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Machiavelli's "Ferocious Freedom": Dangerous Nature, Subjectivity, and the Necessity of Violence

By

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Abbreviations

P	*The Prince*
D	*Discourses on Livy*
FH	*Florentine Histories*

"*The harshness of things and the newness of the kingdom compel me to contrive such things, and to keep a broad watch over the borders.*"[1]

Virgil, *Aeneid* I 563–564

Abstract

What must one undertake to transform one's *subjectivity* in order to acquire and maintain one's free status in a world where one's freedom is inherently fragile and susceptible to constant dangers? This thesis aims to explore Niccolò Machiavelli's *ethos* of protecting individual and collective freedom (exemplified by a democratic way of life) by highlighting the *existential* and *institutional* significance of the necessity of violence and the necessary dangers imposed by others' "ambitions." Based primarily on Machiavelli's works *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*, my reading suggests that for Machiavelli, maintaining freedom (i.e., autonomy or not being dominated or oppressed by others) is inextricable from the constant production or emergence of what I refer to as a "ferocious subjectivity." This consists of (1) the *necessary willingness to look* at the world as conflictual or hostile in itself, which forces one to have an existential understanding of the inherent fragility of one's freedom, and (2) the *necessary capacity to engage* in violence that this new horizon of nature or life necessitates and which is justified because it enables a free being to courageously respond to this *ontologically* dangerous world.

I first analyze how Machiavelli's conception of nature—the main constituents of which are ambition and fortune—derives the necessities listed above and how they, for Machiavelli, are existentially crucial for *subjectively transforming* an actor from someone who is incapable or at least incompetent in protecting their freedom into someone who can stand autonomously in this hostile world. Such a transformation is the emergence of what will be referred to as "ferocious subjectivity." I then explain that these necessities are most vividly illustrated in what Machiavelli calls the "goodness" of political beginnings. I take the notion to mean a generative use of necessary violence (i.e., an expression of

[1] This is quoted in Chapter 17, "Cruelty or Mercy" of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. See *P* 17, p. 66.

ferocious subjectivity) in an extremely hostile situation that allows for the "beginning" (or emergence) of a free community to be possible.

Concerning the *maintenance* of a free community and individual autonomy after a free regime has been established, I argue that for Machiavelli, such maintenance is only possible when certain institutions allow citizens of a community to *continuously* and *sustainably* confront otherwise dominating dangerous forces, such as Rome's tribune, public trials, the equality of offices, and civil militarization. By permitting citizens to directly confront political dangers, these institutions best elicit an awareness of the intrinsic hostility of the world that is, in turn, crucial in triggering courageous (and sometimes necessarily) violent action on the part of citizens. In participating in these institutions, citizens are also able to learn how to engage in and utilize violence in a prudent and responsible way at critical junctures. This enables them to "subjectify" themselves as autonomous and ferocious individuals in the pursuit of maintaining a "free way of life"—just as how the founders deploy ferocious violence in dangerous times that helps establish a free regime (or using Machiavelli's term, the "goodness" of all political beginnings). In this way, what Machiavelli calls a "return of the beginning," is not only the institutional *re-presentation* of the original use of courageous violence of the founders of a regime (i.e., the "goodness" of a political beginning) in a new temporality but also the *reproduction* of dangers which are necessary insofar as they inspire actors in future to engage in necessary violence and instruct them in how to do so responsibly.

Finally, I argue that for Machiavelli, the "corruption" of a community, primarily caused by economic inequality and political dependency of an oppressed populace on militarily stronger groups or princely figures, consists of a refusal to acknowledge the intrinsic hostility of the world and an inability to engage in the violence which would be necessary for attaining their emancipation. If the populace rests in a state of "pacification" such that they become a passive, impotent mass, they will become forgetful of how hostile the world truly is and are deprived of both autonomy and the necessary ability to forcibly defend their freedom.

Altogether, Machiavellian freedom is a process of relational becoming that requires actors to

undertake a specific subjective transformation that inevitably accompanies the necessity of treating danger as a generative good in triggering an actor's courage and the willingness to use necessary violence. The freedom or the well-being of an individual is not a natural given; one must earn it, and in order to earn the freedom that one naturally desires, altering one's mode of existence is a necessity. Thus, living freely is living according to what worldly necessities demand.[2]

Introduction

In Machiavelli scholarship, the meaning of freedom (individual and collective) and how to attain it have been topics of intense debate, giving rise to various interpretations and diverse interpretative frameworks. The Straussian school (Leo Strauss and other scholars, including Harvey Mansfield) tends to equate Machiavellian freedom to the "necessity of acquisition" (the need to acquire resources while they are available) and argues that Machiavelli's teaching concerning freedom inspires those who wish to attain individual glory to disregard the moral status of the means one uses.[3] By contrast, scholars who are aligned with the Cambridge School (such as J.G.A Pocock and Quentin Skinner) see Machiavelli as an important (even groundbreaking) successor to the tradition of Renaissance "republican" freedom, whose major concern is establishing egalitarian institutions that help sustain public civic virtue.[4] Acknowledging the irreducibly "popular" or democratic dimension of Machiavelli's writing, scholars such as John McCormick and Yves Winter highlight Machiavelli's emphasis on how class-specific institutions supported by violent punishment for disobedience or insolence are crucial in deterring oppressive tendencies and corruption among nobles (which Machiavelli collectively terms "insolence"

[2] For the sake of enhancing the flow of argument, most scholarly discussions that I engage in throughout the paper are contained in the footnotes.

[3] See Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958), p. 119–120; and Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 55–78.

[4] See Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 54–87; and J. G. A. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 194, 211–218.

or *insolenzia*).[5] Lastly, scholars who share a close affinity to post-Marxist and post-structural thoughts, such as Miguel Vatter and Roberto Esposito, regard Machiavelli as a radical thinker who sees freedom as a transgressive force that configures itself according to the vital web of political forces in a given time and place.[6]

I generally accept the Straussian school's account of Machiavelli's notion of necessity as amounting to a "new standard" (in contrast to the classical morality) of human striving that induces individuals to embrace and take responsibility for their own agency. However, the problem with such an interpretation is that it suggests that, for Machiavelli, only "elites" are able to learn how to comprehend and prudently make use of danger and violence. Danger, for Machiavelli, is itself necessary because it necessitates violence—the use of which is necessary for pursuing personal "acquisition" or even freedom. In this thesis, I argue that a crucial aspect that the Straussian school often fails to recognize is that these necessities, from the perspective of democratic populism, are justified because common citizens also have the ability to learn about them through proper institutional arrangements, and Machiavelli's concern for necessities ultimately serves the purpose of protecting a democratic free way of life. Given how, based on McCormick's and Winter's respective analyses, institutions (especially the popular type), are crucial to Machiavelli's understanding of the maintenance of freedom and his preference for a popular republic, I further attempt to show that the institutions that Machiavelli mostly admires, including Rome's tribune and civil militarization, are praised due to their capacities to repetitively present or *re-present* the necessary danger that could trigger the plebs' awareness of the necessity to employ violence. This enables the collective to "return" to the healthy condition of the political community at its founding (or what Machiavelli refers to as the "return to the *goodness* of the beginning") and subjectify themselves

[5] See John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 114–138; and Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 152–158.
[6] Miguel Vatter, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom* (New York: Springer Press, 2000), p. 83–975; and Roberto Esposito, *Living Thoughts: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 46–58.

into a ferocious group of people against both "insolent" (that is, oppressive and overly ambitious) domestic elites and foreign enemies. Although my analytical perspective recognizes that Machiavelli's political vision amounts to an ontological field of vital forces constituted by dangers and ferocious reactions to them, the limitation of the post-Marxist analysis, as McCormick argues, is that it pays insufficient attention to how central "institutions" are in Machiavelli's writing with regard to empowering citizens' agency.[7] One argument I make in this thesis is that according to Machiavelli, popular freedom can only emerge and sustain itself within this force field of vital dangers by letting citizens participate in institutions that allow citizens to establish a productive relationship with the vital force of ambition and embrace it. For Machiavelli, the populace must exercise *direct rule* in order to subjectively transform themselves into a ferocious kind of people.

The central contribution that this thesis aims to make is an integration of the views of the scholars mentioned above under the conceptual framework of "subjectivity" and the presentation of this argument: that the production of a ferocious *ethos* or subjectivity (with an additional focus on the institutional conditions for the emergence of such a subjectivity) is the necessary condition for any meaningful attainment of freedom. Such interpretative framework derives from Michel Foucault's conception of "spirituality," which he describes as the "search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformation on himself in order to have access to the truth."[8] Here, I suggest that the "practice" and "experience" that Machiavelli finds necessary in subjectively transforming an actor into a ferocious one whose ability grants one's access to acquire or maintain and understand the truth of freedom are constitutive dangers that trigger one's willingness to deploy necessary violence.

Moreover, in contrast to the views of the scholars mentioned above, my argument for the necessary emergence of a ferocious subjectivity in protecting freedom *starts* with Machiavelli's view on

[7] See the "Preface" of John P. McCormick, *Democrazia Machiavelliana: Machiavelli, Il Potere del Popoli E Il Controllo Delle Elites*, trans. Anna Carocci (Roma: Viella Editrice, 2020).

[8] See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–82*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 15.

nature or the world in general, which is that it is inherently hostile and ontologically constituted by infinite dangers posed by the ambitions of others. I argue that it is this ontological view on the nature of hostility that necessitates the production of a ferocious subjectivity if one wishes to acquire or maintain his or her freedom in this world.

While the liberal notion of freedom is that it consists more of a negative status of security, in which one is freed from interference and fear, Machiavelli acknowledges that the free status one enjoys is easily susceptible to dangers posed by either foreign enemies or domestic figures who seek to empower themselves at the cost of others. Most importantly, however, he further welcomes these profound dangers in the sense that they necessitate and trigger common citizens to actively, ferociously, and sometimes violently exercise power in ruling and neutralizing these threats. To sustain such a ruling power, good political leadership is required, and this is only possible by means of establishing and maintaining institutions that ensure these ferocious actions (against political dangers) can be institutionally reproduced throughout the lifespan of a republic. Machiavelli's account of freedom, in this sense, highlights a significant weakness of the negative notion of liberal freedom where the emphasis is more on the passivity of individual security granted by an ideal constitutional state and, as Frederic Lordon argues, tends to ignore the fact that democratic constitutional order requires an almost infinite number of subjective agencies to maintain their validity.[9]

1.1 Machiavelli's Hostile "Ontology" and the Necessity of Violence

For Machiavelli, the world is itself "conflictual,"[10] and freedom (*libertà*) is the maintenance of one's

[9] For more discussion on the susceptibility or the inherent dissolutive tendency of liberal constitutional order and the necessity of maintaining such an order through a collective affective or "contributive" agency on the part of citizens, see Frederic Lordon, *Imperium: Structures and Affects of Political Bodies*, trans. Andy Bliss (London: Verso, 2022), p.134, 207–209.

[10] Esposito argues that in Machiavelli's writings, "politics is originary" in the sense that "politics occupies the entire horizon of the real" and always entails a "conflictual dimension." See Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 48–49. However, such a characterization is somewhat misleading. According to Machiavelli, instead of seeing the world as originally political in a collective sense, it is the aggregate formation of various "individual" ambitions that constitutes the struggle of different collectives. In other words, the sequence is reversed: The world is first conflictual on the individual level, thereby making

status, either on a collective or individual level, without depending on others in this conflictual ontological network.[11] However, I argue that if one wishes to remain free, to Machiavelli, this requires an emergence of a ferocious subjectivity that 1) necessarily *sees* and *acknowledges* worldly hostility as the basic ontological condition of the world, thereby opening a new horizon of the world that, in turn, 2) necessitates self-sufficient access to violence (i.e., self-arms). This is the condition for 3) *acting* "ferociously" (*ferocissimamente*; see *D* 3.12, p. 247, which can roughly be understood as referring to exhibiting courage and a willingness to engage in violence in order to defend one's own freedom and livelihood). Together, these necessities serve as transformative conditions that enable a radical change of subjectivity that is indispensable to the maintenance of freedom.

The hostile nature of the world (that is, the conflict inherent in human life at every level) is first vividly illustrated by the term "ambition" (*ambizione*). Ambition, for Machiavelli, is the ontological essence that manifests a human being's immanent "vital creative energy" that is essentially "transgressive," and this vitality also explains why the human world can never be peaceful for long and is constantly beset by the threat and emergence of conflict.[12] As Machiavelli articulates in *Tercets on Ambition*, "When man was born into the world, they [ambitions] were born too," meaning ambition and the will to dominate or acquire are inherent aspects of the human condition (1989, p. 243). While our ambitions constitute a major aspect of human life, Machiavelli ironically claims that if "they had no existence, happy enough would be our condition" because "from this [the birth of ambition], it results that one goes down and another goes up […] without law or agreement" (ibid, p. 243–244). The rise and

collective political struggle possible.

[11] Here are some examples of how Machiavelli uses the concept of freedom. Regarding collective freedom, Machiavelli states that Rome "had a free beginning, without depending on anyone" and that "free cities" are "those that had a beginning far from all external servitude and were at once governed by their will" (*D* 1.1, p. 9, 1.2, p. 10). For plebs, living a free way of life means to "not be oppressed" (*P* 9, p. 39) and "not to be dominated" (*D* 1.5, p. 18), followed by freedom from threats: a "free way of life […] is being able to enjoy one's things freely, without any suspicion, not fearing for the honor of wives and that of children, not to be afraid for oneself" (*D* 1.16, p. 45). Freedom is also socioeconomic "equality." As Machiavelli says, "for such corruption and slight aptitude for free life arise from an inequality that is in that city" (*D* 1.17, p. 49).

[12] See Christopher Holman, *Machiavelli and the Politics of Democratic Innovation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), p. 85–86.

fall of powers precipitated by both victorious and failed ambitions occupy the reality that all humans must endure and express "the shifting of every mortal condition" (ibid, p. 244).

In *The Golden Ass*, another poetic work of Machiavelli's, we find a similar description of ambition to the one he gives in *Tercets on Ambition*," but which is more concrete and, for that reason, deserves mention. Machiavelli explores freedom from a quasi-ontological perspective as something "ambitious" in the sense that a person is free insofar as their actions are expressed by a "boundless energy joined to no particular end" that is itself always in motion. That one's freedom is always in motion but has no particular objective may seem somewhat contradictory, but Machiavelli's point is that there is no *predetermined* end or anything that shapes the direction of the will before the agent's own deliberation about what one wants to obtain.[13] Using a "young fellow" in Florence as an example to articulate the general existential condition of human beings, he says that the youth "went running through the street, and at every time, without any heed," and since no "remedy" could cure the youth's desire to run relentlessly, his father decided to place him in custody. However, people found the youth running on the street again after he "saw [that] this street [was] so straight and wide" and he could not "restrain himself […] from turning again to his old pleasure [of running freely up and down it]" (ibid, p. 260–261).

Using the image of the running youth analogically, "every mortal," Machiavelli writes, has the ambition to "run" freely or to express one's individuality without obstacles. Nevertheless, this presupposes that the person must be free in the first place. As Machiavelli makes clear, being free "is being able to enjoy one's things freely, without any suspicion […] not to be afraid for oneself" (*D* 1.16, p. 45). However, in light of his account of the conflictual nature of the world, "being able to enjoy one's things" is only possible when one's own power is great enough to first check the dangerous ambitions of others, thereby preventing others' ambitions from ruining one's free status (*stato*). This, in turn, requires

[13] See Diego A. von Vacano, *The Art of Power: Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and the Making of Aesthetic Political Theory* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 13–17.

active and often violent agency in acquiring one's freedom.[14] Thus, becoming free is both expansive (confronting others' dangerous ambitions) and defensive (preventing others from annihilating one's fragile freedom), making the human world an immanent process of constant exchange between constructive domination and being dominated, necessitated by successful and unsuccessful pursuits of ambition.[15]

Accordingly, the pertinent question is what one must take up or sacrifice to maintain one's fragile free status in this irreducibly hostile world. Machiavelli alludes to certain ethical or practical principles that can provide much-needed guidance and protection against the constant threats of other people's ambitions so as to maintain individual and collective freedom. Such subjectively transformative guidance, I argue, includes the necessity of violence or ferocious actions. However, one must first take, acquire, or, most importantly, absorb a *new perspective* or *sensibility* on the world—namely, seeing the world as ontologically hostile or dangerous, which also implies that one finds life, especially human life, is inherently *fragile*, before one is able to discern that violence is necessary.

Ironically, in *The Golden Ass*, this sensibility or perspective is offered by a "hog," which I interpret as an observer of the human race that calmly yet sarcastically narrates the basic existential condition of humans. The hog believes that we "animals" are inevitably "happy and prosperous" because we are always satisfied with what "nature teaches and commands" (1989, p. 281). Animals "seek the climate friendly to our way of life" and only "care for food" that is "the product of the heavens without art" (ibid, p. 282). By contrast, humans tend to "leave a healthful climate" and always try to "shift" themselves due to their endless "shameful greed," even though this unavoidably means continuous "miseries" that may

[14] In this sense, as argued by McCormick, Cambridge School's emphasis on Machiavelli's negative notion of freedom fails to clearly grasp the whole picture or the "active" nature of Machiavelli's conception of freedom. In the context of the Roman Republic, for Machiavelli, the maintenance of freedom always requires radical plebeian institutions or measures that empower the plebs to actively participate in checking the oppressive nobles. These radical measures include class-specific offices, public trials, public deliberation, and economic redistribution. See John P. McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*: *Scandalous Books, Suspect Engagements & the Virtue of Populist Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 190–196.

[15] See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 13, 292.

not serve to "protect" their "livelihood." No life, like humans, has a "frailer life […] a stronger desire, more disordered fear or greater madness" which "has blocked against" humans "the path of well-being" (ibid).

In *Tercets on Ambitions*, a poem dedicated to one of Machiavelli's closest friends, Luigi Guicciardini, Machiavelli also offers a perspective similar to the hog's. Machiavelli's intention in writing this poem was to show Luigi what the world is fundamentally constituted of and therefore offer him guidance conducive to leading a free life. He tells Luigi that "It does not seem to me that you take the world *as it really is*" (ibid, p. 243; emphasis added). Writing that "from the sun of Scythia to that of Egypt, from Gibraltar to the opposite shore," he can only "see the sprouting of this transgression [ambition]," Machiavelli argues that an understanding of the true nature of the world only emerges from a sober observation of the world (ibid). What one can derive from the "sprouting of this transgression" is "see[ing] the earth wet with tear sand blood, and the air full of screams, of sobs, and sighs" (ibid, p. 246). By looking at the world through the gaze of ambition, one eventually understands that life entails an irreducible fragility when it is, likewise, positioned in an irreducibly hostile world.

