



Montesquieu's anti-Machiavellian Machiavellianism[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 21 March 2011

Keywords:

Montesquieu
Machiavelli
Rome
Juries
Commerce
War

ABSTRACT

Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, mentions Niccolò Machiavelli by name in his extant works just a handful of times. That, however, he read him carefully and thoroughly time and again there can be no doubt, and it is also clear that he couches his argument both in his *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline* and in his *Spirit of Laws* as an appropriation and critique of the work of the predecessor whom he termed 'this great man'. In this paper I explore the manner in which the Frenchman redeployed the arguments advanced by the Florentine for the purpose of refuting the latter's conclusions.

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One can never leave the Romans behind. So it is that still today, in their capital, one leaves the new palaces to go in search of the ruins; so it is that the eye which has taken its repose on the flower-strewn grasslands loves to look at the rocks & mountains. (Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu¹)

The influence exercised by Niccolò Machiavelli was, to a considerable extent, hidden from view. In the early modern period, there were those who brazenly trumpeted their allegiance. Sir Francis Bacon,²

Marchamont Nedham,³ James Harrington,⁴ Baruch Spinoza,⁵ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau⁶ come first to mind. But these were few in number and far between. Most of those who profited from the thinking of the Florentine chose to maintain a prudent distance from the controversial figure thought to have given the devil his English moniker 'Old Nick'⁷ – if only by ostentatiously remaining silent concerning the brilliant *provocateur* whose arguments they were so wont to borrow.

[☆] In citing Machiavelli, I employ N. Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, ed. M. Martelli (Florence, 1971), and I refer to the divisions within each work provided by the author. To make my references to Machiavelli's *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* more precise, I sometimes also employ the paragraph enumeration added by the editors of N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, tr. H. C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov (Chicago, 1996). In citing Montesquieu, wherever possible, I have employed the splendid new critical edition being produced by the Société Montesquieu: Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. J. Ehrhard, C. Volpilhac-Augier, et al., 22 vols. (Oxford, 1998–), which I cite as VF. I cite Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734), ed. F. Weil and C. Courtney, as CR by chapter and, where appropriate, line from VF, ii, 89–285. I cite Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois* (1757), as EL by part, book, chapter, and, where appropriate, page from Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. R. Caillois, 2 vols. (Paris, 1949–51), ii, 225–995, and Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, *Mes pensées* as MP by number from Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. A. Masson, 3 vols. (Paris, 1950–5), ii, 1–677.

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¹ Montesquieu, EL 2.11.13.

² See Sir Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. M. Kiernan, II.xxi.9, in: *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, ed. G. Rees and L. Jardine, 15 vols. (Oxford, 1996–), iv, 144, and *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* 7.2, in: *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath, 14 vols. (London, 1857–74), i, 729 (translated at v, 17).

³ See, for example, M. Nedham, *The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated* (1650), ed. P. A. Knachel (Charlottesville, 1969), 22n., 35, 62, 66, 91n., 111, 114n., 115n., 117, 118n., and *The Excellencie of a Free-State: Or, The Right Constitution of a Common-wealth* (1656), ed. R. Baron (London, 1767), xiv, 2–3, 18–19, 42, 64–70, 72–6, 141–7, 163–72. For an extended discussion of this important but neglected figure, see P. A. Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (New York, 2008), 175–244.

⁴ See James Harrington's *Oceana*, ed. S. B. Liljegren (Heidelberg, 1924), 13, 30, 118, 135.

⁵ See B. Spinoza, *Tractatus politicus* 5.7, in: *Benedicti de Spinoza opera, quotquot reperta sunt*, ed. J. van Vloten and J. P. N. Land, 4 vols. (The Hague, 1914), ii, 24.

⁶ See J.-J. Rousseau, *Du contrat social* 3.6 (with note a), in: J. J. Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond, 5 vols. (Paris, 1959–95), iii, 409, 1480.

⁷ See S. Butler, *Hudibras*, ed. J. Wilders (Oxford, 1967) 3.1.1313–16. For a later example, see [John Mackenzie], 'A Letter to the People' (1769), in: *The Letters of Freeman, etc.: Essays on the Nonimportation Movement in South Carolina, Collected by William Henry Drayton*, ed. R. M. Weir (Columbia, 1977), 21. In 1771, while in self-imposed exile in London, Drayton gathered and published as a book this material, which had appeared two years before in the *South-Carolina Gazette*. Whether the devil's moniker is so derived is a matter of controversy: cf. E. Leisi, 'On the Trail of Old Nick', in: *The History and the Dialects of English: Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*, ed. A. Fischer (Heidelberg, 1989), 53–7.

Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, belonged to neither group.⁸ At first, he exhibited caution. When he was in his twenties, if not before, Montesquieu read Machiavelli with great care; and on 18 June 1716, in the very first paper that he read at the Academy of Bordeaux – which had as its title *Dissertation sur la politique des Romains dans la religion* – he drew heavily on the Florentine's analysis of the political function served by the various religious practices sanctioned by Rome – without, however, mentioning his principal source by name.⁹ Montesquieu appears to have re-read Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* with even greater care – this time in Italian – when he returned to France in the Spring of 1731 from his wide-ranging journeys on the European continent and his extended sojourn in England;¹⁰ and, when he composed his *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, he wrestled with his predecessor's work on that subject at virtually every turn. Here, too, however, he was silent concerning his obvious intellectual debts.

The Florentine earns an occasional mention in the notebooks – the *Spicilège* and *Mes pensées* – that served as Montesquieu's commonplace book. In the former he even compares Machiavelli with the prophet Samuel, asserting that, like his Hebrew antecedent, the Florentine disapproved of princes, and describing him as a 'great republican'.¹¹ But it was not until he published his *Spirit of Laws* that the French *philosophe* openly expressed his admiration for the towering figure whom he described as 'this great man', and he did so in a context in which his purpose was to clarify what it was that separated his thinking from that of the Florentine.¹²

Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and the judicial power

This context deserves close attention – for it is revealing in more ways than one. Montesquieu begins the fifth chapter of the sixth book of *The Spirit of Laws* with an observation: 'Machiavelli attributes the loss of liberty in Florence to the fact that the people in their corporate capacity [*en corps*] did not judge crimes of treason [*lèse-majesté*] committed against them, as they did in Rome' but, instead, left this responsibility to a board of eight magistrates charged with guarding the liberty and security of the city. It takes 'little [*peu*]', Montesquieu's Machiavelli explains, to corrupt so 'few [*peu*]'.¹²

In the chapter within the *Discourses on Livy* to which Montesquieu alludes, Machiavelli makes four distinct claims:

1. That the prospect that there will be accusations of this sort deters crimes.
2. That, where those entrusted with the responsibility for guarding freedom within a city are authorized to bring such charges, conspiracies can be crushed quickly and without hesitation.
3. That accusations provide an outlet through which to vent – in a fashion safe for the community because sanctioned and restrained by the laws – the alternating humors that grow up within a city.
4. And that, where the judges are few in number, accusations will not serve these three functions because 'the few always act in the manner [*modo*] of the few'.

