

# Hume and Machiavelli

## *Political Realism and Liberal Thought*

Frederick G. Whelan



LEXINGTON BOOKS  
*Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Oxford*

50. B. H. G. Wormald, *Clarendon: Politics, Historiography, and Religion, 1640-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 192.

51. Montesquieu, citing England, says that republics fear and avoid the creation of a separate military profession that would jeopardize liberty. Hume draws attention to the Self-Denying Ordinance as an exception that proves the rule. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) V.19; and Hume, *Letters*, vol. I, 134.

52. Braudy suggests that Hume presents Cromwell sometimes as a careful planner and sometimes as one who seized opportunities as they arose. Braudy calls the former portrait "Machiavellian," but the latter trait ("adaptability") could also be so characterized. Leo Braudy, *Narrative Form in History and Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 51-53.

53. As with other new princes in Italian cities in this era (e.g., Galeazzo Visconti in Milan), Walter's seizure of power was made possible by the internal class or factional conflicts between nobles and people. His oppressive rule provoked a temporary revolutionary alliance between these groups, including what proved to be an unstable agreement on how to share power after the overthrow of the tyrant (see FH II.39, 100).

54. It was at this point that the esteemed but less ambitious Parliamentary general Fairfax was pushed aside: a "brave and virtuous man" who "having neither talents himself for cabal, nor penetration to discover the cabals of others, had given his entire confidence to Cromwell" (H V, 499). See also H V 449-50 on the Cromwell-Fairfax contrast, treated in terms of ambitious-unambitious, intriguing-open, and other traits of relevance to a Machiavellian view of Cromwell's career.

55. "Francesco Sforza, because he was armed, became duke of Milan from a private individual; and his sons, because they shunned the hardships of arms, became private individuals from dukes" (P XIV, 58). This observation also captures, in part, the contrast between Oliver and his son Richard Cromwell.

56. In 1378 the popular leader Salvstro de' Medici opposed a plot by the dominant oligarchy by making a dramatic resignation speech and walking out of the Florentine Council. As expected, this aroused his supporters and others, who quickly returned him to office with new power; it also triggered a popular revolution over which he lost control, however (FH III.9-10). In an apparently similar case, Cosimo de' Medici was arrested and exiled in 1433 by his rivals, who feared he was on his way to becoming a prince. Rather than resisting, Cosimo "accepted banishment with a cheerful face"; ensuing factional strife among his enemies allowed his triumphal return a year later, as he doubtless anticipated. This event, in Machiavelli's eyes, established him effectively as "prince" of Florence. Exit threats often carry some risk, but not always as much as in Cosimo's case; as Machiavelli remarks, "it would have been better for them to have let things be than to have let Cosimo alive and his friends in Florence, because great men must either not be touched or, if touched, be eliminated" (FH IV.28-30, 179). This story is told somewhat differently and with a different lesson in D I.33.

## Chapter 6

### Liberalism and Political Realism

The comparison of the political ideas of Hume and Machiavelli that has been pursued here is not intended to suggest that Machiavelli belongs in the liberal tradition. Rather, by bringing out the influence of Machiavelli and Machiavellianism on Hume, it puts the latter's political thought in an unexpectedly realist light. In doing so, it provides a glimpse into a larger discourse of realist liberalism in political theory. Of course, the fact that Machiavellian themes can appear so often in a liberal thinker like Hume may offer grounds for thinking that Machiavelli's new path (D I, Pref.) helped to pave the way eventually to liberal as well as to other modes of modern political philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Hume surely may be described as an adherent of classical liberalism, indeed, as a major figure in this tradition.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of its long history (since 1688 or even earlier) liberalism's essential program of promoting lawful liberty under limited and constitutional government has been supported by different philosophical underpinnings, including historical, empirical, and utilitarian approaches (as in Hume) as well as abstract, rationalist, and natural right-based arguments (as, for example, in Locke or Kant). Liberalism has "forged alliances" at different times with diverse other political and cultural movements, including, by one account, revolution and bureaucracy, enlightenment and romanticism, laissez-faire economics and the welfare state, nationalism and democracy.<sup>3</sup> Two noteworthy alliances that could be added to this list are sovereign-statism, since liberalism (usually formulated with respect to institutions internal to the state) has almost always coexisted with and supported the modern sovereign state and its external prerogatives as set forth in international law;<sup>4</sup> and, more to the present point, political realism, which has in turn

often been formulated in alliance with state-building and state-maintaining projects. Machiavelli was the principal founder of modern political realism and its affiliates, such as reason of state. The Machiavellian Hume is, then, more generally, the political realist Hume and, by extension, Hume the liberal realist.<sup>5</sup>

The larger purpose of this study, in delineating similarities between Machiavelli and Hume, is to indicate how the intellectual possibility of liberal realism was realized in one important case. The existence of this case, in turn, suggests that it may be fruitful to reconsider the body of liberal thought to assess the broader extent of this alliance.<sup>6</sup> This concluding chapter will advance tentatively down this path, first through a general discussion of liberal realist assumptions and themes drawn from the foregoing chapters, and then by considering realist themes in another classical liberal text, *The Federalist Papers*, and in a few works from the contemporary literature of liberal philosophy.

### Realist Liberalism: Themes

Realism like liberalism is a term that denotes a large cluster of analytic and empirical claims, methodological proposals, and practical judgments about politics and the study of politics. In all its forms it would seem to begin with the equivalent of Machiavelli's program to abjure consideration of "imagined" states of affairs and theorize in close proximity to the reality (the *verità effettuale*) of political affairs (P XV). Such a program does not reject the use of models, conjectures, and counterfactual analysis in the study of political reality. The imaginary republics and principalities that Machiavelli rejects are the ideal, even openly utopian, polities whose delineation has preoccupied some political philosophers. In a Machiavellian spirit, one could add social contract scenarios and similar "imaginary" devices designed to generate ideal or perfectly just political arrangements. In denying the utility of such exercises, realism opposes political idealism or utopianism, or an emphasis on the formulation of ideal principles of political life and accounts of polities that embody these principles. In lieu of such ideal or purely normative theory, realism aims to provide an account of political life (at whatever level of generality may be desired) and recommendations respecting political choices and action that are closer to our actual experience, present and historical. Present experience is always in the process of becoming history; hence realist political theory tends to

draw on history, if indeed it is not conducted through the vehicle of historiography.<sup>7</sup> When imagined states of affairs are invoked for heuristic purposes (as they occasionally are by both Machiavelli and Hume), they are modeled situations or conjectural history based on realist assumptions. Approaches grounded in the "effectual truth of the thing" are intended to be more useful, as Machiavelli says, in that their focus on agency and context-based decisions translates more readily into practical advice for politicians and citizens and into proposals for feasible reforms in the situations such actors actually face. The practical (as opposed to a purely theoretical or scientific) intent of political realism is captured in Morgenthau's remark that, by "thinking in terms of interest defined as power," the realist analyst looks over the shoulders of statesmen and listens in on his conversations.<sup>8</sup> Such a stance is often evident in Machiavelli's *Prince* and Hume's *History* as well.

Hume's descriptive approach to moral judgment and virtue and his disdain for "metaphysical reasonings" are intended to serve the objective that he asserts ought to be the purpose of ethics, to serve practical morality (Enq 170-71). In a similar spirit Hume repeatedly resolves not to deviate too far from the actual "practice of the world" (T 569/364) in forming his judgments about political matters, an orientation that is consistent with his larger philosophical enterprise of working out the principles of "common life" as it is actually experienced (T 269-71/175-77, Enq 162). Hence empirical investigations and moral judgments are combined closely throughout Hume's works, whether philosophical, historical, and essayistic;<sup>9</sup> and political reasoners who embrace abstract normative doctrines such as contractarianism are advised to "look abroad into the world" to acquire a sounder footing ("Of the Original Contract," E 469). Hume sometimes suggests that philosophical abstruseness and fantasy (including utopianism) are merely idle or pointless. Some realists argue that in politics they may be dangerous: Machiavelli warns that a prince who abandons "what is done for what should be done" will "come to ruin" among less scrupulous opponents. Others would add that projects to attain the ideal frequently backfire or are pursued at the expense of concrete and more attainable improvements—that, as Voltaire's realist aphorism says, the best is the enemy of the good.<sup>10</sup> This conviction is not born of temperamental cynicism but arises from reflections on historical experience. Hume's verdicts on some of the more radical aspirations to perfect virtue and equality that appeared during the English civil war period, and even on "principles of natural equity" that are "too perfect for human nature" (Enq

193-94; H VI, 83)) indicate his agreement with this disquieting thought.

Beyond this practical orientation we may distinguish what may be termed hard and soft forms of realism. The harder or stronger doctrines, to which we turn below, are more characteristically or notoriously Machiavellian in their challenge to ordinary moral convictions. Soft realism encompasses a panoply of less controversial themes that are found not only in Machiavelli and Hume but in many versions of liberal thought, especially versions that exemplify what may reasonably be termed realist liberalism. At this level there is little conflict between Machiavellianism and liberalism, except perhaps in emphasis and in the theoretical uses to which the ideas are put.

Machiavellians along with many liberal thinkers, for example, take a negative view of human nature or at least believe that such a view is a reasonable, useful, or safe assumption for thinking about political life and designing institutions and policies. A realistic view of human affairs, of course, would strive to be neither excessively optimistic nor unduly pessimistic; realist assumptions about human nature nevertheless appear to be "negative" in relation to some implicit standard of approved and ideal modes of conduct.<sup>11</sup> For both Machiavelli and Hume such a standard could have been set by the higher, altruism-ordaining aspirations of Christian ethics (although realist Christian theologians have always recognized that this standard was impossible for sinful humans to achieve).<sup>12</sup> Other ethical ideals to which realists have responded with skepticism have included public-spirited civic virtue, pure practical rationality (in the Kantian sense), deliberative impartiality in democratic decision-making, the peace-seeking humanitarianism of some modern reformers, and expectations of socialist solidarity and egalitarianism. Desirable as any or all of these dispositions may be, one should not count on their efficacy or infer their potentially general existence from isolated instances, nor plan on their appearance in some improved future state of society. Human motivation in political life and other extensive social arenas should be expected to be self-interested at best, and more actively ambitious, ruthless, dishonest, or "knaveish," in Hume's terminology, at worst.

Such expectations may rest on a sober view of prepolitical human nature as such. More plausibly, they may stem from a view that politics, as a path to power and wealth, tends to attract the ambitious and to corrupt its practitioners, thus eliciting and shaping unscrupulous and aggressive behavior. In any case, the pursuit and attainment of the common or public good, however much this may be stipulated as a normative requirement, is

always problematic in practice.<sup>13</sup> Power, and particularly the organized and concentrated power that may be generated through political movements and within political institutions, is therefore dangerous. Careful theorists as well as prudent political actors should accordingly devote substantial analytical effort to imagining possible worst-case outcomes of actions and policies and to constructing safeguards against them. In light of the not infrequent social and political disasters and the abundant misery revealed by a dispassionate consideration of the historical record, avoiding bad states of affairs should take priority over seeking good ones, and the avoidance of worst-case outcomes should definitely be rated higher than the quest for ideal or best-case arrangements, whose attainment is uncertain and whose very possibility is not empirically attested.

Both Machiavelli and Hume move directly from these concerns about political motivation to an emphasis on law as an important source of safeguards of the public interest. Machiavelli briefly, and Hume more extensively, also endorse constitutional government in the same spirit. Law disciplines civic conduct and attitudes (in republican thought) and channels and coordinates self-interested behavior in socially desirable directions by providing a structure of incentives and sanctions (in liberal thought). Constitutionalism in the familiar senses of the separation of powers and checks and balances limits the exercise of public authority to its appropriate functions and discourages abuses of power by officials. The rule of law as a liberal ideal may certainly be stated in more positive terms, as the means of enhancing or even realizing freedom properly understood or as the expression of ethical autonomy in a civic body. When its purpose is stated negatively, as a means of controlling power, restraining ambition, and obstructing abuses, law becomes a theme and a proposal of political realism.

Idealistic liberals have insisted that all public authority be reduced to lawful forms. They have also sought the extension of this norm into the realm of international relations in forms that appear premature or incautious to analysts and statesmen of a realist persuasion. Realism in its harder varieties dissents from these aspirations as unfeasible in an imperfect world of conflict, power, and unscrupulous opponents.<sup>14</sup> Machiavelli's prince has to be prepared to violate legality, like the principles of ordinary morality, when necessity dictates, and reason-of-state doctrine provides justifications for extra-legal applications of force in the name of state-building, state maintenance, and state security. At some point on this terrain liberalism and harsher forms of realism must diverge; on the other hand, even the most

idealistic liberals must grant that when lawful order actually collapses, outcomes depend on the balance of force. A liberal can only hope for and support the victory of the forces that aim at the creation or restoration of liberal regimes. Realist liberals, however, including Hume, are prepared to follow the realist analysis further, agreeing on a wider range of cases in which extralegal methods are required to create and preserve lawful government itself or to attain other important public goals, hence cases in which the end justifies the necessary if regrettable means. The soft realist view of law itself, however, as a disciplinary, corrective, or protective device needed in the ordinary course of political life seems compatible with all but the most idealistic varieties of liberal philosophy.

All realists and many liberals, finally, pursue a theoretical focus on interest, conflict, and power in political life. Individuals and, in some circumstances, groups and states have interests—or for Hume, opinions of their interests<sup>15</sup>—which they seek to promote by the means that are available to them. Interests clash, either because people have similar interests in acquiring the same scarce goods, or because they pursue different and incompatible objectives. Power, understood as any present means to attain future goods (as the realist Hobbes most succinctly put it), is accordingly sought as instrumental to the pursuit of more substantive interests and is deployed in the hope of resolving conflicts in the most advantageous manner. Groups, which may be thought of generically as interest groups of various kinds, are formed to promote shared interests. Hence both Machiavelli and Hume, both realists and liberals, look to the interaction and competition of factions and parties, whether dangerous or benign, as comprising a significant part of political life and political history. Such, in large part, indeed *is* politics in the realist view, a view for which “power politics” is a helpful if strictly speaking redundant locution.

The focus on interest, conflict, and power in realist and especially in liberal theory may have a normative as well as descriptive and analytic dimensions. (It is of course a feature of realist theory that normative and empirical claims are kept in close proximity.) The pursuit of interests, in some forms and degree, is defended as legitimate, and conflict, if suitably restrained, may be healthy for the body politic as well as natural, as Machiavelli was evidently the first to affirm. Economic interests especially may lend themselves to being channeled into productive rather than destructive competition in a commercial society, which Hume and other liberals support for this reason.

Power can oppose and control power, and recommendations for

arranging such opposition in a regular and institutional manner are prominent within realist liberalism. A self-limiting power arrangement has traditionally been thought of metaphorically as a balance, or a balanced system, and hence a “balance of power” has been a familiar idea for both realists and liberals since Machiavelli’s time. Balance is important not only as the basis of a relatively stable international system, but as a key to domestic government and civil order as well. In these spheres it takes the shape of a balance of parties, a balance of social forces and interests, or a constitutional balance of offices, concepts that are evident both in Machiavelli and (more explicitly and frequently) in Hume.

The state or a centralized government embodies relatively concentrated power that is capable of balancing, regulating, or overruling other power centers in society in order to provide civil peace and other public goods. Realists have typically upheld an effective state as a desirable alternative to the destructive conflict and disorder that they assume would otherwise prevail, a position seen in Machiavelli’s defense of the actions of state-building princes and in Hume’s argument that authority is “essential to [the] very existence” of civil society (“Of the Origin of Government,” E 41). Liberal realists (or liberal statistes) like Hume, however, argue that where possible—as in civilized modern societies, when the basic problem of order has been solved—the state itself should be organized and thence controlled according to the principle of balanced or counteracting powers. Since realism in any form seeks to stay close to the “effectual truth” of things, realist theory draws on and encourages realist, that is, empirical political science, which discovers how such balancing and other goals may be realized. This alliance is clear in Hume’s program, from the Introduction to his *Treatise* to essays such as “That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science,” and it likewise informs the contemporary discipline of political science.

