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DEPARTMENT  
OF HISTORY  
AND  
CIVILIZATION

# Time, Crisis and Western Political Thought, 1500-1660s

Grigol Gegelia

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization  
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute  
**Department of History and Civilization**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the evolution of temporal perceptions amid crises in Western Europe, in the period between 1500 and 1660s. Time captured the imagination of intellectuals, noblemen and commoners alike, constantly faced by instability and changeability. Importantly, time was perceived to be at once the dimension of one's social existence and an agent of history of its own accord. Being such, time then also mattered politically. How did the temporal perceptions alter amid crises? What sort of reflection did temporal perceptions find in the political thought generated between 1500 and 1660s?

This thesis represents a novel re-examination of Western political thought from the perspective of temporal discourses. Concentrating on the study of temporal discourses during crises, the work engages with a number of scholarly debates in early modern intellectual history and provides a new reading of the emergence of the theory of early modern sovereign state, as well as of the paradigm of *state of exception*. It is argued that the early modern theory of sovereignty was born as a result of the gradual radicalization of political thought precisely as the human intellect sought to respond to the *exceptionality* generated by time. With a focus on *kairoitic* temporality and the moment of crisis at which decisive action is called for, this work suggests that the classical idea of dictatorship reemerged powerfully in the context of a *kairoitic* perception of time. In so doing, it contributes to discussion about the appearance of a new ethics of statehood, and a new sort of constitutionalism, by tracking the evolution of a way of thinking about politics and time that translated into the endorsement of some form of absolutism.

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## Chapter I Time and Crisis

### History, Time and Crisis

‘These are the times that  
try men’s souls’

Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*<sup>1</sup>

When, in 1776, Thomas Paine famously wrote of the American crisis as times trying humans’ souls, he was consciously or unconsciously continuing in a tradition of political reflection on crises that had seen daylight centuries before the American turmoil. The kind of reflection that crises found in political thought was in fact always linked with acute temporal sensibility. In all cases, there was a sense not only generally of ‘time’, but of ‘the times’ that were vested with particular flavours, endowed with a particular significance. This significance, to be sure, was *kairotic* significance; in the context of which what mattered was not so much the mundane flow of time as such, that is *chronos*, but the particularity of a qualitative tract of time in its relation to history in general. When Shakespeare’s Hamlet announces that ‘Tis now the very witching time of night’ to act, he declared the arrival of critical time for specific action that he indeed enacted.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of this study, we shall be able to refer to this as ‘The Florentine Moment’ of Western political thought. For it was in the thought of the Florentine Secretary, Niccolò Machiavelli that this specific mode of thought resurfaced for the first time in early modernity. With this, Machiavelli was a true temporal revolutionary. Now, as we are about to see below, citizens of this period were acutely aware of *kairotic time* that was part of the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine, “The American Crisis”, *Pennsylvania Journal*, 19 December 1776.

<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3. Scene 2.

language and the very act of popular daily comprehension of the world. Machiavelli was just one among many to be aware of this mode of temporal thinking. Machiavelli's *kairos* was thus revolutionary not because he uncovered a concept entirely neglected, but because he consciously granted it a very central place in his political thought. Machiavelli's *kairos* was important due precisely to its political weight and implications.

However, this has been almost entirely neglected, as has also been the broader relationship between temporal perceptions and discourses and politics. Yet, all history is the story of *res gestae* in time, while all political theory is also about time, for political philosophy is always a reflection on the ways of ordering the lives of political entities *in* time. However, in early modern Europe, politics was also the art of rendering polities stable *before* the might of time. Thus to a student of the history of early modern political ideas, time is of great importance indeed. This, to be sure, is even more the case in the context of a historical period that witnessed a series of great upheavals and radical changes that challenged the human intellect attempting to comprehend the present and prompted it to reorient itself in relation to time. It was this that gave rise to some of the most prominent theories, including that of absolute and indivisible sovereignty, that have shaped the history of modernity perhaps more than anything else.

The period we aim to explore, from 1500 to 1650, was precisely a period of many radical changes. This was, after all, the very period that witnessed the discovery of *terra incognita*, religious divisions and a series of consequent wars, skeptical doubts being cast over the very ideas of tradition and authority and the intensification of apocalyptic and millenarian thought.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, then, time came to the fore of intellectual attention as baffled citizens were looking for stability. The question of time found a reflection not just in the writings on the past, but also in political thought, literature, art and personal reflections. Time was at the heart of attention on the Continent torn apart by intellectual and political crises.

Now, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have almost in all scholarship been acknowledged as times of crises: epistemologically, politically, culturally

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<sup>3</sup> See E. Weber, *Apocalypses* (London, 1999); A. Brady, E. Butterworth, *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2010).

as well as socially.<sup>4</sup> These were indeed times of novelty so strong and forceful that it seemed to threaten the very stability of the present.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, then, these are the very times that have been variously seen by historians as precursors of modernity, the seat of the first revolution, that of the ‘birth of political science’ and the very time when some of the most influential—and still very much hegemonic—political concepts, among them ‘self-interest’, ‘balance of power’, ‘reason of state’, saw their daylight. However, almost entirely neglected has been the hypothesis that what happened socially, politically and intellectually also had a profound effect on the emergence, reappearance and transmission of the various visions and articulations of time. In the proposed study, I shall attempt to redress this imbalance by exploring what the sixteenth and the seventeenth century intellect—themselves inhabitants of the contexts of crises—made of time. How, then, did the sixteenth and the seventeenth century intellect—inhabiting as it was various presents of crisis—conceive of time? What *political effects* did such a conception have? And, conversely, how was temporal discourse itself constructed *politically*? These are the general questions we shall pursue in order to provide a rich account of temporal discourses in times of crisis.

In this chapter, which seeks to expose broader temporal themes, we shall uncover some of the general corridors of thought that are important to the proper accomplishment of the task at hand. The following sections represent only relatively brief expositions of broader themes and traditions with which we shall engage in greater depths in the contexts of particular historical periods. In this chapter, firstly, we shall speak of the ‘politics of time’ and ‘political time’. These concepts, the first of which is mine and the second

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<sup>4</sup> Cf.: F. Gilbert, “The Reaction of the Florentine Aristocrats to the Revolution of 1494” and “The Crisis in the Assumptions about Political Thinking”, in *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (London, 1985), 49-104, 105-53; F. Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions at the time of Machiavelli and Soderini”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 4 (1957); J. O’Malley, “Historical Thought and Reform Crisis of the Early Sixteenth Century”, *Theological Studies*, 28 (1967); J. Burke, “Meaning and Crisis in the Early Sixteenth Century: Interpreting Leonardo’s Lion”, *Oxford Art Journal* 29 (2006), 770-91; G. Parker and L. M. Smith, *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1978); H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The crisis of the seventeenth century: religion, the Reformation, and social change* (New York, 1968); J. H. M. Salmon, *Society in crisis: France in the sixteenth century* (New York, 1975); I. Benersmeyer, “No Fixed Address: Pascal, Cervantes, and the Changing Function of Literary Communication in Early Modern Europe”, *New Literary History*, 4 (2003), 623-637.

<sup>5</sup> A. Grafton, *New worlds, ancient texts: the power of tradition and the shock of discovery* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

borrowed from Kimberly Hutchings, form the conceptual foundation to the forthcoming argument concerning the pursuit of humans in times of crisis to generate a new time, most often a *political time*, in an attempt to negate the effects of *natural time*, itself seen as threatening continuity and stability of human existence and of political society in time. We shall subsequently survey some of the existing literature and see how they might be helpful to the understanding of the problem posed here, while also observing how and in what ways scholarship has failed to provide proper knowledge on the problem under consideration here.

After that, we shall situate temporal understanding in the context of the theories of history and of the patterns of its movement. This is particularly important if we are to remember that any tract of present time was viewed by the contemporaries as necessarily belonging to the movement of history of whatever kind. Thus, depending on which of the available theories of history one subscribed to, one saw the occurrences of the present times as manifesting the movement of history in the particular fashion. Moreover, as is well known, there was in our period of history a tradition of thought and belief that captivated the minds of, and was often used to terrify the large groups of society, the believers. This was Christianity that has always had a high temporal sensibility. Therefore, we shall here also expose the chief tenets on Christian thought on time, and more generally on the implications of Christianity on temporal perceptions.

Finally, our attention is going to turn to time and crisis in political thought. In our discussion in this regard, we are going to lay the conceptual foundation to the chief argument of this study, that is, the framework in which the chief argument of this study is seen as existing and acquiring meaning. In this final direction of our consideration, we shall firstly expose the historical reality of crisis and then identify a particular mode in which the authors of our period are seen as comprehending their own crisis. This we shall refer to as ‘the crisis of the present moment’. Now, although the authors in the one-hundred-and-fifty years under consideration all lived and wrote in different historical realities—and thus experienced different kinds of crises—nevertheless, as we shall see, they all responded in markedly similar ways to the presents of their crises. We shall then discuss the concept of crisis as well and then show how

there were not one, but two distinct temporal categories of *chronos* and *kairos*, through which sense might have been made, as it most often actually was, of the present. Once we have done so, we shall then see how ‘the crisis of the present moment’ was in fact of a very special kind — namely, *kairotic*. Stemming from this, at this stage we will already be in a position to designate the perception of crises to have been *kairotic*. This, as we shall see, is one of the most important tenets of the argument advanced throughout this study of crisis and political thought in some of the most turbulent decades in the history of the Continent.

### **Politics of Time**

In early modern Europe, before the dominance of linear conception of time and the hegemony of the more clock-oriented economic space, time meant a range of things and could be comprehended in a number of ways. For one thing, what meaning the present was vested with was dependent on the view of history to which one subscribed. Secondly, there were the distinct categories of *chronotic time* and *kairotic time*. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, conceptual perceptions of time and experientially determined visions of time also differed. Not surprisingly, then, two early modern authors who are seen to be in some way reflecting on time may in fact be referring to different things.

Time might stand for a force, an agent of history, or even a Goddess that rules the world and threatens human freedom of action. For instance, Machiavelli’s and Bacon’s *Fortuna*, or indeed Erasmus’ *Fortunatrix* represent such a force or agent of history. However, time could with equal success refer to *qualitative time* in the sense of the author’s particular present. Here, the particular qualitative perception of the present was typically determined through juxtaposition with what came before, or most often with a particular ideal past of history, as was that of Republican Rome for Niccolò Machiavelli or prelapsarian time for Francis Bacon. In yet another sense still, time could stand for inner, psychological time that we encounter, for example, in John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* written in and describing the week when the author lay on what he had convinced himself to be his deathbed. Equally,

time could stand for one's *moment* in the flow of history — here, then, we are dealing with historical consciousness. Time thus stood for a variety of things in the variety of its textual and contextual manifestations. We must thus sound at the very outset that in this study we take an interest not with the *concept* or *idea* of time, but with the *politics of time*; that is, then, with temporal discourse that is to be seen in a range of political and philosophical texts written in contexts of crisis. For in order to uncover discourse, itself very much alive and progressively changeable, is to want to know what sense it made in particular presents of understanding. This in itself precludes an interest merely in static concepts and general ideas of which, to be sure, there were not very many in times of profound epistemic, theological and scientific revolutions.

Instead of launching a search for static and uniformly applicable concepts and ideas, the historian of early modern Europe, and particularly one interested in uncovering temporal discourse, should search for the plurality of meanings that particular paradigms are to be seen as making in the specificity of their own historical contexts. Thus we are interested in paradigms in context. It is this that constitutes *politics of time*. To give one example, in the context of Italy in the last years of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century, what we take an interest with is not so much how 'the Florentine Renaissance saw time' (which might have translated into nothing else but uncovering the temporal implications of general theories and doctrines then available), but how time was seen culturally, how temporal perceptions were affected by historical occurrences and, perhaps most importantly, how temporal discourse was constructed as a response to concrete historical presents.

For instance, as we shall see in the following chapter, Florentine political thought can be seen as secularising the concept of *Fortuna* that had for centuries been portrayed as a might Goddess. Indeed, *Fortuna* is progressively presented as weaker, while the scope of human action is proportionately maximised at the expense of Goddess' power. This culminates in the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli who is very much a politician of time. Yet, Machiavelli is neither a philosopher of time, nor at all interested with the *concept* of time. However, he is truly revolutionary in that he conceives of politics as an act in

time and places politics in the stream of history. It is in fact almost impossible to appreciate Machiavelli's thought without understanding his temporal perceptions. Yet, if we were to look for a *concept* of time in Machiavelli's thought, or Machiavelli's subscription to some meta-theory, we would neglect this profoundly important aspect of his thought entirely. Likewise, without understanding *time in context*, it would be impossible to appreciate the political effects of Machiavelli's temporal philosophy. This seems to be a perfect example of the importance of setting out to uncover not static concepts and ideas of time, but instead *temporal discourse* itself alive and progressive and one that can be seen as making sense in the specificity of its particular socio-historical and political milieu — that is the context in response to which it makes sense and, to be sure, *does something*.

Now, time featured in political thought in a number of ways. Thus the temporal discourse too that we seek to uncover should be sought in these different directions. For instance, as we have already observed early modern political philosophy is always also a reflection on the ways of ordering the lives of political entities *in time*. Such a conceptualisation of the ordering of polities and political life in time itself has various branches, themselves intimately concerned and connected with time. Among them there are questions concerning one's existence *in time* and *before time*, for in early modern thought time is not merely a dimension in which one is seen as existing, but also conceived of as an agent that one faces, plays along and fights with. A further layer of thought concerned social action *in time*; this our authors did equip with the negative or positive idea of one's stance *before time*. This, in other words, was a series of questions about how to act in time and how to conduct political affairs in time so as to ensure continuity and stability.

To be sure, throughout the course of the one hundred and seventy years under consideration in this work, the ideas of continuity and stability themselves changed, as did also the ideas of history in general, the past as a category of legitimation and propaganda, the visions of the futures, as well as the very ideas of civility and statehood. As we progress with our study, we shall track some of the crucial conceptual changes in these and other directions. For as it shall become evident in the later chapters of this work, these changes are themselves intimately linked with temporal perceptions and, all too often,

themselves stem from revolutions of temporal discourse. There, then, the establishment of how and in response to what particular presents such ‘revolutions’ occurred is the high politicized nature of the idea of time and temporal discourse.

Let us, then, ask what we might mean by *politics of time*? As is obvious, the ‘political’ represents the cornerstone of this study, since the intention here is to study the concept of time chiefly in the political thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet, this study claims to be studying something that could be considered as *politics of time* in more than this sense alone. Firstly, the aim is to write the history of the evolution of the idea of time with a particular attention to their social contexts — namely, times of crises. My preoccupation thus consists of uncovering the history of the manifestations and usages of this idea at different times — that is, then, the study of the *politics* of its evolution and deployment over the course of time. In fact, as we shall argue below, I conceive of the evolution of early modern political thought as inseparably linked with—and indeed stemming from—the contexts of crisis.

Secondly, I should like to argue that all invocations of the idea of time at times of crises were by nature already *political*. Indeed, the ways in which thinkers invoked the past, and more particularly *which* past(s) they invoked, and the ways in which one envisaged the future, and more particularly *what kind of a future* one envisaged, were indeed highly political. Equally political, and politically important, was the temporal setting wherein a particular dialogue takes place. The temporal setting of Guicciardini’s *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, written when the Medici family had returned from exile and still ruled the city, yet set in a temporal setting extant decades before, in a Florence right after the expulsion of Piero de Medici in 1494, is a crucial characteristic of the text and has much to reveal about the authorial intent in his own present and for the near future, as Guicciardini himself makes explicitly clear. Similarly, the double temporal stage in Thomas More’s *Utopia*, or James Harrington’s opening of *Oceana* at a moment in time *immediately* after the great legislator has dissolved parliament, as had actually happened in England in 1653, are highly political authorial acts that employ time as a rhetorical tool and place it in the service of political action. It is notable that no



scholarship has to date devoted particular attention to studying the political significance of such temporal orientations. I am, of course, far from claiming that there was a distinct art of choosing the temporal setting of a text; my claim is far more simple: in any case, when in place, such choices were highly political and should be treated accordingly.

Thirdly, as is well known, there were in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries a plethora of political languages available, among them: humanism, Neostoicism, Tacitism, late humanism, scepticism, ‘Machiavellism’ and reason of state.<sup>6</sup> Now, implicit in each of these languages of politics was both a concept of time and a specifically political position (if not always a philosophy or a doctrine) regarding the human ability to act politically *in* time and *against* the malice of time. As Höpfl has observed, ‘any language of political discourse, even the most explicitly anti-‘traditional’ singles out some of the vast range of documents’ of the past which it brings back to circulation.<sup>7</sup> Every sixteenth and seventeenth century treatise on politics indeed call upon their own past. We shall see and analyse specific instances of this in the following chapter. Suffice it here to emphasise Machiavelli’s invocation of Republican Rome in *Discourses on Livy*, Harrington’s politics of ‘ancient’ and ‘modern prudence’,<sup>8</sup> More’s designation of a ‘no-place’ at a ‘no-time, or indeed Hobbes’ ahistorical and timeless (yet temporally bound) Leviathan as examples of just that.

Finally, it is important to remember just how much time mattered to the people of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. After all, time was a tool at once of legitimation and propaganda. For the older a thing or an idea could be said to be, the more praiseworthy or credible it was seen to be. This, in fact, led with equal success to the falsification of the dates of the production of astrological documents in order to claim they were older and thus lend them more credibility. In fact, we see a similarly high politicized choice of *ideal time* in the various histories of the cities and of various noble families as well as in the myths of origin.

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<sup>6</sup> For a contextual discussion of these various languages of politics, see J. H. Burns and M. Goldie (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Höpfl, “History and Exemplarity”, in *(Un)masking the Realities of Power*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Modern’ being everything after Julius Caesar, including the ‘medium aevum’. See Arihiro Fukuda, *Sovereignty and the Sword: Harrington, Hobbes, and Mixed Government in the English Civil Wars*, (Oxford, 1997) 2-5.

The attempt to trace the beginnings of families and cities all the way back to time immemorial, to *illo tempore*, was all too common in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Strikingly, these various visions of the origins became subject to transformations in time, as historical and political presents underwent serious changes. To illustrate this, we might here remember three particular cases of Florence, Venice and the Este family of Ferrara that are excellent examples of the political usage of time. Now, for a long time, the common view of the origins of Florence was that the city had been founded by the soldiers of Julius Caesar. But Caesar was obviously no republican choice, for he had usurped liberty and governed the Roman Republic illegitimately as a *dictator in perpetuo*. He was a tyrant. Therefore, at the height of Florentine republicanism, when the republic was lead by the renowned humanist Leonardo Bruni, a new vision of Florence's origins emerged. This theory now held that Florence had been founded at the time of none other than the Roman Republic. Florence now claimed a republican time to have been the moment of its origin.

By associating themselves not with a tyrant, but with a republic, the Florentine republicans had sought a greater credibility for their own political pursuits and interests in their republican present in Florence. Moreover, such a redrawing of the moment of foundation was in tune with the theory, very much prevalent in the Florentine political thought of the time, that Florence was naturally a *res publica*, that the love and pursuit of liberty was its natural condition, its *prima forma*.

The new temporal format in which the city was now placed justified not only its republican worth, and indeed the cause and the political strength of the Florentine republicans, but also granted a temporal backing to a theory that had seen its daylight so predominantly in Florence. The case of the Este family, rulers of Ferrara, is rather similar. For a long time, the Este had claimed their descent from the Etruscans. However, in the fifteenth century, they now claimed their descent from a Roman republican family of great worth. Times had changed and so too had changed histories of the origins both of a powerful city and of a powerful family, in order to suit the actual political changes of the

present. Florence was powerful; so were the Este. Yet, if they were to maintain their standing, they evidently both needed time to be on their side too.<sup>9</sup>

### **Political time**

Kimberly Hutchings has designated the concept of *political time* as an antithesis to *natural time*. Machiavelli, Hutchings argues, at all times sought to advance *political time* against *natural time* personified by *Fortuna*.<sup>10</sup> Now, as we shall see in greater depths in other chapters, *Fortuna*—or some other personification of time as an agent in its own right—was seen as the mother of unorganised and irregular particulars. Among such particulars, there was chance, occasion as well as accident. It was through these that the supernatural was seen as shaping the order of events. The role of the supernatural was not always negative. It could surely be positive too. In fact, the very problem with *Fortuna* was that one could never know what she willed and what historical situation the various unorganised particulars might create, for *Fortuna* disordered matter into a state of chaos. Now, the chief task of the political thinker the precise reverse of *Fortuna*'s task — it was to order matter back into form, where such a form had existed, or create a form anew, where precedent was absent. Machiavelli spoke plainly of this in the contextually as well as temporally crucial final chapter of *The Prince*. What he also spoke of is what Hutchings has aptly called 'political time'.

The concept of *political time* could be immensely fruitful if subjected to a sharper definition and rendered more historical. Departing from Hutchings' preliminary usage, I shall attempt to elaborate on this concept and render it historical for the period between 1500 and 1650. Here we might note that what I should like to call *political time*, could be defined in a number of ways. Firstly, it is the time of the presence of power and authority, not a time of anarchy and licence. This, then, is a tract of time characterised by a concrete form and order, of whatever kind, which is seen as existing in time, establishing a relation with it and that is to be preserved in specific ways as a form extant in time. In other

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<sup>9</sup> E. Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, 1981), 47.

<sup>10</sup> K. Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 28-32.

words, 'political time' is the time of statehood, all time when the effects of *natural, unorganized time* (with its unruly particulars) are corrected by a form of political organization and control. Secondly, as I should like to argue by the end of this work, *political time* is a *specific kind of time* that is generated by a form itself that is the state, when the theory of the latter has finally been articulated. As we shall see in what follows, my conception of the emergence of early modern political philosophy, as it attempted to institutionalise the phenomena of the present, is one also of the history of an attempt to generate political time against natural time. As I shall argue in this work, this attempt originates most consciously in the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, who is indeed the first temporal revolutionary of modernity. However, only Thomas Hobbes' theory of absolute and indivisible sovereign state finally accomplishes this.

## **Time and History**

Time is not history; history is not time. This is so not only in our contemporary perception, but was also true of the vision of time and history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To be sure, to a contemporary observer, time was an agent *of* history and, accordingly, intimately connected with all that was historical. However, time was not history itself. If history represented the grand notional total of events, time represented events themselves.<sup>11</sup> History, then, was the totality of time, however, in a sense different to our contemporary perception, whereby history is the sum total of time where the latter itself is seen *not* as a totality of events, but as a totality of specific and measurable instants that form an exact and progressive linear succession from one point to another.

History was an inseparable and hugely important direction of temporal thought and discourse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After all, most of the authors of the period were themselves historical writers of some kind. In fact, the knowledge of history was an inseparable part of an educated

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<sup>11</sup> See A. Grafton, *What was History in the Renaissance? The Art of History in early modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

man's repertoire in the fifteenth, sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Although the *idea* of history itself changed with the passage of time, a keen interest in history remained and indeed intensified as time went on.<sup>12</sup> So did also the act of historical writing. These themselves varied in form and contents, from universal histories, such as Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World*, that lay claim to describing the course of events from time immemorial to the present—thus to put into writing the story of *all time*—to more particularised versions of the story of *chronos*, in the form of family histories, histories of particular cities or indeed that of particular polities, as were Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*.

History indeed loomed large in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, it was by no means simply the story of the past. Instead, history acquired a range of meanings and was put to a range of different usages, themselves by nature political. First and foremost, history was a grand total of various qualitative presents. Naturally, as is the case in all historical writing to date yet more so in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, all writings on the past concerned bygone times and naturally characterised those times in qualitative terms. Thus some historical times (*i tempi*) were deemed as those of adversity, while others as those of prosperity. Some tracts of time were republican times, with specific temporal priorities, while others were monarchical times, with their own temporal fabric. Therefore, by virtue of being such as they were, historical times acquired concrete meanings. Viewed from the presents of early modern observers, they could then also be prioritised in terms of their qualitative relation to whatever present one inhabited in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Machiavelli, for instance, designated Roman Republican time as his ideal time; for Harrington, the time to be sought was *all time before Julius Caesar* when 'ancient prudence' was at large; Bacon, in turn, saw all time before the Fall as the ideal time of perfect and uncorrupted knowledge and wisdom; and in the Utopian thought the ideal time was in fact the 'no-time', a *dischronia*. These are just some examples of various pasts that were worthy in terms of whatever qualities they were seen as manifesting from writers themselves inhabiting early modern presents.

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent study of changes in historical thinking see F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (University of Toronto Press, 1967).

Indeed, all of these tracts of time had concrete meanings, by virtue of being such as they had been. However, the politicized nature of temporal usage was born not with such realisation that one saw certain times as better than others, but when these various times, with their implicit meanings, were *invoked* in early modern presents of crises. It was with the act of invocation—in whatever form—that time was used politically. Such politicized nature, which is with what we are particularly interested, can be sought in the ways in which one sought to employ the story of the times past in order to legitimate, explicate, propagate or radically alter one's historical present. The way in which one employed history, as a record of past events and as a reservoir of memories, was indeed highly political. For in the course of narration, the author of a given present reconstructed a picture precisely of that tract of time, which he deemed as most exemplary and did so, most often, in order to provide a commentary. Moreover, this they did rather liberally, often falsifying the actual historical record to suit the events to their rhetorical objectives at hand.

J. G. A. Pocock has rightly observed that historical consciousness is often to be seen in works not exclusively *historiographical*, but *historical* in some way. If so viewed, then, *historical* might be any text that is 'about the past' that is, needless to say, the sole temporal category with which history, as a field of enquiry, takes an interest. It is indeed in texts that juxtapose the present and the past that historical consciousness is most readily available to be read and written about. For it is there that one might observe, at once, the particular vision of a time past, as well as *the way* in which such a vision was enacted, and the particular vision of the present itself both as autonomous and as a qualitative part of history. Instead of concentrating exclusively on *historiographical* works, throughout this study we shall incorporate a range of *historical* works that is texts that in some way concern the times past. This seems all the more justified in the context of our previous observation about the nature of our undertaking here which seeks to uncover temporal discourses themselves very much alive and progressive. As far as our study is concerned, nothing in this regard is of more value than capturing the moment at which *a past time* is brought to life again in *the present time*. For it is here that the usage of time is at its most political.

It is useful to distinguish, on the one hand, between the visions of the movement of history and, on the other hand, what we may call attitudes towards history. There were, in fact, at least six distinct ideas of history extant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the cyclical theory of history, the idea of progress, the theory of the plenitude of nature,<sup>13</sup> the climate theory, the doctrine of uniformitarianism as well as the idea of decline.<sup>14</sup> History was indeed seen as moving in patterns of whatever kinds. However, the portrayal of man's relation to this movement of history was not a vision of history, but a vision of man's place in time and thus an *attitude* to history.<sup>15</sup> These attitudes, to be sure, themselves changed during our period of study. As we are going to see in Chapter II, the Florentine humanists of the fifteenth century (particularly the last decades of it) and the first three decades of the sixteenth century put to question the supreme powers of the classical goddess of history, *Fortuna* who had hitherto been seen as the author of events and thus of history itself, much like the Christian God. The culmination of this tendency, and this was indeed a gradual tendency evolving in time, was the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, who rebelled against history and time alike. Though many have found his views of history to have been cyclical, they were not cyclical in the classical sense of historical recurrence. Far from it, they were in fact revolutionary, for Machiavelli was a conscious preacher of *kairos*, the hidden and powerful opening the very function of which was to invite radical action and refashion history. This inevitably refashioned the role of human agency, for it was the latter that was to act and regain human freedom from its servitude to the movement of history, or other forms of predestination and determinism.

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<sup>13</sup> Here we need not concern transformations in historical thought in any greater depths. For an excellent account of some of the major changes see D. R. Woolf, "From Hystories to the Historical: Five Transitions in Thinking about the Past, 1500-1700" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (March, 2005), 33-70.

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent example of an *attitude* see G. Williamson, "Mutability, Decay and Seventeenth-Century Melancholy", *English Literary History* (September 1935), 121-50; D. C. Allen, "The Degeneration of Man and Renaissance Pessimism", *Studies in Philology* (1938), 202-227.

<sup>15</sup> We need not expose these ideas in greater depths here. We shall concern various ideas of history in each of the following chapters as they are to be seen in specific contexts of crisis under consideration here. On ideas of history see especially H. Weisinger, "Ideas of History During the Renaissance", *Journal of the History of Ideas* (October, 1945), 415-435; see also N. Siraisi, "Anatomizing the Past: Physicians and History in Renaissance Culture", *Renaissance Quarterly* (2000), 1-30. On the idea of progress see R. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress: A Bibliographical Essay* (Transaction Publishers, 1980).

However, at the time of Machiavelli, history was still not a critical field of enquiry but a reservoir of past *exempla* that were to be related for rhetorical purposes and the knowledge of which was deemed to be highly useful for conducting the practical affairs of the present: personal as well as political. Already by 1700, the picture was very different. Now, the ‘details about the past traded at much higher rate in public and domestic settings ... with such frequency and velocity that it was possible to *think* in ways that were fundamentally historical’.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the beginning of our period, the past was still powerfully present and very much alive, encapsulated as it was in *exempla*, even in the thought of Machiavelli whom we here present as an ‘architect of new time’.<sup>17</sup> In later decades, however, the attitudes would change significantly. Montaigne’s critical observation that for all authority men made recourse to the past on which they were exceedingly dependent, sounded after Machiavelli and before the decisive shift in the attitudes to history caused by natural philosophy and advances in science, would occupy an eminent place in the general rhetoric of natural philosophers and scientists towards the end of the sixteenth century, when it became ‘a rallying cry of a number of empiric physicians and artisans to say that investigators should eschew textual resources and commune with nature alone’.<sup>18</sup> Thus by the end of the seventeenth century natural philosophers were no longer citing authorities of the past.

Now, in place here was what we have called pure historical thought, for juxtaposed were the moral and technological achievements of the past and the present. Behind the gradual break from the authority of the past stood the powerful notion that infinite progress is possible and that, precisely due to technological and scientific improvements, the present had far surpassed the past — even its most exemplary tracts of time.<sup>19</sup> In fact, using the language of

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<sup>16</sup> R. Woolf, “From Hystories to the Historical: Five Transitions in Thinking about the Past, 1500-1700” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (March, 2005), 33-70.

<sup>17</sup> There is no contradiction here. As I shall argue throughout this work, all architecture of *tempus novus* requires and has indeed caused a return to the past. Machiavelli, Bacon as well as the French revolutionaries did just this.

<sup>18</sup> Rob Iliffe, “Masculine Birth of Time: Temporal Frameworks of Early Modern Natural Philosophy”, *The British Journal for the History of Science* (2000), 42-78.

<sup>19</sup> See P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1988). For an attack on the corruption of ancient physic, see R. Bostocke, *The difference between the auncient Phisicke, first taught by the godly forefathers, consisting in unitie peace and concord: and the latter Phisicke proceeding from Idolaters, Ethnickes, and Heathen: as Gallen, and such other consisting in dualitie, discorde, and contrarietie. And wherein the naturall Philosophie*



Francis Bacon, early propagandists for the Royal Society even produced a list of modern achievements ‘to articulate a vision of future progress’, while simultaneously trying to re-assure — in a move that is perfectly *politics of time* — clerics that the new philosophy was not a necessary threat to ‘traditional forms of erudition’<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, whatever the reassurance, the attitude to the past, and particularly to the authorities of the past, would never be the same again.

Here it is important to appreciate how Bacon in particular conceived of time and the tasks at hand. We shall return to the exploration of Bacon’s thought in the following chapters. Suffice it here to observe that in Francis Bacon’s thought we encounter two pasts, as there are two presents also. One past is the pre-lapsarian, pre-Socratic mythical time of pure knowledge. The other past is the post-Socratic and the already corrupt past that has to be terminated. It is to such termination that the very title of *Valerius Terminus* refers; and it is to the instauration of the lost time of which the title of *The Great Instauration* speaks. The new future shall choose to reinstate and re-enact the better of the two pasts — the mythical, pre-lapsarian past. In an attempt to overcome the malice of *Fortuna* and break the dismaying cyclicity of learning, Bacon too enters a *kairotic* moment of his thought. It was in fact precisely in so doing that Bacon called for an action truly revolutionary—not least in terms of the proper meaning of *revolutio*—which was mastering nature and *fortune*. This was to become the grand return to the qualitatively best tract of time, which was the pre-lapsarian time of perfect and pure knowledge. But how was this to be achieved? It was again human *virtù* that could materialise the Baconian ‘Great Instauration’ of perfect mythical knowledge. Bacon never referred to this as *virtù*, yet all the contents of *virtù* are very much present. In both cases of Machiavelli and Bacon, we deal with the role of human agency as an adversary of fate, predestination and cyclicity of history.<sup>21</sup> It is *virtù* that should uphold human liberty of choice and action against the repressive will of *Fortuna*.

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*of Aristotle doth differ from the trueth of Gods worde, and is iniurious to Christianitie and sounde doctrine* (London, 1585).

<sup>20</sup> Iliffe, ‘Masculine Birth’, 430.

<sup>21</sup> Guibbory has shown the finest appreciation of the Baconian mission of breaking away from time. See Guibbory 1986, 54-63.

## Time in History

The matter of time and political thought has not received very much scholarly attention to date. Published in 1972, Quinones's *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* is an excellent, though in some ways limited, study of the temporal perceptions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Needless to say, since the date of this publication, much excellent scholarship has redrawn the boundaries of our knowledge of the early modern period in general and of political thought in particular. To name but three works of the latter kind, Quinones' work predates the publication of such influential volumes as were Hexter's *The Visions of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation* (1973), Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* and Skinner's *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978), not to mention a very rich range of seminal studies published in recent decades.<sup>22</sup> We have thus come to think of early modern intellectual life, and especially of political theory, in new ways since Quinones' work saw the daylight. This is not to say that Quinones' study is any less valuable. However, it is evident that a return is needed to some of the broader insights concerning temporal perceptions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in order to establish a relationship between time and political thought, as we have come to think of it since the 1970s, in light of new scholarly insights available. Quinones explored the thought of Machiavelli, Spenser, Rabelais, Montaigne and Shakespeare. Although some very perceptive observations are made about Machiavelli, for example, these are made in general statements that occupy only a few pages.

Quinones observes, for instance, that Machiavelli departs from the temporal paradigm of his Christian predecessors, Augustine and Dante, but does not actually show in what ways Machiavelli does so. In the same stead, we read that 'Machiavelli invests his prince with startlingly new qualities',<sup>23</sup> but we do not receive an account of either what these qualities are or, more importantly, what relation they bear to time. In the event, one of the major thinkers of the period, and arguably the most attentive author to the matter of time, comes to occupy only a few pages in Quinones' account of what is called 'the Renaissance

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<sup>22</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, in fact, makes no mention of Quinones.

<sup>23</sup> R. J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Harvard, 1972), 26.

discovery of time'. This is all the more surprising in light of the authorial acknowledgment of Machiavelli as a temporal revolutionary of the Renaissance. Quinones thus introduces, yet does not answer, a range of legitimate questions: How did Machiavelli depart from the traditional, that is Christian, temporal framework? And what relationship exists between the 'startlingly new qualities', that is *virtù*, and time?

When it comes to the analysis of the temporal aspect, this has been the broader tendency in much of scholarship. As G. J. Whitrow, in his history of the views of time throughout different historical periods, has also argued, 'in the sixteenth century, people tended to be obsessed with the destructive nature of time'.<sup>24</sup> A similar shift of interest has also been observed by J. J. A. Mooij's in *Time and Mind: The History of a Philosophical Problem*, who has observed that 'after Montaigne the effects of the disenchantment of the world began to be felt more widely and the world was no longer related in the same way to eternity'.<sup>25</sup> Yet, Whitrow's preoccupations have remained rather general, and Mooij's work rather particular, concerned as it has been with the *concept* of time in its static form, rather than of temporal perceptions in their social and political manifestations. E. Toulmin's *The Discovery of Time* and A. Guibbory's *The Map of Time* show how the early modern visions of time were informed by a range of differing traditions of thought.<sup>26</sup> But here too, emphasis is too general at the expense of a more concrete analysis. In the case of Guibbory's interesting study, emphasis falls almost entirely on the *theories of history* (cyclicity, recurrence, progress and the like) and not on time as such. As a result, many interesting questions have been risen, but the appetite for learning how time was perceived in actual political presents has not always been satisfied.

For instance, while much commendable scholarship has been devoted to examining Machiavelli's political philosophy, and early modern political thought in general, almost none has been preoccupied with the study of time

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<sup>24</sup> G. J. Whitrow, *Time in history: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (New York, 2004), 132.

<sup>25</sup> J. J. A. Mooij, *Time and Mind: The History of a Philosophical Problem* (Leiden, 2005), 128.

<sup>26</sup> See A. Guibbory, *The Map of Time: seventeenth-century English literature and ideas of pattern in history* (Urbana, 1986); S. E. Toulmin and J. Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Chicago, 1999).

and politics as their primary objects of scholarly examination and dealt in sufficient breadth with either the temporal dimension of political texts. This has led to the sort of scholarship that has at best provided useful insights about time and politics separately, but not sufficiently in-depth analysis of *time and politics*. J. G. A. Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment* (1975) and Kimberly Hutchings's *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (2008) are among the very few works to have been preoccupied very specifically with the temporal dimension of political thought. However, Hutchings's has herself characterised her work as a general survey of *some* of the temporal ideas; her intent has been to provide a general survey of 'world-historical time' and its implications on history.<sup>27</sup> Pocock, too, as he observes, has been preoccupied by studying the fate of a single theme—that of *vivere civile*, the very cornerstone of a *res publica*—and the republican attempts of rendering it stable before the destructive and degenerative might of time.<sup>28</sup> Pocock's own articulation of 'the Machiavellian moment' took two inter-related forms. Firstly, 'the Machiavellian moment' refers to the totality of 'certain enduring patterns in the temporal consciousness of medieval and early modern Europeans'.<sup>29</sup> This recurrent pattern 'led to the presentation of the republic, and the citizen's participation in it, as constituting a problem in historical self-understanding'.<sup>30</sup> Machiavelli and his contemporaries, according to this reading, were contending with this dilemma themselves. Secondly, the Machiavellian moment is the name for 'the moment in conceptualized time in which the republic was seen as confronting its own temporal finitude, as attempting to remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events conceived as essentially destructive of all systems of secular stability'.<sup>31</sup>

This scholarly objective of courses raises some of the salient issues with which this study is also preoccupied. The aspect of temporal finitude in time, for instance, is a hugely pervasive element of temporal thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Likewise, as we will see in what follows, the realisation of an imminent end —be that of the republican way of life, or of time

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<sup>27</sup> K. Hutchings, *Time and world politics: thinking the present* (Manchester, 2008), 6.

<sup>28</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975), vii – viii.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, viii.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

in general—is another broad temporal theme that is to be seen across the entire period of study. Remaining stable before the might of time, ‘in a stream of irrational events’, is an equally salient and recurrent theme throughout much of this period.

However, what Pocock does in his otherwise excellent chapter on *The Prince*, is to pursue a single theme in a somewhat schematic way. Pocock provides a powerful analysis of the battle between *virtù* and *Fortuna*. However, this is a functional analysis of *virtù* as an agent engaged in the broader scheme of things in the antithetical battle against *Fortuna*. Yet, this seems to be a somewhat limited reading of *virtù* that has neglected layers of meaning that carry temporal significance. Upon closer examination, *virtù* indeed acquires its own very particular, context-specific meanings that speak of how a thinker thinks about political action in time. In this regard, Quentin Skinner has come to a better appreciation of the temporal dimension of *virtù* as a dynamic skill set that is to be applied to the challenges of the present in accordance with the nature of the times.<sup>32</sup> Peter Stacey, too, has shown an appreciation of the temporal dimension in which Machiavellian *virtù* acquires its true meaning and in the framework of which the infamous “Machiavellian morality” also operates.<sup>33</sup> In *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince*, Stacey has accurately observed that ‘Machiavelli’s prince is not armed with virtue. His virtue is to be armed.’<sup>34</sup> Brooke, too, in his analysis of the Machiavellian repudiation of Senecan tropes, and especially of Stoic determinism, has shown a fine understanding of Machiavelli’s view of the dynamic nature of *virtù*.<sup>35</sup>

However, since Pocock has been preoccupied with the analysis of republican institutions and their instability in time, while Skinner, Stacey and Brooke have had other scholarly objectives in their texts, a contextually specific, in-depths study of the various meanings of *virtù* has not been provided. Nor was this the scholarly objective, save perhaps in the case of Pocock whose study evolves around the theme of time and politics. At best, what has been provided, again, is a functional anatomy of *virtù* as the antithesis of *Fortuna* with a slightly

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<sup>32</sup> Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978), 129.

<sup>33</sup> P. Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge, 2007), 280-5, 291;

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 283. See also, *ibid.*, 106, 274.

<sup>35</sup> C. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and political thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, 2017), 46-7.

greater commentary on the dynamic nature of the temporal meaning of *virtù*. Yet, *virtù* is a term that bears huge importance on understanding the relationship between early modern politics and temporality. It denotes the totality of qualities one needs in the battle against Fortuna – time. In fact, the very theme so predominant in the sixteenth century of human frailty against time links back precisely to *virtù*, with which citizens and princes must be equipped in order to resist time and which in itself must be equipped in order to be stable before the might of time. As we are going to argue below, in the Machiavellian framework, *virtù* indeed has to be armed with a rich range of qualities so as to render it resilient to a rich range of temporal challenges generated by *Fortuna*. But what we also need to examine is just how this occurs – that is under what temporal circumstances do the meanings of *virtù* alter and why. Moreover, there is very important kairotic significance to *virtù*, which has not been analysed sufficiently. This work aims to provide not just a functional anatomy of *virtù*, in its broader structural manifestation, but also to portray the contextual and temporally bound variance in the meaning of *virtù*.

The more schematic and conceptual treatment of temporal concepts have left certain corridors of thought unexamined. How in particular did humans perceive time at times of crisis? What were their responses like? What sorts of tendencies, if any, did such perceptions encourage in the evolution of political theory in this period? While many themes covered in existing scholarship are highly relevant to the preoccupations of this study, and many of their conclusions, including that of Pocock, are in harmony with our observations here, the chief interest of this work is primarily in the anatomy of temporal perceptions during shorter periods of crisis, *moments* of crisis. Moreover, unlike previous scholarship, this work seeks to uncover not static frames of temporal perception, or analyse longer-term trajectories schematically, but to expose how each moment of crisis served to give shape to various temporal perceptions.

## The Times of Christianity

The early modern present drew its theoretical knowledge of time from three principal sources: Plato's *Timaeus*, Aristotle's *Physics* and Augustine of Hippo's *The Confessions*. St. Augustine remained a powerful shaping force upon the spiritual and political reflections of early modern intellectuals, including Machiavelli, Raleigh, Bacon and Donne. Augustine was important not only due to his influence as one of the chief doctors of the church, but also because he was the only major Christian authority on time in the absence of a coherent Biblical doctrine. Since *Genesis* made no explicit reference to the origins of time, it was always left to an individual interpreter to arrive at a 'Christian idea of time'. One did come across a rich range of temporal references in both the Old and the New Testaments. However, these did not constitute a coherent vision, much less a doctrine, of time. The Biblical references mostly spoke of the end of times; among them, most prominently, were the Book of Revelation and the Gospel of John. They also introduced various theological modes of periodisation, like Daniel's Four Monarchies, made 'known to the King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days' (Daniel, 2:28), or indeed Augustine's Six Ages of the World which was still present in Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History* in the last decades of the seventeenth century. However, there was no precise Christian teaching on time, so it fell to Augustine to devote the entire Book XI of *The Confessions* to philosophical musings upon time.

In the context of Christian philosophy, one encounters a linear conception of time 'as an irreversible progression of moments, yielding ordinal conceptions of past, present and future as well as duration'.<sup>36</sup> It was precisely with the dissemination of Christianity that the Continent came to know *linear time* which was not indigenous. Yet, linear time was not originally Christian at all; Christianity had itself inherited the linear conception of time from the Judaeo-Hebraic tradition of thought that predated Christianity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> C. J. Greenhouse, *A moment's notice: time politics across cultures* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Time so conceived was a linear continuum of instants fleeing ceaselessly in a progressive, linear manner from Point A (the Creation) to Point C (the End of Times). In the middle there had been Point B, that is the ‘Christ-event’, the coming and resurrection of Jesus Christ that had marked at once the fulfilment of time—and thus a *kairos*—and the beginning of the end of time, that is, then, the beginning of eschatological history.<sup>38</sup> Such a conception of time rejected the theories of the cyclicity of time that were well known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

St. Augustine vehemently attacked cyclical theories of time and growth as well as the notion of the eternity of the world.<sup>39</sup> Time was neither cyclical, nor eternal; instead, it was linear and thus entirely unique in and of itself. Time had had a beginning like all other things and, as with all things with a beginning, time too would also have an end. Time had begun at a concrete moment in eternity, through the God’s first act, and it would end at a concrete point of itself, that is the last minute of time, the point at which eternity would once again prevail and *chronos* would explode into *aeon*. The vast majority of early modern writings on the past—be they historical writings of Raleigh and Petau, chronological texts of Sleidan and Cardano or the poetico-historical dramas of Milton—represent ‘a mode of thinking which over the centuries interpreted history as a progressive manifestation of the divine purpose in a linear movement extending from Creation to the Last Judgement’.<sup>40</sup>

Time, in the Christian context of thought, was exclusively of *this world*, while eternity — that of God. Greenhouse thus aptly notes how in the Christian context time represented the *incompleteness* of the world in relation to the *completeness of God*.<sup>41</sup> Being such, time was then inferior to eternity, of which it was but an integral fragment and into which it would ultimately once again transpire. If eternity constantly *is*, time was itself a creation of God, who was eternal and thus resident outside of time. Temporal language did not apply either to God, or indeed to eternity.

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<sup>38</sup> O. Cullman, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1964).

<sup>39</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, ed. M Dods (Edinburgh, 1913), 314.

<sup>40</sup> C. A. Patrides, introduction to *The History of the World*, by Walter Raleigh, 16; see also C. A. Patrides *The grand design of God: the literary form of the Christian view of history* (London, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Greenhouse, ‘A moment’s notice’, 21.



As Augustine wrote in *Confessions*, God was ‘the Creator and Ordainer of time’.<sup>42</sup> Augustine cites the Psalmist: ‘Thine is the day and the night is thine as well ... at thy bidding moments fly’. At the very outset of Christian philosophy, then, God emerges as the *owner* of time. One sees the permanence of this view of God as the *owner* of time in early modern thought also. In his *History of the World*, Sir Walter Raleigh observed how the Divine Providence ‘doth not only behold all past, all present and all to come, but is in the cause of their so being’.<sup>43</sup> Pontus de Tyard, the French poet and historian, in fact went further to suggest that God is the ‘watch-maker ... free to stop, change, reverse or put forward’ time.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, let us here specify the relationship between apocalyptic, messianic and apostolic times, which are simple to be confused and far more difficult to tell apart. Giorgio Agamben has very usefully distinguished these various Christian temporal modes. Agamben has drawn distinctions between the prophet, the apocalyptic and the apostle precisely in terms of their orientation in time. As he observes, the time of the prophet’s announcement always concerns ‘a time to come, not yet present’; the chief temporal category of the prophet, then, is *the future time*. Now, the time of the apostle is the *present time*, for the apostle begins to speak not in advance ‘but when the messiah is already there’. At that moment, the prophecy, as an utterance in time, must remain silent for it is now already truly accomplished and ‘the word is now given to the apostle, the messiah’s envoy, whose time is not the future, but the present’. Now, as opposed to the prophet who foretold from a time past and currently remains silent, and as opposed to the apostle who is now the very speaker of the presence of the messiah in the present time, the apocalyptic ‘dwells in the last day ... he sees the end and describes what he sees’.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the concern of the apocalyptic is not apostolic time of the presence of the messiah, but the end of time itself, the moment that sees time end, the Day of Wrath — the eschaton. Thus prophetic time is one that is essentially preoccupied with futurity and the prophet is defined by his relation to future,

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<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 251.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London, 1971), 112.

<sup>44</sup> Pontus de Tyard, quoted in M. Engammare, *On Time, Punctuality, and Discipline in Early Modern Calvinism* (Geneva, 2004), 197.

<sup>45</sup> Giorgio Agamben. “The Time that is Left”, *Epoché* 1 (2002), 1-14.

while apocalyptic time is preoccupied with the eschaton. In contrast, the apostle's concern is neither prophecy (for he is already an inhabitant of the time of the actualisation and realisation of the prophecy), nor the minute the time ends. Instead, being an envoy of messiah, his concern is with the *present* in which the messiah is also present.

Now, Agamben draws a very useful distinction between 'the time of the end' and 'the end of time'. Apocalyptic time is such a tract that witnesses the *end of time*, at which point time implodes into another *aeon*, eternity. However, the apostolic (and by extension messianic) time is preoccupied not with the *end of time* but with the *time of the end*. This, more precisely, is all time from the messianic event (which is not the birth of Jesus, but His resurrection) to the end of time, that is, the period between the moment when time has begun to contract itself and the moment when it eventually ends. The apostle's concern, then, is 'the time that contracts itself and begins to finish—or, if you prefer, the time that is left between time and its ending'. The messianic time, then, is such time when the messiah is present; at this time, the prophet remains silent and the word is given to the apostle who, as Paul also declares, announces *Kairos*, that is, as Agamben puts it, 'the now time, the jetztzeit, the actuality'.<sup>46</sup>

In this work, we shall uncover the political significance of the various Christian theological preconceptions and concepts. As I argue by the end of this work, these various Christian temporal modes are of crucial significance to early modern political thought also, for the eventual emergence of the absolute sovereign state has very much to do with the secularised Christian temporal modes and concepts that are embedded in early modern political thought as well. With that end in mind, let us here briefly reiterate that in the Christian context, God is the lord of time, Himself always in a position of exteriority to his own creation of time. In turn, the event with which Christian temporality is preoccupied is the Christ-event, the coming in flesh of God's son to *civitas terrena* and his resurrection that marks the beginning of the messianic time, that is then, the beginning of a gradual process of the end of time itself. All that exists in the world is from this moment on seen as living through a *kairos*, the 'now-time' that is the stage of the contraction of time. This is the remaining

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<sup>46</sup> See G. Agamben, *The Time that Remains: a commentary on the letter to the Romans* (Stanford, 2005).

time, all time between time and its end. In this work, I am going to argue that underlying the early modern theories of politics and time—most particularly that of Thomas Hobbes—is essentially the same temporal paradigm as that of the messianic time, while Machiavelli and Hobbes are in many regards ‘Apostles of the State’.

## Europe in Crisis

We have thus far designated our research objective to be the study of temporal perceptions at times of crisis. We shall expose the historical reality of crisis in each of the following chapters. In the meantime, let us briefly concern historiography on crisis. Now, historians have spoken of very many crises: ‘the ‘general crisis of Italy’,<sup>47</sup> the Reformation ‘crisis of spirituality’,<sup>48</sup> as well as ‘The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century’.<sup>49</sup> The historiography of crisis still finds itself in a confused situation, to the point that it seems to fair to say that historiography on crisis is itself in a state of crisis. Some historians like Lublinskaya have argued altogether against the existence of any crisis.<sup>50</sup> Others, for example Roland Moussnier, have on the contrary maintained that virtually all history is a lengthy crisis and such was precisely the period between 1500 and 1650. Those who have argued in favour of the existence of crisis have in turn disagreed on periodisation, causes and effects. Methodological approaches, too, have been markedly different. Some have measured crisis in terms of *change*, while others in terms of its *effects* that is, then, its *aftermaths*.<sup>51</sup> Particularly eminent has been the thesis of the ‘General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century’, advanced by Hugh Trevor-Roper and subsequently by Geoffrey Parker.<sup>52</sup> But it has been stressed that it is not fair to designate seventeenth-century as *the* century of crisis, for something quite similar can be observed with equal success in the sixteenth century, well before the onset in the 1630s of the ‘General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Pettegree 2002, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Skinner, 1975, Vol. 1, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Trevor-Roper 1968; Parker & Smith 1978.

<sup>50</sup> Lublinskaya, 1968.

<sup>51</sup> Raab 1975, 54. Polišíenský 1968. For a general overview of ‘historians and crisis’, see Starn 1971.

<sup>52</sup> Trevor-roper 1968; Parker 1978.

<sup>53</sup> Elliott 1969, 37.

The chief problem of historians, particularly those seeking to provide a Marxist interpretation of history, has for the most part been their willingness to devise conceptual apparatus with which to comprehend early modern European history in a uniform manner. No doubt the most prominent amongst them have been Hugh Trevor-Roper and Eric Hobsbawm who have, despite fundamental differences in their approaches to history, both sought to read ‘crisis’ in terms of some changes that they saw as having been uniform throughout a rather large tract of time. It does not seem to be a coincidence that R. B. Merriman’s *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions* escaped mention in Trevor-Roper’s account of the crisis, for in that work of 1938<sup>54</sup> Merriman saw the six revolutions as ‘an admirable example of the infinite variety of history’.<sup>55</sup> This would in fact seem to be the only correct way of reading the pasts that were very various indeed as presents of varied understandings, material and intellectual problems, and hopes and aspirations. Only recently has historiography returned to appreciating—as it should have perhaps always done—the variety of history instead of trying forcefully to unite various presents under the artificially imposed patterns of uniformity and sameness. More recently, however, the crisis in the historiography of crisis has led historians to concentrate on particular decades, like the 1590s, so as to allow them the autonomy any historical present yearns for and indeed deserves.

### **The Concept of Crisis**

One of the fundamental problems suffered by much of scholarship on crisis is the lack of a definition of crisis. John Elliott has rather aptly noted how ‘the crisis of one historian is a chimera to another’.<sup>56</sup> We have above seen how many different crises historians have designated; in the section below, we are about to see how many more they could designate with equal success. Now, the hegemonic definition of crisis is ‘a short period of acute difficulties, leading to

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<sup>54</sup> P. Clarke (ed.), *The European crisis of the 1590s: essays in comparative history* (London, 1985).

<sup>55</sup> R. B. Merriman, *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions* (Oxford, 1938), 89.

<sup>56</sup> Elliot 1969, 8.

long-term structural changes'.<sup>57</sup> However, this will hardly do. For one thing, it is evident that a crisis can be a lengthier tract of time. Secondly, of whatever length, in order to qualify as a crisis, a crisis does not have to be *leading* to anything, much like 'early modern' political thought does not have to be leading to 'modernity' in order to interest us. The 'Italian crisis' of 1494 – 1530, for instance, led to no significant *structural changes*. On the contrary, the crisis in Italian political thought was largely *the result* of structural changes that had already occurred, rather than totality of time leading up to a crisis.

It is, however, equally evident that in the absence of at least a working definition, almost any two to five-year period of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe would come to qualify as a time of crisis. Thus, while we hope to redeem the lost voices of contemporaries we must also equip ourselves with a certain meaning of 'crisis'. However, to do so, we shall make recourse to history, not to our private fantasies as contemporaries of the twenty-first century. To this end we are fortunate to have had an excellent writer in the person of Reinhart Koselleck, who tracked the evolution of the concept of 'crisis' throughout various centuries. Although Koselleck's enterprise is limited in several ways, it is nevertheless immensely useful for our study.

As Koselleck observed, 'crisis' was in classical Greek understanding 'central to politics', as it was also to judicial theory and medicine. In judicial theory, crisis stood for the *moment* of judgement that would later, already in the Christian context, acquire obvious theological significance. Now, in the context of politics, 'crisis' denoted 'not only "divorce" and "quarrel", but also "decision" in the sense of reaching a *crucial point* that would tip the scales' one way or another.<sup>58</sup> Politically, then, crisis was at once dissent from and dissolution of the perfect *stasis* and a crucial point in time that saw the resolution. Finally, in the medical context, one originating from Galen's *Corpus Hippocraticum*, crisis 'refers both to the observable *condition* and to the *judgement (judicium)* about the course of the illness. At such time, it will be determined whether the patient will live or die. This, in turn, required properly identifying the

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<sup>57</sup>Bourke, in Clarke 1985,177; see also Poliřenský 1968, 36, where we encounter: 'crisis as a culmination of increasingly sharp internal conflicts within the infrastructure of a given society, leading to a sudden disruption of existing economic, social and cultural ties, followed either by regression or advance in social development'.

<sup>58</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time* (New York, 2004), 358.

beginning of an illness in order to predict how regular its development will be.’<sup>59</sup> Obviously, the medical concept of illness itself presupposed ‘a state of health—however conceived—that is either to be restored again or which will, at a specified time, result in death.’<sup>60</sup> Importantly, with the adoption of the concept into Latin language, the concept also acquired a *transitional* nature; it was now vested with temporal significance also. Now it already indicates ‘that point in time in which a decision is due but has not yet been rendered.’<sup>61</sup>

Koselleck’s exposition of the three chief sources of the classical idea of crisis is very fruitful indeed to the study of our period, even though Koselleck himself does not seem to have been aware. As his exposition of the classical idea demonstrates, in all three contexts, crisis was *special time* of decision-making, one so crucial as to concern life and death; ‘at all times the concept [of crisis] is applied to life-deciding alternatives’.<sup>62</sup> But crisis was also a tract of time when time was essentially naked and the future was being made. At times of crises, future was *being made*, but *not yet made*.

