor, sure, but it was by his fortunate exemptions from many of the political life's usual demands that allowed him to live his uniquely honorable life. Machiavelli continues shortly thereafter by returning to what was mentioned in Chapter XV, that a prince is "often forced not to be good" because you must satisfy "that community of which you have need to maintain yourself." This, however, seems not to apply to Marcus who derived his power, Machiavelli suggests, from no such community with any such demands which would require evil. He did not satisfy the people or the soldiers but "kept the one order and the other within its bounds."²⁸ Marcus's political life is thus presented as anomalous: almost a fantastical vision of what some men may think is the promise of political power. And, if Marcus's life is one found to be appealing, it seems

²⁷The Prince, 3.

²⁸The Prince, 76-77.

Machiavelli is suggesting that whatever appeal it may have lies in its dissimilarity to the political life and similarity to the life of the "philosopher," lacking the conditions which make the political life what it is: the evil, the intrigue, the kowtowing to those who allow you your 'power.' It is not the political quality of Marcus's life but the non-political—perhaps the philosophic—which appears to earn Machiavelli's exclusive judgement of it—and his death—as honorable. Further, Marcus ultimately proved a political disaster by breaking the line of five adopted good emperors and allowing Commodus to succeed him, who took a hard left turn and drove the Roman empire into a brick wall. This would seem to suggest that even as Marcus's philosophical pursuit may have been honorable, he was not the manto have in the saddle of imperial power. Philosophers are not the kind of people to rule, at least directly.

And yet, Machiavelli is himself inextricably tied up in politics. It may seem as though it is only simple knowledge of *things* or history that Machiavelli cares for, that his study is purely rational or even almost scientific. As the back cover of the Mansfield Second Edition translation states, "Initially denounced as a collection of sinister maxims and a recommendation of tyranny, [*The Prince*] has more recently been defended as the first scientific treatment of politics as it is practiced rather than it ought to be practiced." In one sense, this could be understood to be the knowledge that the men who command lack. But that doesn't quite follow. If anyone were to know how politics *is* rather than *ought* to be practiced, it would be those who practice it, necessarily. Thus, we return to the normative quality of Machiavelli's project. What Machiavelli is doing with *The Prince* is prescribing new political and moral modes of order for understanding and interacting with the world. These modes and orders are ultimately "persuasions" in which the people must be held.²⁹ Such persuasions are ultimately ways of thinking which guide men's behavior in accordance with the dictates of political institutions, and the process can be trickle-down as with those of the hereditary principality, none of

²⁹The Prince, 24.

whom have any idea of how to or inclination to lead.³⁰ Machiavelli writes on both the natures of princes and of the people; he is the man who can stand outside the metaphor of the dedicatory letter and paint landscapes of the plain and of the great mountains. He is not bound like others are but full of a philosophical wisdom to see men and the world as they are. His political project is undertaken with the belief that he knows these natures of things and wants to create political and social modes and orders more properly adjusted to the nature of human beings which he understands so well. He is neither simply a political man interested in climbing the traditional rungs, nor simply a scientist interested in describing the world as it appears. He seems almost a substitute for the missionary of Christ, offering a worldview as those missionaries do too. His is distinctly disinterested in any sort of afterlife, caring only for the here and now and, perhaps, the condition of the future generations, but certainly not for the immortal soul. Machiavelli offers a way of looking at politics and man that reduces politics to a series of calculations of life and limb. "Can I prevent greater death by killing these men now?" If so, do it. "Can I solidify my power through some cruelty that will protect stability in the future?" If so, do it.

This, I believe, is why Machiavelli pursues this grand political philosophical project rather than work within politics. As he criticizes the emptiness and unreliability of politics' promises, one is right to wonder why he would continue to involve himself in politics. Why would he be confident of success? He believes he has an understanding of human nature as it is; the politics which properly adapts itself to this will come about sooner or later. Machiavelli can only accelerate the pace.

But why? Why would Machiavelli involve himself in politics? Why feel this commitment to improve the world? Why not just step out of politics and continue in philosophical study, especially if you are totally confident of the inevitability of these political

³⁰The Prince, 21.

developments? The answer is latent within the qualities of his political advice: Christianity. Machiavelli's political vision is one which can properly realize the promises of Christianity, at least in this world: peace, mercy, generosity, and so on. To do this, Machiavelli sees that one has to make compromises on those principles, or else one gets the sort of political world in which men are so dogmatically Christian they cannot realize when they are destroying the very things they desire. These goods of Christianity cannot be observed dogmatically but practically, or else they cannot be observed at all, Machiavelli recognizes. His desire to have them better observed, to have the promises of Christianity better realized, is a quasi-Christian disposition. Machiavelli does not immerse himself single-mindedly in philosophical study like Socrates, because he feels a deep compulsion to see justice done in the world, Christian justice. He wants, ultimately, to help people, above all else. As said above, though, it must be made clear that it is a disposition motivated by secularized Christian values. There is no concern for men's souls, but there is a compassion for their bodies and conditions in this life and a desire for peace and stability.

He is interested not only in philosophic inquiry into the nature of things but also in teaching new rules of political behavior. Machiavelli is critical of the political life for its empty promises and shallow potentials. Even if you do happen to come out on top, you're hardly at the top; all those people beneath you hold you up, and you can't damn well do much of anything they don't like or they'll "abandon" you and let you come crashing down from your pinnacle onto the cobblestones, which is the worst thing the people can do to a prince.³¹ Up to now a glimmer had shown in the privately ambitious life, but as we come to understand Machiavelli's political philosophical project, we also come to see how these men too live off empty promises of independence and leverage over power. How much power does a man himself have over a priest, if he believes his holy scriptures? Machiavelli's goal to influence political and social thought, from

³¹The Prince, 39.

how politics functions to what sorts of economic arrangements should be found in a city and how they should interact with politics, is an attempt to place himself in the chapel's nave, behind that great altar, uttering in a scriptural language few understand and none dispute. Machiavelli is issuing forth a new gospel of politics in order to teach princes and shape states for years to come. It is revealing that when Machiavelli discusses the great political leaders of history, he includes Moses, a religious leader, in with Romulus, Cyrus, and Theseus. Even the pure political science—the notion of uncovering politics as it is—is a sort of slavishness to the behavior of other men as determinate of behavioral necessity, unworthy to the most ambitious of men. His may be inevitable, but it is thoroughly original. The most rewarding thing possible for the most ambitious of all men is not just power as it's ordinarily understood—an ordinary understanding which must to some degree be philosophically interrogated to understand its falsities—and not just fame. It is the fundamental reshaping of the world, down to the most irrelevant of believers. It is a task not fitting to the politically nor the privately ambitious men but philosophically ambitious men like Machiavelli or Jesus to marshal the inexorable forces of belief and religion to do something like that. Just as power is promised to the politically ambitious and the privately ambitious over them, Machiavelli, through his work itself and its mission and its successes, promises an absolute and ultimate power above each of those to individuals of philosophical ambition, to reshape the world completely.

Part II

Hobbes's *Leviathan*

Chapter 4

What is Ambition?

4.1 Ambition Defined

Perhaps as a product of the development of natural science in his day, whereby the world was increasingly coming to be understood by rules grounded on basic tenets, Hobbes sets out on his writing about politics with an analysis of the nature of man, that basic political creature. In his introduction, Hobbes writes that all men possess the same passions, namely "desire, feare, hope, etc." The ends of those desires, however, he says differ between men, as "the constitution individuall, and particular education do so vary." But what is a common thread in men's desires, according to Hobbes, is the opacity of their hearts, "blotted and confounded as they are, with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting, and erroneous doctrines." Men's desires may differ, but all are liars with thoughts invisible but to "him that searcheth hearts." One might learn a man's heart by experience with him, but this is limited to a few relations. If one is to read the hearts of all mankind, "to govern a whole nation," one must read mankind in his own heart, as Hobbes claims he is to do with this work. From this point, he writes, the reader must only "consider if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration."¹ Therefore, in setting down a portrayal of human

¹Leviathan, 9.

nature or character, Hobbes seems to suggest he is setting down a portrayal of his own, something necessary for a man who is "to govern a whole nation."

Hobbes portrays mankind, importantly, as naturally explicable creatures whose thoughts, for example, proceed "in *Trayne*," one after another, beginning from an impression caused by the sense of an external object.² Using this method, Hobbes even claims one could scientifically explain the very precise thoughts of the Parliamentary belligerents in the English Civil War which led to their decision to execute the late King.³ The motions of men occur in response to a man's desires, and this Hobbes calls "Endeavour." When endeavor is directed towards something, it is a desire like hunger or thirst or even love, which is only a desire usually of a thing we already have.⁴ When a man thinks he can attain the thing which he desires, Hobbes says this is hope, and despair is that desire without an expectation of acquisition. Ambition, according to Hobbes, is merely a simple desire like the rest but toward attaining "Office, or precedence." Ambition may be used negatively by some, like "Covetousnesse...because men contending for [the same ends] are displeas'd with one anothers attaining them, though the desire in it selfe, be to be blamed, or allowed, according to the means by which those [ends] are sought."⁵ Therefore, Hobbes seems to have laid out a few points of importance regarding his definition of ambition. First of all, while the ends of men may differ, ambition is yet a natural product of human desires. If ambition, that driving force of politics, is merely a sort of base personal reflex and desire, then politics becomes little more than personal character writ large. "And because the constitution of a mans Body, is in continuall mutation; it is impossible that all the same things should alwayes cause in him the same Appetites, and Aversions," and therefore politics as an articulation of personal desire is bound to be a fickle thing.⁶ If Hobbes wishes to set out some system of stable politics, it would seem

²Leviathan, 11.

³Leviathan, 20.

⁴Leviathan, 42.

⁵Leviathan, 45-46.

⁶Leviathan, 43.

he ought to minimize its guidance by a mercurial human appetite such as ambition. Besides this, it is interesting that he notes ambition is not an inherently blameworthy thing. Instead, it is often viewed as blameworthy out of jealousy. While Hobbes says it ought to be blamed only according to its means, he doesn't offer much clarity on any sort of standard for judging those means. Further, hopeful or confident ambition seems to be an opposite of despair, according to Hobbes's definition.

In Chapter VIII, Hobbes discusses intellectual virtues and defects. Such virtues are either natural or acquired, and the natural ones arise from differences in men's constitutions, desires, and natural qualities of mind or body.⁷ "The passions that most of all cause the differences...are principally, the more or lesse Desire of Power, of Riches, of Knowledge, and of Honour. All which may be reduced to the first, that is Desire of Power. For Riches, Knowledge, and Honour are but severall sorts of power." The more desire for power one has, the more capable one is going to be in imagination or wit or any other intellectual virtue, "For the Thoughts, are to the Desires, as Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and the way to the things Desired."⁸ Therefore, Hobbes seems to boil down just about any desire to a foundational, fundamental desire for power before all else, though it may in its course manifest in slightly different ways. Strangely, Hobbes does not call desire for power ambition. Instead, it seems, Hobbes thinks of ambition as a purely political thing and only one form of the desire for power. Further, the intellectual virtues of a man, though perhaps not directly proportional, seem to be, according to Hobbes, at least somewhat proportional to the intensity of his desires for power in any of its forms. To have no desire is to be dead, and "to have weak Passions, is Dulnesse." One might think then that those with the very greatest desires would be in possession of the greatest intellectual virtues. Surprisingly, Hobbes says that "to have stronger, and more vehement Passions"—like the above desires—"for any thing, than is ordinarily seen in

⁷Leviathan, 56.

⁸Leviathan, 60.

others, is that which men call Madnesse." Importantly, though, Hobbes says madness is merely what men *call* such extraordinary passions. He distances the judgement of madness from himself, seemingly suggesting that he may not agree with the diagnosis of unusual passion as mad. By placing the words here in the mouth of another, Hobbes seems to suggest his real attitude may lie elsewhere. His preceding writing seems to say that great passion is not only not mad, but rather smart, given that it contributes to the development of intellectual virtues and faculties. There can be no great honing of the mind without great passions. There seems an interesting implication therein that if Hobbes thinks of excessive passion as sensible rather than mad and necessary to the development of intellectual virtues—which he seems to think he himself has—then any later advocacy by Hobbes for a politics that checks excessive passion would be against himself and perhaps that which he deems sensible. However, Hobbes does continue to explain that of course there are as many different sorts of madness, corresponding to the many types of desire for power, but all are ultimately the same, unsurprisingly. He does note, though, that great passions, "that which men call Madnesse," is bad for your body.⁹ He sounds almost like a doctor telling a hard-working and stressed man that he needs to forget about his desire for a promotion and let his blood pressure come down, or else expect a heart attack. Hobbes seems on the one hand to be pointing to greatness of passion as the prime contributor to greatness of intellectual ability, and, on the other hand, he seems to be trying to talk the reader down, suggesting that he'll live a much longer and healthier life if he may yet learn to love dullness.