It must be noted here that Machiavelli is not encouraging us to negate our wicked "humanity" so that we can be spared some of the torments of this life and find salvation—this is impossible because, as Machiavelli has the hog in *The Golden Ass* say, these "miseries" are ineluctable features of human nature and existence. The hog's perspective in *Tercets on Ambitions* is designed to be a mirror that Machiavelli holds up to humanity so as to force us to understand what it means to be human. To be human is to *accept* that one is vulnerable to a vast array of dangers but still has the courage to live on. Such an "objective" perspective of human beings first elevates one's position to a universal level so that one is able to be sober enough to calmly see or contemplate how endless tragedies, dangers, and violent conflicts form an essential element of the human world.

Interiorizing such an elevated, sober perspective about the fragility of human life and the irreducible

dangers imposed by ambitious others, one soon understands that the most effective way to counter other human ambitions is to establish an "order" and impose a greater force on those who are threatening while not resigning oneself *from* and *to* the ambitions of others. As Machiavelli writes, people who are ambitious but who act "cowardly" always cause the community to become "servile," bring about "every kind of ruin," and expose the community "to every other ill" (ibid, p. 245).

Fortunately, for Machiavelli, such "cowardice" or "lack of worth" can be compensated for by "discipline" (ibid). "Discipline" refers to the establishment of "good laws" or internal orders that allow people to channel their ambitions for the purpose of fighting "foreign peoples" rather than domestic rivals.[16] This shows that what Machiavelli means by the phrase "act cowardly" is the *inability* of a person to establish necessary order for the purpose of maintaining their position in this world, and the inability to establish order also follows the inability to use necessary violence. This is because, for Machiavelli, societal order is only possible if the founder of the regime has a "valiant heart" and "a well-armed vigor," such that the founder can conceive of good laws and use violence to establish or preserve these laws if necessary (ibid.).

We can see that for Machiavelli, only a sober perspective, according to which the world is inevitably hostile, and the use of violence (against internal disorder and foreign enemies) can successfully negate cowardice, thereby increasing the likelihood of the emergence of a virtuous order based on a newly emerged ferocious subjectivity. *Looking* at the irreducible dangers that make up the world is *believing* that violence is a necessary fact of existence, and becoming human is to bear the weight of the inevitable tragedies of human existence, continue living despite them, and re-approach the human world, which is full of conflict and rivalries, with frankness.

[16] McCormick argues that to Machiavelli, young nobles of Florence should appreciate a popular democratic empire or Rome's imperial republic model because their ambitions to oppress or conquer can be channeled to foreign conquest. Still, doing so necessarily depends on the empowerment of the plebs for a larger army, not to mention that popular participation makes the longevity of a republic more likely since nobles' excessive appetites are almost always the sole cause of the destruction of a republic. See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 52–60.

Machiavelli also expresses a similar attitude in both *The Prince* and *Discourses,* in which he asserts that there "cannot be good laws" if "there are not good arms," and "good arms" always refers to arming the subjects of a principality or the citizens of a republic (e.g., *P* 12, p. 48).[17] A wise leader, "whenever he has found" the people "unarmed," "he has always armed them" (*P* 20, p. 83). Thus, good order is, first and foremost, an evaluation of one's own force (*forza*) or one's existential concern for self-sufficient access to violence and the force of others. Machiavelli "measures" both a good principality and a free republic based on how "militarized" the subjects or plebs are,[18] which is equivalent to "governing [...] subjects" and citizens "well" (*P* 10, p. 43).[19] Thus, every act undertaken for the purpose of maintaining one's freedom is simultaneously a re-emerging situational understanding of one's capacity to use violence and the violent potential of the ambitions held by others. In this connection, when Croesus, king of the Lydians, showed Solon the Athenian his "innumerable treasure" and asked "how his power seemed to him," Solon was unimpressed because whoever had "more steel" than Croesus "could come and take [those treasures] away with ease" (*D* 2.10, p. 148). Machiavelli further concludes that "gold itself cannot introduce good soldiers," but good soldiers "are quite sufficient to find gold." Unlike Solon, Croesus, in this case, was clearly not as powerful as he appeared to be. He did not recognize the priority of necessary violence or the "effectual" force of violence that this hostile world necessitates. Due to this misconception, Croesus wrongly saw money as a greater criterion than steel for determining his force.[20]

A community's willingness and ability to arm itself can only be attained by civil militarization, and these should be seen not only as the "existential" conditions of an autonomous and "good" political order

[17] See also *P* 6, p. 24, 13, p. 55–57; *D* 1.6, p. 20–23, 1.21, p. 54–56, 3.22, p. 265–268, 3.31, p. 283–284.

[18] See *P* 10, p.43–44, 12, p. 50–51; *D* 1.6, p. 21–22, 1.21, p. 54–55, 2.10, p. 148–149, 2.30, p. 201–202.

[19] Yves Winter argues that the concept of "force," in Machiavelli's writing, is framed as a "diagnosis" of the "constellations of power at a given historic moment," and to become politically successful, actors must "be able to read force fields and catalog the heterogeneous modes of power and capability." See Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, p. 79–81.

[20] Machiavelli famously states that he is concerned more about the "effectual truth" than the "imaginary" truth of politics. "Effectual," according to Mansfield, is more than the analysis of "efficient" modes of engaging in political affairs; it is also the knowledge of "creating the effect" of power. The necessity to make power "showy," which is often manifested in violent actions, characterizes the other side of effectual truth. See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 28–30.

but also as "ethical" conditions that are inevitably accompanied by a "popular" transformation of subjectivity. The subjects (that is, citizens) of such a political order move from living in a "cowardly" state to one in which they are able to exercise "discipline," which encompasses the ability to use violence if necessary. My use of the term "ethical" is aligned with Foucault's analysis of Greco-Roman "ethics," according to which the "care or practice of the self" in pursuit of transforming oneself from a certain subject to a more elevated status plays the central role that expresses what true ethical life or a truthful "way of living" ought to be. Consequently, ethics, for Foucault, has to do with "governing" oneself through a particular practical process that alters one's mode of being.[21] I argue that for Machiavelli, a life that embraces the necessity of violence derived from the facticity of worldly hostility is "a care of the self" since, in order to change oneself from a potential victim of the ambitions of others to a truly autonomous being, one must take worldly dangers and violence as necessities that elevate a free life.

The need for such a transformation is most evident in the speech made by an anonymous speaker during the Ciompi Uprising in Florence. Trying to persuade the Ciompi workers to revolt against the oppressive ruling elites, the speaker said that "if others do not teach us, necessity does," and that such a necessity required them to "redouble the evils"—redoubling violence against the oppressive nobles (*FH* 3.13, p. 122). However, why could only necessary violence lead the revolting workers to the truth of freedom in this scenario? This was because, as the speaker claimed, all the "riches and great power" of the Florentine ruling elites were "obtained either by fraud or by force." Based on the considerations pertaining to Machiavelli's thoughts on freedom and violence given above, the speaker expresses an "elevated" perspective, according to which most worldly goods can only be attained by brute violence or force. Given that all political orders, including oppressive ones, are built by violence, the workers of the community must also be ready to resort to violence in reclaiming their freedom. In this connection, the speaker is reported to have said that engaging in violence would "open the way for us to have the

[21] See Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rainbow and trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 281–302.

things we desire to have for our freedom" (ibid).[22] Expressed differently, the speech shows that one's concern for desiring freedom, active in acquiring a ferocious subjectivity, is essentially an affective openness to encountering or exposing oneself to the existing hostilities at play and recognizing that there is no way to confront imminent threats besides the necessary use of ferocious violence. Consequently, necessary violence subjectifies and allows people to transcend their previous state from previously being oppressed and acting cowardly to a group of courageous agents that dare to make themselves autonomous and virtuous beings who cannot be ignored by those who would oppress them.

The same subjective transformation supported by necessary danger and violence also applies to military affairs. According to Machiavelli, the most virtuous captains of ancient times were those who understood the necessity of danger and imposed the "virtue of such necessity" on their soldiers in order to generate the greatest ferocious "spirits" when "engaging in combat" (*D* 3.12, p. 247). For instance, the Volsci commander Vettius Messius, who found his army dangerously "enclosed" between two approaching Roman armies, shouted, "Go with me; neither the wall nor ditch oppose you but the armed oppose the armed; alike in virtue, you are superior in *necessity*, which is the *last and greatest weapon*" (*D* 3.12, p. 249; emphasis added). Sometimes free ferocity resulting from the necessity to fight violently and autonomously can even earn respect and freedom from one's enemies. When the Privernates requested a pardon after their courageous rebellion against the Romans had been crushed, the Senate replied, "The voice of a free man had been heard" and granted the rebels citizenship since "only those who think of nothing except freedom are worthy to become Romans" (*D* 2.23, p. 183–184). On the other hand, when the Veientes, who submitted themselves to a "king" for defense, were surrounded by the Romans, the neighboring Tuscans refused to help the Veientes because "they judged it not to be good to defend" people whose dignity had "already [been] submitted to another" (*D* 2.2, p. 129).[23] The necessities

[22] See Yves Winter, "Plebeian Politics: Machiavelli and the Ciompi Uprising," *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): p. 746–748.

[23] See also Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 214–220, 257–259.

presented by these cases were far more than mere *constraints*. They were *transformative* powers that first compelled actors to alter their view of the world from one born of naïveté to one gained by virtue of cold sensibility, followed by the demanding yet authentic willingness to engage in violent acts that eventually enabled them to cultivate ferocious and free subjectivities.

There emerges a new *morality* from an actor's strong capacity to be affected by the necessity of violence and a sharp sensibility for danger as opposed to what Machiavelli calls "cowardice." Machiavelli claims that a person with "a valiant heart [...] seldom fears evil" (1989, p. 245) and that evil (defined as cruelty) can nevertheless encompass some degree of "internal" goodness if employed in certain hostile situations.[24] For example, when Pope Julius II, who "had taken an oath" to "remove Baglioni," entered Baglioni's territory "unarmed," Giovampagolo Baglioni, the ruthless tyrant of Perugia, surprisingly did not choose to kill the Pope (*D* 1.27, p. 62). Machiavelli says that Baglioni not only missed the "opportunity" to kill one of his most dangerous political opponents but also failed to establish a great "enterprise" by destroying the Church—a deed that "would have left an eternal memory of himself." According to Machiavelli, Baglioni's unwillingness to use violence in this situation could only be attributed to his failure to understand how to be "honorably wicked" or not "entering" the cruel "malice" that has "greatness *in itself*" (*D* 1.27, p. 63; emphasis added).[25] Lest Machiavelli's view be interpreted as purely calculative and lacking in moral consideration, we should consider another case. One which Machiavelli discusses in this connection is the Syracuse tyrant Agathocles's murder of all oppressive nobles "in a stroke," which he calls a "crime" and an act of "savage cruelty" or "inhumanity." Even so, Machiavelli immediately goes on to compliment Agathocles's "virtue" and the "greatness of

[24] Although in *Tercets on Ambition*, Machiavelli does not clearly explain what "evil" here refers to, it would be reasonable to interpret such evil as necessary "cruelty" or "violence." For example, when Machiavelli tries to separate cruelties well used from cruelties badly used and justifies the former; he writes, "if it is permissible to speak well of *evil*" (*P* 8, p.37–38; emphasis added).

[25] The same applies to not knowing how to neutralize partisan conflicts in an "inhumane" manner. Machiavelli says that when the Roman consuls were sent to "reconcile" the tumults among the Ardeans, there was no remedy other than "killing the heads of the tumults" (*D* 3.27, p. 274)." For further analysis of Machiavelli's praise for the inherent goodness of cruelty, see Vatter, *Between Form and Even*, p. 281–287.

his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities" (*P* 8, p. 35). It would seem that Machiavelli praises Agathocles in this way because he not only saved the republic from the oppression of nobles through "well-used cruelty," and, above all, established a civil army and successfully managed to repel all foreign threats, maintaining the freedom of his fatherland until his death.[26] Moreover, as Machiavelli writes, in order to maintain such ferocity, Agathocles, a man "born of a potter," must have had an extraordinary ability to endure a "thousand hardships and dangers" (ibid). Again, the ability to endure danger and the willingness to master and acquire violence is transformative and immanently transcendental in the sense that both open an agent up to a new horizon of life, in which they are able to "enter" the "greatness" of violence, that, in turn, leads to the possibility of leaving an "eternal memory" of one's deeds in the hearts and minds of the populace.

1.2 Fortune, "Violent Rivers," and Ambitions

Other than human ambitions, fortune (*fortuna*) is a non-human natural force that Machiavelli often uses to sketch the ontological condition of the world. Machiavelli generally offers three metaphors of fortune: qualitative temporalities, "violent rivers," and an "inconstant woman" or a female god who controls the deeds of humans through a spinning wheel that unpredictably alters human affairs. Given that this section aims to understand how the necessity of sufficient violence is crucial to maintaining oneself in a world structured by fortune, I will focus on the latter two metaphors.

As Machiavelli writes, when fortune, describes metaphorically as a "violent river," becomes "enraged," it "lift[s] earth from this part" while "everyone yields their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard" (*P* 25, p. 98). However, this does not mean that "when times are *quiet*," people cannot resist the arbitrariness of violent rivers "with dikes and dams." On the other hand, in *Tercets on*

[26] On the virtue and civility of Agathocles's "evil" cruelty in Machiavelli's writings, see John P. McCormick, "Machiavelli's Inglorious Tyrants: On Agathocles, Scipio and Unmerited Glory, *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 1 (2015): p. 33–35, 39, 40.

Fortune, similar to Machiavelli's description of fortune in *The Prince* and *Discourses*, fortune is presented as an arrogant higher power that "sits on high above" and who "gives commands and rules with fury," yet she also "may look on" individuals "who have the courage to sing of her dominion" (1989, p. 254). As her "wheels are ever turning," she is extremely unpredictable (she "turns states and kingdoms upside down as she pleases"), and there are two factors that make such eternal spinning possible: "laziness" and "necessity" ("laziness and necessity whirl them around") (ibid, p. 255). Laziness "lays" people's efforts to attain success in "waste" while necessity "puts the world in order again" (ibid). This statement is critical because "necessity" (or the necessity of self-arming, as I will explain later) is conceptualized as a generative mode that serves to "re-order" the unpredictable world commanded by fortune. Similar treatment of necessity as a stabilizing power that offers practical guidance for creating "order" can also be found when he criticizes Sparta's and Venice's non-expansionary policies and comments on the need to expand a republic through empowering and militarizing the agency of the plebs in a dangerous world. In this connection, Machiavelli asserts: "But since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall; and to many things that reason does not bring you, necessity brings you" (*D* 1.6, p. 23; see also *D* 1.49, p. 100).[27] Necessity is *creative* because it offers actors concrete guidelines that help them reduce the uncertainty of fortune and stabilize the flux of ambitions and opposing forces in the world so that a regime can be stable, held up by the arms and virtue of its citizens once a self-arming policy is put in place.[28]

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[27] According to Gabriele Pedullà, the case of whether a republic should expand shows that Machiavelli's political prudence involves more than anticipating the actions of others; it is also "mitigating the downsides that every decision necessarily entails." Non-expansionary aristocratic republics such as Sparta and Venice that do not "necessarily" militarize or empower the plebs will eventually fail for two main reasons: 1) If they later wish to expand or must expand due to necessity, they will be ruined because, without a plebeian army, they do not have a strong "foundation" for expansionary war (*D* 1.6, p. 22). 2) If they choose not to expand consistently, these republics will eventually engender "idleness" that either "effeminates" the regime or makes it "divided" (*D* 1.6, p. 23). See Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult: The Discourses on Livy and the Origins of Political Conflictualism*, trans. Patricia Gaborik and Richard Nybakken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 160–169.

[28] There is also a "bad" necessity that expresses an actor's "laziness." Machiavelli explains that if a prince does not militarize and maintain a good relationship with the plebs and instead is "compelled of necessity" to hide behind a fortress, that prince will easily come to ruin (*P* 10, p. 43). This is because building a fortress presupposes that the prince has a hostile relationship with their people (*P* 20, p.87). For example, the Countess of Forlì, hiding in a fortress during a "popular

As fortune varies, so do the ambitions of others. Sometimes "good" fortune can indicate good luck or the utilities resulting from one's reliance on others, but it is unwise to depend on fortune or others because they, like "violent rivers" or "spinning wheels," change according to their arbitrary ambitions, and only the necessity of self-sufficient violence can put a world dominated by fortune "in order again."[29] For example, although Cesare Borgia acquired Romagna through the arms of Orsini, other mercenaries, and the French King, he decided to "depend no longer on the *arms* and *fortune* of others" and immediately killed those who had assisted him once he realized that they did not share his ambition, which "prevented him from maintaining" his free status (*P* 7, p. 28; emphasis added). Thus, like the "unpredictable wheel" and "violent rivers," people's varying ambitions are concrete representations of fortune as a whole.

Reflecting the necessity of self-arming in maintaining one's freedom when confronting the ambitions of hostile individuals, the necessities presented in *Tercets on Fortune* are identical to the necessities demanded by a world full of opposing ambitions. If building "dikes" stabilizes or preserves a person's existence and frees them from the unpredictable damage caused by the "violent rivers," then the necessity of self-sufficient violence can be seen as another metaphor for "dikes and dams" that prevent variations of the ambitions of others from ruining a person's status while maintaining a "disciplined" order.[30] Anthony J. Parcel argues that "freedom of choice" is impossible in Machiavelli's cosmology since all worldly successes are attributed to either fortune's blessing or one's temporal conformity with the "quality of time" designated by fortune. However, this description misses how "necessity" can be crucial in empowering actors' free agencies to resist arbitrary fortune. Firstly, as Machiavelli indicates,

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uprising," was ruined when "her hostile people" were "joined" by Cesare Borgia's army. Thus, the better necessity is "not to be hated by the people" in the first place (ibid).

[29] Holman argues that Machiavelli's freedom, especially when encountering varying fortune, does not lie in the "unbounded capacity to master the world, in the ability to overcome being's contingent temporality through dictating form, but rather in the ability to spontaneously generate new realities out of the objective opportunities that the subject encounters." See Holman, *Machiavelli and the Politics of Democratic Innovation*, p. 102. This conception of Machiavelli's notion of freedom becomes somewhat misleading if Machiavelli sees that a function of the "necessity" of self-arm is to "put the world [fortune] in order" again. What Machiavelli suggests is that precisely because the world is embodied by varying dangerous ambitions, political actors must build an army of their own in order to seek or try to "master the world." If political actors do not have the desire to master or "put the world in order," they will soon face their own ruin.