It may be added that the realist assumption of individual self-interest may sometimes make group formation and collective action difficult or unstable, as is widely acknowledged in contemporary rational choice theory, with its pessimistic expectations regarding the undersupply of collective goods and the self-defeating dilemmas of rationally self-interested action. Along similar lines, game theory’s expectation of strategic (that is, deceptive or manipulative) behavior toward rival “players” as well as toward rules and institutions is sometimes reminiscent of Machiavelli himself.<sup>16</sup> The fact that theory of this nature has found such a warm reception within modern liberal political science strongly indicates

an intellectual affinity between realism and liberalism, or the presence and persuasiveness of realist forms of liberalism. Machiavelli does not explore rational actor problems in any formal sense, although his analysis of why conspiracies often fail clearly anticipates the prisoner's dilemma. With some stretching, moreover, one can regard his prince as an actor who quite rationally is willing to exercise self-restraint ("be good") only if he has the assurance, as he generally does not, that his opponents will reciprocate or comply with the same rules. On this reading the necessity that a prince be prepared "not to be good" arises from the security, assurance, or commitment dilemmas to which realist analysis is frequently attuned (P XV).<sup>17</sup>

With less stretching Hume (in this respect as an intellectual descendant of Hobbes) may be viewed as contributing to this branch of liberal-realist social theory.<sup>18</sup> It was Hume who first set out a paradigm case of the collective action problem in his observation that two neighbors may agree to drain a common meadow, but

'tis very difficult, and indeed impossible, that a thousand persons shou'd agree in any such action; it being difficult for them to concert so complicated a design, and still more difficult for them to execute it; while each seeks a pretext to free himself of the trouble and expence, and wou'd lay the whole burden on others. (T 538/345)

Government is required among individuals so understood both as a coordinator and contract-enforcer among private transactors and as a supplier of public goods through compulsory contributions and compliance. This argument represents only a narrow slice of Hume's political thought as a whole, but it conveys a clear and influential conception of the liberal state founded on a version of realist premises.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, both Machiavelli and Hume praise liberty and analyze its conditions and consequences. Their valuation of liberty is a normative element in their theories, but their treatment of it falls short of what could be called idealism. As a republican theorist Machiavelli looks to "the love that many peoples in those [ancient] times had for freedom," both the Romans and some of their enemies (D II.2, 129). This freedom, which meant both political independence and the participation of citizens in the affairs of their state, rested on virtue, which had to be rigorously instilled and disciplined by laws and by exemplary punishments of backsliding. Freedom in this understanding, moreover, has a substantial militaristic component and translates into the aggrandizement of one's own state at the expense of others; the growth of the liberty-loving Roman republic,

therefore, meant the extinction of other free states and was thus ultimately self-undermining even for the Romans. Machiavelli's republicanism, unlike some more modern uses of the idea, is thus realist in all the senses we have been discussing, and indeed ultimately rather pessimistic.

Hume endorses liberty as "the perfection of civil society," but at the same time he makes clear that it comes second to effective authority that can ensure social order and enforce justice ("Of the Origin of Government," E 41). Indeed, Hume's political philosophy overall can be termed conservative because of its emphasis on the need for obedience to general rules. Such obedience, which he calls "artificial virtue" because of its reference to authoritative though conventional social institutions and practices such as justice, is held to promote the basic value of social order.<sup>20</sup> Humean conservatism also shares with realism a distrust of abstract rationalism in political theory, especially when its bearing is utopian or revolutionary; Hume's opposition to the visionary or dogmatic political ideologies of his time, including ones that invoked an abstract conception of liberty, reflects the same impulse that led Machiavelli to reject "imagined" states. Conservatism or conservative realism in these senses certainly colors, but is perfectly consistent with, liberalism; it all depends on the content of the rules and the structure of the government to which the artificial virtue of allegiance is directed. Hume clearly defends a liberal conception of liberty as personal security under law, closely allied to the freedoms of private property and contract, religious belief, and intellectual inquiry and expression; he also understands political liberty to be embodied in limited, non-arbitrary, and representative government under a balanced constitution.

Hume's version of classical liberalism, however, like Machiavellian republicanism, is theorized in a realist manner. He does not assert its values as universal requirements of human reason or morality, but rather understands them as distinctively modern historical attainments and indeed as the rather parochial outcomes of particular historical processes in England and perhaps a few other places. Indeed, the English "system of liberty" is the fortuitous by-product of clashes of forces and interests going back to the late Middle Ages and culminating in the seventeenth century, an outcome that was accurately foreseen or intended by none of the key protagonists.

The practical task of a responsible political theorist or writer in this situation is to encourage political moderation and balance so that the more fortunate legacies of history can be preserved and gradually strengthened.

This is how Hume understands his own role, and how he defines the objective of his more popular writings. The aim to avoid the loss of the civility that has been achieved is not only more important than the quest for imagined forms of perfection, but may be jeopardized by the latter. No one ever yielded power or privilege out of goodwill, nor did legitimate institutions come about through a rational consensus as imagined in the "original contract" theories that Hume rejects. Free or limited government emerged through the competition in the past of elites seeking domination; the opening provided in the present to more popular ingredients in government carries new dangers. Hume worries about the excesses of particular forms of liberty, such as that of the press, which he believes can undermine free government as a whole ("Of the Liberty of the Press," E 13); he worries about the preservation of constitutional balance, which must be continually readjusted, sometimes haphazardly, as underlying social and economic configurations and interests change. Hume's very conservatism arises from his sense of the precariousness of the liberal system, and thus reflects his realistic sense of its origins and not always congenial environment.<sup>21</sup> Hume's political moderation differentiates him in an important respect from Machiavelli, whose prescriptions, especially those attacking traditional political forms and supporting revolutionary new princes, sometimes seem immoderate or extremist.<sup>22</sup> Both Hume's moderation and Machiavelli's intemperance, however, reflect their respective assessments of what the real world required for political efficacy in the settings in which they wrote.

Hume's political thought shows how even a moderately realist form of liberalism can incorporate the tenets of soft realism. The harder forms of the doctrine, on the other hand, are more problematic in relation to the familiar forms of liberal ethics. Machiavelli, and much of what has passed into popular usage as Machiavellianism, express this hard realism, urging as they do the occasional necessity of political violence, deception, betrayal, and violations of legal and moral principles. At some point Hume and other liberals, even realist ones, must diverge from these harsher teachings. The argument pursued in this book is not that Hume is a full-fledged Machiavellian, but a liberal realist whose realism is suggested by the unexpected extent to which Machiavellian passages and judgments occur throughout his writings. When it comes to the harder teachings, Hume shares the normal liberal disquiet, but this does not preclude his occasional agreement with Machiavelli even in this area. Hume seems to admire the "crooked politics" of a Ferdinand (H III, 91), although he never

proclaims openly that rulers must be prepared to do bad and that the end justifies their use of immoral means.<sup>23</sup> When he nonetheless occasionally offers judgments implying these positions in particular cases, he expresses them in more discreet language and mostly in offhand passages scattered in his narratives. Machiavelli appears to have wanted to provoke or shock his readers, so that he may have exaggerated his departures from conventional morality. Hume in contrast sought literary success, which in his time meant refraining from shocking his readers unduly; this is another reason, beyond genuine scruples, why Hume's Machiavellianisms are guarded and understated. Stylistic considerations thus may imply even more convergence between the two writers than can be documented. In any case, the reading of Hume offered here suggests that he followed Machiavelli at least part way into the terrain of hard realism, where the alliance with his more conspicuous liberal convictions is more contentious.

We may begin with the uses of political violence, which Machiavelli notoriously recommends to his prince in many situations. Some cases, such as the elimination of rivals in personal power struggles, or aggressive conquest followed by the extermination of all members of the previous ruling group (P III), are impossible to square with any form of liberal politics, including Hume's. Princes also employ violence, however, pursuant to their role as rulers of states, for what they take to be state interests, or the public good, or the well-being of large sectors of society. Liberals are not pacifists, and liberal theory offers justifications for the state with its monopoly of coercive authority, backed up as it is by the instruments of violence deployed by state officials. In this fundamental sense liberalism, like Machiavellianism, always endorses a double standard for permissible conduct with respect to state and nonstate actors. Liberal idealists skirt this fact; realists make sure that it does not drop from sight.

Liberal theory carefully delineates the distinction (not clearly enunciated by Machiavelli) between a private realm of personal freedom and the public realm in which state power is constituted to provide public goods; but although liberals do not like to dwell on the reality of public violence, this distinction opens the way to some of the moral problems associated with Machiavelli's thought. Liberal theory attempts to describe how peace, justice, civility, honesty, prosperity, and other moral and material goods can be realized harmoniously among the members of a civil society; Machiavelli prefers to emphasize that all this is possible (in those fortunate cases when it is) only because of the background security that force-wielding princes and other officials provide. Liberals of course



concede this point in some form, invoking for example the Lockean doctrine that the liberal state exercises the collective "executive power" of society, as well as the "Right of making Laws with Penalties of Death."<sup>24</sup> Liberalism holds, however, that official power must be constrained in two crucial ways: it can be used only for public purposes, and it can be applied only in a strictly lawful manner; publicity, generality, procedural regularity, and legality comprise a kind of state-level morality analogous to the moral principles that are expected of individuals in their private conduct. Most liberal theory (though not Hume) also holds that public force, to be legitimate, must be authorized for specific and limited purposes by the consent of those subject to it.

Machiavellianism's doubts about the possibility of fulfilling these normative requirements on political power point to some of the dilemmas on which hard realism focuses. A realist might question the existence of any purely public goods or purposes (ones that literally serve everyone's interests), or the likelihood of a consensus on them, and certainly whether they can reasonably exhaust the agenda of any state. Machiavelli's prince must choose between policies that favor the interests of the nobles or those of the people; whatever he does, costs and benefits will fall differentially on different groups, and this expresses the standard case in political life. Furthermore, realism strongly doubts that the legality constraint can be fully met. Though he praises law (and perhaps the rule of law) as far as it goes, Machiavelli highlights cases in which extra-legal force, and discretionary authority on the part of rulers to identify such cases, are necessary. Neither Machiavelli nor Hume, finally, insists that rightful government be based on the consent of the governed, Hume rejecting claims to this effect as impracticable even after other liberals (such as Locke) had advanced them. Utility or actual performance offers a criterion that is more realistic as well as philosophically cogent.

One important underlying similarity between realism and liberalism, perhaps, is that, for both, any use of violence or coercion, legal and especially extra-legal, must be justified, and that appropriate justifications are instrumental.<sup>25</sup> Such a position defers to ordinary morality to the extent that it treats violence as *prima facie* wrong and assigns the burden of justification accordingly. Machiavelli approves of political violence more forcefully and in a wider range of cases than does Hume, but no more than Hume does he glorify merely expressive violence. Necessary violence is always a means to a desirable end, and the reasons that justify (or excuse) it reflect this relationship. Realists and liberals converge on approval of

instrumental rationality as a desirable attitude for actors in public and social life generally, as well as, in conjunction with the public good as the end, the proper form of justification in public affairs.

One area in which Machiavelli and Hume appear to agree that violence has historically been necessary pertains to what today might be termed state-building. Here, of course, the rule of law and other procedural constraints on force are largely inoperative, since they presuppose the framework of an effective state. The new or partly new princes whom Machiavelli praises may often be interpreted in this light: they overthrow decrepit traditional regimes and usurp power, they conquer and annex new territories, they establish effective governments staffed by technically adept officials and advisors, they centralize their regimes by destroying former local liberties and by suppressing rival centers of power (especially the nobility), and they enforce obedience to their (at first illegitimate) rule through fear. Much of the violence that Machiavelli excuses or recommends attends actions falling in one or another of these categories. At the same time, however, he offers the needed justification for such policies—sometimes directly, usually implicitly—by reference to the general welfare that is advanced through the large-scale social order that follows.<sup>26</sup> Hume, as we have seen, describes the careers of late medieval kings, whose efforts were especially directed at reducing the disorder of the decadent and violent feudal baronage, in similarly approving terms. He also issues favorable judgments on the often arbitrary measures of rulers who had to cope with violent religious factionalism after the Reformation, and he endorses—somewhat hesitantly and retrospectively, to be sure—the English revolutions of the seventeenth century in terms of their eventual beneficial consequences.

Hume agrees with Machiavelli that most people are strongly attached to custom and thus that most political legitimacy is traditional, conferred by what Hume calls "long possession" of authority in a given dynasty or regime.<sup>27</sup> Hence usurpations or revolutionary governments are usually illegitimate at first with respect to prevailing opinion, although Hume clearly (and perhaps also Machiavelli) sees that effective and beneficial new regimes gain legitimacy over time. (Hume attaches more weight to legitimacy or popular "opinion of right" in sustaining governments than does Machiavelli, who merely argues that rulers need to avoid being hated.) The normative similarity in their theories, however, lies in the point that both Hume and Machiavelli endorse this historical and psychological process of legitimation, and that they offer their own justifications for what



they take to be (or to have been, in Hume's case) the necessities of the European state-building project. For Machiavelli more than Hume, the methods of state-building merge continuously with the requirements of state maintenance in a world where nothing is constant and where states and rulers are continually challenged by enemies both domestic and foreign. Hume seems to accept a prospect of domestic, if not foreign, tranquillity under civilized and relatively stable modern governments. But even the peaceable Hume, as we have seen, approves in several relatively modern historical cases of political murder or other arbitrary exertions of sheer power in exceptional cases, to be sure (Mary Stuart, the Duke of Guise), in which he held that larger public interests were at stake, and not mere personal ambition. Liberal thinkers might agree that violence and other *Realpolitik* methods are regrettably inevitable during the premodern (or preliberal) state-building phase of history but hope that these would disappear once liberal institutions are established. Hume's position in this respect is unclear: undoubtedly he looked to improvement in political conditions and general civility, but he regarded such liberal practices as had been attained in his period as scarce and precarious. A strong realist assumes that the imperfections of political life are permanent, even if their intensity varies at different times.

The states that were being built by princes in Machiavelli's time and in much of the period covered by Hume's *History* were not liberal states. Machiavelli admired republican states and the incipiently national states of his time, but he was prepared on the whole, in a thoroughly realist spirit, to take durability and efficacy as sufficient conditions of praiseworthy regimes. The liberal Hume, by contrast, looks to liberal and constitutional institutions (as in Britain) or at least to "civilized" and lawful monarchies (as in Montesquieu's France) as the eventual outcomes of the state-building process, and he defends the protagonists and evaluates episodes in the process insofar as they contribute toward these (once remote) goals. Although he was an advocate of liberal and legal institutions, in other words, Hume held that such institutions could not simply be willed into existence as a matter of right or reason (as is implied in the social contract theories that he rejected), but rather that they emerge from a historical process that includes both general patterns of development and local contingencies.

A liberal politics of lawfulness and moderation can in some situations be deliberately promoted by statesmen and philosophers, as Hume himself sought to do through many of his essays. A full account of the historical

origins of a liberal regime such as that in England, however, includes actions by people—including monarchs, officials, religious reformers, fanatics, and defenders of many and varied special interests—who were not themselves liberals and who did not remotely foresee or intend the liberal outcome. The historically minded theorist seeks to understand this process and its lessons. To the extent that he also offers judgments of approval or disapproval of actors and actions (as Hume does), these must be at least partly contextual, drawing upon the standards of the time and place as well as the theorist's preferences regarding the direction of historical development.<sup>28</sup> Thus the liberal realist approves of actions that fall short of liberal ideals if they seem to be the best feasible alternative (or if they display a liberal tendency) given the practical and normative constraints of the setting in which they occur; and he approves of illiberal actions that appear to be necessary means, or that have the effect, of promoting the eventual attainment of liberal goals. Similarly, one might add, a liberal democratic realist approves of the violent means that are necessary to replace authoritarian with democratic regimes, even though democracy in itself implies a political process characterized by deliberation rather than violence.<sup>29</sup> Standards for evaluating a regime in place are not necessarily the same as the appropriate standards for evaluating the process by which that regime is (or must be) created. Just as Machiavelli conspicuously endorses violence in the founding of regimes that subsequently provide order and security, so liberal realists conclude that liberal methods are not always sufficient to bring about liberal institutions where they did not previously exist, or to defend them against antiliberal threats.

The condoning of violence, duplicity, and other clear-cut violations of ordinary morality is notorious in Machiavelli and characteristic of hard political realism. The occasional presence of such themes in Hume is more startling in view of the placid, diffident, or moralistic tone of most of his philosophy. Judgments in this vein about particular cases rest on a deeper perspective, however, that is central to the realist tradition in which both writers, as well as more recent liberals, share.

Realist thinkers are generally impressed by the empirical complexity of the real social world and of actual political situations, in contrast to the relative simplicity of models, deductive arguments, and abstract normative schemes. Although intellectual exercises of the latter types may have heuristic value, political theory and political judgment should ultimately be oriented to the real world, where complexity, risk, and uncertainty usually form the context of political action, and where effective decision-making

and the successful design of policies and institutions are correspondingly difficult. Hume's philosophical skepticism grounds this orientation in his case, both because it points to the difficulty of correctly identifying causal connections and because it leads him to reject simple or rational moral truths in favor of a more complex account of the sources of moral distinctions in feelings, reflection, and habit. Both Machiavelli and Hume have often been credited with pioneering efforts in empirical social science, a feature that differentiates their political writings from the more rationalistic endeavors of some of their contemporaries, such as natural law or social contract theorists. Empirical inquiries into case studies of political action or into institutional problems express the effort of the realist theorist to glean practical lessons from experience.

In this light it is also perfectly understandable that both Machiavelli and Hume became historians. History presents an intricate record of events for analysis as well as a chronicle of the imperfections of human life, including a sampling of the worst-case outcomes that realists hope to avoid in the future. Indeed, not only is historiography a natural extension of their earlier political treatises or essays, and a vehicle for further theorizing about intertwined political events and outcomes in time; one can also say that a historical sensibility and attention to temporality pervade all of their political theorizing. A sense of history is often associated with classical republican theory, where it appears in the inspiration offered by ancient regimes and in the fear of political corruption over time, themes that are evident in Machiavelli. Liberal theory tends more clearly to be realist to the extent that it is historical, as in Hume, since this approach implies groundedness in the complexity of the real world.<sup>30</sup>

Of equal or greater importance for realist thought is the relation between empirical and moral complexity and the practical difficulties this presents both for moral and political actors and for moral appraisal. Machiavelli famously argues that the structure of political situations is such that doing good can lead to ruin, that cruelty can be more merciful than leniency in the long run, that apparent parsimony is true liberality, and that "well used" violence (P VIII, 37) can promote the general welfare. The moral ambiguity of the role of *fortuna*, and his comments on the fluctuations of good and evil in human life and history (D II, Pref.), represent Machiavelli's nearest approach to a philosophical statement of the issue. Such arguments (if valid) imply that moral disharmony is a common experience.