Thus the future lay open, offering itself as a work of art to be made by human agents of history. Whatever identity that *time to come* would assume was, therefore, closely connected to human potential to actualise the moment and to turn it into something agreeable. At an ideal level, then, crisis was also a tract of time that invited action. Crisis indeed marked the dawning of the time of action in pursuit of the realisation of human *potential* that could reshape history; it was a time vested with highly *transformative* value.

Now, what of the fate of the concept and the meaning in early modernity? The concept of ‘crisis’ first entered French as a *medical* term in the fourteenth century and was present in English by 1543.<sup>63</sup> Yet, the word ‘crisis’ would not be applied to political affairs until the middle of the seventeenth century. This happened in 1627 when Sir Benjamin Rudyerd observed the existence of ‘the Chrysis of Parliaments; we shall know by this if Parliaments life or die’. Later still, already during the heated minutes of the Civil War, General William

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

Baillie wrote that his present ‘seems to be a new period and crise of the most great affairs’.<sup>64</sup> However, at this stage in his account, Koselleck observes that:

although the metaphor of the body or organism has been applied to the community since antiquity, it was not until the seventeenth century that the medical concept of crisis was applied to the ‘body politic’ or to its constituent parts.<sup>65</sup>

Koselleck seems to have been unaware of a particular way in which men in sixteenth century Florence conceived of their feeble present. In fact, both the metaphor of the body and an explicit articulation, generally, of its mortal character and, more particularly still, of its present illness was an inseparable part of the comprehension of and articulation of the affairs of the political present in Florence. Ill fared the land. In the final chapter of *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli spoke of the Italian problem in terms precisely of a body consumed and torn-apart by a metaphoric illness, or, historically speaking, a series of destabilising ‘illnesses’ that had ravaged the lands of Italy since 1494.

As Felix Gilbert has shown in a small, yet immensely important note, *virtù* denoted in the Renaissance medical theory ‘a force which gave vitality to a living being, and on whose presence the life and strength of the whole organism depended’.<sup>63</sup> Importantly, the contemporaries of Machiavelli at the Florentine *pratiche*<sup>66</sup> were both aware of such meaning and deployed it in the context of a political discussion. One such instance is the speech of Bernardo Rucellai where he stressed the need to reform the constitution and declared the present to be a witness of the ‘situation of a body which has lost *virtù*, and good doctors are most of all concerned with strengthening the *virtu*; their concern should be,

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<sup>64</sup> Sir B. Rudyard, *History*, coll., vol. 1 (1659) cited in Koselleck, 362; R, Baillie, *Letters*, vol. 2 (1841), cited in *ibid.* 363.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 362.

<sup>66</sup> *Pratiche* were meetings at the deliberative council of the Florentine government; this was the place where discussion was held in the sense in which it is being held in the parliaments of contemporary democracies; *signoria* did not discuss anything, it only made decisions by casting votes.

therefore, the organisation of an army'.<sup>67</sup> It is no coincidence that the truly *virtuoso* prince was portrayed as none other than a 'wise physician' in the very last chapter of Machiavelli's *Discourses*.

Whether or not the word 'crisis' was deployed, the exact same meaning that Koselleck rightly identified as pertaining to classical Greek thought and subsequently also present in seventeenth-century England was very much in place in the contemporary comprehension of temporality and politics in the Florence of the beginning of the sixteenth century. Thus, although it was articulated through the means of a different conceptual vocabulary, there was certainly both a sense and an articulation of crisis that was in perfect accord with the classical Greek idea exposed by Koselleck.

Let us, then, return to our working definition of crisis. I shall predominantly conceive the chief causes of crises to have been *ruptures* between the ways of the past and the present. Yet, I should like to stress that an important part of such rupture is, in fact, its *gravity*. One of the problems in historiography of crisis has been its inability to appreciate the difference between *chronotic* and *kairotic* modes of historic passage from one event to another. The due consideration of gravity of a particular circumstance in fact serves to disqualify certain events from the list of those pertaining to 'crisis' properly speaking. At a time when every other day was witness to an upheaval of some kind, contemporaries of early modern presents would not have comprehended of the more minor acts as crises, though we may think so. Not all occurrences that to us the contemporaries seem to have represented crises were crises to the contemporaries of the bygone present, who had expectations very different from ours.

Whatever particular nature a crisis might assume at the level of historical reality, the characterisation of a tract of time as one of crisis always already establishes a relation both with the present and the past. In early modern Europe, most frequently, such perception originated from the realisation that a change has occurred that is serious enough to alter the formed ways of behaviour—this is, in fact, Pocock's definition of 'tradition'<sup>68</sup>—and the formed

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<sup>67</sup> F. Gilbert, "On Machiavelli's Idea of Virtù", in *Renaissance News* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1951), 53-55.

<sup>68</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language & Time* (London, 1989), 233-4.



ways of conceptualising one's existence in time. The present is consequently seen as falling short of fulfilling the experiential and non-experiential expectations accumulated in the bygone times. Such a present is thus perceived as incomprehensible and illegible. It is novel and, therefore, seen as belonging to the realm of the unknown and the not-yet-experienced. It was within this novelty—that is in itself represented a form of rupture between the ways of the past and the reality of the present—that the *critical* nature of such times was most often seen to reside. It is no coincidence that John Donne in his *Anatomy of the World* lamentably noted how 'all coherence [had] gone'.

Politically, however, crises were more than just ruptures. As we have already observed concerning political and medical connotations of Greek thought, crisis was the time of dissent and dissolution of perfect condition of *stasis*—which had to find a reflection in forms of political organisation—and a time of illness, wherein the fate of the body was unclear, awaiting resolution of some kind — preferably, of course, a cure. Faced with a present that lay outside of experience, imagination was transported to the realm of *Fortuna*, to whose power the human ability to comprehend the present and act politically was subordinated. That the early modern intellectual preoccupations are marked by the pursuit of stability in literature and art,<sup>69</sup> and by the attempts to order and control by way of magic and 'witchcraft',<sup>70</sup> could in part be viewed as a psychological response to this realisation. Early modern political thought, too, like all other forms of intellectual expression was marked by the search for order and stability against the might of time. This it would eventually acquire in the person of 'this our artificial Man, the Leviathan'.<sup>71</sup>

In short, our conception of crisis shall be inseparably grounded on the crucial elements of what was also part of its historical conception: rupture between past and present; the failure of forms to institutionalise phenomena of the present and the failure of theory to account for the present; and the consequent search for *resolution*. Such conception of crisis seems to be sound not only because it is more comprehensive and historical than the hegemonic definition of crisis 'as a short tract of time that leads to structural changes', but also

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<sup>69</sup> See Benersmeyer 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Raab 1975, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II.17, p. 223.

because this is the way in which the contemporaries with whom we are concerned conceived of the ills of *their* present. Perhaps even more importantly, as we shall see below, such historical conception of crisis had a particular and highly charged temporal significance neglected in all scholarship to date. We shall, therefore, seek to reinstate its true meaning as part of historiography on early modern political thought. In order to do so, we must first expose the meaning of two distinct temporal categories available to and popularly known by the contemporaries. Before that, however, let us attend to the ills of the moment.

## **Chronos and Kairos**

In early modern Europe, there were two distinct categories of temporal perception: *chronotic* and *kairotic*. Indeed, apart from the *chronotic* mode of temporal perception, there was in early modern Europe also the *kairotic* mode of temporal perception. *Chronos* and *kairos* were different from one another and, perhaps more importantly, had different implications on human thought and action. Therefore, any consideration of time and political thought must be intimately aware of and alert to the existence of these two temporal categories in terms of which the present time was comprehended by the contemporaries. Now, while *chronos* represents the idea of quantitative time, *kairos* is an instance of the qualitative conception of time. While all history is necessarily part of a *chronotic* passage, only certain moments of it can qualify as properly *kairotic*, for *kairos* represents the ‘time of opportunity or ‘occasion’ come and gone which marks the significant moments of historical action’.<sup>72</sup>As I have already attempted to stress, what we witness at around the year 1500 is the intensification precisely of the *kairotic* mode of thought, which began to place more emphasis not on the *quantity* but on the *quality* of the times. As we shall see, the radical sense of novelty and urgency manifest in all presents of crises is a manifestation of this precisely.

The *kairotic* mode of thinking was, to be sure, a common and a popular mode of temporal perception. It was present not only in political thought, but also

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<sup>72</sup> Smith, “Time, Times”, 1.

represented a part of the common socio-cultural language of early modern citizens. It was in many ways also a powerful shaper of everyday life and an inseparable part of their routine comprehension of the world around them.<sup>73</sup> There was indeed an acute awareness both of *the right time* and an observation of its implications. As Luca Landucci wrote in his diary entry of 25 August 1512, upon decreeing that Our Lady of Santa Maria Impruneta should be brought to Florence, the parish priest Andrea Bondelmonte wrote the Signoria asking not to move the holy icon in such ‘sinister times’; instead, they wished the icon to arrive ‘at a quieter and more tranquil time, in order that we may be able to honour her more splendidly’.

Unlike the contemporaries of the early modern presents, historians have often not paid sufficient attention to the *kairotic* mode of temporal comprehension and its implications. In so doing, they have sometimes failed to appreciate separate layers of meaning. This is particularly unfortunate since a number of historians have in passing observed the intensification of what is indeed a *kairotic* mode of thought, though without naming and classifying what they were describing. From their works, we see the huge cultural and intellectual significance of *kairos*, which is never exposed any further. For instance, we read of the ‘*propitious hour* for appropriate treatment’,<sup>74</sup> hear of the instance ‘when the [commercial] *time is ripe*’,<sup>75</sup> as well as of ‘*the proper time* for the phlebotomy, for surgery, for making dresses, for tilling the soil, for undertaking journey and for other things very useful in this world’.<sup>76</sup>

The *kairotic* mode of comprehension had its roots in the Classical Greek thought where it was present in influential ways in the thought on rhetoric and education as well as on action and timing. Moreover, *kairotic* thought was powerfully present in Christian philosophy, as well as in astrology. In fact, the idea that ‘certain days are, for some occult reason, propitious for certain actions, and others inappropriate, is to be found among most pre-industrial peoples’.<sup>77</sup> Astrologically, early modern Europeans believed both in lucky and lucky days, as well as in climacteric days, which were ‘those period dates in a

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<sup>73</sup>73 Luca Landucci, *A Florentine diary from 1450 to 1516* (Arno Press, 1969), 3.

<sup>74</sup>74 Whitrow, *Time*, 121.

<sup>75</sup>75 Le Goff, *Time*, 40.

<sup>76</sup>76 C. Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture, 1300 – 1700* (New York, 1977), 42.

<sup>77</sup>77 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England* (London, 1971), 615.

man's life which were potential turning-points in his health and fortune', which immediately reminds us of the meanings of crisis discussed above.<sup>78</sup>

In physiological terms, climacteric days stand for 'a period of decrease of reproductive capacity in men and women', 'any critical period' or 'a year in which important changes in health, fortune, etc., are held by some theories to occur'. In naturalistic terms, climacteric is 'the period of maximum respiration in a fruit, during which it becomes fully ripened'.<sup>79</sup> Now, to this end it is very important that the early modern European conception of a state, whatever its form or nature, was organic. Much like individual persons, states, too, were seen as having organisms that were alive and susceptible to diseases. Such organic conception and the consequent naturalistic language in the characterisation of states and their fortunes is to be seen throughout the whole of our period of study. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli spoke of curing the state from the diseases threatening its life and observed how 'what physicians say about consumptive diseases' holds true also of states.<sup>80</sup> In the very same passage, he then praised the Romans for their excellent knowledge of timing the cures properly, which was vital to success for 'as time passes' maladies left initially unattended and undiagnosed become 'easy to diagnose but difficult to treat'.<sup>81</sup>

This was in harmony with the early modern medical understanding, according to which each treatment had a time of its own; if timing were correct, the outcome was most likely to be agreeable. It was due to such belief that those who could afford astrological services often employed an astrologer to choose a propitious time for surgical interventions or some other treatment. The organic conception of statehood, and the consequent medical language is present in Machiavelli's *Discourses* too. In the very last chapter of the work, Machiavelli observes that in every great 'City incidents arise every day which have need of a doctor, and according as they are more important, a wiser doctor must be found'.<sup>82</sup> Like Machiavelli, Francis Bacon, who had as we will see later in this work a very strong sense of various ages and times, conceived of statehood as a process evolving through several distinct phases of development and

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 616

<sup>79</sup> See 'Climacteric', Mariam Webster dictionary [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/climacteric>].

<sup>80</sup><sup>80</sup> *Prince*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> *Prince* 11.

<sup>82</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III. 49.

existence.<sup>83</sup> Although Hobbes' 'Artificiall Person' was by definition not organic, Hobbes made it clear that it had a moment of birth and, being a phenomenon with a beginning, and an anticipated moment of an end — death. Chapter 24 of Book III of *Leviathan* is in fact called "The nutrition and procreation of a commonwealth". What would to a contemporary reader seem to be a discussion of economic affairs is, in fact, far more — namely, an instance of the organic conception of statehood. In Chapter 28, Hobbes speaks of the Leviathan's 'diseases and the causes of his mortality', while in a following chapter he observes how 'among the infirmities of a commonwealth, therefore, I count in the first place those that arise from imperfect construction at the outset, resembling the congenital diseases of a natural body'.<sup>84</sup>

Although the organic conception of state was present both in the early years of the fifteenth century and in the middle years of the seventeenth century, this had various implications on the conception of time and politics, which we shall expose and distinguish in other chapters of this work. Suffice it here to observe that states were conceived as living beings and being such in need of proper care. In sixteenth-century Florence, the set of skills that one used to conduct affairs of the state, including averting threats and curing the polity of diseases, was called *virtù*, to which we shall return in great depths in the following chapter. However, *virtù* had another meaning, which had been largely neglected until Felix Gilbert uncovered that in the medical theory *virtù* denoted a 'force which gave vitality to a living being, and on whose presence the life and strength of the whole organism depended'. Machiavelli's contemporaries were well aware of this meaning of *virtù*. One of them, Bernardo Rucellai, while speaking in a public speech of the need to reform the constitution, had declared the present to be a witness of the 'situation of a body which has lost the *virtù*, and good doctors are most of all concerned with strengthening the *virtù*'.<sup>85</sup> We

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<sup>83</sup> He too conceived of the state as an organic entity: '...for as in man the ripeness of strength of the body and mind cometh much about an age, save that the strength of the body cometh somewhat the more early, so in states, arms and learning, whereof the one correspondeth to the body, the other to the soul of man, have a concurrence or near sequence in times...', *Advancemen of Learning*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II 29, p. 363.

<sup>85</sup> In his brief yet important note, Felix Gilbert noted that in the Renaissance medical theory, *virtù* denoted a 'force which gave vitality to a living being, and on whose presence the life and strength of the whole organism depended'. Machiavelli's contemporaries were well aware of this meaning of *virtu*. For example, Bernardo Rucellai had spoken of the need to reform the

shall see the full, and a very considerable, significance of this in the following chapter.

States, then, were far from being merely abstract entities of whatever form or nature. Instead, they were seen as having a physical life of their own in time. Therefore, they were subject to time much like individual persons were. They were trapped into the pattern of history like everything and everyone else and like everyone they, too, were subject to the capricious will of fortune. Apart from necessarily being part of the *chronotic* passage of time, states also had *climacteric* moments in their life manifest in the phases of growth and decay, ascent and descent, lucky and unlucky moments of their history. The political crises endured by states were the climacteric moments of their existence and the temporal category employed to make sense of them was not *chronos*, but *kairos*.

*Kairos* was indeed a truly powerful mode of comprehending the world and political society as extant in time. Although in different ways, all the major intellectual sources had a certain idea of *kairos* of which the contemporaries were well aware.<sup>86</sup> In fact, such was the importance of this temporal mode of thought that its ownership was hotly disputed. After all, *kairotic* days were not only politically influential, since their declaration enabled easy mobilisation of the crowds, but also economically profitable because of the high cost of astrological services, and the income derived from Church processions and increased charity. It should thus come as no surprise that the Church campaigned actively against the belief in a whole range of *climacteric* days, such as the ‘Egyptian’ days, while itself simultaneously endowing every date in the year with some symbolic significance’.<sup>87</sup>

Now, in classical Greek thought, *kairos* has a range of meanings. Firstly, it is the idea of *kairos* as “the right moment”. This is the broadest and the most accepted interpretation of *kairos* also advanced by E. C. White in *Kairomania*. White has observed that in classical understanding the two chief meanings of

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constitution and, in so doing, declared the present to be a witness of the ‘situation of a body which has lost the *virtù*, and good doctors are most of all concerned with strengthening the *virtu*; their concern should be, therefore, the organisation of an army’. See F. Gilbert, “On Machiavelli’s Idea of Virtù”, in *Renaissance News* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1951), 53-55.

<sup>86</sup> See P. J. Sipiora, S. Baumlin (eds.), *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis* (State University of New York Press, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, 617.

*kairos* were “the right moment”, or “the opportune” moment.<sup>88</sup> These, in fact, stemmed from two chief sources: archery and the art of weaving. In archery, *kairos* stood for ‘an opening, or “opportunity” or, more precisely, a long tunnel-like aperture through which the archer’s arrow has to pass’.<sup>89</sup> The second, and by far the most important, meaning identified by Smith is that of *kairos* as ‘a time of tension or conflict, a time of ‘crisis’ implying that the course of events poses a problem which calls for a decision *at that time*’.<sup>90</sup>

Like other ideas and concepts, *kairos* also acquires different meanings in the philosophies of different thinkers and its various contextual meanings are obviously different. However, the core of the meaning of *kairos* remains largely the same in different authors labouring in markedly different historical situations. Therefore, the various interpretations and usages of *kairos* in contemporary philosophy are in a position to inspire our reading of *kairos* that shall, however be historical in accordance with the nature of the proposed study. To this end, two contemporary philosophers, Richard Rorty and Giorgio Agamben stand out in particular.

Stressing the nature of *kairotic* time as one of radical contingency and action, Richard Rorty has observed in his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* that *kairotic* ruptures transport us ‘to the point where we no longer worship anything, where we treat nothing as a quasi-divinity’.<sup>91</sup> According to this reading too, emphasis falls entirely upon the potentiality of the *present moment*. Thirdly, *kairos* means a time when opportunity to accomplish some desirable future end—such as resolving the crisis—shows itself.<sup>92</sup> Needless to say, the last two meanings of *kairos* shall be of particular importance to our study.

Among contemporary philosophers, Giorgio Agamben has, in the footsteps of Walter Benjamin’s study of the Pauline messianism and the ‘Zetztzeit’ (‘the now time’) also taken an interest in what he has referred to as *kairology*.<sup>93</sup> Agamben has interpreted *kairos* as ‘a contracted and abridged *chronos*’ that I shall

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<sup>88</sup> E. C. White, *Kaironomia: On the Will-to-Invent* (Ithaca. 1987), 13.

<sup>89</sup> J. E. Smith, "Time, Times and the 'Right Time': 'Chronos' and 'Kairos'" Vol. 53, No. 1, *The Monist* (January, 1969), 13.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, “Time, Times”, 7.

<sup>91</sup> R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, 1989), 22.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, “Time, Times”, 6.

<sup>93</sup> G. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, esp. 69.

employ in my analysis, for certainly when one seizes *kairos*, one seizes *chronos*, but a particular qualitative segment of it that is indeed abridged and contracted time. In Agamben's thought too, the stress falls on the *moment*. Commenting of Agamben's neologism of *kairology*, Durantaye has observed that *kairos* is in Agamben's political philosophy 'a moment of truth: a moment of decisive intervention that interrupts a continuum and changes the course of history'.<sup>94</sup> The relationship that Agamben establishes between *kairos* and his own concept of "potentiality" is remarkably<sup>95</sup> similar to one established by Machiavelli between *Fortuna* (who is *chronos* and the mother of *kairos*) and *virtù* — the human agency of action and transformation. In fact, in both the philosophies of Machiavelli and Agamben the emphasis falls on exploiting the fullness of the moment, as one actualises human potential in time. The *kairotic* mode of thought, itself popular and broadly available, thus offered a distinct way of comprehending socio-cultural and political existence of individuals and states in time. *Chronos* always time as such, any time; *kairos* was not just any time, but *some* time, for *kairos* placed the importance on the quality of the time; a *kairotic* tract of time was always of some qualitative significance and thus stood out from the ordinary and mundane tracts of *chronotic* time. As we are about to see, this was of great importance to the comprehension of crises in early modern Europe.

## **Crisis of the Present Moment**

Now, the early modern intellectual crisis was above all else a *crisis of the present moment*. Indeed, as Europe grew intellectually and culturally increasingly disenchanted, particular emphasis fell on the preoccupation with the *present moment*. If for centuries time had acquired meaning from its relation to the eternal and unchanging, it now came to be seen as acquiring a *meaning* in relation to this-worldly present of incessant occurrences. Time itself became *present* in the present and instructed by its qualities. This is, in

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<sup>94</sup> L. de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 116.

<sup>95</sup> On Agamben's usage of "kairology" in his own philosophy, see A. Murray, J. White (eds), *The Agamben Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 2011), 64.



fact, the first way in which temporal perceptions of the sixteenth century are already *qualitative*, rather than *quantitative*. Here, in fact, we are already dealing with a *kairotic* context of thought, to which we shall return below in the following section. Of course, as historians, we should be aware of the danger of imposing any “grand scheme” on a canon of selected thinkers. As Pocock usefully warns us, any attempt to pre-establish a scheme to which authors may subsequently be assigned to is indeed an approach that risks betraying the very aims of intellectual history. With this in mind, I should like to stress that we are in fact justified to speak of such a thing as the *crisis of the present moment* as a mental phenomenon that can be discerned not only in a single author writing in response to a particular context, but throughout the writings of many early modern authors who were responding to different presents. It is indeed noteworthy that the *crisis of the present moment* united a very diverse range of authors writing at different times and in different parts of Europe. To note but a few, among them were Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Guicciardini, Justus Lipsius, Walter Raleigh, Michel Montaigne, Jean Bodin and John Donne. Of course, these men lived in different presents that were seen to be infected by different kinds of malaise. Nevertheless, they were all concerned with the nature of the present that they viewed as feeble and infected; many of them in fact also endured a personal crisis; they all sought to dissociate themselves from their presents; they all envisaged a better future in their works; and they all laboured in defiance of time.

The *crisis of the present moment* represented an acute dissatisfaction with the present that was perceived to have become illegible and infected. The world no longer made sense. As John Donne observed in *An Anatomy of the World*, ‘all coherence [had] gone’. The powerful re-emergence of Pyrrhonian scepticism represented a mature reflection on the present. William Hamlin has convincingly argued that scepticism in the widest sense was borne out the observation of diversity.<sup>96</sup> This was obviously a matter of the present. Remaining mindful of the past, present and future, it was precisely the confused state of the present that Francisco Sánchez chose to question in his dramatically entitled 1581 book – *That Nothing is Known*:

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<sup>96</sup> W.M. Hamlin, “On Continuities between Scepticism and Early Ethnography; Or, Montaigne’s providential Diversity”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 31 (2000), 366.

For who can state anything with certainty about all that was, is, or will be? Yesterday you said ... the entire earth was surrounded by the Ocean; and you divided it into three all-embracing parts, namely Asia, Africa, and Europe. But what are you to say today?<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the observation of diversity, the unresolved theological debates in Europe and the continuing emergence of new systems of Christian truth led to the revival of fundamental doubts as to whether anyone could gain metaphysical certitude.<sup>98</sup> The bitter religious divisions of the present found expression in Montaigne's most eminent exposition of scepticism, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, where he anxiously noted that 'there is nothing that abides and is always the same'.<sup>99</sup> As most critics now rightly recognise, the essay was a response to a concrete situation, that it had a vital link with its own epoch; at the same time, Montaigne's concern was to relate classical wisdom to the context of sixteenth-century France.<sup>100</sup>

One of the major effects of the *crisis* on the temporal vision was the increased intellectual preoccupation with the 'moment', the 'instant' as the themes of the frailty of the present and of the flux of time acquired prevalence. To this end, we are reminded how in Raleigh's writing, 'the hitherto reassuring cognitive individuation of past, present and future began to collapse as the readers were asked to attend to the transcendent plane of eternity within which the Prime Mover resides'.<sup>101</sup> Here, Raleigh's temporal perception was Augustinian; however, the latter himself was Aristotelian. Now, deconstructing the Platonic doctrine of time, Aristotle had distinguished between time and motion,<sup>102</sup> noting how a moving object can only be found in the present time, for with every progressive moment it is not where it *was* and is not yet where it *will be*. Similarly, Augustine noted that past no longer *is*, while the future *is not yet*.

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<sup>97</sup> Francisco Sanches, *That Nothing is Known*, ed. E. Limbrick, trans. D. F. S. Thomson (Cambridge, 1988), 220.

<sup>98</sup> C. G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, 2006), 198 and Hamlin, 'Skepticism', 366.

<sup>99</sup> Hendrick, "Montaigne, Lucretius and Skepticism", 144.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-3.

<sup>101</sup> Hiscock, 'Progress of Time', 93.

<sup>102</sup> M. Shapiro, *Hieroglyph of Time: The Petrarchan Sestina* (Minneapolis, 1980), 55; Mooij, *Time and Mind*, 24.

Thus, all that could ever be said to exist was the present moment.<sup>103</sup> For since the present itself is always subject to constant change and transition, the only thing that really can be said *to be*—apart from God who eternally *is*—is the ‘now’.

Montaigne, too, noted how he could only grasp a matter ‘as it is *now*, at this moment’, stressing the importance not of big temporal transitions—for instance, ‘from one age to another’—but of transitions from ‘minute to minute’. With the passage of moments, either he or the subject matter of discussion had changed, rendering the possession of any certitude impossible.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, Montaigne’s reason might be ‘seeking a real stability’ but it is disenchanted and baffled, being unable to ‘apprehend a single thing which subsists permanently’.<sup>105</sup> There’s an important transition at hand here. The rudimentary Machiavellian realisation that man is only partly, or not at all, able to affect time, becomes a certainty in the Europe of Montaigne. In his essays, man’s helplessness against the great forces of mutability is already a well-established and a recurrent theme.<sup>106</sup> Notably, Montaigne proceeds to discuss time precisely in its relation to the eternal that knows no change and therefore acquires particular appeal amid the ever-changing intellectual milieu:

For Time is a thing of movement, appearing like a shadow in the eternal flow and flux of matter, never remaining stable or permanent<sup>107</sup>

One of the consequences of the *crisis* had been an increasing dissension of the intellectuals from their respective present moments. It is noteworthy that even Augustine himself, faced with the challenge of discussing the origins of time, had desired an ephemeral abstention from the present, asking God to ‘grant me [with]in [moments] an interval for my meditations.’<sup>108</sup> Rather similarly, in 1571, Montaigne retired to his library in a self-imposed intellectual exile. There he began to converse with the authorities of the past on a range of issues of his

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<sup>103</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 250.

<sup>104</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. M. A. Screech (London, 1987), 907.

<sup>105</sup> Montaigne, *Essays*, 680.

<sup>106</sup> R. J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass; 1972), 208.

<sup>107</sup> Montaigne, *Essays*, 682.

<sup>108</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 246

present. In 1576, as he was working on the *Apology*, Montaigne had a medal struck with the Greek motto – *I abstain*.<sup>109</sup> It was precisely the abstention from the present that expressed the Montaignean *crisis of the moment*. In the solitude of his tower, experiencing what Richard Popkin has called ‘his own personal *crise pyrrhonienne*’,<sup>110</sup> Montaigne attempted to transcend his own present so as to obtain a degree of objectivity that would enable him to explain the confused and ever-changing present. Raleigh was also embroiled in a battle with the present. His personal time had been severely delimited by an eighteen-year imprisonment that preceded his execution. Facing the undefeatable instantaneity of the present, he proceeded to assess time as ‘the vast and devouring space of so many thousands of years’.<sup>111</sup> The *crisis of the present moment* was an attempt to dissociate oneself from and reject the infected *present moment* and to ascend to an extra-temporal platform from which to view all time panoramically so as to obtain a better possibility of comprehending the rapidly changing present. So powerful was the *crisis of the present moment* that it facilitated the emergence of a fresh approach to time. In response to the *crisis* early modern writers in fact altered their stance *towards* time.

The thought of Francis Bacon, as we have exposed it above, offers yet another excellent example of the *crisis of the present moment*. Now, in order fully to understand Bacon’s temporal vision, one has to deconstruct Bacon’s views precisely in the light of the *present moment*. As he wrote in *The Masculine Birth of Time*, the ‘present is like a seer with two faces, one looking towards the future, the other towards the past.’ At the centre of the present that is gazing in two opposing directions is the *present moment*–the *now*–which marks the end of the past and the beginning of the future. In Bacon’s writing, the *present moment* is vested with a critical importance for two important reasons. Not only will the actions undertaken in the *present moment* underpin the fate of humankind facing a choice between obtaining a ‘golden future’ and succumbing to the ‘transitory shadows’ of the past, but it is also this very

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<sup>109</sup> Michel de Montaigne, M. A. Screech, (ed.), *The Complete Essays* (London, 1993), Chronology (Unpaginated.)

<sup>110</sup> R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (University of California Press, 1979), 43.

<sup>111</sup> Raleigh, quoted in Mooij, *Time and Mind*, 129.

*present moment* which, for its positive characteristics, manifests the possibility of progress. Bacon does not fully reject the past; in fact, he believes that up to a certain *moment* in the *present*, one should study ancient authorities, but do so with the aim avoiding ‘absolute resignation or perpetual captivity’ to the vain and fallacious philosophies of the old age.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, Bacon calls for a break not from the past but from the influence of the past that manifests itself in the *present moment*.

### **Crisis as Kairos**

Throughout both the Italian and English political crises, in the medical context of discussion so prevalent during both presents, crises were perceived at once as *objective conditions of illness* and as *critical times* in the history of the body politic. Crisis was, then, totality of such time when the objective condition of illness was known, but medicine had not yet been rendered, when clear political resolution was still wanting.

Crisis acquired importance in their relation to history in two profound ways. Firstly, in its relation to history and experience, crisis was a tract of time out of joint, for crises lay outside the realm of experience, which encapsulated history, thus rendering inoperative history and convention alike. Crises were, therefore, exceptional tracts of time as ruptures from the normality of predictable and neutral time that is *chronos*. Therefore, crises were ruptures from history itself. Secondly, as we have observed, the very idea of illness presupposed an idea also of a condition of health, which was the ideal that was to be pursued by ‘wise physicians’ of Italy and the ‘skilful surgeons’ of England. Therefore, an inseparable characteristic of crisis was always its being a time of *transformative* value, a revolutionary time of urgent and/or radical action. Thus implicit in the very idea of crisis was the idea also of refashioning the present—be this the Machiavellian taming of *Fortuna*, the Baconian taming of nature or the Hobbesian taming of human agency itself—and in so doing also that of remaking history.

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<sup>112</sup> Bacon, *Birth of Time*, 65.

That there is a remarkable similarity between the historical comprehensions and articulations of crisis and the *kairotic* mode of thought is beyond any doubt.<sup>113</sup> The notion that the *moment*<sup>114</sup> is ill and out of joint can be seen throughout the whole of our period of study, as well as in other periods of history. In fact, the early sixteenth-century and the late seventeenth-century language of crises are remarkably similar. As we shall see in the following chapter, Machiavelli and Guicciardini characterised their presents as ‘stormy’,<sup>115</sup> ‘oppressed...lacerated.... without order or stability, despoiled, lacerated, overrun, in short, utterly devastated’.<sup>116</sup> The present indeed lay out of experience; such had been the might of capricious *Fortuna* that it had once again rendered all things unstable and inexplicable. Remarkably similar to this was the way in which humans of the middle years of the seventeenth century, as England found itself in a turmoil, characterised their present times. Their present too was seen as ‘dislocated ... out of joint’.<sup>117</sup> As Cressy notes, a common theme at this time was ‘confusion, bewilderment and uncertainty. Correspondents wrote of being lost in a wood or a labyrinth, disordered, adrift, bereft’.<sup>118</sup> In the midst of such confusion, an inseparable part of the comprehension and articulation of the crisis of the present became the deployment of a broad range of medical and meteorological imagery. It is no less important that at this very time, men quoted none other than Hippocrates, whose medical concept of crisis we have already mentioned above. special tract of time. *Kairos* was unique and thus not in a position to be unmasked by experience. So too was crisis, being the Arendtian ‘time in between’, a gap between the past and the future.<sup>119</sup> *Kairos* represented a point in time where experience had collapsed and taken with it the might of precedent. Crisis, too,

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<sup>113</sup> It is indeed remarkable to witness that the rich range of quotations about the meaning of crisis throughout various centuries cited by Koselleck represents a collection of statements in the perfectly *kairotic* mode of thought. In fact, it is plausible that Koselleck was himself aware of the *kairotic* mode of thought implicit in such usages of ‘crises’, even if he never wrote about it.

<sup>114</sup> Needless to say, a historical moment.

<sup>115</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 68.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. In an earlier discussion, Machiavelli had already noted that ‘Italy has been overrun by Charles, plundered by Louis, ravaged by Ferdinand and treated with contempt by the Swiss’, *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>117</sup> Sir John Wry, cited in D. Cressy, *England on Edge: crisis and revolution, 1640-1642* (Oxford, 2007), 32.

<sup>118</sup> D. Cressy, *England on Edge* (Oxford, 2009), 30.

<sup>119</sup> H. Arendt, *Between past and future; eight exercises in political thought* (New York, 1968).

lay between, on the one hand, the things of the past themselves known, named, categorised and comprehended and, on the other hand, those of the future not yet into being. Crisis lay between what Koselleck has in *Futures Past* called ‘the space of experience’ and ‘the horizon of expectation’.<sup>120</sup> We are here also reminded of Augustine’s problematic definition of time as nothing but the present moment constantly in the midst of that which *had already been and was no longer* and that which *had not yet come into existence*. The crisis of the present moment endured by Europe in the most turbulent decades of its history was indeed the *kairotic* Augustinian crisis. Moreover, like *kairos*, crisis too was a moment of judgement that would decide the fate of the polity or the human being. The emphasis indeed fell on the *present moment* in history and its qualitative nature, mostly negative; however, precisely within this moment of the present resided also the material seen as potentially propitious for positive transformation of the order of events. Indeed, in early modern Europe, crises were viewed as *kairotic* in almost every sense.

By virtue precisely of being viewed as *kairotic*, crises were thus seen to lie outside of *chronological time* and, accordingly, outside of history also. *Kairos* was seen as a temporal opening of utmost significance, since it disrupted the monotony of *chronos* and challenged the very course of history. Moreover, being a temporal opening—and thus a form of discontinuity—it manifested the possibility of reshaping the present and therefore also of making history. Thus, if a crisis were to be viewed as operating in the context of *kairos*, it would have also been viewed by virtue of its very identity as opportunities for reshaping the present by way of innovation, theoretical or practical, and making history in so doing.

## **The Quest for the Future**

In our examination of what we have referred to as the *crisis of the present moment*, we have seen how various crises evinced the same kinds of responses in the thought authors inhabiting different historical presents. This, to be sure,

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<sup>120</sup> R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the semantics of historical time* (New York, 2004). See especially, “Space of Experience” and “Horizon of Expectation”: Two Historical Categories, 255.

was by no means a sole exception. Upon examination, it becomes evident that not only those crises that occurred in a single century but crises *in general* tend to evince similar human responses. Similarity can often be detected in subsequent political thought as well that follows a reflection on crises. That there are profound similarities between the crises of the twelfth century and that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, between the English, American and French revolutionary presents and political thought is not a coincidence. The similarities themselves take different forms, yet inherent in them is a very similar human preoccupation with time and politics. Since a crisis is always an illness of the present, that reminds us of the Arendtian ‘time in between’—that seeks some other temporal and in the cases of utopian thought also spatial — platform to occupy, the consequent move to dissociate oneself from the present is implicit in any comprehension of crisis. We have seen several examples of this above and plenty more abound. Now, dissociation from the present led thinkers in different directions and to different times; Bacon sought the grand restoration of pre-lapsarian time, Machiavelli tried to restore the civic life of the early Roman republican period, while the English radicals often made recourse to the perfect and pure condition of justice in the Biblical original time (*illo tempore*).

In short, the most profound effect of crisis on thought upon time and political existence in time was the willingness to dissociate oneself from time and devote oneself to some other time entirely. During crises, men indeed engaged in similar activities. That the writing of universalist histories intensified in the twelfth century—and that such writing asserted a claim to knowing and to be accounting for *all time*—much as it happened in our period of study is not a coincidence either. Nor is it a coincidence that part of the universalist approach of both periods was the flowering of mysticism and a belief in the supernatural and the other-worldly. In the twelfth century, much as in the late fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries witnessed a rise of these kinds of beliefs and pursuits. As is almost always the case, men in crisis made a greater recourse than ever precisely to God and to supernatural forces at large. In his *History of the City of Florence* Jacopo Nardi observed this brilliantly, while



commenting on his ‘troublesome’ present that had been a seat of ‘adverse times’:

Impending dangers and the conditions of those troublesome times (*condizioni de’ travagliosi tempi*) had greatly disposed men’s souls toward believing in prophecies. In adverse times (*tempi avversi*), men often and fervently return to God although they rarely do it in happy ones<sup>121</sup>

The rise and huge popularity of astrology, as well as the dominance of the various forms of apocalyptic and millenarian thought in our presents of crises was no accidental occurrence, as we shall see numerous times throughout this study. Needless to say, there was nothing new in the idea of apocalypse itself that had been preached in the Old Testament, then by Jesus Christ and then by his disciples as well as fathers of the Church and the Christian Churches themselves. However, amid the changes in historical reality itself, these same ideas came to have a different influence in their respective presents.

With the appearance of vocal critics of the Roman Catholic Church, most prominently John Wycliffe (c. 1320–1384) and Jan Hus (1369–1415), a whole host of self-pronounced prophets sprang up throughout much of Europe.<sup>122</sup> These men usually declared themselves as divinely inspired and terrified fellow citizens with the idea of an imminent end of time. The more radical and troubling the occurrences of the present, the greater force and vitality the apocalyptic messages of various kinds acquired. Thus, not surprisingly, in what was a succession of presents shattered by crises,<sup>123</sup> the apocalypse, itself the very *telos* of Christian philosophy, came to represent ‘an ever-present form of futurity’ in the early modern period. And a political force millenarianism truly was. As Norman Cohn has observed in his classic *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, ‘all that was required in order to turn such a [millenarian prophecy] into revolutionary propaganda of the most explosive kind was to

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<sup>121</sup> Jacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze*, 25.

<sup>122</sup> See Norman Cohn, *The pursuit of the millennium: revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1970).

<sup>123</sup> A. Wade Razzi, “In Pursuit of the Millenia: Robert Crowley’s Changing Concept of Apocalypticism”, in A. Brady, E. Butterworth, *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2010), 19.

bring the day of judgement nearer — to show it not as happening in some remote indefinite future but as already at hand'.<sup>124</sup>

This the preachers of the end of time certainly did. From Florence of the 1490s, the word of the end of time was vehemently preached by a Ferrarese monk and the *de-facto* ruler of the Florentine republic Savonarola, whose idea on the 'shortness of time' opens the following chapter. However, even after Savonarola's downfall and the passing of the millennium, not much had changed in the business of bringing the end of time nearer. In 1499, a year after Savonarola was executed, two German stargazers, Johanness Stoeffler and Jacob Pflaum forewarned of a planetary conjunction that would, as the popularised version would soon have, result in a second deluge that would wash away sinful man (*Sintflut*). This debate, originally began by two German stargazers, eventually engaged fifty-six authors—Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Netherlanders and Italians—and saw 133 works published on the very issue of the imminent doom of 1524. By the end of 1517, the prediction had become popular knowledge of all social levels, in fact, so popular that Martin Luther felt obliged to address the issue in 1522 in the Advent sermon at Wittenberg.<sup>125</sup> Savonarola had died, but his message had not at all. In the aftermath of Savonarola's death, the fear of an imminent doom not only remained, but was very powerful. Shortly after the debate regarding the doom of 1524, Europe would be engulfed by another debate this time concerning the Wonder Year of 1588. The images of time and its nearing end were deeply impressed in the imagination of citizens. The apocalyptic and millenarian writings would retain their full and powerful force until 1666, the year of 'the last major outburst of prophecies'.<sup>126</sup>

The declaration of end of time in itself was a form of power and control. Whoever claimed the end of time exercised a certain power over at least some people; and those who did it well, exercised their influence over multitudes, as did Savonarola and Luther. The declaration of the coming end of time granted one very considerable influence indeed, in part because an inseparable part of such a declaration, itself substantiated by laying a parallel claim to the

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<sup>124</sup> N. Cohn, *Pursuit*, 202.

<sup>125</sup> C. Scott Dixon, "Popular Astrology and Lutheran Propaganda in Reformation Germany", *History* 84 (1999), 403.

<sup>126</sup> T. Raab, *The struggle for stability in early modern Europe* (Oxford, 1975), 52.

possession of holy visions, was also the duty to declare ideal action in the *time that remains* — that is, to devise the politics of spending the remaining time properly in preparation for the end. This, to be sure, was one of the most important ways during our period of study in which time came to be used most politically.

This, however, was by no means the only means of order and control. As Theodor Raab has argued, all the major themes and manifestations of the last two-thirds of the sixteenth century and the first third of the seventeenth were either ‘a means of escape from or ... an acceptance of confusion [and] could also be regarded as desperate attempts to find *a new order* amidst disintegration’.<sup>127</sup> Various forms of mysticism and belief in the supernatural, Raab believes, were precisely ‘a search of control’.<sup>128</sup> Mysticism, millenarianism and astrology offered at once means of escape from the present as well as instruments of *control* and *order*. If and to what degree they accomplished this is beyond our interest; what is relevant is that they existed and embodied the fears and aspirations of the contemporaries. Astrology too was, in fact, a booming field precisely because it presented itself as an art of foretelling time, thus granting humans an opportunity to time things propitiously, according to the stars and planets. Astrology, aptly characterised as an early form of insurance by Anthony Grafton,<sup>129</sup> was a form of finding harmony in and with time with which one was increasingly at odds in our presents of history. Astrology, a source of the future in the present was thus a source also of a certain degree of much wanted certainty. Therein precisely lay its popularity in times of utmost confusion and disorder.

The cultural anxieties and aspirations of the time that found a powerful expression in flights from the reality of the present by way of giving way to various forms of mysticism and speculation found a parallel expression in political thought. There, too, the chief problem was one of the instability of the present and the consequent vagueness of the future. When Montaigne wrote in the second half of the sixteenth century that ‘the worst thing I find in our states is instability’, he was speaking for generations of thinkers before and after

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>129</sup> Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos*, 6.

him.<sup>130</sup> The crisis of the present moment was *kairotic*, it was at the phenomena of the present—themselves constituting a crisis—lay outside the realm of experience. In this context, political thought was faced with the problem of thought and action. The problem of action was particularly distressing for time posed the need at once to act in defiance of natural time (and generate some other time, such as political time), while at the same time begging the questions of *how* (in what manner, and with what measure) to act towards some pre-selected ideal end, and *when* to act (the right moment and its consequences).

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<sup>130</sup> Montaigne, *Essays*, 734.

## Chapter II

### The Grand Italian Battle

#### The Dinner Party at Soderini's

'The plan of the French Revolution was written large in the books of Machiavelli'<sup>131</sup>

Maximilien Robespierre

In 1502, Piero Soderini was elected *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, the head of the Florentine Republic. The choice of Soderini was the result of a longer quest for political stability in Florence that had recently witnessed a number of transformations and upheavals. Amid the invasion of the French troops in 1494, the Medici regime, then ruled by Piero Medici, was ousted from Florence and the republic restored. For almost five years, the republic was then governed *de jure* by republican institutions. However, *de facto* the city was governed by one man, the Ferrarese friar Girolamo Savonarola. In 1498, the friar himself became subject to a papal interdict that resulted in his burning on the Piazza della Signoria at the heart of Florence before the eyes of all, including the then young Niccolò Machiavelli, who would enter his first public office in five days after Savonarola's execution. After Savonarola's demise republican governance ensued in Florence, although the republican regime itself proved to be subject to constant factional rivalries and turmoil. The republican years were not deemed to be happy at all.

The election of Soderini, already for long a member of the ruling elite of the city and an ambassador to France, to the chief republican position aimed to endow the Florentine republican order threatened with high factional strife with a greater stability. The occasion of Soderini's election was

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<sup>131</sup> J. Sanbonmatsu, *The Postmodern Prince: Critical Theory, Left Strategy, And The Making Of A New Political Subject* (New York, 2004), 163.

observed with a grand celebration at which all of the Florentine *grandi*, including Soderini's fiercest enemy Bernardo Rucellai, were duly invited. There was in Florence indeed a sense of new political time, attended by new hopes and aspirations. Argentina, the *gonfaloniere's* wife, had an imprisoned poet commissioned to write a poem joyfully celebrating Soderini's election. The poem sang praise to the guests comparing them to the great heroes of the time past. Notably, the poem also designated Soderini's success as an astrological instance of sheer good fortune. Florence and Soderini, the poem read, were chosen by Jupiter to usher in a new time of 'a golden age of justice'.<sup>132</sup>

However, already on that evening, the Florentines knew something else about Soderini that marked him out from the previous Florentine *gonfalonieri*. This trait distinguished Soderini before time itself. For Piero Soderini was named *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* not for a period of two months alone, as the Florentine custom and tradition had it, but for lifetime. In reality, Soderini would only hold the position for another ten years, until the downfall of the Florentine Republic in 1512 when the Spanish army invaded and the Medici returned. Be that as it may, in 1502, the Florentine Republic nevertheless moved to make an appointment to the highest republican position that was not temporary, but for all time during which the appointee would physically remain alive. Moreover, a noteworthy alteration was made to the customary rights of the *Gonfaloniere*. Unlike his predecessors, Soderini was granted the right to propose laws *whenever* he wished. Thus, the renewed republican order was endowed by two new legislative qualities, both of which concerned time. These two innovations altered the temporal framework of republican political and institutional order – and indeed the way in which the republic was seen to be conceptualizing itself in historical time. Somewhat unexpectedly, J. G. A. Pocock's otherwise excellent examination of the temporal thought of Florentine republicanism does not pay due attention to these two legislative

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<sup>132</sup> H. C. Butters, *Governors and government in early sixteenth-century Florence, 1502-1519* (Oxford, 1985), 11-15.

initiatives.<sup>133</sup> But these changes were important. Through the appointment of Piero Soderini, the Florentines made a move in defiance of time. Given the nature of the period, after the 1494 invasion and the consequent chaos and instability that characterised the peninsula, it may be legitimately argued that these two innovations represented conscious political decisions that arose in response both to a very specific context and as a response to the malice of time. To this end, too, we might be reminded of the fact that Pocock was not always contextualist, instead at times preferring to follow his own schematic reading of history while engaged in the pursuit of tracking a longer-term thematic trajectory. Concerning *The Prince*, for instance, Pocock has similarly argued that it was ‘inspired by a specific situation, but not directed at it’,<sup>134</sup> while there is much proof to suggest otherwise.<sup>135</sup> Such a conception of time, as one’s enemy, had its very specific origins and was rooted in the social and historical reality of the times to which we are about to attend in greater depths. In order to appreciate such broader socio-cultural sources of temporal perception, first we ought to attend to death in Florence.

### **Death in Florence: ‘That Time is Short’**

On the 23rd of May 1498, Florence witnessed a spectacular death. Like many other days, on this day the republic’s main *piazza* was the stage of an execution by burning. However, this time, the man about to be burnt was the very mastermind of many of the preceding executions. The victim was Friar Girolamo Savonarola, the *de facto* ruler of the republic. Savonarola’s burning was an event of great significance, and not only in the particularity of its own immediate present. This day would leave a deep mark upon the thought of young Machiavelli and indeed affect his observations about politics and time.

The grand death in Florence had an ironic symbolism in more than one sense. Not only did it attest to the miserable downfall of a man who had

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<sup>133</sup> See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 156-182. Pocock does, however, provide an elegant summary of Guicciardini’s argument in favour of lifelong appointment to *gonfalonierate*. See *Ibid*, 131-132.

<sup>134</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 160.

<sup>135</sup> See below “Florence in Time – ‘Stormy Presents and Good men in Crisis’”, p. 57.

himself risen to heights of power by prophesying doom, but it was also the death of a preacher of death and apocalypse. Savonarola's death was one among very many in the last centuries. Death was indeed a regnant force in Florence on the eve of the sixteenth century. Not surprisingly, then, death was also the chief influence upon the popular temporal perceptions of the ordinary Florentines. Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Florence had been the stage of a series of grave and recurrent epidemics. The most severe were epidemics had occurred in 1430, 1437-38, 1449-40, 1478-79 and 1527-31, causing massive fatality. During the last period of epidemic alone, no less than one quarter of Florentines are estimated to have died.<sup>136</sup> Accordingly, the dominant subjective experience known to all Florentines about time ought to have been that it was very likely to end anytime soon.

It is precisely at this time that in the popular and cultural expression of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we observe the intensification of preoccupations with the fleeting nature of time that is now, more than ever, perceived as a devourer of its own children. In a famous essay on 'Father Time', Ernst Panofsky uncovered how *Chronos* the time and *Kronos* the mythical figure are represented as identical.<sup>137</sup> Like *Kronos* had been the devourer of his own children, so too was seen to be time, as Panofsky rightly observes. However, what Panofsky has failed to observe is that the generation of such an idea of time had a very concrete foundation in the social and political reality of the times. The notion that time flew violently and devoured its own children had its source not only in recurrent epidemics, but also in the radical political mutations and instability, which we shall concern below. To this end, Alberto Tenneti has rightly argued that the most important arguments about death emerged precisely 'in a phase that appeared unusually dramatic, tense and uncertain to those who lived it, the one precisely in which the political balance of the peninsula was upset – in particular that of Florence – in the more or less fifty years elapsing

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<sup>136</sup> A. S. Morrison, J. Kirshner, and A. Molho, "Epidemics in Renaissance Florence", *American Journal of Public Health* 5 (May 1985), 528–535.

<sup>137</sup> E. Panofsky, "Father Time" in *Studies in Iconology: humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance* (New York, 1962), 29.



between 1490 and 1540'.<sup>138</sup> To be sure, contemporaries were well aware of the nature of the times too. It was as he commented on such historical reality that in his *History of the City of Florence* Jacopo Nardi designated his present as 'troublesome' and a seat of 'adverse times':

Impending dangers and the conditions of those troublesome times (*condizioni de' travagliosi tempi*) had greatly disposed men's souls toward believing in prophecies. In adverse times (*tempi avversi*), men often and fervently return to God although they rarely do it in happy ones<sup>139</sup>

Nor is it surprising that a range of temporal metaphors and adages, that had themselves already been extant for centuries, came to a new kind of preeminence at this time of history. Dominant among them were the adages: *Tempus fugit* (Lat. 'Time flies') and *Tempus edax rerum* (Lat. 'Time, that devours all things'). As it might be expected, such temporal themes are to be seen most often in texts concerning families and love-life. In the love-poetry of the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the unkind and devouring nature of time features mostly by way of juxtaposition between the cruel nature of time and the extolling of the virtues of affectionate bonds that ought to withstand the destroyer time. With a passionate fury, Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494) has the following to exclaim on the matter:

Tell her, my flute, how slender beauty  
Flies with the years and both together:  
Tell her how time itself  
destroys us, the lost years never renewing for us:  
Say she must use her loveliness, they don't last, the  
violets, roses. Hear, woods, my words of  
sweetness.<sup>140</sup>

In yet another love-poem of the period, Lorenzo de Medici praises Bacchus and Ariadne for 'burning for each other'. They are praiseworthy, 'Since

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<sup>138</sup> A. Tenenti, "Death in History: The Function and Meaning of Death in Florentine Historiography of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", in M. Tetel and R. G. Witt, R. Goffen (eds.) *Life and Death in Renaissance Florence* (Durham, 1989), 1.

<sup>139</sup> Jacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze*, quoted in *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Angelo Poliziano, "Hear, woods, my words of sweetness".

[[http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Italianpoetry.htm#anchor\\_Toc81635268](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Italianpoetry.htm#anchor_Toc81635268)]. Last accessed: 15 April 2015.

deceiving time must flee' (*perché 'l tempo fugge e inganna*) and 'Nothing's sure about tomorrow' (*di doman non c'è certezza*).<sup>141</sup> That nothing was sure about tomorrow, itself an inseparable part of Christian teaching on the shortness of time, was sounded by Lorenzo no less than at the end of each verse of the poem.<sup>142</sup>

Such anxiety about shortness of time naturally posed corresponding problems of continuity, itself expressed by way of reflection on the length of life, the importance of spending time well, fame as well as family. Since the intellectual culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had a strong ideal conception of a 'good life', that is also a life well spent, the observers felt the problem of the shortness of time, and their own inevitable finitude, particularly sensitively. To this effect, Quinones has aptly argued that if the more important temporal themes of *quattrocento* had been *continuity* and *eternity*, in the sixteenth century there was a shift to the preoccupation with instantaneity and the momentous character of existence.<sup>143</sup> No doubt the best exemplification of such temporal torment can be seen in Petrarch's *trionfi*. In Petrarch's *Triumph of Time (Triumphus Temporis)*, time emerges as triumphant over everything else after a series of developments. Time indeed triumphs over Fame, who had triumphed over Death, who in turn had triumphed over Laura, who had triumphed over love. Time has defeated everything and everyone; thus we read in Petrarch's sonnet 272:

La vite fugge, e non s'arresta una ora  
e la morte vien dietro a gran giornate,  
e le cose presenti e le passate  
mi danno guerra, e le future ancóra;  
(Life runs away and never rests a moment  
and death runs after it with mighty stride,  
and present things and things back from the past  
and from the future, too, wage war on me.)<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Lorenzo de' Medici, 'Trionfo di Bacco e Arianna', 1490.

<sup>142</sup> This, too, had a powerful Biblical precedent: 'Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away' (James, 4:14)

<sup>143</sup> Skinner *Foundations*, Vol 1., 176. This, too, had a powerful Biblical precedent: 'Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away' (James, 4:14).

<sup>144</sup> Petrarch, *Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Works*, trans. Mark Musa, 65.

This, to be sure, was by no means an Italian obsession. In a poem of 1523, at a time of death and ceaseless mutability, the English poet Stephen Hawes had the protagonist exclaim how ‘when I thought longest to endure, Deth with his darte arest me suddenly’. Nothing was his ‘world, but a blast of wynde!’.<sup>145</sup> We shall later in this work see a similar, thought in many regards a novel preoccupation with mortality as the fatal culmination of one’s journey across the fleeting and devouring time towards the end of the sixteenth century. This was among the chief preoccupations in the thought of Shakespeare, Montaigne — himself mourning the death of a most intimate friend, Étienne de La Boetie — as well as in the thought of Justus Lipsius.

A very similar approach to the fleeting nature of time is to be seen in Florence decades before Hawes’ poem would see its English daylight. There a Florentine dramatist writes of the sudden death of Castruccio Castraccani, a protagonist of his play. Interestingly, the fates of the English and Italian protagonists are remarkably similar. Death strikes them when they should have been enjoying the fruits of their hard and successful labour. In a rather more famous work of his, *The Prince*, the same author also speaks of the sudden death of Cesare Borgia, whom he finds to have been exemplary in all regards but one — being favoured by *Fortuna*. However, as Machiavelli and his intellectual predecessors and descendants are well aware, there is hardly anything one can do in this regard. It was, to be sure, this very realisation that would make Shakespeare write how ‘All the world’s a stage And all the men and women merely players’.<sup>146</sup> Death, Alberto Tenenti rightly observes, was indeed seen as ‘a blow of supernatural to the order of events’.<sup>147</sup> However, as we shall see, death was by no means the sole agent of *Fortuna*. There were other forms as well, through which the supernatural shaped the order of events and thus directed the flow of time. Not all such manifestations of the supernatural were exclusively negative. In fact, some of them, if properly exploited, promised a positive outcome, as we shall see later in this chapter.

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<sup>145</sup> Stephen Hawes, ‘The Passetyime of Pleasure’, 1523. [<http://www.bartleby.com/361/44.html>]. Last accessed: 15 April 2015.

<sup>146</sup> William Shakespeare, ‘As you like it’, Act 2, Scene 5 in W. Shakespeare, A. H. Bullen and J. Gilbert (eds.) *The Complete Works* (London, 2017), 60.

<sup>147</sup> A. Tenenti, “Death in History”, 3.