[30] See Anthony J. Parcel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 74–82.

relying on fortune is sometimes identical to relying on others, and this mode is problematic due to actors' varying ambitions. If the altering nature of ambition is the concrete expression of fortune's unstable nature, then, as Machiavelli advises in *Tercets on Ambition*, "a well-armed vigor" or the necessary violence of one's arms is not only a solution to confronting ambitions but also fortune as a whole. I argue that this is how "necessity" empowers human agency in "putting the world in order again" and makes certain virtuous actions possible.

For Machiavelli, the greatest "dikes and dams" ever built are exemplified by how the free Swiss-German city-states governed themselves. He observes that the Germans "spend nothing on soldiers" since they always "keep their own men armed and drilled" (1995, p. 21). They even practiced their military skills with "weapons of one kind and another" on "feast days." These practices were put in place for all the citizens to "strive to the same end—that of saving their liberty and guarding themselves against the princes" (ibid, p. 22). Most importantly, this civil militarization achieves true political equality since all citizens must contribute to the public by fulfilling their military duties. As a result, "They enjoy a true freedom without any differentiation between men" (ibid).

In this sense, a stable political order can also mean "civil equality" or, from a leadership perspective, treating your people in a civil manner because only civil leadership can acquire a large army that is strong enough to confront countless foreign ambitions. As Machiavelli explains, a government of "aristocracy" who are "unwilling to rest content with civil equality" since they do not know "the variation of fortune" will certainly face ruin (*D* 1.2, p. 12; see also *P* 10, p. 43).[31] Tyranny, in this way, is often weak, given the leaders' refusal to create a productive relationship with the people, which is the foundation of a regime's civil and military strength against fortune, defined as altering external ambitions.[32] Not arming

[31] For Machiavelli, being hated by the people is also one of a prince's greatest fears. King Nabis of Sparta is considered a prime example of a "civil prince" who "secured himself sufficiently" due to his excellent relationship with the people; in return, he was capable of withstanding "a siege by all Greece and by one of Rome's victorious armies" (*P* 9, p. 41, 19, p. 72–73). See also *D* 1.16, p. 45, for the case of Brutus, and *D* 1.40, p. 89, for further discussion on Nabis's success.

[32] One exception is when a prince faces an independent professional army that considers showing goodwill to people an "effeminate" act; a prince then must imitate Roman Emperor Severus's "cruelty" that "had put to death a great part of the

the plebs through a certain degree of equality, then, is "laziness" that mis-conceptualizes how hostile and unpredictable the world truly is and concludes that self-military reliance is unnecessary. Accordingly, throughout *The Prince* and *Discourses*, Machiavelli emphasizes the unreliability of mercenary and auxiliary soldiers for the reason that they only pursue their own ambitions.[33] The necessity of having sufficient access to arms and being able to defend oneself—derived from a clear perspective of the world's hostility—continually expresses its generative function that "puts the world in order again."[34]

2.1 "Beginning" and the Truth of Freedom

In a Machiavellian world, ambitions and dangerous forces constitute the fabric of human life. Nevertheless, ambitions can only emerge, become, or "stand out" as something concretely tangible and effectual in the form of a political regime through a certain "process." I argue that this process is the "goodness" that Machiavelli discusses in *D* 3.1, which makes all political beginnings possible in the first place. Such "goodness" expresses itself as the founders' "original ferocious courage" or "extraordinary violent deed" in a given hostile situation compelled by the necessity to free oneself from worldly dangers and one's fragility so that an autonomous free order can emerge. However, such goodness is nonetheless "universal" for Machiavelli, meaning that this goodness is the necessary condition for both the establishment of a free principality and a free republic. In light of its moral or ethical connotations, the term "goodness" also refers to an *ethos* or process of a transformation into ferocious subjectivity that lays the ground for the virtuous act of founding a regime, allowing a regime's beginning to emerge as a "beginning."[35]

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people of Rome" in order to satisfy the blood thirst of soldiers (*P* 19, p. 78–81).

[33] See *P* 12, 48–53, 13; p. 54–57; *D* 2.10, p.147, 2.19, p. 173, 2.20, p. 175–177, 3.10, p.241–242.

[34] Necessity is a counterpart of fortune in the sense that the latter introduces blind irregularities while necessity stabilizes and limits certain human actions, and such a limitation, similar to a "teacher," guides actors to coherently structure worldly events. See Yves Winter, "Necessity and Fortune: Machiavelli's Politics of Nature," in *Second Nature: Rethinking the Natural through Politics*, ed. Crina Archer, Laura Ephraim, and Lida Maxwell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 34–35, 37.

[35] However, not all beginnings or returns to beginnings are attributed to violence. A good example is the non-violent succession of Roman plebs that helped created the tribune, one of the institutions that Machiavelli says "drew the Roman

As Machiavelli asserts, "For *all* beginnings of *sects, republics,* and *kingdoms* must have some *goodness in them,* by means of which they may *regain* their *first reputation* and their *first increase*" (*D* 3.1, p. 209; emphasis added). The "goodness" that Machiavelli describes appears to be more than a factor that makes the emergence ("first increase") of a certain beginning of a regime possible, for if the actors of a regime can "return" to (i.e., "regain") this goodness, they are also enabled to revive the regime's "first reputation" that once established its founding. My reading suggests that this goodness, which is the "original courage" or the extraordinary violent action that gives birth to a regime, is best illustrated in *D* 1.1 when Machiavelli analyzes the "universal" causes of any city's "beginning." Machiavelli first identifies that all cities are either "built by men native to the place" or "by foreigners." He uses the case of Athens to illustrate cities built by natives, while Alexandria and Florence exemplify cities built by foreigners. However, as Mansfield observes, this distinction is misleading.[36] Machiavelli says that cities built by natives, such as Athens, were actually built due to the necessity of "fleeing" from the dangers posed by surrounding enemies and that "to flee these dangers" they must "leave many of their strongholds abandoned" and be "*moved* either by themselves or by someone" with greater "authority" to a new place.[37] In this sense, all beginnings were established by foreigners, and the distinction, Machiavelli continues, actually lies in the difference between free and unfree beginnings that were built by "different types of foreigners." "Free" cities were built either "under a prince or by themselves" who were "constrained by disease, hunger, or war" and must "*abandon* the ancestral country" in order to "seek for themselves a *new* seat" (*D* 1.1, p. 8; emphasis added). On the other hand, cities that "do not have a free origin" were built by those who were "sent out [... to establish] colonies either by a republic or by a prince" under the "courtesy" of someone much more powerful.

As I have mentioned, Machiavelli sees the necessity of viewing the world as essentially hostile,

republic back toward its beginning" (*D* 3.1, p. 210). I will discuss this particular incident in the next section.

[36] See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 62–66.

[37] A similar description also applies to Moses, Romulus, and Cyrus; see also *P* 26, p. 102.

which necessitates bold actions, as a power that sets "the world in order" and is crucial to the maintenance of freedom. Here, Machiavelli, too, makes the necessity of witnessing "disease, hunger, or war" (which are all expressions of the conflict of hostile forces in the world) and the necessity of courageously fleeing from them to create a new site, as presuppositions of freedom.[38] However, unfree cities such as Florence—an example of a city with an unfree beginning—was built by those who "trusted" the "long *peace*" under the reign of "Octavian" (*D* 1.1, p. 7; emphasis added). In this way, the criteria for distinguishing "free beginnings" from the unfree beginnings is whether the actors involved build a new city due to the necessity of recognizing and confronting worldly hostility or put differently, whether the actors depend on the peaceful "courtesy" offered by others.

The "goodness" that gives the "first increase" and serves as a principle that later actors may "regain" their "first reputation," then, is nothing but a sober perspective—the human capacity to recognize the necessary dangers inherent in this hostile world followed by the willingness to be affected by the necessity to act courageously, ferociously, or violently if necessary in order to create a "native place for themselves.[39] Put another way, a free actor's frank affection for—or exposure to—the crude, hostile, and dangerous world reveals a new horizon of life where life, using an existential–philosophical term, must "concern" itself as a fragile mortal being that is intrinsically threatened by its possible negation so that

[38] Leo Strauss argues that truly virtuous figures such as "the founders" operate well "because they are prompted by their natural desire for the common good […] they do not operate well because they are compelled by other men or by the harsh necessity." Thus, the best virtue or freedom actually is "derived" from choice, but not necessities. On the contrary, "necessity belongs together with the concern for mere life." Strauss's analysis suggests that there is a clear distinction between choice and necessity, and the greatest deeds can only derive from the former. See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 249–250. However, this distinction is ultimately misleading for the following reasons. Granted, becoming a founder of a regime like Moses presupposes Moses's "natural desire" to work for the Jewish population. But such a natural desire can only be realized, meaning turning such a wish into concrete regime-building when Moses felt compelled to do so in the face of the danger the Egyptians posed. Without such compulsion, Moses would have had no sense of urgency to "liberate" his people because they would have been able to live safely and securely. Moreover, for Machiavelli, freedom of choice *results* from autonomy or maintenance of freedom, not the other way around. How could the founders and their people enjoy freedom of choice without acquiring their free state first? According to Machiavelli, the acquisition of that free status is never separated from courageous actions compelled by danger.

[39] To an extent, free actors are, simultaneously and paradoxically, refugees. As Livy describes the first increase in the size of Rome built by Romulus, "Romulus opened a place of asylum […] The entire rabble from the neighboring people fled there for refuge. They came without distinction, slaves and freemen alike, eager for a *fresh* start" (1.8, p. 16; emphasis added).

autonomous and violent creation becomes existentially possible.[40] Unfortunately, such a departure—guided by the "concern" about one's freedom—that makes a "new kingdom" does not start with a harmonious tone; it inevitably involves entering other people's lands "with violence," "taking possession of the goods" of the initial inhabitants, or even "killing the inhabitants" (*D* 2.8, p. 144). As Machiavelli writes, the Maurusians who moved to Africa from Syria since they were "expelled by ultimate necessity" (i.e., the necessity to remain free from hostile Hebrew forces and the necessity of courageous actions that enabled them to conquer new lands) became the most "frightful" of peoples that could "never be contained" (*D* 2.8, p. 145). One may say that the ontological generating power that makes the emergence of a new order possible is paradoxically derived from one's escape from, or "abandonment," of a dangerous homeland or tortuous past, which simultaneously presents an irreducibly active *ethos* that fully embraces an inevitably dangerous yet vital life.

For Vatter, Machiavelli defines freedom as "no rule," and the return to the "beginning," especially in a republican context, is to act in a "radically transgressive" manner, which presents itself as "an event" that negates the status quo. What follows from this is that the "purpose" of a republican return to the "beginning" is to re-embody the principle of "freedom as no-rule" but not the "establishment of a political form that brings security."[41] This theorization is particularly problematic because it ignores how "rule" itself plays a central role in maintaining and establishing both princely and republican freedom when one is positioned in an inevitably conflictual world. First, as the title of *D* 1.1 states, Machiavelli asserts that the "universal" cause of any city's beginning (this applies to both principality and republic) and its maintenance of freedom is never separated from fleeing dangers, which is also the acquisition of security as well as establishing a regime. Thus, rule is always necessary in such a hostile world. Moreover, unlike Vatter, who argues that a "free political life" is in itself "ungroundable," I have shown that the necessity

[40] Regarding the use of "concern" and how the concern of one's "inwardness" defines the essence of "life," see Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, ed. Lawrence Vogel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 90.

[41] See Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, p. 251–263.

of worldly hostility and the necessity of brave, independent action is the "goodness" that lays the *groundwork* for the emergence of a free "beginning." As Machiavelli says, necessity is what puts the altering world "in order again."

However, every "free beginning" is not only a necessary "departure" or escape from the wasted and broken past or the old native land. This very departure suggests that it is also a "return," a reaffirmation, and an exposure to "this" hostile world because acting ferociously according to the kind of necessities mentioned in order to create the conditions for freedom presupposes actors remaining faithful to the ways of the world. In this way, faithfully recognizing the potential "generative" elements of worldly dangers is also identical to seeking an "opportunity" or "matter" that enables actors to "introduce form" (*P* 6, p. 23). In the moment of a necessary ferocious decision before bodily danger, the founder and each person's "whole being is involved," and they are compelled to feel as if they are acting "under the eyes" of an eternal question again: to be or not to be.[42] Only by being sensitive to worldly danger can life be creative, and this cold understanding of the world, defined as "goodness" or the presupposition of freedom, inevitably negates the possibility of a hopeful salvation or a perpetual peace offering transcendence from this dangerous world.[43] All free beginnings must start with the critical "distance" between a departure from the disastrous past and a creative arrival of a new city, mediated or made possible by countless ferocious courage or even bloodshed. While situated and being affected by the inescapable flux of ambitions that inevitably commands things to either "go up or down" arbitrarily, a free order led by the

[42] Jonas argues that the immorality of a deed is only possible when the deed co-emerges with an existential decision that necessarily relates to the calling of an "eternal" image, such as "justice," "the totality of being," and "absolute." A decision that takes the form of an "either-or" constitutes our eternal action "as if" we are deciding "in the face of the end." See Jonas, *Morality and Morality*, p. 120.

[43] In Chapter 26 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli, as Alison McQueen points out, does use "prophetic" language to describe a potential incoming prince who can "save" and "redeem" Italy from "barbaric cruelties." However, the modes that Machiavelli offers in the very same chapter are strictly immanent in the sense that they tend to focus more on the necessity of "war," the necessity of "self-arm, and the necessity of "furious virtue" than religious piety or mercy. See *P* 26, p. 101–105. McQueen also argues that in contrast to the "epistemological optimism" in *The Prince*, *Discourses* has a much more "tragic" dimension that focuses more on the rise and, to a certain extent, inevitable fall of all political powers. For more discussion on the "apocalyptic" aspect of Machiavelli's political thought, see Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 84–87, 97–103.

most ferocious people arouses and stands as a sign of both courageous departure and violent creation or, namely a miracle, so to speak.[44] By that time, new free actors coming after the end of the beginning will be able to continue "in its own heritage the memory of what has gone before."[45]

The human order becomes inherently weak if people no longer see dangers and their own irreducible fragility due to this hostile world as "goods" in the sense that they trigger or necessitate bodily and spiritual fortitude and the resolution to defend one's own freedom and dignity. In discussing how to confront imminent military dangers, Machiavelli lambasts the many "republics and princes" of his time who chose to "flee the dangers" in believing that the best "mode" to confront enemies is to "guard [oneself] against fighting" (*D* 3.10, p. 242). For Machiavelli, they imitated the cautious "prudence" of "Fabius Maximus" but failed to acknowledge that the sole reason why Hannibal did not "dare to come to meet" Romans was due to Fabius's "virtuous army" (ibid). Most importantly, a person will display "much to be esteemed" if they choose to continue to fight their enemies even "when losing" since that person still "acquires more glory" if "conquered by force," as opposed to surrendering or fleeing the battlefield and being taken prisoner or killed in an undignified state of panic. In other words, the freest and bravest are those who dare to stand in front of the necessity of hostility, understand that life perpetually entails a vulnerable death in wait within itself once it has engaged with other worldly beings, and recognize that there is no way to confront such deadly threats except by valuing or affirming their very existence through fighting the hostile forces with a "valiant heart."

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[44] The idea of interpreting Machiavelli's description of political beginning based on the metaphors of "departure" and "return" is inspired by Mansfield and Vacano, as they deploy an analogy of "homelessness" to describe the necessity of violence in establishing a new regime. See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 65; and Vacano, *The Art of Power*, p. 59–60. The limitation of their interpretations, however, is that both tend to equate freedom to "acquisition." The term acquisition may be very misleading insofar as the word always implies that humanity is defined by the infinite drive to acquire more *economic* goods. Again, this seemingly "universal" anthropological quality inevitably creates tension with Machiavelli's definition of the plebs' *humor*. What the plebs truly desire is not a life with infinite aspiration for wealth but rather a life of freedom from oppression. Thus, it is important to distinguish two types of acquisition. On the one hand, there is a plebeian desire to "acquire" a free state of life; on the other hand, acquisition can also refer to the nobles' infinite appetite for acquiring more worldly goods (e.g., *D* 1.5, p. 17– 19).

[45] See Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, p. 138; and for further discussion on Machiavelli's conception of "progress," see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 109–122.

As Machiavelli concludes, the most virtuous captains always impose the "virtue of such necessity" on their soldiers in order to evoke their fighting "spirits" when "engaging in combat" (*D* 3.12, p. 247). The "necessity" that Machiavelli writes of—that is, the necessity of taking on a resilient attitude and being prepared to engage in violence when one's freedom is under threat—is "virtuous" insofar as the fragility of human life positioned in a hostile and ambition-driven world finds its compensation in the guidance of necessity, which calls for and further triggers the constant arrival of countless ferocious subjectivities that may lead to more free deeds. Necessity, having given itself "whole to the becoming world," has no more to give, and it is the free actor's present task or "now" to give something back to necessity by creating free orders through delivering courageous actions so that the process of "becoming" in the world does not merely amount to a succession of indifferent moments, but rather differentiates itself into "good" and "cowardly" temporal orders.[46]

Finally, one might ask: does not Machiavelli, a self-proclaimed founder of a new political discourse, share identical features with the regime founders who act according to necessities? In the First Book Preface of *Discourses*, Machiavelli writes that the main purpose of writing the book is to find "new modes and orders" or to "take a path as yet untrodden by anyone" because he has a "natural desire" to "bring common benefit to everyone." However, as he continues, paving a new path to new knowledge is "no less dangerous than to seek unknown waters and lands." Does not Machiavelli's intention to write *Discourses* correspond perfectly to his description of a free political beginning? Maintaining one's autonomy and creating a new land, like his action that seeks to introduce a "new path" for political discourse, inevitably invoke numerous dangers, but precisely because a person's degree of freedom is in proportion to how much danger he or she can endure, those who are inclined to achieve greatness or glory absorb necessary danger into their acting process and affirm every kind of hardship without

[46] Such an interpretation is inspired by Jonas's description of human actors' calling for eternity. See Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, p. 129.

hesitation. As he says, "men work either by necessity or by choice" and "there is greater virtue to be seen where choice has less authority" (*D* 1.1, p. 8).[47] Still, is not acting in accordance with what necessity demands a choice as well? If everyone is able to see and act bravely according to necessity, then there is no need for Machiavelli to advise princes that "it is *necessary* […] if he wants to maintain himself, to *learn* to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it *according to necessity*" (*P* 15, p. 61; emphasis added).[48] Similarly, some people, as he writes in *Tercets on Ambition*, choose to act "cowardly" without having a concern for their vulnerable conditions, while others who are brave enough always choose to "compensate" for their "cowardice" by establishing a "disciplined" order with "a valiant heart."[49]

2.2 Republican Beginning, Necessity, and (Non)-Violence

As seen above, undertaking courageous actions in light of the ineluctable danger and hostility of the world is the "universal" existential–generative condition or what Machiavelli refers to as "goodness" of all free beginnings. The beginning of a free republic, namely the beginning of a "civil way of life," is also born from dangerous conflicts between ambitions, given that the founders are well-positioned in the "partisan–conflictual" network of various ambitions. Thus, the essential difference between a free princely beginning and a free republican beginning does not lie at the beginning of the regime but in how

[47] Another occasion when Machiavelli praises how necessity empowers humans is found in *D* 3.12; he says, "the hand and the tongue of men—two very noble instruments for ennobling him—would not have worked perfectly nor led human works to the height they are seen to be led to had they not been driven by necessity" (*D* 3.12, p. 246).