For his part, Hume points to a fundamental tension between different

types of virtues, such as between the requirements of justice and the duties of benevolence. His argument that "artificial virtue" should usually override "natural" sentiments does not deny the reality of the conflict of values or the conflict in the feelings that support our moral judgments.<sup>31</sup> Moral judgment for Hume is principally directed toward the character of agents, but character is often complex, as Hume recognizes, and thus our judgments are correspondingly complex and sometimes ambivalent.<sup>32</sup> Moral rectitude is no guarantee of good results: "The virtue and good intentions of CATO and BRUTUS are highly laudable," Hume remarks, yet their actions only rendered the death throes of the Roman republic "more violent and painful" ("That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," E 30). Hume also describes disagreements between religious and secular value systems, clashes of value judgments in different cultures, and changes in prevailing standards of conduct over time.<sup>33</sup> Within the secular value system of modern liberal politics, one must seek a reasonable balance between important but opposed goals, most notably liberty and authority, resisting the temptation to accept simple generalizations or to embrace unqualified assertions of attractive principles ("Of Civil Liberty"). Since all practicable forms of government have their corresponding inconveniences, we are often in the position of having to choose the lesser evil. It is, for example, "a necessary, though perhaps a melancholy truth" that, in order to ensure the requisite minimum of capability in government, "the magistrate must either possess a large revenue and a military force, or enjoy some discretionary powers, in order to execute the laws and support his own authority" (H V, 129). A liberal may find either course unpalatable but cannot avoid the need to make difficult choices.

Machiavelli and Hume agree that good and bad are often mixed together in human life, and that the sentiments underlying our moral judgments can be equivocal: bad means produce good ends, good intentions lead to bad results, and actions (especially in politics) unavoidably have morally mixed consequences. Suggestions along these lines anticipate the work of recent philosophers who have emphasized moral complexity of various kinds, with the ensuing possibility of ethical dilemmas, that is, cases in which decisions must be made among alternatives none of which is entirely satisfactory or unequivocally right from a moral point of view.<sup>34</sup> Moral trade-offs, compromises, or "on-balance" judgments are inescapable, where rejected alternatives represent genuine values or valid claims, and where no method for resolving such difficulties commands general assent.<sup>35</sup> Good things do not always go together, and the pursuit of some must be at

the expense of others. This may be because of potential conflicts between different values within what is taken to be a single but complex moral system, or, more radically, it may be due to fundamental value pluralism, the view that there are different and incompatible (or incommensurable) values, conceptions of the good, or ways of life whose validity cannot confidently be denied by reason or philosophy. Doctrines of moral complexity oppose visions of moral harmony that descend from ancient Greek ideas of the unity of virtue or goodness, but the modern targets are ethical doctrines, notably Kantianism and systematic utilitarianism, which maintain that there is in principle a rationally correct solution for every problem of ethical choice.<sup>36</sup> Realist liberalism, in the unlikely event of its development in a comprehensive philosophical form, would probably be linked to the former view of complexity and disharmony, whereas the idealism of ideal forms of liberal philosophy is generally grounded in a more optimistic ethical rationalism.

The idea of moral complexity manifests itself more specifically in political theory in the concept of "hard cases" and in the problem of "dirty hands." Discussions of the latter issue often cite Machiavelli as an intellectual ancestor and allude to a "realist" perspective on political life; both topics, however, appear as themes in Hume as well and in realist varieties of liberalism generally.

The concept of a "hard case" has a well-known jurisprudential sense, where a hard case is one whose correct adjudication is not clearly determined by the relevant statutes and precedents. Legal complexity is akin to political and moral complexity and raises important issues for liberal theory insofar as it renders problematic the liberal notion of the rule of impartial law. The focus here, however, is on the political sense of the term, where a hard case (necessitating a hard choice) refers to a situation in which a political decision maker, often a public official possessing the power to make enforceable decisions, must choose from among a set of feasible alternatives, none of which (including inaction) is entirely satisfactory. Any possible course of action will distribute benefits and burdens in a manner that is not fair to all, or will defeat the legitimate claims or expectations of some people even if it promotes the most plausible conception of the overall public good. A conscientious official or leader seeks the best course of action on the whole, but he often finds that this involves a mixture of goods and bads, rights and wrongs, and cannot be characterized as the simply right decision.

The normative judgments about fairness or the legitimacy of claims that

are invoked in this conception are drawn from normative theories of justice; a case is consciously or subjectively a hard one, however, when these judgments are shared by the decision maker, who thus finds himself in a position where he must take actions whose consequences are morally imperfect and troubling from his own point of view.<sup>37</sup> Thus the idea of hard cases as an aspect of political life takes up the perspective of political leadership or decision-making, just as Machiavelli does in much of his political theory and as Hume does in much of his *History*. Practical politics in the realist account inescapably involves a substantial element of political leadership, even for liberals who require equality of basic rights and the accountability of those in authority. The theme of hard cases in realist theory expresses the experience of moral complexity from the point of view of political leadership or office-holding as well as from the perspective of those who assess the performance of leaders.<sup>38</sup>

The natural way for a decision maker to approach a hard choice is to seek a compromise or a balance among the conflicting values or claims. Compromise is a mode of political action that is closer to the empirical reality and complexity of actual cases than it is to abstract principle, since, although it may be guided by general ethical values, compromise must examine and weigh the opposing demands in the contexts in which they arise. Whether its aim is to promote political stability or to satisfy actual claims and expectations, it must attend to consequences, and it therefore must, like all forms of consequentialism, be empirically grounded.<sup>39</sup>

Compromise is not a Machiavellian word, although like Hume he favorably invokes the metaphor of balance in political systems. Hume occasionally invokes the idea, as when he deplores the programs of political parties of principle, "where there is no room for any compromise or accommodation" ("Of the Coalition of Parties," E 493). Indeed, the idea of compromise or, as he more often says, accommodation, seems to fit Hume's approach to the political debates of his time, for example his efforts to promote moderation and to define a middle course between liberty and authority or between the extreme positions of Whig and Tory ideologists.<sup>40</sup> Machiavelli's rejection of middle courses or attempts at compromise reflects a different realist calculus, one premised on more intense and ruthless conflicts.

Although compromise is a familiar and accepted approach in modern liberal and liberal-democratic politics, it is not always regarded without some ambivalence. Compromise, central to diplomatic negotiation, is partly responsible for diplomacy's vaguely disreputable image.<sup>41</sup> Legislative

compromise may often be in the interest of citizens, yet citizens may suspect that compromises sometimes serve the interests of the politicians who make them more than those of their constituents.<sup>42</sup> Compromises of mere interests or in the distribution of material costs and benefits may be unobjectionable, but compromises of basic values, or in the realm of justice, are often viewed as disreputable by those who seek a moral or principled politics.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, such compromises, along with the deceit or lack of candor with which they often have to be made, encourage the derogatory sense sometimes attached to the word "politics," a sense that is suggestive both of the popular connotation of "Machiavellianism" and of Hume's usage of the word "politic" as applied to political leaders. Of course, if a resolutely principled politics leads to impasse, violence, and the demonization of opponents, the proponents of compromise may claim to be the ones who practice a moral politics, albeit a political morality that is not simply a matter of simply "doing good" at all times, as Machiavelli suggests.<sup>44</sup> Political realism, including liberal realism, resting as it does on an assumption of moral complexity, is neither shocked by nor censorious of compromises, even compromises of principles when necessary; it may endorse them as a peaceful and fruitful mode of conflict resolution and political progress, or even of promoting or establishing liberal and democratic institutions in the first place.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond the hard choices of political life, with their moral trade-offs and mixed outcomes, there is the more dramatic problem of "dirty hands."<sup>46</sup> The premise underlying discussions of this topic is that political leaders and high officials are sometimes faced with situations in which, in order to discharge the duties of their office, or to advance national security or the public good, they must commit acts that are wrong from the ordinary moral point of view, such as ordering illegal violence, harming or sacrificing innocent persons, or betraying trust. The claim is that part of the virtue or responsibility of leadership is the willingness to do such things when necessary, and that such conduct, though morally tainted, is nevertheless justifiable, or at least excusable. Although this is a topic with which liberal moralists are understandably uncomfortable, political realism acknowledges the occurrence of such situations and accepts the reasoning indicated in the face of the frequent messiness of political actuality.

Modern discussions of this problem often cite Machiavelli as a predecessor, since he manifestly condones political crimes in the name of necessity and indicates the special ethical difficulties involved: not only does the Machiavellian prince have dirty hands, but Machiavelli faces this

fact and openly says that princes must sometimes do bad and are to be excused if political survival or the attainment of important and beneficial results require it.<sup>47</sup> Machiavelli, however, usually implies that the victims of political violence or betrayal are foreign enemies or domestic rivals of successful princes. Since these figures are presumed to be at least as unscrupulous or tainted as the winners of the contests, they have little ground for complaint about their treatment; insofar as the modern dirty hands problem posits wholly innocent victims, its paradigm cases are even more disquieting than Machiavelli's.<sup>48</sup> Machiavelli highlights dramatic episodes involving political crimes and violence; such cases characterize a "heroic tradition" of strong-willed political leadership, one that also preoccupied Weber.<sup>49</sup> On a realist view of political life, however, dirty hands problems of a less conspicuous nature arise on an everyday basis as well.<sup>50</sup> The peaceable Hume may seem an unlikely candidate for inclusion in this discourse, yet his assertion that scarcely any political choice is "either purely good, or purely ill" ("Of the Protestant Succession," E 507), as well as his treatment of many examples of political decisions and revolutionary violence, suggest an understated version of the same doctrine.

Machiavelli somewhat paradoxically says that a prince must sometimes do "bad," even though such conduct is approved or "excused" (D I.9). A modern utilitarian would presumably say that if "bad" actions are in fact necessary as means to achieve overall good ends (the general welfare), then they are entirely justified and hence not bad but the right thing to do, indeed morally required. Theorists who accept moral complexity usually take an intermediate position, contending that the badness or wrongfulness of certain acts is not effaced by the production of good ends, but that political ends or necessities of sufficient magnitude can nonetheless override the prohibition on doing wrong, which is therefore excusable.<sup>51</sup> A poignant conclusion is that those who may be confronted with such decisions must grapple conscientiously with all facets of the moral ambiguity and the practical dilemmas facing them.<sup>52</sup>

Lines in any event must be drawn somewhere determining what is permissible and what is not in complex situations of choice, including dirty hands situations; good ends do not excuse any means, and a liberal realist might draw the line differently from Machiavelli or an illiberal realist. Prudential judgment regarding actual cases, carried out along Humean lines, looking to public consequences but also guided by (conflicting) moral sentiments, seems to be an approach that is compatible with the liberal spirit as well as more helpful than the attempt to formulate general rules.

To the extent that it is political leaders who typically (though perhaps rarely) are in such a position, this doctrine endorses the double standard of political in contrast to ordinary morality associated with Machiavelli. If it is correct to associate political realism with theories of moral complexity, then realism, including liberal realism, accepts this conclusion in some form.

Morally complex situations may arise in all walks of life, but political theory concentrates on situations and choices facing public officials or other actors in the public sphere, including oppositional politicians and revolutionaries. Machiavelli's problematic advice to his prince is thus often interpreted as involving an implicit claim about the special nature and standards applying to political as opposed to private morality. Responding to complexity creatively or decisively is an aspect of the statecraft on which Machiavellian theory and its practically oriented descendants focus. The view that special moral requirements and permissions apply to states and statesmen was carried on into the influential reason-of-state tradition, which Hume accepted, as we have seen, especially with respect to problems of security and national interest in international politics.<sup>53</sup> The general idea is that the end justifies the (bad) means that are necessary to achieve it in the case of public officials, especially highly placed ones, since the ends they are charged with serving involve important and broad-based social interests.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, one can argue that officials have a special moral duty to follow this form of practical reasoning in consequence of the responsibilities of the office (or more generally, the leadership position) they occupy. Official responsibility entails obligations toward the people over whom or on whose behalf they exercise authority. Machiavelli, Weber, liberals, and democrats can all agree that an "ethic of responsibility" in various senses is a desirable conviction in political leaders: responsibility for the welfare of one's constituents or those affected by one's decisions, responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of decisions, and responsibility to exercise authority in a prudent and conscientious manner. Political responsibility so conceived entails taking up an engaged rather than a transcendent perspective, rejecting moral absolutism (such as may be encouraged by idealism), and seeking fruitful compromises.<sup>55</sup> Officials and leaders are of course also more likely than private persons to confront hard choices or dirty hands situations having serious consequences.<sup>56</sup> Realist theory, both analytic and normative, focuses on leaders' choices not simply because decision-making in public arenas is at the heart of politics, but because

political decision-making so often takes place in settings of empirical and moral complexity.

Machiavelli's and Hume's examples of public choices are mostly drawn from the careers of preliberal rulers. Idealistic liberals might prefer to associate Machiavellianism with absolutist rulers (formerly) and dictators (today), but the problem of moral ambiguity in public decision-making also faces officials of liberal and liberal-democratic states. One might argue that the justifiability of reason-of-state actions and other problematic means-ends calculations depends on the overall moral character of the state whose public interests are being served: making hard choices and inflicting harm to secure the greater good are more plausible when done by officials of a legitimate state, one whose policies as a whole enjoy the consent of the governed and promote justice or freedom. If this is a liberal or liberal-democratic state, then such actions would constitute cases of using illiberal means to promote liberal or liberal-democratic values and institutions. Liberal realism defends this possibility in general and sympathizes with officials who are faced with such decisions in practice, even though this argument leads to the paradoxical result that only liberal politicians are entitled to be Machiavellian. The argument could be extended to include nonliberal politicians who were laying the groundwork for liberal institutions where none existed, as in some of Hume's cases. This would be analogous in part to Machiavelli's scenario of the founding of a republic by nonrepublican means, that is, by a ruthless and power-monopolizing prince (D I.9).

In a developed liberal-democratic state, however, this reasoning encounters another problem. Democratic governance is supposed to be open and visible in order that democratic officials may be accountable to the people they serve. The hard choices of political rule, however, often must be made secretly, even deceptively, both because of their ambiguous and contestable justifiability and because openness would provoke political counterforces that might prevent any decision's being taken, which could be (in the judgment of the official) the worst outcome. Hence the liberal-democratic norm of accountability may conflict with the norm of the responsibility of a public official to promote the public interest according to his best understanding of what that requires in morally complex circumstances.<sup>57</sup> The double problem of "democratic dirty hands" goes beyond anything in Machiavelli or Hume, but it may be regarded as a development of the realist tradition to which they contributed.<sup>58</sup>

Mention of the special position and responsibility of state officials and

the dilemmas they face brings us to the realm of international politics, an area where the concept of realism has its most familiar application in contemporary political science. Machiavelli's teachings often refer to the dangerous external environment and the foreign enemies of the prince, where his morally questionable recommendations rest on the claim that survival depends on a willingness to respond in kind to (or to anticipate) the expected actions of one's unprincipled opponents. Hobbes stated more formally the realist argument that no one is obligated to obey conduct-restraining rules unless one is assured of general compliance, a condition that is never met in the international state of nature. The reason-of-state school absorbed these views and added a distinctive emphasis on state security as the overriding political value and the special responsibility of relevant state officials, whose role in contrast to the position of private persons implies an acknowledged double standard of permissible conduct. The law of nations that took shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought to promote peace by legalizing international relations and diplomacy as much as possible, but through its definition of sovereignty, along with the right of the state to pursue its vital interests by any necessary means, the doctrine in effect merely propounded an enlightened version of reason of state. Hume, as we have seen, accepted reason of state and the law of nations so interpreted as the appropriate basis for foreign relations. His focus on the need for secrecy and discretion in the state's foreign policy-making power and on the less stringent requirements of international in contrast to domestic morality follows from this orientation.

Liberalism in theory and practice, as much as realism, has always been associated with statism, if only implicitly. The central project of classical liberalism was the definition of legitimate political institutions and norms of law and liberty for the civil societies enclosed within modern European states. Externally, however, liberals generally accepted the conception of state sovereignty as set forth in international law and the moral logic of Hobbesian theory or of reason of state as applicable to foreign relations. Idealistic liberals tended to avert their eyes from this scene to concentrate on the attainment of justice within the state; or, as in the important case of Kant, they condemned the "despicable" maxims of the "worldly-wise" political moralists of the reason-of-state school in favor of an ethical imperative to transcend international anarchy.<sup>59</sup> A more realist liberal like Hume acknowledges the apparently inescapably inferior moral status of international politics (given a world of states) with either equanimity or resignation.