As much as he may seem to be dissuading the reader from valuing those great desires, however, Hobbes returns to this discussion of desire for power in Chapter XI. Here Hobbes disagrees with the "old Morall Philosophers," likely Aristotle in particular, and

⁹Leviathan, 60-61.

claims that there is no end—or telos—of human existence, no greatest good or "Summum Bonum."¹⁰ He writes, "The Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied...Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter."¹¹ Man does not want to acquire one thing once but to assure his possession of it forever and to build on the acquisition. Though men do, as Hobbes reminds the reader, have diverse passions and interests, he offers as "a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in death...because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath at present, without the acquisition of more."¹² Therefore, Hobbes depicts the desire for power as universal, yes, but also as instrumental, secondary. All men have a desire for power so that they may better secure those things which they have a real interest in for their personal satisfaction and happiness. The desire for power is not depicted as a possible end in itself. This seems strangely to eliminate the consideration of a typical understanding of ambition—a primary desire for power—while also depicting all mankind as ambitious in the typical sense, at least to a considerable extent. Arising from the natural, essentially animal, qualities of man, Hobbes contends that we all possess individual constitutions leading us to desire particular things and subsequently always endless power by which we can protect ourselves and those things we wish to hold for felicity. All men are ambitious in this way, but it arises from an essentially mechanistic nature grounded in a fear of losing those things we desire.

¹⁰I mention Aristotle because the notion of telos was a significant feature of his philosophy and because Hobbes reserves an apparently particular distaste for him, displayed at a number of points but especially in Chapter XLVI.

¹¹Leviathan, 79.

¹²Leviathan, 80.

4.2 The Problem of Ambition

The Meaning of Life

This fear, by motivating this lust for power, is a problem for Hobbes, but he may also see in it great potential value. As part of his discussion of human nature, character, and desires, Hobbes seems to lay out an answer to the ancient question, "what is the meaning or purpose of life?" As pointed out above, he disparages the notion of any highest good. That discussion, though, also points down the road toward his answer. His claim of a restless desire for power suggests a belief in universal fear: in this case, of loss, but fear nonetheless. Desire for power is not bold. It is not daring. It is not borne of lofty spirit, Hobbes seems to say. Instead, it's all motivated by the basest and most reactive of all human instincts. By this implication, Hobbes not only seems to suggest a sort of lowering of ambition—and perhaps a criticism of it therein—but also a potentially new evaluation of human nature and life's purpose. If all men are motivated in all things ultimately by fear, it is not only ambition which is lowered but all human aspirations. Any erstwhile admirable act or pursuit of man seems to become little more than an occasion of a scared little boy running farther away from the monsters under his bed.

To that end, Hobbes discusses love of honor in Chapter X. The desire for honor is, like all other desires to Hobbes, merely another desire for power. Honor is merely a signifier of respect for someone which generates deference and obedience. If a man is honored by his peers, Hobbes says this means that they seek to please him and do as he wishes: one sort of power. For this reason, men desire honor and love it, but Hobbes claims that many men fear dishonor more than they love honor. When it comes to duels, they "are and alwayes will be Honourable, though unlawful, till such time as there shall be Honour ordained for them that refuse...though for the most part they be effects of rash speaking, and of the fear of Dishonour, in one, or both the Combatants."¹³ Honor

¹³Leviathan, 76.

is not, to Hobbes, any meaningful pursuit of life, but merely the means to an end of ameliorating fears and insecurities, and most men are driven by that fear actually not to pursue honor but merely to avoid dishonor. Fear does not even drive "noble" pursuits for most but merely discourages men from ignobility. Nobility becomes a sort of double-negative action, twice motivated by fear.

In Chapter XIII Hobbes enters into his now famous discussion of the state of nature, which may be most revealing of his believed purpose of life. Men are equal, he begins, in their ability to kill each other. Even the weak may ambush the strong or cut their throats while they sleep. He claims men are equal as well in "faculties of the mind...in those things they equally apply themselves unto."¹⁴ However, it is clear that Hobbes does not believe men equally apply themselves to much at all. Different constitutions instead produce very different levels of the desire for power which motivates application and the development of intellectual faculties. Hobbes writes that "From this equality of ability," which equality is questionable, "ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends." All men, thinking themselves equal to or better than their peers, believe they can achieve those things they desire. "And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other."¹⁵ Here Hobbes has put forth some important points. For one, men are driven by their desires into conflict with one another. Importantly, Hobbes refers to these desires as "principally" self-preservation but also sometimes merely pleasure or gratification. When it comes to self-preservation, its motivating fear is obvious: death. The motivating fear for gratification is less clear, but one might imagine these are the sorts of things men desire to help maintain their power and necessities of survival. However, Hobbes does call this gratification motivated by

¹⁴Leviathan, 100.

¹⁵Leviathan, 101.

"delectation only," which would seem to suggest it isn't the sort of instrumental desire that has been the feature of the above discussion. Further, it isn't quite clear why fear of death would motivate one to fight someone else rather than run away. If men are merely creatures of fear, then there must be another river somewhere, or another deer in some neck of the woods. When it comes to pleasures, if all are merely instrumental toward the end of self-preservation, the same problem arises: why not run away?

Hobbes writes that this state of nature is merely another name for a state of war, consisting of "the known disposition [to fighting], during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is Peace." By this Hobbes means that the state of war is characterized by the lack of a guarantee against fighting, when there is a tendency of men to do so. In such a state, life is characterized by a complete lack of arts, science, industry, "and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."¹⁶ Here is a significant implication that the worst fear and fate are both of violent death in particular. This would seem to pose even greater problems for the description Hobbes gives of the state of nature. Surely it would be violent, but it doesn't sound like it would be as violent as he makes it out to be. If the greatest fear and worst fate is that of violent death, it seems to follow that men would go out of their way to avoid violent confrontation with one another. If it is as violent as he describes, there must be something motivating men besides an overriding and basic fear of violent death. Sure, power over others is useful, and so one could do as Hobbes describes and seek to subjugate others to secure one's self. However, if all men are equal in their ability to kill each other, it wouldn't make all that much sense, even for one who is strong to attempt such a thing. Instead, one can imagine natural man being rather skittish and conflict-averse, not so unlike Rousseau's description. In fact, he even writes at the end of this chapter that "The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a

¹⁶Leviathan, 102-103.

hope by their industry to obtain them."¹⁷ Therefore, strangely, the passion of fear which motivates the state of war is the same passion which motivates men to seek peace.

Add to that his discussion in Chapter XIV of natural right and law, and the picture becomes increasingly confusing. "The Right of Nature...is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto." He continues, "A Law Of Nature, is a precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved."¹⁸ Again, the same problem arises, of why men would not be conflict-averse. This becomes even more of a problem when Hobbes admits that man naturally possesses reason. It doesn't take much hard thought to realize that one can be murdered in one's sleep, no matter how many one may have subjugated. The behavior Hobbes has described of natural man by no means clearly follows from his suppositions about natural man's character. Instead, it seems as though Hobbes is up to something he's not especially explicit about. If it's all fear all the time, his picture doesn't quite hold up, and he points to the cracks himself. Instead, there are certain "delectations" men naturally seek which are not necessarily purely instrumental to self-preservation. For Hobbes's picture of natural life to work out, this may be an admission that there are some men naturally predisposed to love dominion over others and are not motivated simply by negative fear of death but a positive desire for this sort of power. Interestingly, Hobbes later discusses deserters in war, explaining that there is no injustice in cowardice undertaken to protect one's life. Instead, "there is allowance to be made of natural timorousness, not onely to women...but also to men

¹⁷Leviathan, 105.

¹⁸Leviathan, 105-106.

of feminine courage."¹⁹ Therefore, Hobbes implies a masculine courage, and a predisposition of men to not fear death to some extent. This sort of man, however, doesn't fit cleanly into Hobbes's picture and so seems a bit of a problem for whatever Hobbes is trying to do by portraying man in this way.

To that end, his depiction of ambition, or any positive desire for power, is very important. Hobbes is pursuing a rhetoric that the purpose of life is merely to not die as long as possible. According to Hobbes, there is no satisfaction in the face of death. Any nobility or honor one might happen to chance upon in seeking to avoid their negative complements is hardly satisfying. As Hobbes writes in Chapter XI, life is merely a continual progress from one desire to another. No life may end in satisfaction, because nothing can fulfill us, because we are driven by negative desires. Fear cannot offer fulfillment, because it only prescribes what one ought to avoid, which is the loss of a comfortable life or the things conducive toward that. Therefore death cannot be faced with any sort of Socratic satisfaction, because death is the greatest threat of all. It is the inexorable undoing of all power one may have acquired in one's life. Problematic as this belief may be, considering the potential holes in Hobbes's story of natural man, it is central to the mission of *Leviathan*.

The Purpose of Civil Society

This conclusion of Chapter XIII suggests precisely what it is that Hobbes is up to. He points to the founding of civil society as the natural conclusion and way out of the horrifying portrait he's painted of the state of nature. To understand why Hobbes would pursue this potentially confused or surprising view of human nature and the natural state of man, one must understand Hobbes's priorities for civil society, which is his proposed solution to the state of nature. If he believed the only purpose of this civil

¹⁹Leviathan, 178-179.

society was the provision of external security and internal liberty and political opportunity, he probably wouldn't portray human beings as so naturally vicious as he does. Instead, Hobbes seems to prioritize not just simple peace and stability for the purpose of providing better freedom but complete peace, security, and common dedication over individual aspiration.

Of course, with England having recently emerged from its extremely bloody Civil War—which Hobbes fled at its outset, despite his attempt to connect himself to the violence of the war through the dedication of *Leviathan*—Hobbes is no big proponent of domestic conflict. He goes so far as to open *Leviathan* with an analogy of the human body to the state and calls civil war the death of the state, which is both understandable and reasonable.²⁰ One need not have some very vicious view of human nature or a quasi-totalitarian conception of society to believe that civil war is in some ways the death of a state or even an unparalleled horror, but Hobbes does not stop there. This introduction lays out his purpose, and where God created man, says Hobbes, man has created society, the "Artificial Man," and so man can remake society and improve it.²¹ If there is one thing man has longed to change about himself, it is the conquest of death, but God made man mortal. Perhaps man can make his artificial counterpart different.

In Chapter VIII, in his discussion of great passions in men, "that which men call Madnesse," Hobbes pivots to discuss this characteristic in societies. First, though, he expands his discussion of madness, writing, "The Passion, whose violence, or continuance maketh Madnesse, is either great vaine-Glory; which is commonly called Pride, and self-conceipt; or great Dejection of mind." "Dejection," he writes, "subjects a man to causeless fears; which is a Madnesse commonly called Melancholy...All Passions that produce strange and unusuall behaviour, are called by the general name of Madnesse." Here Hobbes draws a somewhat strange conclusion, suggesting that both vain-glory,

²⁰Leviathan, 8.

²¹Leviathan, 7.

or pride, and melancholy—or as we would likely call it, depression—are symptoms of madness, though Hobbes again distances the judgement by saying they are *called* madness. Sure, depression isn't a hard one to imagine as madness or a passion out of control. But it is a little less intuitive to say that any pride or high self-estimation, let alone any merely unusual behavior, is insane. But here Hobbes offers perhaps the real reason for this categorization. "But of the severall kinds of Madnesse, he that would take the paines, might enrowle a legion."²² Hobbes doesn't care so much about individual passions but their impact on the community. Though one mad man may not cause any great disturbance alone, "yet when they conspire together, the Rage of the whole multitude is visible enough...They will clamour, fight against, and destroy those, by whom all their lifetime before they have been protected, and secured from injury."²³ And this reveals the crucial point. Hobbes's priority is not just instrumental security in service of providing the good or happy life. Instead, the secure life *is* the good life. He points to any desire for something more out of life as insane pride and the dejection which one might suffer from crushed dreams as insane sadness. He is saying, essentially, one ought to be simply content with being safe. To demand anything more is madness, and if you take it upon yourself to unseat political leadership which has protected you, even if it has made you patently miserable, your feelings are simply wrong and idiotic. And this is no small issue but lies at the heart of Hobbes's mission and signals his opinion of the purpose of civil society: safety at all costs. Any threat to that, then, may be a problem for Hobbes.

In Chapter X he revisits this subject of pride as an obstacle. He writes, "For let a man (as most men do,) rate themselves at the highest Value they can; yet their true value is no more than it is esteemed by others." In other words, it doesn't matter much at all

²²Leviathan, 61.