[48] According to Mansfield's interpretation, necessity is both the "new standard" of actions as opposed to the classical model of virtue and a "choice" that actors should make since the phrase "acting according to necessity" suggests that actors do have a choice whether to act "according to necessity." Thus, necessity is choosing the right standard that reflects what the world "effectually" is. See Harvey C. Mansfield, "Machiavelli on Necessity," in *Machiavelli on Liberty & Conflict*, ed. David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 39–43.

[49] Benner suggests that Machiavellian necessity is most "useful when agents see it as self-imposed and freely accepted." Put differently, agents work best if these "self-imposed constraints" can be used to *incentivize* agents to act courageously. Moses and Aenas were "free" because they saw the necessary "constraints," i.e., enslavement by the Egyptians and the devastated Troy, as an "opportunity" to seek new lands. On the contrary, unfree or unvirtuous agents see these disasters as mere obstacles. See Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethic*, p. 147–156, 158–160.

powers are distributed after the regime has been established.[50] For Machiavelli, the birth of a republic (even of a popular kind), is not the result of harmonious consent but an action and event necessarily involving the confrontation of ambitions and, unfortunately, often violence, too.

In *D* 1.16, Machiavelli offers a vivid "partisan" analysis of the beginning of the Roman Republic. He states that once a regime "becomes free," this "free way of life" only "makes partisan *enemies* and not partisan *friends*" because creating a free republic presupposes equality of offices, honor, and reward(s)—namely meritocracy—and those who were "prevailing under the tyrannical state, feeding off the riches of the prince" then lose the old privilege or power to exploit others (*D* 1.16, p. 45; emphasis added). Thus, when equality is applied to all citizens, these partisan enemies will grasp every opportunity "to take up the tyranny again so as to return to their authority" (ibid).

In this connection, the founder of the Roman Republic, Lucius Brutus, expulsed the Tarquin family, who ruled Rome in a tyrannical manner. However, Tarquin sympathizers, including Brutus's two sons, who were unsatisfied with how powers were distributed in the newly established republic, soon assembled themselves and sought to overthrow the republic. After the rebellion was suppressed and all remaining conspirators were caught, including Brutus's sons, Brutus sat "on the tribunal and not only condemned his sons to death but [decided to] be present at their death," which Machiavelli describes as "an example rare in all memories of things" (*D* 3.3, p. 214).[51]

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[50] Vatter argues that Brutus's republican founding radically differs from Romulus's princely founding because Brutus's founding created an "entrance of the people into political life," i.e., radical "isonomic equality for the people. See Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, p. 221–227. However, this characterization wholly contradicts Machiavelli's description of Rome's free beginning. To Machiavelli, Rome was only truly "free" in the way Vatter describes it when Rome had a plebeian tribune, which was the only institution that resembled a "popular government" (*D.* 1.2, p. 14). Applying the mixed regime model, Machiavelli says that Romulus created the Senate, which corresponded to the aristocratic rule, while elected consuls created by Brutus played the roles of "kingly power" (ibid). In other words, there is no evidence that Machiavelli thinks Brutus was the one who truly empowered the plebs; instead, Machiavelli attributes the creation of the tribune to the "people who rose up against" the ambitious Roman nobles (ibid).

[51] However, Brutus's killing of his sons is not an instance of extra-legal execution. As McCormick argues, using violent executions to suppress oppressive nobles was necessary, but to Machiavelli, such execution should be mostly carried out in an institutionalized manner, where the people have the right to judge the case. McCormick points out that the failures of Valori and Savonarola were due to the fact that they failed to allow the "Five," who had been accused by Valori of conspiring against the 1494 Florence Republic, to have the legal right to "appeal" to the people or the "Great Council." Because Valori did not "observe" the law of popular appeal, the people of Florence soon lost faith in this very government, which directly caused the fall of the popular government led by Valori and Savonarola. As Machiavelli says, "For I do not

The application of the "goodness" described in *D* 3.1 to the context of Brutus's founding of the Roman Republic provides further evidence that the necessity of danger ("partisan enemies") and the necessity of ferocious action or violence (Brutus's execution of his sons) are the conditions that make a "beginning" not only possible but also concrete. As Machiavelli says, in a republican–free beginning, "there is no remedy more powerful, nor more valid, more secure, and more *necessary* to kill the sons of Brutus (*D* 1.16, p. 45; emphasis added). "Goodness," or becoming both courageous and capable of violence, presents itself as a moral journey that drives the spirit and body to divest itself of a lack of strength so that the possibility of a "good" and "free" order is able to manifest itself (*D* 1.9, p. 29). In other words, being morally "good" means taking part in the process of acting ferociously toward enemies, which compels the insolent to act in a "good" manner. Goodness cannot be a mere intention that sits in people's minds because that would be *insufficient* for "good men" to survive if other insolent figures are always willing to use extreme violence against them. Only the intention of *love* for one's freedom and a free order *along* with ferocious, violent measures that result from one's willingness to acknowledge that freedom is vulnerable to constant threats, can constitute "goodness" in Machiavelli's world.

Moreover, for Machiavelli, actions undertaken in light of the necessity of partisan hostility and the necessity of aligning with a certain party, always entail a "dashing" style. For instance, concerning "what a prince should do to be held in esteem," he writes that a prince is truly "esteemed when he is a true friend and a true enemy" of someone "*without hesitation*" (*P* 21, p. 89; emphasis added).[52] In the same chapter in *Discourses* that Machiavelli describes Brutus's bravery for siding with the public, he observes how Clearchus violently addressed the oppressive nobles in Heraclea, which also vividly exemplifies this partisan–oriented "dashing style." Clearchus, the tyrant of Heraclea, suddenly found

believe that there is a thing that sets a more wicked example in a republic than to make a law and not observe it, and so much the more as it is not observed by him who made it" (*D* 1.45, p. 93). See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 129–133.

[52] Of course, one should not become a friend of a stronger power in the pursuit of conquering new lands. As Machiavelli describes, Venice's "association" with the French against the Duke of Milan later made the French a significant threat in Italy, resulting in Venice's "ruin" (*P* 21, p. 90–91).

himself "between the insolent nobles" who took "freedom away from the people" and "the rage of the people who could not endure having lost their freedom" (*D* 1.16, p. 46). Realizing that he had been drawn into an inevitable partisan conflict that required him to choose a side, Clearchus decided to "*free himself* at *one stroke* from the vexation of the great" and to "win over the people" by "cutting nobles to pieces"—a deed which quickly satisfied the wish of the people for vengeance and won them over (ibid; emphasis added).[53]

Taking a position in extreme danger is also a matter of prudence in which a "wrong" position can easily ruin both a republic's and a person's freedom. This is most evident in siding with a foreign power to overthrow one's government or not relying on the people to overcome the ambitions of elites, as the ruin of Piero Soderini's Florence republic shows. Instead of "favoring the collectivity," which is a "much more honest, less harmful" way to earn a reputation in a republic, "the powerful citizens" who "envied" Soderini's popularity invited the Spanish army to Florence and eventually ruined the autonomy of Florence (*D* 1.7, p. 25, 1.52, p. 104). The same fault can also be found in Soderini's imprudent approach to the "powerful citizens." Being the Gonfaloneire "for life" of Florence and being supported by the people, Soderini could have accused Florence's powerful "sons of Brutus" legitimately in a public trial, through which the people of Florence had the right to execute conspirators (*D* 3.3, p. 215). Unfortunately, he instead "allowed" the "evil" ambitions of powerful citizens to "run loose" given that believed that he "would overcome" these ambitious nobles' insolence "with his patience and goodness" while not siding with the people or not allowing them to trial the conspirators (*D* 3.3, p. 214).[54]

Thus, every free founding of a regime, including a republican beginning, is about taking a prudent

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[53] Filippo Del Lucchese argues that Machiavelli's conception of "constituent power," which is the power to bring political innovation, is a multiplicity since it is "expressed" under the various relations of powers, "humors," and forces that constitute the immanent plane of the political. Thus, the emergence of a constituent power depends on how actors move within the continuum of different powers and renew that "conflictuality" according to different circumstances. See Filippo Del Lucchese, "Machiavelli and Constituent Power: The Revolutionary Foundation of Modern Political Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory* 16, no.1 (2017): p. 10–14.

[54] For further discussion on how, according to Machiavelli, Soderini should have acted with regard to the ambitious nobles in Florence, see McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 133–138.

position, namely siding with or relying on the people in this unavoidably conflictual world. After all, a Machiavellian republic or any regime is not a neutral, impersonal state where politics become a series of legal codes that govern everyone abstractly; instead, it is a continuous partisan conflict both at the very beginning and throughout the life of the body politic itself. As Mansfield argues, a state or *stato*, for Machiavelli, is always personal, meaning that a state "is *someone's* (a prince, nobles, or plebs) to acquire or to maintain" and the state never "separates from the advantage of some person or group" (emphasis added).[55] Such use of "state" radically differs from the modern liberal tradition of an "impersonal state" (i.e., a state that stands above any particular individual and their whims), in which the state is conceptualized as an independent or objective entity owned by no one. Taking a position during the founding of a republic, or during any other beginning, in this sense, is ultimately also an Arendtian performative "appearance," in which the founder "answers the opportunities" that partisan conflicts "open up before him in the guise" of ambitions.[56] Despite how horrific the scene of Brutus killing his sons was, the execution ultimately established a firm and "good" beginning for the free Roman Republic that compelled insolent figures not to "dare" to conduct any further "evil" actions in the near future. That is to say, for Machiavelli, the scene set a *necessarily* "great example" for those who seek to establish a free regime and lead a worthy free life. The bloody performance itself already entails, schematizes, and exemplifies the ferocity *arising* from what the clash of hostile forces and ambitions necessitates in individuals and the community. For this reason, the scene eventually becomes worth memorizing, i.e., a "mark" or a "sign" (*segno*) by which later actors can recognize and understand what price one must take in order to build a free way of life (*D* 3.1, p. 210). As Vacano points out, Machiavelli's account of worldly

[55] See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 288–291.

[56] Arendt's original comment on Machiavelli's conception of freedom is "Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*." See Arendt, "What is Freedom," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 153–155. A point that Arendt misses is that for Machiavelli, the demonstration of one's virtue is never separated from one's action in accordance with necessity, but according to Arendt's definition of genuine political *action*, being able to *act* supposes that one is *freed* from worldly necessities.

or physical "being" sees the essence of a being as an "effect" of various internal or external "agnostic" tendencies. For example, a prince's well-used "cruelty" is a "resultant" of the conflict between general cruelty and mercy.[57] In this way, I also suggest that "freedom," or the kind of "free beginning" that Machiavelli discusses, emerges in a play of forces constituted of various dangerous ambitions. Consequently, "goodness," a ferocious and courageous use of necessary violence exemplified by a ferocious subjectivity, is the efficient cause that makes such a free emergence possible.

Although the free beginning of the Roman Republic is a violent event, this does not mean that violence is necessarily the *only* way to make the emergence of such a beginning possible. As I have explained, the "goodness" of the beginning of a free regime rests on an initial act of courage that necessarily results from seeing the world as a constantly conflictual one; however, the latter does not necessarily entail violent actions only. Violent actions which are undertaken with a spirit of courage are only one means among many that can bring about a free beginning. In *D* 3.1, Machiavelli not only discusses what "virtue of a man" (the capacity to resist oppression or any external threat—exhibited, for example, in Brutus's execution of his sons) could make the "goodness" of the "beginning" re-emerge in the context of the Roman Republic. He also discusses what "orders" or institutions need to be given and established; and in this connection, one of his answers includes the "tribunes of the plebs." The question then is, in what ways did the establishment of the plebeian tribune, an institution that Machiavelli believes had "made the republic more perfect" (*D* 1.3, p. 15), resemble the violent act of Brutus?

In *D* 1.3, Machiavelli argues that "it is *necessary* [..] to *presuppose* that all men are *evil* and that they always have to use the *malignity* of their spirit whenever they have a free opportunity for it" (ibid; emphasis added). To illustrate this point, the case Machiavelli refers to is the *change* in the relationship between Roman nobles and plebs after the expulsion of the Tarquins and how that change gave rise to the creation of the tribune. Before the expulsion of the Tarquins, the nobles, fearing the plebs "would not

[57] See Vacano, *The Art of Power*, p. 78–80.

take their side" to fight against the Tarquins, were "tolerable to anyone." However, once the Tarquins had been overthrown and "found dead," the nobles began to "spit out" all the "poison against the plebs" and "offended it in all the modes they could" (ibid). In other words, the natural appetite of the nobles—oppressing and dominating the plebs due to their infinite ambitions (*P* 9, p. 39; *D*. 1.4, p. 16–17, 1.5, p. 18)—was totally unconcealed once the old threat, the Tarquins, were gone. However, the plebs did not immediately employ violent means to confront the oppressive nobles; instead, they fled from the cities and "refused to enroll their names to go to war" for the nobles (*D* 1.4, p. 17). Because the nobles feared that without military support from the plebs—who constituted most of Rome's military strength—they would be defenseless against external enemies, the nobles and plebs eventually "arrived at the creation of the tribunes for the security of plebs" (*D* 1.3, p. 15).[58]

Similar to Brutus, the unnamed plebs in this incident recognized that in a political world dominated by oppressive or "evil" noble ambitions, maintaining their freedom inevitably introduced necessary dangers that partisan enemies posed, which, in turn, necessarily required forceful and courageous countermeasures. Moreover, to Machiavelli, the conflict between the nobility and the plebs is completely natural in "every city," in which one party always wishes to dominate and the other party wishes not to be oppressed.[59] However, unlike Brutus, the plebs "peacefully" left the city and turned their military strength, on which the nobles' security was highly dependent, into a bargaining chip that forced the nobles to meet their demand of securing greater freedom, which amounted to no longer being dominated or oppressed by the nobles.[60] Both Brutus's violent act and the plebs' "non-violent"

[58] McCormick explores the issue of how a citizen army or a military mostly consisting of plebs not only grants the imperial ambition of the Roman Republic, but also gives plebs collective strength in bargaining against the unchecked oppressive power of the elites through military secession that leaves the nobles defenseless. Moreover, "at a deeper level," McCormick explains that the militarization of Roman plebs, even though it originated in Romulus's reign, the first king of Rome, enabled the plebs to gain a certain "discipline" that would not turn the tumults between nobles and plebs into bloody chaos. See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 31–35.

[59] On the "nature" of the conflict between these two groups or "humors," see ibid, p. 23–26.

[60] For more discussions on the various modes of conflict between Roman plebs and the nobles, see Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, p. 53–64.

disobedience that resulted in the creation of the tribune are, nonetheless, considered great examples of "goodness" in the "beginning" because, in both incidents, the actors were ready to see themselves as responsible, active free agents when they found themselves in an irreducibly fragmented dangerous "partisan" network that demanded one response alone: courage.

3.1 The "Return to the Beginning" and the Re-presentation of Original Courage

Concerning how to "maintain" or sustain a free republic after it has been established by a courageous (even if violent) act, Machiavelli argues that for "mixed bodies" such as "sects and republics," "alterations" or "renewals" of the body are necessary for fighting against its "limited" lifespan. This particular renewal for the "safety" or the longevity of the regime consists in "leading" republics "back toward their beginnings" (*riduzione verso il principio*), which can be achieved by "extrinsic accidents" (e.g., foreign invasions) or "internal accidents" either through the "virtue of a man" (e.g. the emergence of courageous figures such as Brutus) or of an "order" such as the tribune or laws that go "against the ambition and the insolence of men" (*D* 3.1, p. 209–210).

But what exactly are we "returning" to? And what does "beginning"—which is what Machiavelli urges citizens to "return" to—necessarily mean? I have argued that the "goodness" that "all the beginnings" of a regime share and in which "*they may regain their first reputation and their first increase*" is identical with its founders' "original ferocious courage or action *against* dangerous ambitious others" that sets the foundation of a regime (*D* 3.1, p. 209; emphasis added). Thus, it is safe to assume that what Machiavelli wants the citizens of a given regime to "return to" is the "goodness" or *ethos* of the founders' courage and willingness to engage in necessary violence resulting from their encounter and confrontation with the ambitions of others and the dangerous situations entailed by such confrontations.

A republic or regime's free "beginning" or "goodness" at the stage of its founding can be summarized in three words: "dangerous," "courageous," and (sometimes) "bloody." This is especially true when it comes to the "rare" embodiment of bloody actions undertaken against the backdrop of

dangerous ambitions that serve freedom or the establishment of a free republic, which is how Machiavelli describes the scene of Brutus killing his overly ambitious sons. Such deeds are then remembered by the populace as a significant event or "memory" in the life of the republic. Considering the fact that the nature of a free regime's "beginning" is always based on a series of memorable manifestations exhibiting the founders' original ferocious courage, perhaps for Machiavelli, a "return" to the beginning is nothing but the re-presentation, reproduction, or "revival" of the founders' original courage (i.e., the "goodness") that "goes against the ambition and insolence of men" in any given *time* (or during a time of corruption) after the founding of the republic.

Just as the founders establish a republic's free beginning through courageous, and sometimes necessarily violent actions in what can be a dangerous time or period, the *present* actors who "return" to the beginning are able to perform similarly ferocious yet innovative actions or courageously (re)affirm the existing free orders when facing *new* (though "necessary") dangers (sometimes including the ambitions of others who are willing to use violence to achieve their ends) (*D* 1.49, p. 100). Since every "return" consists in the revival of the *ethos* or "goodness" of that original courage in a regime's free beginning, later actors who return to that original courage embodied by their present ferocious actions, at the same time, "subjectify" themselves in the image of the founders, as if those later actors are *re-founding* the freedom of an already established republic.