The political thought of the Enlightenment has sometimes been seen as radically bifurcated: it was (in its progressive manifestations) liberal, reformist, and optimistic internally, but realist, conservative, and pessimistic externally. Indeed, the failure of classical liberal thought to bridge this gap may be interpreted as a weakness, perhaps even a fatal flaw, of the theory.<sup>60</sup> At least two important classical doctrines, however, were applied in both spheres, offering unified theories of political practice. Reason of state, as was noted in Chapter 4, comprised maxims for internal as well as external policy, and the theory of the balance of power provided a model for conceptualizing domestic political equilibrium within a constitutional system or among parties and interests, as well as a basis for international order. Both of these doctrines, especially the latter, indicate part of the domain of liberal realism.

International realism, of which the best known modern proponent is Hans Morgenthau, is not in itself a liberal doctrine; it purports to interpret the behavior of all states, liberal or otherwise, discounting the ideological character of regimes.<sup>61</sup> Most of its tenets, however, can be accommodated within a realist version of liberalism just as its intellectual precursor, reason of state, was earlier absorbed into Hume's political theory and other expressions of eighteenth-century liberalism.

International realism, according to Morgenthau, sets out both to study and to act in the world as it is, not as it ought to be, based on empirical and historical observation. The complexity and ambiguities of world politics, however, mean that the quest for "laws" gives way to a recognition of the "contingencies inherent in political prediction." Contingency, like Machiavelli's *fortuna*, implies a vital role for human agency and competent leadership. The doctrine rests on a view of human nature in which the guiding assumption is the primacy of "interest defined in terms of power"; interested motivation, with ensuing conflicts and the competitive quest for power, is basic for states as well as for individuals. Since the pursuit of power is pervasive, the restraint of power (as a practical objective of realism) must draw on the same source. Pursuit of a balance of power, an essential and a "universal concept," is accordingly the most reasonable strategy for state security and the most reliable basis for international order, even though imponderables in the precise calculation of power make a balancing policy difficult to execute. A role for norms such as those provided by morality, *mores*, and international law is not ruled out; the realist, in fact, recognizes that it is often in the interest of states, especially the more vulnerable ones, to establish restraining norms and conventions



and work to make them effective (just as in Hume's account of the origin of rules of justice).<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, in a world of independent states it is dangerous (as Machiavelli said) to rely excessively on moral or legal motivation in others; power and interest are what ultimately count. Moreover, there is an "ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action." Prudence, involving a careful weighing of the likely actual consequences of actions, is therefore the "supreme virtue" in politics and especially in the case of public officials. Prudence in this sense is the typically realist virtue, contrasting as it does with political idealism, which often misfires and fails to attain the higher values to which it aspires. As in the older reason-of-state teaching, state survival or national security is a paramount goal, and officials have "no right" to sacrifice this goal to moral principle.<sup>63</sup> International realism in its most magisterial presentation thus incorporates both the softer elements of the traditional doctrine, such as the centrality of interest and the balance of power, on which classical liberalism clearly converged with realism, as well as some of the harder or more problematic ethical claims.

Liberals who are uncomfortable with realism and who explicitly reject some of its teachings with respect to the internal governance of states nevertheless find its claims plausible in the international context. Benn's argument that liberalism licenses state officials to "set aside moral principles for the sake of good outcomes (or, more usually, to avoid bad ones)," since "in politics the stakes are too high, and success enables the winner to overrule the penalties for unprincipled behavior," applies mainly if not exclusively at the international level.<sup>64</sup> Liberal statesmen have found it necessary to form alliances with illiberal states in order to oppose even worse regimes or to sustain the balance of power, choosing the lesser evil or avoiding the worst outcome at all costs. Realism was an especially prominent theme in American public life and debates during the 1950s and 1960s as liberal thinkers, reflecting back on the entire twentieth century to date, asserted liberalism's need to be able to defend itself against anti-liberal forces in a dangerous world.<sup>65</sup> Liberal regimes continue to wrestle with practical dilemmas, even ones that arise within the liberal scheme of values, such as forceful foreign interventions to protect human rights or combat terrorism in violation of international legal norms regarding sovereignty and nonaggression.<sup>66</sup> Tension between moral principle and the (regrettable) means that appear necessary to achieve important beneficial results, and the realist preference for consequentialism, may arise more often in international than in domestic affairs, as more generally in political

than in private life.<sup>67</sup>

One perennial impulse in liberal thought, then, is to accept realism but to attempt to consign it to foreign affairs, while insisting on the rigorous application of pristine liberal principles internally. Many "liberals" have in fact been liberals internally and realists externally. This stance, however, as was observed above in relation to Enlightenment thought, is too simplistic (in realist eyes) to be sustainable. Political realism has extensive applicability to internal politics, as we have seen in Hume's case, whereas liberalism no doubt softens external realism even when it does not overcome it. More importantly, realism would deny the practical feasibility of the internal-external dichotomy invoked in the liberal position. The constraints imposed by the perilous external environment and the basic imperatives of foreign policy impinge significantly on the domestic governmental institutions and practices of the state.<sup>68</sup> For Machiavelli, external hostilities determined the popular and militaristic character of the Roman republic; Hume worried that modern wars enhanced executive power and public debts. More generally, national security implies the need for centralized authority, the willingness to use force to promote vital interests, extra-legal discretion, secrecy, and other methods to which liberalism is understandably averse but which realists endorse. The impossibility of protecting regimes of justice through complete insulation from external pressures is simply one of the imperfections of political life. Contemporary political realism in its international aspect belongs to a tradition of modern thought extending continuously back to Machiavelli; contemporary liberal realism in all its applications, external as well as internal, flows likewise from Hume and other realistically inclined theorists among the classical liberals.

Realist political theory stands in contrast with idealist theoretical projects, or in the extreme case with utopianism, in the sense of attempts to imagine and describe a state of social and political perfection. Realist liberalism hence contrasts with idealistic varieties of liberalism, among which may be counted the doctrines of Locke and Kant among the classics and of Rawls and Habermas among contemporary writers, the latter of whom both have intellectual roots in the more idealistic currents of Enlightenment thought.<sup>69</sup> A full survey and critique of political idealism or of idealist liberalism is beyond the scope of this study, but a few suggestions may be offered.

Political theorizing in general involves some combination of normative and empirical (and sometimes formal-analytic) inquiries.<sup>70</sup> ethical



arguments are pointless if they lead to entirely unfeasible conclusions or have no practical implications in the world of experience ("ought implies can"), and empirical investigations and formal models derive their significance from the values that (at least) inform the choice of research program. Since exercises of power call out for both explanation and appraisal, political theories focusing on power often involve a blend of empirical and normative analysis.<sup>71</sup> Realist political theory, following Machiavelli's insistence on the *verità effettuale della cosa*, adheres relatively closely to the "real"—that is, the observed or experienced—world of politics. As we have seen, it is often impressed by the empirical complexity of political relations and draws extensively on history for evidence. Ideal theory, on the other hand, is highly normative in its concerns and approach: it takes the central aim of theory to be the definition or derivation of morally justified principles for political institutions and conduct, such as principles of justice, freedom, equality, and the legitimate foundations of authority. It tends at the same time to be relatively abstract in its arguments, since the principles or values it seeks to establish are detached from contingencies and particularism, if not indeed (as is sometimes the case) as having an allegedly absolute, universal, or rational character.<sup>72</sup>

Both its normativity and its abstractness separate ideal theory in varying but substantial degrees from the empirical world. Ever since Plato's *Republic*, such theorizing has articulated a disquieting gap between actual political life (or much of it) and the ideals that it upholds and prescribes, between what is and what ought to be, a gap that in most instances motivated the theoretical enterprise in the first place. Of course, the paradigmatic realist Machiavelli also acknowledges, in an offhand manner, that "it is so far from how one lives to how one should live," and others would follow him in conceding this point; Hume does not seem especially concerned about it except when he points to the large gap between the legitimacy criteria advanced in "original contract" theory and the actual origins or basis of most governments. Machiavelli, however, immediately turns away from the "what should be done" to "what is done," and he advises princes to do likewise on pain of "com[ing] to ruin among so many who are not good" (P XV, 61). His political theory, and Hume's afterward, builds its conclusions and recommendations on the basis of extensive study of actual political life, working (cautiously) up from observations and history to general doctrine. Ideal theory, in contrast, turns its primary attention to the matter of "what should be done," seeking pristine

principles.

The advantage of the idealist project is its critical potentiality: its conclusions are capable, when juxtaposed to the deficiencies of actual life and actual institutions, of indicating the direction of desirable reform. Its drawback is that its findings may (as Machiavelli believed) be useless, even dangerous distractions, amid the real problems and dangers faced by actual political actors. The corresponding drawback of the realist approach is that it may be overly conservative in the sense of being so committed to the analysis of political life and systems as they are that it is disabled from envisioning and pointing the way to any systemic improvement in the status quo (although, as we have seen, both Machiavelli and Hume have clear normative preferences).<sup>73</sup> The advantage of realism is that, through being grounded in empirical analysis and having more modest expectations, it can more effectively promote successful practice, including a realistic sense of what is feasible in the way of reforms or in practical programs to promote well-being. Liberal realism represents a robust hybrid: the liberal element provides the normative dimension, prescribing the political values that a theorist such as Hume seeks to advance; while the realist element keeps expectations within reasonable bounds and concentrates the theorist's attention on practical means and workable solutions to problems.

Realism is oriented to the real world in the sense of what is empirically observable, but realism in politics is also characterized by what strikes most people as pessimism in its findings about the real world or in the assumptions it holds are reasonable to make when modeling or thinking generally about politics. Pessimism seems evident with respect to human motivation, in the acceptance of conflict as prevalent in social life, and in the attention given to the dangers and worst-case outcomes that may result from political action. The realist might respond both that people can more readily agree on what is bad than on what is good, and that, both in theory and in practice, one ought to proceed on the basis of weak or safe—that is, negative—assumptions. The realist approach, however, is not paralyzed by pessimism, but seeks ways, within the constraints of an imperfect world, to alleviate dangers and channel behavior into constructive activities. A further liability of idealism is that, through concentration on the beauty of what ought to be or what might be the case, the theorist, like Plato in some of his moods, becomes pessimistic to the point of despair with respect to the deficiencies of real life and its prospects for improvement.

A modern liberal idealist like Kant avoids this impasse by turning to history and persuading himself that the historical record indicates steady

progress toward the eventual realization of ideals that he recognizes cannot simply be willed into existence. Such an idealist use of history is of course quite distant in spirit from the historiography of more empirically and realistically inclined thinkers: Machiavelli saw no such pattern, and Hume explicitly rejected the claim made by some of his contemporaries that history justified a faith in the "perfectibility" of mankind. Idealists who lack Kant's insight into historical teleology are left with the disjunction between is and ought that the realist project seeks to narrow, if for more restricted normative leverage and more limited likely gains. Again, a mixed doctrine like liberal realism preserves some of the secular confidence of the liberal tradition (for example, confidence in our capacity for effective institutional design), though chastened by the realist's perspective on the historical record and accordingly tempered by realist caution.

Ideal-normative political theorizing in the early modern period often took the form of the deduction of political norms from the general ethical principles of natural law, held to be objective and knowable by reason. Hume is famous for his repudiation of this approach and the philosophical assumptions that underlie it.<sup>74</sup> The most prominent theoretical device of idealist liberalism in Hume's time, however, was the doctrine of the social contract, invoked in somewhat different forms by Locke and Kant as well as by an even more visionary theorist like Rousseau. It is therefore telling, and consistent with the interpretation of his thought offered here, that Hume was also the most influential critic of this doctrine in the period: his analysis and defense of liberal institutions rests on different foundations.<sup>75</sup>

Social contract theory of the Enlightenment had several features that lent themselves to the project of political idealism as understood here. The imaginary contract represented an intellectual effort to get outside history, to escape from the highly defective and depressing historical record, in thinking about what was desirable and rightful in government.<sup>76</sup> It provided a theoretical framework in which principles of right and forms of government could be deduced from moral postulates (furnished by the law of nature or the moral law) through the reasoning of abstract individuals, unencumbered by cultural contingencies or special interests. The emphasis is of course highly normative: the contract describes an imagined process that generates an imagined legitimate government and articulates substantive conceptions of just and rightful authority that can command valid obligation on the part of those subject to it. Membership in society, contrary to nearly all experience, is portrayed (ideally) as resulting from a voluntary choice by individuals, as a way of accentuating the value of

personal liberty and advancing the somewhat more plausible liberal program of institutionalizing consent, representation, and accountability in government. Such theorizing offered a compelling account of the ethical basis of a liberal society and government but was so detached from actual practice as sometimes to seem apolitical, as "politics" is commonly understood.<sup>77</sup> The contemporaneous reason of state literature, the worldly memoirs and aphorisms of politicians, and historiography all paralleled and counterposed a more realistic, sometimes cynical, alternative to the idealism of contractarian philosophers. Hume's political theory as a whole presents a philosophically sophisticated and comprehensive alternative, one that deliberately stays closer to an empirical account of human nature, history, and practical politics.

Another important theme in classical (and contemporary) liberal theory is the requirement of publicity in political life and government, a theme that conspicuously contrasts with Machiavellian deceptiveness and concealment. Kant argued both for full publicity (*Publizitaet*) in the sense of the freedom of members of the educated public to discuss and criticize all public affairs, even in an (enlightened) absolutist state; and for full publicity or openness (*Oeffentlichkeit*) of governmental processes and decisions. Publicity with respect to law, through the requirement of promulgation, is a standard component of liberal (and indeed preliberal) conceptions of the rule of law; Kant evidently extends the demand for openness more broadly to the executive and administrative business of the state. The capacity of maxims and decisions to be publicized or exposed to public scrutiny is a key criterion of the ethical status both of individual and of governmental conduct; a double standard of permissible conduct in these two spheres, such as was associated with reason of state, is rejected. Acting on maxims that cannot be openly proclaimed indicates immoral intentions in private matters and dereliction of the duty to promote just or public-spirited legislation on the part of citizens and other actors in the public sphere. Secrecy in government, by the same token, allows and conceals corrupt, abusive, and illegitimate policies.<sup>78</sup>

Kant's formal prescriptions on this matter suggest kinship to Rousseau's earlier pleas for complete openness, honesty, sincerity, and transparency in human relations generally, as well as his condemnation of distortions of the general will arising from private bargains and secretive special interest groups in the legislative process.<sup>79</sup> Kant's arguments embody the liberal conceptions both of the accountability of officials and the value of free speech in public affairs, as well as a repudiation of

Machiavellian policies and secretive reason of state in international affairs approaches that Kant held to be an obstruction to world peace.<sup>80</sup> In these views Kant has been followed by modern liberal statesmen like Wilson and philosophers like Rawls.<sup>81</sup> Most influential in contemporary political theory are the efforts of Habermas and other theorists of deliberative democracy to envision a political process that would be entirely non-manipulative and non-deceptive, as well as egalitarian and inclusive.<sup>82</sup>

Projects for openness such as these, however, have regularly been viewed as impractical by skeptical realists. The appealing conviction that (apparent) conflicts would dissolve in the face of reason, rational discussion, or "communicative action" among people of goodwill is doubted, either because it underestimates the reality and intransigence of conflict or because it overestimates the efficacy of practical reason or goodwill in political life.<sup>83</sup> Realists of the rational choice approach suspect that in actual deliberative settings strategic—that is, deceptive and manipulative—speech will be as likely as other forms of strategic behavior are in other political settings, notwithstanding the stipulations of normative theorists.<sup>84</sup> Similar doubts may be raised by pessimistic liberals against the communitarian hope that the "shared meanings" of a cultural community can underlie an open consensus on justice; as Shklar remarks,

To confuse a common culture with a harmony of political interests amounts to little but a sleight of hand. What cultures share as a rule is language, which makes it possible for us to express, among other things, our hatred and contempt for each other, as well as our sense of justice, if we are not too cowed to do so.<sup>85</sup>

Machiavelli notoriously assumed that pretense and deception are both feasible and advantageous in the consolidation of a regime or in power struggles with rivals (or for that matter in dealings with allies), and he therefore advises the prince to cultivate these skills on pain of being defeated by his opponents. Hume is generally less blunt, but he strikingly asserts that honor is due to "able politicians" who employ "pretences" and "hypocrisy" to advance their political purposes; he holds that these qualities or skills are both scarcer and preferable to two worrisome forms of honesty, zeal and fanaticism (H V, 572).<sup>86</sup> Hume points to the importance of "opinion" in the public sphere of eighteenth-century civil society and the ultimate dependence of government on opinion, but he sees this as a breeding ground for ideological partisanship and the assertion of competing interests rather than the disinterested exercises of rational discourse hoped

for by Kant and Habermas. Other classical liberal realists also take lack of candor for granted, both in economic and political affairs and in the promotion of both private and public interests. Although market equilibrium ultimately depends on the free flow of information, attempts at concealment of trade secrets or advantageous market conditions is natural and expected behavior on the part of favorably placed actors, according to Smith.<sup>87</sup> The necessity of "secrecy and dispatch" is a good reason for entrusting the power to negotiate treaties to the president, according to the *Federalist* (FP #64, 392-93). This work was of course written soon after the U.S. Constitutional Convention conducted its deliberations in total secrecy, which was felt to be necessary to cover its members' deviation from their instructions and to forestall opposition until a complete document could be produced.<sup>88</sup>