²³Leviathan, 62.

what you think of yourself, whether you are confident, take pride in your work, or consider yourself skillful in art. Not only does that not matter because you are *effectively* judged by others, but Hobbes claims a man's 'true value' is set by the opinion of others. What's more, "Dignity" is "The publique worth of a man, which is the Value, set on him by the Common-wealth."²⁴ A man, according to Hobbes, has no dignity but that bestowed on him by the government. Both these positions, and the preceding discussions, exemplify Hobbes's effort to humiliate the human spirit. He says outrageous, almost offensive things, shoves the reader's nose in it, and shouts, "This is what you are! You see? Nothing!"

In Chapter XIII he repeats his explanation of this behavior. Besides civil war being driven by mad men, war in general arises from three causes,

First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory.\

The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for Safety; and the third, for Reputation. The first use Violence, to make themselves masters of other mens persons, wives, children, and cattell; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other signe of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name.²⁵

Looking back to Hobbes's earlier explanations of what it is men pursue in all their actions—power—and why—security and felicity—there arise some interesting points. The state of nature is horrible for its violence and the constant fear of death. It is this fear, according to Hobbes, which motivates a move to civil society. It seems the purpose of civil society is to provide against such fears with security and safety at all costs. That would adequately address the two former causes of conflict. The third, glory, is not apparently attended to. Instead, Hobbes insults glory, suggesting it is merely a silly

²⁴Leviathan, 72.

²⁵Leviathan, 102.

obsession with small potatoes. And yet, Hobbes has previously declared that everything in life is a struggle for power, and that those mere "trifles" such as opinions, valuations, and the respect of others are a significant component to power. "Reputation," far from being a thing of little value, is an indicator of power which is everything in life and a useful means toward securing one's self. Here Hobbes has recognized a significant flaw of the promise of civil society: that it doesn't account for glory. It offers an appealing package to those motivated by competition and diffidence, but it doesn't offer glory. Subsequently, the desire for glory poses a threat to civil society. If a man estimates himself too highly, he will think himself capable of doing things to gain reputation and power to himself, which may generate war, as Hobbes says glory does. Those men who may seek glory cannot be satisfied by the arrangement of, in their eyes, mere safety. So instead, Hobbes undertakes to insult and demean that quality, while offering a tale of human nature which suggests that it is defective. The correct thing to do, as Hobbes presents it, is to fear death and be content with avoiding it.

And this gets to the explanation of what Hobbes is up to with his inconsistent tale of the state of nature and natural man. It's a story filled with warning and terrible tales about what life is like when men are not kept in check, and it's also an attempt to discourage ambition in men and debase human existence to the point that any aspiration for anything like glory looks like vain foolishness and the product of silly childhood dreams.

In Chapter XVII Hobbes states plainly what has been suggested throughout, that the purpose of men, "(who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,)" moving to civil society or the commonwealth,

is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shewn) to the naturall

Passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tye them by fear of punishment to the performance of covenants.²⁶

Again, Hobbes seems to suggest that the very same passions which generate war generate peace: a puzzling notion. But there's more. He continues, writing that other animals can live in common directed to common benefit, and that man cannot do the same for a few reasons. First, men compete for honor and dignity. Second, men compare themselves with one another, producing difference between private and common benefit. Third, other creatures do not have reason and so cannot find fault with those who govern. Fourth, the other animals lack words and language by which to discuss concepts of good and evil, specifically. Fifth, man cannot remain "at ease" without becoming "offended" and seeking to influence those who govern. "Lastly, the agreement of these creatures is Naturall; that of men, is by Covenant only, which is Artificiall: and therefore it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required (besides Covenant) to make their agreement constant and lasting; which is a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the Common Benefit."²⁷ Therefore, the purpose of the civil society is to bring men into a social relationship approximating that of drone bees: mindless, selfless acceptance of sacrifice for the common benefit. Importantly, Hobbes does not describe civil society as a natural occurrence but as a matter of convention. To that end, this is Hobbes's clearest admission yet that the tale of civil society he's spinning is an invention. There is no natural compulsion leading men to the end he's laid out, much as he presents the story as some quasi-scientific truth of reason. Instead, men require an overwhelming power to hold them to their agreements in covenant with each other. At least that may be the easy and immediate assumption, though Hobbes makes no description of what besides covenant is necessary. However, that civil society and covenants are artificial may suggest that there is a degree to which the natural inclinations of man can

²⁶Leviathan, 136.

²⁷Leviathan, 138-139.

be subverted. After all, any society, according to Hobbes, is in some way a subversion of human nature. To that end, it is not an implicit necessity that some actor with an actual, obvious, overwhelming force be present to keep men in line. Instead, one might wonder whether men might be made to believe certain things about themselves which subvert their natural inclinations or attitudes or desires. *Leviathan* seems to suggest this is possible, or at least Hobbes thinks so, as he has undertaken a relentless assault on ambition, claiming it to be simply insane and unjustifiable, while recognizing it to be perfectly natural. Hobbes, it seems, is trying to subvert human nature through this tale about people and their natural interests and fears. What Hobbes is up to is to lay out a vision for civil society which hinges on the elimination of ambition, because it poses difficulties for society looking more like a bee-hive. He is thus pursuing a rhetorical line which obsesses over fear and attempts to convince the reader that life is nothing but fear of death, even in the apparently full knowledge that this is against the natural inclinations of at least some men who aspire for something beyond survival.

Chapter 5

What is Hobbes's Solution?

5.1 Portrait of the Commonwealth

Having laid out Hobbes's opinions of ambition and the meaning of life and the subsequent purpose of civil society, it now remains to discuss in some detail the shape and scope of his commonwealth, which is purported to answer life's purpose and fulfill the ends of civil society. To this end, the portrait of Hobbes's commonwealth may be divided into two categories—structure and culture—as both are vital components to his vision of politics.

Regarding the structure of Hobbes's imagined commonwealth, one may begin with looking to Chapter X. In his discussion of "Titles of Honour," Hobbes writes, "In processe of time these offices of Honour," such as duke and lord and so on, "by occasion of trouble, and for reasons of good and peaceable government were turned into meer titles...and men were made Dukes, Counts, Marquises, and Barons of Places wherein they had neither possession, nor command."¹ In this comment Hobbes has indicated a great deal of importance. For one, he refers to "good and peaceable government" as one and the same. It isn't shocking that someone would say good government is peaceful or vice versa. However, his next suggestion seems to be that for such government one needs centralization. You can't have good government while there are Lords about, mucking

¹Leviathan, 78.

things up and being ambitious and disruptive. Again, this is not wildly controversial, but it is an indication of the direction which Hobbes is headed. Offices of honor are a problem, and it isn't hard to imagine why given the value Hobbes places on stability and peace.

In Chapter XVII Hobbes begins Part Two, "Of Common-Wealth," and offers a little more insight into the exit from the state of nature. He defines commonwealth as "One person, of whose acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence." He continues, "And he that carryeth this Person, is called Sovereaigne, and said to have Sovereaigne Power; and every one besides, his Subject." Thus, the commonwealth does not only enforce contracts. The sovereign does not merely ensure all do as they are previously agreed, but he can also use the subjects and direct them to "Peace and Common Defence." Therefore, it is not only that the commonwealth provides security, but to some extent the sovereign possesses the power to direct the lives and behavior of his subjects. If everything in life is competition for power, and competition for power threatens stability, then the sovereign, who is empowered to direct men to the peace of the commonwealth, could fairly direct all facets of the lives of his subjects. Nothing is untouched by Hobbes in his quest to call everything in life competition for power, and so nothing may be left untouched by the sovereign in his quest to secure peace. Further, Hobbes suggests that the only way to truly exit the state of nature is to vest this absolute power in one man or body of men, "to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills...unto one Will."² Keeping on the theme of centralization of power, here is a statement about government which is in some way innocuous; it's not controversial that some power must be vested in a body for a society to function. Hobbes, though, seems to take this investment of

²Leviathan, 139-140.

power to the absolute extreme, suggesting that a proper government doesn't just wield some compulsive power but is the total representation of all wills and is meant to shape and direct all behavior.

In the next chapter, XVIII, Hobbes doubles down on what may be called the extreme statements. First, he points out that since the commonwealth has been established by the surrendering of authorial will to the sovereign, the subjects cannot seek to change the government except as allowed by the sovereign. Again, in one way this is uncontroversial, but if one takes Hobbes's extreme comments to the extreme, one can hardly imagine this a satisfying or just state of affairs. With such total power in the sovereign, one could easily imagine a brutal dictatorship which utterly abuses its subjects with an eye to the keeping of peace, as Hobbes says is the end of government. With such total power comes total permission and unbounded domain of action. To that end, he emphasizes that "Because the Right of bearing the Person of them all, is given to him they make Sovereigne, by covenant onely of one to another, and not of him to any of them; there can happen no breach of covenant on the part of the Sovereigne; and consequently none of his Subjects, by any pretence of forfeiture, can be freed from his Subjection."³ Thus, Hobbes responds immediately to the objection most would have with a categorical, 'No, the sovereign cannot do anything wrong.'

In the next chapter, XIX, we see a fairly straightforward argument of what has been pointed to in one way or another throughout: that monarchy is the best form of government. It is a natural conclusion when all one's priorities are toward centralization of power to secure peace at any cost. He argues for the virtues of monarchy against democracy and aristocracy—the only three forms of government, he claims at odds with Aristotle, because so-called corrupt forms are merely regimes disliked for no good reason. According to Hobbes, the only difference between these regimes, besides the number of men composing the sovereign body, is that "of Convenience, or Aptitude to produce

³Leviathan, 142-143.

the Peace, and Security of the people; for which end they were instituted." Monarchy has the distinct advantage of doing this, Hobbes argues, because, try as a sovereign might, he cannot behave with perfect objectivity and public spirit. "From whence it follows, that where the publique and private interests are most closely united, there is the publique most advanced. Now in Monarchy, the private interest is the same with the publique...For no King can be rich, nor glorious, nor secure; whose subjects are either poore, or contemptible, or too weak through want, or dissention." Thus, Hobbes has apparently asserted that monarchy is best, because the King, in seeking to glorify himself, will keep the people well-fed and disciplined. There may be some truth to it, but Hobbes ought to know that many a King or Queen of England did find great riches while many lived rather poor lives. Perhaps he is right, and these characteristics of English life are products of their times rather than the monarchy. However, I am inclined to think his final point is the most honest or important: "dissention." Monarchy may very well have less trouble quashing dissention than an aristocracy and *much* less trouble than a democracy, in each of which there is likely to be increasing variance within the sovereign over what is acceptable and what is not. These are the central advantages of monarchy: stability and decisiveness. Just after these statements Hobbes makes a further comment on the superiority of monarchy. "In a democracy or aristocracy," he writes, "the publique prosperity conferres not so much to the private fortune of one that is corrupt, or ambitious, as doth many times a perfidious advice, a treacherous action, or a Civill warre."⁴ By this, Hobbes seems to say that the ambitious are more rewarded in such regimes by stirring up trouble than by working to help the people. However, there is no reason an ambitious man would not similarly find more potential reward in such pernicious activities in a monarchy. Instead, the point seems to be that it is simply harder to be successfully ambitious in a monarchy. This is merely a clearer articulation of the advantage of monarchy which Hobbes is after: centralization of power which is quite useful

⁴Leviathan, 153.

in squashing dissent and ambition.

In Chapter XIV Hobbes offers his accounts of natural right and the subsequent natural law which arises from this right and man's natural fearfulness and desire to not die. "Don't die" and "Don't hurt yourself" are the two great commandments. Here and in the preceding chapters Hobbes lays out a rather discouraging and dark view of human nature, suggesting that we are not only cowards but vicious ones in need of taming. All the odd apparent contradictions within this account aside, Hobbes seems to make things even more confusing when in Chapter XVII he gives the description of sovereign power and its inception, declining to explain exactly why a bunch of vicious people, prone to violence against any who so much as inconvenience them, would simply submit themselves to an overwhelming, centralized power without any sort of recourse or resistance. Instead, the only way this seems to be possible is if there is a particular, new sort of culture or outlook among men. If people believe they are low and in need of taming, they may well submit to such a sovereign.

Regarding the culture permeating Hobbes's imagined commonwealth, one can begin with looking to Chapter VI. According to Hobbes, "Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, Religion; not allowed, Superstition. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, True Religion."⁵ By connecting this notion of a fear of a real power and Hobbes's characterization of the total sovereign power, one can see that fear of sovereign power may be what Hobbes calls a "True Religion." This point may serve to emphasize the degree to which sovereign power may be embodied in particular cultural values, such as a sort of state religion. What could be a truer religion, according to Hobbes, than men fearing the invisible and very real power of their ruler due to publicly-allowed stories? Of course, if there is a god, this state religion would not be the only true one, but it would still be true, according to Hobbes.