It quickly becomes clear, however, that Machiavelli is less interested in deterring or crushing conspiracies than in providing an outlet for the venting of what he calls humors. It was in the three chapters immediately preceding the one singled out by Montesquieu that the Florentine had advanced and elaborated his unprecedented and counterintuitive claim that, within a republic, strife between the few and the many is more conducive to freedom than is their solidarity and that, if liberty was sustained in republican Rome, it was because of – and not despite – the struggle of the orders between the patricians and their plebeian underlings.¹³

Montesquieu could easily have mounted a challenge to Machiavelli's analysis. The chief Roman example that the Florentine had cited begs for a counterargument. According to the ancient sources, Coriolanus was, indeed, accused in the very fashion that Machiavelli recommends. But this did not prevent him from doing the very thing that the Florentine had contended such accusations would prevent – for, in response to the plebeians' venting their humor against him in the manner recommended by Machiavelli, Coriolanus vented his own rage against his compatriots by summoning aid from abroad.¹⁴ If Montesquieu made mention neither of Coriolanus' flight to the Volsci nor of his deployment of their warriors against his fatherland, it was, I think, because the Frenchman shared his predecessor's novel conviction that republican liberty is sustained, not subverted, by conflict when that conflict is properly channeled and contained.

In his *Persian Letters*, Montesquieu has Rica describe England in a fashion reminiscent of the shocking remarks that Machiavelli uttered in praise of the tumults generally thought to have bedeviled Rome. In England's historians, this Persian traveler observes, 'one sees liberty constantly spring forth from the fires of discord & of sedition' and one finds 'the Prince always tottering on a throne' which is itself 'unshakable'. If the 'Nation' is 'impatient', this character remarks, it is nonetheless 'wise in its very fury'.¹⁵ In his *Spirit of Laws*, when Montesquieu turns once again to this polity, describing it as 'a republic concealed under the form of a monarchy', he restates these observations and elaborates upon their significance.¹⁶

In his *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, Montesquieu makes the same point with the

⁸ For the secondary literature tracing the relations between the two, see E. Levi-Malvano, *Montesquieu e Machiavelli* (Paris, 1912); A. Bertièrre, 'Montesquieu, lecteur de Machiavel', in: *Actes du Congrès Montesquieu réuni à Bordeaux du 23 au 26 mai 1955* (Bordeaux, 1956), 141–58; F. Gentile, 'De Machiavel à Montesquieu', *Notiziario culturale italiano*, 11:1 (1970), 1–13; C. Rosso, *Montesquieu moraliste: Des Lois au bonheur* (Bordeaux, 1971), 317–26; R. Shackleton 'Montesquieu and Machiavelli: A Reappraisal', in: Shackleton, *Essays on Montesquieu and on the Enlightenment*, ed. D. Gilson and M. Smith (Oxford, 1988), 117–31; H. Drei, *La Vertu politique: Machiavel et Montesquieu* (Paris, 1998); P. Carrese, 'The Machiavellian Spirit of Montesquieu's Liberal Republic', in: *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, ed. P. A. Rahe (New York, 2006), 121–42; and V. B. Sullivan, 'Against the Despotism of a Republic: Montesquieu's Correction of Machiavelli in the Name of the Security of the Individual', *History of Political Thought*, 27:2 (Summer 2006), 263–88.

⁹ Cf. Montesquieu, *Dissertation sur la politique des Romains dans la religion* (18 June 1716), in: VF, viii, 83–99, with Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* 1.12, 14, 19, 25, in: *Tutte le opere*, 95–8, 104–5, 108–9, and see Levi-Malvano, *Montesquieu e Machiavelli*, 64–8; Shackleton 'Montesquieu and Machiavelli', 120–1; and L. Bianchi, 'Nécessité de la religion et de la tolérance chez Montesquieu: La Dissertation sur la politique des Romains dans la religion', in: *Lectures de Montesquieu: Actes du colloque de Wolfenbüttel (26–8 Octobre 1989)*, ed. E. Mass and A. Postigliola, *Cahiers de Montesquieu*, 1 (1993), 25–39.

¹⁰ See Montesquieu, *Spicilège*, ed. R. Minuti, no. 561, in: VF, xiii, 495–7 (with particular attention to n. 5).

¹¹ See Montesquieu, *Spicilège* nos. 513, 529, 561, in: VF, xiii, 456–7, 495–7, and MP 184.

¹² Montesquieu, *EL* 1.6.5.

¹³ Consider Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.7, in: *Tutte le opere*, 87–8, in light of Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.4–6, in: *Tutte le opere*, 82–7.

¹⁴ Cf. Liv. 2.34–40. Note also Plut. *Cor.* 19–39.

¹⁵ Cf. Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, ed. E. Mass, no. 130, lines 30–3, in: VF, i, 493, with Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.4–7, in: *Tutte le opere*, 82–8, and see N. Wood, 'The Value of Asocial Sociability: Contributions of Machiavelli, Sidney, and Montesquieu', in: *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, ed. M. Fleisher (New York, 1972), 282–307 (esp. 298–305), and Carrese, 'The Machiavellian Spirit', 121–42 (esp. 124–37). Note also Montesquieu, *MP* nos. 814, 1252.

¹⁶ Consider Montesquieu, *EL* 2.11.6, 3.19.27, in light of Montesquieu, *EL* 1.5.19 (304).

Roman republic as his example, writing in a fashion which suggests that his narrative of Rome's trajectory is a meditation on the analysis provided by Machiavelli. 'While Rome was conquering the Universe', he begins, 'there was within its walls a war hidden from sight; there were fires like those in volcanoes which spew forth as soon as some matter comes along to add to their combustion [fermentation]'. Then, he goes on to describe the struggle of the orders, the slow retreat of the patricians in the face of popular envy, the emergence of a new nobility constituted by the leading families in both orders, the bitter class conflict that erupted in the late republic, and the salutary role played by the censors in sustaining the *mores* and the mindset or *esprit* that contained this strife and animated the republic down to the time of Scipio Aemilianus.¹⁷

There are passages in this discussion that could be read as a criticism of Rome. But at the end Montesquieu voices his approval. 'The Government of Rome was', he writes, 'admirable in this respect: from its birth its Constitution was such – either because of the *esprit* of the people, the strength of the Senate, or the authority of certain magistrates – that every abuse of power could always be corrected therein'. In this context, he suggests a comparison. Today, he adds,

The Government of England is one of the wisest in Europe, because there is a Body [Corps] therein which examines this government continually & which continually examines itself; & such are this body's errors that they never last long, & are frequently useful in giving the Nation a spirit of attentiveness [*l'esprit d'attention*].

'In a word', Montesquieu concludes, 'a free Government, which is to say, a government always agitated, knows no way in which to sustain itself if it is not by its own Laws capable of self-correction'.¹⁸

Lest he be misunderstood, Montesquieu returns to this question in the next chapter of his little book, arguing, as Machiavelli had done,¹⁹ that the fall of the Roman republic was a function of its expansion. In this connection, he alludes to the fact that the imperial republic could not adequately staff long-service armies in distant provinces in the traditional fashion with landed men [*adsidui*] possessed of a stake in the stability of the republic, and that expeditionary forces of this sort made up of impoverished *proletarii* and *capite censi* would naturally pay allegiance to their generals even in preference to the *respublica*. Then he notes that a *civitas* encompassing a territory the size of Italy as a whole could not be any sort of *civitas* at all. Prior to the Social War and the extension of citizenship to the Italians, he writes, Rome had been a city whose people had 'but one and the same spirit [*qu'un même esprit*], one and the same love of Liberty, one and the same hatred for Tyranny', and if this people exhibited a 'jealousy of the power of the Senate & of the prerogatives of the Great', it was nonetheless 'mixed always with respect', for it 'was nothing but a love of equality'. Thereafter, the city lost the cohesion that had so long sustained it in the face of democratic envy. 'When the Peoples of Italy became its Citizens, each Town brought with it its own genius, its particular interests, & its dependence on some great protector', and 'the City, torn apart, formed no longer a united whole [*un tout ensemble*]'. In effect, the Romans were now 'Citizens solely by a kind of fiction'; and 'since they no longer had the same Magistrates, the same walls, the same Gods, the same Temples, the same graves,

they saw Rome with the same eyes no longer, they no longer had the same love for the fatherland, & Roman sentiments existed no more'.²⁰ In the face of so profound a transformation, even the censorship was of no avail.