Liberal constitutional engineering in general seeks to direct actions to outcomes that are not foreseen or intended by the actors involved. This approach, which seems manipulative if not exactly deceptive, rests on the (Humean or Madisonian) assumption that one must work with actual interests and ambitions rather than expecting rational consensus on the public good. Deceptive maneuvers such as bluffing and withholding information are of course accepted as standard practice in bargaining, whether for private or public advantage and as a normal feature of everyday politics. As Hume remarks, "true motives" are "seldom avowed" in public transactions of consequence (H VI, 526-27). Liberal political analysis, like more formal rational choice theory, likewise assumes the prevalence of strategic (or "insincere") positioning as an aspect of rational behavior. Effective legislative and other decision-making negotiations, including efforts to advance liberal programs, often require secrecy; "indeed, so strong is the need for secrecy that any effort to do away with it . . . has merely had the result of shifting the scene for the important decision making."<sup>89</sup> Morgenthau openly speaks of the "vice of publicity" in diplomatic negotiations.<sup>90</sup>

Liberal realists are guarded in their view of governmental secrecy and even more of lying and other active deceptions, which can obviously conceal abuses and corruption. (Except for John Stuart Mill, however, they usually uphold the secret ballot in elections and various other contexts, although Mill thought this could similarly mask abuses.) They note that secrecy in government provokes secrecy in opposition (Machiavelli's "conspiracy") which is likely to be more dangerous than open criticism, and it invites a countertactic of selective revelation or "leaks." Nevertheless,

although doctrines like reason of state are "rarely defended in their original form" in a liberal culture, it remains true that virtually all politicians in power (in all three branches of government) resort to secrecy. Some exceptions to the publicity principle are universally accepted and affirmed; other, more problematic cases, ones that cannot be openly avowed, may nonetheless be approved by those liberals whose realism leads them to conclude that the public interest is best served in this manner.<sup>91</sup>

Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* has not only been the most influential work of political philosophy in the later twentieth century; it is also, for the most part, a renewed expression of liberal idealism, contrasting with both empirical and realist currents in contemporary political science and theory. In this, it is a fitting heir of the Enlightenment antecedents whom it acknowledges (especially Kant) and of the social contract tradition that it revitalized. Rawlsian theory focuses on the derivation of principles of justice through a method that involves abstraction from the particular facts of any actual persons, societies, or political situations; it then sketches, in a deductive and generalized fashion, the outlines of institutions conforming to the principles. The paramount normativity of Rawls's project is expressed in his own characterization of it as "ideal theory": the objective is to grasp the high-level regulative principles of a "well-ordered" society and their operations under conditions of "strict compliance" by persons having a sense of justice and a commitment to fair institutions and procedures.<sup>92</sup> Setting forth such a scheme of "primary justice" is taken to be the task of political philosophy, which is thereby aligned to political idealism.<sup>93</sup>

Rawls's ideal project contrasts with, and in his view must have priority to, what he terms "nonideal theory," covering for example "the theory of punishment, the doctrine of just war, and the justification of the various ways of opposing unjust regimes."<sup>94</sup> Nonideal political theory would presumably also address situations in which there is either no agreement on justice, or where just institutions are only gradually being created under the constraints imposed by the impact of the defective institutions that have historically existed, or where compliance with the demands of justice is obstructed by power, ambition, dishonesty, ruthlessness, free-riding, rent-seeking, collusive and strategic behavior, dirty hands situations, and the clashes of assertive special interests. Rawls's neglect of these matters gives his work (which is essentially a work of moral philosophy) its somewhat apolitical character. Hume's move from the philosophy of mind and moral philosophy to political essays, political economy, and history, by contrast,

brought him closer to the more thoroughly political Machiavelli.

Rawls's idealism is, interestingly, qualified by several nonideal themes in his theory. His sections on civil disobedience are explicitly such an exercise, since the question of a right to engage in civil disobedience only arises in situations of injustice or non-realization of ideal conditions. (This is also true of certain other rights usually defended by liberalism, including rights to divorce, emigration, revolution,<sup>95</sup> petitioning the government for redress of grievances, and civil and criminal procedure rights in general). Rawls also cites Hume on the "circumstances of justice," adopting certain weak assumptions about limitations on altruism and the permanence of moderate scarcity as parameters for a theory of justice.<sup>96</sup> These assumptions involve a Hume-like rejection of utopian aspirations for major changes for the better in human nature or contextual conditions, but they fall short of realist assumptions about "knavery" and conflict. Of special interest is Rawls's adoption of maximin as a principle of rational choice under uncertainty, a matter on which rational choice theorists themselves are not in agreement; in choosing maximin, with its important consequence the difference principle, Rawls gives priority to the avoidance of worst-case outcomes in a manner that is suggestive of realist pessimism or practical caution.<sup>97</sup> For the most part, though, Rawls presents a sustained example of ideal theorizing, one that like its antecedents is largely oblivious to power and conflict as the givens of political life; his rubric of "nonideal" theory correspondingly indicates the domain of what here is termed realist theory.

Realist liberalism adds that, even in the effort to promote principles and institutions similar to those recommended by Rawls, one might do better to concentrate more attention on the constraints imposed by the real world on the pursuit of justice and the obstacles to its attainment. It is one thing to set forth the principles of a just society or of a legitimate and free government and to demonstrate how such principles reflect a rational consensus (under specially constrained or ideal conditions) or are otherwise justified. It is another matter to explain how justice may be achieved under actually prevailing conditions. Rawls's doctrine has been labeled "utopian" both because it purports to settle conflicting issues through philosophical reason rather than through political give and take;<sup>98</sup> and because of its lack of attention to "transition theory," the problems and methods to be employed in achieving justice in an unjust world. The latter include, most problematically, the possibility that unjust, coercive, or deceptive means might have to be used for this purpose in some situations, or that practical politicians of goodwill might have to carry out policies that involve

compromises with the fully developed conception of justice.<sup>99</sup> Machiavelli and Hume, like other realists, are especially interested in transitions and foundings of regimes, a matter on which their historical inquiries shed light, and the morally controversial aspects of their realism often arise in such contexts. It is only fair to add that in his later work, *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls emphasizes that his theory is to be thought of as a "realistic utopia," that is, one whose principles comprise a feasible project in the world as it is, although one that requires advances beyond present practice.<sup>100</sup>

In nonideal circumstances, which of course comprise the entirety of actual experience, realist theory is not devoid of normative concerns even as it devotes substantial attention to the workings of power and other phenomena of political life. Machiavelli and Hume both express reasonably clear preferences among different states of affairs, based on the values and virtues that they admire and defend. Machiavelli absorbed certain political ideals from the Florentine civic humanist tradition that preceded him, although his observations of the modern world made him cynical about their prospects and open to second-best programs of state-building under capable princes. Like most realists Machiavelli values the maintenance of order and security in the face of natural tendencies to disorder and conflict. For a realist liberal like Hume, the relevant values are of course those of the liberal tradition, ones that are articulated systematically in liberal moral philosophy. Hume provides such an account himself in his ethical and economic writings, emphasizing legal justice, civility, and prosperity. Some liberal political scientists purport to rely on a division of labor between empirical and normative analysis, but blends of these motives are more likely to distinguish important work. Realist democratic theory seeks feasible approximations of the values upheld in democratic political philosophy, subject to the requirements of workable institutions and other empirical constraints. Realism in both the theory and the practice of international relations is concerned with consensual legitimacy in the international order as well as with the power politics for which it is better known.<sup>101</sup> Political realism and idealism should perhaps be seen as poles of a spectrum of political inquiry, each drawing on the other for practical purposes, and with liberal realism occupying a middle position. Realism rejects not morality, but moralism, in politics: the naive morality of simple or absolute principles.

To the extent that realism enters the terrain of normative judgment, therefore, it is more concerned with distinguishing better and worse possibilities rather than with delineating the best, just as it is practically

more concerned to avoid worst-case outcomes than (vainly) to seek perfection. The conservative tendency that is apparent in a realist thinker like Hume is related to his anti-utopianism (in addition to the emphasis he places on social order), since radicalism is generally grounded in some form of political idealism, if not utopian faith.<sup>102</sup> Realism embraces standards that are closer to experience, and therefore more variable, than those generated in abstraction from real conditions by idealist procedures. Following the lead of Aristotle rather than Plato, realism seeks the best feasible result, or the regime that is the best in given circumstances, or subject to some actual set of the many possible constraints on human choice in social and political settings.<sup>103</sup> Pursuing such a program, the more pessimistic realists assume or expect that political action is frequently a matter of choosing the lesser evil, or the least objectionable of the feasible options, given the morally mixed character of politics.<sup>104</sup> Prudence, caution, and responsibility are the virtues it admires and seeks in political leadership in a complex world and in the face of a rather grim historical record.

### Elements of a Realist Liberal Tradition: *The Federalist Papers*

The main body of this book has been devoted to uncovering Machiavellian or realist elements in the political thought of David Hume, leading to the conclusion that at least one eminent classical liberal thinker should be regarded as a realist liberal. Occasional contrasts between Hume and other paradigmatic liberals of the Enlightenment, especially Locke and Kant, suggest that one might distinguish two strands in Enlightenment liberal thought, the realist and the idealist respectively.<sup>105</sup> Philosophical links between Locke and Kant and some of their contemporary descendants, furthermore, suggest an ongoing, if not completely continuous, tradition or discourse of idealist liberalism, one that takes the central task of political theory to be the delineation of philosophically defensible principles of justice or the elements of an ideal political regime. The final step in the present argument is to propose that Hume belongs to a parallel tradition of liberal realism, one that includes other important figures both from his own era and in more recent times. Reconstructing the history of liberal thought in these terms is beyond the scope of this book. Rather, we shall conclude with a few illustrative examples, one classical and several contemporary, that will serve to indicate some of the parameters of such a project.

The 1787-1788 *Federalist Papers* of Madison, Hamilton, and Jay comprise a clear and prominent case of realist liberal theory from the generation immediately after Hume. The classical liberal credentials of this work are scarcely in question, arising as it does from the Anglo-American milieu of the larger Enlightenment. The main scholarly question in this respect has been the extent to which the essentially liberal doctrine of the *Federalist* is modified, like the American founding more generally, by classical republican elements; and for this work, at least, the matter seems firmly resolved in favor of the liberal interpretation.<sup>106</sup> More interestingly, for reasons to be explored, the *Federalist Papers* have also often been appreciated as a work of political realism.<sup>107</sup> Given this hybrid character, it is not surprising that Hume's works were a major influence on the authors, including a number of passages bearing on realist themes that have been discussed in previous chapters.<sup>108</sup> The absence of any explicit reference to Machiavelli is inconclusive in view of rhetorical considerations. Whether there is direct influence or not, however, the spirit of Machiavelli—especially the proponent of the energetic prince-executive, not the admirer of ancient republics—has sometimes been thought to lurk behind Hamilton's vision of America's place in the world.<sup>109</sup>

The most direct route in considering the *Federalist Papers* as a work of realist political theory is to begin with its explicit anti-utopianism, its determination to theorize for the political world as it actually is, with its inescapable imperfections. The work opens with several papers on the vulnerable position of the American states, were they to remain disunited, in the face of challenges emanating from the power struggles of Europe combined with the probability of quarrels and hostilities among themselves. "A man must be far gone in Utopian speculations," Hamilton remarks, to deny that disunity and weakness invite disaster. It would be to forget that "the causes of hostility among nations are innumerable," including the "love of power," the "desire of pre-eminence and dominion," "commercial competitions," and the fact that "men are ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious."<sup>110</sup> To expect harmony among independent neighboring states "would be to disregard the uniform course of human events, and to set at defiance the accumulated experience of ages" (FP #6, 54). The effectual truth of history is that one must attempt to construct viable political institutions against this background; to suppose that America is uniquely exempted from such dangers is naive, or utopian in a familiar sense of that term. An "expectation of peace and cordiality," even among like-minded Americans, is a reverie, like a "deceitful dream of a golden age," from

which it is time to awake (FP #6, 59).<sup>111</sup> Speaking of the need for an effective national taxing power to provide defense against likely dangers, Hamilton again dismisses those "who hope to see realized in America the halcyon scenes of the poetic or fabulous age" in favor of a more realistic assumption that "we are likely to experience a common portion of the vicissitudes and calamities which have fallen to the lot of other nations" (FP #30, 192-93).

It is well known that in FP #10 Madison borrowed a suggestion about the possibility of an "extended republic" from Hume's essay on the "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," an essay that constitutes (superficially) his lone excursion into ostensibly utopian or ideal theorizing.<sup>112</sup> Hume begins this exercise, however, by rejecting the "plainly imaginary" kinds of utopias that "suppose great reformation in the manners of mankind" (E 514); Hume's scheme of government accordingly takes people as they are and in fact concentrates on the realist-liberal theme of carefully dividing power in order to preserve moderation in its exercise. In this of course he is followed by Madison, whose famous paper also rejects any thought of removing the causes of factions by altering the usual patterns of human motivation. Like Hume, Madison proposes to control the inevitable forces of interest, passion, and ambition by "refin[ing] and enlarg[ing] the public views" by passing them through a complex system of representation (FP #10, 82). Hence the background presence of the idea of a "perfect" commonwealth is misleading: both Hume and Madison actually pursue the characteristic strategies of cautious liberals in their respective essays.

Madison's own anti-utopianism appears in his conventional remark that "a nation of philosophers is as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato." For a nation of philosophers, "reverence for the laws" would be sufficiently generated by "the voice of enlightened reason." For people as they are, however, other supports for law abidingness are desirable; these include, in a further echo of Hume, "the prejudices of the community" fostered by stable institutions (FP #49, 315).<sup>113</sup> "Inconveniences" are "unavoidably blended with all political advantages." Hence one must focus on the "possible abuses which must be incident to every power or trust of which a beneficial use can be made" (FP #41, 255), a practical maxim that leads to the emphasis on checks and balances that is the best-known aspect of the *Federalist's* constitutionalism.<sup>114</sup> This theme is central to Hume and to classical liberal thought generally, but the background view of the inevitable imperfections in political arrangements can be termed realist.



Opponents of the new Constitution will attempt to magnify its faults, but the people who are asked to ratify it should reflect that a "faultless plan was not to be expected" (FP #37, 225). As (in certain important respects) Lockean, the Federalists understood themselves to be enacting a process of establishing a new form of government through deliberate popular consent. In the form of a social contract imagined in the abstract, such a procedure for creating legitimate and just institutions reflects a somewhat idealist brand of Enlightenment rationalism. The *Federalist* authors, in contrast, emphasize the difficulties of actually trying to put such a procedure into practice. Such an enterprise has never been carried out before on a large scale, they observe, so the effort is experimental; and although an experimental approach to politics is indicated by realist and Humean empiricism, it should be recognized that constitutional "experiments are of too ticklish a nature to be unnecessarily multiplied" (FP #49, 315). In real life the attempt to create a government through general consent is not likely to yield an amicable consensus (as implied in Lockean theory), but to produce and exacerbate social divisions and discord; this is why the ancients (and Machiavelli) assumed that deliberate political foundations could only be carried out by extraordinary individuals (FP #38, 231-33). Hume's own realist response to Locke had been that governments in fact are almost never founded by consent, but by violence, acquiring broad support only later and gradually. Given their own and their constituents' Lockean convictions, however, the Federalists adopt the method of popular consent, but they understand the exercise as a test of the theory, that is, a test of whether the theory is sufficiently realistic to be workable. It remains to be seen, Hamilton says, "whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions [as Hume had it] on accident and force" (FP #1, 33).<sup>115</sup>

Because of the conflicts and pitfalls of political life, realists seek the best feasible solution to problems under actual constraints, to which they carefully attend, shunning the quest for perfection or "the best" as a dangerous diversion. "Candid people" understand that "the choice must always be made, if not of the lesser evil, at least of the GREATER, not the PERFECT, good" (FP #41, 255). Sometimes, however, the best feasible choice can be characterized as the lesser evil, as realist analysis concentrates on avoiding and taking precautions against worst-case outcomes. Several examples of this practical orientation, previously seen in both Machiavelli and Hume, appear in the *Federalist*. The adoption of equal

representation of states in the Senate, objected to by the larger states, is a prudential decision to "embrace the lesser evil," since any other plan would be "still more objectionable" (FP #62, 377). The presidential veto is defended on the grounds that "the injury which may possibly be done by defeating a few good laws will be amply compensated by the advantage of preventing a number of bad ones" (FP #73, 444): avoiding the bad takes precedence over seeking the good.<sup>116</sup> Madison's famous argument for "extend[ing] the sphere" of the republic alludes to the promotion of the public good, but it also, much more forcefully, dwells on the negative goal of preventing the injustice inherent in the "schemes of oppression" that could be perpetrated by majority factions (FP #10, 83, 77, 81). A weaker confederacy, such as seemed more attractive and less dangerous to Anti-Federalists, would backfire and lead to the worst result (from their own point of view): since it would face noncompliance by the states, it could only be maintained, in the final analysis, by a "military despotism" (FP #16, 115). A stronger national government, which seems risky, would paradoxically be less likely to have to use force and would thus avert the worst case. Much of the *Federalist Papers* is devoted to an analysis of all that is wrong with the existing system and all that could go wrong—foreign domination or domestic tyranny—with any new system other than the one proposed.<sup>117</sup>

As with Machiavelli and Hume, the political theory of the *Federalist* rests on a consistent and explicit view of human nature. The central theme is the prevalence of self-interested motivation in political life, both for individuals and for groups (or factions) and nations, a tenet that liberalism shares with realism and that forms part of the basic common ground between these two doctrines (cf. FP #62, 380: "One nation is to another what one individual is to another," indeed, perhaps even less benevolent). If anything, however, the *Federalist's* version of this claim is slanted to the negative or more realist side. The pursuit of special interests leads political factions and democratic majorities to neglect the public good and "trample on the rules of justice," unless restrained (FP #10, 80). People acting in groups, as is usually the case in politics, are subject to volatile passions and prejudices that lead them to mistake their own best interests (FP #71, 432); whereas, as Hume had noted, "bodies of men" are less restrained by "regard to reputation" and are more likely to rush into "improprieties and excesses for which [individuals] would blush in a private capacity" (FP #15, 110-11).<sup>118</sup>

The *Federalist* authors do hope that the representative system will generate responsible leadership, but at the same time they fear the effects



of avarice, vanity, and ambition in those who may succeed in winning the favor of the electorate (FP #72, 438). Principal reliance is therefore placed on institutions to "[supply], by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives." This fundamental technique, Madison says, applies to "the whole system of human affairs," public and private. Checks and balances in government, as Hume proposed, will work by harnessing the usual traits of human nature, by arranging offices so that ambition counteracts ambition (FP #51, 322). Equally fundamental, for Hamilton, is the Hobbesian point that all government rests in the end on coercion, on laws backed up by effective penalties, "because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint" (FP #15, 110).