In the meantime, suffice it here to observe that, not surprisingly, continuity was a dominant theme in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. This was manifest not only in poetry, but also in paintings and, most certainly, also in the political thought of the time. However, in the particularity of the Florentine republican context in the last years of the fifteenth century, there was another current of thought on time and, in particular, on its drastic shortness. This, to be sure, was a popular current. If the political assumptions and fears, hopes and calculations—and the corresponding political thought in general—were largely the preserve of educated elites, this current came verbally and, in more than one sense, rather loudly from the pulpit of the Santa Maria Novella for the attention not just of the elites, but also the majority of ordinary Florentines. According to Eisenbichler estimation, Savonarola preached to the congregations of as many as twenty thousand people.<sup>148</sup> It was from this pulpit that Savonarola terrified Florentines with the shortness of time in his powerful and popular preachings. This is the state in which the minds of many Florentines, already scared by death and constant political mutations, are to be found at the opening of our period — fearing death, awaiting the end of time that was short.

Savonarola regularly called for a return to the principles of Primitive Christianity. This, in its own way, was markedly similar to a pattern of thought in political thought, which was *ridurre ai principii* (Lat. ‘a return/reduction to the first principles’) that was called for in the political thought of the period. Christianity, perceived by Savonarola to be in a state of moral crisis, was to be regenerated and renewed, for time was short and the mission considerable. Political thought, too, was in need of a temporal renewal, for the political phenomena of the present were no longer seen as falling in the realm of political theory. Thus, interestingly, both Christianity and political thought in crisis sought a renewal by way of reduction to the first principles. As often as Savonarola had called for moral and spiritual purification in anticipation of the end, one of his sermons stands out in particular. This was a sermon delivered on All Soul’s Day, 2 November 1496.

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<sup>148</sup> See K. Eisenbichler, "Introduction" to *Girolamo Savonarola, A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works* (Toronto 2003), 88.

On that day, Savonarola, then already in his second year of *de facto* leadership of the Florentine Republic, preached on ‘The Art of Dying Well’.

Savonarola’s sermon, in its situation as a text to history, must have been a rather powerful one, for that sermon brought together the historically determined Florentine popular fears about death as well as the Christian apocalyptic announcement of the ‘shortness of time’. Not only was the sermon heard by a typically large crowd, but it was also printed three times in Savonarola’s own lifetime. The sermon is important to our purposes in two particular ways. Firstly, it was devoted to the anticipation of the end of time, thus creating a powerful temporal perception that captivated the minds of many and fashioned the setting in which the Florentine republic saw itself as existing. This ought to have been all the more powerful if we are to remember, in the footsteps of Pocock, that Florentine republican theory had already manifested its own temporal anxiety that had to do with republican existentialism. This source of anxiety now came in a perfect, though no doubt terrifying, harmony with a sermon legitimated from the depths of Christian teaching. Secondly, the sermon specified the ways in which to live the *remaining time*. This, in itself, was at once a classical and a Biblical preoccupation.<sup>149</sup> Particularly striking, to this end, was the Pauline messianic calling: ‘But this I say, brethren, the time is short’.<sup>150</sup> Paul, like a range of classical authors, in the very same passage prescribes ideal practice in ‘the rest [of the time] that *remains*’. Christians are called to attend to the messianic present at hand, the time fulfilled for action and behave accordingly, that is, then, spend time accordingly. In the same tradition, a range of secular authors, too, had spoken of the ideal ways of spending the remaining time, which was always seen to be in deficit. The humanists, perhaps most notably Alberti in his *On Family*, in the footsteps of their classical predecessors spoke much about the proper ways of spending time. He warned his children that there were three things to care

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<sup>149</sup> The Bible often spoke of the shortness of time: ‘Remember what my span of life is; For what vanity You have created all the sons of men!’ (Psalms, 89:47); ‘For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he only a short time’ (Revelation, 12:12); ‘And he said to me, These words are faithful and true; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place’ (Revelation, 22:6).

<sup>150</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

about, one of them being time. Petrarch observed how he wished he had not wasted a single day of his life, which he knew he had. Thus, Savonarola's specification of how one should spend time was in itself a very common preoccupation and a fairly common cultural act.

The foundation upon which Savonarola's message of All Souls' Day was constructed was precisely that time is short. This was a message he had already sounded on several previous occasions.<sup>151</sup> The end of time was imminent; therefore, 'it is necessary to think always about making a good end, and this is to think always about death'.<sup>152</sup> In fact, Savonarola went so far as to 'give everyone a prescription for dying well', including the 'healthy, who ought to think that at any hour they may grow sick and die', not to mention those who have already begun to sicken and those on their deathbeds. For his declared intention was to speak of death in such a way that it will be strongly impressed in your brains.<sup>153</sup> Underlying Savonarola's abstract declarations on death was the Pauline apocalyptic message not only about the shortness of time, but about the *kairotic* fulfillment of time that called for radical behaviour. At hand was a radical demand to abandon this-worldly concerns and anxieties. For 'Oh, what foolishness is this, to think only of the here and now!' as though one were not 'You seem unaware that you have to die and ... you know not the time nor the manner, when and how you have to die'.<sup>154</sup> In Savonarola's thought, too, there was a strong sense of time as a destroying force:

One minute they were alive, the next they are dead;  
they are all stink and ashes. I also will perhaps die  
soon; in a single breath everything to do with this  
life will have passed away.<sup>155</sup>

But what was Savonarola's temporal mode: messianic or apocalyptic? This is a question that has escaped scholarly attention. Interestingly, Savonarola

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<sup>151</sup> Savonarola, *On the Simplicity of Christian Life*, in A. Borelli, M. C. Pastore Passario, D. Beebe (eds). *Selected writings of Girolamo Savonarola: religion and politics, 1490-1498* (Yale, 2006), 23. All future references to Savonarola's sermons refer to the same source.

<sup>152</sup> Savonarola, *On the Art of Dying Well*, 35.

<sup>153</sup> Savonarola, *On the Art of Dying Well*, 35.

<sup>154</sup> Savonarola, *On the Art of Dying Well*, 35.

<sup>155</sup> Savonarola, *On the Art of Dying Well*, 38.

fashions himself not as a mere humble servant of God, or indeed the prophet whom he is often and very commonly believed to be, but instead as an *apostle*. Indeed, the modality of his temporal thought and preaching were not merely prophetic but messianic, for his sermons did not manifest the paradigm of shortness of time alone, but were essentially about *the time that remains* and how to live that time accordingly. This is already an apostolic concern.

Remarkably, Savonarola's Christian philosophy, faced with crisis, proceeded to call for a return to the *original principles* — that is, in the Christian context, a return to Primitive Christianity.<sup>156</sup> Political thought, too, would call precisely for such a return to the original principles as a way of cleansing the present of the ills and, even more importantly, in so doing also of generating a new political time. Here, then, we interestingly see how the recourse to *original time*, to a time of the institution of principles or political forms, represents not only a political response, but a general intellectual tendency, a broad human response in the realm of crisis and temporality, when human intellect is faced with a crisis of the present. Finally, such radical invocation of the shortness of time, as was Savonarola's, must have necessarily brought the matter of continuity in time, itself already for several decades a popular preoccupation, to a greater preeminence.

### **Florence in Time — 'Stormy Presents' and Good Men in Crisis**

The memory of Savonarola and of his apocalyptic message was still fresh as Florence celebrated the election of Soderini in 1502. Savonarola's followers were still very much at large in Florentine politics. Despite the fact that the first two years of the new millennium had passed without any noticeable cataclysms, the entire Christendom was still overwhelmed by the anticipation of an imminent doom. We already know from the previous chapters that not only did apocalyptic and millenarian teachings and prophecies not weaken, but they acquired a greater force than ever. It was

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<sup>156</sup> Savonarola, *On Primitive Christianity*, 25.

on such an evening that the Soderini party was held in Florence, in a city terrified of shortness of time, and in a culture anticipating a number of impending dooms.

Among the various guests present at the Soderini house on that evening were also Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini, the two chief authors, largely representative of the period, whose works shall instruct our reconstruction of the temporal discourse in Italian political thought in the period between 1494 and 1530. Both Piero Soderini and the analysis of political process in time would feature prominently in the works of both Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Despite the importance of both authors, the chief focus of our concentration will be thought of Machiavelli.

Five hundred years since the publication of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Machiavelli is still the subject of a heated debate.<sup>157</sup> Barbara Spackman has aptly observed how 'from a single seed, planted on different soil, have grown various forms of Machiavellism and antimachiavellism, monarchist readings and populist ones, reactionary interpretations and Marxian rewritings'.<sup>158</sup> The question posed by Hans Baron in an article suggestively entitled "Machiavelli the Republican Citizen and the Author of *The Prince*" still remains very much in place. Was the Florentine secretary the 'teacher of evil', as Innocent Gentillet and Leo Strauss have thought? Or was Machiavelli a republican as Rousseau, Bayle, Montesquieu, Pocock, Skinner and Viroli have maintained? What relationship, if any at all, exists between *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*? Why did Machiavelli write *The Prince*? Did he intend to 'trap' the Medici and lead them to an imminent downfall, as Dietz has argued?<sup>159</sup> Or was he, as Viroli argues, as a true patriot of Italy, exhorting the Medici to liberate Italy once and for all 'from the Barbarian yoke' and give it a new form?<sup>160</sup> Moreover, what relation did *The Prince* establish with its immediate historical present? To that end, Pocock argued

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<sup>157</sup> Historiography on Machiavelli never ceases to appear. Cf.: M. Viroli, *Redeeming the Prince* (2014); C. S. Celenza, *Machiavelli: A Portrait* (Harvard, 2015); E. M. Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (London, 2012); P. Bobbitt, *The Garments of Court and Palace* (London, 2013);

<sup>158</sup> B. Spackman, "Machiavelli and Maxims", *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990), 137-155.

<sup>159</sup> M. Dietz, "Trapping The Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception", in *The American Political Science Review* 80 (Sep., 1986), 777-79.

<sup>160</sup> See especially, L. Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London, 1999).



that *The Prince* was ‘inspired by a specific situation, but not directed at it’,<sup>161</sup> while Quentin Skinner stressed, and rightly so, that there is ‘an undercurrent of specific warning and advice’ to the Medici audible behind ‘the surface generalities of Machiavelli’s text’.<sup>162</sup>

In what follows, we shall engage with all of these questions. Yet, we shall do so while chiefly exposing and from a perspective hitherto almost entirely ignored — Machiavelli’s temporal philosophy, which is in fact central to the proper understanding both of Machiavelli, as an historical person, and his political thought. Time was hugely important to Machiavelli. As far as he was concerned, there was no politics outside time. With this, he was in harmony with the philosophy of time, according to which there is no action outside of time. However, so were his predecessors and contemporaries, none of whom elaborated a theory of time so complex as that of Machiavelli, who consciously elaborated a theory of time, even if scattered throughout his writings, and its implications on practical political action. The neglect of Machiavelli’s temporal philosophy has resulted in the neglect also of a whole range of layers of meaning embedded in Machiavelli’s thought.

But why Machiavelli in particular? Firstly, such concentration seems to be justified not because Machiavelli was ‘the greatest political thinker of the Renaissance’, or indeed ‘father of modern political science’, which he was not,<sup>163</sup> but because he consciously and explicitly wrote more about time and politics than did any political thinker in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Machiavelli was *the* Renaissance theorist of *time and politics*. Not only did he write a great deal about politics and time, but he conceived of politics as a series of acts *in time*, each of which had its own temporal consequences. In so doing, Machiavelli thus became the first thinker in the tradition of Western political thought consciously to place politics in the stream of time and history. This aspect has attracted the attention of a number of scholars, among them Pocock, Orr and Gilbert. However, each of these approaches have been limited in some way to the effect that

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<sup>161</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 160.

<sup>162</sup> Q. Skinner and R. Price (ed.), introduction to Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Cambridge, 2012), xiii. Hereafter cited as *Prince*. See also M. Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The acquisition and transformation of the language of politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge, 1992), 145-54.

<sup>163</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 34.

Machiavelli's thoughts on time and politics have either received a general treatment, as part of some broader scheme as in the analysis of Pocock and Gilbert, or have assumed the form of a general analysis of a "motif".<sup>164</sup> Our intention instead is to travel beyond both the schematic and the broader approaches to the matter and examine not just how Machiavelli conceived of time and politics, but what range of *meanings* such a conception gave to his vision of what politics ought to be in practice. In fact, it was precisely Machiavelli's placing of politics firmly in the stream of time and history that is truly revolutionary about Machiavelli's thought and not his alleged 'immorality'.

Secondly, Machiavelli affected the course of political thought in the centuries to follow more than anyone else. It was indeed Machiavelli, and not Guicciardini, Sansovino, Gianotti or Sarpi, that was read and discussed, agreed to and fought against, sanctified and demonised in the centuries after the publication of his political works. It is Machiavelli who is praised or demonised for the theory of *ragione di stato* that was in truth advocated by Guicciardini far more than by Machiavelli and formulated as a theory by neither Machiavelli, nor Guicciardini but someone else entirely — Jacopo Corbinelli. Throughout centuries, Machiavelli's readership included the Huguenots and the Catholics, the English revolutionaries, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the French Revolutionaries, the Founding Fathers of the United States as well as Napoleon Bonaparte and many more after them.

Therefore, Machiavelli's thought is not bound to the solitude of a single present that was his own present. Quite on the contrary, it can be seen as very much alive throughout the whole period of our study. Therefore, Machiavelli shall assist us in realising two chief tasks. Firstly, with an analysis of his thought, we shall hope to reconstruct the temporal discourse that is to be seen during the Florentine crisis on the eve of the sixteenth century. Secondly, his paradigm of time and politics shall lay the foundations for our future considerations of the English revolutionary context, wherein such a paradigm, I should like to argue, is powerfully present. In fact, as we will see in Chapter IV, Machiavelli's shadow is

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<sup>164</sup> See R. Orr, "Time Motif in Machiavelli", in M. Fleischer (ed.) *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought* (New York, 1972); Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*.

mysteriously present not only in the English republican political thought and practice, but also in the English royalist thought and action, though in a very different way and with markedly different implications.

Lastly, Machiavelli's thought is a prime example of human thought in crisis generally, and political thought in crisis more particularly. If there was as we have said in Italy a general crisis, which we shall expose imminently, and if all men complained of the feebleness of the present, not all, in fact very few, were actually as honest as was Niccolò Machiavelli. In contrast to a great many of his contemporaries in the intellectual and political elites of Florence, Machiavelli was not an aristocrat. Aristocrats were more resilient to crisis, because they were financially and politically far more stable than Machiavelli. When in 1512 the Republic of Florence fell, the aristocratic was able to flee to Rome, where he would spend the rest of his time in peace. But Machiavelli could not. Guicciardini, a descendant of one of the greatest Florentine aristocratic families, was appointed both by the Medici and the republic to some of the highest offices of the state. But Machiavelli was not. While Soderini fled, and Guicciardini remained powerful, Machiavelli was the only public servant to be not only dismissed, but later also accused of conspiring in treason and badly tortured. Thus he had a natural contempt for the *grandi*, much as for *Fortuna*. This is best to be seen in Machiavelli's famous letter, written on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1513, perhaps the most famous letter of the century.

In a letter sent to Vettori in Rome from the exiled Machiavelli, he describes a true state of crisis in which he finds himself, and of which he is acutely aware. As he tells Vettori, 'since my latest disasters, I have not spent a total of twenty days in Florence'. Instead, he is exiled at Sant'Andrea in Percussina where, employing the 'long experience of modern affairs' but also knowledge acquired from 'continual study of ancient history', he is writing a small book. However, writing the book was the better part of Machiavelli's life in exile. For a large part of each day, he was engaged in a menial and mundane labour of which he was utterly ashamed; in fact, there he even had 'to kill time'. As we shall see later, it was in this state of crisis, and in large part due to it that Machiavelli would really set out to kill time, though in yet another sense. There were, however, always the evenings that

were very opposed to the state of things throughout daytime. The dawning of the evening marked the dawning also of a distinctive temporal phase for Machiavelli. As he told Vettori, upon the dawning of the evening, he would return home and enter his study:

on the threshold I take off my workday clothes,  
covered with mud and dirt, and put on the  
garments of court and palace. Fitted out  
appropriately, I step inside the venerable courts of  
the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, I  
nourish myself on that food that alone is mine and  
for which I was born; where I am unashamed to  
converse with them and to question them about  
the motives for their actions, and they, out of their  
human kindness, answer me.<sup>165</sup>

The evenings thus transported Machiavelli to a distant past that was in every way the exact opposite of his present of crisis. Disgracefully exiled from his '*patria* which I love more than my soul' to a little village,<sup>166</sup> and left without access to the beautiful government halls of Palazzo Vecchio in the city, Machiavelli was now again warmly welcome and able to 'step inside the venerable courts of the ancients' in his imaginary past. Covered in mud throughout daytime, in this mythical past he was again dressed in 'the garments of court and palace'. Scared and utterly ashamed and fearful of poverty in the present, in this past Machiavelli partaking of food 'that alone is mine and for which I was born'. Neglected by all his powerful aristocratic contacts, among whom was the recipient of these very letter, Machiavelli is in this past answered to 'out of their human kindness' by the ancients. If in the reality of the present Machiavelli was so bored as to have 'to kill time', as part of his night-time visits to the past, 'for four hours at a time I feel no boredom, I forget all my troubles, I do not dread poverty, and I am not terrified by death'. Thus, the imaginary past of his own was everything that Machiavelli's actual present in the December of 1513 was not but should

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<sup>165</sup> Machiavelli, "Letter to Francesco Vettori", abridged to Skinner and Price (ed.). *The Prince*, 93-5.

<sup>166</sup> Machiavelli, *Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*, vol. III, Lettere, edited by Franco Gaeta. Utet, Turin 1984, 629.

have been had *Fortuna* not been quite so cruel. Importantly, it was in his occupancy of the ideal and imaginary time past that Machiavelli wrote a ‘short book on principalities’, *De principatibus*, which would become one of the most revolutionary books in the tradition of Western political thought.<sup>167</sup>

Now, Machiavelli had been the offspring of the second Florentine republic, if we conceive of the execution of Savonarola as the end of the first republic, which I believe it was both in theory and in practice. Machiavelli first entered public office in the context of a situation generated by the French invasion that saw the Medici lose their hold over Florence. Having lost all that, Machiavelli was then ousted from his native city in the context of a situation generated by the Spanish invasion. The course of his immediate life, as well as his eternal fame, were thus fundamentally affected by these two historic moments, the two invasions by the two large territorial states both of which were absolute monarchies. Thus the two rising large territorial states of France and Spain had not only profoundly shaped the political life of the Italian peninsula, but also radically altered, and indeed determined, Machiavelli’s biography.

The rise of France and Spain represented the new geopolitical reality that fashioned the context in which Machiavelli thought and wrote. This has often been neglected by the historians of political thought, conceiving of the context too narrowly. Phillip Bobbitt, himself not a historian but a constitutionalist and an expert of national security has in his recent work, *The Garments of Court and Palace*, conceived of the context in a broader, and a commendable, way.<sup>168</sup> As it shall become more evident by the end of this chapter, such a conception of the context, which is perfectly legitimate since Machiavelli was an active observer of politics in other political entities across the Christendom, is of particular importance to understanding Machiavelli’s contextual pursuits.

We have declared our purpose be not only the of study temporal discourses of given authors, but also an examination of the meaning of such a temporal philosophy — that is, then, into what kind of political

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<sup>167</sup> Machiavelli, “Letter to Vettori”, 93-5.

<sup>168</sup> P. Bobbitt, *The Garments of Court and Palace* (London, 2013), 29-39.

implications it had and what ideal theory of practical political action it devised. The geopolitical context in which Machiavelli lived, as well as his immediate Florentine political context and his views on time all combined to lead Machiavelli to a truly revolutionary calling. Prior to examining this further, let us first expose the present in which Machiavelli wrote and, as a matter of fact, *against* which he tirelessly laboured.

Now, the present, as a temporal category was indeed of supreme importance in this period of political crisis in Italy as well as everywhere else. As Guicciardini had Bernardo del Nero declare in *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, ‘the present storm which is raging’ required a remarkably skillful political approach.<sup>169</sup> Now, Bernardo was surely dissatisfied with the revolution of the state (*mutazione dello stato*). However, as a true Florentine patriot, he was worried far more about something else. And this worry had its source beyond the Alps – in France. It was indeed the French invasion of *Regnum Italicum* that had been seen as the temporal point that marked the beginning of times of adversity. In the year 1494, when the French troops invaded Italy, contemporary intellectuals rightly marked the beginning of something new and dramatic. As Guicciardini observed at the outset of his *History of Italy*, the French invasions had brought ‘all those calamities with which miserable mortals are usually afflicted’.<sup>170</sup> The year 1494 not only brought barbarians into the lands of Italy, but it also ended the period of relatively stability guaranteed by the Peace of Lodi signed in 1454. The Peace of Lodi was designed to bring stability and political order to the peninsula, embodying ‘the spirit of conservatism and *statis* in the diplomatic sphere’.<sup>171</sup> Despite the very high levels of factionalism and internal enmity, stability and peace were every political man’s ideals in Florence. Thus, ill now fared the land to all. Although the Peace of Lodi had only ushered in a time of relative stability, even such relative stability was now the memory of a bygone past, yet no longer a reality of the present. The city-states were again actively at war and Italy was subject to ‘barbarian yoke’.

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<sup>169</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 68.

<sup>170</sup> Guicciardini, quoted in Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 1, 113.

<sup>171</sup> G. A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1969).

Crises of all kinds loomed large in Italy. Venice, which had for centuries been deemed to be the strongest and most stable political form on the Italian soil, had now lost its hold over *terra firma*. The Republic of Florence fell and rose twice in the interval between 1494 and 1530, only to fall for the third and the last time in 1530. In 1494, amid the French invasion of Italy, Piero de' Medici was ousted from Florence and a republic instituted. Conveniently employing the occasion, the Pisans revolted and declared independence from Florence.<sup>172</sup> Genoa, in turn, was experiencing a crisis of its own.<sup>173</sup> In the meantime, in Florence it took only four years for the winds of fortune to blow again. In 1498, the influential de-facto leader of the Republic, Fra Girolamo Savonarola was burnt at stake at the Piazza Signoria. Only fourteen years later, in 1512, the republic, now led by Piero Soderini collapsed amid the invasion of the Spanish armies; the Medici were once again in Florence. The 1520s, in turn, were marked by an attempt of Charles V to contest the French control of Milan, 'a decision which converted the whole of *Regnum Italicum* into a battlefield for next thirty years'.<sup>174</sup> Back in Florence, the Medicean state would fall once again in May, 1527, amid the Sack of Rome, to be resurrected again for the last time in 1530. Among those who had come to a disastrous end in their private capacities were none other than the most powerful and renowned princes, Lodovico Moro and Cesare Borgia. Thus the period between 1494 and 1530 saw no established preconception or traditional preconceptions left intact. Instead, this was a period of 'rapid, unexpected, almost miraculous changes in the political scene'.<sup>175</sup> What began in 1494 and did not seem to be ending was a period of incessant flux and flow characterised not by stability, but by change.

Now, change, of which time is the necessary dimension, naturally begged the issue of time. In terms of the contemporary astrological knowledge both widely available and popularly possessed, the political present was one reminiscent of the lower part of the universe, where nothing was ever

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<sup>172</sup> O. Cavallar, "Francesco Guicciardini and the "Pisan Crisis": Logic and Discourses", *The Journal of Modern History* 2 (1993), 245-285.

<sup>173</sup> P. Coles, "The Crisis of Renaissance Society Genoa, 1488-1507", *Past & Present* 11 (1957), 17-47.

<sup>174</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 1, 113.

<sup>175</sup> Gilbert, *Crisis*, 140.

constant and stable. Instead, everything was subject to change and transformation. Now, since the antiquity, the upper part of the universe had been seen as the seat tranquility, a perfect *statis*. As opposed to the lower part of the world, this part of the world knew no time, for time only existed where change existed. Reminiscent to this in Christian theology was the realm of God, the Lord of Time. God, as we have observed, was immune from all things temporal. He had created time, yet stayed in a possession of exteriority to it, as its lord and commander. Temporal language did not apply to God, for in the Christian context of thought he never *was* and *will be* but always *is*. Such was the ideal upper part of universe according both to classical, specifically astrological and Christian sources of knowledge. On the contrary, the sublunar world was subject not only to high level of contingency, but also to what Felix Gilbert has elegantly called the ‘ravages of time’.<sup>176</sup>

This was a world governed by *Fortuna*, the malicious goddess who had been seen since the antiquity as synonymous with time and history. The capricious Goddess of History, *Fortuna* was a rather pretentious female figure who was hard to please and almost impossible ever to subdue. Determining the course of history through her arbitrary will, *Fortuna* was at once feared and adored, fought against and prayed to. Throughout both the antiquity and the middle Ages, *Fortuna* was viewed as a rather powerful agent of history, who unfortunately also happened to be an irrational and highly capricious force, upon whose will the fate of humans and states was seen as depending. It was *Fortuna* that fashioned events, radically altered the qualitative nature of various political presents and played a major role in determining one’s fate. To this end, it is important that to the contemporary mind, time was not some abstract thing, but events themselves. The person of *Fortuna*, then, was seen as almost synonymous with the idea of time itself. Now, *Fortuna* generated various modes of time, which we see best summarised in Machiavelli’s thought.

It was in this context, utterly destabilised by *Fortuna*, that the Florentines spent the evening at the Soderini house celebrating the election of the head of republic rendered atemporal. Soderini’s election reflected more than a

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<sup>176</sup> Gilbert, *Crisis*, 140.



simple willingness to please the Florentine aristocrats by electing one of their kind to the position of the standard-bearer of justice.<sup>177</sup> It was also a quest, generally, for stability in a world destabilised by *Fortuna* and, particularly, in a political society that had been trapped since 1494 in a vicious cycle of constant mutation. It is not at all a coincidence that in the act of justifying this lifelong political appointment, recourse was made in Florence to the case Venice, namely to the Venetian practice of electing the *doge* for life. The question of Venice was not new to Florentines, for Venice had already for long been an appealing example of a stable and prosperous republic.<sup>178</sup>

Moreover, as opposed to the ‘dead’ classical republics of the past, which could only serve as archetypal examples, Venice was very much alive, present and prosperous. The Florentines were acutely aware of this and already in 1410, Florentine humanists had been actively preoccupied with Venice. However, it was precisely after the ‘temporal trauma’ of 1494 that Venice returned ever more actively to everyday Florentine political and intellectual preoccupations; it was precisely then that ‘the politically insecure Florentines turned anew to the Venetian myth’.<sup>179</sup>

Rather ironically, Venice itself was in the last years of the fifteenth century and the early years of the sixteenth century undergoing a crisis of its own. This was a powerful crisis that had its roots in the socio-historical occurrences and even cast under doubt Venice’s own myth of a thousand-year long stability. However, Florentines were not aware of this at the time. As in the case of Florence, here too, it was a context of crisis that served as the impetus to a serious Venetian rethinking of their place in time. Now, the definitive form of the myth of Venice had emerged in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, when the humanists convincingly appropriated the past, ‘clothed Venetian institutions in neoclassical dress and made them appear as if they were living models of ancient ideals’.<sup>180</sup> The recourse to past was powerful indeed; in this equation too, the past was at once a

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<sup>177</sup> This, in part, was no doubt so; more so if one views this innovation as a response to the reform of 1494 that opened political participation to many in the form of the Great Council; this was a measure of aristocratic balance. But by no means just this.

<sup>178</sup> For a discussion on this, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 83-100.

<sup>179</sup> Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 45.

<sup>180</sup> Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 25.

reservoir of institutional and political *exempla*, and a tool of legitimation. So, the Venetian councils were ‘now seen as evolved forms of Roman institution’.<sup>181</sup> Much like the Florentine republicans who had in their thought and speeches consciously laboured to fashion and present Florence as the offspring of Rome, founded not in the time of the dictator’s reign but in that of the republicans, Venice too depicted itself as a political form extant in time as a form reliving and giving material shape to the best of the past in itself.

However, the portrayal was one thing, yet the reality generated by mischievous *Fortuna* quite another. The seat of ‘thousand year long stability’ was not spared by her either. In 1499, the attention of Venetians was grasped by two shocking news. Firstly, as one report observed with great sorrow, the Turks had defeated the Venetian fleet at Zonchio. Secondly, news came to Venice of the appearance of the Portuguese rivals who were after spices in Aden and Calicut. Venice was no longer the dominant naval power, and its hegemony over the profitable pepper traffic was now challenged. Although the immediate effects were not too dramatic, this proved to be the beginning of a gradual Venetian downfall, certainly already that of her naval supremacy, that would come to fruition within the next decade.<sup>182</sup> Far more troubling, and with far greater consequences was an event of 1590, when Venice heard that an anti-Venetian alliance, uniting Louis XII of France, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, had been formed. This was the League of Cambrai, a powerful alliance with the sole aim to put an end to Venice seen, precisely in the tradition of her own myth, as all too powerful and far too rapidly developing and expanding. Such was the irony of time that Venice was now the victim of its own temporal myth.

The Venetian ruling elite were acutely aware of this, as well as of the actuality of the threat levelled against them. The reality too showed, the threat was indeed serious — on May 14 1509, the Venetian armies had to retreat and flee from the forces of the League of Cambrai at Agnadello. Yet *Fortuna* proved to be not too willing to destroy Venice; the internal

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<sup>181</sup> Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 25.

<sup>182</sup> F. C. Lane, “Naval Actions and Fleet Organization, 1499 – 1502”

divisions within the League, particularly between Pope Julius II and Louis XII of France, saved Venice from an imminent destruction. However, the myth never really regained its footing. Muir aptly observes that the threat of an imminent destruction ‘wrought a permanent change in the composition of the ruling group and forced the Venetian nobility to re-examine its political beliefs’.<sup>183</sup> General scholarly opinion, too, has quite rightly found these events at the turn of the century as major catalysts to a new approach to the myth of Venice. The serene city, seen for long as immune from change—and thus immune from the cruel deeds of *Fortuna* and by extension immune from time itself—no longer believed in any immunity of this kind. Bouwsma has to this effect rightly argued that although the ‘old myth of an eternal and essentially unchanging Venice, which in principle denied the absolute sovereignty of change in all things human was never directly attacked’, it became less and less influential ‘as Venetians addressed themselves to the task of constantly shifting political scene’.<sup>184</sup>

The myth was still in place, and indeed foreigners still considered it as reality. However, to the Venetian ruling elite, no illusion of atemporality seems to have remained. On the contrary, due to the events generated by *Fortuna*, Venice in fact exhausted her own myth, instead turning its attention to actual historical time. The mythical time thus turned on itself and was destroyed by historical time. For it was indeed now for the first time that Venice began to pay attention to real historical time, instead of continuing playfully to engage with a mythical narrative of an almost perfect stability in time. Such a novel interest in history found a reflection in practice too. Having begun to care about real time of historical occurrences, Venice now employed official court historians who were to look after not a myth, but after the actual flow of social and political time — history. Exhausted of its own myth, and perhaps also having over-exhausted the myth, Venice turned to actual time and reflected on the potentiality, negative or positive, of its historical moment and situation in time.

Having attended to the contemporary readings of the present moment on the eve of the sixteenth century, as well as the changeability of *Fortuna* and

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<sup>183</sup> Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 26.

<sup>184</sup> W. J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the defense of republican liberty; Renaissance values in the age of the Counter Reformation* (University of California Press, 1968), 556.

the gradual decline of the myth of Venice as history overcame the might of a myth, it is now time to attend to the various times of Machiavelli in crisis. In so doing, we will first expose each of Machiavelli's three distinct ideas of time and then proceed to examining what ideal modes of action Machiavelli's temporal philosophy encourages. Finally, we are going to see what meanings such modes of action themselves acquire in the contextual specificity of Machiavelli's Florentine and geopolitical context.

## The Fortunes of Machiavelli

On *Fortuna*, Machiavelli was no exception to the collective cultural and intellectual mentalité of his time. He was just as much preoccupied with the Goddess, as were most of his contemporaries. In A. H. Gilbert's words, *Fortuna* was 'the essence of his theory of life and affairs'.<sup>185</sup> However, as we shall see in this chapter, Machiavelli transformed the concept in some powerful ways, which was a political act that had specific contextual implications. Etymologically, *Fortuna* was derived from the Latin *fors* (luck), which was itself derived from the root of *ferre* (Latin — to bring). Thus, *fors* denotes 'that which is brought, and *Fortuna* is she who brings it'.<sup>186</sup> The concept of *Fortuna*, itself as changeable and hard to grasp as the Goddess herself, had a rather long history. It is fair to say that there was a whole tradition of thought about *Fortuna* that was inherited, developed and transmitted by Machiavelli.<sup>187</sup>

However, before Machiavelli would assume writing, the concept of *Fortuna* was transformed in several ways in the arts and letters of earlier humanism. These changes were important not only because they reflected the spirit of a new time, but also because they would have a considerable impact on Machiavelli's own understanding of *Fortuna*. Therefore, while we shall not preoccupy ourselves with a more extensive exposition of the history of the concept, we will here briefly expose some of the *changes* in

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<sup>185</sup> A. H. Gilbert, *Machiavelli's Prince and Its Forerunners* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 219.

<sup>186</sup> T. Flanagan, "The Concept of *Fortuna* in Machiavelli", in *The Political Calculus: Essays on Machiavelli's Philosophy*, edited by Anthony Parel (Toronto, 1972), 129.

<sup>187</sup> On the tradition of the Goddess *Fortuna* in medieval literature, see Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (Harvard, 1927).

the understanding of the concept in early Renaissance, which is necessary if we are to understand the concept of *Fortuna* as Machiavelli understood it.

Firstly, in the literature, philosophy and the plastic arts of the fifteenth and sixteenth century one observes the return of the ancient Roman juxtaposition, which had disappeared throughout the Middle Ages, of male *virtù* and female *fortune*.<sup>188</sup> Secondly, if in the earlier artistic portrayals *Fortuna* had been the holder of the rudder of a ship, in the Renaissance portraiture we see *Fortuna* as only one of the *ordinary passengers* of a ship, who is no longer in control of her course.<sup>189</sup> Such conscious, even if only gradual, weakening of the image of the hitherto all-too-powerful *Fortuna* should by no means be seen as a coincidence. In fact, such a move is intimately linked with the gradual secularisation of *Fortuna*, which is politically the most important innovation in the reception and transformation of the concept.

It is in the process of such gradual secularisation of *Fortuna* that those ideas and images that are famously present in the penultimate chapter of Machiavelli's *The Prince* see the daylight. To this end, two predecessors of Machiavelli, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), both eminent and fairly representative figures of early humanist thought, stand out in particular. Alberti had likened *Fortuna* to a river—as would also do Machiavelli in *The Prince*<sup>190</sup>—concluding that one must be a strong swimmer to be safe from her unruly currents. Moreover, for Alberti, *Fortuna* was the governor only of *half of the affairs*, leaving the rest to one's *ingenium*, as she was also for Machiavelli, leaving the 'other half' for human freedom to exercise *virtù*.<sup>191</sup> Pico had in turn argued that humans themselves had conceived of *Fortuna* as a goddess, in so doing wrongly attributing to heavenly powers the control of that which they could in reality control themselves with equal success.<sup>192</sup> In Machiavelli's *The Prince*, too, the concept of *Fortuna* is secularised. Although Machiavelli refers to *Fortuna* as the 'cruel goddess' in his poem *Tercets on Fortuna*, nowhere in *The Prince*, or indeed in any other political

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<sup>188</sup> H. F. Pitkin, *Fortune Is A Woman* (London, 1984), 142, 140.

<sup>189</sup> Flanagan, "Concept", 132.

<sup>190</sup> *Prince*, 85.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>192</sup> See Pitkin, *Fortune*, 143.

text, do we encounter the ‘Goddess *Fortuna*’.<sup>193</sup> Instead, in the footsteps of earlier humanists, Machiavelli compares *Fortuna* only to a river, and to a woman.<sup>194</sup>

Thirdly, there is a change of wheels. Now, traditionally *Fortuna* had been seen as a turner of one even if an exceedingly powerful wheel. The idea of *Fortuna* turning wheels was present both in the classical and medieval imagination. Moreover, in the Middle Ages, also present was the idea of *Fortuna* possessing and turning not one, but several wheels.<sup>195</sup> Machiavelli, too, introduces *Fortuna* as an agent in possession of many wheels. Already in his *Tercets*, he observes that in *Fortuna*’s ‘palace, as many wheels are turning as there are varied ways of climbing to those things which every living man strives to attain’.<sup>196</sup> There is, however, an important difference. If in medieval imagination these several wheels had formed an *integrated system*,<sup>197</sup> Machiavelli conceives of the wheels of fortune as *entirely autonomous*. This, then, would mean that they can be exchanged for one another. In short, by the time of Machiavelli, and already manifest in his thought, one encounters the idea *Fortuna* that is more secularised than ever before. Moreover, she is seen as the controller only of *some* of the course of the ship of time; and she is seen as an agent in control of *several wheels* of fortune. Conceiving of *Fortuna* in this way had significant implications upon Machiavelli’s political thought and his contextual message to Italy. This, as we shall see, was immensely significant not only at the conceptual and abstract levels, but also had a contextually charged significance.

Having briefly established the history of the concept and some significant transformations affected in the early Renaissance, let us now attend to the nature of *Fortuna* in Machiavelli’s thought in particular. What, then, is Machiavelli’s *Fortuna* like? *Fortuna* is exceedingly capricious. As we read in Machiavelli’s excellent *Tercets*, ‘she turns states and kingdoms upside down as she pleases’<sup>193</sup> and ‘shifts and reshifts the world’s affairs’.<sup>198</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>193</sup> See N. Machiavelli, *Tercets on Fortune*, in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others* (3 vols.), translated by A. H. Gilbert (Duke University Press Books, 1989), Vol3.,745. Hereafter cited as Gilbert.

<sup>194</sup> See *Prince*, 85, 87.

<sup>195</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, Vol 3, 746.

<sup>196</sup> Pitkin, *Fortune*, 146.

<sup>197</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, Vol 3, 746.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 748.

*Fortuna* in fact ‘times events as suits her’, according to her capricious will.<sup>199</sup> Thus, she made Castruccio Castracani and Cesare Borgia mortally ill just when they were ready to consolidate their victorious deeds and enjoy great power.<sup>200</sup> Now, here we must recall that a the fifteenth century citizen’s sense of time was sequential, that is — from an event to the next. To this end, Robert Orr has to this end aptly observed that for Machiavelli, too, time was events themselves.<sup>201</sup> Machiavelli was no exception to such conception of time.

Secondly, *Fortuna* is an ‘unstable goddess’ and ‘fickle deity’, who is extremely changeable and unreliable: ‘as she turns, now she does not see you, now she beseeches you, now she menaces you’.<sup>202</sup> *Fortuna* thus generates a constant *state of exception* that might manifest itself negatively at any time.<sup>203</sup> It is *Fortuna* that occasions the ‘untoward events’ and represents ‘some unusually strong force’ that might threaten even the hereditary prince, who enjoys relative stability—due to his possession of traditional legitimacy<sup>204</sup>—or indeed remarkably *virtuoso* rulers, as was Cesare Borgia.<sup>205</sup> Thomas Flanagan thus aptly observes that *Fortuna* denoted ‘success and uncertainty together’.<sup>206</sup> Thirdly, *Fortuna*, ‘this aged witch, has two faces, one of them fierce, the other mild’.<sup>207</sup> *Fortuna* is by definition neither a negative, nor a destructive force, since she might be good or bad’; sometimes she wishes to increase one’s standing.<sup>208</sup> The problematic nature of *Fortuna* resides not in her exclusively negative character, but rather stems from the fact that she is wholly unreliable and unpredictable. Being such, *Fortuna* contains within herself the ever present possibility of a demise. Now, whether this materialises or not is dependent on how lucky one proves to be, for *Fortuna* loves some and despises

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 746.

<sup>200</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*, Gilbert, Vol 2, 533-60.

<sup>201</sup> R. Orr, “Time Motif in Machiavelli”, in *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, edited by Martin Fleischer (New York, 1972), 189.

<sup>202</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, Vol 3, 746.

<sup>203</sup> See J. P. McCormick, “Addressing the Political Exception: Machiavelli’s “Accidents” and the Mixed Regime”, in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, 4 (Dec., 1993), 888-900.

<sup>204</sup> Pocock, 160-5.

<sup>205</sup> *Prince*, 6.

<sup>206</sup> Flanagan, “Concept”, 130.

<sup>207</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, 746.

<sup>208</sup> *Prince*, 74.

some.<sup>209</sup> However, she is in the habit of reversing the wheel's course 'in midcircle' and 'in the midst of your journey she abandons you'.<sup>210</sup> Therefore, Machiavelli never tires of stressing the folly of relying on what is in essence wholly unreliable. Machiavelli thus reminds us that 'luck runs out'<sup>211</sup> and 'a man should never risk falling because he thinks it likely that he will be rescued'.<sup>212</sup>

In important ways, then, Machiavelli may be read as an author, perhaps the earliest, in the tradition of the *state of exception*. As is well known, such mode of political thinking is often ascribed to modernity and the paradigm itself to modern statehood. The works of Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben have done much in this direction.<sup>213</sup> However, it seems to be vital to emphasise the existence of such a mode of thinking at the very outset of 'modern political thought'. For what *Fortuna* does to the political world in Machiavelli's thought is nothing but an institution of a permanent threat of an imminent destruction, an ever-present *state of exception*, where normality breaks down and the present acquires an abnormal character. It is, in fact, precisely in the context of such a breakdown that Machiavelli's famous views on morality should be read and considered; for it is when *chronos* is no longer itself that the ruler has to abandon all modes of normality, if he is to cure the polity of the abnormal ills generated by time.

This mode of thinking, in the tradition of the *state of exception* would continue, though in variant forms, and find the most powerful exposition in the thought of Thomas Hobbes of which later in Chapter V. In the meantime, however, we shall argue that it is precisely in the context of a state of political exception that Machiavelli calls for what we might refer to as 'a temporal dictatorship'. In the previous chapter we observed how crises were in fact seen as illnesses of the body politic and how, in turn, the wise

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<sup>209</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, 147.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>211</sup> Letter to Soderini (c. 15 September 1506), abridged to *Prince*, 98.

<sup>212</sup> *Prince*, 84.

<sup>213</sup> G. Agamben, "The Time that is Left", *Epoché*, 1 (2002), 1-14; G. Agamben, *The Time that Remains: a commentary on the letter to the Romans* (Stanford, 2005); G. Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, 2005); C. Schmitt, *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (Cambridge, 1985).



counsellors were viewed as physicians granted with the task of curing the polities. We may also remember that in the very last chapter of *Discourses*, Machiavelli observes how it so happens ‘of necessity’ that in every great ‘City incidents arise every day which have need of a physician, and according as they are more important, a wiser doctor must be found’.<sup>214</sup>

The *Preface* to Book II of *Discourses on Livy*, in turn, reveals how Machiavelli conceived of the political thinker’s task in response to history and time. There Machiavelli observed that ‘it is the office of a good man to show others that good which because of the malignity of the times and of fortune, he has not been able to accomplish, so that [many being capable] some of those more loved by Heaven can accomplish them’.<sup>215</sup> Machiavelli, to be sure, was talking about himself, for he certainly saw himself as a good and a highly qualified man engaged in a noble and patriotic mission. Being a ‘good man’ meant a great deal to him as to a citizen and servant of a republic among whose institutions there was, after all, a body called Twelve Good Men (*Dodici Buonomini*). Machiavelli’s patriotic fervour, as of a good man, is evident from the preface to *The Prince* too, where Machiavelli observes how he has imparted a great deal of useful information he has accumulated from ‘long experience in contemporary affairs and from a continual study of antiquity’.<sup>216</sup>

Indeed, the very task of the political philosopher, or that of the ‘wise physician’ whom we encounter in the final chapter of *Discourses on Livy* is to cure the republic from daily infections afflicted by time. This task, then, is to generate a *political time* against *natural time* personified by *Fortuna*. But how can one overcome, or at least try to diminish the effects of, an agent before whom even the strongest stability may well collapse? Machiavelli’s answer resides in a concept of utmost significance in his philosophy – *virtù*. *Virtù* alone might ensure survival in time and we shall concern *virtù* once we have exposed the other two ideas of time in Machiavelli’s thought.

## I tempi

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<sup>214</sup> *Discourses*, III. 49.

<sup>215</sup> Preface to *Discourses*, Book II.

<sup>216</sup> *Prince*, 3.

Now, the second idea of time in Machiavelli's political thought is that of *the times* (*i tempi*).<sup>217</sup> The two main usages of *i tempi* can be grouped in the two temporal antitheses, firstly, of 'those times' (*quei tempi*) and 'our own times' (*nostri tempi*) and, secondly, of 'times of peace' (*tempi di pace*) and 'times of war' (*tempi di guerra*). Now, *i tempi* represent a part of *chronos* that brings them; however, they present us with a particular mode of temporal perception. As opposed to the quantitative idea of *chronos*, which is personified by *Fortuna*, *i tempi* denote the totality of events, situations and circumstances that might be characterised in terms of a particular quality. Indeed, *i tempi* always refer to a *certain quality* of a given period of time that is, then, to the nature of the reality: religious, social and political in which one exists.

Machiavelli sees humans as residents of the political world governed by time and thus as belonging to a present that is the stage upon which *Fortuna* enacts events, conditions circumstances and creates situations. The political present, then, is always the supreme witness—and indeed the mirror—of *the times*. Therefore, the present itself also assumes the qualitative identity of the particular *i tempi*. It is precisely such a present that fashions particular 'conditions in which [men] operate'.<sup>218</sup> In short, *the times* always have a particular qualitative nature, itself determined by the nature of the various dispositions, circumstances and aspirations then prevalent. Machiavelli's metaphorical allusion to time as a river is of significance here. Time was like a river not only because it was vested with the potential to enrage any minute, and become a force of destruction, but also due to the fact that much like a river, as it flowed time brought different kinds of things with it: different situations, circumstances and conditions that might be beneficial or evil, for time brought 'all things with it and can produce benefits as well as evils' and vice versa.<sup>219</sup>

However, there could never be any certainty as to what the river of time might bring. *The times* were thus vested with a degree of diversity — there were thus good times and there were bad times too, times of peace much as

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<sup>217</sup> In what follows, I use *the times* and *i tempi* interchangeably.

<sup>218</sup> *Prince*, 86.

<sup>219</sup> *Prince*, 11.

times of war. Machiavelli had a very acute sense indeed of the variety and changeability of the quality of the times. We thus read that many rulers find it hard to maintain their standing ‘even in peaceful times’, not to mention the ‘times of war, which are always uncertain’.<sup>220</sup> In a similar vein, he proceeds to draw a distinction between the degrees of the *grandi*’s trustworthiness in terms precisely of their conduct in the differing times of peace and war. So we learn that the way *baroni* behave in *times of peace* should be suggestive of their likely conduct in *times of adversity*.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, elsewhere Machiavelli notes that ‘divisions are ... useful only in peacetime’, but if only *the times* were to change to those of adversity, the folly of pursuing such a policy would immediately become evident.<sup>222</sup>

The idea of *i tempi*, too, is intimately linked with *Fortuna*. First and foremost, *i tempi* are the product precisely of *Fortuna*’s dramatically changeable and capricious nature. It is precisely as *Fortuna* capriciously turns her wills that different kinds of situations and circumstances are generated. Already in this respect, we might appreciate the importance of the Machiavellian introduction of the *many wheels* of fortune. Indeed, there are different kinds of times just as there are different and numerous wheels of fortune. The times, themselves qualitatively autonomous, are much like the autonomous system of wheels of fortune whose movement does not either comply with a particular logic, or form an integrated system. The full significance of this shall become more evident as we below explore *virtù*.

## **Kairos**

The third idea of time is that of *timeliness* — *occasione*, which in fact has a classical counterpart *kairos*. Now, this is the idea of the rightness of time for an action that is conducive to the realisation of some beneficial future end. Let us first of all consider the person of *Occasione*, the daughter of Goddess *Fortuna* to whom Machiavelli devoted a short poem, *Capitolo*

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<sup>220</sup> *Prince*, 33.

<sup>221</sup> *Prince*, 36.

<sup>222</sup> *Prince*, 74.

dell'Occasione.<sup>223</sup> In the poem we read that *Occasione* is a 'restless' creature, who is exceedingly fast and dazzles everyone as she runs. Not only does she have wings on her feet but, as *Occasione* herself admits, she can 'never be still' for her foot does lie' on the wheel of *Fortuna*, whose daughter she is. *Occasione* is very swift and her face is covered by a veil 'so that in passing I be recognised by noone'. It is, therefore, very difficult indeed both to recognise and to capture her. To be more precise, it is difficult to recognise her *as she is passing*, but very easy to do so *once she has passed* and already shows her back. However, it is by then already very late, for at the back of her head 'no single hair does grow'. Once she has passed, there is no bringing her back and only vainly does he gaze who has just seen her 'hasten by or look back as I go'. However, what *Occasione* does have is a forelock at the front of her head by which she can be seized if only one recognises her *before she has passed*. Therefore, as Pitkin rightly notes, 'the occasion can be seized (and fortune mastered) only by someone astute enough or lucky enough to recognize her as she approaches'.<sup>224</sup> As with *Fortuna* who, being a woman, likes to be treated harshly, *Occasione* too favours boldness and action. However, in the context of *occasione*, the primary difficulty consists of recognising her *on time*, before she has flown by. Therefore, what acquires supreme importance in the treatment of *Occasione* is not simple harshness or boldness, but rather precision and accuracy in the process of seizing her.

With *Occasione*, the emphasis thus falls entirely on the unique quality of the *moment* that sees her approach, *the instant when* she is close enough to be seized by the forelock but has not managed to turn her back yet. Those who seize her are fortunate indeed, for she is sweeter than a mortal woman 'richly decked and dowered' as she is by the Heavens. On the contrary, those who miss her have no choice but to contend with her companion, Penitence. It is precisely *occasione* that forms the true battlefield of *Fortuna* and *virtù*. In fact, as we shall argue in what follows, this is the decisive battle of *The Prince*. Moreover, it is in *occasione* that the many threads of Machiavelli's

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<sup>223</sup> Machiavelli, *Capitolo dell'Occasione*, in L. de' Lucchi, A. A. Knopf (trans.) *An Anthology of Italian Poems 13th-19th Century* (New York, 1922), 116-117, 352. In what follows, I use the following translation.

<sup>224</sup> Pitkin, "Fortune", 147.

temporal paradigm come to acquire their full meaning, as does the very structure and purpose of the work itself that *occasione* serves to expose most fully. We shall in this chapter attend to this final battle of *The Prince*. Prior to this, however, let us first note that the Machiavellian idea of *occasione* refers us to the hugely interesting classical concept of *kairos*. If we are fully to grasp Machiavelli's *occasione*, we should here briefly expose the classical idea as well.

Although Machiavelli had virtually no Greek, he most certainly had some awareness of the concept of *kairos*.<sup>225</sup> Now, as E. C. White observed, in the classical understanding the two chief meanings of *kairos* were “the right moment”, or “the opportune” moment.<sup>226</sup> These, in fact, stemmed from two chief sources: archery and the art of weaving. In archery, *kairos* stood for ‘an opening, or “opportunity” or, more precisely, a long tunnel-like aperture through which the archer’s arrow has to pass’.<sup>227</sup> The second classical meaning of *kairos*, derived from the art of weaving, is even more directly relevant to our consideration, as it draws our attention to “the critical time”, when the gap has opened and the weaver must use that special instant in order to draw the yarn through that gap.<sup>228</sup> Combining these two traditional meanings, White summarised the idea of *kairos* as referring ‘to a passing instant when an opening appears, which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved’.<sup>229</sup> Importantly, the examples both of archery and the art of weaving emphasise the vital importance of *accuracy* and *precision* for the successful passage of *kairos*.<sup>230</sup>

Now, the classical conception of *kairos* is in perfect accord with Machiavelli's elegant poetic exposition of the young and restless Occasione. At the heart of both the Machiavellian *occasione* and the classical

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<sup>225</sup> See M. W. Scott, in J. Marino and M. W. Scott *Perspectives on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History: Essays in Honour of Nancy S. Struener* (Rochester, 2001), 77. It is also possible that he heard of the concept from his intellectual contemporaries at the OrtiOricellari, Florence. See, Hexter, “The Mystery”, 75-96.

<sup>226</sup> E. C. White, *Kaironomia: On the Will-to-Invent* (Ithaca, 1987), 13.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>228</sup> As R. B. Onians noted, ‘*Opportunus* would thus describe what offers an opening, or what is in front of an opening to go through’. See R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought : About the Body, The Mind, The Soul, The World, Time and Fate*, 348.

<sup>229</sup> White, *Kaironomia*, 13.

<sup>230</sup> This in fact also refers back to the earliest instance of the usage of *kairos* as “due measure” in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. See J. R. Wilson, “Kairos as Due Measure”, *Glotta* (1980), 177-204.

conception of *kairos* lies the idea of the uniqueness of the moment—in Machiavelli’s case, as we shall see, that of the *historical moment*—that is conducive towards the realisation of an agreeable future end. Moreover, implicit in the concept of *kairos* is the exhortative idea that such a moment must be *recognised* and *exploited* if the target is to be penetrated, that is, if the political end is to be materialised. It seems to be no coincidence that Machiavelli invokes the image of an archer in Chapter VI of *The Prince*. Importantly, this he does in the context of a discussion concerning a goal that is very difficult to attain, as is the foundation of a new order, noting that when the target seems too distant one should act as skillful archers do and aim at a much higher point so as to strike their target.<sup>231</sup> While using the imagery of an archer politically—in the context of hitting targets, attaining goals and materializing objectives—there is every reason to suggest that Machiavelli uses this imagery consciously, with a particular purpose in mind. Machiavelli invokes the image of an archer, traditionally connected to the idea of *kairos*, but also designates the ideal political end as the target that must be aimed at and penetrated both skillfully and forcefully. Notably, in this chapter he is preoccupied with the mythical legislators and founders who demonstrated a remarkable *virtù* in recognising and exploiting the *occasione*, in so doing also attaining honour, glory and fame. Machiavelli’s exposition of the *kairotic* time, which is one of radically transformative action, occurs in the context precisely of the discussion of archetypal examples, who are not princes or mere rulers, but *founders* of a new order. At the end of *The Prince*, when he again returns to the matter of founding a new political form, Machiavelli invokes the archetypal founders precisely and emphasises the rightness of the moment for the act of foundation, exhorting the ruler to act.

## Virtù

So far we have established that, most broadly conceived, chronological time is almost identical with the image of *Fortuna*, while corresponding to the idea of *i tempi* is the image of the many different and autonomous

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<sup>231</sup> *Prince*, 19.

wheels of fortune. Now, *Occasione* is fortune's daughter, yet by definition unique. What about *Fortuna* herself? She is no longer a goddess. As part of a literary exercise, Machiavelli might have referred to her as a "cruel goddess", but this he does not do in *The Prince*. Instead, in the stead of the earlier humanists, he proceeds to secularise the concept of *Fortuna*. In the event, what remains of the once sacral concept of *Fortuna* is the desacralised idea of contingent occurrences and the consequent warning—which Machiavelli tirelessly sounds—regarding the ever present risks contained in the very essence of such contingency. This holds even truer when one happens to be a prince and thus always under threat, exposed as he is to a plethora of problematic circumstances, both present and future. However, what *Fortuna* metaphorically stands for is what humans by their folly, ambition and laziness have themselves brought about and—due to the lack of flexibility—can now neither resist nor alter. Time, as conceived by Machiavelli, is not supernaturally preordained by some greater force, be it the Christian God or a pagan Goddess. Nor is the human fate predestined. Instead, time is events—which eventually transpire into history—that are created by the actions of humans themselves. For Machiavelli, time is the totality at once of events and of the whole constellation of forces and occurrences unleashed by human action. Therefore, man's fate is in his own hand, if only he could command his *virtù* to greater heights.