Montesquieu emphatically rejected the views of those 'Authors' who claimed that it was its 'divisions that destroyed Rome'. These writers failed, he responded, to see 'that these divisions were necessary to it, that there were always divisions therein, & that there always had to be'. It was, he explained, 'solely the greatness [*grandeur*] of the Republic that did the damage & changed the popular tumults into Civil wars':

It was necessary that there be divisions at Rome, & Warriors so bold, so audacious, so terrible abroad could not be very moderate at home. To ask in a free State for men daring in war & timid in peace is to wish for something impossible; & as a general rule, every time that one sees everyone within a State that calls itself a Republic tranquil, one can be assured that Liberty does not exist therein.

From this example, Montesquieu drew a lesson pertinent to all free states:

That which is called union in a Body Politic is a thing quite equivocal; the true union is a union of harmony which causes all the parts, however opposed they may seem to us, to concur in the general good of the Society, as dissonances in Music concur in an overall accord. It is possible for there to be union in a State where one believes that one sees only turmoil [*trouble*], which is to say a harmony whence comes the happiness that is alone genuine peace; it is like the parts of the Universe eternally drawn together by the action of some & the reaction of others.

In contrast, Montesquieu concludes, the 'accord' that one finds within a 'Despotism – which is to say, within every Government which is not moderate' – hides 'a real division' between men 'joined only because some oppress others without encountering resistance'. Whatever union is to be found in such governments is not that of 'Citizens who are united, but that of dead Bodies entombed alongside one another'.²¹

Montesquieu has evidently made Machiavelli's understanding of the dynamics of republican Rome his own. If the French *philosophe* nonetheless found himself at odds with 'this great man', it was because he objected to the particular fashion in which the Florentine thought it appropriate to channel political conflict. His chosen subject in the pertinent chapter of *The Spirit of Laws* was the relationship between sovereignty and judging, and his attack on the arrangements favored by Machiavelli derived from his awareness of and reflection on the fact that, in cases in which the charge is *lèse-majesté*, 'political interest, so to speak, overwhelms [*force*] civil interest'. What he feared was that 'the security of individuals', which constitutes the civil interest, would needlessly and heedlessly be sacrificed by an overly anxious sovereign desperately seeking to preserve the polity. In his judgment, the fact that, under the arrangements favored by Machiavelli, 'the people', in their capacity as 'the sovereign', will actually 'themselves judge these offenses' is a great 'inconvenience' likely to leave individuals profoundly insecure.²²

The dispute between Machiavelli and Montesquieu does not turn on a differing analysis of institutional dynamics. Machiavelli is perfectly aware that venting humors in this fashion will on occasion

¹⁷ See Montesquieu, CR 8.1–91.

¹⁸ See Montesquieu, CR 8.92–106.

¹⁹ Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.18.3, 3.8, 16.1–2, 24 (esp. 3.24), which should be read in light of 1.17.1, 35, 37, 40, 46, 53, 60, 2.20, 3.1, 6.19, 28, 31.4, 34, 49, all in *Tutte le opere*, 101–4, 117–20, 123–5, 128–9, 134–6, 143–4, 176, 195–7, 209–13, 222–3, 231, 234–5, 239, 241–3, 253–4. For a meditation on Machiavelli's account of the republic's fall and that of the empire as well, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge, 1999–) III: *The First Decline and Fall*, 208–32.

²⁰ See Montesquieu, CR 9.1–53.

²¹ See Montesquieu, CR 9.60–81.

²² Consider Montesquieu, EL 1.6.5, in light of Sullivan, 'Against the Despotism of a Republic', 263–88.

eventuate in injustice, but he is not disturbed by the prospect that the ethos of accusation that he seeks to promote will leave the *grandi* in such a republic at the mercy of a *popolo* apt, when frustrated, to succumb to fits of passion and rage.²³ This is, in fact, precisely what he intends. There is, he believes, no other way in which to rein in the *grandi* and channel their energies in pursuit of the public good. Machiavelli is far more interested in the security of what Montesquieu calls 'the sovereign' than in that of the individual. As this last fact can be taken to suggest, behind the dispute between the Florentine and his French successor concerning modes of adjudication, there lurks another disagreement more profound. If we are to grasp its significance, we will have to take a brief detour.

Justice and the common good

In *The Prince* and in his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli is notably – one might even say, ostentatiously – silent on the subject of justice. This is most obvious in the fifteenth chapter of the former book. The title of the chapter – with its reference to the qualities 'for which men ... are especially praised or blamed' – echoes the language that Aristotle uses to introduce his famous discussion of the virtues and the vices in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and similar language can be found in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Students of classical Rome will recognize that the advice that Machiavelli offers regarding 'the modes and government' that a prince should adopt with regard to 'subjects' and 'friends' is that which Marcus Tullius Cicero recommends for dealing with enemies in *De officiis*. When Machiavelli contrasts 'the effectual truth of the matter' with the advice given by those who 'have imagined republics and principalities', nearly everyone recognizes that he is dismissing Plato and Aristotle, the New Testament, and Augustine and Aquinas. Some scholars have also noticed that Machiavelli's list of the 'qualities that bring ... either blame or praise' is a parody of the lists of virtues and vices found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Summa Theologica*: that, where the authors of these two works catalogued eleven virtues each a mean between two vicious extremes, he not only lists eleven pairs of opposed qualities, such as cruelty and mercy, but he also deliberately omits justice from consideration and muddles the taxonomy, putting putative virtues first and vices second, then putting putative vices first and virtues second, and reversing himself again and again – all in preparation for his conclusion that honesty is rarely the best policy and his suggestion that what we call virtues and what we call vices are postures that one needs to adopt according to one's convenience. 'One should not care about incurring the reputation of those vices without which it is difficult to save one's *stato*', he writes. 'For if one considers everything well, one will find that something *appears* to be virtue, which if pursued would be one's ruin, and that something else *appears* to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being'.²⁴

What Machiavelli does to Plato, Aristotle, and their Christian successors in this chapter, in puckishly turning their arguments inside out, Hobbes does to Machiavelli in the like-named chapter of his *Leviathan*. The profound significance of the critique of morality initiated in the fifteenth chapter of *The Prince* Hobbes readily

acknowledges, but he does so in a typically backhanded way. This he accomplishes by the simple expedient of devoting the like-numbered chapter of his book to moral virtue's defense. He knew perfectly well why it was that in his own day 'successfull wickednesse' had 'obtained the name of Vertue'; he recognized who it was who had described as virtue what characters in American gangster movies would later call *moxie*; and so he singled out for attack an unidentified, but easily recognizable 'Foole' who had 'sayd', not only 'in his heart' but 'with his tongue' as well, that 'there is no such thing as Justice', contending that 'every mans conservation, and contentment, being committed to his own care, there could be no reason, why every man might not do what he thought conduced thereunto: and therefore also [that] to make, or not make; keep, or not keep, Covenants, was not against Reason, when it conduced to ones benefit'.²⁵ Careful readers at the time – such as James Harrington – had little difficulty in figuring out just which fool Hobbes had in mind.²⁶

Of course, the Malmesbury philosopher was by no means alone in challenging Machiavelli's teaching concerning morality. In rejecting it, he had ample and highly respectable company. His peculiarity – that which interested Montesquieu – was that he grounded his critique of the Florentine's conclusions on the very arguments that the latter had himself advanced. If Hobbes came to be called 'the Monster of Malmesbury', it was because he hewed to 'the effectual truth of the matter' no less closely than the Florentine said to have given to the devil his moniker 'Old Nick'.