As in the realist political science of Machiavelli and Hume, the premise of interest leads the *Federalist* authors to a view of the centrality and inescapability of conflict in political life. This is especially true (within states) to the extent that political life is free or republican. The immediate causes of conflict are numerous, including opposing economic or commercial interests, the opposition of parochial loyalties fostered by local politicians, political ambition or the love of power itself, and the "attachments, enmities, interests, hopes, and fears of leading individuals," disguised though they may be under "the pretext of some public motive" (FP #6, 54). In a loose confederacy the separate governments would naturally, even justifiably, seek special privileges for their citizens; and even in the stronger proposed federal union there will be the danger of perceived distributive injustices in contributions and benefits (FP #7).<sup>119</sup>

As in Machiavelli and Hume, however, the major forms of domestic political conflict express themselves in the opposition of classes, parties, and factions. Opposition between nobles and people is absent from America, but tension between the propertied and the poor, and between creditors and debtors, is frequently in the background.<sup>120</sup> The *Federalist* authors employ class categories that are reminiscent of Hume's, citing a fundamental distinction between the landed interest (including both landlords and tenants) and the manufacturing interest (including merchants and mechanics). Whereas Hume's analysis pointed to a natural harmony of interests between the two groups, however, Hamilton foresees deep conflicts, especially over taxation; although he expresses the hope that representatives drawn from the learned professions will be able to mediate the opposition as an "impartial arbiter," his view seems more pessimistic (or realist) than Hume's own (FP #35, 216; cf. #10, 79).

The *Federalist's* well-known analysis of the problem of factions as a

disruptive, polarizing, and potentially violent factor in free political life is also proximately Humean, if more remotely Machiavellian in its general theme. Madison like Hume recognizes not only the "most common and durable" factions based on (economic) interest, but also groupings based on passions of different kinds, including personal attachments to leaders and "zeal for different opinions" in religion and "many other points." Indeed, Madison echoes Hume's exasperation with parties based on "speculative" principles, saying that "the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle [mankind's] unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts" (FP #10, 79).<sup>121</sup> Hamilton observes that "the spirit of party in different degrees must be expected to infect all political bodies," arguing that a constitution should seek to harness the effects of this spirit for beneficial results (FP #26, 171). In general, following Hume, the *Federalist* authors hold that one can only try to control the effects of factions, since abolishing them is impossible under a free government. Madison famously argues that increasing the number of factions through an enlargement of the state will mitigate their bad effects on republican politics. This conclusion is at variance with Machiavelli's thesis in the *Florentine Histories* that the many divisions in Florence were destructive of the city's liberty. In this, however, Madison does not depart from realist analysis but merely adapts the conclusion of another Machiavellian political thinker, Bacon, who argued that one main religious division in society produces dangerous zeal on both sides, but that many divisions are politically innocuous.<sup>122</sup>

Realism assumes that power is central to political analysis. People and groups seek power either as a means to the promotion of their other interests, or as an end in itself; states and governance involve the concentration of coercive power in the hands of public officials, whose use or abuse of it is the central issue in the assessment of regimes; and since power is dangerous as well as necessary, its limitation and control by institutional mechanisms or a balance of power is a perennial concern. The *Federalist* authors, as realists, then, are not naive about power politics. As liberal theorists their main concern, perhaps, is with checking the power of factions, majorities, and especially of government itself, a program arising from the observation that "power is of an encroaching nature," always tending to exceed its legitimate objects (FP #48, 308). The latter claim, however, is a realist as much as it is a liberal one, and thus a key element in the common ground of realist liberalism. In Hume's words, "so great is the natural ambition of men, that they are never satisfied with power; and

if one order of men, by pursuing its own interest, can usurp upon every other order, it will certainly do so" ("Of the Independency of Parliament," E 43-44).<sup>123</sup>

The *Federalist* authors, however, sometimes move from these claims to ones characteristic of a harsher variety of realism. "Government," Hamilton asserts, "is only another word for POLITICAL POWER," understood as the capacity to prescribe enforceable laws (FP #34, 204). The "love of power," however, is such that the liberal strategy of checking it provokes hostility: "Power controlled or abridged is almost always the rival and enemy of that power by which it is controlled or abridged" (FP #15, 111). Hamilton's allusion here to the "lust of dominion," indeed, suggests a deeper, Augustinian current of thought lying behind the Enlightenment confidence that elsewhere marks these essays (FP #17, 119). In this light we are not surprised to read that political friendship is possible only on the basis of the mutual respect that comes from strength, and that weakness "invite[s] hostility or insult" (FP #4, 49, 46). America is currently weak and thus subject to humiliating treatment by European states, an experience that shows "how little the rights of a feeble government are likely to be respected" (FP #25, 167; #15, 106). As its strength grows under the new Constitution, on the other hand, it will inevitably provoke fear and antagonism from the European powers, both as a result of commercial challenges and competition for spheres of influence in America. In either case, "safety" as the first object of any government implies the need for unity, prudence, and constituted power—indeed potentially unlimited power, since potential dangers are infinite—proportional to the necessities of this object (FP #3, 42; #23, 153).

The theme of power politics and the dangers of weakness appear conspicuously in conceptions of international relations, and although the *Federalist Papers* are best known for their contribution to constitutional theory, they also contain a substantial emphasis on America's prospective position in the larger world. In considering this problem, the authors take a consistently realist view of international politics and a skeptical view of the more optimistic proposals advanced by more sanguine or idealistic Enlightenment philosophers. The notion that the nurturing of republican values in small-scale political units could be combined with large-scale defensive capability through a confederacy, for example, is rejected, notwithstanding the authority of Montesquieu: all actual attempts at confederation (in which the sovereignty of the component members is preserved) have failed through "internal dissensions." This disheartening

finding of realist political science thus indicates the need for a stronger union, despite its risks (FP #18, #37).

Because America is relatively weak, Jay suggests, it is in her interest to avoid disputes as much as possible by obeying the law of nations (FP #3, 43). Passing references suggest that treaties and maritime law under the law of nations will be a normal part of American public affairs (FP #80, #83); nevertheless, there is no expectation that international peace can be generally assured (especially among the strong) through an effective system of international law, as some liberals have hoped. The causes of conflict between states, "whether *real* or *pretended*," unjust as well as just, are too numerous (FP #3, 42). Spain excludes Americans from the free navigation of the Mississippi River, although they are entitled to it "by nature and compact," simply because Americans are not "in a condition to resent or to repel the aggression" (FP #15, 106). In general, right not backed up by strength is not respected; the "rights of neutrality," for example, although they are provided for in the prevailing law of nations, cannot be effectively asserted by a small or disunited state that is "despicable by its weakness" (FP #11, 87). Civilized nations frequently enter into compacts and alliances, but history offers "an instructive but afflicting lesson to mankind how little dependence is to be placed on treaties which have no other sanction than the obligations of good faith," in the face of contrary interests or passions (FP #15, 109). The *Federalist's* response to this is not that international law must somehow be enhanced, but that America must become strong. The first essential step is ratifying the new government, with its unified authority over foreign policy.<sup>124</sup>

Some Enlightenment liberals, including Hume, hoped that the growth of international commerce would promote international peace as an important side benefit of its economic advantages. Nations accustomed to enjoying the mutual benefits of trade would be reluctant to jeopardize their prosperity through warfare, and important vested interests within each nation would support peaceful foreign policies. The liberal advocacy of free trade thus claimed not only economic but moral and political superiority to the older and more bellicose mercantilism, which was often associated with reason of state. In his *History*, however, Hume describes and evidently approves of commercial wars that England fought in an earlier period, and in the key essay "Of Commerce" he emphasizes that commercial prosperity is ultimately at the disposal of the sovereign for conversion into military power if necessary. Hume's liberalism, then, does not lead him to think that economic imperatives will displace politics and abolish

political conflicts, a stance consistent with his continuing acceptance of reason of state in external affairs.

This mixture of themes is also evident in the *Federalist*, which asserts that knowledge of "reasons of state" is "essential to a right judgment" about national policy (FP #15, 111) and frequently alludes to commerce not as a basis for peace but as a potential source of international (or, without federal authority, interstate) hostilities. Hamilton predicts that America's growing commercial energy will be viewed as a threat by Great Britain, which will respond by trying to foster disunity. A strong American government, however, will be able to "bargain with great advantage for commercial privileges," forcing open British imperial markets by threatening to close ours to them (FP #11, 85-87). Such a forthright policy, however, will not preclude the possibility of commercial wars: "if we mean to be a commercial people it must form a part of our policy to be able one day to defend that commerce" through a strong navy (FP #34, 208). In a world where other states have not adopted the principle of free and peaceful trade, but use commerce and protected markets as a means to aggrandizement, America must be prepared to respond in kind to promote its own national interests.

The *Federalist*, finally, anticipates and, so to speak, rejects in advance the argument of Kant's "Perpetual Peace" that republican governments may be expected to favor peace, an argument that optimistically sees two important ethical imperatives as being mutually reinforcing. "Visionary or designing men . . . advocate the paradox of perpetual peace between the [separate] States," says Hamilton, on the ground that "the genius of republics (say they) is pacific." The truth is closer to Machiavelli's assumption, based on historical observation, that republics are "not less addicted to war than monarchies." Popular assemblies are subject to rage, resentment, and other "violent propensities," and commercial republics (such as America will be) have been doubly and conspicuously bellicose (FP #6, 56-58).

International threats and hostilities thus loom in the future of America, and the need to confront this external environment effectively forms one of the main *Federalist* arguments for a strong national union of the American states.<sup>125</sup> Eventual warfare among the states (or a probable breakup into three or four warring confederacies) is expected if they fail to achieve a strong union: it is "a sort of axiom in politics," according to Hamilton, "that vicinity, or nearness of situation, constitutes nations natural enemies," a point borne out in the history of England and Scotland prior to their Union

(FP #5; #6, 59). Even unified, the Americans will at first be weak relative to the major European states and will therefore face the dangers of "foreign arms and influence," since weakness will invite interference or domination (FP #3, 42). Europe's dominion has spread "by force and by fraud" to Asia, Africa, and America, and her "arrogant pretensions" indicate pressures to be expected in the future (FP #12, 90-91). Defense, or "safety from external danger" is clearly the first objective of any government, outweighing even liberty (FP #8, 67). Hamilton goes further, denouncing the "novel and absurd experiment in politics of tying up the hands of government from offensive war founded upon reasons of state" (FP #34, 208). The doctrine that Hamilton invokes here permitted offensive war in the sense of preemptive wars intended to defend the state's interests in a larger sense; it also allowed warfare as an instrument of a rational policy to expand the power and resources of a state. In this connection it is relevant to note that the *Federalist* authors several times (beginning on the first page) refer to America as an "empire" and clearly envisage its westward expansion at the expense of Spain and Britain; and republican empires or imperial republics were not known to be peaceful, to judge from the best-known example, Machiavelli's Rome. In any event, "peace or war will not always be left to our option" (FP #34, 208): realist founders or statesmen must therefore be prepared for all eventualities.

The *Federalist* suggests three ways in which America might approach dangers emanating from abroad, in addition to a centralized government with unified direction of foreign policy. First, the authors accept the logic of the balance of power, which, as we have seen, is endorsed by both Machiavelli and Hume and constitutes a prominent common theme of both liberalism and realism, classical and contemporary. Echoing (and perhaps drawing on) Hume's *History*, Hamilton criticizes Henry VIII and Wolsey for allowing vanity and ambition to lead them into hostilities with France, rather than following the "plainest dictates of [balance of power] policy" and opposing the Habsburg "project of universal monarchy" (FP #6, 55). Along the same lines, a unified American government with a reasonably strong navy could be "of respectable weight if thrown into the scale of either of the two contending [European] powers," allowing America to bargain for advantageous terms of trade. Indeed, by playing the role of a regional balancer in great power politics skillfully, America might "become the arbiter of Europe in America, and . . . incline the balance of European competitions in this part of the world as our interest may dictate" (FP #11, 87). Hamilton appears to be thinking of the balance of power not as a

source of international order, but as a practical strategy by which a weaker but not insignificant power might extract maximum benefits from ongoing international conflicts. Madison also expresses interest in the subject but strikes a more cautionary note: when a weaker state seeks balancing alliances, it runs the risk that "a victorious and powerful ally is but another name for a master" (FP #18, 127). Such calculations of the perils of an active foreign policy are equally an expression of political realism, in this case, a warning that directly echoes Machiavelli's own admonition "that a prince must beware never to associate with someone more powerful than himself" on pain of becoming a prisoner (P XXI, 90).

Second, the *Federalist* authors, following Hume rather than Machiavelli, endorse the need for a professional army (and navy) controlled by the federal government to supplement the state militias. It is true, they admit, that standing armies obstruct the growth of liberty in continental Europe, although such armies have the advantages of preventing sudden conquests and making war less destructive than it might be. In any event, security in a modern society requires a professional military, since most people, "absorbed in the pursuits of gain and devoted to the improvements of agriculture and commerce," are unsuited to be soldiers. Hamilton indeed goes beyond Hume in his enthusiasm for the "entire revolution in the system of war" brought about by the modern "science of finance," which makes possible the maintenance of a specialized and disciplined army (FP #8, 69). Money, contra Machiavelli, is the "vital principle of the body politic," and public credit, contra Hume, must supplement taxation in "the modern system of war" (FP #30, 188, 192). The further need for unified command over the national army, a point also made by Machiavelli (D III.15), forms part of the argument for a unitary executive in the new Constitution (FP #70, 427). America must adapt to these realities of modern politics and warfare, despite the dangers and the unattractiveness of the modern system from the classical republican point of view.

Finally, the Federalists look to effective political leadership to guide the nation through foreign dangers as well as to exercise a moderating influence on the factions and unruly passions that will manifest themselves in a popular republic. Machiavelli argued that an advantage of republics over principalities was the former's ability to recruit competent leaders from throughout society, giving these regimes a greater chance of being led continuously, and especially in times of crisis, by able individuals. The *Federalist* authors, as republicans, doubtlessly accept this comparison with monarchies, yet they are nonetheless concerned about an adequate supply

of responsible leaders: hence one of the benefits of increasing the size of the republic through federal union will be an increase in the size of legislative districts and thus "a greater probability of a fit choice" of representatives from the larger pools of potential political talent (FP #10, 82). With respect to foreign threats, though, the main focus is on the controversial grant of the foreign affairs power largely to a single president. Such centralization of decision-making is necessary for the secrecy, dispatch, steadiness, access to information, and view of the national interest as a whole that should inform treaty negotiations and foreign policy generally. Shifting "tides" mark national and world affairs, and "as in the field, so in the cabinet, there are moments to be seized as they pass" by experienced leaders (FP #64, 392-93).<sup>126</sup>

Like successful Machiavellian princes, American leaders will (it is hoped) not only be decisive in opportune moments but will also know how to follow "the usual maxims of prudence and policy" (FP #24, 162), where "policy" may be understood to carry overtones of realist statecraft, as in Humean usage. Prudence as practical judgment is associated, for the *Federalist* authors, with a more modern, scientific approach to decision-making, to the extent that this is possible.<sup>127</sup> Hamilton no doubt expects American leaders to engage in the same "rational calculation of probabilities" that he and his colleagues have employed in designing and defending the Constitution (FP #60, 367), the mode of rationalism accepted by Humean empiricism and political realism alike. Most conspicuously and repeatedly, however, the *Federalist* calls for "energy" in government. As the special virtue of the executive, this distinctive term is suggestive of qualities that Machiavelli praised in leaders, as well as of the contribution of the monarchical or princely part of a mixed government in the classical doctrine. The modern realist diagnosis of the need for effective leadership of the state thus incorporates strands from various historical discourses of politics.