When it comes to the "virtue of a man" that leads individuals and the community at large back to a republic's beginning, Machiavelli lists the actions of a number of Roman figures who, like the founders, all demonstrated extraordinary bravery in the pursuit of defending their homeland in extremely dangerous circumstances. Machiavelli mentions Horatius Cocles's sacrifice, which held off the enemy "at the bridge until it was cut" (*D* 1.24, p. 59), Scaevola's assassination of King Porsena (ibid), Decius's glorious self-sacrifice (*D* 3.45, p. 305–306), and Regulus Attilius's return to Carthage in order to save his fellow

Romans (*D* 3.25, p. 272).[61] For Machiavelli, the "re-presentation" of this original courage is also a "re-memorization" of the past great deeds because to re-present is to present or *perform* the past scenes of courageous free actions "again" in a vivid manner and in a new time and place.[62] In this sense, the endurance or sustainability of a free regime relies on the continued memorization of those virtuous deeds that mentally bridge the founding past and the future of the regime.

However, the emergence of re-presentations of courageous deeds such as those listed above cannot be expected among all actors in the present day, given that not all actors are naturally courageous. The individual examples mentioned above can serve as models for imitation, but this does not mean that everyone in the republic can suddenly have the *capacity* to perform deeds so courageous and virtuous as to contribute to a republic's return to its beginning. Moreover, the freedom that a republic must maintain is more than the autonomy of a regime; it is also the institution of a "free way of life," which encompasses the following conditions:

- Public affairs are dealt with in a transparent manner (*D* 1.7, p. 24).
- Powers are distributed to various institutions with specific functions (*D* 1.9, p. 30, 1.25, p. 60, 1.49, p. 100, 2.2, p. 130).
- There are equal opportunities for people to take public office regardless of their socio-economic background (*D* 1.16, p. 45, 1.36, p. 78, 3.16, p. 255).

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[61] For further discussion on how these examples relate to people's natural passion for glory, see Eero Arum, "Machiavelli's *Principio*: Political Renewal and Innovation in the *Discourses on Livy*," *The Review of Politics* 82 (2020): p. 541–545. My interpretation, however, indicates that the function of enlisting these examples is more than triggering citizens' passion for glory, but also providing imitative models for securing freedom actively. In addition, for Machiavelli, the attainment of glory usually collides with an agent's success in maintaining freedom when situated in an extremely critical time.

[62] In the "Preface" of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli criticizes that most people in the present time only "admire" but do not seek to "imitate" the "most virtuous works" done by ancient figures when it comes to "ordering republics, maintaining states, [and] governing kingdoms […]." Instead, they spend an enormous amount of time imitating antiquity's art, medicine, and civil laws. As Faisal Baluch argues, Arendt's reading of Machiavelli treats his emphasis on imitation of the great deeds performed by past figures as a "crucial passage" since the imitation of the past is neither an attempt at merely repeating previous events or a giving into nostalgia but is rather the creation of "a certain continuity" that ensures that the "pearls" of the past are still relevant to the present. This store of wisdom serves to guide and inspire present actors. The imitation that Machiavelli emphasizes is therefore intended to be a method of preserving and reviving the civic virtue embodied in noble actions by important actors in the past, because, for Arendt, the existence of past, almost-forgotten actions depends on continued action in the present. See Faisal Baluch, "Arendt's Machiavellian Moment," *European Journal of Political Theory* 13, no. 2 (2014): p. 156–158.

- The political power and influence of the elites and the plebs is balanced (*D* 1.33, p. 71).
- The absence of independent and competing private powers (e.g., warlords) (*D* 3.24, p. 270)
- There is some degree of equality of wealth (*D* 1.37, p. 79, 3.25, p .271).

Bearing in mind that only dangers (for example, the risk of violent confrontations between plebs and elites) can engender actions taken up with both courage and "ferocity," the core question now is how a republic can not only *reproduce* the dangers that make such deeds possible but also provide sufficient opportunities for common citizens to emulate or reproduce the founders' original, virtuous courage in a substantial manner (and, in time, thereby acquire it). This has to be done in an innovative, *orderly* and *sustainable* fashion so that the "virtue of a man" (again, as exhibited among the figures mentioned above) emerges and can be further cultivated as a matter of course. How courageous (and, if necessary, "ferocious") actions that serve to protect freedom in a republic can be produced and honed is a key problem for Machiavelli.

I argue that, for Machiavelli, institutions such as public trials, equality of offices, tribune, and civil militarization are institutional apparatuses that expose common citizens to new political dangers. Such dangers include the possibility of plebs prosecuting elites and initiating public executions of ambitious social members *directly* and *continuously*, thereby enabling the plebs to perform innovative and courageous acts that are crucial for their transformation from passive entities to active subjects. Put differently, the "virtue of an order" that leads back to a republic's beginning is the *institutionalization* of necessary violence, innovative courageous action, and above all, the institutional *reproduction* of necessary danger that altogether makes the emergence of virtuous deeds possible.[63] Since the dangers faced by the founders of a republic necessitate them to perform ferocious actions when seeking to successfully establish a free regime, it is, likewise, necessary for these institutions to allow citizens to encounter dangers directly and compel them to become people who bravely go "against the ambition and

[63] See also Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, p. 144–147.

insolence of men." Like a "prudent captain" who "impose[s] every necessity to engage in combat on his soldiers" in order to make them fight courageously and "ferociously," Roman institutions such as the tribune and public trials and executions enabled and made hostile encounters between common citizens and ambitious elites or other threatening forces part of daily civil–political life (*D* 3.12, p. 246–249).

These institutions are praised by Machiavelli because, after all, in the context of the Roman Republic, the courage that they were able to repeatedly inspire in citizens was always channeled against foreign powers, oppressive nobles, and ambitious figures who sought to tyrannize others—in other words, against the biggest threats to republican freedom (*D* 1.3, p. 15, 1.5, p. 18–19, 1.7, p. 23, 1.37, p. 80). As Machiavelli claims, the plebeian tribune was an institution that "drew the Roman republic back towards its beginning" since it always "went against the ambition and the insolence of men" (*D* 3.1, p. 210). This is especially true when these Roman institutions were born of or "discovered" by "new" and dangerous "necessities" that required "necessary new orders" (*D* 1.49, p. 100; see also section 2.2), indicating that the emergence of these institutions functioned as imitations or re-presentations of the founders' original courage that made the beginning of the regime possible given that they all shared the same root: fighting against hostile forces with courage and a willingness to use violence.

Again, political dangers, such as overly-ambitious individuals who seek to tyrannize the populace, force the plebs to realize that the freedom they enjoy is fragile and that they can only negate that fragility through "ferociously" resisting the forces which would oppress them. Consequently, for Machiavelli, freedom *only* emerges in the context of dangers which are evident to the actors involved. Freedom is not a given but a *relational* concept that concerns whether one is prepared to resist the conflictual yet vitally productive web of forces in a courageous and ferocious manner. The major function of institutions that allow for a "return to the beginning" is to bring the actors involved to a new awareness of willingness to confront the dangers which in fact give them the opportunity to exercise freedom and thus *become* free.[64]

[64] For further analysis of the "relational" essence of freedom, see Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 80–84.

What these institutions also provide is the *popular production* of virtue among all citizens. In moving from the emphasis on the contingent emergence of the "virtue of a man" (individual courage and willingness to rule and fight against ambitious others) to the "virtue of an order" (institutions that serve to promote and defend freedom by allowing citizens to participate in political affairs), Machiavelli seeks to negate the polarity between the two and demonstrate that they are mutually dependent. On the one hand, citizens can only become virtuous if they take an active role in the popular institutions previously mentioned and participate in safeguarding against tyrannically minded nobles. On the other hand, the sustainability of the institutions becomes fragile when citizens are not given the opportunities or training necessary to become virtuous or courageous enough to protect them.

In light of sustaining such courage among citizens, democratic participation must also become a civil pedagogical process of learning how to employ violent force in an appropriate manner. The necessity of continuous deployment of proper violent action comes from the fact that virtuous orders are *fragile*. As Machiavelli writes, institutions such as the tribune "have need of being brought to life by the virtue of a citizen who rushes spiritedly to execute them against the power of those who transgress them" (*D* 3.1, p. 210). Machiavelli's account of the popular institutions of the Roman Republic thus entails what Esposito describes as a "productive" paradox, which involves both 1) the establishment of an "entity" that allows citizens to constantly perform active agencies or even violence, if necessary, in protecting freedom and, at the same time, 2) the incorporation of "novelty" or novel actions within the boundaries of the established institution so that the institutions can be more adaptive to historical changes and varying political dangers.[65]

Moreover, for Machiavelli, the function of these institutions is to mediate the gap between people's "natural drives" for political freedom and the courage and willingness to use violence that citizens must have in order to secure their freedom. This is because the institutions serve as a platform for all citizens

[65] See Roberto Esposito, *Institution*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), p. 39–55.

to participate in the life of the community in direct ways, even if, on an individual level, they do not have the capacity or political knowledge to do so. In mediating that gap (that is, institutionally producing necessary ferocity among all citizens), it also suggests a reciprocal relationship in which the basic structure of those institutions is sustained by the ferocious energies of the participating citizens that the institutions have produced in the first place. Serving as conduits for the citizens to 1) act courageously and sometimes violently, and 2) learn from political dangers—which helps them to cultivate the original courage of the founder—they protect the endurance of those institutions and the stability of a republic's free way of life. In what follows, I analyze the specific ways in which those institutions serve to sustain the vitality of people's ferocious agency in ruling or participating and deterring threats against a republic's freedom from within and without.

3.2 Public Trials and Hostile Encounters Between Ambitions and Plebs

When it comes to foreign policy, although Machiavelli criticizes the "multitude" or the plebs as being easily "deceived by a false image of [the] good" and "excited" by harmful but "spirited" opinions (*D* 1.53, p. 54), this does not mean that the plebs cannot make good judgments under good institutional conditions and with competent and responsible civic leadership. This is especially the case when these judgments are related to taming the ambitions of nobles or individuals who could pose a threat to the regime.[66] Indeed, Machiavelli sees the plebs as the "guardians of freedom," and does so for two main reasons. He praises the people's desire "not to be commanded" as more "decent" (*onestà*) than the nobles' desire to oppress (*P* 9, p. 39) because the desire for freedom from oppression signifies "a greater will to

[66] Stefano Visentin argues that when the people are defined as a multitude, i.e., "a constituent multiplicity," Machiavelli always suggests that orders and laws are necessary for "creating a common frame" for the multitude so that collective affect and cooperation can be possible. In other words, the inconstancy and the inherent "multiplicity" of a multitude "is always at risk of being fragmented." The objective of a prince or civil leader, thus, is to answer such a self-degenerating multitude by building productive and orderly relationships with them. See Stefano Visentin, "The Different Faces of the People," in *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy, and Language*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, Fabio Frosini, and Vittorio Morfino (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 374–381.

live free" (*D* 1.4, p. 16). In contrast, the nobles often pose great threats to freedom by seeking to "acquire" more economic goods or "something else new" by dominating the plebs in order to ease their own "fear of losing" what they already possess (*D* 1.5, p. 19).

However, if the plebs are by nature "more decent" than the nobles but are easily "excited," which might lead to them making bad judgments, then it is necessary to establish institutions to rectify their unstable humor and establish "order."[67] When refuting how past historians such as Livy negatively characterized the "inconstant" or irrational nature of the plebs, Machiavelli claims that the multitude is no less inferior to princes or nobles in governing a republic if they are "regulated by laws" (*D* 1.57, p. 115–117). The "order" afforded by public trials or accusations against ambitious figures is one of the answers that Machiavelli provides, for as he explains, the "order" of the public trial is useful not only in producing the "fear of being accused" so that ambitious figures do not "attempt things against the state" (or even if they have attempted, "they are crushed instantly"), but also in "[ordinarily] venting" plebs' dissatisfaction toward ambitious figures that prevents internal dissatisfaction between nobles and plebs from turning into civil wars (or, as Machiavelli puts it, "extraordinary modes") (*D* 1.7, p. 23–24).

Most importantly, Machiavelli believes that the more the plebs participate in public trials or feel free to accuse nobles of wrongdoings, the freer the trials or accusations are undertaken and the more useful they become. This is because "the few always behave in the mode of the few," indicating that a trial with a smaller number of judges is more easily manipulated by the few (i.e., oppressive nobles) (*D* 1.7, p. 25; see also *D* 1.49, p. 101).[68] In this sense, public trials grant the plebs orderly institutional and pedagogical access for confronting and learning from the endless emerging domestic dangers arising

[67] Holman argues that, to Machiavelli, ambition is an inner creative energy that every human actor needs to express. Thus, the best order is the one that provides multiple channels to ensure that the multiplication of "virtuous self-expression" is possible. In this case, a popular republic is the best order since it provides varying institutions for plebs to express their will to govern. See Holman, *Machiavelli and the Politics of Democratic Innovation*, p. 231–232. For a shorter version of this perspective, see Christopher Holman, "Machiavelli and the Concept of Political Sublimation," *Italian Culture* 35, no.1 (2017): p. 8–12.

[68] See also John P. McCormick, "Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 2 (2001) p. 305–306; and McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 67–70.

from the ambitious nobles in violent and non-violent ways. By constantly taking part in public trials that are necessary for the reproduction of the original courage present at the founding of a regime, the plebs also reinforce the vital maintenance of institutional public trials. After all, a "free way of life" would not "last long if it remains on the shoulders of one individual" and not "in the care of many" (*D* 1.9, p. 29).

The value of the plebs' good judgment, along with the varying measures they employ not only in checking the insolence of ambitious figures but also being able to *re-present* the original courage of the free founders, is illuminated by three examples which Machiavelli gives (the first two incidents took place in Rome and the other in Capua). The first example involves ambition mixed with envy and how the plebs handled it forcefully and decisively. After withstanding the French invasion, Furius Camillus earned a great reputation from the plebs, but in the meantime, Manlius Capitolinus, another general who saved Rome and achieved "other martial praise," did not receive the admiration that Camillus enjoyed. "Loaded with envy," Capitolinus decided to spread calumnies to win over people's support. He declared that "the treasure gathered together to give to the French" was taken ("usurped") by rivals ("private others"), and if the treasure was taken back, "it could [have been] converted to public utility, relieving the plebs of taxes" (*D* 1.8, p. 26). The excited plebs soon began to riot, forcing the Senate to send a dictator to take Manlius into custody. However, a trial held by the tribune eventually proved that Manlius had not been speaking the truth and that he had been spreading out of envy and to serve his own ambitions. The plebs, without hesitation, "condemned him to death," even though Manlius promised to redistribute Rome's wealth to them, and they, on their part, admired his great virtues in military affairs (*D* 1.58, p. 116, 3.8, p. 237). The plebs' ruthlessness or, as Machiavelli says, "ingratitude," was only possible because they understood how taming the overly ambitious with violence—even those who previously were held in esteem as virtuous figures—was necessary to maintain "public safety" (*D* 1.58, p. 116; see also *D* 1.24, p. 59).

Public trials held by the plebeian tribune also assisted the Roman Republic in dealing with overly

ambitious or dangerous figures in a prudent manner, without the actors involved resorting to bloodshed.[69] Machiavelli writes that the "Roman nobility had become angered against the plebs" due to the "creation of the tribunes" and that Coriolanus, an "enemy of the popular faction," advised the Senate not to distribute the grain to the plebs at a time when Rome was experiencing a famine (*D* 1.7, p. 24). According to Machiavelli, Coriolanus would have been "killed" during the "tumult" caused by the plebs if they had gotten wind of his plan and the tribune had not "summoned him to appear" in a public trial (*D* 1.24, p. 59).[70] In contrast to Coriolanus being sentenced and executed violently, this case further shows that by giving the plebs sufficient power and opportunities to deal with political dangers under competent civil leadership, the Romans were able to institute "ordinary" measures (i.e., the opposite of civil war) that at once sustained the basic stability of the republic (and the free way of life made possible) and forcefully punished those who tried to violate the established order.

The last incident took place in the city of Capua, and this case validates that the plebs, again, if guided by prudent civil leadership, were able to prioritize the most imminent threats to the republic and make good decisions in dangerous times without letting their hate towards the nobles ruins the regime. While Hannibal had defeated the Romans and prepared to invade Capua, Machiavelli describes that the city of Capua was "still in tumult because of the hatred" between the plebs and the Senate (*D* 1.47, p. 97). As a result, Pacuvius Calanus, the "supreme magistracy" of Capua, found himself caught between the furious plebs and the oppressive nobles. Pacuvius first told the nobles about the "danger of being

[69] McCormick stipulates that tribunes could have been elected by Rome's popular assembly (*concilium plebis*), which was a legislative body constituted exclusively by plebs. The powers that a tribune enjoyed were rather responsive to nobles' aggressive actions. For example, a tribune could "veto most official acts through the intercession" and indict or prosecute magistrates and powerful citizens who were "suspected of political crimes." See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 92–97. Regarding the change in how tribunes were elected, Livy also describes that Publius Volero and Gaius Laetorius, two plebeian tribunes at the time (around BC 471), proposed a law according to which the Tribal Assembly should elect the officers of the plebs but not the *Comitia Centuriata* (2.56, p. 152). This was because, when sitting in the *Comitia Centuriata*, the nobles could use the "client's vote," or weighted voting, to elect candidates who prioritized the nobles' interests. However, in the Tribal Assembly, given that the rural tribes held the majority, the plebs were more likely to deliver outcomes that favored their own interests. After an extremely hostile confrontation between the tribunes and the pro-noble consul Appius Claudius, Quinctus, another consul at the time, eventually persuaded the Senate to accept such a proposal because not passing the law, he believed, would tear the entire republic apart (2.56–57, p. 153–154).

[70] See also Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2.36, p. 126–127.

killed" by the angry plebs and then asked them to stay inside the palace and authorize him to consult with the people to "reconcile" their conflicts. He soon assembled the plebs and informed them that all the senators were locked inside the palace, adding that the plebs now had the opportunity to "tame the pride of the nobility and avenge themselves for the injuries received from it" by executing them if they wished (ibid).

However, due to the imminent Carthage invasion, Pacuvius indicated that the plebs must choose new senators to replace the senators who were old or dead in order to create a new government. The plebs eventually decided not to kill the senators since they could not find better substitutions capable of withstanding Hannibal's invasion. Nevertheless, permitting the senators to stay alive did not mean that the plebs would allow the noble to continue to act in an oppressive and tyrannical manner. As Pacuvius later claimed, the fear generated by the threats to kill all senators "will have made them so humble that the humanity that you are seeking elsewhere you will find in them" (*D* 1.47, p. 98).