Now, *virtù* is a phenomenon belonging specifically to the present, because it is a remedy to a concrete political problem in a concrete segment of time that is the present. In the broadest sense, *virtù* is that which is exercised as a means of endowing the world destabilised by *Fortuna* with a degree of stability and constancy.<sup>232</sup> Importantly, in *The Prince* Machiavelli announced a departure from the prevalent conception of *virtù*. First he declared that he is 'not unaware' how many have argued that so are the

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<sup>232</sup> *Virtù* is intimately involved in rendering a *stato* secure in time. Regarding this, interesting interpretations have been developed by L. Althusser and R. J. Quinones. Althusser distinguished 'two moments in the constitution of a state': firstly, 'that of the absolute *beginning*'—itself unstable—and 'the second moment, that of *duration*'. See L. Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London, 1999), 64-5. Furthermore, Quinones rightly observed that 'the problem of Machiavelli's prince is that 'the only true and successful resolution of charismatic qualities is for them to become institutionalized, to translate themselves into regularly functioning laws and orders'. See R. J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Harvard, 1972), 177.

affairs of the world ‘ruled by fortune and God’ that they cannot be controlled by human *virtù*.<sup>233</sup> However, he then proceeded to uphold the importance of *virtù*, ‘so as not to eliminate human freedom’.<sup>234</sup> For *virtù* that was the guarantor of human freedom and, if well equipped, possibly the liberator of man from the ills of temporal servitude also. Now, neither could Machiavelli stop time, nor could *virtù* ever fully overcome *Fortuna*. After all, ‘it is it is a very true thing that all worldly things have a limit to their life’.<sup>235</sup>

However, what Machiavelli *could* do was to maximise the degree of prince’s non-reliance upon *Fortuna* and, in so doing, minimise the malicious impact of *Fortuna*. Peter Stacey has correctly observed that ‘Machiavelli’s prince is not armed with virtue. His virtue is to be armed.’<sup>236</sup> We have already observed how the task of the political philosopher was to assist the generation of a *political time* versus the *natural time* personified by *Fortuna* that was chaotic and full of possible dangers. Machiavelli was going to do exactly this by arming princely *virtù* with the necessary prudence derived not only from ‘long experience of modern affairs’ but also from ‘continual study of ancient history’.<sup>237</sup> After all, it was in an attempt to save human freedom, Machiavelli in the event observed that ‘fortune is the arbiter of half our actions’ but it ‘lets us control roughly the other half’.<sup>238</sup> It is precisely this ‘other half’ that forms the realm of *virtù*, where human skill can be exercised in an attempt to save human freedom from the tyrannical advances of time. However, in a world where everything and everyone was subject—in Gilbert’s apt phrase—to the ‘ravages of time’, *virtù* itself was no exception.<sup>239</sup> ‘Not a thing in the world is eternal; Fortune wills it so’, Machiavelli lamentably observed in *Tercets*.<sup>240</sup>

All things were indeed of the world governed by time; and nothing could ever be stable in the world destabilised by *Fortuna*. In the broadest sense, then, *virtù* was action, and more specifically, an action undertaken in the

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<sup>233</sup> *Prince*, 84.

<sup>234</sup> *Prince*, 85. See also, Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 24.

<sup>235</sup> *Discourses*, III:1, 209.

<sup>236</sup> P. Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 283. See also, *ibid.*, 106, 274.

<sup>237</sup> *Prince*, 85.

<sup>238</sup> *Prince*, 85.

<sup>239</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 192.

<sup>240</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, Vol. 3, 748.



present—in response to particular present circumstances and situations—with the intention of imposing form upon *Fortuna*. However, *virtù* being the tool of rendering stable that which *Fortuna* had destabilized, the very meaning of *virtù* itself could not be either fixed or timeless. This is, of course, not to say that *virtù* had no meaning.<sup>241</sup> Skinner has elegantly observed that for Machiavelli and his contemporaries the concept of *virtù* denoted ‘the indispensable quality which enables a ruler to deflect the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’.<sup>242</sup> On the contrary, the concept of *virtù*, as conceived by Machiavelli, had a range of meanings, because it had to be flexible if it were to suit the changeability of the very malady it was meant to cure.<sup>243</sup>

It is in the context of a plurality of meanings that the general idea of *virtù* assumes its various concrete and particular characters. And it is here, perhaps more than anywhere else, that we see most clearly the crucial importance of considering Machiavelli’s various ideas of time and how they determined the ideal modes of practical political action preached by the Florentine Secretary. We shall now turn to the exposition precisely of this practical political advice. This is the practical side of the human political battle against time, and the site of the clash between the manly *virtù* and female *Fortuna* who, Machiavelli believes, being a woman must be beaten and coerced until she becomes submissive to one’s will.<sup>244</sup>

### **Political Time: Time for Human Potential**

We should now turn to the *practical* political implications of Machiavelli’s various ideas of time. This we will do by exposing the various meanings that *virtù* acquires in the context of each of the three ideas of time. As has been remarked above, due to the lack of such an approach, historiography has hitherto failed to uncover the proper function performed by various temporal concepts in response to their socio-historical contexts. Such an

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<sup>241</sup> For a range of translations and meanings of *virtù*, see J. Plamenatz, “In Search of Machiavellian *Virtù*”, in *Calculus*, 157-78.

<sup>242</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 1, 121.

<sup>243</sup> Skinner has developed the same interpretation. See the excellent chapter on “Machiavelli’s Critique of Humanism” in *Foundations*, 128-38.

<sup>244</sup> *Prince*, 85.

undertaking is particularly important in the context of Machiavelli's thought, where time directly determines the ideal of practical political action. After all, in response to each of the three ideas of time, Machiavelli has corresponding ideas of what constitutes good political practice.

Firstly, in the context of the *chronotic* idea of time, considering that central to all princely practices ought to be awareness of *Fortuna's* changeability, it is above all else possessing and exercising foresight that constitutes *virtù*. We learn that this is a skill that 'only a shrewd and far-seeing man', like Cesare Borgia, possesses.<sup>245</sup> Even when Borgia had successfully consolidated his hold over Romagna, he was already looking cautiously to the future, thinking rightly that the French would 'not tolerate his plan' of further expansion.<sup>246</sup> Accordingly, he was wise enough already to be seeking alternative alliances. The importance of exercising foresight and acting *on time* is captured brilliantly in the example cited earlier concerning the need to provide a timely cure to the diseased polity. It is crucial that the troubles be detected and cured *on time* or else be encountered only 'when they have grown' and there is no longer any remedy. If 'the first signs of trouble' are left unattended, when time has passed, 'the medicine will be too late' because 'the malady will have become incurable.'<sup>247</sup>

The Romans were in this regard exemplary, for they dealt not only 'with existing troubles', but also with those that were 'likely to develop', and did so 'when they were merely brewing'.<sup>248</sup> Indeed, 'as time passes' maladies left initially unattended and undiagnosed become 'easy to diagnose but difficult to treat'. Importantly, we also learn that 'what physicians say about consumptive diseases' holds true also of states.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, as opposed to the Italian rulers of the recent times, who had failed to be foresightful enough and consequently lost their *stati*, the Romans had been truly *virtuosi* because they were in the habit of eliminating troubles in their incipient form instead of allowing them to develop.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> *Prince*, 11.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. *Prince*, 24-5.

<sup>247</sup> *Prince*, 11.

<sup>248</sup> *Prince*, 11.

<sup>249</sup> *Prince*, 11.

<sup>250</sup> See also *Discourses*, II:23, 181-4.

However, being merely foresightful is by no means sufficient. After all, Borgia had been full of foresight.<sup>251</sup> But he had been brought to power by *Fortuna* and was more dependent on her. And ‘luck runs out’.<sup>252</sup> Why did the Italian rulers lose their *stati*? Because they did nothing in peaceful times to strengthen their *stati*. Not only did they not develop any real *independence*, but ‘when difficult times came, they hoped that the people would restore them to power’.<sup>253</sup> They thus resigned their part in the affair, the very part of human freedom that must act and exercise *virtù* for its very survival. This was neither prudent, nor brave. Such a defence was, in fact, ‘weak and cowardly’, because it fell wholly outside their control. In truth, ‘only those defences that are under your control and based on your own ability are effective, certain and lasting’.<sup>254</sup>

Therefore, equipped with foresight, one must necessarily develop a degree of independence.<sup>255</sup> In fact, it is precisely the degree of non-reliance on external agents that represents the very criterion of the strength of a principality.<sup>256</sup> Germany, Spain and France were *stati* that were *virtuosi* because they had made proper provisions for times of adversity.<sup>257</sup> The German cities had ordered their affairs so virtuously that they were ‘completely independent’.<sup>258</sup> Italy, however, was not a *virtuoso* state, for she had been ‘devoid of any embankments or defences’.<sup>259</sup> It was for that reason that Italy had proved to be the ‘seat of many changes’ and turbulences discussed above, for as we have already learnt, *Fortuna* strikes precisely where no defences have been constructed.<sup>260</sup> Had the Italian rulers

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<sup>251</sup> *Prince*, 23.

<sup>252</sup> Letter to Soderini (c. 15 September 1506), abridged to *Prince*, 98.

<sup>253</sup> *Prince*, 84.

<sup>254</sup> *Prince*, 84.

<sup>255</sup> What is meant here by “independence” is not simply political independence but, in the widest sense, non-reliance on external agents, forces or powers that be. It is of course the case that political independence is a valuable form of such independence, but the sense in which here we deploy this word is more than simply political independence. After all, one could be politically independent, as were the Italian *principi*, but not have developed the necessary degree of independence, as the Italian *principi* had not.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. *Prince*, Ch. X, “How the Strength of All Principalities Should be Measured”, 37-8.

<sup>257</sup> *Prince*, 38.

<sup>258</sup> *Prince*, 38.

<sup>259</sup> *Prince*, 85.

<sup>260</sup> *Prince*, 83.

developed the necessary degree of independence, ‘the flood’ would not have caused such great changes, or better still ‘not have occurred at all’.<sup>261</sup>

Machiavelli ceaselessly stresses the importance of independence in Chapter VI devoted to completely new rulers who are by nature most fragile before *Fortuna*. Here he once again insists that it is always better to owe one’s standing to *virtù* rather than to *Fortuna*, for ‘rulers maintain themselves better if they owe little to luck’.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, the very success of innovators, who face countless grave difficulties before they have fully established their *stati*, is dependent precisely on their degree of independence. Those of them who are independent—that is, possess sufficient forces of their own—‘rarely find themselves in difficulties’, while those who are dependent upon others ‘always fare badly and accomplish nothing’.<sup>263</sup> Machiavelli’s view is captured perfectly in his letter to Giovan Battista Soderini, where he observed that ‘the success of everybody depends on how they act, and everyone runs out of luck’.<sup>264</sup>

Importantly, it is precisely in this context that the idea of ‘force’ is introduced in *The Prince*. Now, this is a very important consideration, taken up again in Chapters XII-XIV, as well as in Chapters XXIV and XXVI. In these chapters, Machiavelli tirelessly stresses the pressing necessity before a new ruler of creating a military composed entirely of native troops. Such was indeed the importance of possessing independent military forces that Machiavelli designated good laws and good armies to be ‘the main foundations of all states’.<sup>265</sup> However, it was the bitter truth that men have ‘so little judgment and foresight’ that they fail to foresee ‘any poison that is concealed’ behind their inability to see the importance of creating independent military forces.<sup>266</sup> In fact, precisely in his discussion of military matters, Machiavelli then revokes his earlier discussion of ‘consumptive diseases’ affecting the body politic, once again stressing that ‘a ruler who

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<sup>261</sup> *Prince*, 85.

<sup>262</sup> *Prince*, 19.

<sup>263</sup> *Prince*, 21.

<sup>264</sup> Letter to Soderini, abridged to *Prince*, 98.

<sup>265</sup> *Prince*, 42.

<sup>266</sup> *Prince*, 51.

does not recognise evils in the very early stages cannot be considered wise; this ability is given only to a few'.<sup>267</sup>

Secondly, already in the context of *i tempi*, responding to the qualitative reality of *the times* was the key virtue. After all, for Machiavelli, prudence was the knowledge of 'how to assess the dangers and to choose the least bad course of action as being the right one to follow'.<sup>268</sup> Effective prudence above all else consisted of possessing a decent understanding of the qualities and the nature of the present that was itself the mirror of *the times*. After all, Machiavelli was interested not in how things should be in an imaginary, ideal world, but in the *verita effettuale* of the real world, which was the world governed by time.<sup>269</sup> Having placed politics in the stream of history, Machiavelli had thus designated politics not only as the art of choice and decision, but one also of knowing *what* to do *when*.<sup>270</sup> For *i tempi* themselves set the criteria for success, since they required, demanded and encouraged particular kinds of actions that were in accord with the demands of the qualitative nature of the times. Accordingly, In the context of *i tempi*, the strength and resilience of *virtù* was measured as the ability to respond to the demands of *the times*.

Being in tune with the quality of the times was indeed crucial. Of the two men who have same characters, one might prove to be successful, while the other fails. Conversely, 'one might act impetuously, while the other acts cautiously, and they might both succeed'.<sup>271</sup> Why should that be so? The reason is that men are successful only when their conduct is 'suited to the times and circumstances, and unsuccessful when they are not'.<sup>272</sup> Pope Julius II, a lucky man in general,<sup>273</sup> represents an excellent example.<sup>274</sup> Julius always acted impetuously, but was lucky enough always to find the

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<sup>267</sup> *Prince*, 51.

<sup>268</sup> *Prince*, 79.

<sup>269</sup> *Prince*, 54.

<sup>270</sup> Robert Orr has rightly noted that 'Machiavelli's writings lend themselves more convincingly to a dualistic rather than a monistic form of philosophical construction. The initial idiom of his political thinking is that of government and society; that of his moral thinking is that of a man and circumstances'. See R. Orr, "Time Motif in Machiavelli", in *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, edited by Martin Fleischer (New York, 1972), 188.

<sup>271</sup> *Prince*, 86.

<sup>272</sup> *Prince*, 85.

<sup>273</sup><sup>273</sup> As we read elsewhere, 'his good luck meant that' he did not pay for his 'bad policy', *Prince*, 48.

<sup>274</sup> See also: *Discourses*, III:9, 239-41.

‘times and circumstances very well suited to his ways’.<sup>275</sup> Similarly, Fabius Maximus,<sup>276</sup> who ‘displayed a prudence and caution’ unnatural to his countrymen, was fortunate for ‘good fortune made this mode of his match well with the times’.<sup>277</sup> And there is also Numa, the legendary founder of Rome’s religious and political institutions, who was also very fortunate, because ‘the circumstance of the times’ in which he ruled were ‘deeply tintured with religious feeling’. Analysing the careers of the first three Roman kings, Machiavelli notes how fortunate the city of Rome *itself* had been. Such was indeed the ‘extreme good fortune’ of that city that her first king, Romulus, was ‘fierce and warlike’, just when a strong founder of civil life was required. The second king, Numa, was ‘peaceful and religious’ and the third king, Tullus, more disposed to war than to peace.<sup>278</sup> But all of these instances represent examples of sheer luck. Indeed, the city of Rome had owed a great deal to *Fortuna*, for she had enjoyed the good luck of having had the rulers so well suited to the times, while Numa, Fabius Maximus and Pope Julius II had been lucky to have lived in the times that were suited to their characters and ways of acting.<sup>279</sup> These men, though no doubt able, were particularly gifted, above all else, at being themselves and ordering affairs in their *own ways*. However, times change and circumstances constantly ‘vary’.<sup>280</sup> What, then, should one do?

Now, since being in harmony with the times increases the chances of success, the change in the nature and quality of times then necessarily requires a corresponding change in one’s ways of acting as well. If one were constantly to adjust one’s character and conduct to the times, ‘one would always be successful’.<sup>281</sup> It is precisely here that the image of the many wheels of fortune acquires particular significance. In *Tercets* Machiavelli noted that ‘a man who could leap from wheel to wheel would always be happy and fortunate’.<sup>282</sup> As we have already observed, Machiavelli believed

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<sup>275</sup> *Prince*, 86.

<sup>276</sup> *Discourses*, I:11, 34.

<sup>277</sup> *Discourses*, III:9, 239.

<sup>278</sup> *Discourses*, I:19, 53.

<sup>279</sup> See also *Discourses*, III, 9, 239-41.

<sup>280</sup> *Prince*, 87.

<sup>281</sup> *Prince*, 86.

<sup>282</sup> *Tercets*, Gilbert, III, 746.

that fortune has ‘as many wheels ... turning as there are varied ways of climbing to those things which every living man strives to attain’.<sup>283</sup>

Like his contemporaries, Machiavelli believed that the true end which all men seek to attain is fame and glory. Unlike them, however, he maintained that there are ‘varied ways’ of climbing to these great and honourable ends.<sup>284</sup> It is from the idea of the many wheels of fortune that Machiavelli derives his firm belief in the necessary flexibility of *virtù* as well as his firm belief, accordingly, in the acceptability—and sometimes even a pressing necessity—of employing a diverse range of methods in the process of attaining these desirable ends. Now, the problem of remaining on one wheel, which was turned irrationally by *Fortuna*, was that it would eventually lead to one’s demise. Having brought one to the top of the wheel, *Fortuna* could do nothing else, since it kept turning, ‘than carry him to the bottom’.<sup>285</sup> Therefore, if one were to succeed it was necessary to exchange one wheel for another and in so doing always remain on the top of the wheel.

In what represents a passage of vital importance, Machiavelli wrote to Giovan Battista Soderini that if men were ‘shrewd enough to understand the times and circumstances’, and capable of adapting to them, it would then be true that ‘a wise man could control the stars and fates’.<sup>286</sup> This, to be sure, was a common astrological conception at the time most likely derived from Ptolemy’s *Almagest* and well known to and equally appreciated by Machiavelli’s contemporaries.<sup>287</sup> However, this was a task almost impossible to accomplish, since men ‘lack flexibility’ and cannot ‘preserve the just mean’ in adjusting their ways to the demands of the times.<sup>288</sup> There, then, was Machiavelli stressing how miserably human folly and frailty allowed *Fortuna* to repress and subdue them.

Unable to adjust to the times, men often come to grief. Fabius Maximus was an able warrior. However, had he been king of Rome, the war that actually ended well might have ended unhappily, because Fabius did not

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<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 746.

<sup>284</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 1, 134.

<sup>285</sup> Machiavelli, *History of Florence*, III, 19, Gilbert, III, 1170-1.

<sup>286</sup> Letter to Soderini, abridged to *Prince*, 98.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. A. J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (Yale, 1992).

<sup>288</sup> *Discourses*, III, 9, 240; *Prince*, 86-7.

know ‘how to vary his procedure as the times varied’.<sup>289</sup> And if ‘circumstances had changed’, so that cautious conduct was now required, Pope Julius II ‘would have been undone’, because he would have never deviated from his rash and impetuous ways.<sup>290</sup> After all, Machiavelli’s own friend and colleague, Piero Soderini, head of Florentine Republic, had been undone in just such a manner. Soderini was in all his actions ‘guided by patience and gentleness’ and prospered with his country ‘while the times were conformable to the mode of his proceeding’. But he proved unable to respond to the change of *the times* and, when this had actually occurred, for he could not abandon his usual ways.<sup>291</sup> Soderini thus ruined not only himself, but also the Florentine republic and of course Machiavelli’s career at the government of Florence.

However, we also encounter rulers who represent an exception to this rule due to their multi-faceted *virtù*. Romulus, for example, was ‘fortified with [both] prudence and arms’.<sup>292</sup> Moreover, Ancus, the successor to Tullus, had so much *virtù* that he was always in a ‘mode that enabled him [both] to use peace and endure war’.<sup>293</sup> These men, then, enjoyed greatest stability of all—though like anyone else they were equally vulnerable to the unusually strong and unexpected attacks of *Fortuna*—because their *virtù* enabled them to operate in different kinds of times. If a prince like Numa was set to hold or lose power ‘according as fortune and circumstances befriend him’, rulers like Romulus or Ancus would hold their *stati* ‘in any mode unless it is taken from him by an obstinate and excessive force’.<sup>294</sup> In short, such was their *virtù* that it transcended the limits of the present. By its very nature, their *virtù* thus had the greatest potential to master *Fortuna* and beget fame, honour and glory. But this passage is of vital importance in yet another way. Namely, it testifies to the notion already encountered that truly well cultivated *virtù* in fact enables one to develop a remarkable degree of independence and, accordingly, a high degree of freedom from the mischievous and repressive doings of *Fortuna*. However, these represented

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<sup>289</sup> *Discourses*, III:9, 240.

<sup>290</sup> *Prince*, 86-7.

<sup>291</sup> *Discourses*, III:9, 240.

<sup>292</sup> *Discourses*, I:19, 53.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.



exceptions to the rule. That Rome had been exceedingly lucky to have had the right kinds of kings was due to *Fortuna* who, as we have established is ‘exceedingly variable and uncertain’.<sup>295</sup> Therefore, ‘while it lived under the kings, [Rome] bore the dangers of being ruined under a king either weak or malevolent.’<sup>296</sup>

On the contrary, a republican regime was better suited to the diversity of the times. This is an important trait of Machiavelli’s thought – and one ignored by Pocock’s analysis of republican temporality. Now, the process of adaptation to the change of *the times* is slower and riskier in a republic because, being a form of “many”, ‘occasions must be waited for which shall stir *the whole community*, and it is not enough that a single citizen alters his method of acting.’<sup>297</sup> However, the very same diversity grants a republic a ‘greater life and ... good fortune’ than one enjoyed by a monarchy,<sup>298</sup> because a republic is able to produce a diverse range of rulers suited to the diverse demands of *the times*. In short, a republican regime is better prepared to respond to the limitations imposed by the fixed character traits of human beings.<sup>299</sup> Therefore, a republic can ‘accommodate itself better than a single prince to the diversity of times’, a quality wholly indispensable in the world of constant alterations such was for Machiavelli the real world.<sup>300</sup>

Finally, in the context of the *third* idea of time, *virtù* comes to denote the ability at once *to recognize* and *to grasp* the fleeting *occasione*. *Fortuna* was indeed kind enough to bestow appropriate opportunities upon Moses, Cyrus and Romulus to shape the material into form. However, since *occasione* must be both recognised and responded to adequately, if these men ‘had lacked ability, the opportunity would have been wasted’.<sup>301</sup> Similarly, Hiero of Syracuse enjoyed ‘a fine opportunity’ to which he then applied his remarkable *virtù*. The *occasione* were themselves greatly valuable, for it was precisely the right kind of opportunities that provided these men with the

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<sup>295</sup> *Prince*, 23.

<sup>296</sup> *Discourses*, I;19, 53.

<sup>297</sup> *Discourses*, III:9, 240.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>299</sup> C. J. Nederman, “Machiavelli and moral character: principality, republic and the psychology of *virtù*”, *History of Political Thought*, 3 (2000), 351.

<sup>300</sup> *Discourses*, III:9, 240.

<sup>301</sup> *Prince*, 20.

possibility to attain the great heights. Had these opportunities been absent, ‘the strength of their spirit would have been sapped’.<sup>302</sup> However, without ‘their surpassing abilities’ that enabled them ‘to recognise and grasp these opportunities’, they would never have succeeded. Cesare Borgia was also able at seizing the unruly maid by the forelock. As we read in *The Prince*, the traditional problem of maintaining balance between the powerful Roman factions of the Orsini and the Colonna had been unresolved partly due to ‘particular circumstances’ – the lack of appropriate *occasione*. Cesare Borgia resolved this problem precisely by waiting ‘for an opportunity to destroy the leaders’ of the factions and eventually did so when fortune occasioned ‘a fine chance’, which he ‘exploited to the full’.<sup>303</sup>

In a similar vein, Borgia also ‘availed himself of an opportunity’ to have the ruthless messer Remirro de Orco, who had been amassing hatred on his account, executed publicly.<sup>304</sup> Therefore, Cesare Borgia possessed the ability not only to recognise the opportune moment, but also to take appropriate measures and advance his standing. Pope Julius II is yet another example here. He not only found the church ‘already powerful’, but also enjoyed ‘opportunities for accumulating money’ never used before the reign of Pope Alexander. In the event, those who proved to have sufficient *virtù* both for recognising and seizing the *occasione* all enjoyed very agreeable outcomes. In the case of the legislators, ‘the outcome was that their own countries were ennobled and flourished greatly’,<sup>305</sup> while the popes rendered the Church ‘so great’ and stable that even the King of France ‘stands in awe of it’.<sup>306</sup>

## Republican Time

The problem of stability and continuity in time loomed large in Italy during the entire period between 1490 and 1530s. This stemmed directly at once from the social and political reality and from a set of cultural preconceptions about one’s existence in time. As we have already observed, in this period of history, time was conceived as a physical being that

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<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

devoured all its creation. Time was short and death constantly imminent. That the most powerful and definitive arguments about death emerged in this period, and the preoccupation with the myth of Venice intensified at that time precisely, both have to say much about the nature of these years. The sense of instability was to be seen everywhere, from poetry and art to political thought. Moreover, such temporal conceptions united to invite a certain mode of *state of exception*; time was exceptional not only due to its nature in the *historical present*, but also because it was seen as constantly posing a challenge, as an agent promising to usher in the moment of end and destruction. Not surprisingly, then, political thought, which has in all ages sought stability and order of whatever kind, can be seen to be doing the same with a far greater zeal in this period. It was precisely in the same context that longevity of an order became the foremost political priority. Importantly, already in *The Prince*, even when writing for a single ruler, Machiavelli set a far more republican priority of *longevity* as a priority.<sup>307</sup> This was, indeed a more republican priority in the context of the republican form of life, since the matter of longevity came to pose, more particularly still, the problem of time and *virtù*, that is a problem of time and human political action, and by implication begged questions about institutional stability of the Italy to come. In the thought of both Machiavelli and Guicciardini, the prevalent temporal conceptions, themselves the results of cultural and socio-political milieus, led to a call for an institutional order that would hold republican universal ideals stable in time.

Now, if we are to understand the relation between a republic and Machiavelli's temporal philosophy, it is vital first to appreciate how Machiavelli and his contemporaries saw the city of Florence as a political form and a socio-political fabric extant *in time* at the present moment of her existence in history. Florence, Machiavelli believed, was gravely ill; and the illness had a particular name — corruption. At the time, corruption meant not only a fraudulent abuse of power in pursuit of private interests, as we might understand it today, but a broader range of phenomena that together stood for moral depravity. The lack of *virtù* was a coeval presence to, and indeed a source of, the state of idleness and corruption that had engulfed

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<sup>307</sup> *Prince*, 84.

not only contemporary Italian states, but also France and Spain. There was one exception, Machiavelli believed. This was Germany, for she had not kept a regular contact with foreign states and thus had been saved from ill influences circulating at large.<sup>308</sup> This was indeed fortunate, for Machiavelli conceived of corruption really like an illness that, should it continue for long, would ‘spread through [the republic’s] members’<sup>309</sup> and ‘pass into the vitals of [the] City’.<sup>310</sup> Like other illnesses, corruption was to be detected on time, which required ‘a prudent man ... who sees this evil from a distance and at its beginning.’<sup>311</sup> Here too, we see the organic conception of the state that can be—and we are told is —ill and consequently in need of *virtù* as an urgent medical cure.

Although Machiavelli speaks of corruption frequently, he does not often speak of Florentine corruption in particular. However, it is almost always clear that he is commenting about Florence. Machiavelli speaks so often of ‘a corrupt city’, while also mentioning ‘a corrupt city that lives under a Prince’ in particular, as was Florence when Machiavelli sat writing his work, and in fact even declares he ‘will presuppose the city very corrupt’ so as to find adequate ways for overcoming them at least in part. Nor is it a coincidence that there Machiavelli is not merely describing the objective condition of a corrupt people living under a prince, but rather discussing the difficulties they will face *in becoming a republic*. This, too, shows us that Pocock’s abstract observation that we have already encountered requires a qualification and that *The Prince* is indeed very directly connected with the circumstances of the city of Florence. Here we clearly see the priority in the light of which Machiavelli is examining the objective condition of the corrupt people living under a prince; coupled with this, we also see the difficulty of instituting a republic in a historical situation like this.<sup>312</sup>

Here we must remember that Machiavelli was writing *Discourses* as a good and knowledgeable, yet an unfortunate man for the less knowledgeable yet more fortunate men who lacked proper knowledge of history, which resulted in the lack of sufficient *virtù*. If the more fortunate

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<sup>308</sup> *Discourses*, I. 18.

<sup>309</sup> *Discourses*, I. 18.

<sup>310</sup> *Discourses*, I. 17.

<sup>311</sup> *Discourses*, I.18.

<sup>312</sup> *Discourses*, I.18.

men in high places were to listen to Machiavelli, they may accomplish something great, they may attain ideal ends. Now, in the context of *The Prince* and the principality as a political form, the ideal end to be pursued was the attainment of honour, fame and glory. However, in the context of the *Discourses* and a republic, the ideal end was in turn the foundation of a lasting order. This order, as we shall see, was to be *republican* in terms of priorities, yet not necessarily in terms of political organisation, or not *always so*, as we are about to argue.

If longevity was generally seen as a priority for individuals and political entities alike, in the context of republican political thought, *lasting order* was even more of a priority. If the basic ideal of a principality was security, that of the republic was — liberty. But the state of liberty was only possible where good laws and institutions were in place to manage the economy of liberty and protect liberty in time. Liberty had to be protected from degeneration and corruption that constantly threatens to destroy the ‘free way of life’ for a ‘free way of life’ was almost impossible where corruption reigned. If something truly great was to be done, corruption had to be eradicated and this Machiavelli viewed as a very difficult task. It was this that led him to rather radical conclusions not only about *how* to think about the political matter in time theoretically, but also about *what* to do about it in the immediate time. It is here that we shall see how Machiavelli’s philosophy of time came most fully to fashion a concrete theory of political action that was, to be sure, of a radically transformative nature. It is this that qualifies Machiavelli as the father of the revolutionary temporality that was to reshape the world throughout the centuries to come.

Corruption was a really powerful enemy of the ‘free way of life’. If a city is corrupt, Machiavelli believes it is not likely to remove princes and institute liberty; instead, in the more likely scenario, the people are going to exchange one prince for another, thus still remaining under the yoke. Of course, the prince may be highly *virtuoso* and kind thus granting the subjects efficient government and liberty. However, ‘that liberty will last only during his life time’.<sup>313</sup> However, this would hardly do, for one’s lifetime was rather short both according to the actual social reality of the

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<sup>313</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17.

time, and in the theoretical visions of it. Guicciardini also stressed in his *Dialogue*, and this too in the context of the discussion on founding a *new state*, how ‘it’s not reasonable in public affairs to adopt a time-scale of only the few years of one’s own life’.<sup>314</sup> In his *Maxims and Reflections*, Guicciardini further spoke of the inefficiency of papacy, as a form of rule, to create anything durable and worthy in time, for the life-time of the popes was rather short, at best a decade, at worst only several months. For that reason, secular princes got better employees than did the pope, ‘for greater hope is entertained of remaining long in his service’.<sup>315</sup> Guicciardini observed this not so much because he cared much about the fate or effectiveness of papacy, but precisely in the broader context of his conception of politics in time. The point he wished to stress here and elsewhere was that where longevity and durability in time lacked, there inefficiency reigned. Because secular princes reigned longer and were followed by rulers ‘almost identical with him’, the possibility of institutional stability of whatever form in time was far greater. The popes, ‘being as a rule short-lived have little time to train new servants’, yet the old ones, who had often served their fiercest enemies who had just died, could not be trusted. This, then, resulted either in utter inefficiency, or in a miserable lack of trust, none of which were agreeable.<sup>316</sup> In contrast, secular princes were generally more likely to trust those ‘who have been employed ... by his predecessors’.<sup>317</sup>

When Guicciardini spoke of those who set out ‘to found new states’, he stressed the foundation of a republic: a state ‘especially in the name of liberty’. The founder, Guicciardini observed, ‘should have as his objective the creation of a better and *more long-lasting government*’, for the time-scale of ‘only the few years of one’s own life’ was by no means sufficient. As is clear, the political form under consideration here is a republic. All forms and institutions need stability in time, however, now we see that a republic needs it ‘especially’.<sup>318</sup> Now, this is a specifically republican anxiety concerning time and political stability. This, to be sure, is also one that is to

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<sup>314</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 23.

<sup>315</sup> Guicciardini, *Councils and reflections*, 5.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>318</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 23; italics are mine.

be seen throughout ages, in Roman and Byzantine thought, in the thought of English and American republicans, as well as that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, all of whom were essentially rebelling against the notion of arbitrary *dominium*.<sup>319</sup> Although republicans throughout the ages have been able to presuppose that a prince might be particularly kind, they have nevertheless claimed that in this scenario the liberty of people depends on the life of the prince, which is short and on his goodwill that might prove even shorter. No matter how wonderful the prince might be, there is nevertheless always the *possibility* that he shall change, or cease to be. With this possibility, so too will the fate of liberty and that of the free way of life. This trait is still very much a part, if not even the most important part, of contemporary republican political theory.

It is faced with the finitude of the political persons and forms in time, and as it seeks to realise universal ends that republican philosophy tries at all times to cancel to the extent possible the power of possibility, chance and accident—contingency in general. The same realisation seems to have been in place always. Anthony Kaldellis' recent and in many ways already revolutionary work on *The Byzantine Republic* brings to our attention a particularly interesting passage to this effect from Priskos of Panion's *History* (c. 470s). In *History*, Priskos relates the story of his conversation with a Roman expatriate Graikos. Graikos, who was first a slave yet by the time of the conversation had already become a successful member of the Hun community, is in the dialogue criticising the practices of the Roman way of life.

We cannot be sure if the meeting ever took place, though it may have. In any case, Priskos the historian employs this rhetorical setting in order to air his own criticism of the Roman society through someone else's mouth. The conversation thus presents the advantages and disadvantages of the Roman mode of political organisation, before Priskos proceeds to answer the charges raised by Graikos, arguing that the life of Huns is governed by luck and chance, by 'the arbitrary whim of a despot'. Accordingly, that Graikos became a member of the community was 'thanks to Chance'. In contrast, in Rome, institutions and not luck or goodwill served as sources of liberty and

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<sup>319</sup> See P. Pettit, *Just Freedom* (New York, 2014).

there were ‘many sanctioned ways of giving freedom among them’. Thus the late Roman and Byzantine intellect did not see the Huns as a political community in possession of a *politeia* (that is a republic), precisely because their political life was seen as subject to chance. This was so, because theirs was an uninstitutionalised order, while the Byzantine political order, like the Roman one before it, was institutional. The Huns were instead seen as operating in the realm of contingency, where dominant were the unorganised particulars of time, while the *politeia* and the *res publica* were seen as extant in what we have in this study called political time.<sup>320</sup> Where institutional order was wanting, there natural time reigned. This was so for the late Roman intellect, as much as for the Florentine republicans of the early years of the sixteenth century and for theorists of republican political thought today. Machiavelli’s anxiety over the shortness and feebleness of the liberty issuing from the prince is an example of the very same traditional republican anxiety too.

However, in the specificity of the Florentine context of the time, such an anxiety translated into more than just that — namely, it became an anxiety about the *impossibility of a republic*. This, as we are about to see, had grave consequences on Machiavelli’s political thought. The impossibility of the republic stemmed from the realisation of the urgent need to cleans the city of corruption. Now, this required a great deal of *virtù*. As we have already observed, for Machiavelli the amount of *virtù* extant in a country directly affected the success and prosperity of that country. Where there was much *virtù*, as in Germany, there reigned freedom and prosperity.<sup>321</sup> On the contrary, where *virtù* was wanting, as Machiavelli believed it was in the Italy of his present, there reigned *Fortuna* and her unorganised particular and the political society was subject to chance and contingency. It was precisely the lack of *virtù* that had granted *Fortuna* an excellent opportunity to ravage Italy entirely. Had more *virtù* been levelled against her deeds, which she would have favoured for she favours boldness and action, Italy might have successfully constructed the ‘dams and dykes’ against the ravages of time the torrential river. However, even where there

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<sup>320</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic : people and power in New Rome* (Harvard, 2015), 65.

<sup>321</sup> Machiavelli, *Prince*, 38.



was *virtù*, it was still frail before the might of time. Indeed, no matter what *virtù* was like and however strong it was, it was itself never stable in time, for *virtù* could belong either to a prince, a mortal individual, or to a republic, a continuous plurality of people. However, being a plurality, no republic could ever be entirely virtuous because it was a form of many and thus always diverse. The true and proper *virtù* of which Machiavelli wrote was usually the trait of a single man. As he observed, if a city is corrupt she may not at all recover; however, ‘if it is ever to happen again’, it happens through the *virtù* of one man ‘who is then living, and not by the *virtù* of the general public that the good institutions are sustained’.<sup>322</sup>

The problem of *virtù* and time was one of human political action in time, for human skill, even when of such magnitude so as to be able to minimise the malice of time, was itself finite in time like all things extant in time. *Virtù* was ultimately defenseless before *Fortuna*, for *virtù* was a human trait and thus limited to the duration of a particular human life. Indeed, the *virtuoso* ruler being mortal and finite in time, like Hobbes’ ‘this artificial person, the Leviathan’ is would also be, and ‘as soon as such a one is dead’, the polity will ‘return to their pristine habits’.<sup>323</sup> Such was the unfortunate reality that ‘one man cannot live so long that the time will be enough to bring a City back to good habits which for a long time has had evil habits’.<sup>324</sup> If there were to be neither a continuity of *virtù*, nor an institutional order to render *virtù*, as a phenomenon, atemporal, the polity would instead return to the original state of corruption from which *virtù* had aimed to liberate it. To this end, Quinones has rightly observed how Machiavelli finds it absolutely crucial to institutionalise the ‘charismatic qualities of the moment’ of princely reign and render it atemporal in the form of an institutional order.<sup>325</sup> Indeed, if the end is to be agreeable—that is, in the republican context, if the free way of life is to be preserved—*virtù* cannot reside only in one man, but must necessarily be enshrined in a complex institutional order itself continuous and durable in time.

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<sup>322</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17.

<sup>323</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17.

<sup>324</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17.

<sup>325</sup> Quinones, *Discovery*, 78.

Machiavelli saw two possible scenarios that could withstand the challenge of the finitude of a *virtuoso* prince's life-time and thus that of his *virtù* that guaranteed proper government. Here too, Machiavelli's thought can be seen as operating with the two opposed categories of *natural time* versus *political time*, though we should remember that these terms are our invention, not Machiavelli's. Now, the first scenario was either simply 'very long life', or 'continuous successors of *virtù*'. If the good prince were to live for long enough so as to bring the city out of its miserable condition of corruption, or if he should be succeeded by another prince of great *virtù*, there would be hope of overcoming the malady. However, we have already observed that the usual expectation was never that one would live long. The continuity of *virtù* in a series of rulers was more probable, though similarly unlikely, and Machiavelli named one of the later chapters precisely that: 'Two Continuous Successions of Princes of *Virtù* achieve great Results; and that well organized Republics of necessity Have Successions of *Virtù*.<sup>326</sup>

Now, the second alternative was the institution an institutional order—this is a republic and when Machiavelli speaks of his famous 'new modes and orders' he has precisely this in mind—fit to hold republican ideals and fashion the kind of setting necessary for realising universal values. However, this too posed grave problems. For one thing, in the context of the current level of corruption, as Machiavelli himself explicitly observed, the republic was next to *impossible* even if highly ideal and sought after. Moreover, like everything else the institutional order, too, existed in time and was subject to the very same *state of exception* to which time subjected all things of this world, and especially all things political. Nothing was stable in time and institutional order could not be either, however perfect it may be. Now, here we should remember the Polybian political doctrine of *anakyklosis*, which Machiavelli relates in the beginning of his *Discourses*. Here Machiavelli describes the evolution of political life through three good political forms (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy) and their three opposing bad political forms (tyranny, oligarchy, anarchy). We do not need to discuss this theory at any greater length; suffice it here to note that at the heart of the constant corruption of the good forms of rule into their respective

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<sup>326</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 20.

opposites lay degeneration that was the product of time. Such was ‘the circle in which all the Republics are governed and will eventually be governed’.<sup>327</sup>

We must remain mindful of Machiavelli’s firm belief in the inevitability of the advance of corruption and degeneration *in time* if we are to understand his concern with the stability of institutional order in time. As Machiavelli observes, ‘the institutions and laws made in a Republic *at its origin*, when men were good’ are no longer suitable ‘when [men] have become evil’.<sup>328</sup> Now, Machiavelli believes in the power of good laws to overcome the feeble nature of human disposition towards the political present; it is first and foremost good laws and good education—inseparable components of any republican conception of statehood from Cicero to Pettit—that must enhance *virtù*.

Yet, laws, too, are very much subject to time; namely, they must be adapted to the exigencies of the moment if they are to serve as the cure to the maladies of the present. However, ‘if laws vary according to circumstances and events in a City, its institutions rarely or never vary’.<sup>329</sup> Thus, here another problem arises, that of the lack of coeval condition between the laws and the institutions that hold them. Since the institutions remain ‘firm’, that is unchanged, while the laws are adapted to the needs of the moment—to provide adequate response to the unorganised particulars sent by *fortune*: chance, accident, occasion and the like—the laws are held by an inadequate institutional order the features of which are not coeval with the temporality of law itself responding to the actual state of the present. Thus the laws themselves will inevitably become corrupted. If, apart from the laws, the institutions that hold the laws are not also adapted to the exigencies of the moment, and thus able to withstand the *state of exception* posed by time, laws will become inadequate in response to the actuality of the present moment and thus wholly ineffective. Such laws, if themselves corrupt, will not only not cure anything, but themselves come to form a part of corruption. This would, then, facilitate yet another degenerative cycle into which all republics necessarily go.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 2.

<sup>328</sup><sup>328</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 18.

<sup>329</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 18.

<sup>330</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 18

The problem of *virtù* was indeed complex. On the one hand, true *virtù* was seen to be the potential possession not on ‘the many’, but of ‘the one’. Yet, such *virtù* itself was bound by time in more than one sense, including that of its finitude. The problem of *virtù* in time—in other words, the difficulty *virtù* faced while willing to become *gloria*— thus brought to the fore of attention the need for the continuity of *virtù*, which was very hard to attain both due to the shortness of one’s life and the slim chances of having two or more sufficiently *virtuoso* leaders in a succession. On the other hand, if *virtù* was to succeed in generating *political time* against *natural time*, it had to be institutionalised in the form of ‘the many’, a republic. The most optimal solution, though itself far from perfect, was indeed the institution of a republican order whose psychology, as we have earlier observed, was better adapted to the diversity of times. However, ‘the many’, the republic in its entirety, was never sufficiently *virtuoso*. Moreover, in the context specifically of Machiavelli’s Florence, not only was the city wanting *virtù*, but worse still it was ‘very corrupt’, which led Machiavelli to concluding that the reinstatement of the republic was nothing but *impossible*.

It was this problem of *virtù* and these very conclusions that led Machiavelli to the most radical conclusions. While Machiavelli’s ideal future end remained the foundation of a *new state* in the name of liberty, the reality of the political present posed a grave social objective that was to be realised if a republic were to be founded, or re-founded. The city was to be cleansed of corruption. With this ideal end in mind, and while viewing the city as ‘very corrupt’, and entertaining very little hope for ‘the continuity of *virtù*’, which was highly improbable Machiavelli proceeded to call for the architecture of a new political time.

This was Machiavelli’s new constitution and it was this that rendered Machiavelli not only ‘the spiritual father of revolution’, as Arendt referred to him, but the very father of the revolutionary temporal paradigm and the revolutionary mode of human thought and action. In her *On Revolution*, Arendt observed how ‘it is difficult to deny that one may well see in [Machiavelli] the spiritual father of revolution’.<sup>331</sup> However, Arendt went no further. Arendt did, to be sure, have an excellent appreciation of

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<sup>331</sup> H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (London, 1963), 37.

Machiavelli's thought and she did make observations that were insightful and accurate. It was in so doing that Arendt observed how Machiavelli 'was the first to think about the possibility of founding a permanent, lasting, enduring body politic' (which was to her precisely 'what makes [Machiavelli] so relevant for a history of revolution').<sup>332</sup> In fact, Arendt went so far as to remark—and with this engage in a long-standing debate, in which we are also about to engage imminently—how Machiavelli 'apparently felt that a united Italy would constitute a political body so different from ancient or fifteenth-century city-states as to warrant a new name'<sup>333</sup>— *lo stato*.<sup>334</sup> Moreover, Arendt rightly appreciated that Machiavelli was not simply a theoretical preacher of the foundation of states, but as a matter of fact a citizen and a political thinker calling for the imminent foundation, very much in practice, of a new Italy. However, Arendt believed this was to be 'modelled after the French and Spanish examples', which I doubt since Machiavelli was a republican, who had disliked France and Spain both as a private person—not least because France and Spain had caused his grave misfortunes—and as a citizen with a republican fervour.<sup>335</sup>

In any case, Arendt argued that Machiavelli saw such a task of foundation not as the beginning and foundation of a *new time*—which is an inseparable prerequisite of Arendt's own conception of revolution<sup>336</sup>—but simply as a *rinovazione*, as an *alterazione a salute*, that is a renovation, a welcome and propitious change.<sup>337</sup> Yet, the main reason why Arendt did not conceive of Machiavelli as more than 'a spiritual father of revolution' was that apparently 'the specific revolutionary pathos of the absolutely new, of a beginning which would justify starting to count time in the year of the revolutionary event, was entirely alien to him'.<sup>338</sup> However, these criticisms require a considerable qualification. For one thing, it remains unclear why

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<sup>332</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 36.

<sup>333</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 39.

<sup>334</sup> H. C. Mansfield, "On the Impersonality of the Modern State: A Comment on Machiavelli's Use of *Stato*", in *The American Political Science Review*, 4 (Dec. 1983), 849-57.

<sup>335</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 36-7.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Machiavelli, especially if he is read as a prophet of a new Italian state,<sup>339</sup> might not be seen as the preacher of a new foundation and thus a new political time. Firstly, there was no precedent of a unified state of whatever form on the soil of Italy; Machiavelli was calling for an unprecedented political phenomenon and, as we are about to argue, he also saw and consciously depicted the correspondent tract of time, in which appropriate actions to this end were to be taken, as also unprecedented. Secondly, it is even more unclear why it is necessary to seek in the thought of Machiavelli, a sixteenth-century political thinker, the precise precedent of an act that would occur centuries later in the context of a specific historic situation, the French Revolution, in order to qualify him as ‘revolutionary’. In fact, not only was Machiavelli *the* father of the very paradigm of revolutionary time, but he also satisfied the requirements of Arendt’s own normative definition of a revolution as a process in time throughout which necessarily present must be ‘pathos of novelty ... where [this] novelty is connected with the idea of freedom’.<sup>340</sup> We shall soon attend to Machiavelli’s revolutionary time and his contextual battle for a *new Italy*. However, prior to that, we should bring together some of the most important threads of our previous considerations, so as to prepare ourselves to see Machiavelli in relation to history and time. Only then will we be able to appreciate Niccolò Machiavelli not only as a humble Florentine Secretary, but also as the first temporal revolutionary in the history of Western political thought.

## **Machiavelli Against History**

In the previous chapter we observed that in one sense history was seen as a record of *virtù*. History was a reservoir of a rich range of *exempla*, themselves imparting powerful moral and practical lessons, by which one was to guide one’s actions in the present times. In Machiavelli’s thought,

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<sup>339</sup> I read Machiavelli in this way, for the most part, I share Althusser’s interesting and exciting reading of Machiavelli’s contextual commitments. See, Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London, 1999).

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

*exempla* was ‘encapsulated past’,<sup>341</sup> containing within themselves those aspects of the past that were invaluable for any political action. Moreover, *exempla* might be imparted, and indeed given as a gift, like Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and *Discourses*. Now, since Machiavelli conceived of the feebleness of the present as stemming chiefly from the lack of *virtù*,<sup>342</sup> which itself was to be sought in great exemplary stories of the times past, history was of utmost significance to Machiavelli’s conception of time and politics in the present.

That in contemporary Italy *virtù* had been lacking so miserably was precisely due to the lack of proper knowledge of history. History, Machiavelli lamentably observed, was read only in pursuit of pleasure, but never in order to be imitated. Such a reading, or more precisely the lack of proper reading, was exceedingly foolish for history offered examples not only of various kinds of situations, but also of the practical modes of action in response to such situations. After all:

it is easily recognized by those who consider present and ancient affairs that the same desires and passions exist in all Cities and people, and that they always existed. So that to whoever with diligence examines past events, it is an easy thing to foresee the future in any Republic<sup>343</sup>

In an identical argument in Guicciardini’s *Dialogue*, we read that so is ‘the world is constituted that everything that exists at present has existed before, under different names, in different times and different places.’<sup>344</sup> The conclusion was that, observing such similarities, men could ‘take for [the future things]the remedies that were used by the ancients, or, if they do not finds any that were used, to think up new ones through the similarity of the accidents’.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Such designation is influenced by a reading of Collingwood and Oakeshott. See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946); M. Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (New York, 1983).

<sup>342</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, Preface to Book II.

<sup>343</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 39.

<sup>344</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 16.

<sup>345</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 39.

That some of the future could be foreseen, but foreseen in the sense mentioned above, with a certain degree of certainty was one of the commonly held temporal beliefs of the period. After all, astrology, one of the most popular fields at this time, was seen as providing one such source of knowledge, as was also the ability to read the various signs and omens sent by the heavens in advance of the event. ‘No great event ever takes place in a City or a Province’, Machiavelli observed, ‘that has not been predicted either by fortune tellers, by revelations, by prodigies, or by other celestial signs.’<sup>346</sup> But why and in what way did history enable one to foreknow some of the future time? Was it because it turned in a cyclical manner, thus rendering the knowledge of future occurrences available and absolute, or was it for some other reason? For one thing, this could have been so because history was seen as moving in a cyclical manner and thus as perfectly recurrent. If so viewed, then, experience would indeed have been the knowledge of what was going on and what exactly would go on consequently.

Both classical and Christian systems of thought had ideas of temporal recurrence, yet underlying them as their foundations were the ideas of nature and God respectively.<sup>347</sup> Machiavelli and Guicciardini had none of them. Although they introduced God and the heavens into play now and then, their conception of time and politics could function without these, as it did most of the time.<sup>348</sup> Moreover, the kind of foreknowledge of time of which Machiavelli and Guicciardini spoke was not the foreknowledge we have encountered in Christian theology. As we have observed, in the Christian context, God is the creator and owner of time. Being such, he already always *foreknew* time in its entirety. Therefore, Christian Divine *foreknowledge of time* is exact and absolute. However, in contrast to this, what thinkers of the early years of the sixteenth century had in mind was by no means a *knowledge* of anything, which would in itself presuppose a degree of certainty, but only an ability to *make assumptions* of varying accuracy.

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<sup>346</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 46.

<sup>347</sup> See G. W. Tompff, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought: from antiquity to the Reformation* (University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>348</sup> It is generally accepted that the word ‘God’ in the final chapter of *The Prince* is a later extrapolation, most likely intended to lend the rhetorical chapter more credibility.



One way in which history was seen as actually equipping the human agent with a degree of *foreknowledge* of time was that the knowledge of historical situations of the past equipped one with the experience necessary for seeing similarities between the historical situations of the past and those of the present. Indeed, the chief way in which historical time was seen to be active in the present was experience, itself to be discerned from the *exempla* in which the past still lived on, though itself no longer extant. To be sure, experience could also be non-historical, that is, knowledge acquired *over time*, during one's own subjective, personal time of existence. Machiavelli famously noted in the prefaces to all his works how he had himself combined his knowledge of history with his personal experience of long service to Florence.<sup>349</sup> In Guicciardini's *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, Bernardo del Neri similarly observes how '...the experience of [his] long life has shown [him] that revolutions do a city more harm than good'.<sup>350</sup> In fact, as Bernardo surely noted, experience penetrates to many areas 'where learning and natural judgement alone don't reach'.<sup>351</sup> As Bernardo declares:

anyone who has learnt about [humours and controlling them] from books, has not observed and savoured all the details as has someone who has observed them from experience. For experience penetrates to many areas where learning and natural judgement alone don't reach<sup>352</sup>

Bernardo is in turn praised by the republicans as a man especially praiseworthy since 'he has learnt these things not from books of philosophy but from his own experience and deeds, which is the true way to learn'.<sup>353</sup> Thus old age, that was dreaded in the period so acutely aware of the fleeting nature of time, had its political advantages too. In fact, at the time it was widely believed that, had Piero de Medici been older, and thus more experienced and in a position to moderate his behaviour, he might have

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<sup>349</sup> Cf.: Machiavelli, *Prince*, 3.

<sup>350</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 7.

<sup>351</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 67.

<sup>352</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 58.

<sup>353</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 8.

retained his hold over the principality. Experience, be it one acquired from works on the past or from the totality of one's own time of existence, was in short seen as an important possession as one engaged in ruling the polity and thus in a daily battle with contingency.

Now, to this end, it is important to stress how the role of experience is presented in the political thought of this period. To be sure, no claims whatsoever are made about the human capacity of absolute foretelling of what is going on and what it is immediately leading to, as scholars often seem to have thought. As Bernardo del Nero declares, although he has a great deal of experience, he could be 'wrong on many details'. Yet, he still hopes to be able accurately to assess 'general matters and ... everything of substance'.<sup>354</sup> There, then, is an important distinction drawn between particular matters and general matters. The same observation is to be seen in Machiavelli's *Discourses* too, where good historians, such as Titus Livy, are praised for writing 'distinctly and in detail of certain cases so that future people may learn how they have to defend themselves in similar incidents'.<sup>355</sup> As far as Machiavelli and Guicciardini are concerned the lesson of history can be drawn not from history and experience in general, but from particular cases that constitute history.

Therefore, experience and exempla are effective not because history recurs perfectly, but because it presents circumstances and historical situations that are often very similar. Thus it was not due to perfect recurrence, but due to much sameness that experience and exempla were in a position to instruct the human agent's actions in response to whatever circumstances, accidents and occasions time generated in their respective political presents. What the ability to foresee the future means in the thought of this period is not an exact and absolute knowledge, with any degree of certainty, of what is going to happen, but far more simply the ability to sense what may be going on. There is, to be sure, neither anything supernatural, nor any theory of the 'cyclicity of time' involved here.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>355</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, Ch. 30.

<sup>356</sup> On the importance of the concept of God in Machiavelli's political philosophy, see M. Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton, 2012).

No matter what Machiavelli mentions, his conception of time and history can function fully and properly without any transcendent forces, be it God, the Heavens or a Goddess. In fact, what Machiavelli tells us in this regard is what we also believe and appreciate in the twenty-first century. For we too generally deem the knowledge of history, as the reservoir of the examples of past events acquiring meaning in their specific contexts, as useful in comprehending what *may be* going on in the present. Yet, we neither claim that time is cyclical, nor do we necessarily see any supernatural forces behind the similarities of events, which are indeed often very similar. Machiavelli did not either, though many have thought he did.

Yet, though we may believe we recognise the historical situation before us, and subsequently also make certain assumptions about the likely consequent events—such as the probable resignation of a government in a situation of grave crisis, or the high likelihood of the beginning of a new war—one can nevertheless never be sure of what will actually happen, unless one claims the possession of supernatural powers. For history may rhyme, but it is ultimately always novel, even if the situations presented to us are often all too similar. This, to be sure, is precisely how Machiavelli conceived of history. The political present, as seen by Machiavelli, was really like a game of chess. It was made up of constantly shifting situations, wherein *virtù* was the knowledge of what to do *here and now*, while its actors had fixed traits of character as in a game of chess where every figure performs a specific and unchangeable function of its own. Like the figures of chess, humans too travelled on the same paths that determined by their feebleness: their ambition, as well as their inclination to greed, envy and corruption. Unable to change their ways and thus almost always unable to enhance their *virtù*, humans themselves created disagreeable events. It was in so doing that humans created history and gave a helping hand to the already far too powerful and supreme enemy of human freedom, against whom, Machiavelli firmly believed, their *virtù* should have rebelled. However, since the truth of the matter was such as it was, it was always possible to foreknow how the particles, the *umori*, constituting the city would act in particular scenarios.

This is why that recourse was made at all times to the *historically determined nature* (the *prima forma*) of the city of Florence as a socio-political fabric extant in time. It was this, and not his supernatural prophetic powers, that enabled the wise and experienced Bernardo del Nero to declare that ‘strange times lie ahead’, in a conversation that is in the text presented as occurring in 1494.<sup>357</sup> The same is even more evident when the discussion of the learned Florentines comes to the difficult task of comparing the goodness of the Medici government and the newly reinstated republican government. The problem that arises here is that the republican government was far too new to be compared to anything that had already existed in the past. Thus, the discussants realise that the best they can do is to make *political assumptions* about the nature of the young republic and its near future. It is in this context that Piero Guicciardini comments on the difficulty of speaking with any accuracy while comparing the two regimes. To this replies Bernardo, who first declares how thanks to his ‘long life’ and ‘frequent experience of domestic upheavals’, coupled with what he has heard from ‘old men with great experience’, he knows by now so much about the historical nature ‘generally of the whole city’ that he can imagine ‘at quite close hand the possible effects of each form of life’.<sup>358</sup>

Let us here return to Machiavelli’s *The Prince* where we see the gradual destabilisation of the experience, prudence and *general wisdom* precisely in relation to the various modes of time. We have seen how in the context of each new idea of time, *virtù* acquires specific meanings. It is certainly the case that in the most general context of *Fortuna*, Machiavelli has wisdom to impart and does so as he arms the princely *virtù* with practical political advice. It is here that historical images and examples are operative. In the context of *i tempi*, however, we already see the Machiavellian wisdom as declaring that there is no real wisdom other than the knowledge of *the particular times* themselves. Thus—and Machiavelli was a lover of paradoxes—here we witness prudential renunciation of prudence, or perhaps a lamentable observation that in a world where no fixed meanings are to be found, destabilized as it is by the malignity of *Fortuna*, there can

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<sup>357</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 70.