Hobbes's argument takes the form of an exploration of the consequences inherent in accepting Machiavelli's famous assertion that a legislator must 'presuppose all men evil [*rei*]' and presume that they will make use of 'the malignity' hidden in their hearts at the first 'free opportunity'.²⁷ This premise, as I have argued at length elsewhere,²⁸ Hobbes justifies by means of what eventually came to be called a phenomenology of mind. Once in this fashion he has established its truth to his own satisfaction, he draws from this premise a highly plausible inference: that 'Men from their very birth, and naturally, scramble for every thing they covet, and would have all the world, if they could, to fear and obey them'.²⁹ Then, after noting 'that the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others', and that men are disinclined to defer to the putative wisdom of others, he concludes that the natural condition of man must be war: 'where every man is Enemy to every man'.³⁰

If the war of all against all defines man's natural state, Hobbes then remarks, the situation of unaccommodated man is of necessity exceedingly grim:

There is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of time; no Arts; no Letters;

²⁵ Note Psalms 14:1, 53:1; cf. T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, 1968) I.xv, 203, with Machiavelli, *Il principe* 15–18, in: *Tutte le opere*, 280–4.

²⁶ See James Harrington's *Oceana*, 12–14, 29–30, 34–5.

²⁷ See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.3.1, in: *Tutte le opere*, 81.

²⁸ See Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 245–72 (esp. 263–7).

²⁹ See T. Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, second edition, ed. F. Tönnies (London, 1969) I.ix.1–21 (esp. 1 and 21), *De cive: The Latin Version*, ed. H. Warrender (Oxford, 1983) I.i.5, 12, *Leviathan* I.xiii, 185, II.xvii, 226, *Decameron physiologicum*, in: *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, 11 vols. (London, 1839–45), vii, 73. See also *Elements of Law* I.vii.7, ix.19, xvi.11, II.viii.3, *De cive* III.xv.13, *De homine* XI.11–15, in: *Thomæ Hobbes Malmesburiensis opera philosophica quae Latine scripsit omnia in unum corpus*, ed. W. Molesworth, 5 vols. (London, 1839–45), ii, 100–3.

³⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.xiii, 183–6.

²³ Note Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.58.1–2.

²⁴ Cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1105b19–1109b26 (esp. 1105b28–1106a1) and T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.2, qq. 59–60 (esp. q.60.a.5.c) with N. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 15, in: Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, 280; note L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, 1958), 236 (with 338–9 n. 139); and see C. Orwin, 'Machiavelli's Unchristian Charity', *American Political Science Review* 72:4 (December, 1978), 1217–28, and R. H. Cox, 'Aristotle and Machiavelli on Liberty', in: *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*, ed. K. L. Deutsch and W. Soffer (Albany, 1987), 125–47. In this connection, note D. N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues* (Chicago, 2006), 370–2 (with 201–2). Consider Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 15–18, in: *Tutte le opere*, 280–4, in light of the remarks it elicited in the Elizabethan period from the Oxford don John Case: see C. B. Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England* (Kingston, 1983), 181–6.

no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.³⁰

Hobbes is perfectly willing to concede that in man's natural condition 'the notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice ... have no place'. As he puts it, 'Force, and Fraud, are in warre the two Cardinall vertues'. Moreover, he recognizes that Machiavelli's account nicely describes the situation of the sovereign, who remains within the state of nature. If he disagrees with the author of *The Prince*, it is only in his adoption of the perspective of ordinary men unlikely to become princes; in his insistence that, in constructing a polity, a legislator must rely on 'the Passions that encline men to Peace', such as 'Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them'; and in his belief that the war of all against all need not persist.³¹

On the crucial question, Hobbes argues that – if Machiavelli was indeed right in asserting that 'security and well-being' are the end of human life and the standard by which virtue and vice are to be defined – it is a dictate of reason that ordinary men trade submission for protection and not breach faith, for, except in the case of those extraordinarily situated, the 'successfull wickedness' promoted by the Florentine is an oxymoron. In elaborating the logical consequences of this argument, Hobbes establishes the principle of absolute sovereignty and restores the traditional virtues – 'Justice, Gratitude, Modesty, Equity, Mercy, & the rest of the Laws of Nature' – to something like their traditional place. In the process, however, he acknowledges the Machiavellian foundations of this restored morality: 'These dictates of Reason, men use to call by the name of Lawes; but improperly: for they are but Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defense of themselves'.³²

Montesquieu was no more an unabashed admirer of Hobbes than he was of Machiavelli. But the force of the argument that the Englishman deployed against the Florentine the Frenchman tacitly acknowledged. As a consequence, in his *Spirit of Laws*, he, too, traced the roots of civil society back to the state of nature. Of course, his description of man's passage from the latter to the former state was intended as a correction of Hobbes's account and a criticism of the doctrine of absolute sovereignty and enlightened despotism that the Malmesbury philosopher embraced. It was also designed to provide a foundation for a prudential political science free from the doctrinaire propensities inherent in John Locke's description of man's passage from his natural state into civil society. But, like the systems developed by his two English predecessors, Montesquieu's account eventuated in a political teaching with regard to natural right that emphasized the security of the individual.³³

It is telling that, when Montesquieu defines political liberty in books eleven and twelve of *The Spirit of Laws*, he does so in two ways: identifying 'political liberty in its relation with the constitution' as the rule of law, and arguing that 'a constitution

can be such that no one will be constrained to do things that the law does not require or prevented from doing those which the law permits him to do'; then, defining 'political liberty in its relation with the citizen' as 'that tranquillity of mind [*esprit*] which comes from the opinion that each has of his security', arguing that – if he is to possess 'this liberty – it is necessary that the government be such that one citizen be unable to fear [*craindre*] another citizen', and observing with regard to this particular species of liberty that 'the knowledge which one has acquired in some countries and which one will acquire in others with regard to the surest regulations that one can hold to in criminal judgments', especially those arising from charges of treason, 'interests human kind more than anything else that there is in the world'.³⁴ Hobbes would have rejected both definitions of political liberty as preposterous,³⁵ but he would have sympathized with Montesquieu's interest in guaranteeing personal security. Locke might have admired Montesquieu's analysis of the manner in which the distribution and separation of powers within the English constitution as it existed after 1703 safeguarded the rule of law, and I suspect that he would have found Montesquieu's discussion of the criminal law congenial. But it is hard to imagine Machiavelli finding the French *philosophe's* account of political liberty palatable.

Machiavelli sympathized with the perspective of the many, 'infinite in number', who 'desire liberty' solely 'in order to live securely', but he did not himself embrace freedom solely for the purpose of 'being able to possess one's things freely without any suspicion, not having grounds for doubting the honor of women and of children, not fearing for oneself'.³⁶ In *The Prince*, the Florentine signaled his own peculiar preference for republican government by observing that 'in republics there is greater life, greater hatred, more desire for revenge' than in principalities and by then arguing that, since 'the memory of ancient liberty does not and cannot leave them in repose', republics are extremely hard for a prince to subdue.³⁷ In his *Discourses on Livy*, when he came to explain why he thought Rome superior to Sparta and Venice, he emphasized the more populist state's inclination for, and capacity to, achieve imperial expansion.³⁸ In one passage, he later remarked, 'A city that lives in freedom has two ends: the first is to acquire, the other is to maintain its independence [*libertà*].'³⁹ In another, he observed that submission to a republic is 'the harshest' of 'all the harsh servitudes' not only because it is 'more durable' but also because 'the end of the republic is to enervate and weaken for the purpose of its own body's growth all other bodies'.⁴⁰ That Machiavelli's standard for judgment was a polity's propensity for aggrandizement and not its mode of governance, there can be no doubt.⁴¹ For Athens and its radical democracy, he had hardly a good word.⁴²

³⁴ See Montesquieu, *EL* 2.11.1–4, 6 (397), 2.12.1–2.