⁵Leviathan, 47.

On that note, Hobbes asserts that all the actions of men, being driven by fear, are manifestations of appetites or aversions. When there are competing or changing appetites or aversions, Hobbes calls this "Deliberation." He writes, "And it is called Deliberation; because it is a putting an end to the Liberty we had of doing, or omitting, according to our own Appetite, or Aversion." Thus, Hobbes seems to suggest that the freest life, that of the greatest liberty, is the one in which man merely behaves according to his desires without thought, for it is thought and deliberation, the weighing and consideration of options, which robs us of the liberty to do as we please. In particular, this deliberation can lead men to consider "things impossible, which we think possible."⁶ This seems to suggest an attitude which seeks to discourage thinking of doing anything which might at face value be contrary to our base, impulsive interests. For example, consider a man rising against the sovereign. Without thought, this could never occur; all the impulsive interests of the man are clear and his aversion will be against such risk. It is with thought and deliberation, however, whereby he may come to believe this thing supposedly impossible may be possible, and this would be a problem for Hobbes and his vision of politics.

Chapter XXX, "Of the Office of the Sovereign Representative" continues the discussion of culture.⁷ First, Hobbes makes a return to the regarding the potential 'truth' of state religion, and its advantage. Hobbes suggests that the sovereign ought to undertake public instruction of the people in many things, including duty and adherence to natural law (which is not so natural, requiring indoctrination for it to be upheld). "It is his Duty, to cause them to be so instructed;" in natural law, that is, "and not onely his Duty, but his Benefit also, and Security, against the danger that may arrive to himselfe in his naturall Person, from Rebellion."⁸ Such public instruction is vital to shaping the

⁶Leviathan, 49.

⁷Leviathan, 275.

⁸Leviathan, 278.

feelings and ambitions—or lack thereof—among the people. In Chapter XXXII he emphasizes this point by seeming to claim an inseparability of the sovereign and religion or religious teaching. He also points out, returning to Chapter XXX, that the sovereign ought not provide just safety. According to Hobbes, "By Safety here, is not meant a bare Preservation, but also all the other Contentments of life, which every man by lawfull Industry, without danger, or hurt to the Common-wealth, shall acquire to himself."⁹ This seems to suggest that Hobbes desires a state in which men have the opportunity to pursue wealth through regulated and safe means. Thus, Hobbes is still essentially interested in safety. To the extent that a man should prosper, Hobbes only mentions that he ought to be able to try, though within certain bounds. There is no priority of the sovereign caring or providing for the welfare of his subjects beyond simple security, despite the airs Hobbes may put on to the contrary. He also recommends that there be within the commonwealth no partiality toward the great. The great are a problem to Hobbes, because "Potent men, digest hardly any thing that setteth up a Power to bridle their affections; and Learned men, any thing that discovereth their errours, and thereby lesseneth their Authority."¹⁰ Thus, the powerful and learned may stand in the way of Hobbes's vision of politics, being as they are, unlikely to willingly surrender themselves to a supreme sovereign, despite Hobbes's claim that this move is a natural conclusion from the natural state of affairs of man. Therefore, Hobbes seems to make clear in this chapter that the realization of his commonwealth is going to encounter many obstacles and that its maintenance is going to require comprehensive public indoctrination into submission. This indoctrination, it seems, must be inclined to the support of Hobbes's story about natural man and a turning away from ambition and toward an understanding of man as a low creature motivated only by fear above all else. However, in Chapter XLVII, the final chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes an interesting comment, assigning blame

⁹Leviathan, 275.

¹⁰Leviathan, 278.

for the growth of papal power. He writes, "I blame those, that in the beginning, when their power was entire, by suffering such Doctrines to be forged in the Universities of their own Dominions, have holden the Stirrop to all the succeeding Popes, whilst they mounted into the Thrones of all Christian Sovereigns, to ride, and tire, both them, and their people, at their pleasure."¹¹ Thus, Hobbes has seemingly asserted that the growth of papal power, quite a blight on the kingdoms of Europe, was caused by the ambition of the Popes but more importantly, at least so it seems by his phrasing, a lack of ambition among the monarchs of Europe to cement their power and stamp out dissent. In this way Hobbes admits that perhaps a proper political order may not be possible when none are ambitious. At the least, the sovereign must remain hungry for power.

5.2 Path to the Commonwealth

Such centralization of power as Hobbes imagines demands a significant shift of culture and popular attitudes toward ambition, self-estimation, and ideas of human purpose. To get to that point, Hobbes seems to lay out what is essentially a guide to the reader of the myriad ways he must adapt himself to this new system, attempting to implant, in a way, into the reader a new perspective or attitude regarding human nature and ambition. Hobbes begins *Leviathan* by discussing, among other things, the universities and their education. He sets himself plainly at odds with Aristotle, in particular, criticizing the "Philosophy-schools, through all the Universities of Christendome, grounded upon certain texts of Aristotle" for the teaching of improper notions of natural science. While he says nothing about Aristotle's political philosophy, he continues by saying, "I say not this, as disapproving the use of Universities: but because I am to speak hereafter of their office in a Common-wealth, I must let you see on all occasions by the way, what things would be amended in them; amongst which the frequency of insignificant Speech is

¹¹Leviathan, 580.

one."¹² Interestingly, Hobbes says he will discuss the university's "office in the commonwealth," suggesting a politicization of education, and this also seems to suggest that his attack on Aristotle has only just begun. Not only does he have much more to say, his opinions about the universities and their philosophic education have much to do with impacts on politics.

In Chapter III Hobbes writes, "He that has most experience in any kind of businesse, has most Signes, whereby to guesse at the Future time; and consequently is the most prudent...not to be equalled by any advantage of naturall and extemporary wit: though perhaps many young men think the contrary." In this, Hobbes seems to be saying directly to the reader, especially young and confident ones, 'Don't think you know better or that you've got it. Ambition is pointless, and you don't have what it takes.' As an apparent alternative to any ambitious designs, Hobbes writes that "by study and industry...by the help of Speech, and Method, the same Facultyes may be improved to such a height, as to distinguish men from all other living creatures."¹³ Thus, the suggestion seems to be that study and learning provide, in a way, a more proper pursuit for man than anything else, including political ambition.

In Chapter V Hobbes discusses "men that think themselves wiser than all others" who "clamor and demand right reason for judge." These men, writes Hobbes, "seek no more, but that things should be determined, by no other mens reason but their own," which is "intolerable in the society of men."¹⁴ These are like men who try to break the rules of a card game to their advantage, says Hobbes, as they, in thinking themselves better than their peers, seek to subvert the rules of a society and their equal application, to their own advantage. Hobbes further insults behavior of this sort by arguing in Chapter VIII that craftiness is merely a product and "signe of Pusillanimity."¹⁵

¹²Leviathan, 12-13.

¹³Leviathan, 23-24.

¹⁴Leviathan, 35.

¹⁵Leviathan, 59.

In Chapter XII, the chapter just prior to his story of the state of nature, Hobbes shares an intriguing insight into religion and statecraft. He describes only the founding of religions which also were the founding of states, such as with the Inca, Numa's Romans, and Mohammed's Muslims, as all of these constituted occasions of a union between religious and 'secular' law, which gave the founders' 'secular' laws a greater gravity, according to Hobbes. "And by these, and such other institutions," he writes, "they obtayned in order to their end, (which was the peace of the Commonwealth,) that the common people in their misfortunes, laying the fault on neglect, or error in their Ceremonies, or on their own disobedience to the lawes, were the less apt to mutiny against their Governours."¹⁶ In other words, Hobbes is saying that peaceful states arise from men blaming themselves. Importantly, Hobbes presents diverse and—especially with the inclusion of Islam—mutually-exclusive religions. Not all of them can be true at the same time, and yet if all share this characteristic which Hobbes uses to illustrate his point, then the point can be expanded in this way. Peaceful states arise from men blaming themselves, regardless of whether the problems are truly their fault. In one way, this is obvious; if you don't blame the government for your problems, you probably won't rebel. However, the point extends well beyond simply this. If men blame themselves enough for their misfortunes that they come to think little of and disparage themselves, they would become extremely unlikely candidates for any ambitious designs which, after all, demand an almost excessive degree of confidence. While an apparently different point than that made by Chapter XIII's encouragement of a value for simple, pleasant living, the end is similar, and Chapter XII point about self-despising may suggest just what sort of attitude Hobbes thinks necessary in many people for Chapter XIII's argument to be alluring and effective. For some, fear may do the trick quite well, but self-loathing might be an entirely different method of generating amenability to Hobbes's political project among entirely different people.

¹⁶Leviathan, 94-95.

In Chapter XV Hobbes discusses "The Foole" and "other Lawes of Nature."¹⁷ "The Foole" who "hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice; and sometimes also with his tongue; seriously alleaging, that every mans conservation, and contentment, being committed to his own care, there could be no reason, why every man might not do what he thought conduced thereunto," perhaps bears some resemblance to an understanding of Machiavelli, who may be thought to suggest just this. Regardless, though, Hobbes makes his point clear that to think or act in this way is a foolish way to live, that "this specious reasoning is neverthelesse false," and that one rather ought to honor covenants, as there can be no justice without them. Further, any ambitious designs of such men are not "reasonably or wisely done," because they are plans "which notwithstanding any thing can be foreseen, and reckoned on, tendeth to his own destruction, howsoever some accident which he could not expect, arriving may turne it to his benefit."¹⁸ Such men may be tolerated by others in a society "onely out of ignorance of what is good for themselves."¹⁹ Not only does Hobbes call ambition stupid and a matter of pure luck, he encourages other readers not to tolerate ambition in others, as this is not conducive to that which is good for them, which is stability.

In Chapter XX Hobbes reiterates the importance of the absolute power of the sovereign and asserts, "The condition of man in this life shall never be without Inconveniencies; but there happeneth in no Common-wealth any great Inconvenience, but what proceeds from the Subjects disobedience, and breach of those Covenants, from which the Common-wealth hath its being."²⁰ Conveniently, Hobbes blames all the worst elements of the commonwealth on the subjects, striking an impressive resemblance to the recommendation Hobbes gave above, how peaceful states arise from men blaming themselves, whether or not it's true.

¹⁷Leviathan, 118, 117.

¹⁸Leviathan, 118-119.

¹⁹Leviathan, 120.

²⁰Leviathan, 170.

In the Third Part of *Leviathan*, Hobbes builds on a number of these ideas. In Chapter XLII Hobbes attacks a different kind of ambition. He discourages his readers from getting any ideas about religious independence and tells them that as long as they believe, it is okay to say whatever the sovereign may have them say. To a similar end, he also argues a very strict definition of martyr, which is "a Witnessse of the Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah; which none can be but those that conversed with him on earth, and saw him after he was risen: For a Witnessse must have seen what he testifieth, or else his testimony is not good."²¹ By arguing such a line, Hobbes has essentially described martyrdom as impossible, thus potentially discouraging the designs of any Christians to do anything foolish and contrary to their sovereign for the sake of their religion. Also in this chapter, he doubles down on this argument against any sort of Christian ambition by recounting the story of Christ's passion and seemingly asserting that doing whatever your sovereign tells you, suffering whatever your sovereign decides, is what Jesus would do.²² Martyrdom is not Christlike, but obedience unto death is.

With all this, Hobbes has launched a multi-pronged assault on ambition. He has cultivated a sense of fear in his readers, arguing that anything but his civil society is tantamount to an environment in which one must live in the constant fear of death. He has encouraged his readers to cast out the ambitious from their company as troublemakers. He has presented a story of human nature and arguments of seeming logic which suggest that ambition is essentially idiotic. However, Hobbes produces a sort of dilemma. On the one hand, he recognizes the necessity of ambitious sovereigns who might cultivate and assume the kind of quasi-totalitarian powers he describes, and on the other hand, he has worked very hard to extinguish ambition. Therefore, *Leviathan* needs to somehow promote ambition in the sovereign, still. This problem is exemplified by Hobbes's comment in Chapter XXIX that a frequent cause of trouble in a state is "That

²¹Leviathan, 416.