<sup>358</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 16.

be no stable and fixed prudence. Already in the framework of *i tempi*, we saw how the meaning of *virtù* becomes subject to a sharper qualification. As one responded to the demands of one's political present *virtù* became the ability of selection and moderation, in other words, essentially the quality of knowing *how* to act *when*. *Virtù* thus came to stand for a set of qualities demonstrated as one responded to the variety of the times — that is, to a particular qualitative segment of time. It is in this process that *virtù* came to mean a broad set of qualities, while the worth of *virtù* became measurable in terms of the degree to which it produced actions that were in accord with the demands of *i tempi*.

That *virtù* could now be measured only in the immediacy of its context is evident most of all in the problem of generalisation that Machiavelli encounters in discussions that occur in the context specifically of *i tempi*. Should one or should one not govern a new principality with the help of those who were initially hostile? There is no direct answer, either affirmative or negative, because 'it is very difficult to generalise about this, since men and circumstances vary'.<sup>359</sup> And should one, or should one not build fortresses? Here too, there is no timeless wisdom to be imparted. The practice of building fortresses might be praised as a traditional practice 'used since ancient times', however, 'in [Machiavelli's] own times', Vitelli, Ubaldo and Bentivoglio had all proceeded to destroy fortresses in their own *stati*. Recent experience had shown that they had been of no 'advantage to any ruler of recent times', save the Countess of Forli, who fled to a fortress when she was ambushed.

In the event, Machiavelli's advice regarding fortresses is this: 'fortresses are *sometimes* useful, then, and *sometimes* not; it depends on the circumstances'.<sup>360</sup> For example, if particular circumstances are such that a ruler is more afraid of his own subjects than of foreigners, he should build fortresses. However, a ruler who is more afraid of foreigners than of his own subjects should not do so. Where *i tempi* are concerned, there is, then, no clear resolution to the practical and positive meaning of *virtù*. For no 'definite judgement' can be passed on all these measures unless one

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<sup>359</sup> Machiavelli, *Prince*, 74.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Italics are mine.

considers the ‘particular circumstances’ of the states in which such decisions are made.<sup>361</sup> In the framework of *i tempi*, in the broadest sense, *virtù* then denotes, firstly, the knowledge of what times demand and, secondly, how exactly to act when. *Virtù* still necessary calls for action and courage, yet its scope is broadened, now already also denoting—as Skinner has excellently captured—‘whatever range of qualities the prince may find it necessary to acquire in order to maintain his state and ‘achieve great things’.<sup>362</sup> This tendency comes to a culmination in the *kairotic* context, where it is an established fact that there *is* no wisdom. *Virtù* is most naked before *kairos*, because *kairos* is unique and so must also be a response to it. However, what we see Machiavelli do here is to halve the difficulties before Medici. If when faced with *kairos* part of the challenge lies in recognising *Occasione*, then Machiavelli has accomplished the part of recognition *for* the Medici. They now had to act; and we shall soon see how exactly they were to act.

Yet, nowhere do any of these men claim to be able to *foreknow* time because time goes in cycles, or because history is perfectly recurrent in the classical sense of recurrence. Instead, it is the role of experience, itself encapsulated in *exempla* that keep the past alive in the present that is seen as enabling one to discern contextual similarities and differences between the historical situations of the past and the present. If one possesses sufficient knowledge of history and of the various situations and remedies that might be imitated by fortune and humans respectively, then one may hope to possess sufficient amount of *virtù* necessary for any proper political action in the present.

Thus the problem that political action necessarily faced was the battle between the constantly changeable and the rarely changeable. For while human character remained firm, historical situations did not; men were feeble and thus unable to adapt their natures to the situations generated by *Fortune*, who as we have observed was an ever-present form of *state of exception*. Yet, new situations required novel responses, and thus a very dynamic human disposition. Machiavelli knew this better than anyone else,

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<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>362</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 1, 138; Skinner rightly observed that ‘the crucial difference between Machiavelli and his contemporaries lies in the nature of the methods they took to be appropriate for the attainment’ of the same ends of honour, glory and fame, *Foundations*, 134.

for he was crushed by time at every single critical occasion possible. Of all people, ironically, it was indeed the very theorist of time—and the preacher of *kairotic time*—who himself got time wrong. In 1512, in an attempt to gain the favour of the Medici, Machiavelli wrote a book for absolute rulers. Although he would later get a number of Medici commissions, he never obtained what he was after with the submission of *The Prince*. When the Florentine Republic was restored again in 1527, Machiavelli was no distrusted by the very Florentine republicans as the author of *The Prince* (his *Discourses* were not completed yet). Machiavelli himself followed his own advice of adapting to *i tempi*; and he certainly was neither humble nor blaming it on the lack of *virtù*. Instead, as we have seen above, he deemed himself to be unfortunate stating how there are many ‘more fortunate men’ for whom he was now writing. Machiavelli, then, was just like Cesare Borgia, full of *virtù*, yet wanting *fortune*. This is why, though by no means the only reason why, he explicitly sympathises with Borgia whom he had also met personally. Machiavelli’s political philosophy is a conscious revenge against *fortune* who diminished the role of good men. If the rulers’ *virtù* were to be equipped with sufficient knowledge, Italy too might have come under the rule of temporally minded rulers, who could attain the great ends. It was this that Machiavelli set out to do, betrayed by Fortune and history, now labouring to construct a new time.

# Against Time's Tyranny — Temporal Dictatorship

## Machiavelli and Dictatorship

Prior to exposing the relationship between Machiavelli's temporal philosophy and his attempt to find a resolution to the ills of the actual historical present, we must first briefly discuss a political form that Machiavelli was well aware of and explicitly discussed, yet one that has been neglected in almost all scholarship on Machiavelli's thought. This is dictatorship, which is for a number of reasons very much a phenomenon of time. Firstly, dictatorship is seen as arising in relation to a specific kind of time, one of crisis and urgency; secondly, it is to remain time-bound if it is to retain its legitimate nature; thirdly, it is to attack the malice of time in order to save the republic. Thus, the temporal dimension is wholly inseparable from any discussion of this political institution present in Machiavelli's thought. As I shall suggest in the following section, which brings together our previous considerations in this chapter, this is also Machiavelli's specific answer to the contextual crises of his contemporary Italy.

This form of rule is dictatorship, of which Machiavelli has a very specific idea. It is, in fact, specificity that reveals the full richness of the thought of Machiavelli as a republican author. Here it first of all befits to note that dictatorship is a phenomenon *of the republic*. Indeed, such a thing as a dictatorship can by definition only exist and acquire a meaning in the context of a republic, yet not in other forms of rule that already anyway have absolute leaders, be they princes or kings. Moreover, where Machiavelli speaks of dictatorship he employs the normative ideals from a particular historical context of a particular political form that was a republic — the Roman Republic. This is no coincidence; the time of the Roman Republic also represents the ideal past time in all of Machiavelli's political philosophy.<sup>363</sup> No less important is the fact that in the history of his own republican *patria* of Florence, there had been at least three known cases of dictatorship, of which Machiavelli was familiar.

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<sup>363</sup> He makes this clear in *Discourses*, III.1.



Now, by dictatorship Machiavelli refers to a phenomenon at once *legal* and *necessary*. Dictator was the person ‘who, without any consultation, should be able to decide, and without any appeal should be able to execute his decisions’.<sup>364</sup> Thus a dictatorship was indeed a creature of the moment of radical contingency that required adequate action. Machiavelli described dictatorship as one among ‘the usual remedies made by [the Romans] in urgent perils’, ‘a means of overcoming *imminent perils*’ and ‘most useful in all those *incidents* which sprung up at any time’ in the life of the Republic. Thus we hear how the Senate ‘deemed [the problem] *of moment* and perilous [and] created a Dictator’.<sup>365</sup> It is precisely such *momentary necessity* that legitimates dictatorship. In fact, some contexts might so radically demand the institution of a dictatorship that those republics that find themselves ‘in urgent perils’ yet ‘do not have resort either to a Dictatorship or a similar authority’ shall be ruined.<sup>366</sup>

However, to be legitimate, a dictatorship has to conform to particular normative criteria. First and foremost, dictatorship must of necessity be *bound by time*, since it is good and legitimate only in so far as it is limited to a certain period of time, and not perpetual, as was the rule of Julius Caesar, a *dictator perpetuo* of the Roman Republic. Machiavelli is careful to stress this explicitly. Where instituting a dictatorship led to an agreeable end, we are told, this was so because the people had not transferred dictatorial powers ‘except with limited powers and for limited times’; in fact, a good ‘Dictator was made for a [limited] time and not in perpetuity’ and this, to be sure, ‘only to remove the cause for which he was created’.<sup>367</sup> Secondly, a legitimate dictatorship was not to be characterised by any constitutional *renewal*. In other words, no new laws or institutional changes were to be introduced. Thus a dictator was not to ‘destroy the ancient institutions of the City’, deprive the Senate or the People of their power, or indeed create new institutions. Therefore, a dictator was not—and indeed was never to be—an innovator.

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<sup>364</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 33.

<sup>365</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 8.

<sup>366</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 34.

<sup>367</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 35

## **Crisis as *Kairos* — A Revolutionary Opening in History**

Machiavelli was an author intensely preoccupied with overcoming the tyranny of time. It was as he attempted to control time and uphold human *virtù* that he generated a theory of *political time* versus *natural time*. It was also in so doing that he articulated the idea of *revolutionary time* that no doubt qualifies him not as a ‘forerunner of the revolution’ alone,<sup>368</sup> but as the proper father of revolution. We shall see this as we attend to the decisive battle of *The Prince* in the final chapter of the work, “Exhortation to Liberate Italy from Barbarian Yoke”. Now, this is a remarkable chapter that does ‘weave together the many warps’ as promised by Machiavelli in Chapter II.<sup>369</sup> Machiavelli did stay very true to his promise and of ‘the many warps’ is of absolutely immense significance to understanding his contextual mission. For it was in so doing that Machiavelli brought together *all of his three ideas of time*, preached the dawning of *kairos* upon the lands of Italy, spoke of the existence of right portents and also of the favour of God and once again invoked the archetypal *great founders* who had exploited their *occasione* so very intelligently as to create a new order and/or lead their people out of misery. In short, Machiavelli employed aspects of almost *all* of the available socio-cultural languages: astrology, temporal language, theological language, political myth, so as to preach the dawning of a *tempus novus*.

The final chapter resolves around the following question: Is there in Italy at the *present time matter* that provides *opportunity* for a new ruler *to mould it into form*? Machiavelli’s answer is: there is indeed for ‘so many things are propitious for a new ruler’ that there has never been ‘a more appropriate time’ than this to liberate Italy once and for all. Machiavelli’s pursuits here are not only vehemently exhortative, but also as persuasive as a piece of rhetoric may hope to be. As he stresses in “Exhortation”, apart from the perfect rightness of time, also present are the ‘very unusual events, which are signs from God’ that no doubt endow Machiavelli’s forecast with

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<sup>368</sup> Arendt, *On revolution*, 34.

<sup>369</sup> Machiavelli, *Prince.*, 6, 5.

greater credibility.<sup>370</sup> It is no mere coincidence that all of these heavenly signs recall the Biblical journey of the Israelites under Moses.<sup>371</sup> As is well known, this was a journey from the Egyptian slavery to the prosperity of the Promised Land. But this was also the journey that perfectly captured the future mission of the new ruler of the new Italy.

Machiavelli's *Exhortation* transcends the present. Not only does it envisage a very particular future, but it also transcends the locality of *virtù*, which is a phenomenon of the present, and instead proceeds to operate in the higher order of *greatness* and *glory* — the ideal end to be attained. The task before the new ruler was extraordinary and precisely in this lay the potential of *virtù* to beget glory. Machiavelli had laid foundations for this in Chapter XXI, which he dedicated exclusively of the way of gaining reputation. There his example was Ferdinand of Aragon who 'might almost be called a new ruler'. Now, the 'newness' of Ferdinand <sup>372</sup>consisted not of the newness of his *stato* but in the newness of the qualities of the leadership that he offered. His achievements were 'very remarkable and some of them quite extraordinary'. Therefore, having begun as a weak king he became 'the most famous and *glorious* king in Christendom'.<sup>373</sup> If the *occasione* were to be used effectively, Medici too would have to demonstrate extraordinary *virtù*, for extraordinary challenges required one to exhaust one's potential. Now, in the last chapter Machiavelli did refer to the *virtù* of the Italians, who are 'superior in strength, skill and resourcefulness'.<sup>374</sup>

However, with the transcendence in the last chapter from the realm of the present to that of the future, one witnesses also the elevation of *the prince* from his status to that of the higher order of *founding legislators*, whom he is called upon to imitate no less than two times in this chapter. It is not a coincidence that in this chapter Machiavelli invokes the past memory not of effective rulers alone—as were Cesare Borgia or Ferdinand of Aragon, the likes of whom we encounter in great abundance both in *The Prince* and *Discourses*—but specifically the great mythical legislators: Moses, Cyrus and Theseus are mentioned twice in this chapter. Indeed, Machiavelli reassures

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<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-9.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>374</sup> *Prince*, 87.

the Medici that no difficulties are to be feared when ‘circumstances are propitious’, if only ‘your family will imitate the methods of the men I have proposed as exemplars’.<sup>373</sup> Moreover, the Medici are called to emulate the ‘deeds and lives’ precisely of ‘those great men’.<sup>375</sup> In short, if only the Medici would now ‘play your part’, the desirable end might well be attained. However, this they had to do themselves—true *virtù* being action—because God does not like depriving men of *freedom* and *glory* that is properly theirs.<sup>376</sup>

Now, what marks out these men is precisely that they were not only effective rulers, but *founders* of new orders and leaders of their people out of crisis and into prosperity. Moreover, all of these men, according to Machiavelli’s reading of history, had been provided with *right occasions* that they had in turn aptly exploited. It was in so doing that they had attained stability for their people and glory for themselves. What Machiavelli’s work was offering the Medici, ‘if it is read and pondered diligently’, was precisely the achievement of ‘greatness which propitious circumstances and your fine qualities promise’.<sup>377</sup> Now, we should here recall that, in order for the *virtù* of the great legislators to have been displayed, these men had to find their people enslaved, oppressed and disarrayed. It was precisely such circumstances that had provided the *occasione* afterwards skillfully exploited by them. But such, too, was Italy of Machiavelli’s present:

more enslaved than the Hebrews, more oppressed than the Persians, more scattered than the Athenians, without an acknowledged leader, and without order or stability, beaten, despoiled, lacerated, overrun, in short, utterly devastated.<sup>378</sup>

In fact, so desperate was the condition of Italy that even the mythical rulers ‘had less favourable opportunities’, and less righteous causes, than

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<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. In fact, in the last chapter of *The Prince* Machiavelli stressed just how ‘successful and talented’ the ‘illustrious family’ of the Medici were, ‘favoured by the God and by the Church’, *Prince*, 88.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

the modern Italian founder of the time to come.<sup>379</sup> Italy of Machiavelli's present was not only 'reduced to the desperate straits',<sup>380</sup> but also 'almost lifeless' and formless<sup>381</sup>. The problem, as Machiavelli conceived it, was in the constitution of a body that was—in the enfeebled present—deprived of *virtù* and thus lifeless and formless.<sup>382</sup> Therefore, there was need of remarkable *virtù* that would resuscitate life in the Italian body politic by 'healing her wounds' and by curing 'the sores that have been festering her for a long time'.<sup>383</sup>

Feeble as *chronos* had rendered Italy, there was now, 'after such long time', a unique *kairos*. This was an opening in the dismaying present that manifested the possibility of a rupture from *chronotic* time of the past and the institution of a new form destined for a new future. Here, then, was a unique opportunity for an illustrious family with both God and the Church on their side to be acted upon.<sup>384</sup> This was an opportunity that 'cannot be missed'.<sup>385</sup> The crisis of Italy was the *kairos* of the Medici and for Italy it was an historical opportunity that promised the institution of a qualitatively new tract of time that would be a rupture from the disagreeable *historical time* that had reigned in Italy since 1494. The pursuits of Machiavelli as the healer of body politic from the ills of time immediately reminds us our discussion of *crisis as kairos* in the first chapter and of the nature of *kairos* as at once the decisive moment when judgement, resolution and/or cure should be rendered and a revolutionary opening in time when history lay feeblest and the future open. Therefore, *kairotic time* was the time of radical transformative action that, if well executed, could forever alter the course of history. Such was the immensity of the moment that the Italian *kairos* required a firm resolution to which we are about to attend. Only once we

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<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. In an earlier discussion, Machiavelli had already noted that 'Italy has been overrun by Charles, plundered by Louis, ravaged by Ferdinand and treated with contempt by the Swiss', *Ibid.*, 47. <sup>378</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>380</sup> The Syracusans had also been in a 'desperate strait' before choosing Hiero of Syracuse, first, as their general and afterwards their ruler also. Importantly, Hiero had enjoyed 'a fine opportunity' and possessed great *virtù*. *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>382</sup> Here we ought to be reminded of the medical connotation of *virtu* discussed above, which was *known* broadly in the Renaissance. See F. Gilbert, "On Machiavelli's Idea of Virtù", in *Renaissance News* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1951), 53-55.

<sup>383</sup> *Prince.*, 88.

<sup>384</sup> *Prince*, 88.

<sup>385</sup> Machiavelli, *Prince*, 90.

have exposed this resolution will we finally know the consequences of ‘Time in Context’, which is what we set out to study.

Having designated the crisis of Italy as a *kairotic* opening in the flow of *chronos* and in fact compared it to an archer’s target in an eminently *kairotic* language, Machiavelli proceeded to call for the emergence of a leader who would unite the various disparate political forms of Italy into either an alliance, or a single whole. In much of historiography, the debate regarding this has concerned the identity of a political form that the future Italy envisaged by Machiavelli should assume. The question has thus been if Machiavelli was advocating the institution of an Italian monarchy under the absolute rule of the house of Medici, or an Italian republic constituted of various presumably self-governing parts. However, due precisely to the neglect of Machiavelli’s temporal discourse, the third—and theoretically as well as contextually by far the most likely—alternative seems to have been neglected by interpreters of Machiavelli. This was dictatorship.

### **Temporal Dictatorship: The Architecture of New Time**

At this stage of Machiavelli’s thinking, the problem of *virtù* remained as the dominant challenge. For if *kairotic time* offered an opportunity for the institution of qualitatively new time and order, which had the potential of rewriting history, its realisation required considerable *virtù*. Yet, the Italian *virtù* had for over two decades proved to be only individual *virtù*, because it had proved to be ineffective in a series of battles and thus in constructing the appropriate defences against the malice of time. Being so feeble, the individual *virtù* had constantly been overwhelmed by *Fortuna*. If the new Italian ruler were truly to emulate Moses, Cyrus and Theseus—and in so doing also manage to enlist the Italians ‘skill and courage’ in defence of the country—then he must centralize individual Italian *virtù* by composing an army of his ‘own men’.<sup>386</sup> Although innovation was an exceedingly dangerous enterprise, true glory was the reward only for those who devise

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<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. See also Chapter XIII, 48-51.

‘new laws and practices’.<sup>387</sup> For it was precisely the ‘introduction of such new methods of fighting’ that could certainly establish the *greatness* of a ruler.<sup>388</sup>

We have already observed how for Machiavelli the very course of history from which he wished his *patria* to break free was the course of history created by humans lacking *virtù*. It was indeed human feebleness that had caused too much similarity in the progression of events and it was this that led to temporal servitude. As we remember from Machiavelli’s letter to the young Soderini, if humans were to render their *virtù* more resilient, they would even control stars and fates. Therefore, an important part of the political problem was equipping human *virtù*, so as to render it more resilient for its battle against time. This, to be sure, is what Machiavelli was doing in both *The Prince* and *Discourses*. His *Prince* was, after all, a guide to correct political behaviour in response to the three various temporal contexts discussed above, while his *Discourses* sought to revive the ancient *virtù* now long lost. Machiavelli opened the First Book of *Discourses* by observing how his carefully selected historical observations were to guide Italy to a new future constituted of new *virtù* and he ended *The Prince* with Petrarch’s patriotic *Canzone 28*, with a notably positive opinion of the future of *virtù*: ‘...ancient valour [*antico valore*] is not dead in Italian hearts’. It was indeed such remnant of ancient *virtù* that formed the potentiality of a new future with a new political order that was, potentially and ideally, to be one of *gloria*. In fact, Machiavelli did all that was in his powers. Not only did he equip princely *virtù* with the knowledge of *how* to act *when*, but he also recognised an actual *kairos* for the real princely family of the real present. Since prudence and experience lay at their weakest before *kairos*, it was always hard to tell when the fleeting opportune moment had arrived. However, now that Machiavelli had, firstly, prepared the prince generally and, secondly, outlined the dawning of *kairotic time* for them, all the Medici had to do was simply to act according to the detailed instructions. Machiavelli had done his share in his battle against both history and time.

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<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

We are now in a position to see how Machiavelli's temporal philosophy and his contextual anxieties come together to form his theory of political action in the specificity of the Florentine context. Now, the task that Machiavelli envisages already in *The Prince* is neither spontaneous nor temporary and charismatic, but *lasting* and *institutional*. For only that which is institutionalized could be deemed as lasting and stable in time in a world governed by the capricious will of *Fortuna*. And no less importantly, such were the consequences to which Machiavelli was led by the problem of *virtù* discussed above. Already in the last chapters of *The Prince*, while still operating in the context of a single man's rule, Machiavelli explicitly calls for the institution of an army. This, of course, should be an army under the guidance of one man — the prince. Nevertheless, this is an institution that must be an inseparable foundation of the new order for which he calls for in *The Prince*. If the order is to be one that has a potential against the malice of time, it has to be an institutional order, that is, one founded on good and stable arms, not on the spontaneous programme of hired mercenaries, which Machiavelli terribly disliked.<sup>389</sup>

The particular identity of the political form of the future Italy that Machiavelli calls for shall always remain a secret to historians. However, in the light precisely of the temporal discourse that is hugely influential in his thought, it becomes evident that Machiavelli was most likely calling for a republican dictatorship. This, as it might be evident, was the most optimal option to him as a republican citizen and thinker who was nevertheless acutely aware of Italy's history, the nature of capricious *Fortuna* and the difficulty of the task that lay before Italy — reinstating a virtuous civic life. Machiavelli was not likely to call for a monarchy under the Medici, for that is what he dreaded as a republican observer of the rise of France and Spain. Paradoxically, he was even less likely to call for an Italian republic, for he had an acute appreciation of just how divided and morally corrupt Italy had become throughout the course of years. What was needed was a *single founder* with an absolute authority to found a political form that would endure time and institutionalise *virtù* into glory.

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<sup>389</sup> This too, incidentally, may have been not only due to political but personal reasons. For during one of his diplomatic missions, Machiavelli was assaulted by Swiss mercenaries.



In order to understand well Machiavelli's programme for a new time, and indeed conceive of Machiavelli as a conscious architect of a new time, we must appreciate his understanding of time *and* power. For as we have established, different kinds of times, as per their quality, require and encourage different kinds of political actions. To Machiavelli there is no politics outside of time; therefore, a political action cannot have an atemporal meaning. It is precisely this aspect of Machiavelli's thought, present in both *Prince* and *Discourses*, that best exposes Machiavelli's contextual mission.

As we have already outlined, there were two considerable preoccupations in Machiavelli's thought as he is attempting to overcome the malice of *natural time* and to create a new *political time* with a new institutional order. The first was the problem of *virtù* and time, which were enemies of one another. Yet, if the mission were to succeed, *virtù* had to be institutionalised and rendered lasting before the might of time. Stemming from this consideration, the second was the foundation of a lasting institutional order itself, fit to institutionalise and hold *virtù* that is the foundation of a republic. However, as we already know, Machiavelli deemed this to be *impossible* in the current circumstances of Florence. If we now return to the chapter on corruption, we shall find the republican Machiavelli declare that due to 'the difficulty or impossibility of maintaining a Republic in a City that has corrupted, or establish it there anew'—and here too it is perfectly clear that he is discussing the historical situation of Florence in particular—it may be 'necessary to reduce [the polity] more to a Royal State' than to a republic. For it is in this way that one may hope at once to create an institutional order resilient before the might of time and *in time* to overcome the insolence of men which 'cannot be controlled by laws [and thus] should be restrained by a Power almost Regal'.<sup>390</sup>

This power, importantly, is not regal but 'almost regal'; it is absolute, yet not monarchical and by no means hereditary. Here we must remember Machiavelli's belief in the inevitability of generational degeneration,<sup>391</sup> as well as the fact that dictatorship was never to be hereditary if it were to

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<sup>390</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 18.

<sup>391</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 2.

remain legal. These aspects, to be sure, make every difference in the thought of a republican who is a representative calling for the foundation of a ‘free state’, or a state, as Guicciardini has it, ‘especially in the name of liberty’,<sup>392</sup> yet one who realises that the city is not ready to become a republic, for it is too corrupt. It is not a coincidence that Machiavelli’s example here is Cleomenes, who had already featured in the context of an earlier discussion precisely of dictatorship. In short, ‘where corruption exists, well ordered laws are of no benefit, unless they are administered by one who, with extreme strength, will make them be observed until the people become good’. Instead, in such a context, one really must use ‘most extraordinary means’ if one is to succeed.

We have already observed how Machiavelli conceived of a dictatorship. It was a legal mechanism instituted in times of utmost affliction with the sole aim of attaining a single, difficult goal. If good and useful, it thus had to be strictly limited to *a certain period of time*. An inseparable part of the legality of a dictatorship was indeed the quality of the times – the very determinant of the meaning with which political practice must be vested. For instance, where corruption had taken its toll and ancient *virtù* was consequently absent, a dictatorship was necessary. This, to be sure, was particularly so if the objective was the institution of a republic. As Machiavelli stated in *Discourses*, it was rarely the case that some republic or kingdom was ‘well organised from the beginning’; instead, to Machiavelli, a good political order was an artificial creation *in time*, through wise political practice. However, since the opinions of the many necessarily differ, there could be very little agreement as to what was ‘right political behaviour’. It is mostly due to this that Machiavelli found it necessary that a new order must be founded by one man alone; if truly willing to advance the common good, and not his private ambition, ‘a prudent organiser of a Republic’, Machiavelli wrote, ‘ought to endeavour to have the authority alone’.<sup>393</sup>

The great legislators, whom we encounter in the contextually crucial chapters of *The Prince*: Moses, Lycurgus and Cyrus figure here again. These men were ‘able to formulate laws for the common good only by assigning

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<sup>392</sup> Guicciardini, *Dialogue*, 23.

<sup>393</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 9.

the necessary authority to themselves'.<sup>394</sup> In the context of the history of Sparta, there are two other examples of the same: Agis and Cleomones, both Kings of Sparta. Perhaps most noteworthy in Machiavelli's discussion of Agis' context is that Agis had realised how Sparta had deviated from the laws set by Lycurgus and had thus 'lost much of that ancient *virtù*. Agis proved to be unsuccessful, for he was assassinated by Spartan Ephors who saw a rising tyrant in his person. However, unfortunately to the Ephors, his successor read Agis' records and followed the same course. Fortunately to Cleomenes, as opposed to Agis, Cleomenes realised that 'he could not render this good [a return to the laws of Lycurgus], unless he should become alone in authority', which he did and did so successfully. Machiavelli's conclusion is rather simple: 'to establish a Republic it is necessary that one must be alone'.<sup>395</sup>

However, it is essential to stress that this observation remains valid in the context of two acts in time: either the *foundation* or a republic, or its *renewal* to the first principles. Both of these acts are seen as serving the common good of the republic. However, the same does not apply to the *perpetuity* of a polity *in time*. For even if the organiser is truly prudent and has founded something worthy of praise, 'the thing organized will not endure long if its (administration) remains only on the shoulders of one individual'. It is instead best that not one but many should labour to sustain it. Therefore, Machiavelli explicitly states that the founder should be 'so prudent and wise' that 'he will not leave his heirs or any others' the power he has accumulated in the act of foundation or renewal. Should this take place, degeneration is imminent, for it is in the nature of humans as actors in time to degenerate generationally. As with Machiavelli's exposition of dictatorship, here too temporal limitation is an absolutely crucial aspect of his political thought on the matter of *founding* or *renewing* a republic.

Machiavelli conceived of Florence as a city trapped in the vicious cycles of time and history that had been generated by the failure of *virtù* in its battle against *Fortuna*. Machiavelli's own life had been rendered miserable by the cruel deeds of fortune. Thus his political philosophy at all times sought to

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<sup>394</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 9.

<sup>395</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I. 9.

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defeat the power of time and history. Machiavelli rebelled both against time as a malicious agent and history as the sum total of disagreeable occurrences. While his views on time were rather typical of his period, it was his conscious battle against time that fashioned out of the Florentine public servant and playwright the first political thinker to place politics in the stream of time and history, and the first preacher of revolutionary time of *kairos*. Machiavelli was indeed the father of the revolution for he declared the revolutionary time of transformative action in the form of *kairos*. This, to be sure, he conceived as the battle for freedom, which has been neglected in all historiography. As Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*, he upheld the importance of *virtù* ‘so as not to eliminate human freedom’.<sup>396</sup> This much he observed in his own words; far more he *did* throughout both of his chief political works. Machiavelli’s very vision of history as created by humans and more precisely by their folly, itself due to the lack of *virtù*, was revolutionary in that it granted the human potential an unprecedented place. For it was down to human agents of history to reshape history forever through their *virtuoso* deeds, particularly when time was so very appropriate for radically transformative action. Instead of resignation, which he deplored at all times, humans had to act and create a *tempus novus*. This was an attempt, at the ideal level, at human liberation to the extent possible from the tyranny of time and, at the practical level, of restoring a free way of life, that is a republic.

But such restoration itself was by no means a simple renovation as Arendt holds. As she herself claims, Machiavelli was after something new for which he sought a new name, *lo stato*. He was indeed after ‘new modes and orders’ and this had no precedent on the soil of Italy, or indeed anywhere else, for dominant at the time were either large monarchical territorial states, or small free republics. Yet, what Machiavelli called for was a state in the more contemporary sense that would be a republic, yet large like monarchies and with a centralised army and institutional order. Machiavelli was indeed a republican throughout all of his life. However, he was a disappointed republican, both politically and personally and one who inhabited and adored a city that had become utterly corrupt, and a land ravaged by

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<sup>396</sup> *Prince*, 85. See also, Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 24.

barbarians. *Fortuna* had not favoured Italy, and Machiavelli hated *Fortuna*. If the impossibility of the republic were to translate into the possibility of the republic, which was Machiavelli's consistent ideal throughout, absolute rule was necessary. In fact, absolute rule was necessary to enact precisely those things that were necessary for the possibility of a republic. If Machiavelli's ideal theories—and chief among them that of time—and his contextual objectives are seen together, and this is what we set out to do by embarking upon our quest of 'Time in Context', then we are going to be able to appreciate why Machiavelli is not only a spiritual father of revolution. Having declared the 'nowtime' of radical transformative action, Machiavelli became the most powerful theorist of *revolutionary time* since Paul the Apostle and the first political writer of revolutionary time in history.

## Chapter III

### All Coherence Gone

#### The Great Instauration

The sixteenth century was the seat of some of the most profound epistemic earthquakes. Fortune's onslaughts were ever more apparent as Europe was engulfed into a series of schisms, wars and epistemic crises. The religious schism that originated North of the Alps in 1516 as Machiavelli's *The Prince* was still a fresh piece of work and his *Discorsi* still being written, spread to the entire continent. In the decades to come, this schism would cost the lives of millions and alter the political landscape for good. Coupled with this, the wide range of geographical discoveries and continuous observation of diversity brought with it an immediate historiographical problem. It was now evident that what had once been perceived as a seamless version of history was not at all coherent. How could the Hebrew and the Greco-Roman texts claim any authority over truth if no one had known of the existence of the human beings in the Americas? Where exactly did these people originate from? And how did they get to their present location? Answers to these questions clearly could not be sought in the histories of Florence or France, England or Denmark. The scope of such histories was limited geographically as well as chronologically. Worse still, traditional textual remedies were failing too. The first port of intellectual call, the Bible, contained no direct references to the inhabitants of the New World; nor could it explain how exactly those people had managed to reach lands surrounded by the seas. At the height of intellectual quandary, European intellectuals instead turned to different modes of thinking.

First, there might be observed a 'universalizing' tendency in historical thought. Confused by the present, some early modern intellectuals chose to rewrite all history so as to make sense of it all panoramically. Much as Europe seemed to be anxiously bidding farewell to the past, in reality, it was returning to the past ever more vigorously. They returned to the past to bring coherence to the present and do so with 'utmost care for the future', as Bacon noted.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Bacon, *Birth of Time*, 62.

But the new return to the past was different. Not only was it universalist, but it also envisaged the alteration of the foundations of the present in the past and the reenactment of the mythical past in the future. In 1566, Jean Bodin published his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*. As the title of the work suggests, the historian was about to enlighten Europe as to how to comprehend history more easily. There, Bodin promoted the idea of a universalist approach to the past; ‘I call that history universal which embraces the affairs of all or the most famous peoples’, he conceded.<sup>398</sup> If Machiavelli, Bruni and Guicciardini had only concerned themselves with the provision of histories that were limited to particular city-states or nations, Bodin called for the emergence of a ‘universal historian ... a new sort of scholar’, who must study the histories of all nations, times and places and independently determine which versions deserved credence.<sup>399</sup> Bodin was, essentially, calling for a revolution in historiographical methodology – the present demanded that all of time be assessed by the new kind of etymologist historian:

...let us place before ourselves a general chart for all periods ... in which are contained the origins of the world, the floods, the earliest beginnings of the states...<sup>400</sup>

Bodin’s plea did not go unheard. In London, a new kind of historical work was published in 1614. It consisted of five heavy books and was one of the greatest history books the world had ever seen – Walter Raleigh’s *History of the World* dealt with the history of the world in its widest sense, relating to the histories of various lands from the time of the creation to 130 B.C. In a similar vein, in 1659 the French Jesuit Denis Petau published *Account of Time*. Both Raleigh’s *History of the World* and Denis Petau’s *Account of Time* followed the structure recommended by Bodin: they dealt at great length with the Biblical story of the Creation, the floods, the origins of particular peoples and the beginnings of states. Most directly, the emergence of the universalist approach to the past resulted in the widening of chronological horizons but

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<sup>398</sup> Bodin, *Method*, 21.

<sup>399</sup> Grafton, *New Worlds*, 121.

<sup>400</sup> Bodin, *Method*, 21.

obviously such an approach also required the expansion of hermeneutics. Raleigh, for instance, used a wide variety of Jewish, classic as well as Christian sources, and in so doing cited more than six hundred authors in the *History*.<sup>401</sup> Similarly, Petau drew on ‘the innumerable testimonies of Ancient and Modern authors ... Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristotle, Plutarch, and hundreds of others in the Monkish Age’.<sup>402</sup> The very titles and prefaces of the works reflect the spirit of the new approach. In his troubled poem, *Anatomy of the World*, John Donne expands his anxiety to the anatomy of the entire world, and in the process of describing the confusion of the present accounts for all of time. The preface to Petau’s book asserts that ‘there was never yet an Historicall Book so Compleat as this, Extant in any Age’,<sup>403</sup> while Raleigh’s narrative represents ‘The Truth of the World’s Story’, a ‘witness to time’.<sup>404</sup>

The hermeneutic wideness of the writings was important in more than one sense. The expansion of hermeneutics granted the author the possibility of being highly selective; this, in turn, simplified the process of rendering the narratives of the past more coherent in relation to one another and in their cumulative intellectual relation to the present. For example, if the Bible had been mute on how the inhabitants of the Americas reached those lands, Plato in *Critias* spoke of ‘an island which ... was larger than Libya and Asia, though by now earthquakes have caused it to sink’.<sup>405</sup> This Island was the legendary Atlantis, which was gladly perceived to have provided a bridge used *in illo tempore* to reach the remote lands now surrounded by waters. Conversely, when Plato’s texts failed to explain where the inhabitants of the New Land had originated from, there was of course the Bible which provided ample opportunity to trace their origins to one of the sons of Noah.

Numerous other writers, including John Lightfoot, Hugh Broughton, William Nisbet and Girolamo Vechietti, also began to produce chronicles that aimed to account for all time.<sup>406</sup> Notably, both Raleigh’s *History* and Petau’s *Account* followed the structure recommended by Bodin. They dealt with the

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<sup>401</sup> See K. S. Cooper “Walter Raleigh and “The Truth of the World’s Story”, *Peabody Journal of Education* 1 (1966), 8.

<sup>402</sup> Petau, *Account of Time* (London, 1659), ‘To the Reader’ (unpaginated).

<sup>403</sup> Petau, *Account of Time* (London, 1659), ‘To the Reader’ (unpaginated).

<sup>404</sup> Raleigh, *History*.

<sup>405</sup> Plato, *Critias*, 105.

<sup>406</sup> On these and other authors, see Patrides, “Renaissance Estimates of the Year of Creation”, *Huntington Lbraray Quarterly*, 26 (1963), 315-322.



Biblical story of Creation, the floods, the origins of particular peoples and the beginnings of states. Echoing Bodin's work, the preface to Petau's book asserts that 'there was never yet an Historicall Book so Compleat as this, Extant in any Age',<sup>407</sup> while on the frontispiece of Raleigh's History the 'witness of time' holds a globe, as text proclaims: 'The Truth of the World's Story'.<sup>408</sup> Raleigh used a wide variety of Jewish, pagan classical as well as Christian sources, citing more than six hundred authors in the History. For example, whilst adopting the Biblical myth of creation, Raleigh had drawn on the mythical Orpheus, Plato's *Timaeus*, and the writings of Augustine and Bede.

Petau similarly drew on 'the innumerable testimonies of Ancient and Modern authors ... Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristotle, Plutarch, and hundreds of others in the Monkish Age'.<sup>409</sup> The expansion of hermeneutics enabled the author to be highly selective, which simplified the process of rendering the narratives of the past more coherent in relation to one another and in their cumulative intellectual relation to the present. To this end, it is noteworthy that in his 1647 book—suggestively entitled: *The harmony, chronicle and order of the Old Testament*—John Lightfoot promised to have the 'difficulties in the chronology *untied*: differences in the relating of stories reconciled'.<sup>410</sup> Such an approach brought many misunderstandings to an end. Or so it was thought. If the Bible had not spoken on how the inhabitants of the Americas reached the lands surrounded entirely by the waters, Plato in Critias spoke of 'an island which ... was larger than Libya and Asia, though by now earthquakes have caused it to sink' (108 e). This island — the legendary Atlantis — was gladly perceived in to have made it possible to reach the New World in illo tempore. Conversely, when Plato did not refer to the origins of the New World inhabitants, the author willing to explain the present was granted an ample opportunity by the Bible to trace their origins to one of the sons of Noah.

The universalist return to the past represented a return to the very origins of the universe — the *arche* of reality. The early modern preoccupation with arche — the beginnings, the causes, the basis of cosmogony — was important not only because it was an expression of the anxiety with the present moment but

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<sup>407</sup> Petau, *Account of Time* (London, 1659), 'To the Reader' (unpaginated).

<sup>408</sup> See, Preface to Raleigh, *History*.

<sup>409</sup> Petau, *Account of Time* (London, 1659), 'To the Reader' (unpaginated).

<sup>410</sup> J. Lightfoot, *The Harmony, chronicle and order of the Old Testament* (London, 1655), 1.

also because it granted the present its own archaeology. It allowed to identify how the present had come to be, and what it was by accounting for *all of time* from the very origins to the present. For example, beginning with the Creation, Petau's historiographical narrative terminated in 1656, just three years before the text's publication. Similarly, Raleigh occupied himself with the archaeology of peoples, states and events and Milton took his historical inquiry all the way back to the very beginning of human history whilst asking 'what cause/Mov'd our Grand Parents in that happy State ... to fall off/From their Creator'.<sup>411</sup> It has rightly been stressed in recent criticism on Milton's *Paradise Lost* that Milton is deeply preoccupied with the origins and causes of spiritual and physical events alike.<sup>412</sup> Returning to the origins of the universe also involved a return to the mythical time. In the case of early modern universalist histories, which reproduce the Biblical cosmogony, this represents the time in which Creation took place in the Biblical myth of Genesis. Plato's *Timaeus* similarly represents a cosmogony. The cosmogonic myth relates to a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time, *ab initio* – it is, in the words of Mircea Eliade, a 'recital of creation'. There the Gods labour to create harmony, order and stability from chaos and nothingness, nations and organised forms and structures of existence emerge, kings are made and deposed, castles built and wars waged. While relating to these experiences, myths show how a reality came into existence and present the reader with an archaeology of time, which explains how the present has come to acquire its identity. Importantly, since telling a myth is proclaiming what gods did *ab origine*, myths also establish apodictic truth—that is absolute and beyond debate—about the origins of reality.<sup>413</sup> The very vastness of the narrative, and of its hermeneutic breadths, allows the universalist author to justify those aspects of the present that he sees fit.

This holds true for both twelfth-century and early modern methodological returns to the past – albeit in different ways. Interestingly, the most fundamental intellectual response to the twelfth-century intellectual crisis

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<sup>411</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, quoted in D. Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge, 1990), 94.

<sup>412</sup> See Loewenstein, *Drama of History*, 94; D. Quint, *Origin and originality in Renaissance Literature* (Yale, 1983).

<sup>413</sup> M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (Florida, 1957), 95. See also M. Eliade "Cosmogonic Myth and Sacred History", *Religious Studies*, 2 (1967), 171-183.

had been the provision of cosmogonic myths – for instance, Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*.<sup>414</sup> As in the early modern period, in the twelfth century too intellectual emphasis had fallen on the expansion of hermeneutic and chronological horizons of the intellectual enquiry across time and space. This represented a direct response to the prevalent intellectual crisis in that it made possible the drawing of an epistemological harmony between the opposing academic disciplines and sources of knowledge. Similarly to the early modern universalist narratives, the twelfth-century texts also returned to the *arche* in so doing. Peter Dronke notes that in the twelfth-century mythopoeic tradition, ‘when an account was such as could not have happened, then the theologian, like the scientist, must find a way to interpret it allegorically.’<sup>415</sup> This they certainly did – William of Conches bravely argued that ‘it must not be believed literally that [God] took a rib out of the first man’ to create Eve.<sup>416</sup> In an attempt to bring more sanity to the present, the twelfth-century writers had set out to rewrite the story of all time and bring a more agreeable version of the past to the intellectually polarized present. If in response to his present the twelfth-century mythographer assigned Achilles a place in the same textual spatiality as Virgin Mary<sup>417</sup>—in so doing, altering the temporal reality—the later early modern authors similarly return to the past to alter the foundations of their present. In Antwerp, Mercator not only denounces Ptolemy’s authority, but also proceeds to correct the ancient text with more recent information from his present, while Montano’s recently published text is accompanied with a map that locates the New World in the ancient past.<sup>418</sup>

In his *Method*, Bodin remarked that ‘if accounts seem objectionable, it is very easy to skip them’. It is precisely in this sense that Bodin’s new historiographical method should be read. As his praise of Johan Funck’s *Chronologia* demonstrates, Bodin envisaged the ideal of a universalist approach to the past to be a work that drew a seamless balance between the times past and the times succeeding: a definite scheme of chronology [of] things recorded by Eusebius, Bede, Lucidus, Sigismund, Martin and

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<sup>414</sup> Bernardus Silvestris, *The Cosmopgrahia of Bernardus Silverstris*, edited by Winthrop Wetherbee (New York, 1973).

<sup>415</sup> P. Dronke, *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden, 1974), 19.

<sup>416</sup> William of Conches, quoted in Dronke, *Fabula*, 19.

<sup>417</sup> Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia* (Oxford, 1990), 76.

<sup>418</sup> Grafton, *New Worlds*, 124.

Phrygio.<sup>419</sup> The later early-modern return to time was neither the choice of the past, nor of the future. It was a powerful combination of both. To this end, no author's writings serve as a better example than that of Francis Bacon, who asked the following with his rhetorical brilliance:

‘Has not the river of time carried down to us the light and windy and sunk the solid and weighty? What of those old trackers-down of truth? What of Heraclitus, Democritus, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and the rest, known to us only through the writings of others [...] behind the silence and the reserve of antiquity.’<sup>420</sup>

For Bacon, the goal of advancing learning is to restore humanity to its prelapsarian state, which is essentially a mythical time — outlined in Genesis. Therefore, paradoxically, the Baconian promise of a golden future is markedly backward-looking’, as is his idea of progress. Eliade has perceptively noted that ‘for a religious man, re-actualisation of the same mythical events [as outlined in the myth of creation] constitutes his greatest hope; for with each reactualisation he again has the opportunity to transfigure his existence, to make it like its divine model’.<sup>421</sup> Faced with a frail and infected present moment, that is precisely what early modern writers set out to do. It is important to stress that Bacon sets out to re-enact not just the Biblical perfection that predated the Fall, but also the condition of the pre-Socratic thinkers. Here too we are dealing with an epistemological synthesis. Significantly, in *Masculine Birth*, Bacon looks beyond ‘the silence and the reserve of antiquity’, to a time before the Greeks, which had a truer, closer knowledge of nature than the Greeks possessed.<sup>422</sup> There is, in Bacon’s thought, a better past and a less agreeable one. In the preface to the *Wisdom of the Ancients*, Bacon praises Hermes who had the ‘learning and universality of a philosopher’,<sup>423</sup> but in *Masculine Birth* calls Plato the ‘deluded theologian’ while Aristotle is ‘at variance with facts’. But very importantly there he also

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<sup>419</sup> Bodin, *Method*, 22.

<sup>420</sup> Bacon, *Birth of Time*, 68.

<sup>421</sup> Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 106.

<sup>422</sup> Bacon, *Birth of Time*, 68.

<sup>423</sup> Bacon, *Advancement*, 5.

asserts that ‘the most ancient times are buried in oblivion’ — the world was ‘full all kinds of fables, and enigmas, and parables, and similitudes’, which were ‘purposely shadowed out’,<sup>424</sup> which contained true knowledge.<sup>425</sup> If mythical knowledge is uncovered, the world can break from the vain and false ways of philosophers who ‘debauch our minds’.<sup>426</sup> It is in the sense of uncovering the true, mythical knowledge that Bacon proclaims: ‘take heart, then ... and give yourself to me so that I may restore you to yourself’; he promises to restore the humankind to the mythical condition of utopian perfection that was manifested *ab origine*.<sup>427</sup> In the temporal archaeology of Bacon, this becomes the uncovering and instauration of the hidden yet perfect past. Not only does such an action in the present bestow the potential of a golden future, but it also represents a move—even if only imagined—towards defying time, for the mythical past is *euchronic*, it knows no time.

Indeed, the early modern European return to myth was a powerful response to the perceived intellectual crisis of the present moment: it envisaged the future which is the re-enacted mythical past; it attempts to defy time for mythical reality is *euchronic*; it rebels against the intellectual confusion of the present, for knowledge in the distant, mythical past was uncorrupted, pure and perfect. At the heart of any universalism lay the notion of some underlying perfection which is, in principle, attainable by all; at the heart of the universal early modern return to the past too exists the notion that there is one perfect *sapientia* attainable by all. Therefore, it is not surprising that at the time of increasing intellectual uncertainty, in response to the infected present moment, Europe began to re-enact the myth, envisaging the re-enactment of what all cosmogonic myths establish as apodictic truth – the time of origin which is the pure and perfect time. In his influential *Essays*, towards the end of the sixteenth century, true to the spirit of the age exhausted by particularism and seeking universal truths, Montaigne despairingly observed how there was no concord even on universal laws among nations and even among people in the same nations. This exclamation was not just a mere observation, but instead a lamentation that in a world where all coherence was

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<sup>424</sup> Bacon, *Wisdom*, vi.

<sup>425</sup> Bacon, *Masculine Birth*, 63-4.

<sup>426</sup> Bacon, *Birth of Time*, 62.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

gone, no absolutes remained anymore. In fact, as the European historical thought began its quest to universalize, the political thought made greater steps to absolutize the particulars. This, true to the culture of the quest for order and control that we have seen above, was the response of Europe in crisis.

As the sixteenth century wore on, political pessimism spread across Europe exhausted by religious and civil strife. The despair caused by the Spanish hegemony, the social crisis in the community and the and political breakdown across Europe, encompassing ‘the decline of political authority in France, Scotland, Poland and the German Empire’ was only further by the confessional strife fueled by fanatics of all sorts: religious as well as political.<sup>428</sup> This had a very apparent effect on Europe’s intellectual life also as is evident in the thought of Justus Lipsius and Michel de Montaigne, no doubt Europe’s leading intellectual lights at the time. It was at this time precisely that Montaigne mused how ‘Instabilitie is the worst I find in our state’, comparing ‘our lawes’ with garments that ‘can take no settled forme’.<sup>429</sup> The search for a ‘settled form’, so typical of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, manifested itself heavily in Lipsius’ political thought as well. Just two years before his initial edition of Tacitus in 1574 — by virtue of which Lipsius to date remains as one of the foremost Tacitean scholars<sup>430</sup>— the Massacre of St. Bartholomew had taken place in 1572. And even this, in Oestreich’s apt summary, was but one incident in ‘the interminable road of suffering, which threatened the structure of the state and the existence of every individual’.<sup>431</sup> Lipsius’ biography reflected the tumultuous nature of the times remarkably well. Throughout his productive and eventful career, Lipsius served as a professor at the Lutheran university of Jena, Calvinist university at Leiden and the Catholic university at Louvain. In so doing, he had converted back and forth between various Christian denominations according to the needs posed by his various academic positions. Much as Lipsius may have found peace and tranquility, avoiding conflict was a difficult task, particularly since 1568 when Seven Provinces of the Low Countries rebelled against the

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<sup>428</sup> Oestreich, 39.

<sup>429</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 680.

<sup>430</sup> On this see C. O. Brink, “Justus Lipsius and the Text of Tacitus”, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 41 (1951), 32-51.

<sup>431</sup> Oestreich, 39.

Spanish empire. Lipsius thus spent much of his life observing crisis and eventually also worked for the initiation of truce between Spain and the Dutch rebels.<sup>432</sup>

Montaigne and Lipsius have justly been interpreted as the leading lights of the day, Lipsius being a representative of one of the two urban centres of Europe, the Netherlands, and Montaigne that of the upcoming centre – France. The two men not only corresponded, but also had a profound respect for one another. In 1589, Lipsius observed that ‘I have found no one in Europe whose way of thinking about things is closer to my own’ while Montaigne for his part described Lipsius as ‘the most sufficient and learned man now living; of a most polished and judicious wit’.<sup>433</sup> They led markedly different lives, Lipsius travelling regularly as Montaigne sat peacefully in the quietude of his study from 1571 onward. However, they did indeed have much in common. As highly educated rational members of the French and Dutch elites, the two men were terrified by the flames of irrationality exhausting Europe. Moreover, they were both humanists; yet both enjoyed an understanding that something rather new was required. Both Lipsius and Montaigne were critical and ambivalent towards the Ciceronian style and classical eloquence in general. This, importantly, included a degree of scepticism concerning the possibility of educating an individual citizen into a culture of virtue in the republican tradition.<sup>434</sup> As Tuck has written, ‘a new kind of humanism became a central and familiar feature of the intellectual landscape ... in place of Cicero it put the stylistically and morally objectionable figure of Tacitus.’<sup>435</sup> Such an ideational shift might be explained – quite apart from an alteration in discursive priorities – due to historical realities. In the later decades of the sixteenth century, the objective facts of religious and civil strife, and Spanish imperial hegemony – at one point with its roots in Italy and England as well – ‘led to more pessimistic political thinking’, shifting emphasis ‘from rhetoric and philosophy to politics and history’.<sup>436</sup> Consequently, it has been argued,

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<sup>432</sup> On this, see Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 60-61.

<sup>433</sup> Lipsius and Montaigne, cited in Tuck 45.

<sup>434</sup> On Montaigne’s skeptical attitude regarding the culture of virtue, see Douglas Thompson, “Fortuna’s Revenge: Montaigne’s Critique of Classical Virtue”, *Montaigne Studies*, 24 (2012), 205-224.

<sup>435</sup> Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 40.

<sup>436</sup> J. H. M. Salmon, “Cicero and Tacitus in 16th century France”, *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), 317.

the civic humanism of the Renaissance ‘gave way to the political humanism of the Baroque’.<sup>437</sup> The rise of intellectual scepticism and political pessimism has often been ascribed to the emergence of the culture of Neostoicism across Europe from about 1570s. Yet, such a rise was itself the product, in what represented a truly two-way process, of a thorough reflection on the nature of the times.

The remainder of this chapter deals with the thought of Europe’s two chief intellectual voices in the second half of the sixteenth century. The choice of these two authors see to be sufficiently justified from the above considerations. No less importantly, here one ought to bear in mind that Montaigne was not an exclusively political commentator, but a *cultural commentator*. He wrote of politics as much as he wrote about almost anything else. Therefore, his broader philosophical and cultural approach to the matter of life in time provides an excellent backdrop in which to view the times in general. His ethical percepts, as we are about to see, are those upon which Lipsius draws his *political* philosophy as he creates a vision of a novel political phenomenon, thus paving the way for the appearance of Thomas Hobbes.

## Montaigne’s Times

The period in which Montaigne thought and wrote was indeed fraught with instability and increasing sense of insecurity that largely originated from the shifting realities of early modern Europe. If nothing else, just the discovery of the new world alone and the Reformation would have sufficed to cause an intellectual uproar and epistemological anxiety, which they did in the event. The cultural encounter of the Christian and non-Christian worlds contributed to a ‘circumambient air of uncertainty and scepticism which is most markedly prompted by the Reformation’s doctrinal controversies’<sup>438</sup> The very upsurge of early modern skepticism, of which Montaigne has been seen as one of the greatest proponents, indeed greatly owed its existence to the challenging shift in the ‘known’ and ‘established’ early modern truths. There, then, was a crisis

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<sup>437</sup> H. Leyra, “Justus Lipsius, Political Humanism and the Disciplining of 17th Century Statecraft”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Oct., 2008), 673.

<sup>438</sup> W. M. Hamlin, “On Continuities between Scepticism and Ethnography: Or, Montaigne’s Providential Diversity”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 31, 2 (2000), 365.



of an epistemic nature. And it is in Montaigne's contemplations about such matters that we discern his great sense of his own present. In the essay *Of Cannibals*, Montaigne explores the newly found *terrae incognitae* at great length and admires the simplicity and of the native people. However, in the very same passage, Montaigne then expresses his fundamental epistemic fear about the future that he can 'by no means [be] sure that some other land may not be discovered in the future, since so many persons, greater than we are, were wrong about this one.'<sup>439</sup> Hamlin has aptly noted such 'skepticism in the broadest sense [was] born of diversity.'<sup>440</sup> In the sense of our study, however, Montaigne's skepticism is not just that but also the supreme demonstration of Montaigne's sense of the present. Both *On the Cannibals* and *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* – 'that amazing product of his own *crise pyrthonienne*'<sup>441</sup> - clearly demonstrate this. In both essays Montaigne comments on issues that are the causes of the early modern epistemological anxiety and very much contemporary to him. However, what is perhaps most noteworthy is the manner in which he does so.

'He [Montaigne] made no attempt to describe every feature of the Brazilian manner of life. Rather, he selected only those elements which seemed to correspond with what in the culture of sixteenth-century France seemed important to a sixteenth-century Frenchman.'<sup>442</sup>

That Montaigne was acutely aware of time comes across from a range of other examples as well. At the end of the Second Book of *The Essays*, Montaigne observes how since the beginning of writing 'I have aged by some seven or eight years', ironically observing that this has hardly been 'without some fresh gain', for he is now suffering from a form of abdominal pain, colic paroxysm, a result of 'long commerce and acquaintance with the years'.<sup>443</sup> Moreover, his selection and organization of material for *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, for example, was such that he rendered the original text by Sebond much more agreeable to his contemporaries than it had actually been. This was a common

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<sup>439</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 229

<sup>440</sup> W. M. Hamlin, "On Continuities", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 365.

<sup>441</sup> R. H. Popkin, *The history of scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* 43.

<sup>442</sup> M. T. Hodgen, 'Montaigne and Shakespeare Again,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1952), 26.