³⁵ Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* II.xxi.

³⁶ Note Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.16.3–5, in: *Tutte le opere*, 100–1.

³⁷ See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 5, in: *Tutte le opere*, 263–4.

³⁸ See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.5–6, in: *Tutte le opere*, 83–7.

³⁹ See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.29.3, in: *Tutte le opere*, 111–12.

⁴⁰ See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 2.2.4, in: *Tutte le opere*, 150.

⁴¹ In this connection, see N. Rubinstein, 'Florentina Libertas', *Rinascimento*, n. s. 26 (1986), 3–26. The more fervent admirers of Machiavelli's populism are inclined to discount, dismiss, or ignore this evidence and to read their own predilections – political moderation and a profound longing for stability and prosperity, an admiration for equality under the law, a seething resentment of the rich and well-born, an enthusiasm for the moment of revolutionary rupture when the distinction between ruler and ruled purportedly dissolves – into the Florentine: cf. J. H. Whitfield, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1947), *passim* (esp. 106–57); C. LeFort, *Le Travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel* (Paris, 1972), 451–690 and 'Machiavel et la vérité effective', in: *Écrire: À l'épreuve du politique* (Paris, 1992), 168–79; J. P. McCormick, 'Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism', *American Political Science Review* 95:2 (June, 2001), 297–313; and M. E. Vatter, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom* (Dordrecht, 2000), *passim*.

⁴² The exceptional word of praise proves the rule: see Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.58.3, 59, 2.2.1, in: *Tutte le opere*, 141–3, 148. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.2.6, 28, 53.4–5, 2.3, 4.1, 10.3, 24.4, 3.16.1–2, in: *Tutte le opere*, 80–1, 110, 135–6, 151–3, 160, 184, 222–3.

³¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.xiii, 188.

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.xiv–xv (esp. 216–17).

³³ Consider C. P. Courtney, 'Montesquieu and the Problem of "La Diversité"', in *Enlightenment Essays in Memory of Robert Shackleton*, ed. G. Barber and C. P. Courtney (Oxford, 1988), 61–81, and 'Montesquieu and Natural Law', in: *Montesquieu's Science of Politics: Essays on the Spirit of Laws (1748)*, ed. D. W. Carrithers, M. A. Mosher, and P. A. Rahe (Lanham, 2001), 41–67, along with J. T. Levy, 'Montesquieu's Constitutional Legacies', and C. Larrère, 'Montesquieu and Liberalism: The Question of Pluralism', in: *Montesquieu and his Legacy*, ed. R. E. Kingston (Albany, 2008), 115–37, 279–301, in light of B. Binoche, *Introduction à De l'Esprit des lois de Montesquieu* (Paris, 1998), 153–96; M. Zuckert, 'Natural Law, Natural Rights, and Classical Liberalism: On Montesquieu's Critique of Hobbes', *Social Philosophy & Policy* 18:1 (2001), 227–51, and 'Natural Rights and Modern Constitutionalism', *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights*, 2 (Spring, 2004); and N. G. Robertson, 'Rousseau, Montesquieu and the Origins of Inequality', forthcoming in *On Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality*, ed. J. Duncan (Toronto, 2011).

It is by no means fortuitous that Montesquieu accuses Machiavelli of being ‘full of his idol, Duke Valentino’, and of having proposed laws and institutions reflective of his ‘passions and prejudices’.⁴³ The Frenchman and the Florentine were profoundly at odds. And yet, as the former must have recognized, the argument that he makes for separating sovereignty and judgment owes a great deal to the latter. As we have seen, Montesquieu begins the fifth chapter of the sixth book of his *Spirit of Laws* with a criticism of the judicial practices that Machiavelli recommends for republics. In this context, he pauses briefly to survey the ways in which ancient republics attempted to prevent popular judgment from descending into something indistinguishable from lynching. The remainder of the chapter he devotes to an extended diatribe warning that a monarchy in which the monarch exercises the judicial power will quickly become a despotism. As he intimates when he refers his reader to book eleven of *The Spirit of Laws*, this discussion is an anticipation of his extended analysis in that book of the distribution and separation of powers within the various forms of government. What Montesquieu does not expressly say – which we should nonetheless note – is that the distinction which he draws between despotism and monarchy and the emphasis that he places on the role played by the nobility and, above all, the *parlements* in sustaining and invigorating the latter is a more elaborate restatement of the analysis outlined in *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* by the man whom he accuses of having idolized that would-be tyrant Cesare Borgia.⁴⁴

Commerce, Politics, and the International Order

There is one other passage in *The Spirit of Laws* in which Montesquieu alludes to Machiavelli. The twenty-first book of the Frenchman’s *magnum opus* is dedicated to a study of the history and progress of commerce and to an analysis of the role that it gradually came to play in human affairs. In the twentieth chapter, Montesquieu addresses what he regards as a central question – ‘how commerce made its way past barbarism in Europe’ – and, in this chapter, he draws attention to the recovery of Aristotle’s works and to the manner in which the adoption by the Schoolmen of his critique of lending at interest gave rise to policies hampering trade.

As a consequence of the strictures laid down by the Schoolmen, Montesquieu reports, money-lending and ‘commerce passed’ from the Christians to the Jews, ‘a nation’ much ‘toyed with from one century to another’, which was

then covered in infamy, & so commerce was no longer distinguished from the most horrid usury, from monopolies, from the levy of subsidies, & all dishonest means of acquiring silver. The Jews, enriched by their exactions, were then pillaged by the princes with the same tyranny ...

Nonetheless, one saw commerce emerge from the bosom of vexation & despair. The Jews, proscribed by each country in turn, found the means for saving their effects. By this they rendered their retreats forever fixed – since such a prince, who

wanted very much to get rid of them, would not for all that be in a humor to be rid of their money as well.

These late medieval Jews managed to save their property by making it disappear. For the first time in human history, as a consequence of their invention of letters of exchange, ‘commerce was able to elude violence & to maintain itself everywhere’, for ‘the richest trader had nothing but invisible goods, which could be conveyed everywhere & leave not a trace in any place’. According to Montesquieu, this invention obliged theologians ‘to rein in their principles’. As a result, ‘commerce, which had been linked by violence with bad faith, returned, so to speak, to the bosom of probity’.⁴⁵

Niccolò Machiavelli was born and reared and lived almost the entirety of his life within the confines of a mercantile city. He did not reside in a Greek *pólis* or in the Roman *civitas*, and he knew it. His immediate audience was not composed of farmers and warriors. It was made up of merchants, bankers, tradesmen, and craftsmen – ‘men’, as he put it, ‘who draw their nourishment from the exchange of merchandise [*uomini nutricati nella mercanzia*]’.⁴⁶ Mindful of the condition of those for whom they wrote, Italian humanists in and before his time – men such as Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, Vespasiano da Bisticci, Francesco Guicciardini, and the like – consistently failed, when speaking in a civic vein, to display toward men of commerce the haughty disdain evidenced by classical republicans in antiquity.⁴⁷ Machiavelli was himself perfectly ready to acknowledge that most men ‘hold possessions [*roba*] in higher regard than honors’, that those who ‘desire to be free in order to command all the others’ are as few in number as they are great in weight, and that ‘the common utility’ that ordinary men – whether born rich or poor – draw ‘from a free way of life [*vivere libero*]’ is extremely prosaic, even bourgeois: ‘being able to possess one’s things freely without any suspicion, not having grounds for doubting the honor of women and of children, not fearing for oneself’. Men of such a humor, he acknowledges, ‘when they are governed well, neither seek nor want any other freedom’.⁴⁸

The mercantile ethos of Florence may go a long way toward explaining why Machiavelli thinks it so important that a prince ‘encourage his citizens so that they can quietly engage in their occupations, both in commerce and in agriculture and in every other occupation pursued by men’, by seeing to it ‘that one man is not afraid to improve on his properties for fear that they will be taken from him, and another is not afraid to open a business [*uno traffico*] for fear of taxes’.⁴⁹ It was not for nothing that Peter Laslett, half a century ago, suggested that John Locke be considered ‘Machiavelli’s philosopher’.⁵⁰ One takes a giant step from Machiavelli’s position toward that of liberal individualism and one severs the last tenuous link connecting the Florentine’s understanding of the purpose of liberty with that of the ancients when one follows through on the logic of Machiavelli’s populism and grounds the polity exclusively on the desire of the *popolo* for security while subordinating to that desire quite systematically the

⁴³ Montesquieu, *EL* 4.21.20.