We see from these examples that when the "inconstant" plebs, as Livy describes them, were able to check the ambitions of dangerous elites through well-established institutions, they could make the right decisions at critical moments.[71] For Machiavelli, since "men will always turn out bad […] unless they have been made good by a necessity," allowing the plebs or tribune to practice public trials backed by violent force embodied the "necessity" to force people to act in a "good" manner (*P* 23, p. 95). This is how the founders used necessary violence in confronting external enemies, or in Brutus's case,

[71] Strauss argues that, for Machiavelli, "The people cannot find the truth by itself. By itself, it is ignorant; it is in need of guidance." Consequently, for Strauss, the plebs are the "conservatives" who lack the innovative spirit required to create new modes of political organization (including a regime), and the responsibility to innovate solely belongs to the elites. See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 127–130. This interpretation, however, is quite misleading because according to Machiavelli, institutional guidance or constraint at least can ensure the people to become prudent and virtuous while there is no way to constrain a "wicked prince other than steel" (*D* 1. 58, p. 119). Second, the distinction between innovation and preservation is problematic when Machiavelli's innovation or renewing (*rinnovargli*) of the republic serves the end of preserving a regime's freedom, making both terms non-mutually exclusive (*D* 3.1, p. 209). As I have shown, under the institutional guidance of the tribune (an institution that "returns" to Rome's beginning), the plebs were able to preserve the longevity of a regime through innovative actions as they deployed various measures in checking the insolence of elites. For more discussion on the "elitist bias" of Strauss's interpretation, see McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, p. 153–168.

destroying both anti-republican conspirators and his sons to create a new and free political order. The plebeian public trial then is also a *re-memorization* of fear that reminds citizens, including the elites, of the "terror" the founders imposed on enemies when establishing the regime (*D* 3.1, p. 211).[72] As Pacuvius's case indicates, the function of the potential use of violence against Capua's Senate was to generate great fear among oppressive or "insolent" nobles so that they could recover or "revive" their humanity and rejoin the community peacefully.[73] Every successful public trial against these kinds of elites that served as a presentation of "good custom" *re-presented* dangers similar to those that the founders once confronted, and also revived the same ferocious *ethos* shared by the founders but in the context of a new and dangerous temporality (*D* 1.18, p. 49).

The operative line of thought here is that whenever a new public trial is held, the original courage of the founders is also revitalized for a new epoch, sustaining the institutions that enable these clashes and the courageous actions of those involved in the first place. As Machiavelli uses the term "renew" (*rinnovare*) to describe the movement of returning to the beginning or reviving the energetic spirit of a free regime, these cases show that returning to a free regime's "beginning" does not mean the mere re-introduction of old laws, institutions, or actions that set the foundation for the regime. On the contrary, such "renewal" amounts to offering different and innovative measures that withstand various political dangers, which nevertheless share the original ferocious *ethos* of the founders, as illustrated in the three cases discussed above.[74]

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[72] See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 167. Likewise, Winter argues that executions that lead a regime back to its beginning can also be seen as a "violent sign" that resembles the hostile foundation of a republican order: Its establishment necessarily relies on the blood of the few. See Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, p. 152–158. I recognize the irreducible positivity of fear (that is, in protecting a regime's autonomy) generated by these executions, but my reading focuses more on the *subjective conditions* that make such generative fear possible in the first place. To Machiavelli, without going through a subjective transformation from cowardice to "valiant heart," it is impossible for free actors to employ any necessary fear toward their enemies.

[73] McCormick argues that since Pacuvius authorizes the plebs to have the final decision on the fate of Capua's nobles, his mode of taming nobles' insolence was far more "civil" than the mode practiced by Agathocles and Clearchus, who unilaterally murdered the entire noble class to neutralize the oppressive behaviors of nobles. See John P. McCormick, "Subdue the Senate: Machiavelli's "Way of Freedom" or Path to Tyranny," *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): p. 721–728.

[74] Arum clearly distinguishes the Latin word *principium* from Machiavelli's use of *principio* (beginning). The former refers to a "chronological starting point" or an "origin in the logical sense," and this contradicts how Machiavelli uses words such

However, the need to renew a regime only arises when there are new and real dangers that compel actors to act bravely and often violently (see *D* 1.14, p. 55). Another function of the public trial, then, is the continuous *re-presentation* of domestic and foreign dangers that compel the people to act "ferociously" and learn from such an experience.[75] As these cases indicate, naïve, peaceful reactions are not an option because, as history has shown, all the actions which "altered" or saved the body of a given regime from potential danger and toward stable strength were violent (or at least potentially so). This makes participating in a public trial an opportunity to learn how to act prudently and how to use—or abstain from—violence during dangerous times.[76] Pacuvius's case offers a useful example of such prudential use of violence. By authorizing the plebs to have the power to decide between life and death for the nobles, Pacuvius offered the plebs a real opportunity to experience policymaking and governance directly. This is ultimately pedagogical for the plebs, as it helped them to focus on the military urgency posed by Hannibal's invasion and cooled down their excessive desires to murder the nobles. Machiavelli claims that the plebs were "easily deceived in generalities, but are not deceived in particulars," which can be interpreted as follows: although Capua's plebs felt that they were "generally" superior to the nobles in governance, once the imminent "particular" danger (or Hannibal's incoming invasion) was taken into account, they were capable of seeing the advantage of not violently killing all senators, since the nobles were more experienced in governing military affairs.

Machiavelli's claim can also be interpreted as saying that the threat that foreign enemies posed

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as "renew," "renewal," "innovate," and "innovation" to describe the movement of returning to the "beginning." For more discussion on the innovative feature of returning to the beginning, see Arum, "Machiavelli's *Principio*," p. 528–531.

[75] As Machiavelli claims, there are "two remedies" that can revive citizens' virtuous bravery in peaceful times: "One, to maintain the citizens poor so that they cannot corrupt either themselves or others with riches and without virtue; the other, to be ordered for war so that one can always make way and always has need of reputed citizens" (*D* 3.16, p. 255).

[76] Winter emphasizes the "theatrical" or "dramatic effects" of these executions given that they remind all the citizens of the original ferocious terror of the "beginning." In other words, "extraordinary" symbolic affection is the key to these trials. See Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, p. 156. My reading, slightly different from Winter's, suggests that public punishments or trials (e.g. the execution of Brutus's sons), in light of the fact that they offer opportunities for public decision-making, are not merely opportunities for the plebs to witness and observe shocking events, but also serve to instruct the plebs in civil virtue and empower them (and civil magistrates) to employ both violent and non-violent strategies in confronting threats to social order. Such strategies helped to ensure effective "popular" statecraft during critical times.

forced the plebs to be more reflective in deciding what to prioritize in critical times, such that they were able to see that they had a choice between killing all the nobles for vengeance or confronting Hannibal's brutal invasion. Such experiences of confrontation could further provide the plebs with the civil capacity to make the right decision in the future and thereby sustain the endurance of the institutions that allow them to exercise decision-making power.[77] On the other hand, when dealing with the "envy" and ambition of Manlius, which imminently threatened the republican order, the plebs imitated Moses's killing of "infinite men" without hesitation. Moses, Machiavelli writes, had also faced numerous envious opponents to "his plans" at the time he founded his own regime (*D* 3.30, p. 280).[78] Every public trial, in this sense, should be seen as a space of un-concealment of plebeian agency in which, by confronting the dangers that threaten a free way of life face to face, citizens are able to exercise and adapt to various strategies in dealing with those dangers. This explains why Machiavelli claims that in an orderly situation, "a people is more prudent, more stable, and of better judgment than a prince."[79] Most importantly, what was reproduced from these trial cases was the "hostility to the kingly name" among the freedom-loving plebs and the people's "love of the common good of its fatherland"—a remanufactured endurance of active ferocious subjectivity that at the same time sustains the institutions that give birth to such active ferocity (*D* 1.58, p. 117).

3.3 Equality of Offices and the Maximization of Power(s)

The maintenance of a free way of life necessarily relies on the many rather than the few; this

[77] See also McCormick, "Subdue the Senate," p. 725–726.

[78] As Machiavelli says, "To conquer this envy, there is no remedy other than the death of those who have it; and when fortune is so propitious to the virtuous man that they die ordinarily, he becomes glorious without scandal […] But if he does not have this luck, he must think of every way of removing them from in front" (*D* 3.30, p. 280).

[79] Mansfield argues that, to Machiavelli, political execution against certain figures that returns toward a regime's beginning is mostly about producing "good effects and not their accuracy in retribution." Thus, "procedural regularity" is not Machiavelli's top concern in contemplating the execution of insolent figures. See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 298–302. However, this directly contradicts Machiavelli's analysis in *D* 1.45, in which he says that during a legitimate republican trial, the people should always have the final power to decide a case. It would be "hardly a civil thing" if there were no such "procedural regularity" (*D* 1.45, p. 93).

necessity, in turn, requires a republic to employ modes that can allow *numerous* figures to freely perform courageous and often violent deeds in defeating those who are hostile to the regime. Fully emancipating a community's potential vitality is only possible if there is an equality of offices and free elections. Unfortunately, however, as is shown in Machiavelli's writings, not all regimes necessarily champion such approaches to politics. As Machiavelli claims, after Brutus and others expelled the Tarquins and established a republic, one advantage of this new republican life was that the strength of the Roman Republic's leadership no longer depended on arbitrary "inheritance" that did not necessarily produce good leaders; instead, leadership was determined "through the mode of electing" the most virtuous leaders (*D* 1.20, p. 54).

It was also believed that the Roman people should not only have the power to elect leaders but also have the power to be elected as leaders of the community themselves because this permitted the Roman Republic to enjoy "infinite" virtuous successors (ibid). As Machiavelli asserts, "after the consulate came to the plebs," the Romans did not elect leaders purely based on the candidates' "age" or "blood" (ancestry or lineage) but "always went out to find virtue" (*D* 1.60, p. 121). He also contends that this equality of office or reward was a "necessity" for the Romans insofar as it allowed for the reproduction of courageous actions in an inevitably hostile world because "men cannot be given *trouble without a reward*, nor can the hope of attaining the reward be taken away from them *without danger*" (*D* 1.60, p. 121–122). In this way, equality of offices incentivized Roman plebs to engage in dangers so that the reproduction of ferocious bravery became truly possible.[80] Such equality encouraged Roman citizens "who judged themselves worthy" to ask to be elected, and in order "to be judged worthy [and earn the recognition of others], each one worked well" (*D* 1.18, p. 50, 1.60, p. 122).

Although consuls were elected by all common citizens through the *Comitia Centuriata*, the

[80] Vatter argues that Rome's emphasis on equality and the potential to "become a prince," to Machiavelli, was the essential reason why Romans had so much excessive *virtù* that was crucial to conquering other furious freedom–loving people such as the Tuscans and Samnites (*D* 2.2, p. 132). See Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, p. 292–293.

weighted voting system of the *Centuriata* allowed the wealthiest citizens to enjoy a voting advantage that was more likely to produce officials who favored their class interests.[81] Those in the Senate were also willing to use false religious justifications (such as something having been prophesied) to block pro-plebeian reforms or manipulate tribunate elections in order to secure their class interests (see *D* 1.13, p. 39–41). Worse, as Machiavelli suggests, the feeling of "security" or lack of danger would further distort or "corrupt" the citizens' judgment in electing officials since there would be no necessity to elect or propose the laws that secure freedom most effectively (*D* 1.18, p. 50).[82] If the "insolence" of Roman nobles was the greatest threat to a "free way of life," while prolonged security could diminish people's determination to make good judgments, then it was necessary for Rome to have institutions such as the tribune and a popular assembly that empowered ordinary citizens to have stronger agency in proposing laws which checked the power of dangerous, corrupt or tyrannical nobles. Doing so afforded the plebs a unique opportunity to re-present the original courage of the founders of the Roman Republic.

As illustrated by the two cases mentioned in Section 3.2, every punishment, once initiated by the tribune, reproduced the "good order" and free way of life that Romans enjoyed insofar as they were used for "preventing the insolence of the nobles" from ruining the regime (*D* 1.3, p. 15). Furthermore, this guardianship of freedom became possible only when "the tribune, or any other citizen whatever, could *propose* a law to the people, on which every citizen was able to *speak*, either in favor or against, before it was decided" (*D* 1.18, p. 50; emphasis added).[83] In other words, for Machiavelli, the notion of "rule"

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[81] McCormick claims that such a system is what Rousseau prefers since the *Centuriata* "formally" included all citizens, but at the same time, the weighted voting enabled the nobles, whom Rousseau considers much more prudent than the plebs, to elect better officials who were more capable of acting according to the common interest. See McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, 115–132.

[82] The lack of danger described here refers to Rome's successful conquest that "subdued Africa and Asia and had reduced almost all Greece to obedience." What followed from this security was that people only favored those "who knew better how to entertain men rather than those who knew better how to conquer enemies." See *D* 1.18, p. 50. On how foreign dangers or fear in general constitute republican courage and virtue, see Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, p. 94–95.

[83] According to McCormick, the assembly that a plebeian tribune "could propose a law" should be the popular assembly (*conclium plebis*) or *publico consiglio*, which almost certainly excluded nobles; *concioni* or *comizi*, and *Comitia Centuriata*, however, were the places where "any citizen" could propose a law and deliberate. See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, p. 97–100; and McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, p. 132–136.

is similar to the twofoldness of his conception of freedom (both defensive and expansionary) in which maintaining freedom has to do with negatively confronting ambitious and hostile individuals through public trials and having the ability to positively make laws that benefit the freedom of a republic.

From an ethical perspective (i.e., the subjective transformation of a ferocious subjectivity), the institutionalization of popular participation ultimately negates the naïve equivalence of security and freedom because maintaining freedom involves actively participating in policymaking for the purpose of confronting public dangers. According to Machiavelli, people usually have two ends: one is to "avenge those who are the cause that it is servile," and the other is to live "securely." A prudent prince can achieve both by killing the oppressive nobles and establishing the rule of law to allow the plebs to depend on him (*D* 1.16, p. 46). However, what the Roman plebs demonstrated by holding public consultations and public trials, executing insolent figures, and electing officials (which all sought to actively renew the republic), made the plebs an autonomous force, free from dependence on a prince who could have satisfied them. By emphasizing the significance of public participation, Machiavelli, far from being a thinker who sees freedom as a "property" that can only be negatively defined, is a thinker who believes that the maintenance of freedom also demands the care of endless productive and innovative actions. A republican "way of life" is the active *production* of freedom.

Another measure for demonstrating Rome's capability of producing strong and courageous citizens was its relatively equal openness toward "foreigners." This was crucial not only in maintaining the republic's autonomy but also in expanding its territory. By welcoming foreigners to stay and contribute to Rome and become citizens or soldiers, Rome was like a "thicken" plant that was "able to produce and mature" great "fruits" (*D* 2.3, p. 134). This resulted in a republic that had the capacity to easily assemble an army of "two hundred eighty thousand," while isolated "kingdoms" and republics that practiced strict immigration policies, such as Sparta and Venice, "never passed beyond twenty thousand" (ibid; see also *D* 1.6, p. 20–23). Here, equality refers to an increase in population without severe exclusion, which also serves as a condition for sustaining a courageous army, i.e., a virtuous violent force. As

Machiavelli writes, since "all things of men are in motion" (*D* 1.6, p. 23), the effectiveness of the necessary violence that "puts the world in order again" depends on whether a regime is able to use a variety of modes to ensure that various actors have access to engage in danger so that they will have the proper opportunities to perform ferocious violent acts. Both the equality of offices and an open policy for foreigners enabled the Roman Republic to have a "greater life" than a "principality" since it could better withstand the "diversity of times through the diversity of the citizens" (*D* 3.9, p. 240).[84]

A similar argument can also be found in Machiavelli's remarks on Rome's mixed-government structure. Machiavelli suggests that the vital dynamics, or even discords, caused by various internal forces in Rome could better help the regime adapt to various situations or "accidents" that might otherwise lead to the ruin of a state. Unlike Sparta, which had a perfect beginning orchestrated by the legendary Lycurgus "alone and at a stroke," the "perfection" of Rome (according to Machiavelli) was a consequence of "accidents" or chance (*D* 1.2, p. 14). Although King Romulus and others had "made many and good laws" (e.g., the establishment of the Senate) that established good bases for a "free way of life," their "end was to found a kingdom." Fortunately, the "accidental" conflicts between Brutus and the Tarquins and the discord between oppressive nobles and plebs eventually contributed to the establishment of consuls and tribunes that made Rome a truly "mixed regime" (ibid). As Machiavelli claims, Rome could not necessarily devise "new orders" without the "danger" expressed by the "occurrences" of these "accidents" (*D* 1.2, p. 10–11). While Rome was "born from" the discord between the nobles and the plebs, Rome also preserved and institutionalized such constant internal disunity, channeling the energies of the opposing sides into branches of government (e.g., the Senate and the tribune), which Machiavelli saw as the "first cause of keeping Rome free" (*D* 1.4, p. 16).[85] This is also

[84] Esposito considers Machiavelli's conception of the Roman Republic as a demonstration of what he calls "affirmative biopolitics," by which he means that citizens' lives are vitalized in constructing different "productive relationships" with other vital, and often dangerous, forces. There is no "governance *on* life" or dominion over the citizens from above, but immanent situational knowledge of exploring various possibilities of vital relationships. See Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 49–54.

[85] For Esposito, the "constituent" feature of conflicts when defining the meaning of politics expresses an irreducible

to say that the Roman Republic "internalized" the occurrence of dangerous accidents by making domestic discord a necessary feature of its mixed government, thus making it more adaptive to withstand future accidental dangers.[86] In this sense, the accidental dangers caused by the maximization of internal discord between different forces inherent in Rome altogether provided the necessary opportunities for Romans to perform virtuous and often violent deeds that gave rise to the possibility of implementing innovative new orders and laws in favor of freedom. Again, the degree of freedom of a republic corresponds to the durability of institutions (over time, and in terms of their ability to withstand the dangers they themselves engender). People's freedom emerges and grows within this institutionalized framework of dangers. Machiavelli is therefore not concerned with neutralizing internal dangers or conflicts through stable and even authoritarian institutions; rather, he advocates a novel notion of free order or an institutional system in which institutions are productive in the sense that they mediate the dangers entailed by the natural conflict(s) between nobles and plebs and transform them into orderly confrontations. Such confrontations, when settled in an orderly manner, serve to secure a free way of life for both the plebs and the republic as a whole.