<sup>443</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 1195.

course of action for early modern intellectuals who of necessity had to turn into strategists of time — often for their mere survival. Justus Lipsius, for instance, ‘changed — indeed falsified — his published letters to meet the present or future situation.’<sup>444</sup> Unlike Lipsius, Montaigne had maintained in the *Essays* that ‘I never correct my first thoughts by second ones’,<sup>445</sup> but he was no less alarmed by the fate of meaning in time. In fact, so great was his fear of being misrepresented along the river of time that he issued a threat of returning from the other world in order to haunt whoever would misrepresent him.<sup>446</sup>

However, skepticism was not the only fruit of the observation of the present and the ensuing epistemic crisis. Moral relativism was another. Tuck has interpreted Montaigne’s radical attacks on science and medicine,<sup>447</sup> in the context precisely of Montaigne’s endorsement of the Pyrrhonian skeptical position. In a famous passage in the *Essays*, Montaigne asks:

what goodnesse is that, which but yesterday I saw in credit and esteeme, and to morrow, to have lost all reputation? ... But they are so pleasant, when to allow the Lawes some certaintie, they say, that there be some firme, perpetuall and immoveable, which they call naturall, and by the condition of their proper essence, are imprinted in mankind: of which some make three in number, some foure, some more, some lesse: an evident token, that it is a marke as doubtful as the rest... Now are they so unfortunate (for, how can I terme that but misfortune, that of so infinite a number of lawes, there is not so much as one to be found, which the fortune [or the temereritie of chance] hath graunted to be univerally received, and by the consent of unanimitie of all Nations to be admitted?) they are (I say) so miserable, that of these three or foure chaise-selected lawes, there is not one alone, that is not impugned or disallowed, not by one nation, but by

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<sup>444</sup> Gerlo, cited by Oestereich, 20.

<sup>445</sup> Montaigne, *Essays*, 1194.

<sup>446</sup> R. Scholar, “Montaigne’s Forays into the Undiscovered Country” in A. Brady, E. Buttwerorth (eds.) *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2010), 40.

<sup>447</sup> Medicine chapter

many.<sup>448</sup>

Scientists, too, are wrong for their diagnoses are nothing but different sorts of perceptions through senses,<sup>449</sup> themselves always deceptive. Medicine is also suspect to Montaigne's skepticism. There are, after all, no two doctors who might prescribe one and the same drug. This should, of course come as no surprise from an author undergoing an acute skeptical crisis who had struck a medal with a motto "I abstain!" and a 'device of the poised scales with *Que sçay-je?*'.<sup>450</sup>

In a truly disenchanted manner, characteristic of skepticism and a degree also of neo-Stoicism, Montaigne shows a degree of sarcasm towards his own present. His remark, in the essay *Of Vanity*, that 'scribbling seems to be one of the symptoms of an age of excess...When did we write so much as since the beginning of our civil wars?', is a further illustration of his intimate awareness of his own present, much as of historical change.<sup>451</sup> In the same chapter he further mentions that one of the reasons that invite him to travel in time so extensively is his 'incompatibility with the *present* political morality'<sup>452</sup> and expresses his dissatisfaction with 'our tempestuous times.'<sup>453</sup> Montaigne's criticism of his present time, more specifically of the intellectual crisis at hand, is even more evident in the chapter *On physiognomy* where he draws a comparison between the past - in particular, Socrates' time – and the present:

'Under so common a form [in which Socrates communicated his thoughts] *we today* would never have discerned the nobility and splendor of his [Socrates'] astonishing concepts; *we ...* are never aware of riches except when pompously paraded... *nowadays* fill men up with nothing but wind and then bounce them about'<sup>454</sup>

Here Montaigne draws a stark contrast between his own frail present, filled with men of 'gross' vision, with the ancient times of 'the most clear-sighted men.' Yet, as Scodel has noted, what Montaigne has also set out to do here is 'to obliterate the distinction between a powerful past and an enfeebled

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<sup>449</sup> On the early modern distrust of senses, especially the visual, see the excellent account by Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>450</sup> M. A. Screech, *Preface* 44.

<sup>451</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 1071.

<sup>452</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 1082.

<sup>453</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 1084.

<sup>454</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 1147.

present.<sup>455</sup> Indeed, even purely linguistically, in his narrative Montaigne actively fuses past and present:

‘Socrates makes... this man did not propose to himself... his aim was... he raised nothing, but rather brought... down and back... The other walks... and treats... and behaves... He shows... he constructed... It is he who brought... back down... See.. see.. he rouses... He did’<sup>456</sup>

Montaigne is fundamentally preoccupied with the matter of changeability across time and history. In his account the world is governed by fortune who is highly unreliable. Montaigne remembers how Croesus, about to be punished by Cyrus, the Persian Emperor, during the Libyan conquest, exclaimed: “Solon, Solon!”. As the Persian emperor requested to know what meaning this might have carried, Cyrus conveyed that he had ‘found the teaching Solon had formerly given him true to his cost; which was, "That men, however fortune may smile upon them, could never be said to be happy till they had been seen to pass over the last day of their lives.’ This, Montaigne explains, was due to ‘the uncertainty and mutability of human things, which, upon very light and trivial occasions, are subject to be totally changed into a quite contrary condition’.<sup>457</sup> The following observation in a chapter characteristically entitled *That we should not be deemed happy till after our death* speaks best of Montaigne’s truly dramatic sense of changeability across time:

‘descendants of Alexander the Great, themselves kings of Macedonia, became cabinet-makers and scriveners in Rome; tyrants of Sicily became schoolteachers in Corinth... conqueror of half of the world... became suppliant to the beggarly officials of the King of Egypt ... and in our fathers' days, Ludovico Sforza, the tenth Duke of Milan, whom all Italy had so long truckled under, was seen to die a wretched prisoner at Loches’<sup>458</sup>

Nothing and no one could be immune from the malice of fortune. The account of fortune in Montaigne’s thought indeed offers a far more resigned, and indeed dramatic, sense of fortunes utter changeability and the

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<sup>455</sup> J. Scodel, “The Affirmation of Paradox: A Reading of Montaigne’s “De la Phisionomie,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 69 (1983), 217.

<sup>456</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 217.

<sup>457</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 217.

<sup>458</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 87

corresponding weakness of human free will in affecting a contrary change. Montaigne, in fact, even suggests there are ‘also spirits above that are envious of the greatnesses here below’, comparing them to ‘storms and tempests’<sup>459</sup> that overthrow lofty buildings and also citing Lucretius who speaks of ‘occult powers’.<sup>460</sup> Such changeability, manifesting itself most directly in Montaigne’s present, gave rise to uncontrolled emotions, irrationality, fear and the consequent willingness to prognosticate upon the future, which we have already encountered as a rather typical characteristic of times of crises. To that end, it is interesting to point to Montaigne’s reflection on fear itself. ‘The thing in the world I am most afraid of is fear’, Montaigne observed, ‘that passion alone, in the trouble of it, exceeding all other accidents’. Fear was, after all, not just the central characteristic of Montaigne’s present but, in part, a cause of that present as differing factions all sought survival. Fear overtakes all, not just ‘simple folk’ with a belief in ‘chimeras, werewolves or goblins’, but also the braver sort like soldiers. Montaigne designates fear as ‘a strange passion ... that dethrones our judgement from its proper seat’. In fact, Montaigne observes how he’s seen ‘very many become frantic through fear’, even among ‘those of the best settled temper [where fear] begets a terrible astonishment and confusion during the fit’.<sup>461</sup> Interestingly, in the same chapter Montaigne then also recounts a historical event that ‘brought so wonderful a desolation upon Carthage’. Moved by fear, the inhabitants left their homes and began to wound and slaughter one another ‘as if they had been enemies come to surprise their city’. This, Montaigne observes, is what ‘they call panic terrors’.<sup>462</sup>

It was fear of the unknown, coupled with the ability to withstand emotions, that also gave rise to yet another temporal inclination that Montaigne deemed to be not only of no use, but even unhealthy. This was the willingness to prognosticate upon future. In an essay *On Prognostications* Montaigne speaks of the ‘mad curiosity of our nature which wastes time trying to seize hold of the future as though it were not enough to have to deal with the present.’<sup>463</sup> Here

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<sup>459</sup> Montaigne, “Of Fear”, *Essays*, 190.

<sup>460</sup> Montaigne, “That we should not be deemed happy till after our death”, *Essays*, 195.

<sup>461</sup> Montaigne, “Of Fear”, *Essays*, 190.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 193

<sup>463</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 42

Montaigne calls on the authority of Cicero and Lucan, employing their texts in an attempt to call on individuals to live in and with the present and to worry little about the times that have not yet arrived. This is what Montaigne selects from Cicero's *De Divinatione*:

‘Let your mind rejoice in the present: let it loathe to trouble about what lies in the future’

And from Lucan's *Pharsalia*:

‘O Ruler of Olympus, why did it please thee to add more care to worried mortals by letting them learn of future slaughters by means of cruel omens! Whatever though hast in store, do it unexpectedly; let the minds of men be blind to their future fate...’<sup>464</sup>

Montaigne demonstrates a remarkable nonchalance towards his own very personal medical malaise. Although at times tremendously difficult to bear, Montaigne declares that the illness never gets hold of him. Here he manifests the sort of Neo-Stoic pride that had often been the target of Christian attack due to its promotion of self-love and egoistic disposition. Not only had Montaigne ‘made a compact’ with the colic paroxysm, but he could even find ‘sources of hope and consolation in it’.<sup>465</sup> For even ‘at the darkest moment of the paroxysm’, he finds himself capable ‘of talking, thinking and replying as sensibly as at any other time’. The reason behind this was his ability to find sufficient inner strengths to deflect the arrows of fortune. It was either that Montaigne was ‘flattering myself’, or that it was truly possible that ‘a man can still find things bearable if his soul has cast off the weight of the fear of dying and the weight of all the warning threats, inferences and complications which Medicine stuffs into our heads’.<sup>466</sup> Montaigne, in fact, praises his own ‘stolid complexion’ as ‘one of the best of my natural characteristics’, again in accord with the Stoic self-pride. This, importantly, he ascribes partly to his judgement and his ability to remain ‘insensitive to anything which does not come straight at me’. Such an ability, for the soul not to be ‘called to arms’ by anything not bodily and at the same time having ‘prepared myself by reason for such

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<sup>464</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 42.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 1195.

<sup>466</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays* (London, 1987), 1197.

misfortunes' is eminently Neostoic.<sup>467</sup> This is one of the instances when Stoicism and Skepticism truly encounter one another, even if only in the context of Montaigne's musing on the details of his personal health. Here's indeed his mistrust of scientific diagnosis, medical wisdom and, no doubt most importantly, his own 'stolid complexion' that facilitates an inner liberation from temporal anxieties –the sorrowful worry of the present medical condition and sorrows, much as the future.

Montaigne is acutely aware of time, of his and others' existence within a structured time-frame and of the inevitable end of it. His sense of an existence on a timescale that is one's life is perhaps most evident in the chapter *To philosophise is to learn how to die*, where Montaigne notes factors that accompany one's life, such as pain, pleasure, good health, poverty or tranquility, in the end noting that 'death can end them... that is inevitable.'<sup>468</sup> Montaigne even informs the readers the he is 'always having death not only in my mind but on my lips.'<sup>469</sup> Yet, in the same chapter of the *Essais*, Montaigne discusses his age and his expectations of how long he has left to live in a rather calm and rational manner:

'it is exactly a fortnight since I became thirty-nine: 'I ought to live at least as long again; meanwhile, it would be mad to think of something so far off'<sup>470</sup>

'I have already half-said my adieus to everyone but myself,' Montaigne writes and notes that he is already actively disposing of his possessions, since life is nearing its end with the passage of time and that the possession of material things will neither slow the passage of time, nor make the inevitable end of it any easier.<sup>471</sup>

Death in Montaigne's understanding is the absolute termination of time, for 'wherever your life ends, there all of it ends.'<sup>472</sup> A man of wisdom, learning and argumentation himself, Montaigne rather ironically notes that 'all the wisdom and argument in the world eventually come down to one conclusion'<sup>473</sup> - death

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<sup>467</sup> Montaigne, *Essays*, 1200.

<sup>468</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays*, 91.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

- for 'all rules meet and concur in this one clause.'<sup>474</sup> Skeptical and ironic attitude that Montaigne is renowned for is present in his contemplations about life and death too. Montaigne finds it rather amusing that people cross themselves when death is mentioned to them and that, in an overly optimistic move, they attempt to stubbornly continue living, as a means of defying death. 'However decrepit a man may be, he thinks he still has another twenty years to go.'<sup>475</sup> In Montaigne's eyes, it is increasingly naïve that only few people 'die convinced that their last hour has come; nowhere else does deceiving Hope take up more of our time.'<sup>476</sup> Instead, people 'go to cutting marble and are about to die: yet [they] forget [their] own tomb and start building houses.'<sup>477</sup> Yet, for Montaigne, or at least he would like to make it seem so, death is one of the many things that one encounters on the timescale that is one's life:

'death is one of the attributes you were created with, death is a part of you, you are running away from yours, if, this *being* which you enjoy is equally divided between death and life'<sup>478</sup>

Indeed, we are born to die – the very first hour of our time is the first hour of the beginning of the end – 'Our first hour gave us life and began to devour it,' Montaigne notes.'<sup>479</sup> Therefore, it is absolutely rational for one to realize that whether one likes it or not, one must be in full readiness for the dawning of that last hour, as was Montaigne, having always been ready for death:

'the other day someone was going through my notebooks and found a declaration about something I wanted done after my death. I told him straight that, though I was hale and healthy and but a league away from my house, I had hastened to jot it down because I had not been absolutely certain of getting back home'<sup>480</sup>

However, such uncertainty does not render Montaigne unable to retain calmness and rational thinking. Indeed, he notes that whatever age one reaches should be considered as an age reached by few and 'since in the

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<sup>474</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 684.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.



normal course of events men never reach that far, it is a sign that we are getting on.’<sup>481</sup> Likewise, despite being so acutely conscious of the passing of time and the nearing of death, Montaigne nevertheless writes that he has ‘set out on a road along which I shall travel without toil and without ceasing as long as the world has ink and paper.’<sup>482</sup> Such stance perhaps reflects another wider characteristic of Montaigne’s *Essais* that is the paradoxical nature of the text. In his brilliant article ‘The Affirmation of Paradox,’ Scodel has noted that ‘inner and outer, past and present knowledge and ignorance ... life and death – all these polarities collapse and supposed opposites fuse.’<sup>483</sup>

Importantly, Montaigne’s nonchalance and an ethics of civic abstention also extended to his view of political life. In a rather conservative manner, Montaigne spoke skeptically about innovation and its virtues. In so doing, he also proceeded to reject the entire fabric of republican philosophy on the battles of human virtue in time and thus against fortune. Now, like Lipsius and Bodin, Montaigne also believed that traditional laws and ordinances were to be changed only if a pressing need arose.<sup>484</sup>

The ‘worst aspect of the state’ was precisely the ‘lack of our stability’ stemming from the changeability of all under heaven, ‘that our laws cannot adopt one fixed form any more than our fashions can’.<sup>485</sup> Here we need to make a further observation that Montaigne here speaks not just of natural changeability — that is the work of Fortune, which is inevitable by nature — but changeability of an essentially *psychological* nature. This sort of changeability stems not from the heavens or external causes directly, but from the deepest levels of human nature, fueled by vainglory, passions and irrationality. The incessant search for innovation, understood in the broadest terms not just as a political act in time but also as a cultural process has resulted in the alteration of ancient customs, fashions and laws also. All things under sun are imperfect anyway, Montaigne concedes, but the generation of ‘contempt for [a nation’s] ancient customs’ has proven all too easy to all men. Yet, in their pursuit of replacing ruined conditions by better ones, ‘many who

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<sup>481</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays* (London, 1987), 367.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 1070.

<sup>483</sup> J. Scodel, ‘The Affirmation of Paradox: A Reading of Montaigne’s “De la Phisionomie,”’ *Yale French Studies*, No. 69 (1983), 209.

<sup>484</sup> Oestreich, *Neostoicism*, 47.

<sup>485</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays* (London, 1987), 367.

have tried to do that have come to grief.<sup>486</sup> Strikingly, this passage is then followed by a truly Neo-Stoic declaration about human agency in time. Montaigne admits that in his activities, he grants but only a small part to his own intelligence: 'I readily let myself be led by the public order of this world.' If the earlier civic humanist blessing extended to those who 'did their bit' in their attempts to maximize human freedom against the tyranny of time, the resigned political humanist of the late sixteenth century instead has this to say:

'Blessed are they who, without tormenting themselves about causes, do what they are told rather than tell others what to do; who, as the Heavens roll, gently roll with them. When a man reasons and pleads causes, his obedience is neither tranquil nor pure...'<sup>487</sup>

One is thus advised not to get involved and alter, but essentially to obey. For the 'world is not good at curing itself' and if it does so, it is 'at the expense of itself'. One may very well 'throw off the burden of a present evil', but end up worse off, 'for good does not necessarily succeed evil'. Caesar's republican killers 'threw the Republic into such a crisis that they had cause to regret their intervention'. The same has often occurred 'down to our own times. My own contemporaries here in France could tell you a thing or two about that!'. As though the call for civic disengagement were not perfectly clear, Montaigne still warns all 'aiming straight for a cure' that should he 'reflect about it before anything was done, [they] would soon cool his ardour for setting his hand to it'.<sup>488</sup> Now, this of course represents the radical opposite of the ethics not just of pursuing *gloria*, but also of *vita activa* in general. Montaigne may himself served as the Mayor of Bordeaux, but this was more in the memory of his father, also a Mayor of Bordeaux, than due to his belief in civil service.

Montaigne was no doubt one of the most important skeptics of the early modern intellectual life. Both of his mottos, *I abstain* and *What do I know?* summarize his thought remarkably well. It may be remarkably hard to theorize about Montaigne's "political thought", for there is none directly speaking and yet, all his thought is indirectly speaking political. Montaigne was a moral philosopher and one of the earliest public intellectuals in the

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<sup>486</sup> Screech, (ed., trans) *Essays* (London, 1987), 470.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

sense very contemporary to us in the twenty-first century. Like a blogger of our times, Montaigne mused on a very broad range of matters, including his health, his local river, some of the finest and hardest matters of philosophy, his son-in-law as well as the stomach operation of his bishop friend. In so doing, Montaigne provided a vivid picture not just of a particular sort of intellectual history of the time, but also of the French and European times themselves, in their social and cultural manifestations. Tuck has very rightly noted that ‘Renaissance scepticism, like its ancient precursors, was not fundamentally an epistemological position, but rather a *psychological* one’; the skeptic, he has argued, looked for a wisdom and thought he had found it in ‘the complete elimination from his mind of the beliefs which cause harm — namely all beliefs which, if acted upon or expressed, would bring him into some kind of conflict with other men or with the world itself’.<sup>489</sup> Montaigne’s call to obedience — one good example of the very many that we have singled out above — is not just moral and political, but also epistemological. What, after all, does anyone, and especially the simple folk with a belief in goblins, know to request the alteration of the ancient state of things? Have innovations in customs, laws and against tradition not brought upon this world a host of misfortunes Has Montaigne’s contemporary Europe not made the very same mistake that Caesar’s republican murderers made? It is indeed the epistemic skepticism — the doubt concerning human ability not just to practice well politically, but also to *know* what the best course of practice might be. In the absence of such knowledge, and in the presence of fortune’s changeability, the best course, in fact is obedience, protecting oneself in pursuit of the Stoic ideal of self-preservation and in practice, living quietly and peacefully in accordance with the existing laws and norms of the country. Now, was this the resignation that is often observed by commentators of this period of intellectual history and a new brand of humanism? This was, indeed, resignation from a political point of view. The subject was to remain calm, not seek much innovation and indeed not get involved very much, for there was hardly any point to it — the situation, in fact, may only be worsened. Yet, though Montaigne no doubt calls for political resignation, to him this may also have looked like the very mastery of time itself; yet, a mastery of time of a different sort. Unlike earlier humanist

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<sup>489</sup> Tuck, Preface, *Philosophy and Government*, xii.

appeals to the mastery of time that took the form of human action, this new response to the malaise of fortune—in the age of quest for control that we have already exposed — this form of possible rebellion against time was in some ways even more radical. For if the Neo-Stoic claim was that ills of the present, and indeed of humankind at large, resulted from uncontrolled passions resulting in fear, emotionality and irrationality, then what better answer could be given to history than to mould a new kind of character in one's own self? Montaigne's inner exile, which also took a physical form in 1571 as Montaigne confined himself to a solitary existence in his study, was an inseparable part precisely of his own response to outer and inner crisis: outer resulting from the observation of diversity and discord, and inner caused, by the death of his intimate friend, Etienne de la Boetie. Importantly, it was also part of his 'stolid complexion' that, as he proudly declared, granted him the liberty of deflecting all the outer accidents.

## **Kings, Masters of Time**

In July 1589, Justus Lipsius published his *Politicorum sive Civilis Doctrinae libri sex* (shortly, *Politica*). Drawing on a remarkably rich hermeneutics, it was a work at the convergence of various intellectual traditions. As Lipsius himself declared, his work was like a tapestry in the Phrygian style: a 'uniform and coherent' whole made 'out of a myriad of parts'.<sup>490</sup> Until the appearance of works by Wilhelm Dilthey, Fortunat Strowski and Léontine Zanta, Lipsius' name was almost entirely forgotten. It was in 1983, however, with the publication of Gerhard Oestreich's *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* that Lipsius decisively re-entered the scene.<sup>491</sup> However, *Politica* has generated a long-standing scholarly debate concerning the place of Lipsius, as well the identity of the work itself. If the earlier accounts brought to the forefront the problem of the sixteenth century liberation of 'the individual without supplying any theoretical structure' to hold the society of 'radically empowered

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<sup>490</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Six books of politics or political instruction*, ed. Jan Hendrik Waszink (Assen : Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 233. Hereafter cited as *Politica*.

<sup>491</sup> Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge 1983)

men',<sup>492</sup> as was the case in Dilthey's account, or indeed Lipsius as a Christian and a Stoic moralist, as was in Zanta's scholarship, Oestreich's account offered a far more radical interpretative challenge and declared that Lipsius proclaimed 'the modern state, based on order and power, from amid the ruins caused by the religious wars'.<sup>493</sup> This Lipsius was one that belonged to 'the world of *raison d'Etat* and the military revolution, and to scepticism and self-perfection: the rise of the state *and* the birth of the citizen'.<sup>494</sup> Oestreich emphasised Lipsius' contribution to a broader "Netherlands movement" which, in his opinion, played a seminal role in the political and military revolution that transformed European statehood and military organisation. This, in Brooke's assessment, was an argument in favour of 'an ethic of duty that bordered on asceticism' that, in Oestreich's opinion, helped to cement the early modern absolutist monarchy as a sort of foundational secular ideology.<sup>495</sup>

Oestreich has observed that Lipsius 'always directed his activity to practical ends' and did so successfully, for he 'correctly read the signs of the times' in both *Constantia* and *Politica*. To him, 'The spirit it embodied and its exceedingly practical orientation derived from the Neostoic philosophy of the state, which was itself eminently practical'.<sup>496</sup> However, this very designation, 'Neo-Stoic', and indeed Oestreich's own ideological reading of Lipsius' political thought, ought to be treated with a degree of caution. As Peter Miller has suggested in his important essay, Oestreich's work was part of a broader project that had deep roots in the National Socialist ideology. Miller's central claim is that, although the work was itself written in the post-war period, its likely intellectual foundations in the depths of Nazi ideology had made Oestreich's reading of Lipsius' *Politica* deeply ideological.<sup>497</sup> To cite but one of Miller's central charges, he has highlighted how 'Oestreich's evocation of Lipsius's idea of discipline ... seems to pick up every single nuance and echo of

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<sup>492</sup> Miller, "Nazis and Neo-Stoics", 145.

<sup>493</sup> Oestreich, *Neostoicism*, 70.

<sup>494</sup> Miller, "Nazis and Neo-Stoics", 147.

<sup>495</sup> C. Brooke, *Philosophic pride: stoicism and political thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, 2012), 37.

<sup>496</sup> Oestreich, *Neostoicism*, 70.

<sup>497</sup> On this, see an excellent essay by P. N. Miller, "Nazis and Neo-Stoics: Otto Brunner and Gerhard Oestreich Before and After the Second World War", *Past and Present* 1 (2002), 144-186.

the National Socialist language of *Erziehung zum Wehrwillen* (education of the will to war).<sup>498</sup> Waszink, too, has detected an ideological undercurrent at work in Oestreich's account of Lipsian political thought. While Oestreich argued that Lipsius 'saw military force as the real foundation of the state', Waszink has accurately pointed out that 'the military is not central to the *Politica* at all'.<sup>499</sup> Outside the Book V of *Politica*, the matter of military indeed does not at all assume a prevalent position in Lipsius' discussion.

How "Neo-Stoic", then, was Lipsius? To this end, it is important first to distinguish the Lipsius of *Constantia* and the Lipsius of *Politica*, for there is no reason to equate them. As Blair Worden observes, unless we conceive of the thought of Lipsius and that which is called "Neo-Stoicism" as synonymous, we do not have sufficient grounds for interpreting *Politica* strictly as a "Neo-Stoic" work.<sup>500</sup> Jan Waszink has suggested that in *Politica* '[t]he Neostoic key virtue of *Constantia* is given no particular prominence'.<sup>501</sup> Strikingly, in his discussion of "mixed prudence", which we examine again below, Lipsius distances himself from the classic Stoic political pursuit of identifying the honourable (*honestum*) and useful (*utile*), instead favouring the path of "mixing" deceit prudence with a "sediment of deceit".

This, then, conveniently leads us to examine yet another, and deeply interconnected, bone of contention in the historiography on Lipsius – one that also forms the larger part of this chapter due to our preoccupations in this work. This is: How "Machiavellian" was Lipsius? It has been argued by Robert Bireley that Lipsius was the prime representative of the Catholic 'anti-Machiavellian' tradition of political thought that aimed to 'elaborate a vision of practical politics, in response to Machiavelli, that would be moral, Christian' and suitable for the historical circumstances of the late sixteenth century.<sup>502</sup> However, Bireley has failed to account for Lipsius' overt endorsement of "mixed prudence" that, in his own admission, 'brought him perilously close to Machiavellism himself'.<sup>503</sup> Brooke has read Lipsius' *Politica* as a predominantly "neo-Stoic" piece of work, while leaving room for the presence

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<sup>498</sup> Miller, "Nazis and Neo-Stoics", 177.

<sup>499</sup> Waszink, Introduction to *Politica*, 101.

<sup>500</sup> B. Worden, "Constancy", *London Review of Books* 1 (1983), 13-14.

<sup>501</sup> Waszink, Introduction to *Politica*, 13.

<sup>502</sup> R. Bireley, *Counter-Reformation Prince: Anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe* (Carolina, 2017).

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

of some “Machiavellism” also. In his *Philosophic Pride*, Brooke has rightly interpreted *Politica* as an attempt at modifying Senecan Stoicism in the wake of Machiavelli’s attack on Stoic providentialism in *The Prince*.<sup>504</sup> Waszink has in turn noted that the task that lay before Lipsius was not that of negating Machiavelli’s political thought, but of distancing himself from the contemporaneous image of Machiavelli as a highly immoral author.<sup>505</sup> We need not dwell much on this point – the remainder of the chapter represents our share of the answer to this historiographical debate. Suffice it in the meantime to observe a few broader shifts in the intellectual milieu of which Lipsius was a part and that may be seen as affecting his stance on Machiavelli also.

Of these, we have already mentioned the first – the discursive shift to Tacitus. But the choice of Tacitus was highly strategic as well. Firstly, Tacitus was *contextually relevant*. ‘Tacitus is a penetrating writer, God knows, and a prudent one: and if ever there was a time when men could profit from reading him, it is now’, Lipsius maintained.<sup>506</sup> For unlike many others, Tacitus had not concerned his attention with ‘things which entertain more than they instruct the reader’. Instead, he was *practical* and dealt ‘with princely courts, with the inner life of princes, their plans, commands and actions’.<sup>507</sup> Secondly, no other Roman writer had been quite so disenchanting and skeptical about political life.<sup>508</sup> Thirdly, Tacitus enabled one to raise some of the “Machiavellian” themes without ever posing the need to cause suspicion. For neither Tacitus, nor Imperial Rome had been Machiavelli’s prime models unlike Livy and Republican Rome. The Tacitian strand of thought, thus, enabled one to be practical, skeptical and yet, when need be, also “Machiavellian”. Last but not least, the pursuit of Tacitus enabled diversion from Cicero and the related culture of classical virtue. To that end, Richard Tuck has usefully pointed out that a turn to the works of Tacitus could be discerned among Italian exiles in France in the 1570s. Tacitus enabled them to engage with Machiavellian ideas without acknowledging Machiavelli himself who was already demonised at the time. However, Tuck has also noted that there is no evidence to suggest

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<sup>504</sup> C. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 27.

<sup>505</sup> Waszink, introduction to *Politica*, 42-47.

<sup>506</sup> Lipsius, cited in Tuck 46.

<sup>507</sup> Lipsius, cited in Tuck 46.

<sup>508</sup> Tuck, *Philosophy*, 40.

Tacitus was used to conceal Machiavellian ideas - Tacitus, Machiavelli and Guicciardini were 'all treated equally openly'.<sup>509</sup> At any rate, if Lipsius were to retain his reputation and at the same time advance some of the more "Machiavellian" themes in his political argument, he necessarily had to assume what Worden has called a 'half-hearted Machiavellism'.<sup>510</sup>

There is yet another interesting tendency observable in this period. This is the return not just of Tacitian humanism, but also of Senecan constancy, as exposed in *De constantia sapientis*. Lagrée has argued that *Constancy* is 'the virtue that responds to the onslaughts of fortune', representing 'the stability of the sage's soul when faced with the absolute exteriority of fortune, which signifies the changeability of events outside us'. Constancy, then, was a mechanism of self-defense in a new world characterized by incessant flux and knowledge of it in the contemporary intellect. The search for inner coherence in a life 'lived in accordance with nature and reason' was a disenchanted intellectual's response to time's malaise.<sup>511</sup> In his own book of 1584, *On Constancy*, Lipsius makes this perfectly clear. As the protagonist, also called Lipsius, visits a friend, Langius, he asks 'who is of so hard and flinty a heart that he can any longer endure these evils?'. Langius attacks such an infantile approach, observing that 'Our minds must be so confirmed and conformed, that we may be at rest in troubles, and have peace even in the midst of war.'<sup>512</sup> It is interesting to observe just how directly 'constancy' is in fact contextualized to make a particular commentary about the tumults of the contemporary times. Montaigne, too, conceived of constancy as the ability of 'patiently and firmfootedly bearing misfortunes for which there is no remedy'.<sup>513</sup> However, yet another way of seeing the utility of constancy is to see its practical value, as of a philosophy of obedience employed to counter Monarchomach theories of rebellion and tyrannicide. That Lipsius was intimately aware of the Monarchomach language and also trying to assume

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<sup>509</sup> Tuck, *Philosophy*, 41.

<sup>510</sup> Worden, "Constancy" 14.

<sup>511</sup> J. Lagrée, "Constancy and Coherence", in Steven K. Strange and Jack Zupko, eds., *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151.

<sup>512</sup> Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy*, John Stradling, trans., John Sellars, ed. (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), 1.1, 31-32.

<sup>513</sup> Montaigne, 'On Constancy', in *The Complete Essays*, M. A. Screech, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 1.12, 47.



some of it so as to diminish the Monarchomach energy is evident also in his appropriation of their argument that the prince, though he ought to stand above the people, is at the same time the servant of all.<sup>514</sup> To that end, Skinner has argued that, apart from arguing for constancy as the ability ‘to remain steadfast in the face of Fortune’s changeability’, the moral philosophy of political Stoics also insisted ‘that everyone has a duty to submit himself to the existing order of things, never resisting the prevailing government but accepting and where necessary enduring it with fortitude’.<sup>515</sup> But as we shall see in what follows, Lipsius’ account of constancy is not as Stoic as it has often been interpreted to be. Instead, Lipsius provided a synthetic argument. While constancy was extolled as a private virtue of the ruler, “Machiavellism” was no less extolled, even if in a highly concealed manner, as the practical guide to governance. Lipsius was far from being a mere ‘half-hearted Machiavellian’. Especially insofar as our exploration of time and politics is concerned, Lipsius was very much a Machiavellian.

Let us, then, examine in greater depths the extent to which Lipsius was a Machiavellian – first and foremost, in the prism of our chief interest, that is, politics and temporality. We shall first examine the relationship between Lipsius and Machiavelli and then also attempt pinpoint the emergence of that which precedes the eminent political thesis of the Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*. Now, this is not at all to ask in what ways Lipsius *anticipated* Hobbes, for Lipsius did not write his *Politica* in order to anticipate anyone. Nor is it to ask how Hobbes *interpreted* Lipsius, for much as Hobbes disliked, or simply avoided citing authorities, one cannot be sure as to whether Hobbes had read Lipsius’ *Politica* at all. Nevertheless, not only is the broader Hobbesian perception of government and authority one that we first see emerge most explicitly in Lipsius’ *Politica*, but the Hobbesian paradigm and the very language employed in *Leviathan* to convey the importance of government and authority are also noticeably Lipsian. It is, in fact, precisely this paradigm that – according to our reading of *Politica* in this chapter – represents the truly innovative aspect of Lipsius’ *Politica* itself.

Let us first begin by exploring what Lipsius was actually doing in *Politica*. In

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<sup>514</sup> Oestreich, *Neostoicism*, 41.

<sup>515</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 2, 279.

order to uncover this, we have to turn to Chapter 8 of the First Book, where Lipsius discusses the importance of remembrance, that is History, which has ‘more to contribute to Prudence’ than even experience.<sup>516</sup> Importantly, there Lipsius reminds us that ‘all the examples would lie in the dark, if the light of literature did not reach them.’<sup>517</sup> Like Machiavelli and Guicciardini before him,<sup>518</sup> Lipsius subscribed to the Polybian notion of *similitudo temporum* – the notion that certain tracts of historical time bear similarity with certain other tracts of historical time. We have already seen Machiavelli subscribe to this very view that led him to see history as a reservoir of useful *exempla*. If Machiavelli had found Republican Rome to be his ideal, Lipsius found in Imperial Rome temporal similarity. As he observed in a commentary on Tacitus, this was ‘theatrical representation of the life of today, as it were’. To that end, has aptly observed how ‘the expulsion of the tyrants and the struggle for freedom in first-century Rome must have seemed strikingly topical’ to a subject who witnessed religious and civil wars and the despotism of Philip II.<sup>519</sup>

The very choice of Tacitus, then, for which Lipsius became so renowned in his own time and forever was also political – there he could find *multa exempla temporum nostrorum* (‘many examples for our own times’), thereby appreciating the practical value of history.<sup>520</sup> In the *Politica*, too, with his approach to history, Lipsius took the earlier approach exemplified by Machiavelli. History is a reservoir of situations that are exemplary – some in the good light, others the reverse. But what matters is that there are similar kinds of situations across the river of time. Therefore, it is possible to draw lessons. ‘Accept the lessons taught by all periods of history’, Lipsius teaches the ruler.<sup>521</sup> In what is also reminiscent of Machiavelli, Lipsius then stresses that, as ‘the record of all periods of history shows’ more things are ‘dealt with by foresight and planning than by arms and physical force’.<sup>522</sup> Yet again,

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<sup>516</sup> *Politica*, 233.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>518</sup> Oestreich has argued that Guicciardini and Bodin represented two contemporary sources of influences for the historical thought of Justus Lipsius. Oestreich, 62.

<sup>519</sup> Oestreich 61

<sup>520</sup> Oestreich, 61

<sup>521</sup> *Politica*, 327

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

Lipsius preoccupation is also ‘eternal glory’.<sup>523</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the Lipsian philosophy of politics as a process in time is evident in his declaration that ‘rarely did great men not employ strong helpers to aid them in directing their fortune’.<sup>524</sup>

Two conclusions emerge from this. The first is that fortune can indeed be directed; the other that strong helpers are need in order to do so. Like Machiavelli before him — whom we have seen to be engaged in the task of equipping *virtù* with sufficient knowledge in order to make it resilient — Lipsius too seeks to equip Virtue by providing a carefully crafted anthology of ‘so many maxims together, beautiful maxims, sharp maxims’<sup>525</sup> that were ‘to teach you [the Prince] how you can set out on a right course in Civil Life, and pursue it right’—a matter, clearly, of the practical political present.<sup>526</sup> Indeed, if Lipsius’ earlier *De Constantia* (1586) had aimed to ‘equip citizens for endurance and obedience’, *Politica* was now aiming to ‘equip those who rule for governing’.<sup>527</sup> Therefore, Lipsius established from the very beginning the practical and teleological significance of his work; indeed, the prudential remembrance of *Politica* was to be applied to the feeble present in order to secure a stable and peaceful future. The orientation of *Politica* is indeed strictly practical.<sup>528</sup> After all, learning itself is good not because ‘it can itself give Virtue’, but ‘in order to be used’.<sup>529</sup>

More strikingly, in what is eminently Machiavellian, we are told that learning renders one ‘better capable of defending the commonwealth against the assaults of fortune’.<sup>530</sup> The Lipsian political world, too, is dominated by Fortune. The presentation of the Goddess of History is in fact often rather more dramatic than in Machiavelli’s political thought — perhaps a reflection of the more pessimistic position. As Lipsius warns his political readership, ‘every monarchy is fleeting and unsteady’, then citing Tacitus: ‘*the duty of ruling is hard and subjected to Fortune*’.<sup>531</sup> Yet, Fortune ‘refrains from nothing. Against

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<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>524</sup> *Politica*, 349.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>528</sup> Waszink, introduction to *Politica*, 3.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

Empires it has the same power as against their rulers.’ This is then accompanied by a maxim from Seneca that ‘*Just as high peaks always catch the winds, so towering power lies exposed to Fortune*’,<sup>532</sup> It thus so happens that ‘a monarchy often collapses for unknown causes’. Kingdoms that have otherwise survived all sorts of crises ‘fall without anything pushing them’. There is but a single step between the greatest height to ‘the deepest humiliation’,<sup>533</sup>

Let us, then, turn to the exploration of Prudence and Virtue in *Politica*. Now, Virtue and Prudence are two leaders of civil life and are completely indispensable to one another. Indeed, without Virtue, Prudence is ‘mere cunning and malice’,<sup>534</sup> while prudence is the ‘leader ... even that of Virtue itself’.<sup>535</sup> Prudence has an exceedingly practical character, being ‘the understanding and choosing of what is to be sought or avoided, both in private and in public’.<sup>536</sup> It is ‘the skill of living’.<sup>537</sup> Virtue, in turn, ‘consists entirely of Selection and Moderation’ that, for their very existence, necessarily require the existence also of Prudence.<sup>538</sup> Therefore, Virtue cannot exist without Prudence. Lipsius thus grants Prudence a position of strategic superiority in the very first book of *Politica*. Now, as we read in Book Two, ‘Prudence shows forth from [the Prince’s] actions, Virtue from his life’.<sup>539</sup> Therefore, in Lipsius’ thought Virtue is that which characterises the totality of the ruler’s time—the defining characteristic of the totality of his political time, the outcome—while Prudence is that which distinguishes the degree of diligence of particular responses to particular political challenges of the given present. Virtue is thus a positive future possibility, ‘considered glorious and eternal’<sup>540</sup>, while Prudence is that which presently, and ideally also constantly, feeds Virtue as the ruler attempts to impose order on the matter. In short, Prudence is the more important of the two, because to fulfill itself Virtue must necessarily be equipped with Prudence.

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<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>534</sup> *Politica*, 261.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

Now, scholars have often drawn attention to Lipsius' discussion of 'mixed Prudence', the moderate use of which Lipsius affirms.<sup>541</sup> However, there has been a general tendency to ignore an important aspect of Lipsius' thought, which he shared with Machiavelli. This is the idea of the importance of particular circumstance, or of the rightness of time, which we have encountered already on several occasions in the context of the discussion of *kairotic* mode of temporal perception. In fact, where Lipsius was concerned, since particular political realities of the present require particular kinds of prudent responses, all Prudence has to be mixed to a certain degree. As he noted, 'what we call Prudence is in reality unstable and changeable in every respect'.<sup>542</sup>

After all, Prudence is the 'selecting and combining of things which relate to each other now in this way, then in that way ... if these things are uncertain, then so certainly is Prudence.'<sup>543</sup> In short, much as one might wish to remain entirely virtuous, this promises to be highly impractical because such is the reality that one lives among 'cunning men, bad men'.<sup>544</sup> Therefore, in Lipsius' thought, too, one encounters a degree of 'ontological realism' characteristic of *The Prince*. Now, in Chapter XV of *The Prince*, Machiavelli had quite explicitly written that he was writing not on imaginary matters, but instead concentrating 'on what really happens' in the real world of politics.<sup>545</sup> Perhaps more strikingly, in Chapter XXV, Machiavelli then proceeded to note that 'circumstances vary ... and men are successful if their methods match the circumstances'.<sup>546</sup> From this, flexibility emerges as a positive princely tool against the vicissitudes of Fortune. Like his predecessor, Lipsius too believes in the rightness of time. This is why he holds that severity must be demonstrated not continuously but only at appropriate times; that 'nothing is more dangerous than untimely remedies'; and that, for example, the ruler should make sure 'some time passes between detection [of a conspiracy] and revenge'.<sup>547</sup> Prudence too, for Lipsius, consists of the application of virtue to

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<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, 507

<sup>545</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, edited by Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>547</sup> *Politica*, 453.

the circumstances of *the present*. Prudence is, therefore, not a fixed wisdom, but the knowledge of various kinds of historical situations. Not at all coincidentally, Lipsius divides prudence into two parts: civil and military. Civil prudence is necessary when ‘things are peaceful’, and military ‘in times of unrest’.

Therefore, the *politics of prudence* deployed by Lipsius is also eminently Machiavellian by nature. Now, Prudence being defined as that which is practical, it becomes evident that the books that deal with actual Prudence are the last three books (Books IV-VI) of *Politica*, for that is precisely where Lipsius deals with particular political objectives, while also outlining his ideals of the diligence of particular responses. Importantly, it is precisely as Lipsius unfolds Prudence, in Books VI-VI, that there emerges in Lipsius’ *Politica* a distinct vision of the state, to which we shall return below.

Prior to that, however, let us here restate the author’s belief that prudence is to be used ‘to be better capable of defending the commonwealth against the assaults of fortune’.<sup>548</sup> Now, with this extraordinary statement, Lipsius distances himself from Senecan thought wherein constancy is generated by the ‘confidence in an underlying moral order and divine benevolence’.<sup>549</sup> True, the Lipsian political drama, too, unfolds on a divinely ordained continuum that is ruled and directed by God who ‘foresees and decides... from eternity and to eternity’. Fate, in turn, is similarly portrayed as ‘the decree and the voice so to speak of the divine order’ that is absolute and inescapable.<sup>550</sup> So far, so Senecan. However, Lipsius then proceeds to ask: ‘Then what? ... Should I do nothing and leave everything to Fate?’, only to answer himself: ‘A foolish thought!’.<sup>551</sup> Although destiny cannot be overcome, it can nevertheless be made more agreeable ‘through alertness and acting’ while still necessarily remaining within the frame of the divinely ordained and predestined continuum. It is foolish to expect victory or fortune to favour one without acting to procure such a favour. On this, Oestreich has aptly argued that ‘although Lipsius makes everything subordinate to divine Providence, he makes an exception of the human will: ‘Man must bravely seize the oar in the

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<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>549</sup> Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 24.

<sup>550</sup> *Politica*, 271.

<sup>551</sup> *Politica*, 275.

ship whose tiller is held by God.’<sup>552</sup>

It is noteworthy that Lipsius here quotes not from Seneca but from Livy, the principal classical source of none other than the infamous ‘Italian reprobate’<sup>553</sup> —Machiavelli. In fact, if we then turn to the penultimate chapter of Machiavelli’s *Prince*, we will find the author ‘disposed to hold that fortune is the arbiter of half of our actions, but that it lets us control roughly the other half’.<sup>554</sup> Importantly, like Lipsius, Machiavelli too is ‘not unaware’ that according to many the affairs of the world are so ruled by fortune and by God that ‘the ability of men cannot control them’.<sup>555</sup> In fact, Machiavelli even states that he is ‘sometimes inclined, to some extent, to share this opinion’.<sup>556</sup> However, in the interest of ‘human freedom’ — which he here deploys not in the sense of political liberty but in that of the freedom to act — he nevertheless leaves room for human action.

Brooke has to that effect aptly observed that Machiavelli totally rejects ‘the Stoic providential rationalism that underpins Seneca’s entire political theory’.<sup>557</sup> Stacey, too, notes how for Machiavelli ‘the Senecan view of Fortuna ... is the height of imprudence, a psychological debility’.<sup>558</sup> Indeed, the Senecan view renders one less diligent and less dynamic in one’s response to the practical challenges of the political present. However, as Lipsius is all too aware, this cannot be for ‘alertness and acting’ can procure a better fate. In fact, being a form of response to the challenges of the practical political present, both alertness and acting are themselves none other than Prudence. Indeed, prudent is he that ‘has the ability and power to take care of himself and of the commonwealth’ instead of succumbing to or merely contemplating about the vicissitudes of Fate; ‘a wise man creates his own lot’.<sup>559</sup> With this too, Lipsius is Machiavellian *par excellence* — not just discursively, but even semantically. We have already explored how Machiavelli extols *foresight* as a form of virtue, as he writes the young Soderini that in principle wisdom could

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<sup>552</sup> Oestreich, 42-3.

<sup>553</sup> *Politica*, 511.

<sup>554</sup> Machiavelli, *Prince*, 85.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>557</sup> Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 50.

<sup>558</sup> Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 283. See also: Machiavelli, *Prince*, 84.

<sup>559</sup> *Politica*, 285.

even alter fate.<sup>560</sup> Lipsius, in fact, goes even further and grants Prudence the character of Divine character itself: ‘For it is Prudence, which regulates the present, foresees the future, remembers the past’.<sup>561</sup>

Therefore, Lipsius does not subscribe to the Senecan view of constancy as being generated by a mere confidence in the divine benevolence. Although Fate is inescapable, it *can* be made more agreeable. This the Prince can do by constant application of Prudence to the matter at hand. It is precisely this that becomes the new kind of political constancy of Lipsius’ *Politica*. However, in order fully to grasp this, we first need to examine the relationship of the Prince to the matter—that is the body politic—and, secondly, the identity of the matter itself. In fact, it is with this that the truly Lipsian innovation of *Politica* begins to emerge.

What, then, is the relationship of the Prince to his territory? Now, concerning Machiavelli, Michel Foucault remarked that ‘what is to be protected [in *The Prince*] is the principality as the relationship of the Prince to his subjects and his territory, and not directly, immediately or fundamentally, the territory and its inhabitants’.<sup>562</sup> Commenting on Lipsius’ *Politica*, Brooke has in turn noted that, as in Seneca’s *De Clementia*, in Lipsius’ *Politica*, too, the Prince is the “mind” of the body politic.<sup>563</sup> A few points are in order here. In *Politica*, Lipsius draws no identity between the prince and the political entity. In fact, the prince is organically exterior to the body politic, while the subjects under his government are not either contractually or organically ‘One’, that is united in the person of the ruler as they will be in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.<sup>564</sup> In the absence of the idea of a *stato* in the more “modern” sense of the word, ‘the people’ are still a multitude in the more old-fashioned sense. They are a body politic, but not a contractual whole. It is precisely such an absence of identity between the Prince and the body politic that also distinguishes conspiracy from treason: the first is directed against the person

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<sup>560</sup> See Chapter II.

<sup>561</sup> *Politica*, 285.

<sup>562</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 92.

<sup>563</sup> Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 28.

<sup>564</sup> See: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111-5; Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State”, in *Vision of Politics*, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 177-208.



of the king himself, while the latter threatens his possessions, territories and castles.<sup>565</sup> Again, Princes who show excessive mildness are ‘harmful in two ways: to the state *and* to themselves’.<sup>566</sup> There is thus a clear distinction between ‘the prince’ and ‘the others’. However, in the chapter devoted to the discussion of things that destroy ‘the reign’, and not the state itself, Lipsius notes that the conspirator ‘destroys all by killing one, and drives the prosperity of a great nation to destruction’.<sup>567</sup> Here we simultaneously see two streams of thought. The first one is the more “Machiavellian” and its meaning is effectively summarised by Foucault’s remark. But the second already represents a rudimentary identification of the Prince with the territory. What, then, is the case?

Now, as Lipsius tells us in Book Five, ‘every commonwealth is preserved by two things: courage towards the enemy and concord at home’.<sup>568</sup> Notably, that which is here being preserved by Prudence is no longer the Prince himself, but already, and more explicitly, the communal, political sphere that unites the Prince and the people. Such a communality is, in fact, central to the whole of the second part of *Politica*. Civility emerges precisely in relation to a certain idea of communality, for civil life is ‘that which we enjoy with other people’.<sup>569</sup> Moreover, it is precisely the fulfillment of the common good that represents the ‘very end of true kingship’<sup>570</sup> and the fundamental criterion of a good and legitimate monarchy.<sup>571</sup> And the dignity of a ruler, that ‘seems a god-like thing’, arises ‘if it is administered for well-being and in accordance with the common interest’. Lipsius further designates ‘Public Good’ to be the noble end towards which ‘a Prince directs all his actions’.<sup>572</sup>

And therein lies the centrality of the Lipsian Prince: not in being the “mind” of the body politic in the sense of forming an organic unity, but in the sense of being the prime mover of the delivery of the desired end. That by “mind” and “soul” Lipsius in reality means not a physico-political unity but executive centrality—which is in both cases inseparably linked with the idea of

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<sup>565</sup> *Politica*, 447.

<sup>566</sup> *Politica*, 501.

<sup>567</sup> *Politica*, 453.

<sup>568</sup> *Politica*, 539.

<sup>569</sup> *Politica*, 261.

<sup>570</sup> *Politica*, 309.

<sup>571</sup> *Politica*, 301.

<sup>572</sup> *Politica*, 227.

government as the facilitator of motion—is also evident from his later reference to army commanders as ‘being the soul of the army, and its very life’.<sup>573</sup> But importantly, the end to be attained by the princely application of prudence concerns the preservation and well-being of that which is *common*. Now, such a teleology of legitimate kingship is already eminently at odds with that of the Machiavellian Prince whose chief preoccupation lay not with the preservation of the common good, but with the preservation of his own hold over the given territory—that is, his power, his personal *stato*—and the attainment of *gloria*. It is precisely in this context of communality that there emerges in Lipsius’ thought an early, and perhaps primitive, notion of a communal political sphere that is neither simply the body politic, nor a full-fledged state in the Hobbesian sense of the word.

What, then, is it? Firstly, if Machiavelli had conceived of the political present as composed of different humours, most notably the *grandi* and the *popolo*, who entertain different ideals and aspirations, in Lipsius’ thought—and this is notably present in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* also<sup>574</sup>—there emerges the idea of the individual and monarchical interests as being necessarily identical.<sup>575</sup> The well-being of the ruler and that of the governed also become identical: ‘Your safeguard, O Prince, is our safeguard.’<sup>576</sup> This is of great importance, because not only is the service of the common good the very criterion of true and legitimate kingship, but with this one also witnesses the emergence of the rudimentary notion of the mutual relationship between protection and obedience, though not precisely in these terms. The second important aspect of such a unity is the relationship of religion and politics. As Lipsius notes in Book IV, religion is ‘the sole creator of unity’.<sup>577</sup> In fact, he views religion as a key tool of maintaining unity and order, for it is a ‘restraint’, which, if removed, shall fill ‘the life of men ... with folly, crime and barbarity’.<sup>578</sup> This is why Lipsius wholeheartedly opposes ‘novelties in religion’, for they cause dissension from the apodicticity of established truths, thereby increasing the possibility of seditions and conspiracies and, in the event, lead to disorders;

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<sup>573</sup> *Politica*, 607.

<sup>574</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 131.

<sup>575</sup> Cf.: N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I:4-5; Lipsius, *Politica*, 309.

<sup>576</sup> *Politica*, 453.

<sup>577</sup> *Politica*, 389.

<sup>578</sup> *Politica*, 389.

‘you must punish whoever causes disorder’, calls Lipsius, the resident of an unruly present willing to impose form upon disordered matter, upon the prince.<sup>579</sup>

Now, although Lipsius noted that ‘the prince does not have unlimited power in religious affairs’, in the very same passage he nevertheless granted the prince the right of the ‘inspection’ of religious sphere, and this ‘in order to protect’.<sup>580</sup> In short, Lipsius subordinated religion to a certain degree of princely control, and therefore to politics.<sup>581</sup> What one sees here is Lipsius’ attempt not only to maintain the unity of the ‘political sphere’, but also its ‘Oneness’ — its purity. This is precisely why innovators who stray from the straight path of the purity of established truths necessarily become dissenters from the ‘whole’ that is the common political sphere. They must be punished accordingly, ‘for it is better that one perishes than that unity perishes’.<sup>582</sup> Similarly, against what is the physicalist image of the ‘whole body’, Lipsius calls on the Prince to note that ‘what is harmful must be removed’.<sup>583</sup> Thirdly, the idea of the unity of the political emerges in the discussion of contempt, which is worse than fear and is ‘a thing in every way pernicious to monarchies whose soul and life is Authority’.<sup>584</sup> Indeed, if authority were to be removed, ‘the entire structure of the realm will dissolve in many parts’.<sup>585</sup> Let us, then, in a summary statement note that the new sort of political union an instinctive idea of which Lipsius seems to entertain is ‘the entire structure of the realm’ that unites the princely, the popular, the religious and the military realms under one overarching, teleologically determined idea of enacting the common good in the present, in an attempt to attain the mutually desirable future ends; and it is bound by authority.

It is precisely in a relationship to this conception of common politics that the idea of government emerges in *Politica*. Government is, in fact, the spirit that facilitates the motion of the whole: it is a well-defined ordering of commanding and obeying.<sup>586</sup> Therefore, government is not only necessary, but

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<sup>579</sup> *Politica*, 493 link this to the context in which he lived

<sup>580</sup> *Politica*, 387.

<sup>581</sup> Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 59.

<sup>582</sup> *Politica*, 391.

<sup>583</sup> *Politica*, 427.

<sup>584</sup> *Politica*, 497.

<sup>585</sup> *Politica*, 499.

<sup>586</sup> *Politica*, 295.

also useful in the maintenance of the unity and purity of this political entity, for all things would quite simply perish without government.<sup>587</sup> In fact, without a government it would become ‘a dead weight and defenceless prey’.<sup>588</sup> Government is thus a complex combination of princely prudence applied to the political sphere, which is the matter upon which prudence is to be applied for the protection of its very unity. In what forms an important transition, Lipsius then asks why thousands conform to one, concluding that it is due to authority alone, for ‘this huge multitude is ruled ... by the Spirit of Authority.’<sup>589</sup>

But authority is in itself nothing but a ‘reverent opinion of the king and his government’ impressed in the peoples’ minds.<sup>590</sup> However, to the great misfortune of the unity and purity of the political entity, of opinions there are a variegated sort. Contempt is indeed only one example of a group of pernicious sentiments that captures Lipsius’ attention, but no doubt the most important, for it possesses the greatest potential to negate the very tenet of statehood, the spirit of authority, without which there can be no government. Therefore, it must be eradicated. It is a wider range of such challenges that provides the criteria of a good government: it must be stern and constant.<sup>591</sup> And to do this, government must by ‘using everyone’s particular fears’ first of all centralize fear and thus become like the ‘rod of Circe’ from which emanates centralized fear, where the kings take refuge.<sup>592</sup> Lastly, it is also from the government that military discipline and order emanate and Lipsius provides a very complex set of advice regarding military prudence.<sup>593</sup> It is, after all, only as a consequence of true discipline, order and control that one might succeed in ordering the matter so as to make sure the unity of the political sphere. This is the constancy of *Politica* that translates not in the constancy of the application of Prudence to the matter: constancy of discipline, order and the unity of sovereignty.

Several points are in order here. Firstly, Lipsius is neither fully “Machiavellian”, nor fully “Neo-Stoic”. His *Politica* is work looking both to the

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<sup>587</sup> *Politica*, 295-6.

<sup>588</sup> *Politica*, 295.

<sup>589</sup> *Politica*, 499.

<sup>590</sup> *Politica*, 425.

<sup>591</sup> *Politica*, 429.

<sup>592</sup> *Politica*, 295.

<sup>593</sup> See, *Politica* V:23; V:13, 581-607.

past and to the future — a truly masterly whole composed of many parts. Selection being part of Prudence, Lipsius prudently and moderately selects according to the needs of the present where selection and moderation could in fact alter one's fate immediately in the context of religious intrigues and civil strife of which he was a resident. There are three main similarities that Lipsius bears with Machiavelli. Firstly, he develops a politics of prudence that is eminently Machiavellian; secondly, he entertains the idea of the rightness of time; thirdly, he also rebels against debilitating providentialism. Lipsius' ultimate adherence in *Politica* to the necessary flexibility of a free human agent of history is the very cause why he favours "mixed prudence" in complete repudiation of Senecan political theory. Indeed, there emerges in Lipsius' work a clear notion of prudence as the diligence of a *concrete* political action in response to a concrete political present. At times, however, such an action has to be quite apart from moral reason; for it is a separate category, that of the reason of the state. To that end, Brooke has very rightly argued that Lipsian thought is 'a variation on the Machiavellian theme, but one disguised in Senecan clothing'. Much of *Politica* is indeed, 'conventional fireworks display of humanist erudition rather than ... any kind of distinctive, interesting, or original political argument'.<sup>594</sup>

Importantly, in *Politica* Prudence is vested with the meaning at once of the Machiavellian freedom of action and the Lipsian ordering of the matter. Indeed, Prudence must be free from the constraints of an absolutely predetermined framework in order to fulfill itself — to allow the act of being prudent in practice. However, Lipsian Prudence is applied to the new sort of political entity, the unity and purity of which is of the highest importance. It is in fact in relation to this that government — as the source of control, order and discipline—emerges in *Politica*.