*The Federalist Papers* thus exemplify realism, along with their equally prominent liberalism, in straightforward ways: in their assumptions about the constants (interest, power, conflict) of political life and in their recommendations for a government that is strong, generally energetic, and forceful in foreign affairs, as well as constitutionally restrained and accountable. It should be noted, however, that the realism of this work is of a relatively soft variety, which is why it so readily combines with classical liberal postulates. Despite the few passing endorsements of reason of state in external policy, the *Federalist* does not suggest the necessity of

deception, extra-legal violence (other than in open warfare), elimination of opponents, or other morally disturbing methods characteristic of Machiavellian teaching. Madison argues that a deplorable practice like maintaining standing armies in peacetime is necessary for a state so long as rival states do so: "If one nation maintains constantly a disciplined army, ready for the service of ambition or revenge, it obliges the most pacific nations . . . to take corresponding precautions. . . . All Europe has followed, or been forced into, the example" (FP #41, 257). This captures the discouraging logic of Hobbesian (and arguably also Machiavellian) realism in conditions of international anarchy, but the authors never say or imply that rulers must be prepared to do bad on pain of coming to ruin among unscrupulous rivals and enemies. Hamilton accuses his Anti-Federalist opponents of "deliberate imposture and deception" for comparing the proposed presidency to the British monarchy (FP #67, 408); but one might suspect he protests too much: the *Federalist* deliberately downplays the parallels between the president and Senate, with their virtues of energy and wisdom, and the kingly and aristocratic elements called for in the classical theory of a mixed constitution. Such a rhetorical concession to the democratic spirit, however, seems a mild form of disingenuousness. Madison observes that religious superstition was one of the "engines" of ancient governments, but there is no sign that he would deign to employ such devices, even in the benign form of established religion such as even Hume condoned (FP #18, 123).

Deception and superstition, as Machiavelli recognizes, were especially useful in foundings of regimes, according to ancient sources; the fact that the American founding is being carried out openly, on the basis of publicly debated principles, is one of various improvements on the "ancient mode" of establishing new plans of government (FP #38, 233). The *Federalist* authors are, of course, addressing a wide popular audience, appealing for ratification of the Constitution under rules stipulating an open, relatively popular procedure for doing so. One might, then, assume that Machiavellian techniques of the more disreputable variety would not be openly announced even were their employment contemplated. The explicit theory of the papers on this score, however, expresses the liberal norms of publicity and rational consent rather than the prescriptions of a harder (and illiberal) form of realism.

### Elements of a Realist Liberal Tradition: Contemporary Political Philosophy

The *Federalist Papers* understandably stay for the most part on the level of the practical political issues that confronted their authors and readers. A practical understanding of politics as decision-making and institution-building, indeed, is characteristic of realism, in contrast to an emphasis on ideal principles that, if realized, would remove the practical dilemmas that always face actual statesmen. Political realism as a theoretical doctrine, however, can have a philosophical dimension as well. Turning to a few selected examples of contemporary liberal political philosophy, we shall conclude with consideration of the more abstract theme of moral complexity as it appears in some of its recent forms.

This theme does not of course exhaust the content of contemporary liberal realism. One could trace the descendants of classical liberal realists such as Hume and the *Federalist* authors among the proponents of modern empirical democratic theory, in institutional studies in the public choice vein,<sup>128</sup> in the problems of stabilizing constitutional government in previously authoritarian countries, and in international realism, among other branches of political science. The idea of moral complexity and its political implications, along with its often explicit anti-utopianism, however, is a key element in the philosophical underpinning of political realism, and it is a theme that has attracted some influential recent thinkers. These authors, indeed, sometimes cite Machiavelli on the problems of moral conflict in political life, or Hume on skepticism with respect to the rational solution of moral questions.<sup>129</sup> An intellectual lineage from contemporary doctrines of moral complexity back to the main figures of this book is thus apparent if not always prominent.

The doctrines under consideration sometimes evince interest in the characteristically Machiavellian problems of ends and means, dirty hands, and the disjuncture between public and private morality. More fundamentally, they express doubts about the possibility of discovering (and achieving consensus on) rationally adequate foundations for universal moral and political principles that could have any practical application amid real-world dilemmas and clashes of opposing opinions. They sometimes articulate a full-fledged metaethical doctrine of value pluralism, implying the intransigence of moral and political disagreements and conflict.<sup>130</sup> They often hold that it is probably easier to secure agreement on the identification of particular injustices than on the meaning of justice in

general, and that the more pressing and more feasible political project is one of reducing bads (and perhaps making incremental improvements) rather than attaining comprehensive goods. Writings to this effect are inevitably set against the discouraging background of twentieth-century political history and the cultural relativism of the (uneasy) postcolonial world. This is an era that has not, on the whole, been conducive to idealist hopes, and in which an attitude of cautious realism seems especially compelling.

I begin with brief consideration of two moral philosophers, Bernard Williams and Stuart Hampshire, both of whom have occasionally aligned their work and concerns with the perspective of political realism as I have explored it here. Williams develops a distinctive critique of ethical and political utopianism such as was personified in the ruthlessness of the French revolutionary Saint-Just, whose "illusion" lay in supposing that his utopian vision, composed as it was of ideals that were alien to the modern world, could be imposed on the reality that was "obstinately there," with resultant disaster.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, Williams rejects Plato's question of how the good can rule, taken simply and unequivocally, as "excessively pious," and he acknowledges the force of Machiavelli's question: "how to rule [in] the world as it is."<sup>132</sup> Seeking a tenable middle position between these poles of classical theory, Williams explores the moral ground occupied by politicians (the polar opposites of a Saint-Just) who are both decent, if not ethically pure, and yet effective and whose decency causes them to experience genuine disquiet at the inevitable moral costs of the decisions they must make.

The costs and the disquiet arise, Williams continues, from the frequency of dirty hands situations and hard choices (in addition to the exceptional "tragic choices," where "one might say that whatever the agent did was wrong") that politicians frequently face. It is "a predictable and probable hazard of public life that there will be those situations in which something morally disagreeable is required," and where refusing to act in the indicated manner means that "one cannot seriously pursue even the moral ends of politics." When actions are taken in such situations there will be victims, both victims outside the rough-and-tumble of the political context, who "can justly complain that they have been wronged," as well as "victims inside it who get worse than they could reasonably expect."<sup>133</sup> In Williams's analysis, as we follow these and similar threads through his essays, such political dilemmas ultimately arise from the anti-utopian reality that value pluralism and hence conflicts of values are not pathologi-

cal, or the consequence of error, but a normal feature of the moral condition of human life.<sup>134</sup> The moral complexity of the world is evident, moreover, not only in diverse cultural valuations, but in conflicts of values within a given political culture (including, or especially, a liberal one), and indeed in clashes among valid but incompatible obligations within an individual moral agent.

Williams makes clear that he is thinking not only of dramatic cases in which the use of violence is in question (he mentions the Machiavellian case of having an opponent killed), but of everyday politics and indeed of the mundane, extra-political competition of interests as well. Ordinary politicians must consider acts from which "honourable and scrupulous people" would shrink but without which "important and worthy political projects would fail." Examples, which occur even in the course of orderly democratic politics, include "lying, or at least concealment and the making of misleading statements; breaking promises; special pleading; temporary coalition with the distasteful; sacrificing the interests of worthy persons to those of unworthy persons; and . . . coercion up to blackmail."<sup>135</sup> Williams's view that there is sometimes a political justification for morally questionable proceedings, arising from the constraints imposed on actions and alternatives by the circumstances of the political environment, marks him as a political realist. This stance is apparent also in several further arguments: that the call of some contemporary democrats for "instant publicity" in all governmental business is unworkable and invites hypocrisy; that cooperative understandings among professional politicians (condemned by democratic purists) are often functional; that unattractive qualities of ambition and professionalism are likely to be necessary for "getting to the top" in any political system; and that we should hope for a "less ruthless clique [of political leaders] resisting more ruthless outsiders" as preferable to a ruthless "clique checked by less ruthless outsiders," given the tendency of many political systems to select for some degree of ruthlessness in high positions.<sup>136</sup> Williams returns to some of these themes in his latest book, where his defense of a liberal version of the value of truthfulness is tempered by acceptance of a "moderate" form of Machiavellianism: governmental responsibilities are different enough from those of private persons to justify a double standard of virtue, and "any government is charged with the security of its citizens, a responsibility that cannot be discharged without force and secrecy."<sup>137</sup>

Williams's liberal sensibility, on the other hand, is evident in the fact that he deplors the moral shortcomings of political life, especially the



more extreme cases, even while seeking a practical accommodation with the realities of the political domain. One looks for decent politicians who employ disagreeable means to achieve good ends with regret, since "only those who are reluctant or disinclined to do the morally disagreeable when it is really necessary have much chance of not doing it when it is not necessary."<sup>138</sup> The problem that Williams fastens on is essentially the classical liberal problem of the corrupting effects of power, and the related danger that because of this the more conscientious will avoid the disagreeable world of political necessity altogether, leaving this arena to the unscrupulous or ruthless.<sup>139</sup> Hard choices must be made, and in the best case they will be made by individuals who are sensitive to the costs involved.

The further problem, one which neither Machiavelli nor Hume addressed, is the dynamic effect on the character or moral disposition of those who get their hands dirty in order to serve the public interest. One can attribute to Machiavelli the belief that beneficial effects (such as social order) follow from actions, such as state-building policies, that the prince undertakes from purely selfish or ambitious motives; the prince's skill, not his moral character, is the issue. Hume points to morally desirable dynamic effects on the participants in the moral conventions of society, for example, the process by which people normally acquire a larger sympathy with the public interest and develop a sense of duty with respect to justice through following the rules. A comparable emphasis on the psychology of the possible forms of corruption in public life, however, would be more typically realist. On these matters both Machiavelli and Hume are optimists; liberal realists like Williams, who hold both that the intentions and character of decision makers matter and that even liberal-democratic political life can have a morally coarsening influence on its participants, have further grounds for apprehension.

Stuart Hampshire is another contemporary moral philosopher who declares himself to be a liberal<sup>140</sup> and is akin to Williams in his reflections on the political implications of moral complexity and conflict.<sup>141</sup> He also invokes and aligns himself with both Machiavelli and Hume in ways that are suggestive of the account of the origins of realist liberalism that have been explored in this book (although Hampshire himself does not characterize Hume in this manner).<sup>142</sup> Value conflicts and ambiguity are central to actual moral experience, according to Hampshire, in contrast to the "ideal of rationality" in ethics, with its quest for "absolutes" and its excessive reliance on abstractions rather than narratives of actual and problematic

moral choice situations. Both in public and private life we encounter "moral problems that on occasion seem hopeless, incapable of solution, leaving no right action open," in contrast to the premise of a "computational" morality like utilitarianism. Decisions must be made, but the trade-offs that are chosen do not bring about a cessation of incompatible moral claims.<sup>143</sup>

This general perspective is brought to bear on the concerns of political theory when Hampshire considers the normative divergence between the public and private realms that he, like others, associates with the (moral, not amoral) thought of Machiavelli. In private life people appropriately proceed on the basis of moral intuitions that arise (like manners and language) from internalized rules whose basis is not always conscious and articulate, and our ordinary moral intuitions appropriately often include absolute prohibitions based on firm ideas of right and wrong. Moral complexity, however, is more apparent and explicit in public life for three reasons that are often cited in the literature of realism: the consequences of political decisions on many people's lives are often greater and more enduring; violence or the open threat of force is often "in prospect" in the execution of public policies; and the representative character of decision-making in democracies entails special obligations for the actors. It follows, for Hampshire, that practical reasoning in the public realm should be consequentialist, although this by no means assures a "right" answer to problems; that moral reasoning in this sphere should be less intuitive and more explicit, in the interest of accountability; and that political leaders must take full responsibility for the hard choices they must make.<sup>144</sup> Hampshire's mode of pursuing moral philosophy appears to rule out a project of defining ideal principles whose realization would remove the difficulties that confront us in real political life.

Hampshire's liberalism supplements his interest in the "dirty hands" version of the moral complexity theme in an essay entitled "Morality and Machiavelli," which itself appears in his suggestively entitled *Innocence and Experience*. Here he attempts to "solve" "Machiavelli's problem" in a manner that, so far as possible, is acceptable to liberal sensibilities. Machiavelli's problem is that political success, including success in attaining beneficial or morally desirable ends, sometimes precludes moral innocence. "Justice is the opposite of aggression, conquest, domination, violence, and deceit. Yet all these denials of justice are indispensable means to secure the survival of any city or state under any foreseeable conditions of political life." One could add that the survival of the city or



the state is the indispensable condition for the attainment of justice within it, with the resulting paradox that injustice is the condition of justice. Machiavelli observed that ordinary people often admire strong, even ruthless leaders; Hampshire implies that this need not indicate people's perverse love of being dominated but rather their realistic sense (if Machiavelli is correct on the larger issue) of the qualities that are sometimes necessary to secure their state against dangers.

Hampshire says that Machiavelli's influence makes it natural to look to Italian examples to develop this point; but Hume's historical view of the realities of modern politics, with his assertion (contra contractarianism) that nearly all actual regimes originate in violence or coercion, should count as another expression of the impossibility of political innocence. The case of Hume indicates that liberals must face Machiavelli's problem, distasteful though it may be, and Hampshire correspondingly explores its ramifications in the context of a recognizably liberal morality. There is, it appears, no precise "solution" to the problem, as one would expect in view of the background account of complexity. What one can insist on, however, is not negligible: that procedural justice requires a fair hearing for all sides; that decision makers acknowledge and conscientiously weigh competing claims before choosing the alternative that realizes the lesser evil, or perhaps the best on-balance combination of justice and good consequences; and that leaders be responsible and accountable.<sup>145</sup>

This program, finally, informs Hampshire's reflections on justice, a topic that is prominent in contemporary liberal theory. Hampshire defends a conception of justice as fair procedures for accommodating the irremediable differences and conflicts of points of view, ends, interests, values, and policy preferences in modern society—for hearing all sides and adjudicating and deliberating among them. Justice refers to "the principle of institutionalized fairness in procedures for the resolution of these conflicts"; it has nothing to do (contra Plato and some modern liberals) with the quest for social harmony and consensus. This proposal bears a family resemblance to Rawls's and other recent liberal theories insofar as it rests on a view of value pluralism or legitimate diversity in people's conceptions of the good within the same society, although Hampshire's variant seems more strictly procedural and draws on a background emphasis on moral conflict rather than mere pluralism.<sup>146</sup> A just state in this view might recall a Lockean "umpire," but its function would relate not to universalist natural law but to diversity, not to conflicts over liberty and property (values on which all agree) but to conflicts over basic disagreements.

Hampshire claims the support of Hume in establishing the metaethical basis for the view of moral complexity that underlies his account of justice, adding that a proper skepticism in moral theory rules out (as it does for Hume) a "generalizable account of a future ideal society" in favor of a politics of trying to eliminate particular evils in particular circumstances. At the same time he cites Machiavelli for a general account of the political context of justice: a view of politics as power, uncertainty, decision-making, and leaders who "owe it to [their] followers to be decisive and successful, even at the cost of [their] own integrity and moral respectability."<sup>147</sup> Hampshire thus endorses a distinctive form of realist liberalism that is consistent with the perspective developed in this study and indeed is inspired directly by the two figures that have been its central focus.

The most influential proponent in the twentieth century of value pluralism, a form of moral complexity, in relation to liberalism was Isaiah Berlin, a colleague and sometime collaborator of both Williams and Hampshire.<sup>148</sup> As an intellectual historian Berlin may be said to have historicized the value pluralism claim by locating its origins (as a doctrine that has had an impact on modern politics) in Herder and other romantic opponents of Enlightenment universalism and its confident program to discover the correct principles for organizing human life. Herder's rejection of such universalism, which Berlin endorses, entails anti-utopianism and, by extension, the repudiation of forms of idealistic political theory that have been fundamentally utopian in spirit. With Herder, Berlin points to a basic plurality of different (and potentially conflicting) cultural values and ways of life embodied in the traditions of different societies or nations. In Machiavelli, by contrast, Berlin discerns a compelling assertion of the incompatibility of different moral aspirations within the same emergent, modern European society: one could choose to pursue the life of a Christian or a pagan, a moral absolutist or a *Realpolitiker*, but not both.<sup>149</sup> Elsewhere Berlin points to conflicts within particular political doctrines such as liberalism: liberty clashes with equality, and different liberties clash with one another, so that trade-offs must inevitably be made. Thus, whether at the level of contrasting cultures, within the same culture, or within a single political morality, the fact is that all goods cannot be pursued and realized simultaneously.<sup>150</sup> Different goods or values, each attractive and genuine in its own right and each a component in a coherent way of life, are incompatible or (as Berlin says) incommensurable, such that human life, both individual and political, is essentially a matter of choices and dilemmas, however rich the total landscape may be. It follows that there

can be no "coherent political morality," including liberalism, that rests on "a single principle or an ordered system of principles."<sup>151</sup>

Berlin's value pluralism accentuates the diversity of plausible value choices that people have made and can make, but it falls short of the moral outlook of the (Machiavellian) realism that we have been considering insofar as Berlin does not especially emphasize political conflict as a consequence of moral and cultural difference. Berlin did not join in the discussions of hard choices and dirty hands situations that attracted philosophers such as Williams, Hampshire, Nagel, and Walzer, although his ideas no doubt influenced some of them. Although he wrote on Machiavelli and on many aspects of European intellectual history, he did not examine the reason-of-state or political-realist traditions or relate their arguments to his own view of moral conflict; nor did he address the central realist issue of the alleged disjuncture between public and private morality or the special dilemmas faced by political leaders whose choices, even the most conscientious, cannot be entirely innocent. Berlin espoused liberalism, emphasizing the centrality of the value of (negative) liberty grounded in a view of the human capacity for choice. His liberalism is explicitly anti-utopian in the sense that neither liberalism nor any other political program can possibly deliver perfection, an incoherent aspiration given value pluralism; he also recognizes, in the manner of realists, that utopianism (founded on idealism or rationalism) can lead to dangerous fanaticism.<sup>152</sup> But his liberal doctrine (which is not fully developed) lacks other such characteristic realist doctrines as the centrality of power and interest and the negative goal of avoiding worst outcomes.