²²Leviathan, 487.

a man to obtaine a Kingdome, is sometimes content with lesse Power, than to the Peace, and defence of the Common-wealth is necessarily required."²³

Hobbes pursues a few points by which the necessary ambition might be cultivated in such men by *Leviathan*. For one, he pursues a scientific rhetorical line for much of the book, seeming to suggest that one can come to understand and predict the world and man with enough study of its behavior or history. He also seems to frame the assumption of greater powers by the sovereign as a matter almost of necessity, that if civil society is left as it is, terrible things will continue to come, for which the sovereign will be to blame. Also, though he openly denigrates glory or reputation as anything more than "mere trifles," he asserts an advantage of Monarchy being that the good condition of the state and the people in it redounds to the monarch, offering him a sort of reputation due to competent governance.²⁴ This, though, doesn't seem so much an encouragement to the ambitious sovereign as it is a suggestion that Hobbes's anti-glory rhetoric may not be able to totally undo human character, at the very least not with the sovereign. Instead, one might as well capitalize on the desire for individual glory and reputation best as possible and align it with the interests of the state in some way or another.

In Chapter XXX Hobbes remarks a few important things. For one, he seems to describe the purpose of *Leviathan* by writing, "There may, Principles of Reason be found out, by industrious meditation, to make their constitution (excepting by externall violence) everlasting. And such are those which I have in this discourse set forth." To any reader of political power, this would seem to be an enticing promise. Certainly the root of some lack of ambition, as Hobbes has shown he knows well, is fear. To offer a reassurance of this sort then, while it can't fully solve a lack of power-hunger on the part of a sovereign, does seem like it could dissuade some of the problematic hesitance. There's much less reason to be scared of a loss of power if Hobbes's advice seems to be

²³*Leviathan*, 264.

²⁴*Leviathan*, 153.

good and the promise of greater durability by his advice is believable. Of course, security can breed complacency, but since fear is a great ambition-killer, dispelling it may be a net positive. However, Hobbes follows this by saying of the advice in *Leviathan*, "Whether they come not into the sight of those that have Power to make use of them, or be neglected by them, or not, concerneth my particular interest, at this day, very little. But supposing that these of mine are not such Principles of Reason; yet I am sure they are Principles from Authority of Scripture."²⁵ Hobbes continues, commenting that the great are not very impressionable, though he adds that the people are very much so. "The Common-peoples minds, unlesse they be tainted by dependance on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Publique Authority shall be imprinted in them."²⁶ Thus, it seems not so clear as before that Hobbes needs to cultivate ambition amongst the powerful or the sovereign, when it is really the people who are impressionable.

Instead, Hobbes needs only to demonstrate the potential value of the teaching of *Leviathan* as a sort of public scripture. Instead of convincing the sovereign to be ambitious, he merely seems to be offering a book with a word of promise that, if used correctly, ambition becomes unnecessary. After all, what need is there for ambition on the part of a sovereign if the people are properly instructed in fear and duty as Hobbes seems to try to do in *Leviathan*? As Hobbes himself says further in Chapter XXX, about whether he seeks to teach the universities, "It is not fit, nor needful for me to say I, or No: for any man that sees what I am doing, may easily perceive what I think."²⁷ Regarding teaching, however, Hobbes says the following in Chapter XXXVII.

²⁵Leviathan, 277.

²⁶Leviathan, 278.

²⁷Leviathan, 283.

For it is evident enough, that Words have no effect, but on those that understand them; and then they have no other, but to signifie the intentions, or passions of them that speak; and thereby produce, hope, feare, or other passions, or conceptions in the hearer....So that [when one discusses false miracles] all the Miracle consisteth in this, that the Enchanter has deceived a man; which is no Miracle, but a very easie matter to doe.²⁸

Therefore, Hobbes seems to suggest that manipulation into believing falsities through writing is something which he knows how to do. It may just be that he seeks to do the same, indicating his own peculiar ambition and that, in a way, the road to Hobbes's "leviathan" is paved by Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

²⁸Leviathan, 365-366.

Chapter 6

What is Hobbes's Ambition?

6.1 The Ambitious Project of *Leviathan*

I refer to Hobbes's ambition as peculiar, because it is, in the sense that it is not clearly a political sort of ambition in the traditional sense or according to the definition that Hobbes himself offers, which restricts ambition to office-seekers. Indications of some sort of ambition first appear as early as his introduction. Therein, Hobbes makes the comment that, "He that is to govern a whole Nation must read in himself, not this, or that man; but Man-kind."¹ He then suggests that what follows in *Leviathan* might be assessed by the reader considering if he sees himself in the work or, in other words, according to whether it is a good reading of mankind. Therefore, Hobbes has set his sights high, on a characterization of all men, but he has also positioned himself as one "to govern a whole Nation" in doing so. Hobbes also comments that such a task is quite hard to complete but that he has done so and left miniscule resulting work to the reader. This tone suggests a rather high self-estimation—perhaps well warranted—which points to a potentially interesting reading of Hobbes's so-called self-reading. If this self-reading is particularly appropriate for one who is to "govern a whole Nation," and it also leads to such a sense of superiority as displayed by Hobbes, one might wonder whether this

¹Leviathan, 9.

reading of self is, rather than a discovery of one's shared humanity with all others, really a discovery of one's superiority to all other men. More on this later.

In Chapter II, "Of Imagination," Hobbes describes two discreet sorts of imagination. The first, "simple Imagination," is nothing but the recollection of a previous sight, the embodiment of Hobbes's definition of "Imagination" broadly as "nothing but decaying sense."² The other kind, "Compounded" imagination, is the combination of two images recollected, such as those of a horse and a man, which are then "Compounded" into the image of a centaur. While this is in a way decaying sense, it is also inventive by its creation of new things from the combination of ideas which do not naturally go together. As another example, Hobbes discusses men who compound images of themselves and "Hercules" or "Alexander" and calls their imaginings "a Fiction of the mind." The sort of imaginings behind Greek mythology and ambitious men looking to those stories of the ancients, whether historical or mythological, are all compounded imagination. With regard to Astronomers, those "gazing upon the Sun" for too long such that they hurt their eyes, or Geometers, those spending too long before the chalkboard that "in the dark" they see lines and angles dance before their eyes, the imaginings of these men Hobbes sees as so unimportant, he offers these visions no name. He attributes this disregard to this sort of imagination "being a thing which doth not commonly fall into mens discourse."³ Therefore, Hobbes seems to say that the imagination of men who model themselves after Alexander is more important than the imagination of scientists, which is not necessarily intuitive, seeing how the imagination of scientists is responsible for so much important work and thought for which Hobbes is very likely grateful. After all, though, it seems Hobbes's *Leviathan* is in many ways more like an act of compounded imagination than science. In his state of nature story he combines two different elements of human character, fear and ambition, and tries to craft a story in which ambition or desire for glory

²Leviathan, 15, 14.

³Leviathan, 15.

is displayed but is really motivated by fear, painting a new portrait of human character. Hobbes, in this new story of social origins, is trying to craft a new mythology about the nature of man—like the creation of the centaur—while in a way founding a new state—like Alexander. Further, then, it's little surprise that he proceeds in this chapter to discuss the ease with which men of "knavery" could exploit the superstitious into absurd beliefs.⁴

First, I want to address the question of a new mythology by demonstrating Hobbes's particularly anti-Christian ambition. In Chapter XXXI, before embarking on the third part of *Leviathan*, "Of a Christian Common-Wealth," Hobbes makes several intriguing prefatory comments. He begins the chapter by writing that he has shown with his writing how obedience to the sovereign is owed by all subjects, so long as it is not "repugnant to the Lawes of God." He has not shown, however, what those laws of God are, because without this it is impossible to maintain obedience to both sovereign and God. "And seeing the knowledge of all Law, dependeth on the knowledge of the Sovereign Power; I shall say something in that which followeth, of the Kingdome of God."⁵ Here Hobbes has signaled a seismic shift in his focus. Before, he only claimed to be elucidating the "Law of Reason," which he claimed was accessible through scientific thinking about human behavior to any man but one who is mad. How sincere a claim like that was is not clear, given Hobbes's complications surrounding the application of self to the development of faculties for this sort of 'scientific' thinking, but that is beside the point. What is significant is that the law of God is no longer in that same category of accessibility. While both sorts of law are understood through "knowledge of the Sovereign power," knowledge of the law of reason or *leviathan* could be accessed through knowledge of man, who is the sovereign and the creature which sets up his regime. Knowledge of the sovereign of the law of God seems to require knowledge of God, given that he is the

⁴*Leviathan*, 17.

⁵*Leviathan*, 292-293.

sovereign there. Two interpretations of this comment stand out to me. First, perhaps Hobbes is simply suggesting that man is sovereign over God—as in religion is a construct of man—and so knowledge of him grants knowledge of Him. Second, Hobbes is suggesting he himself possesses knowledge of God. Either possibility seems wholly sacrilegious and a clear suggestion of Hobbes's immense ambition to unseat Christianity completely or replace it with a Hobbesian version of Christianity which is tantamount to his own 'religious doctrine.' One very well may respond that Hobbes is only referring to his reading of scripture, rather than some unique, personal knowledge of God or his word.

In Chapter XXXII, he affirms the sacrilege of his efforts in Part Three by writing, "For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect." This he says just before proceeding to "chew" Christian scripture for two-hundred pages, rendering it, at some points, into basically a parody, as he labors over whether the "word of God" is meant literally or as an expression.⁶ He revisits the point of his sacrilege in Chapter XL, asserting that "Whosoever in a Christian Common-wealth holdeth the place of Moses, is the sole Messenger of God, and Interpreter of his Commandments. And according hereunto, no man ought in the interpretation of the Scripture to proceed further then the bounds which are set by their severall Sovereigns." Therefore, since Hobbes has not just taken the interpretation of scripture into his own hands but interpreted it in surprising and shocking ways, he has appointed himself Moses on earth. "For the Scriptures since God now speaketh in them are the Mount Sinai; the bounds whereof are the Lawes of them that represent Gods Person on Earth...To interpret them; that is, to pry into what God saith to him whom he appointeth to govern under him...is to gaze upon God irreverently."⁷ Hobbes has not

⁶Leviathan, 306.

⁷Leviathan, 393.

only made himself Moses, but he also seems to be suggesting that to question his understanding of scripture would be to interrogate the Ten Commandments rather than simply obey them.

Returning to Hobbes's peculiar creativity, in Chapter IV he interestingly remarks that, while printing is good and writing even better, nothing truly compares to the most "noble and profitable" invention of speech, without which "neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace" could exist. Thus, it seems that writing, a "profitable Invention for continuing the memory of time past," stands in contrast to speech for its passivity compared to speech's political activity.⁸ While writing may be good for remembering things, speech brings about the actions of men which are worth remembering. In this way, Hobbes seems to place a surprising value on action over word, surprising for a man of letters, that is, unless this writing of his may be not just a tome for the preservation of memory but for the generation of something new, something political.

In Chapter VII he continues this discussion in a way. Here Hobbes discusses deliberation, writing that deliberation toward the future ends in the thoughts either that "it will be, or it will not be."⁹ "The last Appetite in Deliberation," he continues, "is called the Will."¹⁰ Therefore, it seems that deliberation toward the future, according to Hobbes, ends in some will toward how something will be or not be. And from a will arises action toward the realization of that will. Thus, one may wonder what it is exactly that Hobbes might be willing to be with this deliberative text, which appears to be the action toward the realization of a particular political will. Just after this, he writes, "It was, and ever will be reputed a very Evill act, for any man to speak against his Conscience: or to corrupt of force another so to do: Insomuch as the plea of Conscience, has always been hearkened unto very diligently in all times." Therefore, Hobbes seems to say that

⁸Leviathan, 25.

⁹Leviathan, 52.

¹⁰Leviathan, 53.

corrupting the conscience of another, while it "was...a very Evill act," is no longer so, perhaps due to a decline, at least with Hobbes, in the care for the "plea of Conscience."¹¹ One thus ought to be wary of any move by Hobbes which could be aimed at a corruption of the conscience, not so as to safeguard it, per se, but so as to better understand just what is his ambition, which may be enlightened to some extent by this foreboding about the corruption of conscience.

In Chapter XXX, just after his refusal to comment on whether he seeks to reshape or "teach" the universities, he discusses the matter of advice, which begins to go to the heart of the more purely political component of his compounded imagination. To determine good counsel and counselors, is "To know, who has the most knowledge of Publique affaires...and they that know them, need [counsel and counselors] a great deal less. For to know, who knowes the Rules almost of any Art, is a great degree of the knowledge of the same Art."¹² Therefore, it is very difficult to tell what political advice is good, "unlesse we shall think there needs no method in the study of the Politiques, (as there does in the study of Geometry,) but onely to be lookers on; which is not so. For the Politiques is the harder study of the two."¹³ Thus, it follows that Hobbes is suggesting there is no way to gauge the reliability of this book—which is a set of principles for an everlasting constitution—unless one knows as much as Hobbes does about politics, or more. In other words, Hobbes is suggesting just how easy it is to trick a reader or recipient of his counsel into taking bad advice for good, which may suggest further caution in taking him at his word and suspicion regarding his intention.