Secondly, one of the more important innovations of Lipsius' *Politica* consists in the introduction of a new sense of the polity that unites the various groups into a unity, that envisages the attainment of a common end. In his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes spoke of the Sovereign as the 'Publique soul, giving Life and Motion to the Commonwealth', comparing the body politic without

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<sup>594</sup> Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 52.

government to ‘the Carcasse of a Man’ whose soul has departed.<sup>595</sup> Government is indeed the facilitator of a motion; among other things, it facilitates the motion precisely of a well-defined chain of ordering and obeying. Interestingly, in Hobbes’ thought too, government necessarily arises in relation to civility, for the emergence of government itself marks the beginnings of civility.<sup>596</sup> In addition, the unity and purity of the political sphere—in Hobbes’ case already a sovereign state in the more contemporary sense—is based on the identity between the sovereign’s and the subjects’ interests *and* well-being.<sup>597</sup> In fact, the Commonwealth dissolves precisely when the mutual relationship between protection and obedience diminishes — that is, when the communality and the teleologically determined political sphere is damaged.<sup>598</sup> Therefore, it is indeed in Justus Lipsius’ masterly tapestry that one also witnesses the emergence of the paradigm of a new kind of sovereign state, most likely read and developed by Hobbes in his *Leviathan*.

As the sixteenth century wore on, political pessimism spread across the Continent exhausted by religious and civil strife. The perception of crisis of some kind was unanimously present among intellectuals. Montaigne and Bodin, two eminent representatives of the Continental intellectual life at the time, both belonged to the community in crisis and importantly, saw themselves as belonging to one. Their crises were in some ways different, as were also their lives. Montaigne had a personal Pyrrhonian crisis, and his skepticism was turned into an outright nonchalance and resignation towards all things thisworldly by the death of his friend, Etienne de la Boetie in 1571. Unlike Montaigne, Lipsius had less of a personal crisis. He was highly successful (as was Montaigne also later, travelling to Italy, Germany and Switzerland as the author of the acclaimed *Essays* — though in contemporary times, this never paralleled the sheer success of Lipsius’ *Politica*), exceedingly active. His flight from one place to another was pragmatic and Neo-Stoic — in pursuit of peace. But this was not an inner, psychological flight in the way it had been for Montaigne. Yet, for both the dominant contexts were fashioned by the Spanish hegemony, and a series of religious and civil strife resulting in

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<sup>595</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 230.

<sup>596</sup> Cf.: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 13, 86-90; Chapter 17, 117-121.

<sup>597</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 131.

<sup>598</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 230.

bloodsheds. While making sense of their presents in history, both Montaigne and Lipsius subscribed to the traditional ideas of *fortuna* available during the sixteenth century. Yet, their presentation of fortune's deeds was often far more dramatic than had been previously. This reflected their broader resignation, be it Neo-Stoic, or Skeptic.

The answer evinced by crisis was not singular or homogenous. At one level, the crisis prevalent throughout the Continent did indeed present a ripe soil for the spread of Neo-Stoic philosophy of self-preservation, self-control, resignation and indeed, in more contemporary terms, one of 'self-help'. However, Montaigne and Lipsius did nevertheless differ on the extent to which human virtue might transform politics. Perhaps because he was as we have seen less skeptic, Lipsius was still more optimistic, than was Montaigne, on the transformative value of human action. In the final analysis, however, both Lipsius and Montaigne chose to favour as exemplary life a rational life that consisted not in political participation but as Tuck has wonderfully summarised 'in the cultivation of an emotional state, that of the unimpassioned and undespairing observer of events.'<sup>599</sup> This, to Machiavelli, Guicciardini and the civic humanists at large, would have meant a shocking betrayal of the very human agency itself.

Interestingly, though not at all accidentally, Neo-Stoicism and Skepticism both re-emerged powerfully in the era that saw the demise of republican ways of life, as the city states gave way to large territorial states, France and Spain *in primis*, and as many early modern intellectuals began to look for new responses in resignation. What one encounters in Montaigne's thought ethically, one encounters formally politicized in Lipsius' thought. The nonchalance that calls for inward reflection and inner battle against the passions that cause wrongful events is theorised by Lipsius as a call against patriotic quest for *gloria*. Instead, obedience, self-preservation and an ethics of duty (itself conceptualized as obedience and knowing one's due place) is placed at the forefront of the political ideal. We have seen how Justus Lipsius innovated in political thought and introduces a clear sense of the 'political space'. The economy of this space rests precisely on the resigned ethics that favours very limited public participation and a high degree of obedience.

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<sup>599</sup> Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 52.

Oestreich has rightly observed that the sovereign who ‘sees it as his chief task to preserve peace and tranquillity at home’ becomes ‘a superman’ for Montaigne, Lipsius and Bodin alike, all in favour of *reason of state*.<sup>600</sup> This, as is well known, and as our next chapter shall also explore in greater lengths, is theorized further and most famously by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*. But Lipsius’ thought cannot be reduced to Neo-Stoicism alone. Brook has rightly remained skeptical about the level to which Lipsius was in fact a full-fledged Neo-Stoic. Lipsius *social psychology* and *ethics* were indeed Neo-Stoic. All the major themes of Stoicism are present in both *Politica* and *Constantia*. However, *politically*, we should be careful in interpreting Lipsius as a Neo-Stoic. He does indeed have strong Neo-Stoic influences, but practically speaking he is as we have seen eminently Machiavellian. To divorce his thought of this is to see only a part of what he wrote all too consciously. The innovative nature of Lipsius instead consists of the convergence of Machiavellian practical insights and Neo-Stoic philosophical insights. From Machiavelli, Lipsius inherits his belief in human agency that distinguishes him from Montaigne. But from Stoic morality, he inherits the ethics of duty, the admiration of a state based on finances and arms. Machiavelli’s priorities were different. He did, however, live and write almost a century earlier. Oestreich sees this as a fundamental Lipsian contribution to what he calls “The Netherlands Movement” that contributed to the rise of the early modern rational state. Now, the result of such a convergence is strikingly important. The ethics of duty and obedience, much as the belief in an inward reflective life, lead Lipsius to advocate a detached life of *apatheia* — away from all things public and political. However, the philosophical belief in *virtu* leads him, in a truly post-Machiavellian’ manner’ to call on the prince to act virtuously and prudentially. As we have said, at the same time, Lipsius also develops a very distinctive sense of what we have called the ‘political space’ — the state of the future centuries. It is this state and its *security* that is the preserve of the princely virtue, while it is the obedience and duty towards the very same that is the sphere of human virtue that is now calm, rational and inward looking. As for Montaigne, for Lipsius too this is in some ways not fleeing time, but another way of mastering time — mastering, above all else, yourself and the

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<sup>600</sup> Oestreich, 50.



passions that render one helpless towards fortune, inviting her malaise.

While the rise of Neo-Stoicism was fundamentally important in fashioning the political thought of the second half of the sixteenth century, Machiavelli was still very much in place. Especially importantly, the Machiavellian temporal paradigm of political life, with its messianic prince included, persisted all the way to the time of Justus Lipsius who employed this in the service of his new prince too. It just so happened that this prince was to be the head of a Neo-Stoic harmony of obedience, preservation and duty. In so doing, however, Lipsius provided the ground for the arrival of an Englishman who would take this line of thought radically further. In the quest also of controlling the particulars, passions and irrationality, equipped with a degree of Neo-Stoic ethics and a degree of skepticism, Thomas Hobbes would in fact go so far as to cancel the human agency in its entirety and generate a permanent state of exception.

## Chapter IV

### Disjointed Times – England in Crisis

#### The Day of Wrath

If we are to understand the thought of the period upon time, we must first be in a position to understand the millenarian concerns of the time. Apocalyptic beliefs of various kinds were powerfully present throughout the whole of the period between 1640 and the 1660s. Their sources varied, as did the visions themselves, yet a certain idea of the end of time, whatever its source and nature, was almost always in place. Some politicians and commentators were far less apocalyptically inspired than others, but even many of the lesser inspired exploited the rich range of apocalyptic beliefs already available in the service of their immediate political ends. As ever, once the paradigm of any one thing, especially one as powerful as the idea of the end of time, is in place it may then be put in the service of a vast range of political causes and anxieties. And of causes and anxieties, they had no shortage in the turbulent period of the English Civil War.<sup>601</sup>

Oliver Cromwell, for instance, was never really seriously interested either in apocalypticism or in deploying this mode of thought, not even when the conditions were propitious as they were when he was launching a war of Protestant England on Catholic Ireland. However, even Cromwell opened the Barebones Parliament (also known as the ‘Nominated Parliament’, or even more suggestively the ‘Parliament of the Saints’)<sup>602</sup> of 1653 with a speech that has been called ‘the apogee of his millenarian rhetoric of power’.<sup>603</sup> An apogee it no doubt was, for Cromwell’s speeches and texts contain very scant evidence of his interest towards apocalypticism. In fact, even this apogee of a speech is itself hardly apocalyptic when placed in the context of the complex,

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<sup>601</sup> For an excellent review of anxious anticipations and a sense of crisis, see David Cressy, “The Pulse of the Kingdom: Distempers of the Times” and “Tumultuous and Disjointed Times”, in *England on Edge*, 25-27.

<sup>602</sup> On Cromwell and his parliaments, see: H. R. Trevor-Roper, “Oliver Cromwell and His Parliaments, in *The crisis of the seventeenth century: religion, the Reformation, and social change* (New York, 1967), 317 – 358.

<sup>603</sup> J. Adamson, “Oliver Cromwell and the Long Parliament”, in J. S. Morrill (ed.), *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (Harlow, 1990), 88.

sophisticated and passionate apocalyptic arguments then available and widely circulated. In that speech, Cromwell based his rhetoric on some of the more conventional apocalyptic arguments present in the Old Testament, particularly in Daniel, as well as the Psalms 68 and 110. They were very propitious indeed for any republican political rhetoric for they collectively spoke not only of the end of times, but also of a period when God ‘shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath’ (Cf.: Psalm 110; King James Version). This is a rather typical example of how even a not so ardent believer of apocalyptic thought might at that time have exploited the powerful political formula readily available. Milton, no great radical himself had, after all, had already in 1641 spoken of the ‘shortly expected king’. This king, Milton stressed, ‘shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world [and] shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth’. No less importantly, as Milton foretold, in this process ‘national honours’ would be distributed to ‘religious and just commonwealths’.<sup>604</sup>

Conversely, this also serves to show the degree of intensity with which those who actually believed fervently in the paradigm of the end of times, spread the word about it and conceived of their own agency in the service of a particularly noble cause. To this end, it is important to note that apocalypticism, as a set of ideas, was never merely a set of theoretical notions about the future and its end, but also a movement with a clear *political* potential. Apocalypticism, as a movement, certainly went beyond the theoretical sphere of existence and informed the very practical political actions of men.

Moreover, this temporal framework provided effective lense through which a lot of the practical political present could be viewed. We have seen Cromwell speaking of none other than the day when God would ‘strike through kings’. Similarly, his own death in 1658 would be seen in the apocalyptic perspective and welcomed by many apocalyptically inspired observers on the grounds that Cromwell himself had apparently been an obstacle to the full-blown appearance of the millennium (simply because he had dismissed the Parliament of the Saints themselves). Before then, the Anglo-Dutch war had been seen in purely missionary terms as the mission of Protestant England

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<sup>604</sup> John Milton, *The Deliverance of England*, in Henry Craik (ed.) *English Prose* Vol. 2 (London, 1916).

amid the nearing of the end of time to purify the Catholic Dutch Republic and restore religious and moral truths there. And regicide too, was inspired by a group of Biblically inspired apocalyptic thinkers and activists.<sup>605</sup> In short, the phenomena of the present were placed by the humans of the seventeenth century in the framework of the impending millenarian end of time, itself determined as inevitable, from which inevitability flowed the necessity of placing all that was occurring in the grand scheme of millenarian end of times.

Neither apocalypticism nor broader anxieties about the future were the fruits of the seventeenth century, and even less so of English making in particular. In previous chapters, we have already observed how the spread of apocalyptic and millenarian ideas was a fully trans-national and pan-Continental affair. Instead, both had originated far earlier and both had been a result of a far longer conceptual and material evolution in historical time as we know from many excellent studies on the rich tradition of thought upon the end of times.<sup>606</sup> However, the political, material and infrastructural setting in which these particular ideas now found themselves made a profound difference to the course of *their* history.

To begin with, these were the years, in Meiksins Wood's apt characterisation, of 'unique intellectual ferment' characterized by 'outpouring of political debate' and a 'vast profusion of pamphlet literature'.<sup>607</sup> Indeed, at this time of English history, just about *anybody* could obtain a hearing and even get published. Amid the dawning of a clearly new time, the consciously liberated time, a whole plethora of texts flew in all directions. With the disappearance of traditional censorship speeches, articles, news-pieces and pamphlets abounded. Not at all surprisingly, 'what news?' became the popular greeting among the citizens of news-dominated turbulent times. Ian Atherton has rightly described this moment of English history as 'an information revolution with profound consequences for the political, religious, social, cultural and

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<sup>605</sup> See J. Coffey, "The Impact of Apocalypticism during the Puritan Revolutions", *Perichoresis* 2 (2006).

<sup>606</sup> See especially: N. Cohn, *The pursuit of the millennium: revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London, 1970); P. Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto, 1978) R. B. Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, 1988), 36-53.

<sup>607</sup> E. M. Wood, *Liberty and Property*, 224.

intellectual life of its citizens'.<sup>608</sup> The Thomason Tracts, now housed at the British Library, contain over 22, 000 printed items in 2, 000 volumes, out of which 7, 200 are newsbooks and pamphlets. The output of printed works was indeed very large in the 1640s and 'larger than that of the entire previous period since Caxton had begun printing in the 1470s, and probably greater than it was to be again until into the eighteenth century'.<sup>609</sup> This itself is a sure sign of a new sense of time, but also a reflection of the nature of the times themselves. As a revolutionary *kairotic* opening in time, the present was seen as a disjunction from the stability of *chronos*. The present was all new and all news.

As we shall see in what is to follow, no source of authority would go unquestioned in this period of our study and eventually the very traditional forms of power – in the form of the 'king-in-parliament', the House of Lords and the established church – would be entirely abolished. Yet, traditional forms of political organisation were far from being the only forms that would be radically challenged. So was also the way of thinking itself. Indeed, in this very period of the proliferation of free thought, that was very often radical, the entire politics of knowledge was also challenged. As Christopher Hill has observed, formal discussions and reading were no longer dominated by 'people with a shared classical education who assumed that discussion must be conducted according to formal rules, starting from a syllogism'.<sup>610</sup> One particular text of 1640, Cobbler How's *The Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching without Humane-learning*, is the best illustration of this very approach. As Cobbler How declared, though learning might indeed be very good to a gentleman, as well as to scholars and lawyers, simple folk did not require any of it, for no special learning was required in order to decipher 'the mind of God'. All that was necessary, perhaps quite on the contrary, was a pure mind, uncorrupted by much formal instruction.<sup>611</sup> Such self-proclaimed liberation from the authorities, political as well as epistemic, was a conscious rewriting

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<sup>608</sup> I. Atherton, "The Press and Popular Political Opinion," in *A Companion to Stuart Britain*, ed. Barry Coward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 88.

<sup>609</sup> G. E. Aylmer, *Rebellion or Revolution? England 1640-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 65.

<sup>610</sup> C. Hill, "The Bible in Seventeenth-Century English Politics", *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at University of Michigan October 4* (1991), 96.

<sup>611</sup> Cobbler How, *The Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching without Humane-learning* (London, 1640), 25.

both of the politics of knowledge and of prudence that we have encountered in previous presents of crisis where authors like Machiavelli, Luther, Montaigne, Bacon and a whole host of others, while all calling for a certain novelty, nevertheless also drew heavily on a certain kind of approach to the authorities of the past. In the context of the English Civil Wars, however, this approach was challenged and such challenge, to be sure, was the first and biggest sign of the general liberation of the times and the attendant sense of novelty that is to be seen everywhere at the time.

Another characteristic of such liberation was the reassertion of selfhood. Not only was one freer to exercise one's liberty and express oneself at one's pleasure, but one was free also to make a range of choices between a range of beliefs and political preferences and indeed between the classics and the Bible. And in the battle between the classic wisdom of rational politics and the Bible, at the popular level, the choice was made decisively for the Bible. Instead, in this new perspective, one's *personal relationship* with both the Bible and God became a dominant approach.

The Bible had been all too powerful a tool of deciphering not only the occurrences of the present, but also history and the future alike. In early modern Europe, the Bible was the most important cultural monument and one that was always present in the physical and mental reality of humans as they lived their everyday lives. Already from the time of the appearance of Gothic architecture in the towns and cities of the Continent, the majority of illiterate ordinary humans found themselves engaged in a new, personal relationship with the Bible. The purpose of Gothic architecture, as is well known, was not only aesthetic and theological, but also pedagogic, for it intended not only to enthrall its visitors by its sheer beauty, but also to *educate* them by re-enacting in stone the Biblical scenes that imparted moral lessons. Centuries later, with the growth of popular literacy, the Bible would become ever more powerful. In the England of the middle of the seventeenth century, the Bible was by no means only a favourite Sunday reading, but also a part of everyday cultural life. For it was seen to be almost everywhere: in art and architecture, in the ballads humans sang and in the ale-houses where common people spent most of their free time. Moreover the Bible was also part of one's 'interior design at home' in the form of Biblical textual paintings on

the walls and on the hangings that most ordinary homes of the time had for meteorological reasons, as well as in the form of ‘Godly tables’ used for interior decoration.<sup>612</sup> Thus the Bible was at once a spiritual guide and an ever-present physical and mental reality.

Now, the most revolutionary of all ideas and concepts in the Bible was that of the millennium. In our previous discussion of *kairos*, we have seen the specificity and high importance of this concept in the tradition of Christian, and particularly Pauline, messianic thought. And Christ, himself an exposition of *kairotic* epiphany, is certainly to be seen as deploying *kairotic* thought at numerous times in the New Testament. However, the most *kairotic* of all tracts of time was the end of time, itself a manifestation of a unique instant that saw time explode into eternity. The end of time was quite obviously the termination of all time itself and thus the termination and fulfillment of eschatological history also. However, the time that preceded it was the time that remained and, more particularly still, remained to be fulfilled. Apocalypse was this fulfillment. Hugh Trevor Roper has observed how ‘in the early seventeenth century millenarian ideas, forgotten since the Middle Ages, were revived’.<sup>613</sup> However, this is inaccurate for millenarian ideas had never in fact been forgotten, even if they were not at the forefront of intellectual and political battles. Instead, we have already observed that there were always various forms of apocalypticism, be it in the form Waldensians and Albigensians or of Joachim of Fiore or of John of Leiden, to note but a few examples.

Instead, since the heyday of these ideas during the Reformation in the sixteenth century, these ideas had been transmitted in various ways and with varying consequences and eventually *reintroduced* and *reformed* in the highly propitious context of the seventeenth century social and political crisis. The very success of apocalyptic thought depended on the nature of the temporal ground upon its seeds fell and the turbulent present of the English Civil War was a perfect ground. The contents of the present were indeed so constantly refreshing and propitious as to grant *any* apocalyptic thought at least some

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<sup>612</sup> C. Hill, “The Bible in Seventeenth-Century English Politics”, *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at University of Michigan October 4* (1991). See also, C. Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London, 1995).

<sup>613</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Crisis*, 160.

credibility. It is thus not at all surprising that we encounter a widely shared agreement between Protestant scholars at the time that 1650s would most probably be the temporal setting of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and thus of the millennium. However, these ideas had made their first reappearance considerably earlier than the immediate decades of the English Civil War. Coffey has dated the 'academic rediscovery of the millennium as a theological, exegetical concept' to as early as at least the 1630s. The highly turbulent decades of the English Civil War had thus only reawakened a force that had crept quietly in the minds of Englishmen for quite some time beforehand.

This was made possible by three men in particular: Thomas Brightman, John Henry Alsted and Joseph Mede. Now, what united these men, other than their theories of the end of time, was their reading of history – itself an inseparable part to any comprehension of their thought. Of particular interest to us here is their categorisation of history into 'pure' and 'impure' time for this manner of categorisation would be the defining characteristic of the temporal thought of the entire period. In a truly restorationist manner, Brightman argued that the golden years of the Church had been those under the rule of Constantine. For at that time, the church was characterised by a primitive purity. However, for the following 1000 years, the Church had become corrupt amid the slow advancement of unorthodox beliefs and doctrines and the veneration of material relics rather than spiritual values. Accordingly, the purity and truth of the Christian faith had only been conserved in those who went against the then prevalent current – embodied by the Pope. Such had been various religious movements of history, like Waldensians and Albigensians, ultimately persecuted by the Catholic Church. It was only the 14th and the 15th centuries, with greater piety and thus increased number of reformist movements, so Brightman argued, which had reintroduced light after centuries of darkness. Already in place was the anti-Popish argument that would be dominant in the ideological and religious battles of the Civil War, particularly in the fight against Archbishop Laud and Laudianism, or Armenianism that he was seen representing. Precisely against the primitive purity of true Christianity, so the reformers deemed, Laudianism had sought to enhance the role of visual and sense-based rituals in a way more



characteristic of the Catholic tradition of worship and in a sharp contrast with the Protestant preference for the purity of primitive, original Church.

Therefore, Brightman extolled the Genevan order of churches as the guardian of true Christianity and foretold its further strength in the years of come. It was this order that would play a central role in the ultimate purification of the Church and establishment of saintly government in the millennial times imminently at hand. For this, it would be rewarded and ‘remain to see the restoring of the new Church, wherein the new Jerusalem shall come down from Heaven, and be joined with it in covenant and society’.<sup>614</sup> Basing his vision on Johanne Apocalypse, Daniels’ Revelation and the Song of Solomon, Brightman, himself born in 1575, had foretold a series of armed conflicts in his writings of the late sixteenth century. Not surprisingly, by the middle of the 1640s, a lot of his thought had been perceived as truly prophetic. After all, the Thirty Years War that ravaged Europe in the period between 1618 and 1648 would claim 7, 000, 000 lives was a process occurring in real time.<sup>615</sup> Thus, when Brightman’s thoughts first became fully known to Englishmen at the height of turbulence, in 1644, the ground was indeed fertile for all kinds of apocalyptic theories to take hold. It was only after four years from this English publication that the Treaty of Westphalia, itself setting a secular temporal order of its own, would conclude the Continental malaise and many more years before England would eventually look any less apocalyptic than it did in 1644 to the vast majority of Englishmen. And even then, apocalyptic beliefs would not disappear for quite some time.<sup>616</sup>

At about the same time as Brightman’s ideas found their course through the turbulent English soil, yet another source of influence was beginning to appear in England. This was the thought of John Alsted with its own vision both of history and an imminent end of time. As does all millenarian thought, Alsted’s apocalyptic vision too, though in a different way to that of Brightman, categorised history into pure and impure times. Alsted argued that all time since 1517 had been something akin to Pauline ‘remaining time’, for it was in 1517, with the advent of Reformation that the last age of Church had also been

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<sup>614</sup> Brightman, quoted in Coffey, “Apocalypticism”, 139.

<sup>615</sup> S. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (London, 2011), 195.

<sup>616</sup> Coffey, “Apocalypticism”, 140.

inaugurated that would end with the nearing of the millennium and ‘the great reformation’.<sup>617</sup> Alsted’s millenarian ideas appeared in the 1640s and found a local exponent in the person of Joseph Mede. His works had no little influence upon English social and political thought and practice and were in fact re-published in 1642 and 1643 as well. However, what made these apocalyptic works perhaps most famous was not so much their being advocated locally, but an attack launched on them by Thomas Hayne in 1645, who deemed these sorts of ideas as highly unorthodox and even heretic.<sup>618</sup>

Alsted’s thought was by no means exclusively Biblical. Instead, in a fashion characteristic of times of crisis, Alsted effectively fused a variety of information from different fields, also drawing heavily on astrology and including the famous prophecy of Tycho Brahe, Danish astronomer, regarding the coming Golden Age. Not only the Bible, but also stars and heavens foretold a revolutionary change in the order of things. The period between 1603 and 1642 was the gradual temporal setting for an imminent *kairotic* occurrence of the time to come. After all, this was the period that would witness the end of the seventh planetary revolution and with that the world would thus witness a ‘very great alteration’ and ‘the end of kingdoms of the world’.<sup>619</sup> Quite obviously, such prophecy had a clearly republican connotation, as did one of the very few apocalyptic utterances of Oliver Cromwell at the opening of the Barebone’s Parliament in 1653 cited above. Moreover, the period between 1603 and 1694 was the forerunner of the apocalyptic years that would themselves last a thousand years. The years that opened the seventeenth century were thus seen as those immediately preceding first the rule of saints and secondly the Second Coming of Christ. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Alsted had identified the specific two years of 1642 and 1643 as the years of ‘the Revolution of some new Government, of Empire’ and observed how:

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<sup>617</sup> John Alsted, *The Beloved City*, A. Arbor (ed.) Text Creation Partnership, 2003-05 (EEBO-TCP Phase 1).

<sup>618</sup> See Thomas Hayne, *Christ's Kingdom on Earth Opened According to the Scriptures* (London, 1645), Early English Books Online [<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A86120.0001.001>].

<sup>619</sup> Alsted, *City*, 32.

‘The several phenomena, or apparitions in the heavens; namely, new stars and comets; also earthquakes, and the like, taken notice of in these latter times, do without doubt portend and manifestly foretell some notable, and extraordinary change.’<sup>620</sup>

By far the most radical of religious and political movements were the Fifth Monarchists. As is obvious from their very name, the Fifth Monarchists were staunch believers in the nearness of the “Fifth Monarchy”, that is, then – the earthly reign of Christ and ‘God’s people’, or saints. This particular direction of apocalyptic thought indeed held that the Second Coming would be preceded by a period of increased turbulence and a consequent ‘rule of the saints’. As George Fox declared, ‘the saints shall judge the world’, only to add with a modesty characteristic of the times: ‘whereof I am one’.<sup>621</sup> By virtue of being united the umbrella of a rather broad idea, the Fifth Monarchists could be very diverse indeed. It has instead been suggested that the name is better ‘reserved for a minority with whom this belief was not merely a pious opinion or aspiration, but became their central and all dominating idea .... who were disposed to pursue, by such means as lay in their power, constitutional, or sometimes even unconstitutional, the aim of bringing nearer the realisation of that hope’.<sup>622</sup> For the Fifth Monarchists, unlike the more moderate millenarians or the likes of Cromwell who occasionally deployed apocalyptic language, the establishment of a Fifth Monarchy was an imminent political possibility that was to be realised. Their thought, more than anything else, illustrates how the English revolution was by no means an exclusively political affair, but also a theological one. As the Fifth Monarchist Mary Carey noted, there were some ‘already so far enlightened in their understandings, about the present proceedings of God in the world, as they do in some competent measure, already discern the footprints of God, in these great present providences; and do discern also what his designs are in these

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<sup>620</sup> Alsted, *City*, 45.

<sup>621</sup> George Fox, cited in Hill, 94.

<sup>622</sup> Gray, “The Fifth Monarchy Movement”, 167. See also Leo F. Solt, “The Fifth Monarchy Men: Politics and the Millennium”, *Church History*, 3 (Sep., 1961), 314-324.

things'.<sup>623</sup> And what their enlightenment imparted on them was the sure knowledge of the imminent appearance of the fifth kingdom. As Christopher Feake declared, 'if thou staggerest not through unbelief, as those exceeding great and precious promises which are recorded in the Scriptures of Truth, concerning the fifth kingdom, thou shalt in due time, behold, with a mixture of joy and wonder, those other grand Mutations and extraordinary Revolutions, which are even at the door, and ready to break in on the Princes and upon the People of the whole earth'.<sup>624</sup>

Coffey has rightly observed that 'apocalypticism was a crucial element in the lethal cocktail which produced the English civil war',<sup>625</sup> for apocalypticism had a very direct political effect on the occurrences that went on in the turbulent years between 1640 and 1660. For one thing, the psychology of apocalypse is by definition always friendly to radical behaviour, for the temporal paradigm of any tradition of apocalyptic thought is necessarily constructed around the idea of the *shortness of time* and the inevitable end of time. This, to be sure, has most often, and indeed is, accompanied by radical political action and even violence.<sup>626</sup> In fact, in the postscript of our study, we shall in fact explore how these millenarian mode of time, and the idea of the 'shortness of time' in general in fact affected the political thought and practice of the French Revolution, National-Socialist Germany and Soviet Union. Prior to that, however, in the following chapter we shall see how Thomas Hobbes used this very sensibility and mode of temporal thought to develop the first comprehensive thesis of an absolutist and terrorist state, as would indeed be all of the three states of the coming centuries.

Yet, apart from being characterised by a manifestly violent potential, an implicit part of such millenarian ideas was the idea also of a moral judgment. The end-times are never simply ends of time, but also times of qualitative

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<sup>623</sup> Mary Carey, "The Little Horns Doom and Downfall," in *Women's Political Writings, 1610-1725*, ed. Hilda L. Smith, Mihoko Suzuki, and Susan Wiseman (London: Pickering and Chato, 2007), 2:184.

<sup>624</sup> Christopher Feake, "Reader," Preface to Mary Cary, "The Little Horns Doom and Downfall," in *Women's Political Writings, 1610-1725*, ed. Hilda L. Smith, Mihoko Suzuki, and Susan Wiseman (London: Pickering and Chato, 2007), 2:188.

<sup>625</sup> Coffey, "Apocalypticism", 124.

<sup>626</sup> On the psychology of millenarianism in general, see: S. Zitrin, "Millenarianism and Violence", *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 2 (1998); J. F. Rinehart, *Revolution and the Millennium: China, Mexico, and Iran*. (London, 1997); M. Barkun (ed.) *Millennialism and Violence* (London and Portland), 1996.

judgment, when right and wrong are separated before the introduction of eternity. The end of time, then, was also a crisis – in the true classical sense of crisis that we have exposed in great depths in the previous chapters. Now, an inseparable characteristic of the psychology of eternity is its admiration for a perfect *stasis*, non-change, sameness, for by definition there *can be* no change outside time and so eternity is immune from change. From this results the psychology of apocalypse according to which nothing is left to be lost or cared for, because all is about to end anyway. Such is the mentality of apocalypse that has manifested itself in far more recent times too.<sup>627</sup>

Thus it is true that apocalyptic beliefs played a very considerable role indeed at once to make men fight for certain political values – into which these ideas were carefully translated by apocalyptic activists – and to radicalise them further. In 1644, for instance, a group of parliamentary soldiers were captured by the Royalists. During questioning, it emerged that they had directly been inspired by the apocalyptic ideas of Marshall. As one of the soldiers confessed, they had fought for the parliamentary cause for ‘tis prophesied in the Revelation, that the Whore of Babylon shall be destroyed with fire and sword, and what do you know, but this is the time of her ruin, and that we are the men that must help to pull her down?’<sup>628</sup>

In short, apocalypticism had at least three important political effects: firstly, it made compromise hard for no one on the ‘rightful’ side would ever wish to compromise with the forces of ‘Antichrist’ himself; secondly, the paradigm of the end of time and its sense of inevitable finitude made men care less about their material well-being and far more radical in the course of their *own* realisation of the imminent millennium; and finally, these very two processes scared the more moderate factions so badly as to lead them to join the Royalist side.

Due to the very nature of millenarian thought, it is far too simple to assume that, temporally conceived, it was an exclusively forward looking phenomenon. This, however, is far from reality. In fact, a lot of the apocalyptic and millenarian political thought was very much backward looking. The

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<sup>627</sup> T. Robbins and S. J. Palmer (eds.) *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (London, 1997).

<sup>628</sup> W. Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 310.

categorisation of history into ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ tracts of time serves to testify to the same. As we have seen, though in varying degrees, all apocalyptic thought essentially classified not only history but more generally *the flow of time*. All time was indeed subject to qualitative categorisation and accordingly the diagnosis provided for the illnesses of the present were most often fed by a certain categorisation of the precedent time, of which the present was but a part and sometimes a result. Such categorisation of time came in a broad variety of forms. Some views had it that the Antichrist had already reigned for 1650 years; or that kings had martyred saints for 750 years or that the last age of the Church as having begun in 1517. However, whatever the difference in the perception of historical causation and explanation, one thing was perfectly clear to almost all Englishmen: the present was ill. And the predominant temporal tendency of the middle of the seventeenth century was not to call for a *new time* – such as might be truly revolutionary call – but to call for the restoration of a *purier time*, most often long forgotten, or entirely rejected by the malevolent practices manifest in historical time.

It is true to say that Christianity, at this time of its life on the British Isles, had a truly social dimension, as did apocalyptic thought as well. However, it was markedly conservative in everything else, for both the radical and moderate Protestant thought sought the restoration of a purier time. In a truly restorationist manner, many puritans saw the better future ahead not in creating something radically different, but as a restoration of that which had been lost and that in anticipation of the end of time. However, the vast majority thought first and foremost in terms of the church. Of course, it is true that

‘Protestantism had always been a primitivist or restorationist movement, of course, deeply concerned to recover the teachings of the New Testament and imitate the original models of church and state laid down in Scripture’.<sup>629</sup> However, with the radical alertness to the nearness of time’s end, these already extant tendencies only intensified and radicalised. As Father John Robinson declared, ‘The Lord has more truth and light *yet* to break forth out

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<sup>629</sup> Coffey, “Apocalypticism”, 127.

of his holy word'.<sup>630</sup> The restorationist paradigm was also manifest in the thought of the Quakers. The sense of liberation from bondage and malevolence – that had gradually accrued in time in the form of *temporal debris* – might be seen very clearly in the thought of Margaret Fell, a Quaker leader. In a manner already familiar to us, Fell too categorised historical time into pure and impure tracts of time and also placed the changing present in the picture of the qualitative trajectory of the times. Her chief paradigm was that of the 'night of Apostacy' that had begun 'since the Revelations have ceased and been hid' and united 'many hundred Year together'. However, the present now fared better and indeed promised to draw this night 'which was above Twelve hundred Years' to a close. 'The Darkness is past, and the Night of Apostacy draws to an end'.<sup>631</sup> Eventually women's voices would now be restored out of bondage.

All major traditions of thought available in the turbulent years between 1640 and 1660 were in fact manifestations of a quest for a *purser time*, be it the Christian restorationist quest for primitive purity, the common law outlook, or the radicals' invocation of their social and political 'birthrights' manifest to them in the pure and noble times of origin. Much as Protestant scholars and apocalyptic activists called for the imminent restoration of the perfection of pure, uncorrupted time as a prerequisite of millenarian end of time, so the New Model Army define the reason of their fighting the War as none other than the 'Good Old Cause'. Like Bacon and Donne in England earlier in the century, or Petau in France, they all sought a return to some earlier time, most commonly the time of the origin and in all cases, the pure and uncorrupted tract of time.

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<sup>630</sup> John Robinson, quoted in G. F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (2nd edn: Chicago, 1992), 24, 107-113.

<sup>631</sup> Margaret Fell, *A touch-stone, or, A perfect tryal by the Scriptures, of all the priests, bishops, and ministers, who have called themselves, the ministers of the Gospel : whose time and day hath been in the last ages past, or rather in the night of apostacy* (London, 1667), 27.

## Good Old Liberty

The apocalyptic temporal mode of thought was indeed very powerful. Its influence was far-reaching and in fact incorporated political thought also. To that end, we should here remember that many of the Levellers and Diggers themselves held these very same ideas about the millennium and the end of time. Therefore, not surprisingly, we shall see that a lot of the same theologically determined temporal paradigm is actually in place in political thought also. In fact, the very same thing might be seen as occurring in the context of a rich fabric of thought upon the idea of liberty – the very bone of contention at the heart of the constitutional crisis that flared up the English Civil War. And it is with remarks upon liberty and temporal thought that we should begin.

At this point in English history, the notion that liberty of the people had no origin was a common one. As the popular contemporary legal jargon claimed, liberty as a phenomenon, and mixed government as its institutional basis, were both ‘time out of mind’, ‘time out of memory’ and of ‘ancient usage’. In other words, liberty was seen as originating from *time immemorial*. Liberty was truly ancient, for the very laws that guaranteed it were, as the parliamentarian Dudley Digges wrote in 1628 ‘grounded on reason *more ancient* than books, consisting much in unwritten customs, yet so full of justice and true equity’.<sup>632</sup> There was, in other words, no *original moment* of the creation of liberty in its own right, save that of the Creation itself when one deployed an explicitly Christian argument. Yet, whatever the ‘time out of mind’ argument eventually claimed about the origin of liberty, it always *had* to claim one thing. It was this: the *origin* was neither known to, nor comprehensible by the human intellect. There was an obvious and a highly politically charged explanation to such a tendency. If there had been a beginning of liberty that would be known to humans for being such, this would inevitably have led to the sort of thinking with disastrous consequences on the temporal psychology upon which the English anti-royalism and parliamentarism rested. Indeed, any acceptance of the fact that liberty and mixed government, as embodied in

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<sup>632</sup> Dudley Digges, *Answer to the Printed Book* (London, 1642), 2.



the institutional form of the ‘King-in-Parliament’, had a beginning in time, that is then tyrannic countenance’ against which all are already powerless.<sup>633</sup>

This was in many ways true of the seventeenth century English intellect that might seem to have been enslaved to the temporal paradigm of custom enshrined in the common law, often at the cost of neglecting inaccuracies. Thomas Hobbes would ridicule the whole notion of custom and those that followed its moral guidelines blindly and call them childish. However, to the majority of the English this was the very source of their liberty, not only theoretically, but also in practice. Custom was perhaps the most temporal of all the concepts extant in political thought at the time. More than any other idea, custom was directly *historical*, for its essence was founded upon historical time, memory and usage. This is very well summarised by the Attorney General for Ireland, Sir John Davies:

‘the Common Law of England is nothing else but the Common Custome of the Realm and a Custome which hath obtained the force of a Law is always said to be *Jus non scriptum*: for it cannot be made or created either by Charter or by Parliament, which are Acts reduced to writing, and are always matter of Record but being onely matter of act, and consisting in use and practice, it can be recorded and registered no-where but in the memory of the people’<sup>634</sup>

Such, indeed, was the temporal psychology of custom. The older any given custom could be claimed to have been—that is, the more ancient its ‘ancient usage’ was—the greater social respect and legal power it was accorded. There was, to be sure, a temporal point, one chosen entirely arbitrarily, that defined the legitimacy of a custom and that was the year 1189. Any practice that could be traced beyond that point in time qualified as a custom and thus cancelled the need of any form of *jus sriptum* (‘written law’) and relocated the practice in the sphere of lawful ‘matter of act, consisting in use and practice’ and

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<sup>633</sup> Montaigne, “Of Custom”, in *Essays*, 78.

<sup>634</sup> Sir John Davies, quoted in A. Wood, *Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013), 94.

registered ‘no-where but in the memory of the people. So, the very paradigm of custom, too, had temporal implications remarkably similar to that of the apocalyptic mode of temporal perception. For the great lesson it imparted upon all was to seek and find legitimacy in the deeds and precedents not in the present, but in the mists of time.

Such temporal psychology was indeed remarkably conservative. In fact, such were also the English ‘revolutionaries’. The predominance for a long time of the Whig and Marxist interpretations of the Civil War has unfortunately done much to blur the real picture of the turbulent ground of the civil war.<sup>635</sup> For these histories have often portrayed, in a rather anachronistic fashion, ‘progressives’ and ‘heroes’ who were themselves unaware of any such status and would most likely have disagreed with it.<sup>636</sup> Such historiography has thus encouraged a way of thinking that has conceived of the principal agents of historical change as necessarily leading towards some form of progress as ‘innovators’. Yet, as Ashton very accurately reminds us both the contemporary reality and the perception of such reality was exactly the opposite. For ‘it was absolute monarchs who were the innovators *par excellence*, and that everywhere, or nearly everywhere, in Europe representative institutions appeared to be on the retreat.’<sup>637</sup> The Spanish monarchy, only to be superseded by the rising and far more efficient territorial monarchy of France, is a vivid example.

Far from being revolutionaries in any sense, the driving energies of the Civil War were not rebellion and dissent, but ‘conservatism and tradition’, as the ‘keynote of the attitude of most of the principal opponents of royal policies in the 1630s and 1640s’.<sup>638</sup> In a similar vein, Pocock too has highlighted how the historical context of the alleged radicalism, styled as the Good Old Cause, was ‘that of a resolute conservatism’,<sup>639</sup> while Hugh Trevor-Roper has argued that Oliver Cromwell was himself a staunch conservative.<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> For a useful critique, see Trevor-Roper, *Crisis*, 48. See also P. Zagorin, *The Court and the Country* (1969).

<sup>636</sup> On this, see H. H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*. Esp. Chapter 2, “The Underlying Assumptions”.

<sup>637</sup> R. Ashton, “Tradition and Innovation and the Great Rebellion”, in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, 1980), 210.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>639</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, “Interregnum and Restoration”, in *The Varieties of British Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1993), 155.

<sup>640</sup> H. Trevor-Roper, “The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century”, 326.

This, of course, is not to say that the English Civil War did not result in a constitutional change of government. This is rather to say that the English Civil War was itself a *conservative* revolution. To that end, Pocock has elegantly observed that if the French Revolution killed the king for being one, the English revolution killed the king for failing to be one.<sup>641</sup> Thus when we speak of a ‘revolution’, we must speak carefully. The ‘revolution’ of the English Civil War was a revolution not against tradition, but against a present of crisis that had been interpreted as a juncture from the historical flow of time and the traditional order of things. The demand, accordingly, was that the old time and indeed *all time* be respected for it was good. The whole brilliance of the Magna Carta had been that it enshrined all that had been best about being a ‘freeborn Englishman’. Yet, it never did anything new. ‘It simply did what William I allegedly had done when he confirmed the laws of the Confessor; what Henry I had done in his coronation charter; what Edward I was to do when he confirmed the charters in 1297’.<sup>642</sup> And this was the very same that the parliament would ask the King to uphold and defend when it presented the *Petition of Right* to him.

As the parliamentarian John Pym wrote in what is a classic statement of the view, ‘those commonwealths have been most *durable* and *perpetual* which have often reformed and recomposed themselves according to their *first institution and ordinance*’. Interestingly, this is a direct invocation of the Roman constitutionalist notion, revived by Machiavelli, of *reduction to the first principles (ridure ai principii)*. No less strikingly, Pym believed that in so doing republics repair ‘the breaches and counterwork the ordinary and *natural* effects of time’. By ‘demanding their ancient and due liberties’, citizens were ‘not suing for any new’.<sup>643</sup> Here, then, we have one of the most classic statements of the parliamentarian temporal mentality that had borrowed aspects from classical republicanism, yet was nevertheless specifically English. The ideal end, in this exposition too, was not a revolution but *durability* and *perpetuity* that could be achieved by reducing the state of things to the original principles in order to cleanse it of temporal debris

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<sup>641</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, “Interregnum and Restoration”, 146.

<sup>642</sup> Ashton, “Tradition and Innovation”, 212.

<sup>643</sup> John Pym, Cited in J. Forster, *The Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England: With a Treatise on the popular progress in english history*, Vol. 2, (London, 1840), 50.

accumulated in time and by *natural time* as an agent in its own right. This, it was finally stressed in a conservative mood, was not asking for anything novel, but asking for what had throughout all time been just and right, yet had been violated in the present of crisis that was itself a juncture from the normality of *chronos* so conceived.

Now, the course of events was in many ways made faster by the King himself, or rather by whoever signed the fatal discursive move in the form of the king's 'Answer' to the 'Nineteen Propositions' presented to him by the Long Parliament. Traditionally, the supporters of monarchy had relied on the doctrines of divine and patriarchal right, stressing that the monarch had no need of any consent after the very first one, exactly as Hobbes' theory of sovereignty and Filmer's *Patriarcha* would argue in the future. As the Royalist Sir John Spelman observed in reply to the Republicans, 'I should rather think if Regall power were originally conveyed from the people, they by conveying it over have divested themselves of it.'<sup>644</sup> It is simple to conceive of the Parliament, in an anachronistic manner, as a body of supreme importance. However, this was not the case. In reality, the two houses of parliament were seen as the king's great council and actually included most of his privy councilors as well. The parliaments owed their very being to the king who called them, *whenever* it pleased him and for whatever *duration* it pleased him. As we shall soon see, such temporal arrangement would become a matter of grave discontent. In actual historical reality, parliaments only sat for 'about four and a quarter years between 1603 and 1629'.<sup>645</sup> The Parliaments often ended without producing any legislation; this had been the case with the Parliaments of 1614, 1626 and the early 1640. They were mostly summoned, particularly during the reign of Charles II with the eleven-year period of 'Personal Rule' after 1629, to raise taxes and fund either royal expenses, or war. Moreover, the parliament had never been a *topos* of conflict; it was instead a place of doing business. This is illustrated perfectly by the fact that the Parliaments of 1621 and 1624 simply ignored serious 'royal slights to their privileges' and far from enacting revenge upon the monarchy, in fact, voted the

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<sup>644</sup> Sir John Spelman, cited in Q. Skinner and M. van Gelderen *Freedom and the Construction of Europe* Vol. 2 (Cambridge, 2013), 147. For a classic statement of the Royalist view, see also P. Hunton, *A Treatise of Monarchy* (1643), reprinted (London, 1689), esp. 21.

<sup>645</sup> D. Hirst, *England in Conflict: 1603-1660* (New York, 1999), 9.

taxes after that.<sup>646</sup> It is important to see the full nature of the king's 'Answer' against this context of *concordia discors* ('harmony in discord') wherein the national and the local, the monarchical and the parliamentary were seen at once as constantly at odds, and as forming a perfect unity — as Pocock's apt summary has it, a 'trinity-in-unity'.<sup>647</sup>

It was the King's own answer that indeed proved to be disastrous. Instead of presenting a counter-argument in the form of a doctrine of monarchical sovereignty, the king's reply instead reaffirmed the conventional view, that had been held at least since the Elizabethan times yet never an object of a constitutional struggle, that the government of England was a 'Mixture' that united 'Absolute Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy'. Ever since that moment, the opponents of the crown would exploit this failure of the king to defend a doctrine of monarchical sovereignty and repeatedly stress that 'the King was just one of the three estates in a mixed government, that he was essentially subordinate to the other two estates'.<sup>648</sup> But the King had by no means simply reduced himself to one of the three estates, but also stressed the indivisibility of sovereignty represented by the three branches *together*; any breach of which would be disastrous to the body politic. It is thus far to observe that the two sides fought over 'the means to a common end, that of bringing the king back to his parliament and the head back to unity with the body'.<sup>649</sup> Yet, the King's fatal discursive positioning had already affected the minds of men and the fatal attempt upon the five members of parliament did not take long to happen. The king withdrew immediately first from the parliament and then from London. The Civil War had practically already begun.

Ironically, if republican thought had been rather unorganised in the prelude to the Civil War, it was far more organised and consistent after the king's own admittance that England had been a mixture of monarchy and republicanism. This body of thought was now organised around a number of principles among which the chief contention was that the king simply was not necessary and should be 'replaced by genuine and undivided sovereignty exercised by the

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<sup>646</sup> Hirst, *England*, 13.

<sup>647</sup> Pocock, *Varieties*, 150.

<sup>648</sup> C. Weston, *English Constitutional Theory and the House of Lords, 1556-1832* (London, 1965).

<sup>649</sup> Pocock, *Varieties*, 150.

parliament as the institution' that represented the *true sovereigns*, the people.<sup>650</sup>

An earlier classic statement of the same view had indeed been produced by Henry Parker. The immediate context in which Parker published his *Observations* was one of England on the verge of a constitutional crisis, yet not already constitutionally dissolved. The broader context, however, was already that of the body politic at war with its own head. This, however, was an instance of 'time out of joint', for England had never known such a moment in its centuries-long quest for custom. 'Power', Parker declared, 'is originally inherent in the people' and had been entrusted *by them* to their rulers *conditionally*.<sup>651</sup> Royal power was indeed 'subject to some conditions ... that the saftie of the people is to bee valued above any right of his' own.<sup>652</sup> Royal power was not presented as *perpetual* and the popular power as *divested of its original force*, but instead stressed the popular right of resistance and disobedience in the case of irregular acts, when 'Kings may be disobeyed, their unjust commands may be neglected, not only by communities, but also by single men sometimes'. However, should the king disagree, Parker observed, there would be nothing left but that 'we must retire to ordinary justice' and, in the worst-case scenario, also to 'the principles of Nature'.<sup>653</sup> Thus a lot of English republican thought was indeed remarkably conservative. Far from consciously envisaging, or intending a regicide, English republicans instead sought to restore the purity of older times and preserve the very continuity of what they had deemed to be the best possible arrangement that allowed a republican way of life to co-exist with a monarchy. It was only after the failure to get the king to do the same, and after the latter's fatal declaration of the same principle of a 'Mixture' of a monarchy and a republic, that the head of the body politic was indeed brought back to London, though only too literally.

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<sup>650</sup> Pocock, *Varieties*, 151.

<sup>651</sup> [Henry Parker], *Observations upon some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses*, 2nd edn (n.p., n.d. [London, 1642]) in William Haller (ed.), *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution*, 3 vols. (New York, 1936), II, pp. 167-213.

<sup>652</sup> *Observations*, p. 8.

<sup>653</sup> Parker, *Observations*, 44. See also p. 16, where Parker had asserted the entitlement of the people to act in their own defence: 'if the King will not joyne with the people, the people may without disloyalty save themselves . . .'

However, this is by no means to say that the progressive agenda was wanting during the English Civil War. Apart from the more conventional Republicans, there were of course also the Levellers and the Diggers with more progressive political agendas and a greater, though varying, degree of political radicalism. The same temporal paradigm, however, is to be discerned in the political thought of the Levellers and Diggers also to which we are about to attend in greater depths. The predominant temporal argument they advanced was, to be sure, entirely geared towards the restoration of a time past, or of the qualities manifest therein. Thus it may seem that scholarly discussion of a ‘revolution’, in the temporal sense of the word, is devoid of the most fundamental ground – the revolutionary itself and we shall return to this consideration below. Now, the Levellers developed a number of temporal paradigms with which their thought can be seen functioning. The first and, no doubt, the most important temporal paradigm advanced by the first “socialists” of the world, contrary to what Marxist historians have repeatedly attempted to dismiss, was none other than a Christian argument of time. However, we have already seen that ‘the Christian idea of time’ is very incoherent indeed and might be seen as referring to a number of things, from the Biblical periodisation of eschatological history, to Augustine’s musings upon the nature of time itself. The ‘Christian idea of time’ we encounter in this period of our study is above all else Christian in the sense of belonging to a longer tradition of ‘pre-lapsarian’ thought, to which Bacon also belonged, that stressed the purity and positivity of the human condition, much as of knowledge wisdom and of course the sinless condition of the two ancestors of mankind.

However, both the Levellers and the Diggers took this temporal paradigm to fresh heights, importing into the pure time of the Biblical present *their* social and political ideas of a good society that enabled them to do what most politicians and activists have always sought to do to legitimise one’s particular vision of time with the invocation of an ideal tract of time. In fact, as we shall see later in this chapter, it was Ireton, one of the ‘grandees’ of the Army that would remind the radicals how a lot of their temporal import could not stand any substantial historical scrutiny. The right to property, for instance, Ireton would observe, was never part of any ‘birthrights’ of Englishmen. And in the next chapter we shall see how Hobbes would similarly observe that the whole

temporal paradigm of 'ancient rights' and 'birthrights' was a historically flawed one. However, the temporal paradigm of rights and liberties was far too powerful a political tool to the radicals. They had no wish to abandon it.

## ***Diggers***

Before would expose the thought of the Levellers, who preceded the Diggers, it seems best to expose the thought of the later and more radical Diggers first. For although the chief intellectuals of both radical groups wrote prolifically, the thought and the activities of the Diggers was relatively more limited, while the thought of the Levellers intimately involved in a range of constitutional texts and practices of utmost importance to the period. Thus, we have far more to say of the impact of Levellers and their temporal language. Moreover, many of the Diggers were in fact Quakers inspired by the millenarian beliefs just discussed. Thus it seems fit first to expose the thought of the Diggers, and with the 'Norman Yoke' thesis as well, and then to proceed to the Levellers.

Now, the very leader of the Diggers, Gerard Winstanley, was himself indeed a Quaker. Although Winstanley had broken away from organised religion and 'worshipped God, not knowing who He was or where He was', he was nevertheless engaged with the Quaker Society of Friends and his death was registered in Quaker records.<sup>654</sup> Moreover, Winstanley's own approach to Christianity was in total harmony with the then rising tradition of religious thought in the form of Quakerism. We should here remember the ethics of Cobbler How who denigrated the need for education, observing how the wisdom of God was most readily available to pure and simple minds. Such preference was eminently in harmony with the Quaker view. Winstanley's own declaration that he worshipped God without much theological knowledge was one precisely in the same tradition.

Like most Quakers, Winstanley too believed that God resided, if at all, inside each and every one of the humans. This Winstanley most often called 'inner light', yet as Spritzler observes, 'sometimes he speaks of an inner light, sometimes of Christ, sometimes the Law of Righteousness, or the law of

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<sup>654</sup> R. T. Vann, "From Radicalism to Quakerism: Gerrard Winstanley and Friends". *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* XLIX (1959), 41-46.



universal love. All are spoken of as being good qualities within every person, and are understood to be synonymous.’<sup>655</sup> The whole of Winstanley’s political thought was in fact based on very personal considerations of man’s station in time and the consequent political conclusions. After all, as Winstanley himself observed, he ‘was in a trance not long since’ when he heard ‘Worke together. Eat bread together; declare this all abroad’. A Biblical trance had then paved the way for the communist thought and practice of Winstanley that would follow in the form of digging a plot at St. George’s Hill and sharing all produce amongst the workers.

Now, the Diggers, which came later in time, were on the whole more radical than the Levellers. If one is to invoke, for a moment alone, a highly anachronistic comparisons, one might observe that the Levellers – with their emphasis upon equality, the rights of all men, ‘self-propriety’ and electoral reform to ensure equal franchise – were the first ‘socialists’, or ‘liberal socialists’ of the world, while the Diggers, with their outright attack on the entire system of property relations, on the institution of hiring others and being hired by others and on the communality of all land and produce – were indeed ‘the first communists’ of the world. Such characterisations are to be identified as anachronistic simply because no such terms and indeed systems of ideas, as ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’, existed at the time. In every other way, however, these terms capture the very essence of the two groups’ thought and practice. After all, the Diggers themselves established a commune that they would ‘dig’ and in so doing reinvent the pure time of Creation and also invited ‘others to come in and help them, and promise them meat, drink, and clothes’.<sup>656</sup> This lesser known Surrey commune of 1549 predated the famous Paris Commune of 1871 by 222 years and lasted long than it, from its foundation on 1 April 1649 well into 1650.

Like the Levellers would deem the Army ‘grandees’ as traitors of the original path jointly agreed once upon a time, so Winstanley and the Diggers would see the Levellers as guilty of being too moderate. This is the reason why one of the foundational texts representing the views of the Diggers was in fact called ‘The

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<sup>655</sup> David Spritzler, “Winstanley & The. Diggers. The Spiritual and Political Story of a Seventeenth Century Communist Movement”. Published on *NewDemocracyWorld* [Last accessed 10 April 2016: <http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/diggers.pdf>].

<sup>656</sup> Gerard Winstanley, *The True Levellers Standard Advanced*, in Tony Benn (ed.) *Gerard Winstanley: The Common Treasury*, 21.

True Levellers Standard Advanced'. In that text, Winstanley developed a new temporal argument that was a potent mixture of Christian ideas and radical political ideas in a way that the thought of the Levellers never was – remaining in the sphere of the ancient birthrights of freeborn Englishmen. 'In the beginning of time', Winstanley observed, Earth had been 'a common treasury'. What is more, at that time, 'not one word spoken that one branch of mankind should rule over another'. Nor was there apparently any need for it, for 'every man is a perfect creature endowed with reason' originally present in all men. However, there then comes a point of temporal departure, identical to the departure of the Biblical theological narrative, wherein man, already in a fallen condition of humankind, falls prey to material passions and enters a crisis with his own original self. It is at this point that he 'set up one man to teach' and rule that resulted in the bondage. Winstanley thus portrayed the Creation not as a singular act but as a lengthier time-process, almost an event, as the very seat of liberty and equality.<sup>657</sup>

Having designated the Creation as such, the rest of the temporal argument was then devoted to a radical juxtaposition of the pre-lapsarian distant past with the immediate political present full not only of turbulence and apocalyptic anticipation, but also of *injustice* and *inequality*. For 'such a state of things', in which England found itself, 'dishonours the Creation'.<sup>658</sup> No less importantly, Winstanley presents the time of his writing as a crisis precisely in the *kairotic* temporal mode that we have already exposed several times in this work. For one thing, Winstanley's account of events is told consciously as a story *of a time*, when the old and the new are radically at odds with one another: when the 'present state of old world [finds itself] like a parchment in flames of fire', while the new order has not yet been founded.<sup>659</sup> Yet, what worries Winstanley and his kind of argument is not the loss of order and peace, but the loss of something far greater; a loss incurred not so much recently as *historically* – that is, *over time*. This, to be sure, is the loss of true liberty that for Winstanley is wholly inseparable from social and economic equality. When exactly did such loss occur?