⁴⁴ See Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine* 1.39, in: *Tutte le opere*, 658.

⁴⁷ Consider M. Jurđjević, ‘Virtue, Commerce, and the Enduring Florentine Republican Moment: Reintegrating Italy into the Atlantic Republican Debate’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62:4 (October, 2001), 721–43, in light of Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 55–104.

⁴⁸ Consider Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.16.3–5, 37.3, 3.5, in: *Tutte le opere*, 100–1, 121, 200, which should be read in light of *Discorsi* Ep. Ded., 2.2.3, in: *Tutte le opere*, 75, 150.

⁴⁹ See Machiavelli, *Il Principe* 21, in: *Tutte le opere*, 292.

⁵⁰ See P. Laslett, ‘Introduction’, in: J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 2nd edition, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge, 1967), 86–7.

⁴³ Montesquieu, *EL* 6.29.19.

⁴⁴ Cf. Montesquieu, *EL* 1.2.1, 4–5, 3.5–10, 5.10–6.9, 21, 8.6–10, with Machiavelli, *Il Principe* 4 and 19, in: *Tutte le opere*, 262–3, 284–9, and Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.2–8, 16, 19, 55, 58, 3.1, in: *Tutte le opere*, 78–90, 99–101, 104–5, 136–42, 195–7, and see P. A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1992) II.v.12, n. 173, and Carrese, ‘The Machiavellian Spirit of Montesquieu’s Liberal Republic’, 137–40. David Hume, who draws a distinction quite similar to the one deployed by Montesquieu, traces it to Machiavelli: see D. Hume, ‘That Politics May be Reduced to a Science’ [1741], in: Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised edition, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1985), 21–4.

vain aspirations of the *grandi* for honor, glory, conquest, and command.⁵¹

But, of course, Machiavelli himself did not take this step. He wrote from the perspective of princes and from that of those worthy to be princes. He may have been sympathetic to the *popolo*, but – as is obvious when one reads through *The Prince* and his *Discourses on Livy* – his aim was to provide guidance for those who ‘desire to be free in order to command all the others’. In consequence, his focus was statecraft, not trade. He spoke the truth when – after being ejected from his office as secretary to the Second Chancery in Florence, after being arrested on suspicion of conspiring against the Medici, after being tortured, released, and barred from entering the city proper – he wrote to his friend Francesco Vettori an apologetic letter, in which he remarked, ‘I could not help but fill your head with castles in the air [*castellucci*] because *Fortuna* has made it so that, knowing how to reason neither with regard to the silk trade [*dell'arte della seta*] and the wool trade, nor with regard to profits and losses, it suits me to reason concerning affairs of state [*ragionare dello stato*].’⁵²

The secular ruling order within Montesquieu's Europe had this in common with Machiavelli: they shared the Greek and the Roman predilection for conquest and war, the attendant contempt for trade, and a profound disdain for those who secured their livelihood in this fashion. It was Montesquieu's purpose to persuade his readers that this perspective no longer mattered – that, thanks to the revolutions that had taken place in commerce, statecraft of the sort practiced by Rome and recommended by Machiavelli was hopelessly obsolete. From the moment that the Jewish bankers introduced the letter of exchange, he pointed out, ‘it became necessary for princes to govern themselves with greater sagacity than they would themselves have thought possible – since, in the event, great acts of authority [*les grands coups d'autorité*]’ of the sort advocated in France by Machiavelli's disciple Gabriel Naudé and engaged in by the latter's employer Cardinal Richelieu ‘proved to be so maladroit that experience gave rise to the recognition that goodness in government [*la bonté du gouvernement*] alone brings prosperity’. In conclusion, Montesquieu observed,

We have begun to cure ourselves of Machiavellianism, & we will continue the cure all the days of our lives. There is now greater need for moderation in councils. Those things which in other times one called *coups d'État* would today, apart from the horror, be blunders [*imprudences*]. Happy it is that men are in a situation in which, though their passions inspire them with the thought of being rogues, they have an interest in not being such.

If scholastic speculation was responsible for ‘all the evils that accompanied the destruction of commerce’, it was ‘to the avarice of princes’ that Europe owed ‘the establishment of a thing which places commerce in a certain fashion beyond their power’.⁵³

⁵¹ When Machiavelli rejects the classical notion that the quest for honor and glory points beyond itself to the pursuit of virtue and human excellence or, indeed, to anything higher than fame itself, he not only eliminates the ground for distinguishing the wise and virtuous few from the foolish and vicious many; as he knows all too well, he prepares the way for the collapse of his own distinction between the *grandi* and the *popolo*: consider Pind. F215 (Bowra) and Theog. 1104a–1106 (West) in light of Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1123b35–1124a2; then, ponder *Il Principe* 18 (at the end), in: *Tutte le opere*, 284, and see Rahe, ed., *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, passim.

⁵² See Letter to Francesco Vettori on 9 April 1513, in: *Tutte le opere*, 1131–2.

⁵³ See Montesquieu, *EL* 4.21.20. Cf. G. Naudé, *Considérations politiques sur les coups d'État* (1639) (Paris, 1988), 116–17. Montesquieu came to this conclusion concerning the import of the invention of letters of exchange quite early on: consider *MP* 77 and 280, in light of R. Shackleton, ‘La Genèse de l'Esprit des lois’, in: Shackleton, *Essays on Montesquieu*, 49–63 (esp. 51–2). Regarding Montesquieu's understanding of Machiavelli, see also *MP* 207.

This was one piece in a much larger argument. As I have argued in detail elsewhere,⁵⁴ when Montesquieu returned from England in 1731, he set out to write a tripartite work, arguing that his contemporaries lived in a world transformed. In the original conception, his *Considerations on the Romans* was to be followed within a single volume by a disquisition entitled *Reflections on Universal Monarchy in Europe* and that in turn by a treatise on contemporary England. Montesquieu's aim was to draw a contrast between the martial world of the Romans and the commercial world of his own day with an eye to dissuading his compatriots from their propensity to seek for France a dominion over Europe comparable to that once exercised by Rome.