At the very end of Chapter XXXI and Part Two Hobbes begins almost to despair, remarking,

Considering how different this Doctrine is, from the Practise of the greatest

¹¹Leviathan, 54.

¹²Leviathan, 289.

¹³Leviathan, 290.

part of the world, especially of those Western parts, that have received their Morall learning from Rome, and Athens; and how much depth of Morall Philosophy is required, in them that have the Administration of the Sovereign power; I am at the point of believing this my labour, as uselesse, as the Common-wealth of Plato; For he also is of opinion that it is impossible for the disorders of State, and change of Governments by Civill Warre, ever to be taken away, till Sovereigns be Philosophers.

In other words, Hobbes seems to confirm that his effort is one toward creating a new sort of state or polity, since he compares it to Plato's *Republic* and characterizes it as useless only in light of the steep differences between his vision and contemporary practices. Thus, Hobbes's mission is not merely the imagination of a sort of state but the realization of such a vision and a persuasion of some to bring it about. However, he continues by taking solace in the fact that no such learnedness or "depth of Morall Philosophy" is necessary for sovereigns to be philosophers. Instead, Hobbes claims he has, unlike any man before him, "put into order, and sufficiently, or probably proved all the Theoremes of Morall doctrine, that men may learn thereby, both how to govern, and how to obey." Thus, Hobbes has more clearly than ever set himself up as the teacher of new morals to both subject and sovereign. However, Hobbes claims to "recover some hope" that *Leviathan* will come into the possession of some sovereign who will consider the work, "without the help of any interested, or envious Interpreter; and by the exercise of entire Sovereignty, in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice."¹⁴ These closing remarks seem only to accord with what has been argued above, that Hobbes's ambition with this book is immense, seeking to establish a new sort of state headed by a sovereign of immense power who is actually subordinate to Hobbes and his teachings.

¹⁴*Leviathan*, 304.

In Chapter XXXVI Hobbes remarks, arguably of himself, that "He that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity," just as Hobbes does in *Leviathan*, "pretends to govern them...which is a thing, that all men naturally desire, and is therefore worthy to be suspected of Ambition and Imposture...unlesse [one has] yeelded [them obedience] already, in the institution of a Common-wealth; as when the Prophet is the Civill Sovereign."¹⁵ Therefore, Hobbes seems to have confirmed the above connecting of the dots and admitted his ambition to rule, even going so far as to characterize it as something which all men desire. In the final sentences of *Leviathan*, in Chapter XLVII, Hobbes discusses the Catholic Church and its clergy's ambition. Hobbes wonders whether the Catholics, now cast out of England, or an "Assembly of Spirits worse than" they might yet return to England, "inhabite this clean swept house, and make the End whereof worse than the Beginning? For it is not the Romane Clergy onely, that pretends the Kingdome of God to be of this World, and thereby to have a Power therein, distinct from that of the Civill State. And this is all I had a designe to say, concerning the Doctrine of the Politiques."¹⁶ Thus, Hobbes ends his discourse with a rather strange and cryptic suggestion about the future of England and the threat of those who may make claims to some knowledge or power regarding the afterlife, as Rome does. Yet, it seems an obvious conclusion to think of Hobbes as one besides the Roman clergy making such claims, as indicated by his repeated sacrilege, emphasis on natural science, and personal ambition for power. Yes, Hobbes may be referring to other Christian religions or the Aglicans, but he too seems to fit this description. The fact that he treats England's potential fate under such actors as bleak as he does, however, reminds one of a couple important questions raised several times above. For one, does Hobbes, given that he is so ambitious, truly believe in the goodness of his doctrine of total obedience and absolute power uncontestably in the hands of one man? For another, does or even could

¹⁵Leviathan, 357-358.

¹⁶Leviathan, 585.

Hobbes possibly believe what he says about human nature being conducive to such a political arrangement?

6.2 Honesty of the Commonwealth

As to this former question, it may be divided into two parts. First, does Hobbes seem to actually *like* the idea of the commonwealth? In other words, does it seem at all compatible with what he is looking for in this life, given that he seems so ambitious himself? Second, does Hobbes seem to buy his own argument for the formation of his commonwealth and institution of the leviathan?

To the first part of the question, many points above may indicate some amount of incompatibility between Hobbes's desires, or degree of ambition, and his vision of an essentially ambitionless civil society. For further consideration, one may look first to Chapter XV and Hobbes's discussion of "The Foole." Hobbes says, "The Foole hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice; and sometimes also with his tongue." Now, Hobbes here has suggested a consistency between the fool's thoughts and words, at least sometimes, but this comment does seem to suggest that Hobbes recognizes—consistent with his introductory comments about the opacity of men's hearts—that it could just as well be that a man could say in his heart that there is no such thing as justice, but not with his tongue. Hobbes continues, apparently, to attempt to debunk the reasoning of the fool. The fool's argument, according to Hobbes, is that if justice is a law of reason to help one's self, as Hobbes admits it to be in *Leviathan*, then the seizure of power, if it not bring harm to one's self, is in fact just. Instead of really refuting this argument, Hobbes merely declares, "This specious reasoning is neverthelesse false," essentially because one can't know whether or not one will succeed, and risk like this is against all

reason and thus unjust.¹⁷ However, Hobbes undoubtedly risked a great deal in publishing *Leviathan*, as it was an extremely provocative text which called into question the political supremacy of Parliament. And this was a matter which had been settled by civil war and gotten the king beheaded, so it is by no means trivial in its provocation. Therefore, Hobbes—whatever argument he may make "with his tongue" that risky ambition is foolish—seems to have made the inclination of his heart clear in the publication of such an ambitious text at such apparent risk to himself. It may well be that Hobbes knows this argument is insufficient—for at least his behavior suggests he doesn't believe it—and this may signal an important point. For Hobbes, there may be no perfect argument to this end, but he may be seeking to discourage many ambitious types as best he can.

In Chapter XXIX Hobbes attributes one of the most frequent causes of rebellion to "the Reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the antient Greeks, and Romans; from which, young men, and all others that are unprovided of the Antidote of solid Reason" become enamored with popular government and regicide, convinced such a thing may be easily justified as tyrannicide.¹⁸ It seems strange that Hobbes would make such a suggestion when he himself spent so much time with such texts, even undertaking to translate Thucydides and Homer. There is, of course, the obvious explanation that Hobbes is not a man without "solid Reason," and so such texts did not have the same corrupting effect on him as he asserts they have on others. However, it seems strange that Hobbes would offer translations to English of those Greek texts which he advises forbidding or censoring, unless perhaps Hobbes's suggestion applies to everyone but himself.

Further, Hobbes asserts that all men do what they do out of a fear of losing power, that the base emotion of men was fear and the base desire one for power. An example of this is given in Chapter XXX, when Hobbes talks of men "accounted the most Learned"

¹⁷Leviathan, 118-120.

¹⁸Leviathan, 269.

who seek to quash opinions and thoughts contrary to their own, to avoid discovery of their errors, which would "thereby lesseneth their Authority," which is, according to Hobbes, merely one form of the power which all men seek.¹⁹ As a man himself, and one who dedicates so much to his writing, it seems reasonable to think that Hobbes seeks in some way authority through *Leviathan*, which is a common way for the "Learned" to gain power, being the avenue most accessible by their skills. Thus, it follows that Hobbes, if he is desirous for power and authority in the ways in which he says all men are, would be willing to be deceitful or misleading so as to conceal any errors he may have made, as men of learning are wont to do. It is not so much a matter of "errors" in this case but loopholes or confusions. Just like the counterargument to the fool, it may be that to get his point across, there are certain unsolvable problems or inconsistencies that Hobbes couldn't get rid of. With his contradictory story of human nature—which will be discussed more below—Hobbes needed a way to conceal some of those faults to leave the all-important impression behind. Hobbes frequently complains, in fact, of readers who do not spend the time to go to the root of a writer's thinking to see what he is really trying to say, but instead merely take statements as reliable according to the authority of the writer. In his final words of Part Three, Hobbes writes that "it is not the bare Words, but the Scope of the writer that giveth the true light, by which any writing is to be interpreted," not looking to mere "atomes of scripture."²⁰ It would be entirely reasonable, then, to apply this line of thinking to Hobbes's own work and to figure that a great deal of the text will be misleading from the actual intention, if taken at face value. Just as Hobbes proclaims religion ought not be thought of very hard, he presents his account of human nature and arguments for his common-wealth as very scientific and indisputable.²¹ One must, though, proceed as Hobbes does and behave contrary to instruction, considering the ideas thoroughly in the understanding—which

¹⁹Leviathan, 278.

²⁰Leviathan, 504.

²¹Leviathan, 306.

Hobbes promotes—that the writers of scripture, no different from Hobbes, wrote with the same motivations as all men have, which is to gain power.

All this has the following to do with ambition. Given that Hobbes is ambitious, this seems to suggest a caution with which one should treat his work and its intention, as he recommends when dealing with those who pretend to offer the way to felicity.²² This all suggests some skepticism as to whether a man so desirous of power—and who claims others desire it similarly—could really look favorably upon the institution of a regime which would so inhibit the realization of ambition such as his own.

As to the second part of the question, whether Hobbes believes his own rationale for the formation of the common-wealth, skepticism is also warranted. First of all (discussed above in Chapter 5 Section 2, "The Problem of Ambition") is the apparent confusion or contradiction of Hobbes's own story of natural man, who lives in constant fear and yet sometimes out of "delectation," or other desires, engages constantly in combat with other men in the state of nature.²³ When put to a test of scrutiny, as he seems to advise one to do with this text, the question arises of why such fearful men would be so confrontational and aggressive. Hobbes never seems to offer a clear resolution of this serious problem. Instead, an answer rather than a solution seems to appear. If Hobbes's ambition is to establish a despotic state grounded in fear, then he must convince the reader of the violence of men and of his own timidity and cowardice. Thus, the only answer seems to be that Hobbes's story isn't consistent, because the philosophy of his regime rests on competing assumptions about human character and desires. It assumes that men are fearful and desirous of protection, which protection is necessary because men are aggressive and ambitious in their desires for power. Both these may be true of men, but Hobbes's regime exclusively satisfies the fear, aiming to squeeze out the ambition and desire for power, or at least constrain it so much it cannot be realized. The

²²Leviathan, 357.

²³Leviathan, 101.

regime needs both elements to justify itself, but it doesn't actually seem to follow very clearly from or very fully satisfy human nature as Hobbes portrays it. One could argue Hobbes doesn't need to fulfill all of human nature. However, he portrays his civil society as the natural culmination and fulfillment of human desires and inclinations in Chapter XIII. It is the conclusion of his story of the state of nature. He portrays all of his political philosophy as natural this and natural that, as if the leviathan is the natural regime, which seems a deceptive presentation, if there are also significant aspects to human nature which he recognizes and then disregards.

Further, Hobbes maintains that no matter the society, men like Machiavelli or the fool, ambitious men, will continue to exist and will often be accommodated by fellow citizens, suggesting an incompleteness of the regime he advocates.²⁴ While Hobbes on the one hand seems to present the common-wealth as a way of the state of nature, on the other this reality and Hobbes's admission that the common-wealth cannot be complete in its eradication of ambition, since men are not like bees or ants, seem to suggest that it is not really an exit from the state of nature.²⁵ While Hobbes attempts to disguise this likeness of civil society to the state of nature by promising and then neglecting to discuss the "Common-wealth by Acquisition," after all, subjects remain in a state of nature in relation to the sovereign, who has no contract with them.²⁶ Politics remains a state of war, merely strictly confined to the near-guaranteed success of one party and the near-guaranteed obliteration of the other.

In Chapter XXV Hobbes writes that good counsel is short and clear, whereas bad or deceptive counsel is more drawn out and reliant on excessive examples which allow the counselor to mask the deception at the root of the counsel.²⁷ If one asks into which category *Leviathan* would fall—short and clear or long and obfuscated by example—I have

²⁴Leviathan, 120.

²⁵Leviathan, 138-139.

²⁶Leviathan, 141.