3.4 Militarization and Republican Discipline

As argued in Section 1.1, when Machiavelli speaks of the necessity of cultivating greater

"positivity" or generativity, and if that conflictuality is canceled, we can no longer think of politics. Thus, every action expressed by this generativity under this perspective is a differentiated reaffirmation of this very generativity. See Roberto Esposito, *Politics and Negation: For an Affirmative Philosophy*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), p. 177–182. However, it is one thing to make conflictuality a basic presupposition of Machiavelli's realist political inquiry. It is another thing to see conflictuality as a thing that must be preserved at any cost. Esposito's fascination with conflicts leads him to conclude that Machiavelli opposes "too much equality" (a point that Machiavelli would never support) because this will neutralize the generative function of conflicts. In other words, Esposito tends to confuse Machiavelli's "realist" analysis of conflict with his theoretical agenda of negative generativity. As Pedullà correctly points out, Machiavelli champions conflict over social harmony not because he thinks conflicts are worth more than harmony but because the "dangerous disputes" between the rich and poor are "inevitable." Since social harmony, or the equilibrium of it, is unachievable, whenever Machiavelli uses the term "check" (*frenare, tenere in freno, guardare*), it does not assume an ultimate "balancing point" or a "temporary balance" between the plebs and the nobles; "a check without balance," as Machiavelli may put it. See Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, p. 117–126.

[86] See also John P. McCormick, "Addressing the Political Exception: Machiavelli's "Accidents" and the Mixed Regime," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 4 (1992): p. 892–895.

discipline among the citizens of the Republic, he is always referring to civil militarization. Here, I further suggest that, for Machiavelli, civil militarization, like the other institutions that I have mentioned, is a mode of rule that also creates opportunities for citizens to embrace dangers (in this case, foreign threats), learn from those dangers, and, at critical times, take violent measures if necessary. This, in turn, constantly reproduces the necessary ferocious subjectivity that is crucial to the maintenance of a free way of life.[87]

During the Roman Republic, militarization was more a question of the military's strategic and technical abilities on the battlefield. Machiavelli argues that continually enhancing the military's capabilities should be a "custom" that is required of a free community even in "times of peace" (*D* 3.31, p. 283). The aim of military training and discipline or the maintenance of this virtuous "custom" was to continuously produce ferocious subjectivities among citizens so that they could understand how to fight foreign adversaries effectively.[88] According to Machiavelli, the French had "fury" but lacked discipline, which is why they were unable to win battles if they "did not succeed in conquering" the enemy "with their first thrust" (*D* 3.36, p. 293).[89] By contrast, Rome's military "virtue" was expressed in both its "fury" and its "discipline," which enabled the Roman army to always remain "steady" and make effective use

[87] A free way of life sustained by civil militarization is mostly about confronting foreign ambitions but not domestic ones. Machiavelli argues that the "tumults" between Roman nobles and plebs were the causes of Rome's freedom because they "rarely engendered exile and very rarely blood," indicating that these tumults were mostly non-violent but backed up by the potential use of violence (*D* 1.4, p. 16). Alissa Adito also argues that, for Machiavelli, the Senate should have had a more determinate power in decision-making on foreign affairs since the plebs' relatively slower "learning process" was not conducive to making quick (though reasoned) decisions in the face of dangers posed by foreign powers. In return, the plebs could have a voice in rejecting or supporting the decisions made by the Senate. See Alissa M. Adito, *Machiavelli and the Modern State: The Prince, the Discourses on Livy, and the Extended Territorial Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 132–135, 161–167.

[88] On how Machiavelli characterizes the term "force" in military terms, which can be deployed, measured, and inflicted through injury, see Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, p. 67, 87–88.

[89] As McCormick argues, although Machiavelli argues that civil militarization is crucial for generating the civil virtue required to safeguard a free regime in a dangerous world, Pocock over-emphasizes its importance in Machiavelli's political thought. McCormick also argues that Pocock neglects Machiavelli's analysis of popular institutions as crucial means of securing a republic's free way of life in the face of domestic dangers posed by overly ambitious and dangerous elites. See Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, p. 211–213, and McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, p. 186–188. My reading aligns with McCormick's, according to which civil militarization is only one measure among many that serve to sustain the longevity of a free way of life; that is, only by emphasizing the importance of both civil militarization and popular domestic institutions without reducing one to another, can we truly appreciate Machiavelli's analysis of a free republic's endurance and have a holistic picture of what Machiavelli offers.

of "its fury with modes and with times" (*D* 3.36, p. 292).

An example of the Roman military's ability to utilize both fury and discipline is when Camillus and his army first confronted the Tuscan army. The entire Roman legion was initially "frightened" and thought "they could not resist" them because "it appeared to them that they were so inferior" compared with the "greatness" of the Tuscans (*D* 3.32, p. 283). Knowing how frightened his army was, Camillus came to the Romans and said, "What anyone has *learned* or is *accustomed to*, he will do" (ibid; emphasis added). Unlike the Volsci commander Vettius Messius, who had to turn to "necessity" as an additional rhetorical weapon to maintain his army's morale (see *D* 3.12, p. 249), Camillus simply "reminded" the citizens of what they already had—the necessary courage and skills they had acquired during their training. Nothing rhetorical was needed since the daily training of the citizen–soldiers had already prepared them. As Machiavelli says, Camillus could "neither have said nor have done any of those things to an army that had not first been ordered and trained both in peace and in war" (*D* 3.32, p. 283–284). His speech simply revived the courageous and ferocious "spirit" of the Romans that could not be attained unless military training constituted a necessary central part of the "public and particular times" of the Roman civil army (*D* 3.32, p. 284). By making the reproduction of such a "spirit" or "virtue" inherent in the daily life of the Romans, plebeian Roman soldiers were able to become disciplined enough to withstand the Volsci army even when their commanders, the two Manlii, had left the Roman camps (*D* 3.33, p. 286).[90]

In addition, Machiavelli discusses the military training of the early Roman Republic in detail and argues that a republic should have its own irreducible style of training. He writes that Rome's training was characterized by both "hardness" and equality—the former referring to the fact that republican

[90] Winter argues that Machiavelli's emphasis on the civil army often "suggests" a revolutionary dimension. Once the daily training helps to organize a group of citizen soldiers into a collective subject that shares mutual responsibility and trust, such a force could become "a force of political change," i.e., revolutionary power, during times of peace if the plebs are kept being severely exploited or oppressed by the rulers. See Yves Winter, "The Prince and His Art of War: Machiavelli's Military Populism," *Social Research* 81, no. 1 (2014): p. 179–182.

military leaders rigorously trained everyone in the republic without regard for their social status, discomfort, or different learning speeds so that everyone was trained with "equally" high expectations put upon them. While the Roman captain Valerius Corvinus was a man of "kindness" and always treated his soldiers "humanely," Manlius Torquatus "commanded his soldiers with every kind of severity, without interrupting either toil or punishment" and even executed his own son for disobedience (*D* 3.22, p. 265). Although they led their soldiers in two radically different ways, and both were admired by the people and became celebrated leaders, Machiavelli argues that it is Manlius's "hardness" that ought to be imitated in a republican context. Manlius's hardness, as Machiavelli describes it, presupposed a public "spirit" or a view of communal life "in favor of the public [rather than the elites]," since by being severe on everyone to an "extraordinary" degree (including himself), he could not "acquire partisans" and expressed a "love" for the "common good" (*D* 3.22, p. 267). On the contrary, Valerius, who always showed "goodwill" to the soldiers, could raise "doubts" about the possibility of maintaining republican freedom. This is because, in Machiavelli's analysis, one major cause of the Roman Republic's eventual collapse (referred to by Machiavelli as its state of "servitude") was the "prolongation" of military commands such as those made by Sulla and Caesar. When stationed in lands far from the capital, they utilized their powers by giving soldiers particular favors in order to "win them over" and make them their "partisan" friends (*D* 3.24, p. 270; see also *D* 3.28, p. 276–277). Above all, for Machiavelli, Manlius's "extraordinary hardness" helped Rome to "return its order toward their beginning and into its [Rome's] ancient virtue" (*D* 3.22, p. 266). With this "hardness" and the emphasis on equality and a non-partisan spirit, Manlius provided the Roman civil army with the necessary violent means to confront their enemies, and each time it was applied, it simultaneously reaffirmed the equality that defined the Roman Republic.[91] In other words, Manlius's "extraordinary" command was also an "extraordinary" affirmation

[91] Winter believes that Manlius's "severity" was purely "republican" because it treated everyone equally in an absolute sense. To the contrary, Brutus's cruelty could have applied to both the founding of a principality and a republic since both beginnings presuppose memorable violence against "particular" enemies and do not necessarily apply to everyone. See Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, p. 154.

of equality, and since thoroughly rigorous military training—in which all are treated in an equal fashion—affords the army with a force of equally brave soldiers, it is also a "return" to the "goodness" of the beginning of a given regime.

After examining the topic of returning to the beginning through three different institutional perspectives, I conclude that "returning to the beginning of a republic" means to *re-present* the original, often violent, ferocity or courage that sets the basis of a political establishment. However, to do so, there must be institutions that 1) can vitally *re-present* the necessary dangers for the emergence of courageous individuals and the undertaking of courageous actions, 2) provide sufficient access for common citizens to undertake such actions "ferociously," and 3) offer opportunities for citizens to learn how to prudently exercise violence. Whenever a citizen performs a civil or even violent action under these institutions, it is, at the same time, a manifestation of the reproduction of the necessary ferocious energy that maintains a free way of life. It is also an imitation of the original bravery that allows for a free regime's "first increase." Acknowledging that institutions are fragile and require the people's constant care and vigilance, Machiavellian democratic participation involves an extraordinary performative energy that negates the threats of overly ambitious individuals who seek power for themselves, and, in so doing, serves as an indicator of the sustainability and longevity of these institutions. The popular institutions listed above are "living laws" that *emerge* from the vital conflicts between nobles and plebs or Romans and foreign enemies and are praised by Machiavelli mainly because their *function*, which is to *re-present* or "return to" the original ferocity of republican founders in the pursuit of "extending the boundaries" of civil freedom in opposition to those who wish to tyrannize the populace, *re-affirm* the free way of life that defines a free republic.

4.1 Corruption, Security, Pacification, and the Political Dependence of the Plebs on the Prince

In a Machiavellian world, things "either go up and down" arbitrarily, and a free way of life needs to be maintained by participation in public institutions and military might. My reading of Machiavelli's

political thought eventually suggests that for him, "corruption," i.e., the loss of freedom, is a state of "dependence" on certain powerful individuals (usually a prince) that results in a change in perspective on the world and at the same time the loss of a ferocious kind of subjectivity. This changed perspective no longer sees the world as a web of hostile forces and views autonomous ferocious action as unnecessary, such that plebs can and should simply depend on the strength of a prince for the maintenance of a free way of life. Simply put, corruption occurs when the citizens are incapable of exercising ferocious violence or active agency and are indeed pacified by princely protection. It follows that the state of security, which makes citizens become complacent and think there is no need to cultivate the "ferocity" that Machiavelli has in mind, is one of the main sources of corruption.

In *D* 1.18, Machiavelli argues that laws alone are "insufficient" in maintaining a free way of life if the "orders" or "customs" of that regime are fully corrupted. Orders or customs, here, refer to "how" the citizens of a republic practice and participate in politics, and the effects of law thus are highly dependent on how citizens actualize (and, most importantly, reproduce) the effects of good laws.[92] For instance, before Rome became corrupted, common citizens only elected magistrates who were "judged to be worthy" and virtuous, but when it had been corrupted, citizens chose those "who had more power" or people "who knew better how to entertain" citizens instead of the virtuous ones (*D* 1.18, p. 50). Similarly, during peaceful or "quiet times," as Machiavelli claims, citizens are more likely to assign offices to "unworthy men of less substance" (*D* 3.16, p. 55). The emergence of a corrupt order that elects men who are unworthy over the virtuous can only be attributed to the absence of "dangerous times." As Machiavelli argues in discussing the threat of foreign invasions, when times are dangerous, the necessity of war inevitably compels citizens to elect "reputed" citizens so that the freedom of a republic can be maintained (ibid). In fact, Machiavelli stresses that a remedy for preventing corruption is to constantly

[92] On the "asymmetry" between order and law and how the change of a regime's customs or orders is fundamental to the cause of corruption, see Fabio Raimondi, *Constituting Freedom: Machiavelli & Florence*, trans. Matthew Armistead (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 10–12.

"make wars," thus continually reproducing the necessary dangers that are crucial to the emergence of virtuous talent (ibid). However, after Rome had "subdued Africa and Asia and had reduced almost all Greece to obedience," the Romans became "secure in their freedom" and no longer thought virtuous figures or ferocious actions that induced "fear" in their enemies were necessary (*D* 1.18, p. 50). The loss of the understanding that hostility between internal factions and rivalry between Rome and other nations was necessary—caused by the sense of security—led to a change of perspective that sees the world as inherently peaceful and quiet. This, in turn, led people to think that the maintenance of freedom does not necessitate endless ferocious, violent action.[93]

Machiavelli always characterizes the necessity of ferocious action as an expansive practice in which one's freedom relies on the constant neutralization of threats posed by hostile actors. We see that this is especially true when we compare Rome's expansionism with Sparta's isolationism. Machiavelli claims that if nations such as Sparta attempt to isolate themselves from constant threats and remain inactive and unresistant, there "arises idleness" that "would be the cause of its ruin" (*D* 1.6, p. 23). Such an explanation entails an irreducible or vital dimension of free beings in light of which the maintenance of one's free status is equivalent to one's ability to become vital, or proactive in the leading of one's life and the defense and maintenance of one's own freedom. The expansive or expressive vitality determines the strength of a being. Without such vitality, the being simply "ceases to be" because sooner or later, a stronger power will eventually absorb the weaker. In other words, the essence of a being is its strength, and strength is the expansive vitality of a being.[94]

However, security is not itself the cause of idleness or a false perception of this hostile world.

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[93] For further discussion on how the lack of danger endangers an "empire's" well-being, see Nikola Regent, "Machiavelli: Empire '*Virtù*' and the Final Downfall," *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 5 (2011): p. 770–772.

[94] In *The Golden Ass*, Machiavelli sees "evil" as a synonym for "laziness," while "ability" of strength is "good." He writes, "Ability makes countries tranquil, and from tranquility, laziness next emerges, and laziness burns the towns and villages. Then, after a country has for a time been subject to lawlessness, ability often returns to live there once again. Such a course she who governs us permits and requires, so that nothing beneath the sun ever will or can be firm. And it is and always has been and always will be, that evil follows good, good after evil" (1989, p. 273).

There is a difference between security achieved by "popular participation" under civil leadership or institutions and security achieved by dependence on a powerful figure. The latter inevitably introduces idleness or servitude because people who enjoy that type of security do not share the same perspective and *ethos* of the world as those who enjoy the former security.

In sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4, I argued that the institutional reproduction of confronting both internal and external enemies of a republic expresses how active agency is ultimately necessary for securing freedom, making such maintenance equivalent to endless courageous and often violent actions against constant political dangers. The problem with the security provided by a prince is that it pacifies the citizens since the prince strips away not only their opportunities to directly confront danger and publicly participate in their own maintenance of freedom but also the necessary perspective that sees the world as inevitably dangerous, as mentioned in Section 1.1. As Machiavelli writes, "a people" who live under a prince are "nothing [more] than [...] brute animal[s]" and *do not know* how to protect themselves once *granted* freedom since they are constantly "nourished in prison and in servitude" (by which Machiavelli is referring to the security offered by the prince) (*D* 1.16, p. 44; emphasis added). The inability of citizens to protect themselves also makes them unable to understand "how to reason about either public defense or public offense," and, thus, they are inevitably led into a process and eventual state of "corruption" (ibid).

As opposed to the Roman plebs who created the tribune and realized that they could only live freely if there were an institution that belonged exclusively to them, those who rely on powerful figures to secure them a safe and peaceful existence lose the capacity to perceive imminent danger if they are used to living and being, as Machiavelli writes, "nourished" in a safe "prison."[95] Losing the objective outlook that sees the world in itself as hostile, people also lose the "knowledge" of necessary violence or

[95] See also Amanda Maher, "What Skinner Misses about Machiavelli's Freedom: Inequality, Corruption, and the Institutional Origins of Civic Virtue," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 4 (2016): p. 1013.

ferocious actions that maintain their freedom.[96] In other words, political dependence resulting in the loss of institutional guidance that *re-presents* dangers and makes people ferocious is, after all, the absence of the production of a ferocious subjectivity (see also *D* 3.12, p. 247).[97] The process of corruption is the gradual process of citizens becoming "weak."

The most vivid example of losing freedom through dependence followed by pacification that Machiavelli provides in the *Discourses* is the establishment of the Ten or the rise of Appius Claudius's tyranny. Machiavelli states that after "many disputes" between the people—who had a "great desire to be free" and aspired to abolish the office of consuls—and the nobility, who had a "great desire to command" and attempted to destroy the tribune, both agreed to establish the Decemvirate, or the Ten. The Decemvirate, led by Appius Claudius, replaced all essential magistrates in Rome, including the tribunes, the consuls, and the appeal to the people (*D* 1.40, p. 85–86). However, as Machiavelli claims, under such an arrangement, if no parties are willing to "*make* a law" in favor of freedom, and instead, one party "*jumps* to favor one individual," tyranny becomes a real possibility (*D* 1.40, p. 88; emphasis added). Indeed, once Appius acquired all authority for himself and removed all institutional checks on his power, including the limit on the number of terms he could serve as the leader of the Ten, he then showed his true colors by "beating down the plebs" (*D* 1.40, p. 87).

This case further shows that if citizens are too "excessive" in wishing for security and are even willing to give a person absolute power to act on their behalf rather than protecting or establishing institutions such as the tribune—which was not only exclusively pro-plebeian but also allowed citizens

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[96] Although Vatter recognizes that for Machiavelli, dependence on the princely rule of law leads to corruption, his emphasis on freedom as "no-rule" is extreme to the extent that every "rule," according to his interpretation of Machiavelli, is a sign of corruption. See Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, p. 125–127. However, it should be noted that the plebs' desire "not to be dominated" is not identical to "no-rule." Freedom from domination, and the process involved in winning such freedom, which is what Machiavelli focuses on, inevitably requires the "endurance" of certain institutions that allows the plebs to actively participate in them. This makes the plebs a formidable force, able to rule, and thereby rival the power of the nobles in a republic. The real question, then, is not a choice between rule and no-rule but *how* to rule, and this question involves who has the proper access to necessary violence that guards freedom in a regime.

[97] Machiavelli states that Venice could easily conquer its surrounding cities because those cities "have been used to living under a prince, and not free." In contrast, free cities are extremely "difficult to capture" and will not "surrender easily" due to their "obstinate" and "natural hatred" toward princely rule (*D* 3.12, p. 247).

to exercise violence or use potential violence as a means to tame the ambitious of troublesome nobles—the citizens' welfare becomes ultimately dependent on the will and whims of one person, such that power is not only extremely concentrated by also exercises completely arbitrarily. Ironically, the moment Appius Claudius became the sole ruler of Rome, authorized by the plebs' excessive desire to be free, was also the moment when the plebs' security and freedom were at serious risk. Pacification, or the loss of opportunities to exercise violence when necessary, is the beginning of the loss of personal and political freedom.