For the most part, in the first part of his triptych, he embraced Machiavelli's account of Rome's trajectory. In the second part, where he argued that what the Romans had accomplished subsequent Europeans could not duplicate, he drew on Machiavelli as well. In his *Art of War*, the Florentine had mourned the fact that Christianity ruled out a conqueror's selling those conquered into slavery and seizing and selling or distributing their lands, and Montesquieu, in agreement with his predecessor's conviction that this prohibition was a great obstacle to the projection of power, deployed this argument as an explanation for the failure of the various attempts made by figures such as Charlemagne, Charles V, Philip II, and Louis XIV to establish the hegemony of a single power within western Christendom. Then, in the same disquisition, he argued that the rise of commerce had radically altered the political landscape. In the third part of the volume, he apparently intended to point to England's emergence as a great power, to suggest that a well-ordered modern Carthage – tolerant in religion, uninterested in territorial expansion, dedicated to commerce, and equipped with a salutary distribution and separation of powers – was better able in modern circumstances to project power than an ill-ordered facsimile of imperial Rome like modern France.

Montesquieu was prevented from publishing this work as originally intended by fear of the censor, but he managed to restate the argument and elaborate on it in a muted fashion in his *Spirit of Laws*. What deserves attention in this context is the fact that, in making his argument concerning the transformative effects of commerce, Montesquieu is replicating Hobbes's deployment of the Florentine's presumptions against his conclusions. If he takes delight in recounting the invention of the letter of exchange and its consequences, it is because, as a consequence of that act of invention, however much men's ‘passions’ may ‘inspire’ political leaders ‘with the thought of being rogues’, they now ‘have an interest in not being such’. Montesquieu is heir to a way of thinking about the evolution of civil society that owes a great deal to what Hobbes achieved when he turned Machiavelli's argument inside out. Here, too, a digression is in order.

Jansenism and the emergence of a liberal sociology

Just short of twenty years after the publication of *Leviathan*, Pierre Nicole and Antoine Arnauld, authors of *The Port-Royal Logic*, helped usher into print Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, and the following year Nicole began publishing his *Essais de morale*. The latter, multi-volume work has been forgotten. But it was considered seminal at

⁵⁴ See P. A. Rahe, ‘The Book That Never Was: Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Romans* in Historical Context’, *History of Political Thought* 26:1 (Spring, 2005), 43–89, and Montesquieu and the *Logic of Liberty: War, Religion, Commerce, Climate, Terrain, Technology, Uneasiness of Mind, the Spirit of Political Vigilance, and the Foundations of the Modern Republic* (New Haven, 2009), 3–60.

the time, and it exercised a profound influence on subsequent political thought.⁵⁵

According to Pascal's account, the Fall transformed self-love into a new form, and what had once been subordinated to the love of God, remained 'alone' in what was a 'great soul, capable of an infinite love'; and, in the absence of a proper object for human longing, by 'extending itself & boiling over into the void that the love of God had left behind', this self-love metamorphosed into the species of vainglory that Pascal and the French moralists of the seventeenth century called '*l'amour propre*'. This had, he contended, predictable consequences, for, in the process of becoming 'infinite' in its scope, this self-love became both 'criminal & immoderate' and gave rise to 'the desire to dominate' others.⁵⁶ Then, after sketching what was a more or less conventional Christian account, Pascal went on – in a series of fragments omitted by Nicole and his colleagues from the Port Royal edition of the *Pensées* – to suggest a paradox: that men in their 'grandeur' had somehow learned to 'make use of the concupiscence' spawned by *amour propre*; and that, despite the fact that it dictates that 'human beings hate one another', they had managed to deploy concupiscence in such a fashion as 'to serve the public good'. They had, in fact, 'founded upon & drawn from concupiscence admirable rules of public administration [*police*], morality, & justice', and they had even succeeded in eliciting from 'the villainous depths' of the human soul, which are 'only covered over, not rooted up' by their efforts, a veritable 'picture' and 'false image of charity' itself.⁵⁷ To this paradox, Nicole devoted a seminal essay suggesting that Christian charity is politically and socially superfluous – that, in its absence, thanks to the particular Providence of God, *l'amour propre* is perfectly capable of providing a foundation for the proper ordering of civil society, of the political order, and of human life in this world more generally.⁵⁸

Nicole's inspiration, and no doubt that of Pascal as well, was a passage in which Saint Augustine dilated on the propensity for human pride [*superbia*] to imitate the works inspired by Christian charity [*caritas*]. It could, he claimed, cause men to nourish the poor, to fast, and even to suffer martyrdom.⁵⁹ At the beginning of his essay, Nicole specifies that, when he speaks of '*l'amour-propre*', he has in mind the fact 'that man, once corrupted, not only loves himself, but that he loves himself without limit & without measure; that he loves himself alone; that he relates everything to himself'; in short, that 'he makes himself the center of everything'; that 'he wants to dominate over everything' and

desires 'that all creatures occupy themselves with satisfying, praising, & admiring him'.

This 'disposition', which Nicole attributes to all men, he calls 'tyrannical'. He acknowledges that it 'renders human beings violent, unjust, cruel, ambitious, fawning, envious, insolent, & quarrelsome', and he readily concedes that, in the end, it gives rise to a war of all against all. He merely insists – in the shocking manner so famously described by Thomas Hobbes, to whom he with approval alludes – that instrumental reason, animated by *amour-propre* and by nothing else, can provide the polity with a firm foundation, and he contends that, by way of cupidity and vanity, *amour-propre*, with its 'marvelous dexterity', can promote commerce, encourage civility, and even elicit from men a simulacrum of virtue, as those who desire security and prosperity are forced by the fear of death and the lust for gain to embrace justice and 'traffic in works, services, favors, civilities', and as those who desperately crave admiration and love are driven to do admirable things. 'In this way', he writes, 'by means of this commerce' among men, 'all the needs of life can in a certain fashion be met without charity being mixed up in it at all'. Indeed, 'in States into which charity has made no entry because the true Religion is banned, one can live with as much peace, security, & convenience as if one were in a Republic of Saints'. Nicole is even willing to assert 'that to reform the world in its entirety – which is to say, to banish from it all the vices & every coarse disorder, & to render man happy in this life here below – it would only be necessary, in the absence of charity, to confer on all an *amour-propre* that is enlightened [*éclairé*], so that they might know how to discern their real interests'. If this were done, he concluded, 'no matter how corrupt this society would be within, & in the eyes of God, there would be nothing in its outward demeanor that would be better regulated, more civil, more just, more pacific, more decent [*honnête*], & more generous. And what is even more admirable: although this society would be animated & agitated by *l'amour-propre* alone, *l'amour propre* would not make a public appearance [*paraître*] there; & although this society would be entirely devoid of charity, one would not see anything anywhere apart from the form & marks of charity'.⁶⁰

In the 17th and the 18th centuries, Pierre Nicole was widely read. John Locke pored over his *Essais de morales* as the volumes were issued, and he even saw fit to translate three of the essays into English. The analysis of the political import of *amour propre* first thoroughly explored by Nicole was subsequently taken up, as I have tried to show elsewhere, by a variety of figures – including Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville.⁶¹

Among the first to do so was Pierre Bayle, who regarded the *Essais de morales* as 'a masterpiece'.⁶² In the *Pensées diverses sur la comète* that he published in 1682, he took up the question of *amour propre* and argued – to the consternation of his contemporaries – that a society of atheists could not only subsist and prosper but that it was more likely to flourish than a society of idolaters.

His claim in this regard was not new. Thomas Hobbes's mentor Sir Francis Bacon had intimated as much in his essays,⁶³ and such a claim could easily be inferred from the argument advanced in the first part of *Leviathan*. If Bayle was original, it was in baldly

⁵⁵ See A. McKenna, *De Pascal à Voltaire: Le Rôle des Pensées de Pascal dans l'histoire des idées entre 1670-1734*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1990), i, 186–229. For a discussion of this neglected figure, see E. D. James, *Pierre Nicole, Jansenist and Humanist: A Study of his Thought* (The Hague, 1972).