²⁷Leviathan, 212.

to imagine it would fall into the latter, especially regarding the second and third Parts of the book which dwell so gratuitously long on examples that Hobbes spends paragraphs explaining why the "Word of God" is not a "Noun, or a Verb" but meant metaphorically, going through many lengthy exegeses of scripture to prove his point.²⁸ Thus, when one considers Hobbes' work as a whole, one can see that this drawn out second half is not unlike his description of bad counsel. While obscurity is not the only purpose, the fact that this lengthening obscurity comes in the second half makes sense, since this is where excessive detail and example would be most effective in papering over in the memory of the reader the confusions and inconsistencies present earlier in the book, leaving behind only the impressions, which are fear of violence and desire for protection. All this seems to suggest perhaps some amount of awareness on Hobbes's part of those problems of the first half of the book, given his descent into a style of discourse resembling what he calls bad counsel. He also says in XXV that the best counsel comes from the best knowledge of affairs which arises in a man that "hath not onely been much versed in, but hath also much meditated on...And this is not attained to, without much experience." Yet there does not seem to be much evidence of Hobbes having much experience with governance but only study and meditation. He does continue, however, to say, "All the experience of the world cannot equal his Counsell, that has learnt, or found out the Rule. And when there is no such Rule, he that hath most experience...has therein the best Judgement, and is the best Counsellor."²⁹ One might assume that, according to Hobbes, government would be a field in which such rules might be found, but he does not name it among his examples of such fields. Further, it has been shown that there may be very reasonable objections to Hobbes's science of government, due to its apparent internal inconsistencies, which suggests that even Hobbes has not found a rule of government so infallible as of geometry that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two angles of

²⁸Leviathan, 344-348.

²⁹Leviathan, 213.

a square.

In Chapter XXVII Hobbes admits to three potential causes of the violation of law in the commonwealth. First, men might observe others getting away with violation without punishment or even with reward for their boldness. This, however, can be solved in the common-wealth through all kinds of measures, like extensive secret police operations, so that isn't so much a problem. Second, men may be taught poor principles by individuals or texts such as those of the Greeks and Romans, for example. This, again, can be easily solved through book banning and burning as well as the jailing of those who speak or hint of inclination against the sovereign, no problem. The third cause of disobedience, though, is that some men "are hasty, and præcipitate in concluding, and resolving what to do; such as are they, that have both a great opinion of their own understanding."³⁰ This is a much harder motive to eliminate from the common-wealth, because to a great extent it is tied to the character of a man, which is formed by so many diverse events and causes that it seems hardly feasible to control for them all to ensure that no such individuals arise. Further, Hobbes seems to suggest early on in *Leviathan* that such characteristics are natural to man, who may seek out conflict with or abuse of others out of "delectation only," which could not be so unless some men merely had characters which produced some amount of recklessness and high self-estimation, pointing to another instance of the disconnect between Hobbesian human nature and Hobbesian civil society.³¹ Further, Hobbes writes later in this chapter that "The want of means to know the Law, totally Excuseth: For the Law whereof a man has no means to enforme himself, is not obligatory...only Children, and Madmen are Excused from offenses against the Law Naturall."³² Hobbes, though, never quite defines what makes a mad-man. Instead, in Chapter VIII he only says having extraordinary passions is "that

³⁰Leviathan, 243.

³¹Leviathan, 101.

³²Leviathan, 247.

which men call Madnesse."³³ Since Hobbes offers no other definition, I am assuming that when he refers to "Madmen," it is in reference to those whom men would call mad-men, which are those with immoderate passions. Of course, it may also be a reference to truly insane individuals who may be completely ungrounded in reality, but it seems only fair to follow Hobbes's repeated advice that one should read according to the definitions offered by the writer. Thus, the implication may be that Hobbes's natural law is not so natural after all. It takes such a cold and dispassionate character to reason one's way to an acceptance of Hobbes's natural law that any individual of any immoderate passion is excused from its violation, because he could not even possibly access or understand this natural law. And yet it seems entirely reasonable to think it part of human nature that some men may be more passionate than most—since similarity of passion to the majority seems to be the base-line of sanity offered—and thus that this so-called natural law is hardly in tune with human nature. Therefore, there seems to be a significant degree of dishonesty in Hobbes's testimony, both regarding the desirability of such a state so at odds with his own ambitious character, let alone others', and regarding the portrayal of his commonwealth as some fulfillment or satisfaction of human nature and longing which is often passionate and ambitious rather than merely fearful.

6.3 The Political Nature of Man

From these revelations—regarding Hobbes's great ambition, the apparent undesirability for a man such as him to live in his own common-wealth, and the disconnects between his account of human nature and his portrait of civil society—the final question of interest here seems to arise; Does Hobbes want to alter the nature of man?

After his dedicatory letter, Hobbes begins *Leviathan* by writing, "Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the Art of man, as in many other

³³Leviathan, 60.

things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal." Therefore, Hobbes introduces his work with the assertion that in many ways men may imitate God, including in His principal art of Genesis: creation. The tone is thus set clearly that Hobbes seems to be undertaking a work in which he will do as God did and create new life, "an Artificial Animal." "For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principall part within; why may we not say, that all Automata...have an artificiall life? For what is the Heart, but a Spring; and the Nerves, but so many strings...Art goes yet further, imitating that Rationall and most excellent worke of Nature, Man."³⁴ While Hobbes does go on to suggest that the artificial man of which he speaks is the Leviathan "which is but an Artificiall Man," Hobbes has not only suggested that man can be imitated. He has suggested that man is little different from a mechanical contraption and thus subject to as much manipulation by a skilled artisan as any other. After all, if the heart is but a spring, the nerves but strings, and the joints but wheels, it follows very clearly that just as such a contraption could be made up a certain way, it could be unmade or modified with a knowledge of the mechanical workings. Thus, it comes as little surprise when Hobbes doesn't take long to pivot away from discussion of the leviathan and to a discussion of how it is one might know men, which knowledge is necessary to rule them.³⁵ Above, it was briefly discussed whether, since this reading of one's self toward understanding all men is so invaluable to "He that is to govern a whole nation," it is the case that this reading of self is for Hobbes a way of coming to understand the ways in which he is superior to all others. With what has since been laid out, this seems to be a reasonable reading, as he has ambitions demonstrably incompatible with the regime he advocates, placing himself on a sort of pedestal, suggesting that none should ever be able to do again what he is trying to do. It may be, then, if this self-reading is a realization of personal superiority, that Hobbes honestly believes the common-wealth and its

³⁴Leviathan, 7.

³⁵Leviathan, 8-9.

crushing of passion and ambition is compatible with most men, despite how it may be incompatible with him. After all, as a reading of self which is to be judged in its accuracy by the comparison by others with themselves, it does suggest an air of exceptionalism that Hobbes would denigrate and minimize ambition up-front while signaling his own ambition quietly in the background. In this, Hobbes seems to suggest that he believes most men to be neither very ambitious nor very good readers or serious thinkers, if his work "admitteth no other Demonstration" than for men to measure it against themselves and if it is to pass this test.

Therefore, there may be some slight indication that Hobbes believes for most men a change of nature is not necessary for the common-wealth to work and fulfill their longings, which are generally for safety. However, there yet remains the issue of him and men like him: deeply ambitious types. For those sorts of men Hobbes's effort of compound imagination may be most important.³⁶ If it is true that most men are not mad or ambitious or immoderately passionate and instead desire only to live peaceably and predictably, then Hobbes's long story justifying his political philosophy is not necessary for them; it's needed for those who aren't so easily satisfied, who desire greater and more glorious things. Hobbes thus uses compound imagination to create an illogical image of a human being. Just as a centaur is an impossible hybrid between two contradictory things, Hobbes's natural man is a hybrid of a creature of fear and a creature of vain-glory and ambition: fearing constantly for its life and also spoiling for a fight at every moment. And just as the Centaur is a creature of mythology, conveying certain tales needed to produce certain beliefs and behavior in men—in other words, a symbol of religion—quite similar is Hobbes's natural man. He presents characteristics of man which conduce, when believed, to certain sorts of behavior, and it follows easily that

³⁶Leviathan, 15. Refer back to the discussion on page 93 of this work to see the foundation of these ideas laid out.

Hobbes—who recognizes the political utility of religion and who is ambitious of political influence—would seek to use the tools oft wielded by religion for his own ends. And for those for whom this method will not work, such as devoutly Christian men, Hobbes also undertakes to completely re-interpret traditional understandings of the Christian God and Christianity, lending credence to the notion that Hobbes is not just interested in political impact but religious and cultural as well. After all, what would be more god-like, in the absence of the technology to clone men or create androids, than to create a new god for men to live in accordance with? Therefore, Hobbes has two artificial men: one created directly, the other indirectly. Directly, he creates the artificial man of nature. Indirectly, this image of a man is meant to influence the development of men, as religion—or things very much like them—are wont to do.

In Chapter XVII Hobbes begins Part Two of *Leviathan* by writing,

The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which wee see them live in Common-wealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contended life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shewn) to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and observation of those Lawes of Nature set down in the fourteenth and fifteenth Chapters.³⁷

And this so beautifully expands on the idea of compound imagination and religion. Hobbes's political prescriptions and philosophy are, in a way, contrary to natural passions. Men love dominion over others, and yet they will introduce restraints upon themselves, says Hobbes. But these restraints, he says, are also naturally consequent from

³⁷*Leviathan*, 136.

those natural passions. Men love dominion over others, and so they must be restrained. Politics, in short, is about an un-humanizing of men, as a consequence of natural human character. Not only that, but Hobbes seeks to use certain components of human nature to destroy or subjugate other parts; the desire for contentment is used as an incentive to entice men to lay down their weapons and set aside their ambitions. This is not unlike Hobbes's use of compound imagination. Religion, and religious inclination, is a deeply-ingrained characteristic of human beings, perhaps simply a part of human nature. Hobbes seeks to use religion and desire for contentment to ends not unlike Christ's. Just as Christ encouraged men to set aside their ambition and turn the other cheek in submission to the state, even unto death, so too does Hobbes. Not that Hobbes's mission is Christian in any truly substantive way, but he does seem to take significant cues from Christ in the turning of man against himself.

From this, the ultimate question regarding Hobbes and ambition once more rears its head. Why would Hobbes, an ambitious man by all appearances, write this book and seek to stamp out the possibility of political ambition? For one, Hobbes's society does not preclude private philosophic ambition. Men may not publish their thoughts or be too public about them if they go against the dictates of the state, of course, but the private sphere of conversing and philosophizing with peers remains intact. However, this seems an incomplete answer, as Hobbes had the opportunity to do such things himself and clearly wasn't satisfied. He still embarked to write and publish a book which sought to reshape political philosophy. The answer seems more completely to be that Hobbes possesses a sort of double-ambition. His political philosophy, which has an obvious concern for bringing about great political stability, is clearly motivated to some degree by a concern for the quality of life of others. Civil war must be avoided simply because it is terrible for those who live through it, because it is too close a return to the "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."³⁸ But this political philosophy also enables for Hobbes

³⁸Leviathan, 103.

an expression of ambition even more profound than just being a cultural refounding. If Hobbes is able to realize this philosophy, he would also close the door behind himself, so to speak. The ambition to bring all others to heel, to stop anyone else from realizing their own, is perhaps the greatest ambition of all, and this seems to be a large part of what Hobbes desired.

Conclusion

For whatever other appearances these men may have, Machiavelli and Hobbes are, after all, very much like the fox and the lion, respectively. Machiavelli's reputation is as a man not only encouraging but guiding and advising those of political ambition toward the achievement of their ends. The first impression of *The Prince* may be that political ambition is good, that involvement in politics is promising of great reward. However, Machiavelli's account of the limited power of virtue in the face of fortune points to a severe vulnerability in the political life. Instead, the life in which virtue may have the most power is one less exposed to the whims of fortune than the highly unpredictable and variable life of politics is. Further, his account suggests that what is needed for really good politics is a reimagining of political order and morality. To achieve the ends of politics, one must go beyond it. Cesare's downfall, for example, was brought about by his belief in forgiveness and, by extension, his inability to overcome some of his Christian philosophical assumptions about the world and morality. If he had possessed some sort of philosophic ambition to complement his political ambition, perhaps things would have turned out differently. In other words, political ambition is still critical to good politics, but it needs some guidance. Republics may offer a political order conducive to a competition of the ambitious which is constrained and made more productive. Thus, Machiavelli's *The Prince* leads down a winding and somewhat circular road from the belief that political ambition is excellent and promising to the recognition that philosophic extra-political ambition is the most capable of achieving the ends sought by purely political ambition. Therefore, Machiavelli does not fundamentally contradict the apparent

understanding of his work. In fact, the apparent understanding becomes vitally important, as Machiavelli's exhortations to the politically ambitious are offered up alongside his new moral and political guidelines. The impression of his support for political ambition is what gives his extra-political philosophic ambition its ability to transmute into immense political impact. As much as he may be critical of political ambition, he continues to value it and use others' for his own ends of reimagining politics. His ambition is very apparent but is enabled by an unexpectedly sneaky and crafty method, not so unlike a fox, who has a reputation for craftiness and yet continues to outwit those expecting such wiliness.