4.2 Corruption and the Plebs' Economic Dependence on the Nobles

Machiavelli also claims that corruption "arises from inequality," and here inequality refers to economic dependency that eviscerates a person's fundamental ability to act autonomously and which again leads to political dependency. A great source of economic dependence or corruption is the class of "gentlemen" or landlords and their "way of life." As Machiavelli describes them, gentlemen are those "who live *idly* in abundance from the returns of their possessions without having any care either for cultivation or for other *necessary trouble* in living" and are in a position to "command" citizens "from a castle and have subjects who obey them" (*D* 1.55, p. 111; emphasis added).

As I have shown, while the acquisition of freedom requires engaging in violence when necessary, the need to engage in violence in a prudent manner is bound up with the need to discipline and vitalize citizens' agency by enabling them to confront dangers "directly" under institutional guidance. The gentleman's way of living fundamentally contravenes everything that "a free way of living" demands, because, as Machiavelli argues, living "idly" is living without danger or "other necessary troubles." The "matter," customs, or *ethos* that citizens acquire in a regime, depending on whether they see danger followed by necessary violence as a necessary part of guarding freedom and political life, is crucial in establishing or maintaining a free way of life. Thus, it is not only the exploitative economic system

established by landlords that corrupts the populace but also their "way of living" or *ethos*, namely "idleness." This is why Machiavelli argues that a great founder of a free city should not build on in a "fertile" site but a "sterile" one because, living in a rich land, people can be easily "seized" by idleness through having wealth and good fortune without being too "industrious" (*D* 1.1, p. 8). Even if the founder chooses a location where the soil is fertile and there are abundant resources, they must impose strict laws (Machiavelli uses the term "necessity") to compel people to work effectively and prevent idleness from corrupting them. The presence or absence of an idle *ethos* among the population is the key to freedom, and the emergence of that *ethos* depends on whether the dangers discussed above can be "artificially" created.[98]

Machiavelli also suggests that because the very nature of a regime dominated by a small number of landowners enables them to "command" large numbers of people or "have subjects" who must obey them, there is no way for the citizens to have the necessary ability to fight and stand up for themselves. In the Roman Republic, by contrast, the plebs wielded at least some degree of political power through the relatively equal access to confront political dangers that the institutions previously mentioned afforded. Machiavelli goes on to argue that the uncorrupt way of life enjoyed in early and middle periods of the Roman Republic was maintained by its emphasis on popular agency and use of violence, and this agency was only possible when Romans could live "equally" with others.[99] Other examples of uncorrupted regimes which Machiavelli provides, such as the German free cities (see also section 1.1), always maintained among "themselves an even equality" politically and economically and were "hostile" to the class of gentlemen to the extent that "if by chance" some gentlemen were to "fall into their hands, they [would] kill them as the beginnings of corruption and cause of every scandal" (*D* 1.55, p. 111).

[98] For further discussion on the artificiality of "necessity," see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p. 70–72; and Winter, "Necessity and Fortune," p. 35.

[99] In fact, even though the tribune was later created, to Machiavelli, the Roman Republic's very beginning already signified a will for equality, as opposed to one-man rule. He says the Romans swore at the birth of the republic that this regime "would never consent that *someone* should reign in Rome" (*D* 1. 17, p. 48; emphasis added).

Unfortunately, despite having strong popular institutions that sustained Rome's free way of life, the Roman Republic, like any other entity, could not escape decay and dissolution.[100] For Machiavelli, Rome's eventual corruption was due to increasing economic inequality expressed by the conflicts around the agrarian laws, which the Gracchi brothers (both were tribunes) proposed, and further resulted in the plebs' dependence on particular warlords to fight for their freedom. As Machiavelli says, the primary motive behind the agrarian law was to "divide" newly acquired lands "among the Roman people" since the nobles had possessed much greater wealth than the plebs (*D* 1.37, p. 79). However, knowing that such a law would hinder the satisfaction of their ambitious, oppressive "appetite," the nobles eventually murdered the Gracchi brothers "extraordinarily," i.e., in a private mode. Since "public magistrates" such as the tribune could no longer check the ambitions and insolence of the nobles, the plebs soon were forced to depend on Marius and began a civil war against the pro-noble Sulla (*D* 1.37, p. 80).

At the same time, the Roman nobles' appetite for endless military expansion necessitated the "prolongation" of the term of offices of many military leaders (*D* 3.24, p. 270). This, in turn, made many poor plebeian soldiers even more dependent on these generals (as they lived far away from their homelands), which provided conditions for civil wars led by various warlords.[101] Machiavelli makes the case that Rome indeed became "corrupted" and was "never again free" once the impoverished plebs could no longer depend on public institutions to prosecute and check the ambitions of the nobles while particular warlords (especially Caesar in later times) exploited plebeian soldiers' aspirations for economic security and made the plebs their "partisan friends" (*D* 1.17, p. 48, 3.24, p. 270).

In other words, Rome's eventual corruption was mainly due to the nobles' limitless or "infinite"

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[100] Such a pessimistic view on the finitude or ephemerality of material things (including the human body) is also mentioned in *D* 2.5, p. 140. Machiavelli says, "For as in simple bodies; when very much superfluous matter has gathered together there, nature may times moves by itself and produces a purge that is the health of that body, so it happens in this mixed body of the human race that when all provinces are filled with inhabitants […] and human astuteness and malignity have gone as far as they can go, the world must of necessity be purged by one of the three modes [inundations, plague, and famine], so that men […] may live more advantageously and become better."

[101] This prolongation also gave rise to a more independent "professional" army (as opposed to an army consisting of citizens) led by a few experienced generals, who later became ambitious warlords (e.g., Sulla and Caesar). See McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, p. 60–61.

greed that not only destroyed the plebs' economic autonomy but also incentivized them to further depend on warlords. The plebs became powerless to violently resist the nobles, and knowing that by this stage, only the warlords on whom they depended could employ violence as they wished, they became passive, unable to act autonomously. Unfortunately, as in the case of Appius, the wants and wishes of warlords did not necessarily coincide with the plebs' desire to "not be dominated." The most unfortunate example that Machiavelli gives is when Caesar eventually used his army in pursuit of his personal and tyrannical ambitions, which led to the absolute ruin of the Roman Republic. On the other hand, Machiavelli claims that if economic inequality or corruption was not so severe, the plebs would "never [have] served [the elites] humbly" and would have been able to resist the favors offered by various ambitious figures that could otherwise be turned into fertile soil or a later foundation for tyranny (*D* 1.58, p. 116, 3.8, p. 238, 3.28, p. 276).

Perhaps for Machiavelli, the Gracchi brothers were also corrupted in the sense that they were too faithful to the duty of the tribune (which was nonetheless a "civil" magistracy) and did not resort to civil-military mobilization or the use of extraordinary violence to tame the ambitions of the nobles. Unfortunately for the Gracchi brothers, the nobles, by contrast, were ready to use "extraordinary" violence to kill them.[102] In this connection, Machiavelli argues that in a totally corrupted republic, the "laws" themselves are too weak to "correct" the "insolence" of elites and only in such circumstances "should be checked in some mode by an almost kingly power," i.e., extraordinary or extralegal violent force brought to bear on the nobles by someone representing the plebs (*D* 1.18, p. 51). For example, after Spartan elites murdered King Agis (due to the fact that he wished to radically reform Sparta's "deviated" laws) (*D* 1.9, p. 30), Agis's successor, Cleomenes, knowing that reformation necessarily worked "against the wish[es] of the few" and must be done "alone," assembled all the ephors and nobles and killed those who might "stand against him" at a stroke. Soon, the laws of Sparta were "renewed altogether." In this

[102] See John P. McCormick, "Of Tribunes and Tyrants: Machiavelli's Legal and Extra-Legal Modes for Controlling Elites," *Ratio Juris* 28, no. 2 (2015): p. 263.

sense, corruption becomes a definite fact when public institutions that ordinarily grant plebs the opportunities to exercise potential violence against ambitious figures are replaced with the pacified dependence on particular powers or the inability to autonomously engage in necessary violence that "leads back to" a republic's beginnings.[103]

5.1 The Hardship of Freedom

The hardship of Machiavellian freedom becomes self-evident if freedom is defined as the state of "non-dominance" while the very maintenance of this free status is inevitably embedded in a ruthless network of conflicts from which no one can escape until death. To live freely, therefore, necessitates having limitless willpower to embrace the factual dangers which emerge in the world and, at the same time, finding the ontological generativity of violence or the potential use of it accompanied by ferocious actions precisely as *necessities*. Insofar as we understand that as aggressive virtues and ferocities that sustain a regime's existence are constantly "transferred" to other places after old regimes are "conquered" by new ones, we can see that the "world always [operates] in the same mode and there [is] as much good as wicked" (*D* 2. Intro, p. 124). Machiavelli's conception of nature is indeed a dynamic though tragic one.[104] In this connection, and applying this view to a particular case, Machiavelli writes that the "Tuscans" were associated "with the highest glory of empire" and acquired the most extraordinary virtue and customs, but once they were suddenly eliminated by the stronger Roman power, there remained "almost no memory of the [former]" (*D* 2.4, p. 138, 2.5, p. 140).

The maintenance of freedom, to a certain extent, may never be attainable if one is born into a

[103] Maher correctly identifies the subtle relationship between dependence on others and corruption, especially depending on powerful figures to acquire plebs' "desire for security and freedom from domination." See Maher, "What Skinner Misses about Machiavelli's Freedom," p. 1012. My difference with her analysis is that I tend to focus more on how corruption is related to the change of plebs' access to violence or how corruption is always related to the "misuse" of violence, meaning that violence, due to dependency, changes its nature from a weapon that empowers freedom to servitude.

[104] Pocock argues that in a world without "grace" and transcendental salvation that prevents the decomposition of a regime from happening, Machiavelli arrives at the conclusion that worldly goods, i.e., virtues, are, after all, "finite quantities of energy" that can be replaced, substituted, or "transferred" among all existing worldly actors. See Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, p. 217–218.

world of violent conflict and in which one's freedom will sooner or later be absorbed by stronger powers. Nevertheless, precisely because this very maintenance of freedom is fragile and vulnerable, good orders and laws, along with ferocious and prudentially undertaken violent deeds, necessarily arise. To be sure, there are people who desire not to live "freely" but rather wish to live "securely" under a tyrannical prince. Nevertheless, as Machiavelli says, once they lose the protection provided by a price, they "become the prey of the first one who seeks to rechain it" (i.e., citizens' freedom/autonomy) (*D* 1.16, p. 44). In the same chapter of *Discourses*, Machiavelli compares unfree peoples to brute animals and contrasts them with free people who fight for their freedom. As is evidenced by his infamous deed, Brutus is a paradigmatically free individual and his actions suggest that Rome's republican freedom constituted a vital *privilege* due to both the difficulty with which it can be attained and its inherent vulnerability when its emergence was ultimately situated in the causal field of heterogenous ambitions (i.e., partisan enemies of a free way of life).

Machiavelli's worldview, though dictated by the seemingly indifferent transfer of quantifiable ferocious virtues, is not one of moral indifference as he uses the moral terms of "good" and "evil" to describe the strength or decline of a free regime.[105] The constant shifting back and forth between the "good" (i.e., maintenance of freedom) and "wicked" or "evil" (i.e., loss of freedom) is a process laden with *moral* values and judgments, and which condition prevails depends on how each one of us is willing to act ferociously or often violently to sustain its free existence. From this philosophical perspective, nothing is more morally expressive than the original ferocity of a "free" beginning. It is the most illustrative "good" because the forceful repression of dangerous ambitions is inherent in the expressivity of the establishment of a free regime. Without the imposed forceful repression of certain ambitions held by certain rivals—whether in the case of killing the old inhabitants of a city for the purpose of creating a "new land," executing "Brutus's sons" in order to establish a republic, or carrying out Medici's purge

[105] See footnote 86.

(which was undertaken "every five-year[s]" (*D* 3.1, p. 211)—there would be no "beginning" at all.

Machiavelli considers the Roman Republic as having been the freest political entity in history in light of its ability to internalize the vibrant energy produced by class antagonism in its very structure of government and established various institutions or modes based on such antagonistic conflicts in order to channel the vibrant energies ordinarily so that they could sustain citizens' free way of life—"as if" conflict was not at all an opposition to free politics defined as social harmony, but an intrinsic/essential part of it.[106] Most importantly, these institutions all potentialized the original violence of the founder and were always ready to ordinarily "crush" those who attempted to ambitiously destroy a free way of life without hesitation. Machiavelli shows that Rome's democratic institutions that guarded freedom were not mere legal apparatuses that could function or run themselves according to abstract legal–procedural codes; on the contrary, the vitality of these institutions must correspond to certain ferocious subjectivity based on a particular transformative process. This was because, after all, those institutions were also born from the founders' practice of a certain ferocious violent *ethos* or, as Machiavelli puts it, a particular "goodness," which aimed at reproducing the original ferocious subjectivity by providing orderly accesses and conditions for plebs to encounter dangers and practice necessary violence. A democratic institution must remain a vital productive apparatus that is simultaneously reinforced by those very same vitalities that it has produced.

Machiavelli's approach to freedom thus contrasts sharply with the liberal tradition, in which one's freedom is essentially negatively defined as the state of being able to act in a secure, private realm with no interference. As Arendt argues in "What is Freedom?" or as Esposito claims, the modern philosophical responses to the question of freedom have long been dictated by the principle of security or personal

[106] For other "civil humanists" in Machiavelli's times and ancient philosophers, politics is a conduct that aims at "harmony" or "stability." For example, Guicciardini critiques Machiavelli for assigning the plebs as the major guardians of freedom, whereas such responsibility should belong to "everybody" who desires a free life. Similarly, ancient thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero all champion social harmony over conflict and believe that a "mixed government" that shares equal duties among various classes for protecting freedom is the only way to sustain freedom. See Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, p. 118–124.

protection, which in turn led to freedom being understood as a "potential freedom from politics"—as if the maintenance of freedom is contrary to "public appearance[s]" or affirmative "actions."[107] Above all, in the liberal tradition, individual and collective freedom is seen to justify itself based on the idea of a "naturally" given "subjective right," which is the most fundamental principle of any political inquiry. According to this inquiry, human beings are "naturally endowed" with power (*potestas*) of freedom of choice that shall not be abrogated.[108] To a certain extent, such a privatized notion of freedom necessarily turns the essence of freedom into a legal concept, according to which freedom, defined as "private possession," is best guaranteed by a series of just and universal legal procedures derived from humans' "natural laws or rights."

However, as Machiavelli emphasizes, legal codes alone or individual freedom alone, without the civil virtue and "ferociousness" of the people, are fragile and susceptible to being exploited by ambitious figures or worse, structural inequalities. The problem with the theory of universal "natural rights" is that it does not recognize that the compatibility between universal institutions and universal subjects is vulnerable to socioeconomic circumstances, and the compatibility or incompatibility between them must be modified historically. For Machiavelli, freedom cannot be completely "natural" since freedom is an "effect" of a vital struggle resulting in the process of imposing ferocious or even violent "effects" against those with ambitions that may pose threats to oneself. Just as one cannot establish a tyrannical principality in a place of equality, a republican-free way of life cannot emerge in a place where people do not know how to ferociously and actively participate in public affairs (e.g., *D* 1.17, 1.18, 1.55). Consequently, Machiavelli conceives freedom as performative—a stabilizing or destabilizing process that one takes on and which exposes itself to the constant threats of others. One must have access to the institutions mentioned above to be in a position of being able to perform the necessary and ferocious actions

[107] See Arendt, "What is Freedom?" p. 149–150; and Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics*, trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 4, 48–49.
[108] For further discussion of the natural givenness of modern liberal "right," see Davide Tarizzo, *Political Grammars: The Unconscious Foundations of Modern Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), p. 44–52.

(sometimes backed up by violent means) in order to stabilize one's process of becoming free.

6.1 Conclusion

I have argued that Machiavelli's analysis of freedom is best understood in relation to the production of a ferocious subjectivity, which is the emergence of an individual's comprehension of and ability to be affected by political dangers and thereby acquire the capacity to use violence to defend their interests when necessary. Such subjectivity or *ethos* is crucial since I make the case that, for Machiavelli, the world or nature is ontologically conflictual and hostile. A "free" beginning of a regime is only possible when founders of regimes are able to make effective use of danger and necessary violence in the sense that they utilize a hostile scenario and manipulate the forces at play to found a regime. That quality of action is what Machiavelli calls "goodness," which gives a regime its "first increase" and "first reputation." I further show that in sustaining such "goodness" or the courageous use of violence, the institutions Machiavelli praises the most are praised due to their abilities to re-produce the necessary dangers for triggering necessary ferocity on the parts of the plebs, thereby allowing the plebs to have opportunities to perform or re-present the original courage of the founders of a regime. In this connection, my reading of Machiavelli seeks to re-situate the relationship between institutional arrangements and the production of necessary ferocious subjectivity that is crucial for the sustainability of a democratic system of government. I have attempted to understand what institutional conditions—and what kind of transition of subjectivity—are necessary for one to come to an adequate understanding of the nature of freedom and the emergence of a ferocious subjectivity.

We have seen that corruption ruins a free regime if the plebs are no longer willing to expose themselves to dangers and exercise necessary violence if for the purpose of self-governance. It is when the plebs seek for political dependency or mere protection provided by powerful figures that their autonomy and freedom are lost. Economic dependency resulting from serious socioeconomic inequality also has the same effect. Impoverished citizens do not have the ability to remain ferociously autonomous

and are used as tools for realizing the tyrannical ambitions of figures on whom they depend.

From a more theoretical perspective, Machiavelli's notion of ferocious freedom and the natural freedom of the liberal tradition, symbolize two different beginnings of and narratives about communal life. On the one hand, according to Esposito, the aim of the theory of natural rights or freedom, whether it is defined as Hobbesian self-preservation or Lockean property rights, is to "interiorize," "return," or "reclaim" the natural self from the "potentially hostile outside world" and return it to the "confinement" of security.[109] We have also seen that Machiavelli's notion of ferocious freedom invites us to imitate the *ethos* of every free regime's founders who "reclaim" their freedom by "fleeing" from the unfortunate, even regretful past and, at the same time, "reaffirm" and "return" to "this" concrete, dangerous world in order to create a new site for their people through an irreducible ferocity that is always backed by violent force. To be affected by the necessity of hostile danger and necessary violence, Machiavellian freedom narrates a tale of human bravery, a grand journey of the "foreigners" who created, a memory of those who fought, and before anything else, a ferocious love for this only world that we call home—although this "home" has always been, and always will be, cruel.

[109] See Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 61; Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 258; and Esposito, *Terms of the Political*, p. 48–49.

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