⁵⁶ See B. Pascal, *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*, third edition, ed. É. Périer (Paris, 1671), 294–5 (XXX.3, in the expanded edition published in 1678 and frequently republished thereafter). Note also the reference to *libido sentiendi*, *libido sciendi*, *libido dominandi* in Pascal, *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*, 254–5 (XXVIII.55, in the expanded edition). For a survey of the seventeenth-century literature discussing *amour propre*, see N. O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1980), 183–97, 262–82, 286–311.

⁵⁷ See B. Pascal, *Pensées: Édition établie d'après la copie référence de Gilberte Pascal*, ed. P. Sellier (Paris, 1999) nos. 150, 243–4.

⁵⁸ In this connection, note James, *Pierre Nicole*, 148–61, and N. O. Keohane, 'Nonconformist Absolutism in Louis XIV's France: Pierre Nicole and Denis Veiras', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35:4 (October–December 1974), 579–96, and see H.-J. Fuchs, *Entfremdung und Narzissmus: Semantische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der 'Selbstbezogenheit' als Vorgeschichte von französisch 'amour-propre'* (Stuttgart, 1977), along with D. Van Kley, 'Pierre Nicole, Jansenism and the Morality of Enlightened Self-Interest', in: *Anticipations of the Enlightenment*, ed. A. C. Kors and Paul Korshin (Philadelphia, 1987), 69–85; McKenna, *De Pascal à Voltaire*, i, 225–7; and J. Heilbron, 'French Moralists and the Anthropology of the Modern Era: On the Genesis of the Notions of "Interest" and "Commercial Society"', in: *The Rise of the Social Sciences and the Formation of Modernity: Conceptual Change in Context, 1750–1850*, ed. J. Heilbron, L. Magnusson, and B. Wittrock (Dordrecht, 1998), 77–106.

⁵⁹ See August. *In epistolam Joannis ad Parthos tractatus decem* 8.9.

⁶⁰ See P. Nicole, 'De la charité et de l'amour-propre', in: Nicole, *Essais de morale*, ed. L. Thirouin (Paris, 1999), 381–415 (esp. 406–7, where the passage from Augustine is cited and paraphrased). The same theme is developed in Nicole, 'De la grandeur', in: Nicole, *Essais de morale*, 197–243 (at 212–17). In this connection, see Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France*, 293–303.

⁶¹ See P. A. Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect* (New Haven, 2009), 42–6, 88, 95–140, 154–89, 272.

⁶² See P. Bayle, *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (1682), ed. A. Prat and P. Rétat (Paris, 1994), § 84.

⁶³ See Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* II.i.5, and *Against Throne and Altar*, 255–61.

advancing such an assertion, and he did so by deploying the arguments with which he had been provided by Nicole. There was, however, this difference. Bayle, who frequently cited Epicurus and Lucretius, made no mention in this context of the Fall.

Instead, Bayle secularized what had been in Augustine, Pascal, and Nicole a religious argument, contending that *amour propre* is a 'passion inseparable from our nature'. What he insisted on with regard to a society of atheists was this:

As the ignorance of a First Being, a Creator and Preserver of the world, would not prevent the members of this society from being sensitive to glory and scorn, to reward and punishment and to all the passions seen in other men, and would not stifle the light [*lumières*] of reason, people of good faith in commerce would be seen among them who would help the poor, oppose injustice, be faithful to their friends, scorn insults, renounce the pleasures of the body, and harm no one, either because the desire to be praised would prompt them to all these fine actions that could not fail to earn public approbation, or because the plan to gain friends and protectors for themselves in times of need would lead to such action.

'It is', Bayle contends, 'to the inward esteem of other men that we aspire above all', and it is on that propensity that civilization can rely.⁶⁴

Bernard Mandeville, who was among the students of Pierre Bayle, outdid his master rhetorically, arguing puckishly and with great zest that private vices, if properly managed, make for public virtues. Mandeville's book *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* – which was originally published in attenuated form as *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest* to no acclaim in 1705 and then reprinted in a much-expanded edition under its more familiar title in 1714 – suddenly and unexpectedly came to enjoy a *grand succès de scandale* when a Middlesex jury sought the suppression of a still-further-expanded edition on moral grounds in 1723.

In this notorious and highly influential work, Mandeville not only defended vanity as a spur to commercial growth and to progress in the sciences and the arts; like Nicole and Bayle, he contended that 'self-liking' is at the root of all the splendid, external qualities that men justly admire. To begin with, he stoutly denied that human beings are by nature 'sociable'; the origins of

human association he attributed to the fear of wild beasts. For the cooperative capacity of his contemporaries, he had a simple explanation: in the course of time, 'by living together in Society', men underwent a process akin to the fermentation of grapes. Painful experience slowly taught them that it is in every man's interest to accommodate himself to his fellows, and 'good Manners or Politeness came into the World' and even supplanted brutishness when the canniest human beings acquired the civilizing art of subterfuge and learned 'to be proud of hiding their Pride'. 'The nearer we search into human Nature', the Dutch-born satirist argued, 'the more we shall be convinced that the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride'. A careful study of history would reveal that 'Luxury and Politeness ever grew up together'.⁶⁵

It was, in this fashion, that Hobbesian contractualism was transformed into liberal sociology. The importance of the development and of the reaction that it provoked on the part of John Locke's student Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, needs no extensive discussion here. What can fruitfully be said, however, is that Montesquieu was familiar with the writings of Nicole, Bayle, and Mandeville; that his analysis of the political psychology of modern European monarchy with its ethos of honor was a restatement of the argument pioneered by the Jansenists and taken up by the neo-Epicurean disciples of Hobbes; and that the same can be said with regard to the argument he advanced in book twenty of *The Spirit of Laws* regarding the manner in which the growth in commerce is conducive to peace.⁶⁶

In embracing as a goal well worthy of pursuit the security of the individual and in celebrating the manner in which the growth in commerce promotes the rule of law, encourages the security of property and persons, and discourages war, Montesquieu deliberately sets himself in opposition to Machiavelli. But, in every case, the grounds upon which he and the intermediate figures on whose arguments he draws construct the case they make against Machiavelli's recommendations are those provided by the Florentine himself. In this sense, Montesquieu was the very model of a modern anti-Machiavellian Machiavellian, for he could never quite leave behind what he had learned from the reflections on the Romans articulated by the figure whom he thought of as 'this great man.'

⁶⁴ See Bayle, *Pensées diverses sur la comète* §§ 84, 102–93 (esp. 171–2), 239–63. For a translation with an interpretive essay, see P. Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, ed. and tr. R. C. Bartlett (Albany, 2000).

⁶⁵ Consider B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1924), i, 47, 51, 78–80, 342–4, 369, ii, 128–34, 147, 188–9, 268, which was subsequently republished in ever-expanding editions in 1724, 1728, and 1733, and ultimately translated into French in 1740, in light of M. Raymond, 'Du Jansénisme à la morale de l'intérêt', *Mercure de France* (June, 1957), 238–55, and see L. Dickey, 'Pride, Hypocrisy, and Civility in Mandeville's Social and Historical Theory', *Critical Review* 4:3 (Summer, 1990), 387–431; E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge, 1994); and P. Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge, 2003), who draw attention to the strange kinship linking the peculiarly modern Epicureanism championed by Hobbes, Bayle, and Mandeville with the Jansenism of Pascal, Nicole, and La Rochefoucauld. In this last connection, note Joseph-Marie, comte de Maistre, *L'Église gallicane* (1821) 1.3–12, in: *Œuvres du comte J. de Maistre*, ed. L'Abbé Migne (Paris, 1862), 510–46.

⁶⁶ Consider Rahe, *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*, 78–85, 186–211, in light of *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*, 108–13, 174–9.