Hobbes, on the other hand, may leave readers with precisely the opposite impression. When reading *Leviathan* it can be very easy to take away the lesson that Hobbes despises ambition and views it as purely threatening to the stability of political order. Ambition drives men to reckless politics and the upset of states and the generation of civil war and unimaginable horror. Therefore, politics should not be competitive at all. Monarchies provide stability, and the fully realized Hobbesian monarchy of the leviathan offers a truly ambitionless society in which none have the opportunity to aspire to greatness and, by extension, destruction. Further, Hobbes claims this desire for stability is hardly normative but the natural compulsion which drives men to society. If that stability can be achieved, then politics may fulfill its purpose as a realization of the natural desires of man. However, his argument regarding the origin of society and natural desires for stability point to an admission that some men do not desire such things. Hobbes concedes that some men are naturally ambitious and have no interest in the sort of state that he describes. In this way, then, Hobbes's project becomes fundamentally unnatural, a rejection of natural human desires for anything other than overriding security and peace. Therefore, Hobbes and his project begin to seem extremely ambitious in their own right. Hobbes's project ceases to be merely a descriptive account of human desires and natural forms of political order and instead becomes an ambitious project to build

a social order which subverts a portion of the human spirit and turns a part of man against himself. As much as men may love order, they also possess a natural ambition, and to stamp that out the love of order must almost paradoxically come to dominate the love of power and glory within man. Thus, Hobbes also does not directly contradict the apparent understanding of *Leviathan*, which is anti-ambitious. However, it proves more complicated and interesting as Hobbes exhibits an extraordinary level of ambition himself which manifests itself in the attempted destruction of all others' ambitions. Strangely, Hobbes's ambition is a sort of anti-ambition, in which he is seeking to place himself at the head of a new political order in which he cannot be superseded. He turns out rather like the lion, roaring loudly to intimidate every other animal on the plain not out of any real hatred of ambition but a hatred of *their* ambitions which stand against his own.

These are the general summaries of the works of the fox and the lion as they relate to ambition broadly, but a few particular points of contrast are worth looking at specifically. First, one ought to consider Hobbes's and Machiavelli's relations to the political or apolitical lives. Machiavelli's presentation is one which is outwardly pro-political but also quietly endorses a more philosophic, less traditionally political life. While he exemplifies an unparalleled level of political influence, Machiavelli recommends a life which nonetheless can be found only outside politics and in study. The philosophic life is subjected to far fewer of the turbulences of fortune so common to the life of politics, and it seems to be a life which actually provides what it promises. While someone else or some misfortune could deprive you of your state, nobody can take your wisdom from you. Sure, time or accident may one day rid you of your faculties, but these are the unavoidable instances of fate or fortune. That is still a far lesser risk than that which one takes on by participating in politics. However, Machiavelli's embodiment of the political impact this life can have and his outward endorsement of the explicitly political life seem a sort of recognition of the fact that so many men may live with some amount

of political ambition. For however much his open exhortations may be toward a life of which he is somewhat critical, he still points to another path toward a similar end of political impact. Even the apolitical is political for Machiavelli, and so even his philosophic life leaves room for spiritedness. Hobbes, on the other hand, seems to invert this relationship. Like Machiavelli, he recognizes the impact philosophy can have on politics, but he openly denigrates the work of philosophers like Aristotle or Carneades in Rome. Political ambition is unacceptable, and so is that political ambition of the philosophers which masquerades as apolitical. Instead, such things ought to be rooted out. Philosophy ought not be studied because it leads the student to deliberations of justice and a questioning of constant obedience to the sovereign. Instead, only his book ought to be taught, and otherwise students should spend their time in the study of mathematics and geometry which enables only an understanding of simply how the world physically operates rather than a contemplation of how it may be or how human beings are more deeply than a conglomeration of tissue. To the extent that Hobbes serves as an exemplar of the very opposite of what he recommends—his being a studious life directed toward the impact of politics—he might serve as some inspiration to others with some political ambition, but he seeks to hide this aspect of himself and his project as best he can behind a façade of scientism. He tries not only to set rules to curtail and constrain ambition but conceals his own and seeks to terrify his readers into abandoning theirs. In this way, Hobbes promotes an entirely apolitical population, squeezing out—either through physical annihilation or social pressure—anyone verging on a political interest or disposition.

Second, one ought to consider these two authors and their relations to Christianity, Christian thought, and religion more broadly. Machiavelli presents an obviously critical perspective on Christianity. Not only the church but almost everything it teaches, from mercy to forgiveness, serves to disrupt good politics. However, as we have seen, Machiavelli's cruelty is not simply an end in itself but a means to an end not unlike a

secularized Christian ideal of peace. Machiavelli rejects turning the other cheek in order to secure one's place in a peaceful afterlife. This sort of behavior brings greater suffering and instability into politics in this life, and so instead Machiavelli recommends an immanentization of the eschaton: peace in this world now rather than in the hereafter. Further, by placing a great deal of emphasis on the value and importance of politics and encouraging ambitious men to pursue power, he attempts in a way to reawaken an ancient interest in honor and glory rather than submission and disinterest in this world. Thus, he guts Christianity, taking only the barest inspiration from it and bastardizing even that to a point of little resemblance to the faith. Religion remains important, according to Machiavelli, for the people will still desire to believe their leaders Christian men and so on, not merely bloody-handed brutes. However, since a reformation of politics to the extent which Machiavelli imagines requires some philosophic innovation and breaking of customs, religion and Christianity will need to be forgotten by the prince, though still imitated before the people. Machiavelli implicitly recognizes the immense power of Christianity and religion in shaping men and seeks to undermine its influence on a certain class of individuals who might by their actions cultivate new, less Christian political cultures, perhaps more akin to ancient republics with some new, less Christian values. While Hobbes too is largely at odds with Christianity, he takes a road in some ways very different than Machiavelli's. Hobbes places a similar importance on peace but focuses not on the cultivation of ambition which might achieve it. Instead he advocates submissiveness which might allow for a dictatorial government to achieve it. The problem seems not to be that Christianity has made men too submissive for good government but that it has not made them submissive enough to power. Enough men think too much of themselves that some were even driven to launch an insurrection and civil war against the King, partly in the name of Christianity. Thus, Hobbes seeks not to supplant Christian values with some ancient notions of virtue and honor and glory but to intensify Christian values. He exhorts men to embrace turning the other cheek before

the power of the state. He also uses Christ's method of turning man against himself to reject part of himself—in this case, ambition—and so resembles Christianity not only in principle but in method. While this is all focused on the generation of a more stable political order and thus thoroughly secular—having nothing to do with an afterlife—Hobbes does couch much of his writing in a thoroughly Christian ethos, reminding the reader that such behavior is precisely what Christ did under the power of the Romans. Hobbes similarly implicitly recognizes the power of Christianity and religion but—while he does abandon any Christian interest in the afterlife or God for that matter—he seeks more to bolster the Christian value of submission rather than supplant it with ambition.

Third, one ought to examine the motivations of these writers, whether they were driven to such efforts only by ambition or also by some moral compulsion, a desire to help others. It could be said for either of these men that ambition was their only motivation, but that seems difficult to believe. For Machiavelli, there is certainly some ambition, but there also seems a genuine sense of distress about the utter disorder of Italian politics. For Hobbes too there is ambition, but he also displays a serious concern about the risk of civil war in England, something he displayed also in his personal life. Both clearly have an interest in the generation of peace: Machiavelli through turbulence and ambitious competition and Hobbes through deference and centralization of power. The Christian promise of peace in the afterlife is in many ways directed to the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers who hereafter shall have their rewards in exchange for their suffering on Earth. Machiavelli and Hobbes seem to be driven to the assistance of a similar group of people. Machiavelli cautions his reader frequently against abuse of the people. Though this is couched in an argument of self-interest—an abused people pose a danger to the abuser—his philosophy remains nonetheless interested in securing better treatment for the people and that more of them are left alone. Hobbes seems to have a similar interest. While he recognizes the existence of some men who would prove problematic for his vision of politics, he nonetheless pushes forward in his

project, implying that his interest is in a regime which better provides for the wants of the majority—i.e. security—at any cost to that minority with other interests. In other words, both authors are significantly interested in the protection of the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers. Both share a similar moral compulsion apparently rooted in Christianity. Now, of course, Machiavelli is not interested in the cultivation of a meek population as Hobbes is, but both seem keen to protect such people from unstable or incompetent political orders. However, Machiavelli, unsurprisingly, seems to have a moral compulsion very different, or perhaps wider, than Hobbes's. While Hobbes is focused on the protection of the submissive and a lowering or destruction of the great or ambitious, Machiavelli is focused on an atmosphere of coexistence for these two diverse humors which are found in every city. Hobbes favors monarchies as a tool to crush the ambitious, but Machiavelli appears to favor republics for their ability to channel ambition productively into the creation of an active and competent city. Machiavelli sees the ambitious as a political constant which must be appropriately dealt with if one is to have good and stable politics, and so while he may not display a particularly moral interest in these people, he nonetheless considers their accommodation important. Hobbes, on the other hand, displays no interest in or obligation, moral or otherwise, to these sorts of people. His moral compulsion to prevent the suffering of the majority is, he seems to think, completely at odds with the perceived interests of any ambitious person.

Finally, it remains for me to offer some thoughts on the approaches of these authors to ambition in politics. For one, it is intriguing just how much each of them wants to reject Christianity and yet cannot quite escape its cave. Machiavelli, for all his moral and political innovation, remains trapped in the premise that the purpose of politics is to secure a peaceful life for the average person. Hobbes at times seems even more anti-Christian than Machiavelli, if only for his obvious atheism which can be almost painful to read, but he too remains constrained by a similar idea as Machiavelli. Now, this isn't "Christian" in the obvious sense, given that Christ rejected the importance of politics

and instructed his followers to care little who was Caesar as long as they knew who was their God. Instead, it is Christian in its impulse to help the downtrodden, the people, whom Christ so revered, in stark contrast to the values of the past. Machiavelli makes an attempt to reach back to the ancients and their values through republics, but this is limited by his apparent principle of government and philosophy. In this way, though, Machiavelli does seem considerably less "modern" than Hobbes who makes no attempt to look back to the values of the ancients but instead disparages such things and attempts to cultivate a sort of super-Christian ethos of submission to the state. This is also extremely modern in the sense that Hobbes appears to recognize the unnatural qualities of his political project and yet believes human nature is malleable enough, taking after Christ in a way, that man can be turned against himself and his ambition rooted out. This is the element of the Hobbesian project which seems not only repulsive but impossible.

It may well be possible that a state could be expertly arranged that for generations any ambition is staved off. However, the belief that ambition itself can be rooted out of men seems to me impossible. Human nature is human nature, and the fact that even Hobbes recognizes ambition as natural to man seems fairly damning of his argument and vision. You can certainly turn the knobs and adjust this or that characteristic of human nature, as religion often does and Christianity certainly did when it turned down ambition and love of glory considerably. Nor does it seem to me to be appealing to try to eliminate ambition as much as possible. If it cannot be rooted out of men's characters, then the state which fully obstructs it can only generate incredible sadness and purposelessness amongst its people. I wonder whether Hobbes's desire to ameliorate suffering would be fulfilled with such widespread psychological agony. Instead, Machiavelli seems to offer a wiser path, recognizing that the ambitious have existed, do exist, and will forever exist. A healthy political order should certainly seek to ameliorate suffering, but it should do that through the cultivation of human excellence and the channeling of that excellence and ambition into productive political venues that help people. There

seems not to be any aspirational purpose to life in Hobbes's regime other than not to die as long as possible, and I cannot accept that is a wise view of life. There may be modest private pursuits, but there is no way that in a regime which so thoroughly regulates thought—as Hobbes advises a regime ought to—that private pursuits could reach to the same heights of profundity and originality that they could in a less quasi-totalitarian regime. Machiavelli's politics allow for beauty, nobility, aspiration, and the creation of great things which are impossible, as Hobbes says, without a stable political order but which are also impossible in a political order that offers nothing but oppressive stability. Machiavelli, for all his reputation as a lover of ruthless ambition and vicious politics actually seems to advocate for a somewhat moderate regime which—while ideally only at first involving considerable cruelty—is focused on the cultivation of domestic peace and yet allows for both political competition and profound private pursuits. Hobbes, in seeking to subvert human nature and crush the spirits of men, advocates for a political order which is very much at odds with humanity. Perhaps surprisingly, it is Machiavelli who, by recognizing human nature and taking men as they are, not only profoundly humanizes politics but sheds light on a path to philosophical fulfillment which would very well be inaccessible to the Hobbesian man.