Berlin's affiliation to realist variants of liberalism, however, is more apparent in the interpretation and development of his ideas that has been offered by John Gray. The Berlin-derived doctrine that Gray endorses is termed "agonistic" liberalism, a word that implies the prevalence of conflict in human life that is a usual assumption of political realism. The agonistic character of this liberalism rests on a "darker vision" of the implications of value pluralism than some proponents of this position recognize, including the claim that "goods may depend upon, or presuppose, evils, and right actions contain, or entail, wrongs."<sup>153</sup> Even within liberalism there are inescapable conflicts of values or valid claims, frequently reflecting competing conceptions of human well-being more broadly (for example, the opposing human interests in privacy and freedom of information), that require political decision but that cannot be rationally settled by agreement on a principle such as maximizing liberty or the system of liberties as a

whole: "if value-pluralism is true, hard cases, undecidable by reasoning from any overarching theory, are the rule, not the exception, in political life."<sup>154</sup> Tensions and sometimes overt political clashes between liberal and illiberal ideals are even more intransigent, nor is there any standpoint (for Berlin and Gray) from which the truth or the superiority of the liberal choices can be established by reason. Berlin's romantic appreciation of the rich diversity of alternative ideals and choiceworthy ways of life is thus recast as a doctrine of permanent social conflict and as an impasse for the theoretical project of grounding any determinate set of political principles.

Gray is particularly critical of the tradition of Enlightenment liberalism represented by the political theories of Locke and Kant, and of Rawls as the leading contemporary heir of this tradition. Such theories are held to be excessively rationalist and universalist: they illegitimately universalize distinctively western conceptions of human nature and particular (liberal) cultural values, and on this basis they propound general principles of social justice that falsely purport to be grounded in reason.<sup>155</sup> One consequence of this enterprise, Gray argues, is a characteristically apolitical form of liberalism, one that abstracts from or is oblivious to the many forms of real-world disharmony that must be negotiated in political life: since reason is held to generate a complete set of regulative principles for a just society, all that remains is the essentially judicial function of applying the principles and adjudicating problematic cases that may arise.<sup>156</sup>

Another consequence is the blindness of liberalism to its own parochial character, which leads to its underestimation of the depth of the conflicts that are likely to arise between liberal and illiberal ways of life, including those more typical of non-Western societies. Gray is especially concerned with the varieties of national, communal, and fundamentalist assertiveness, the challenges posed by which may be said to constitute the latest practical issues for political realism. In this connection we may recall that Machiavelli's Florentine and Italian patriotism figured in his appreciation of the popular sentiments that could be marshaled by energetic state-building princes such as Ferdinand in Spain; insofar as Machiavelli's realism manifested itself in his approval of such efforts, one may discern in his thought an early linkage between nationalism and political realism. Hume's frequent worries about the dangers to social stability posed by the sectarian "enthusiasm" of his own and the preceding two centuries anticipate the worries of contemporary liberals about resurgent religious fundamentalism; hence it is noteworthy that Hume's realism is occasionally expressed in his approval of the measures taken by rulers to contain religious conflict.

Themes that for Gray loom large in the real world that political theory should address, and that therefore figure in his defense of agonistic liberalism, thus have a lineage extending back to the classical founders of realism and liberalism that are the main subjects of this study.<sup>157</sup>

For Gray, the type of "traditional" liberal theory that he criticizes exemplifies the limitations (or the presumptuousness) of the "political rationalism" and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. His critique, as well as his strong sense of the inadequacy of Western universalism in the face of the realities of the later twentieth-century world, indicate an affiliation between his views and other contemporary postmodern critiques of the so-called Enlightenment project.<sup>158</sup> In terms of the present study, however, Gray can be understood as objecting to the idealist form of rationalism that underlies much of traditional liberalism; the more limited, contingent, contextual, and conflict-sensitive theory of agonistic liberalism that he defends, on the other hand, may be termed realist in its explicit appeal to "the real world of history and practice."<sup>159</sup>

I conclude this survey of contemporary realist liberal thought (a survey that, to repeat, can only be suggestive, not comprehensive) with consideration of the work of Judith N. Shklar.<sup>160</sup> Shklar admired the *Federalist* authors, especially Hamilton (if anything the most systematically realist of the trio), and as with them, the place to begin is with her anti-utopianism and the practical attitude of pessimism and caution that underlies it.

Shklar's historical studies began with an account of the loss among many nineteenth-century thinkers of the Enlightenment's radical optimism concerning reason and progress, a loss of confidence that has been intensified in light of twentieth-century political experience. The result, she remarks, is that "disenchantment—perhaps it is realism—" is the usual stance of modern democrats.<sup>161</sup> Shklar does acknowledge the value of a limited type of utopian thought: the classical (pre-French revolutionary) tradition of utopianism, which pursued moral visions unassociated with radical political programs.<sup>162</sup> She thus does not go so far as Machiavelli, who implied that any utopian thinking was a dangerous distraction, at least for political practitioners, or even Hume, who had little use for theorizing on the basis of unrealistic assumptions about human nature. In parallel fashion she defends the value of normative models in political science, as long as they are cognizant of what is feasible and are not "prophetic," a position that is consistent with the realism of the earlier authors.<sup>163</sup> On the whole, her valedictory discussions of the widespread disillusionment with modern, practical expressions of the utopian impulse, whose dangers and

destructiveness have outweighed the attractiveness of some of their ideals, is sufficient to signify Shklar's affiliation to contemporary political realism.

Shklar's aversion to excessive idealism in political theory is also signified by her admiration of Montaigne and Montesquieu among the modern classical authors. She praises Montaigne's famous skepticism (and the skeptical temperament that underlay it) precisely because of its anti-utopian bearing; she did not point to the fact (although she might have) that Hume's philosophical skepticism functions similarly in his political thought.<sup>164</sup> Montaigne understood that there was much unavoidable evil in political life; personally he "wanted no part of it," but "he was not one of those fastidious souls who preserve their inner purity by shunning politics altogether." Rather, during his brief public career, he "sought the least harmful course of action available to him." As we have seen, such a practical principle is characteristic of realism, although Montaigne's version is relatively passive and conservative. Like Hume later, Montaigne emphasized the usual value of following custom, not because existing customs can be shown to be the best possible rules of behavior, but because they are there and are functional and because attempts to change them often make things worse.<sup>165</sup> Montesquieu's approach to politics (in Shklar's interpretation) was also to support institutions that might "limit our worst propensities." As in Hume's case, such institutions include commerce, a civilizing force that, while falling short of the highest virtue, nevertheless works against the worst ills of public life; and constitutionalism, defended in liberal fashion as guarding against abuses of unified power. Montesquieu's "grim realism" exemplifies, for Shklar, how "misanthropy" can be of value in political theorizing.<sup>166</sup> In her writings on the American political tradition Shklar rejects simplistic interpretations that portray the American spirit as embodying the "mindless optimism" of the Enlightenment and American politics as being somehow exempt from the formative experiences of injustice and violence that engendered the pessimistic and realist currents in European thought.<sup>167</sup>

Shklar's sense of the dangers that attend excessively high expectations from politics and her alignment to realist figures in the history of political thought reflect a view of moral complexity and conflict in political life that is comparable to the views of the contemporary philosophers discussed above.<sup>168</sup> Shklar's later work exemplifies the contributions of a doctrine of "negative morality" to political theory, that is, an analytic orientation to the numerous vices and forms of injustice that appear in social and political life, rather than the more usual focus on desirable virtues and on the

construction of a theory of (ideal) justice.<sup>169</sup> Injustice, Shklar observes, takes many forms, some of them not easy to distinguish from misfortune (a distinction that is often contestable and self-serving). It is often perpetuated passively, by the negligence or indifference of bystanders rather than by active commission on the part of specifically culpable agents. These ambiguities in the identification and sources of injustice make corrective action more difficult than is envisioned or implied in simpler theories (the "normal model") of justice, even though reductions in the incidence of injustice (and misfortune) ought to be the aim of a decent politics.

Even in the best case, however, moral dissonance is an unavoidable condition of human life. Sometimes justice could be increased, but only at the expense of other genuine values, such as liberty or social peace, and reasonable people differ about the appropriate trade-offs. Beneficial policies inescapably defeat the legitimate expectations of some even while alleviating misery elsewhere: "Every social change, every new law, every forced alteration of public rules is unjust to someone. . . . To redress one injustice is to create another." Any feasible system of legal justice (says Shklar, citing Hume), is bound to produce results that will seem unfair or undesirable in particular cases, even if it is just and beneficial on the whole. Shklar agrees with Hume that there is no preferable alternative to the rule of law in public life, even while acknowledging the hardships and the unassuaged sense of continuing injustice that accompany it. More generally, no political system can satisfy all (arguably) legitimate claims; an important advantage of democracy, at least, is that it "does not silence the voice of protest." Genuinely "tragic situations," in which there are no good choices, occasionally face decision makers in any government, even if talk of "misfortune" sometimes masks passive injustice and even though appeals to "necessity" are sometimes a cover for political ambition. Self-serving ideologies, too, are the common experience of political life.<sup>170</sup>

Shklar's general account of social life highlights the multitude of its ills and evils, both imaginable and, all too often, historically attested. (This is a sensibility she shares with Hampshire.<sup>171</sup>) Indeed, she openly acknowledges "my preoccupation with political evil" and its unavoidability in thinking about modern political life.<sup>172</sup> Such a negative focus indicates the limits of skepticism or relativism, since people largely agree on the evils of life even when they cannot agree on a positive moral or political theory or a conception of the good life. It also prompts the practical attitude characteristic of realism, that the primary concern should be the reduction of suffering and the avoidance of the worst ills rather than the quest for an

ideal state of affairs. This imperative leads, in Shklar's work, not only to an analysis of the various vices but to an attempt to assess differing degrees of vice or evil, with distinction between those that are tolerable and those that are not. In this respect she is best known for her insistence on "putting cruelty first" as the worst vice. The elimination of the deliberate infliction of pain or degradation should therefore be the first concern in moral and political life. Although she does not mention the fact, she is, on this point, of one mind with Hume, who also argues that cruelty is "the most detested of all vices" (T 605/386). Abhorrence of cruelty may readily be seen as part of the historical liberal sensibility; Shklar's emphasis on its continuing and manifold manifestations, however, is more pessimistic than Hume's conviction that the opposing virtue of "humanity" was on the increase in modern society.

An assessment of Shklar's political realism, however, should take note of her observations on the more tolerable or excusable of the "ordinary vices" as well as her focus on combating the worst. Hypocrisy, deception, and betrayal are prominent among the vices that Shklar explores as pervasive and probably unavoidable in many walks of life and social interactions, both public and private. Shklar approvingly cites Hume's view, for example, that some degree of hypocrisy (so condemned by purists like Rousseau) is required by the common duties of civility. The laxity of a liberal society with respect to the lesser, everyday vices reflects not only its commitment to tolerance and its acceptance of competition but also its realistic sense of the impossibility of perfection in human relations, with their frequently ambiguous and changing standards, and the dangers of trying to achieve or impose perfection, especially through politics. On the contrary, the ordinary vices seem to be especially inseparable from liberal democratic political life. Extraordinary individuals (like the genial realist Benjamin Franklin) dissimulate their superior talents or their heterodox beliefs in conforming to the norms of a democratic society. Political compromises regularly invite charges of hypocrisy toward professed ideals, violation of promises, and betrayal of loyal supporters or allies. Persuasion in democratic debate draws on rhetoric with its manipulatory techniques. Bargaining and competition are incompatible with complete sincerity. Yet compromise, persuasion, bargaining, and settling for the best feasible (not the best) outcome are central to democratic decision-making in the (usual) absence of consensus.

The paradox of liberal democracy is that it encourages hypocrisy because the politics of persuasion require . . . a certain amount of dissimulation on

the part of all speakers. . . . Honesties that humiliate and a stiff-necked refusal to compromise would ruin democratic civility in a political society in which people have many serious differences of belief and interest.<sup>173</sup>

Shklar draws on both private and public examples of the common vices and does not insist on the special significance or permissibility of a double standard in this regard, a familiar theme among Machiavellian moralists. Nevertheless, her assertions that some vices are inseparable from democratic politics amounts to an endorsement of a realist account of democracy. Shklar of course accepts constitutional democracy as "the best available response" to the problem of reducing cruelty and injustice, while recognizing that "even the best political systems inevitably generate sources of resentment" as a consequence of their shortcomings.<sup>174</sup>

The dissimulation, deception, and betrayal that Shklar is (up to a point) willing to countenance in public life often figure in Machiavelli's advice to political actors and are prominent aspects of what is commonly known as Machiavellianism in politics. Machiavelli at any rate appears to believe that such vices are necessary to political success (if not, like Shklar, to the normal functioning of a liberal democratic society), in a republic as well as in a principality. Machiavelli to be sure speaks, somewhat paradoxically, of the "virtue" of political leaders who deploy such capabilities to good effect; but in his acknowledgment that such methods are part of "knowing how not to be good," he may perhaps be said to have anticipated Shklar in maintaining that certain vices are "ordinary" or inescapable in politics.

It is therefore striking that Shklar (unlike Hampshire, for example) not only does not align her thought with Machiavelli's but repeatedly denounces him and his influence. There are several exceptions to this stance, for example in her crediting Machiavelli with "political honesty" in embracing the fact that hypocrisy and dissimulation are ubiquitous in politics.<sup>175</sup> Shklar also, importantly, endorses the reason-of-state tradition in European politics, a version of realism par excellence. Reason of state "has its merits" in containing political passion and violence, even though its cold calculation of interests leads to betrayals and other disreputable conduct. Oddly, though, Shklar does not associate the doctrine with Machiavelli, but with her hero Montaigne, who alludes, distastefully but acceptingly, to "reason of state necessity" in one of his essays. Machiavelli by contrast is identified with the treasons and civil wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rather than with the dispassionate statecraft that eventually quelled these disorders.<sup>176</sup>

Shklar's abhorrence of Machiavelli arises from her view that he was a

teacher not of political rationality or prudence but of violence and cruelty, the worst vices, and furthermore that his endorsement of violence rested on a love of glory or on a vicarious admiration for glory-loving (and hence entirely self-serving) princes. She goes so far as to compare Machiavelli with Nietzsche in regarding violence and cruelty as expressive and therapeutic for the actor, and as celebrated on this basis.<sup>177</sup> She ignores Machiavelli's own argument (P VIII, XVII) that, in committing all his cruelties at once, an order-bringing prince will prove to be more merciful vis-à-vis the majority of his subjects in the long run—that violence, though sometimes necessary, should be "economized" or employed in an instrumental fashion. One may conclude, then, that Shklar's repudiation of Machiavelli rests on her special interpretation of him as something other than a realist. This position in no way implies that she herself may not be classified as an adherent of political realism, allied as it is to the "unheroic realism" she admires on the personal level.<sup>178</sup>

I have drawn on Machiavelli in this book and read him as the founder of modern political realism; and I have pointed to sufficient references and parallels to specific Machiavellian teachings in Hume's works, I hope, to establish that there is a Machiavellian side to Hume's political theory. Nevertheless, the larger conclusion is that liberals can be realists, whether or not they invoke Machiavelli or agree with the interpretation of Machiavelli outlined here, and that we should recognize a recurrent form of the doctrine that may be termed realist liberalism. I conclude, then, by acknowledging Shklar's distinctive non-Machiavellian yet realist version of liberal political theory.

The "liberalism of fear" follows from "putting cruelty first" and from the historical reflection that "nothing but cruelty comes from those who seek perfection," as well as from glory-seeking, the love of domination, and other propensities of human nature. Beginning from such "liberal misanthropy," then, the liberalism of fear follows the classical (including Humean) strategy of trying to avoid the worst eventualities by limiting power through law and constitutional checks. "To assume misanthropically that abuses of power are inevitable unless carefully restrained is the whole basis of this kind of liberalism."<sup>179</sup> More strongly stated, the assumption must be that "the power to govern is the power to inflict fear and cruelty and that no amount of benevolence can ever suffice to protect an unarmed population against them."<sup>180</sup> Ruling institutions, however, can be designed to draw on the "lesser vices in order to avoid worse ones," as Montesquieu suggested, as Hume did in assuming (in politics) that men are knaves, and