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<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>659</sup> Winstanley, *Ibid.*, 10-11.

In response, Winstanley designates two separate, though morally and spiritually interconnected, points in time. The first of these coincided with the emergence of 'bondage' as free humans, having entered into a personal crisis of their own making, accepted teachers and rulers and thus ultimately masters to direct them. This is, as is evident, an entirely spiritual and theological argument devoid of any historical or indeed theological accuracy that would have been clear to contemporaries of Winstanley also. The second moment, however, is far more distant from this *original time* and travels all the way up to the England of 1066 when William the Conqueror established the Norman Kingdom, or – especially for those that hated him so dearly as did Winstanley and republicans in general – when King William instituted the 'Norman Yoke'. Far more than any other temporal or political paradigm, it was precisely that of the 'Norman Yoke' that united the Republicans in general, the Levellers and the Diggers with one other. But, here too, the Diggers employed the same temporal argument to call for more radical alterations than the Levellers had ever called for.

Now, that King Charles and his rule had descended directly from the Norman Kings was a persuasive temporal argument, particularly if it could be made clear to ordinary Englishman that the Norman phenomenon was entirely negative and indeed a cruel tyranny, as did all republican thought and activism did.<sup>660</sup> However, no single group did so much as to advance the 'Norman Yoke' thesis, as did the Levellers. It is thus partly accurate to call the 'Norman Yoke' thesis 'a historical fantasy the Levellers had developed'.<sup>661</sup> According to the narrative, the Norman Kingdom was portrayed as the usurper of the true freedoms of Englishmen. As the curiously named Leveller news-pamphlet *The Moderate* declared, ever since the Conquest, the English had been 'slaves, by and from the Conquest [and that] all the Laws of this Land [were] Tyrannical and Arbitrary, being made and maintained by the sword'.<sup>662</sup> In short, the Norman rule had been 'arbitrary and tyrannical ... depriving the English of their original liberties'.<sup>663</sup> 'For what are those Binding and Restraining Laws', Winstanley exclaimed, 'that have been made from one

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<sup>660</sup> G. H. Sabine (ed.) *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (New York, 1941), 56.

<sup>661</sup> D. Mulder, *The Alchemy of Revolution* (New York, 1990), 74.

<sup>662</sup> BM E470(12), Thomason, *The Moderate*, no. 17 (October 31 to November 7, 1648), 137.

<sup>663</sup> Mulder, *Alchemy*, 75.

Age to another since that Conquest?'.<sup>664</sup> Similarly, the parliamentarian Henry Parker, attempting to develop a theory of parliamentary sovereignty in his 1642 *Observations*, had observed how it is 'a shamefull stupidity in any man to thinke that our Ancestors did not fight more nobly for their free customes and Lawes, of which the conqueror and his successors had in part disinherited them by violence and perjury'.<sup>665</sup> However, in actual historical reality the Norman Conquest had altered only very little,<sup>666</sup> and at any rate *all absolute monarchy* has always been and is an arbitrary form of rule. Yet, the persuasive temporal mythology was badly needed by the anti-royalists in general from a practical point of view. The more radical a group got, the more radical its temporal philosophy also became, be it in the apocalyptic or in the more directly political context of thought and action.

It was only as part of this combined Biblical and historical mythology of time that Winstanley could launch a complex attack on the entire system of social and political organisation. The argument of the 'Norman Yoke' was employed to advance a series of social and political criticism extremely radical for the time. The whole of the socio-economic order was brought to its heels by Winstanley as doing none other than 'dishonouring the Creation'. So long as the 'present Civil Propriety' was maintained, he observed, 'we hinder the restoration'.<sup>667</sup> Now, with 'Civil Propriety', Winstanley was referring not only to the economic order of private ownership, but also to the contemporary division of labour into a hierarchy of those who hire and those who are hired. The very idea of private property was in fact murderous for, according to Winstanley, this was the only possible way in which private property could have been procured at first. As Winstanley reassured his readers, 'the landlords, Teachers and Rulers are Oppressors, Martherers and Thieves' and in so doing also united *all masters* in abstract terms, as well as *concrete historical masters* in the form of historical persons of the Norman Kingdom, King Charles and Cromwell's anti-Royalist military government included.<sup>668</sup> With this temporal argument securely in place, Winstanley then turned again

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<sup>664</sup> Winstanley, *Levellers Standard*, 25.

<sup>665</sup> Henry Parker, *Observations*, 3.

<sup>666</sup> L. H. Berens, *The Digger Movement in the Days of the Commonwealth* (London, 1906), 38.

<sup>667</sup> Winstanley, *True Levellers Standart Advanced*, in *Common Treasury*, 13-4.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

to the juxtaposition of the pure present of Creation with the impure present of his own, observing how ‘this was not thus from the *beginning*. And this is one Reason of our digging and labouring the Earth one with another; That we might work in Righteousness and lift up the Creation from bondage’,<sup>669</sup> for ‘surely, the Righteous Creation did not ordain’ such unjust condition and in contrast, ‘every one, friend and foe, should enjoy the benefit of the Creation’.<sup>670</sup> However, Winstanley also felt disappointed by the government of the then already English Republic. ‘O, powers of England, thou hast promised to make these people a Free People... yet thou hast wrapped us up in more bondage and oppression lies heavier’, Winstanley exclaimed woefully. Now, this was most likely a direct response to the Act of Parliament of 17 March 1649 abolishing the monarchy that had, if only in word remaining true to the tradition of republican temporality, promised a ‘lasting freedom and good of this republic’.<sup>671</sup> To Winstanley, the true essence of the task was ‘advancing the Creation out of bondage’ by guaranteeing universal liberty and freedom, ‘which is our birthright, which our Maker gave us’.<sup>672</sup> It was this that the ‘lasting freedom’ must have guaranteed to free peoples of England otherwise already subjected to the ‘tyrannical yoke’. However, the newly erected state had fallen short of remaining true to its temporal mission. The situation that had emerged was one-sided, for the people had kept their part of the bargain, granting soldiers of the state their share of support, while the state had not kept the covenant, causing the Creation to remain in bondage.<sup>673</sup>

Winstanley’s temporal and political task was thus at once manifold. It was to restore the purity of the time of Creation, to demolish the remnants in the once-pure land of the impure Norman Kingdom and at the same time to rebel against the republican government. Dismayed by the state, the rebels took it upon themselves to restore the purity of the lost time, the paradise lost. As Winstanley declared, ‘the place we should begin upon... taking the Earth to be a Common Treasury, as it was first made for all’.<sup>674</sup> Disobedience was the only

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<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>670</sup> Winstanley, *Declaration from the poor and oppressed People of England*, in *Ibid.*, 30, 31.

<sup>671</sup> See ‘An Act prohibiting the proclaiming any person to be King England or Ireland, or the Dominions thereof’, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*. (His Majesty’s Stationery Office, London, 1911), 1253-1264.

<sup>672</sup> Winstanley, *True Levellers Standard Advanced*, in *Common Treasury*, 15.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

way so that ‘the Curse on our part may be taken off Creation’. Yet, this was a disobedience, as Winstanley repeatedly made it clear, not by armed conflict, but by commission in service of the original lord, not those masters who had imposed their rule over the originally free people. This was disobedience markedly social by nature directed as it was wholly against the socio-economic structure of English history in general. For this disobedience aimed not only at revoking that which the Norman Conquest or thereafter the English monarchy had imposed on the historically allegedly free peoples of England, but to refuse all forms of hierarchy: ‘neither giving hire, nor taking hire’.<sup>675</sup> As the house of Israel had been rescued from bondage, Winstanley declared, so ‘we endeavour to lift up the Creation ... from the bondage of Civil Propriety, which it groans under’.<sup>676</sup>

### ***Levellers***

Amid the onset of the conflict, by far the majority of the ruling opinion in Parliament as well as the countryside outside London ‘fell within the range of opposition to absolute and arbitrary government’.<sup>677</sup> This, as far as temporal perceptions are concerned, presents us with a typical republican anxiety that we have also seen extant in the late Roman Empire as well as, most prominently, in the thought of Machiavelli. This is the trait of thought concerned with organising time in a way that eliminates *arbitrariness* and the weight of *contingency*, both themes being predominant in the context of English anti-Royalist thought. Now, to this end it is important to observe that majority of the anti-Royalist thought was not in fact *republican* in the sense of Machiavelli, or indeed even more so in the sense of the French revolutionaries. Although the parliament did in fact enact a series of anti-absolutist legislations, they were far from being radical in any sense and especially in the sense of welcoming regicide. In fact, the charge leveled against the king stemmed not from the pretence of constructing a new time, but rather from

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<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>677</sup> John Lilburne, *Legal Fundamental Liberties* (1649), in A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty, being the Army Debates* (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents (London, 1938), 351.

the general anti-Royalist feeling that the King himself had betrayed the purity of 'historical time' that had been embodied into the English constitution. In this temporal sense too, the vast majority of the English 'republicans' were neither truly republican, nor truly revolutionary, but an essentially conservative force trying to restore the cure the infected time of the present and restore the order purity of ancient time. That the parliamentary army had first marched yelling the slogan: 'for King and the Parliament', rather than 'against the King and for the Parliament'.

In fact, even the 'radical' Levellers were against regicide, if in part due to very practical reasons. As Lilburne wrote in *Legal Fundamental Liberties* (1649), 'I look upon the King as an evil man in his actions ... but the Army had ... fallen from all their promises and declarations, and therefore could not rationally any more be trusted by us, without good cautions and security'.<sup>678</sup> Lilburne realised perfectly well was that there being 'no other balancing power in the kingdom' against the dominant power of the army apart from the king and parliament, 'it was our interest to keep up one tyrant to balance another, till we certainly knew what that tyrant that pretended fairest would give us as our freedoms'.<sup>679</sup> In all other cases, the army would 'devolve all the government of the kingdom into their wills and swords' and leave no counter-balance against them. Should we do so, Lilburne then observed, 'our slavery for the future (I told them) might probably be greater than ever it was in the King's time, and so our last error would be greater than our first'.<sup>680</sup> Lilburne, to be sure, had a very clear political program that he wished to see enacted. However, this never translated into a demand for regicide.

In fact, the kinds of republicans that would wish to behead the king made appearance only after 1648 when things had moved decisively in the more radical direction. It has even been suggested in a range of literature that even Oliver Cromwell and Henry Ireton were faced with no choice other than accepting the fact that the king was to be beheaded without exercising much influence over the immediate decision. For instance, Hugh Trevor-Roper has argued convincingly that Cromwell, far from being a radical like others, was

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<sup>678</sup> John Lilburne, *Legal Fundamental Liberties* (1649), in A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty, being the Army Debates* (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents (London, 1938), 351.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

actually rather conservative, seeking to regenerate an ideal past of his own that was the time of the reign of Elizabeth.<sup>681</sup> The very sequence of events that preceded regicide and subsequent declaration of England as a republic is in itself suggestive in this and other directions. For one thing, Cromwell and Ireton, far from wishing to behead the king tried to negotiate with him openly and formally. It was this attempt that resulted in the *Heads of Proposals*, a set of proposals drafted in 1647 that sought a postwar constitutional settlement between the King and the anti-Royalists. The proposals of Cromwell and Ireton offered what would in essence have been a constitutional monarchy. The proposals aimed at the restoration of the king to power and of the episcopacy to church government, though with considerably reduced power. The *Proposals* also provided for the liberty of religious gathering and worship, the use of the Book of Common Prayer, reorganisation of constituencies and the establishment of a new Council of State in charge of foreign policy.

The *Heads of Proposals*, like any other document of the time, was rich with temporal references that aimed to introduce sanity to the present and the future and provide a certain economy of time by ordering time in very specific terms. This, as we shall see below, is precisely how the contemporaries themselves conceived of the situation. Time and more generally temporal aspects of the negotiation and political organisation of the future polity were so central that they became one of the chief bones of contention. For these people understood all too well that the nature of the polity was determined largely by the specific mode of the organisation of civic and political life *in time*. Let us, then, first attend to the temporal orientations of the *Heads of Proposals* and then to the critique of these very specific temporal orientations.

Firstly, the *Proposals* maintained that no Royalist would be allowed to hold or run for an office for following five years, that is then until 1652. Secondly, the sitting parliament would be granted leave to decide upon the date of its own termination. However, all future parliaments would be biennial – called once in every two years and obliged to sit for the minimum of 4 months (120 days) and the maximum of 240 days – just over 7 months. Now, both the timing and length of parliaments was a crucial issue to the contemporaries of this present, since they had for a long time witnessed two different extremes,

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<sup>681</sup> Trevor-Roper, “Cromwell and His Parliaments”, 317–358.



both of which had damaged liberty and popular sovereignty alike. The one kind of extreme was not calling the Parliament with sufficient frequency, and instead calling one only when monarchy wished to raise taxation. King Charles had ruled for 11 years without calling a parliament, in the period between 1629 and 1640. This tract of time had become known as ‘Eleven Years’ Tyranny’ or the time of ‘Personal Rule’. That this was part of the Royal Prerogative, already anyway deemed as the very source of potential tyranny, did not help the Royalist cause. Moreover, as we have already learnt, such was the temporal philosophy of all republican thought that it conceived of the republic as *possible* when things were certain in time and contingency diminished. Yet, in such a context, no certainty could ever exist; instead, as John Wildman understood all too well, subjects would be constantly under the threat of unjust subjection and never ‘under some possibility of relief under any growing oppressions’.<sup>682</sup>

King Charles’s ‘personal rule’ ended with the Scottish invasion of England in the aftermath of Charles’ failed and disastrous effort to reform the Church of Scotland. In 1640, in the context of an apparent emergency, Charles had called a parliament that only lasted a few days and became known as the ‘Short Parliament’. If one temporal extreme was not calling a parliament or calling it for a few days alone and dismissing it at one’s arbitrary will, the other extreme was a parliament that sat for too long. This is precisely what happened with the parliament that the king was forced to call in the autumn of 1640 and that suggestively became known as ‘Long Parliament’. The reason this parliament became known as the ‘Long Parliament’ and indeed the longevity itself had a sound legal basis that is itself telling in a number of regards. On the 10th of May 1641, the months-old Parliament passed ‘The Act against Dissolving the Long Parliament without its own consent’.

The parliamentarians justified their pragmatic and political striving towards atemporality with nothing but the state of emergency in which the kingdom found itself amid the Scottish invasion of the North that was still going on. The parliamentarians cleverly reminded the king of his own demands, that ‘great sums of money must of necessity be speedily advanced and provided for

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<sup>682</sup> Wildman, *The Levellers’ Discontent With The Heads Of The Proposals*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 426.

the relief of His Majesty's army and people in the northern parts of this realm, and for preventing the imminent danger it is in'. Moreover, they made reference to 'His Majesty's present and urgent occasions, which cannot be so timely effected as is requisite without credit for raising the laid monies'. This, the parliamentarians argued, in itself required the removal of all kinds of 'jealousies and apprehensions of divers His Majesty's loyal subjects', above all else the Privy Council that in fact governed the country, that would see 'this present Parliament may be adjourned, prorogued, or dissolved, before justice shall be duly executed'.<sup>683</sup> This, then, was the other temporal extreme wherein the parliament was indissoluble and thus temporally absolute. If temporally unregulated, this too would become just another form of arbitrary rule. It is in these temporal contexts that the introduction of biennial parliaments should be seen. If so viewed, the full political potential of a single clause is rather more apparent. By determining in advance the *minimum* and *maximum* amount of time during which a parliament could sit was an attack both on the extreme temporalities of royal absolutism and parliamentary absolutism. Finally, the *Proposals* held that the Parliament would have the exclusive right of appointing all officials and officers of both the army and the navy for a period of ten years.

On the whole, *Heads of Proposals* provided a relatively *more* republican temporal management of time. However, neither arbitrariness nor the kind of *temporal certainty* that truly republican philosophy – and its socially radical manifestations – demanded were dealt with. Had the proposal been accepted by the King – and it was not – this would have conceded some of the worthy victory to the defeated side and return a good deal of establishment to their previous positions of power, even if with drastically reduced authority. Worse still, once the predetermined number of years when no Royalists were to be appointed in public offices with an influence upon foreign policy and appointments in the army and the navy had expired, there would be the danger of an imminent Royalist return to positions of considerable influence. After all, according to the *Proposals* of 1647, both monarchy and the House of Lords would still enjoy the right of vetoing republican legislative programme in Parliament. Perhaps even more importantly, as we have already learned in

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<sup>683</sup> Gardiner, *An agreement of the People for a firm and present peace* (London, 1647), 21.

our discussion of the *possibility* and *impossibility* of a republic, where contingency reigned, no republic was possible. Yet, all that the *Heads of Proposals* had to offer was *a short number of years* endowed with a guarantee of republican life and not the kind of ‘lasting order’ that was one of the chief paradigmatic demands of the republicans of time.

Not at all surprisingly, then, in the course of their attempts at negotiation, Cromwell and Ireton lost the support of the far more radically inclined rank and file of the army. Many men of the army were at this point consciously or unconsciously already the followers of the ‘Levellers’. The failed, yet attempted, negotiations of Cromwell and Ireton, the ‘grandees’ of the Army, with the king only fueled this further. Several months after the failed June negotiations, in the late September of 1647, five regiments elected representatives called ‘Agitators’ who would voice the views and interests of the rank and file of the army. Although not all of the Agitators were themselves Levellers, many of them certainly were and the group as a whole soon established a close relationship with the ‘radical’ Londoners.

It was this new class of lobbyists that soon produced a manifesto called *The Case of the Army Truly Stated*. Among them, most notably, was John Wildman, an originally poor, self-made graduate from Cambridge and a soldier who had, in his suggestively titled *Putney Projects, Or the old serpent in a new forme*, already attacked Cromwell and Ireton for their alleged betrayal of the interests of the rank and file of the army and indeed of their original causes in general. Several aspects of his criticism are particularly striking and telling with regards to just how much importance the contemporaries of our present attached to the matter of time. Although Wildman’s criticism concerns most aspects of the *Proposals*, his chief targets are precisely the maintenance of *arbitrariness* and the *impossibility of a republic*. No less importantly, this Wildman sees as stemming precisely from the inadequate constitution of political life in time. Now, one of the very first things that Wildman does is to attack the practice of ‘the King’s negative voice’ – the royal veto. For the veto, he believed, raised the problem precisely of ordering political affairs in time. As Wildman observed, in the first draft of the *Proposals*, only a very little room had been reserved for royal veto, for ‘it was agreed to be proposed that whatsoever bill should be propounded by *two*

*immediate succeeding* Parliaments should stand in full force and effect as any other law', regardless of royal consent or dissent. What is more, this to Wildman was a guarantee that people would not have been 'absolutely vassals to the King's will' and conversely would have been 'under some possibility of relief under any growing oppressions'.<sup>684</sup> Not only was Wildman attacking Cromwell for betraying the initial agreement of *Proposals*, but he was also attacking the very principle according to which the will of the English people – that as we shall see the Levellers deemed as the fountain and the true source of all legitimate government – embodied in 'any sentence of the Commons, representing all England, may be contradicted by five or six Lords, by virtue of the King's patent'.<sup>685</sup> As the radical negation of such possible historical situation, Wildman instead envisaged the *longevity* of parliamentary decision as the desirable objective. If two successive parliaments, and thus a succession of the manifestation of true sovereign's will, was to achieve the same decision, that decision was final and irreversible.

At a more practical level, however, Wildman also saw another kind of betrayal from Cromwell. As he stressed, in the 'rough draft' of the *Proposals*, it was observed that the enemies of the parliamentary side would be 'incapable of bearing office of power or public trust for ten years, without the consent of Parliament'. However, this ten-year limitation had 'in further favour of the King's interest' been 'changed to five years'. Moreover, if previously it had been agreed that parliament alone had the right to grant a royalist the right to a public office, in a new document it was the State Council, a small executive body of appointed officials, that was given this right and, worse still, would 'have power to admit such delinquents to any office of power or trust *before* those five years were expired'. Wildman thus angrily concluded how 'the greatest delinquents in England would be in the greatest trust before twelve months' end'.<sup>686</sup> Such had already been the thinking of Wildman when he was elected as an 'Agitator' in the army. Not surprisingly, it is assumed, and most likely rightly so, that it was Wildman that authored most of *The Case of the Army Truly Stated* that led to the publication of the first *Agreement of the People* issued in 1647 that then precipitated the Putney Debates held at the

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<sup>684</sup> Wildman, *Discontent*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 426.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Putney, between the 28th of October and 11th of November, 1647.

The formal beginnings of the ever growing political and spiritual connection between the rank and file of the army and the 'Levellers' are best exemplified in *The Case of the Army Truly Stated* that indeed gives us the best account of the grievances of the army. As the authors of the *Case* observe, 'the Army hath waited with much patience to see their common grievances redressed and the rights and freedoms of the nation cleared and secured'.<sup>687</sup> The rank and file of the army in this text are consciously portrayed as the self-appointed voicers of popular causes and interests. The army, so the *Case* argues, at first took up arms 'in judgment and conscience for the people's just rights and liberties, and not as mercenary soldiers, hired to serve an arbitrary power of the state'. Moreover, we are told how the army 'proceeded upon the principles of right and freedom, and upon the law of nature and nations'.<sup>688</sup> However, this has all been to no avail. For one thing, 'in respect to the rights and freedoms of ourselves and the people ... there is no kind or degree of satisfaction given'. Secondly, 'no determinate period of time' has been set 'when the Parliament shall certainly end' and the house remains unpurged. The army case also stresses how 'the present manner of actings of many at the [Army] Headquarters' shows that nothing has 'been done effectually, either for the Army or the poor oppressed people of the nation' but also that nothing is likely to be done 'the present manner of actings of many at the Headquarters ... been done effectually, either for the Army or the poor oppressed people of the nation'. As a result of such complete betrayal of the original path that 'no provision for apprentices, widows, orphans, or maimed soldiers' has been provided. And, what is more, people's rights and liberties, the true cause of the battle, remain unprotected and 'the free-born people of England should remain subject to such injuries, oppression and abuse, as the corrupt party in the Parliament then had attempted against them'. As a result, 'all promises of the Army' once fighting 'for the national interest, freedoms, and rights' had 'declined'.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Wildman, *Case of the Army Truly Stated*, in Woodhouse *Puritanism and Liberty*, 429.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

The sounding of the various grievances by the army was followed by a series of texts, including *A Call to All Soldiers Of The Army By The Free People Of England*, issued on 29 October 1647 and written again by John Wildman, where the army was reminded to ‘take heed of crafty politicians and subtle Machiavelians ... it being *high time* now to see actions, yea, and those constantly upright too’.<sup>690</sup> Amid the dramatic speed of change in political affairs, these various letters and pamphlets soon grew into a larger body of political demands that became known as the first *Agreement of the People* of which the first definitive text was produced in 1647 and the second in 1649, with a range of lesser texts published in between. Already in the first *Agreement*, the preliminary observation that no determinate date of the dissolution of the parliament was set now became a demand that ‘this present Parliament be dissolved upon the last day of September [of the following year], which shall be in the year of our Lord 1648’.<sup>691</sup> Importantly, this was not only to dissolve an old parliament but so as ‘to prevent the many inconveniences apparently arising from the *long continuance* of the same persons. True to this spirit, the *Agreement* also specified exact time of the parliamentary election that was ‘once in two years, upon the first Thursday in every second March’ precisely after the manner ‘as shall be prescribed before the end of this Parliament’.<sup>692</sup> Finally, this parliament was ‘to begin to sit upon the first Thursday in April following, at Westminster ... and to continue till the last day of September then next ensuing, and no longer’.<sup>693</sup> The *Agreement* was above all else a text enshrined in republican temporality, seeking not only reform in abstract terms, but a reform so set out in time as to render a republic possible. Now, the publication of the first *Agreement* resulted in the Putney Debates, of which we have rather scant evidence, for no recording took place since the 2nd of October, thus unfortunately leaving the last nine days of the heated debates at Putney to historical oblivion. However, what of the debate did survive enlightens our mind to a particularly novel development of a revolutionary nature.

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<sup>690</sup> Wildman, *A Call to All Soldiers Of The Army By The Free People Of England*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 439.

<sup>691</sup> *The Agreement of the People*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 443.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

The Putney Debates, or rather that part of it of which we have a record, developed around a number of fundamental issues. However, such was the intensity and gravity of the debates that it is fair to say, as Meiksins Wood has, that the debate in fact encompassed ‘the very foundations of political order and the system of property’.<sup>694</sup> Before exposing the chief tenets of the debate, however, we must first be in a position to understand the Leveller’s conception of man’s original station *in illo tempore*, at the beginning of time. For this is right at the heart of their revolutionary arguments sounded at Putney. There is no better place to start than John Lilburne’s text of 1646, *The Free-man’s Freedom Vindicated* which Wildman opened by stating how God, ‘the original fountain and cause of all causes’, had given man ‘sovereignty and ... endued him with a rational soul or understanding’.<sup>695</sup> Men were thus ‘by nature all equal and alike in power, dignity, authority, and majesty’ and none had ‘by nature any authority, dominion, or magisterial power’ over another. All power, Lilburne argued, other than the power ‘derived, or assumed by mutual consent and agreement’ was ‘unnatural, irrational, sinful, wicked, unjust, devilish, and tyrannical’.<sup>696</sup> Such had indeed been the behaviour of men who had assumed ‘to rule, govern or reign over any sort of men in the world without their free consent’. Such men, Lilburne complained, had sinfully tried to imitate God himself, as they were not content with their ‘first station’ and had tried to ‘assume unto themselves the office and sovereignty of God’ and ‘to be like Creator’.<sup>697</sup> This, however, was ‘the sin of the devils’, as the Bible surely taught.

Now, this argument was to find a revolutionary exposition in the discussion of practical politics at Putney. One of the fundamental things that the Levellers demanded was a reform of franchise — that Cromwell and Ireton would in fact enact, even if in a way unsatisfactory to the Levellers and even more so to the more radical Diggers. Now, the argument deployed by the in defence of the Leveller cause was that ‘the people of England, being *at this day* very unequally distributed’ ought to be ‘more indifferently proportioned, according to the number of inhabitants’.<sup>698</sup> This was in many ways a truly revolutionary

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<sup>694</sup> Wood, *Liberty and Property*, 234.

<sup>695</sup> John Lilburne, *The Free-man’S Freedom Vindicated*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 329.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>698</sup> *Agreement of the People*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 443.

demand, particularly so in the context of an already increased social base of the electorate that had been made possible 'due to an inflation that made property rights', an essential prerequisite for running for parliament, more inclusive. As a result, the political energy, and indeed weight, of the commoners reached hitherto unprecedented heights. As Plumb has observed, 'The situation in the counties as well as the boroughs changed out of all recognition from Elizabethan times, and we witness the birth of a political nation, small, partially controlled, but no longer coextensive with the will of the gentry'.<sup>699</sup> However, with *this* argument of the Levellers, if it were to prove successful, the state of popular democracy would in fact reach totally new heights. On the one hand, the argument could be interpreted as demanding a correction of some of the anomalies in the present electoral system. However, there was potentially far more to this argument, if it were to be followed to its logical conclusions. And the Commissary-General Henry Ireton, perhaps the most outstandingly bright mind of the time, promptly did so. Ireton did indeed see the revolutionary future implications of such an argument. As he declared at Putney, such demand made him 'think, that the meaning [of the proposal] is that every man that is an inhabitant is to be equally considered, and to have an equal voice in the election of those representers'. If this were to be the demand, 'then I have something to say against it'.<sup>700</sup> Ireton could not have been more apt in seeing through the Levellers' fundamental argument. So much was made clear to him during the very same next hour by the Leveller Colonel Rainsborough who pronounced some of the most remarkable words of the English Civil War period that are famous even today: 'really I think that the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he'. These emotional words were followed precisely by another manifestation of the Levellers' vision of man's station in time and history – as Rainsborough stressed, all power, if it were to be legitimate had to be derived by free consent of all men (and by this they actually meant men) living under such government.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> J. H. Plumb, 'The Growth of the Electorate in England from 1600 - 1715', *Past and Present* 45 (1969), 107.

<sup>700</sup> Henry Ireton, Putney Debates, in *The English Civil War and Revolution: A Sourcebook* (Routledge, 1998), 152.

<sup>701</sup> Thomas Rainsborough, *Ibid.*, 152.



The argument, then, was that *all men*, simply by virtue of being men and alive were eligible to have ‘a voice to put himself under’ whatever government one wished so to elect. If so viewed, it would then emerge that rights were inherent in men *as men* and not as property owners or men of ‘good birth’. Thus the proposal wished to overturn in its entirety the idea that financial and cultural capital was to determine franchise also. And at this point in argumentation, a most remarkable innovation occurred that would have far-reaching consequences in the history not only of Western political thought of the time to come, but also the practice of modern nation-states as well. This came from Henry Ireton, who himself engaged in the task of temporal analysis. ‘Give me leave to tell you’, Ireton replied, ‘that if you make this the rule, I think you must fly for refuge to an absolute *natural* right, and you must deny all *civil* right’.<sup>702</sup> What Ireton meant, in a truly republican temporal manner, was that the rights of the Englishmen were determined by the English constitution, itself a *historic process*. This, Ireton thought, endowed men with certain rights and privileges but equal franchise had never been one of them. If all men that were inhabitants were to be equally considered in matters of franchise, then Ireton had something to say against that. If, however, ‘it be only that those people [who were franchised] that by the civil constitution of this kingdom, which is *original* and *fundamental*, and beyond which I am sure no memory of record does go’. Exactly at this point, Ireton was interrupted by Cowling who remarked ‘Not before the Conquest’, to which Ireton returned saying ‘But before the Conquest it was so’. If the intention was, Ireton held, that the electors be those ‘that by that constitution that was before the Conquest, that hath been beyond memory’ then he had ‘no more to say against it’.<sup>703</sup> This is what Ireton meant by his hugely important separation of natural right from civil right. Civil rights did indeed issue from and since ‘time out of mind’ and were enshrined in the constitution as a living document. However, that to which the Levellers made recourse was never part of this constitution, either before or after the Conquest.

Now, the Levellers, as we know, repeatedly made claims based on *birthrights*, *ancient rights* (sometimes also *native rights*) from and since ‘time

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<sup>702</sup> Ireton, *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

out of mind'. In a way, then, Ireton's historical critique caught them short-handed. However, here too, the Leveller Wildman once again made recourse to the argument of the 'Norman Yoke'. The English Constitution being a living document, and precisely in this way a continuous historical process, its nature was determined by the ruling elites. These, however, had been none other than the tyrants who had usurped power and with it the ancient rights of free-born Englishmen. As Wildman declared, 'Our very laws were made by our conquerors'.<sup>704</sup>

What is of vital importance in this exchange between Ireton, representing the Army 'grandees', and the Levellers, represented most notably by Colonel Rainsborough and John Wildman is the birth of the language of *natural rights* that is introduced by Ireton's divorcing of *civil rights*, stemming from the living English Constitution, and *natural rights* representing more fundamental principles entirely immune from time. It is striking how here, too, two opposing political conceptions have two distinct temporal arguments in their service. On the one hand, there is the English Constitution, as a set of practices themselves claiming atemporality and *commonal adherence* by virtue precisely of this. However, so Ireton's claim goes, this constitution has been only what it has been and not what the Levellers would like it to have been through their temporal import of their own values into the continuous present of the evolution of the English Constitution. Ireton himself, willing to counter the revolutionary idea that would see the entire order of private property and political life debased, unwittingly provided a far more radical idea to the Levellers who were actually neither radical, nor willing to claim that much.

The argument based on the *principles of nature* or of *law of nature* was never fully developed at Putney, perhaps because it was never in the interests of the Levellers to seek such fundamentally radical arguments. However, this principle did not go entirely unnoticed or unexposed. One man, in particular, provided its fullest available exposition before Thomas Hobbes would do so far more powerfully and famously five years after that. Although Lilburne was no doubt the chief Leveller, perhaps the strongest of all Leveller attacks against the very essence of tyranny came in the work of Richard Overton, *An Arrow*

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<sup>704</sup> Richard Overton, *An Arrow Against all Tyrants* (Cambridge, 2002), 54.

*Against all Tyrants*, ‘shot from the prison of Newgate into the prerogative bowels of the arbitrary House of Lords’, on 12th October 1646. Here too, as in all radical thought of the time, the temporal argument was entirely vital to the argument. As Overton’s text promised from the very beginning, it would expose ‘the *original*, rise ... and end of magisterial power, the natural and national rights, freedoms and properties of mankind’.<sup>705</sup> As in Lilburne’s *Vindication*, here too a claim was made on behalf of the entire humankind stipulating that ‘by *natural birth* all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty and freedom’.<sup>706</sup> Overton designated humans as ‘the sons of Adam and observed that ‘from him have [we] legitimately derived a natural propriety, right and freedom’ that were ‘the just rights and prerogative of mankind’. A fundamental part of such *innate* and *original* rights and prerogatives was to Overton ‘an individual property by nature’. Such ‘self-propriety’ was the very defining original trait of all humankind, ‘or else could [man] not be himself’. To invade or usurp any of it was a ‘manifest violation and affront to the very principles of nature’.<sup>707</sup>

Having established the sanctity of inviolable original rights, the privilege of all men by nature, Overton then proceeds to list a number of grievances and political misdeeds all carried out in defiance both of natural rights of humankind and the just privileges inherent in the very humanity of humankind. ‘Contrary to all precedents’, Overton exclaims, ‘the free commoners of England are imprisoned, fined and condemned by them’. This, moreover, was happening ‘against the express letter of Magna Carta’, namely of the Chapter 29 which declared that no man ‘shall be passed upon, tried, or condemned, but by the lawful judgement of his equals, or by the law of the land’ [magna].<sup>708</sup> Founding his argument on Coke’s analysis of Magna Carta, Overton demanded that three chief principles be defended at all costs. Firstly, ‘That no man be taken or imprisoned, but *per legem terrae*, that is by the common law, statute law, or custom of England’. Secondly, no man shall be ‘dispossessed of his freehold (that is, lands or livelihood) or of his liberties or free customs’. Thirdly, ‘No man shall be in any sort destroyed’ unless it be

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<sup>705</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>706</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>707</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>708</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 58.

according to ‘the law of the land’. Yet, Overton himself knew far too well that this was far from being the everyday political practice. He had himself had, without ‘legal conviction preceding’, his home invaded and his personal liberty violated. Therefore, he ‘denied subjection to these lords and their arbitrary creatures’ and in so doing secured himself a place at Newgate Prison whence he wrote these very lines.<sup>709</sup>

Not only have the political elites, save those elected by the commons one of whom Overton is in fact addressing in this letter, betrayed the promise of a perpetual republic, some of them, namely the House of Lords, even appropriated ‘to themselves the title of the supremest court of judicature in the land’. One such person was Lord Hunsden, a man of ‘a most illegal, anti-parliamentary’ thinking. The likes of Hunsden forgot, Overton stressed, was that the power they wished to appropriate ‘for more than may be granted to the king himself; for the parliament, and the whole kingdom whom it represents, is truly and properly the highest supreme power of all others — yea above the king himself’. Here and with this, Overton stayed true to his promise that he would expose the origin of truly legitimate government. This, as we have already seen, was necessarily a government ‘derived, or assumed by mutual consent and agreement’ and by the ‘free consent’.<sup>710</sup>

However, later in the same text, Overton is in fact asserting a bolder claim with a foundation in *timelessness* – namely, in the principles of nature. ‘For it is’, Overton observes, ‘nature’s instinct to preserve itself from all things hurtful and obnoxious; and this in nature is granted of all to be most reasonable, equal and just’.<sup>711</sup> Similarly, in a later text of 1647, Overton stressed how in fact ‘reason hath no precedent; for reason is the fountain of all just precedents. Therefore, where that is, there is a sufficient and justifiable precedent’. The might of reason was thus indeed powerful. And one of the most reasonable was, as Overton would write in *An Appeal from the Commons to the Free People* ‘a firm law and radical principle in nature engraven ... by the finger of God in creation’ that every living being ‘defend, preserve, guard, and deliver itself from all things hurtful, destructive and obnoxious’ to the best of one’s ability. Thence followed a principle of nature that by legitimacy of natural law

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<sup>709</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>710</sup> Overton, *The Freeman’s Freedom Vindicated*, *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>711</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 55.

itself atemporal, one 'by all rational and just ways and means possibly he may, save, defend, and deliver himself from all oppression'.<sup>712</sup> And Overton deemed 'the unreasonable oppression of myself, my wife, brother, and children, under the arbitrary tyranny of the Westminster Lords' as the violation precisely of the natural law thus proceeding to defend the 'natural radical principle of reason'.<sup>713</sup>

In short, then, Overton deployed a Christian temporal argument while, in a manner typical of both Levellers and Diggers, he also imported his own political contents into the nature of *all time* since the original moment of being a free-born Englishman. Both 'self-proprietty' and other inviolable rights were guaranteed to all humans *naturally* by virtue of their being human. And it was 'from this fountain or root' that 'all just human powers take their original'.<sup>714</sup> Here, then was one of the very first arguments for popular sovereignty. This, Overton further qualified to observe that such power was granted not from God – as the most common defence of royal prerogative had it – but instead 'by the hand of nature, as from the represented to the representers'. In short, it thus followed that 'the sovereign power is not originally in the king or personally terminated in him' but that 'the king at most can be but chief officer or supreme executioner of the laws'. Therein lay indeed the very essence also of just power. If unjust was all power derived without free consent, just was power 'betrustrusted, conferred, and conveyed by joint and common consent'.<sup>715</sup> This argument too was based on the *natural, atemporal rights* of men: for all men have 'individual propriety by nature' and again 'by *natural birth* all men are equal, and alike born to like propriety and freedom, every man by natural instinct aiming at his own safety and weal'. In a sentence of striking importance, Overton first apologises for disrespecting parliamentary precedent of addressing the people, and immediately observes how reason should need no precedent to be valid. Yet, what is most striking is how he also conceives of his act as an address not *from* the sovereign to the people but as an address *to the sovereign* fountain of all legitimate power.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>713</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>714</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>715</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>716</sup> Overton, *Ibid.*, 67.

The thought of John Milton serves as the perfect example of the various strands of thought upon time available during these heated decades.<sup>717</sup> We shall thus conclude this chapter with an examination of Milton's temporal and political thinking. Perhaps the most classic statement of the reformed theology, and indeed highly Protestant ethics, is presented in John Milton's *A treatise of Civil Power*, published in February 1659, in defence of the freedoms of worship and speech from the encroachments of the *Interregnum* government led at that time already by Richard Cromwell. This is an important text of the period not only by virtue of its exposition of the reformed Christian attitude to matters, but also because it shows perfectly the divergence between various sorts of republicanism during the English Civil Wars. Indeed, even during the *Interregnum*, the sort of republicanism that eventually caused the regicide was by no means Milton's republicanism with its emphasis on the classical republican notion of freedom and the resultant freedoms of conscience, religion and speech.<sup>718</sup>

The chief authorial intention in *Civil Power* was to uphold what Milton believed to be a specific kind of liberty – 'Christian liberty'. This liberty had no need of a source other than, and greater than, God himself. The Scriptural evidence too, upon which Milton relies heavily, was ample. Now, religion, Milton argued, pertained to 'such things as belong chiefly to the knowledge and service of God: and are either above the reach and light of nature without revelation from above and therefore liable to be various understood by humane reason'. For Protestants, unlike Catholics, the sole source for the interpretation of religion was the Holy Scripture itself and 'the illumination of the Holy Spirit' necessarily for the right interpretation of God's will. However, a problem of epistemic nature then arose, for 'no man can know at all times [for this divine illumination] to be in himself'. None, then, could 'in these times ... be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion' to anyone other than themselves and their own conscience.<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> While chronologically Milton ought to be discussed later, the intention is to devote the entire chapter to the study of Hobbes separately. Therefore, a discussion of Milton is offered here.

<sup>718</sup> On this, see the exhaustive study: D. Armitage, A. Himy, Q. Skinner (eds.), *Milton and republicanism* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. "Milton's Classical Republicanism", 3-24. On the republican idea of freedom see, Petit, *Just Freedom*.

<sup>719</sup> Milton, *Treatise of Civil Power*, 2-5.

The civil powers, Milton stressed, had even less of a legitimate claim to establish the right interpretations of the doctrines, than did the churches. If the Papist was deemed by the Protestants 'so ignorant and irreligious ... to think himself discharged in Gods account, beleeving only as the church beleevs', how much stranger was it then for Protestants themselves to follow the creed established not by even a church but the state? This was particularly so for the possibility that those 'less experience'd in religion, may come to govern or give us laws' was rather high, thus rendering Milton's publication 'a timely instruction'. It was, therefore, 'with good cause ... the general consent of all protestant writers that neither traditions, councils nor canons of any visible church ... but the scripture only can be the final judge ... in matters of religion'. For Christ alone had been 'the only lawgiver of his church' and the pope was 'an antichrist because he has established himself' in the place of true messiah. The truth of the Gospel had been 'supported by the same divine presence and protection' for a thousand years and to believed it would be otherwise now was to be devoid of all inward belief. In short, 'the civil power hath neither right nor can do right by forcing religious things ... by violating the fundamental privilege of the gospel, the new-birthright of everie true beleever, Christian libertie'.<sup>720</sup>

Such a novel approach to the Bible, that essentially entailed one's own *inner faith* and personal interpretation of the Christian truths, is to be seen in almost all authors of our period, among them the Levellers, Winstanley and the Diggers and even in the thought of Hobbes. In fact, Milton's argument in *A Treatise of Civil Power* is not only a response to the views of Hobbes on religion, which we are about to examine, and particularly the exclusive right to the interpretation of the Scriptures that Hobbes accorded entirely and solely to the sovereign some 8 years before the publication of *A Treatise* in his *Leviathan* of 1651. But the approach itself, a new reformed theology that entailed a novel sense of personal responsibility and in many cases an urge to change the state of things was indeed crucial. For this eventually meant the emergence also of a far richer range of apocalyptic and political beliefs than had ever existed; there were, indeed, as many of them, as there were preachers and readers of the Bible and their listeners and followers.

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<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Interestingly, Milton's thought, too, provides an instance of temporal thought that is characterized by its *restorationist* zeal. We have seen much of this in our discussion of the thought of English republicans: Levellers and Diggers. Let us first look at one particularly curious manifestation of the same tendency. In 1644 Milton published his defence of liberty and, in particular, of the freedom of the press. Like Francis Bacon generations earlier and his contemporary Margaret Fell, Milton also spoke of a lengthy apostasy that had divided the perfect truth of the apostolic age 'into a thousand pieces'. This was the truth that had once been in 'a perfect shape most glorious to look on', yet as a result of the apostasy, not in one piece anymore.<sup>721</sup> Milton's argumentation at this instance was remarkably similar to the temporal-epistemological argument advanced by Francis Bacon. Bacon, as we have seen, was acutely aware of the sinful human history that had resulted in the diminishing of wisdom. However, Bacon nevertheless believed that wisdom had nevertheless come down the river of time, preserved as it was in various branches of knowledge. He too, in his *Grand Restoration*, sought to unite these various disparate branches of knowledge into a single and perfect whole. In a similar argument, though one tailored to the specificities of his own context, Milton claimed that if the 'Truth' of the apostolic age, now dispersed into various truths, were to be restored censorship had to be eradicated and humans given the liberty to express themselves and introduce 'new light'.<sup>722</sup>

As Milton argued in his *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, men were 'borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself'. By virtue simply of being humans, they were already in a position of 'priviledge' above all other creatures and thus 'born to command and not to obey'.<sup>723</sup> Now, for that Milton has thus sometimes been portrayed as a thinker with "affinities" to the tradition of the English radical democrat political thought and action. Christopher Hill has read him as 'living in a state of permanent dialogue with radical views which he could not wholly accept, yet some of which greatly attracted him'.<sup>724</sup> However, this might be a grossly exaggerated view. Milton

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<sup>721</sup> John Milton, "The Search After Truth", in Craik, *Prose*, 45.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>723</sup> Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (London, 1650), 8.

<sup>724</sup> C. Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London, 1977), 113-4.



was no democrat;<sup>725</sup> he was an elitist who, as Filmer would correctly observe at the time, when speaking of ‘people’ indeed had a much smaller groups of ‘the uprighter sort’ in mind.<sup>726</sup>

Now, in a typical move, Milton then proceeded to designate Adam’s transgression as the point of temporal departure after which wrong and violence make appearance. It is at this point, however, that men realise the need ‘to bind each other from mutual injury, and joyntly to defend themselves against any that’ should oppose such agreement. We are then told a conjectural history of the appearance of magistrates and officers of all sorts who initially rule well only to be corrupted by the thirst for more power. It is then that people realise ‘the danger and inconveniences of committing arbitrary power to any’ and invents laws either ‘framed, or consented by al’ in order to confine the realm of authority.<sup>727</sup> It is in this manner that Milton supports the chief parliamentary doctrine of *salus populi suprema lex*. For indeed, ‘power of Kings and Magistrates is nothing else, but what is only derivative, transferr’d and committed to them in trust from the People’.<sup>728</sup> This is a classic statement of the Parliamentary position that intended to counter Royalist claims that ‘the laws of the land invested sovereignty in the king, whilst Parliament figured as a mere body of counsel’.<sup>729</sup> Such a view, to be sure, had a very direct *temporal* implication also that Milton proceeded to stress. Since power had come from people as a collective entity, ‘originally and *naturally* for their good in the first place’ and not that of the ruler, then it logically followed that the people may ‘as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him’.

Such ‘right of choosing, yea of changing their own Government’ was, moreover, by the grant of God himself as evidence in *Deut 17:24*. If the King of Spain had no right ‘to govern us at all’, Milton exclaimed, why should it be that the King of England has any more right ‘to govern us tyrannically’?<sup>730</sup> While

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<sup>725</sup> On this see a highly useful comparative exploration: W. Chernaik, “Civil Liberty in Milton, the Levellers and Winstanley”, in A. Bradstock, *Winstanley and the Diggers* (New York, 2000).

<sup>726</sup> See R. Cox, “John Milton’s free citizens and the politics of family”, in Q. Skinner and M. van Geldern (eds.) *Freedom and the Construction of Europe* (Cambridge, 2013), 148.

<sup>727</sup> Milton, *Tenure*, 10.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>729</sup> R. Cox, “John Milton’s free citizens and the politics of family”, in Q. Skinner and M. van Geldern (eds.) *Freedom and the Construction of Europe* (Cambridge, 2013), 146.

<sup>730</sup> Milton, *Tenure*, 21.

the Spanish monarch would be bound by no laws and covenants, 'what hath a native King to plead, bound by so many Covenants, benefits and honours to the welfare of his people', to continue 'for his own wills sake entirely unaccounted?'<sup>731</sup> Kingship so portrayed was thus a temporal kingship, subject to conditions. Its time was legitimate only insofar as it met certain criteria. However, upon the failure to meet such criteria, it might legitimately be deposed. Such was the tenure of kings and magistrates. And it could, to be sure, prove to be rather short-lived:

when Kings or Rulers become blasphemers of God, oppressors and murderers of their Subjects, they ought no more to be accounted Kings or lawfull Magistrates, but as privat men to be examin'd, accus'd, condemn'd and punish't by the Law of God, and being convicted and punish't by that law, it is not mans but Gods doing<sup>732</sup>

Now, Milton published these lines two weeks *after* regicide. Traditionally, it has been argued that the authorial intention was to not so much to declare that the king was 'guilty as charged, but that the Parliament had the right to prosecute him'.<sup>733</sup> And Milton too would later remark how his intention with this piece had been 'to reconcile men's minds, rather than to determine anything about Charles'.<sup>734</sup> However, this view is debatable, for Milton's views exposed in *Tenure* had first been put forward years earlier by Henry Parker in his *Observations upon some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses* a week after the king's 'Answer' was published. That Milton later withdrew his fervour, or at least modified the heated sentiment is not surprising at all. Milton spent the last fourteen years of his life under the Restoration monarchy. Milton in the later years was never Milton the author of *Eikonoklastes* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistraetes*. Ashton has better appreciated this trajectory in Milton's rather tragic fate, aptly observing how when the author of these very works 'comes to speak in the voices of Sir Edward Dering, the authentic conservative voice of the Country ... revolution

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<sup>731</sup> Milton, *Tenure*, 21.

<sup>732</sup> Milton, *Tenure*, 52.

<sup>733</sup> T. N. Corns, *John Milton: the Prose Works* (New York, 1998), 67-75.

<sup>734</sup> Milton quoted in J. Shawcross *John Milton: The Self and the World* (University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 105.

has indeed been achieved. But it is the revolution of a wheel that has come full circle'.<sup>735</sup>

The same mood towards time and history, coming from Milton himself, is to be seen in his poem "On Time". In that poem, Milton is markedly spiteful towards time. 'Fly envious *Time*', he calls upon the evil agent of history, 'till thou run out thy race', adding revengefully. Thus here too, in what is a continuation of a broader literary tradition upon time, we see the dual nature of time as at once an agent that is envious and devouring its own children as in the myth of Cronos and as a force that is itself, though slowly, *being* devoured by something greater than it. This is God, the author and owner of all time under whose leadership time and history shall transpire into eternity. Milton does his best to present time as cheap and vulgar, for what is devours so greedily is 'no more then what is false and vain ... meerly mortal dross'. This process might look to be horrifying, but in reality, Milton tells time, 'so little is our loss, so little is thy gain'. For no matter how much time devours, eventually 'long Eternity shall greet our bliss, With an individual kiss'. Eternity shall be such period when 'Truth and Peace and Love shall ever shine ... Triumphant over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time.'<sup>736</sup> In this markedly Christian, republican and civic calling that wishes to see the end of vulgar change and the dawning of such period that knows nothing but perfect bliss and *stasis* and knows no chance and change, Milton shows a lot of his own inner disposition to the course that vile time had taken before his very own eyes. The hope, from now on, rested in eternity.

## Who's Time?

In this chapter, we have explored a rich variety of traditions of thought and many authors in the period between 1640 and 1660: self-proclaimed saints, missionaries, parliamentarians, feminist Protestants, anti-Royalists in general and Diggers and Levellers in particular. Yet, perhaps the single most important conclusion that emerges is not in the form of a concrete answer about *the* dominant language of time, but instead that there was a very rich *variety* indeed of political languages of time in these most turbulent years of

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<sup>735</sup> Ashton, "Tradition and Innovation", 221.

<sup>736</sup> Milton, "On Time", accessed at [<http://www.bartleby.com/4/205.html>].

the English Civil War. The value of history, as we have already observed in the previous chapter, is above all else not in fitting the story of the times past under a single umbrella and explain it with a single explanatory apparatus but in uncovering the *variety* and *plurality* of human thoughts and behaviours of the past. This is not to say that there was no similarity whatsoever. Quite on the contrary, we have in fact uncovered how the *paradigm* of temporal thought deployed by people very different from one another was in fact remarkably similar. However, there is a substantial difference between a *paradigm* and what we call a *political language of time*, the latter being not only about *the way* of looking at time in its various manifestations, but *using* that outlook, whatever its nature, in order to activate a political message. That we have sought not only how people looked at time paradigmatically, but also how they then put such an outlook in the service of their present and future causes has been our fundamental approach throughout the previous chapters as well. And here too, it is while remaining true to this fundamental approach that we see paradigmatic similarity attended by a rich political variety.

At the paradigmatic level, we have indeed witnessed a remarkable continuation in an age of profound ruptures. This, to be sure, we have uncovered to have been not only an English, but a broader European way of thinking manifest in the thought of Raleigh and Bacon, much as in that of Petau in France. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that at the very heart of the rich range of disputes that made up the English Civil Wars were above all else competing ideas of time. On the one hand, there was the allegedly divinely ordained time of kingship with the typical claim to atemporality; and, on the other hand, there was the competing republican temporality that sought to master contingency and in so doing extinguish arbitrariness. However, the latter itself found expression in various equally competing languages of time, as the Levellers built their argument around the concepts of *ancient rights*, *birthrights*, *memory* and *custom*, while the Diggers, the more radical politically and the more radically in their political language of time as well, went even further beyond to the very point of Creation demanding the *restoration* of the original moment of Creation that would lift the Creation out of the bondage under temporal debris – the result of time. This they saw as

characterised by a perfect social, economic and political equality – at that, a truly communist equality.

Now, apocalyptic mode of temporal thought can neither be divorced from any of these various movements, nor separated as autonomous. This is why we have exposed it separately at the beginning, also observing how its dominant paradigm – importantly, the Biblical and Christian and thus a profoundly influential one – is to be seen as having influenced to varying degrees the thoughts and practices of each and every one of these groups and individuals at large.

Yet another and no less important role that this turbulent decade played would, in fact, to become clearer – and perhaps especially so to a study of temporal perceptions in times of crises – in the following decade. This shall form the subject of our study in the chapter that follows. Before that, however, a summary of some of the broader contributions of this turbulent decade to the coming one is in order. Firstly, notable is the emergence of the language of rights and of the idea of popular sovereignty precisely as part of a temporal argument. Moreover, it is especially striking to observe how as part of the mid-seventeenth century understanding of sovereignty, in the thought of the Leveller Lilburne in particular, the idea of Divine sovereignty might be seen as figuring. Sovereignty, we are told, was granted by God to man directly and that was man's 'first station'. All legitimate sovereignty was thus to be by 'free consent' between men each already in possession of divinely granted self-propriety. This, as we shall see in the following chapter, was a paradigm that far from disappearing, found a new though a cardinaly different expression.

Secondly, it was this period that left an ample body of thought and practice in the tradition of apocalyptically fueled political radicalism. This was attended by millenarian psychology that relied on the psychological and intellectual perception of the *shortness of time* upon which all totalitarian experience has ever since based its rule. This, then, was essentially the Christian mode of temporal *state of exception* as a tract of time in crisis, in anticipation of an imminent judgment and the ultimate dawning of eternity. It was precisely in this tradition of thought that Milton observed how God 'shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and mild

monarchy through heaven and earth'.<sup>737</sup> To be sure, something remarkably similar would in fact happen, yet God would have very little to do with that. Secondly, it was this decade that provided – most likely accidentally – the contrasting language of *natural rights* and *birthrights* of 'free-born Englishmen'. This, too, as we are about to see would soon find a comprehensive resonance in the most important political work of the decade about to dawn. It was indeed the turbulent decade of the English Civil War that provided some of the most influential paradigms that, somewhat paradoxically, a man of very different political tastes would subvert and exploit in the service of his own political preferences. This man was Thomas Hobbes.

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<sup>737</sup> John Milton, *The Deliverance of England*, in Henry Craik (ed.), *English Prose* (London, 1916). Vol. II.



## Chapter V

### The Artificial Eternity – The Birth of Leviathan

Thomas Hobbes spent much of this turbulent time in the safety of Paris. Yet, he was acutely aware of all the occurrences of the revolutionary present and the political ideas of the English Revolution. His intimate awareness of the wartime political languages and events is evident in his own conscious refutation of many of these arguments. As we shall argue in this chapter, among the political languages refuted by Hobbes in order to construct a new grand political project were also various understandings of time then available. For the sort of philosophy that they imparted represented a hindrance to the complex Hobbesian project. This project would encompass at once various corridors of thought and revise views upon religion and morality, much as about historical change and politics in time. As we shall argue in what follows, these revisions were a part of the same grand project that Hobbes elaborated with meticulous care and precision.

Apart from his famous political works, Hobbes also wrote a range of other historical, scientific and philosophical texts. His *De Cive* (1642) and later *Leviathan* (1651) are only two more famous texts from among a broader corpus of texts. The early Hobbes is traditionally interpreted as the historian, while the later Hobbes as a *philosopher*. There is certainly some truth to such interpretation, for the younger Hobbes might indeed be seen as labouring in the more traditional humanistic understanding of history that conceived of the function of history as a didactic genre.<sup>738</sup> However, as we shall see, Hobbes never really abandoned *historical* thinking even in his later and truly more philosophical years. On the very contrary, here we argue that much of Hobbes's later *philosophical* thought is at the same time remarkably *historical* – and indeed grounded on an intimate understanding at once of historical

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<sup>738</sup> See L. Borot, "History in Hobbes's Thought", in T. Sorell (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), 305–328.



change, of the historically problematic role of religion in the fate of a civil order and of the need of collective morality to ensure the same noble end. These priorities are themselves derived from Hobbes' own reading and understanding of history, of its ways and creators – particularly in the context of the rich fabric of reasons that Hobbes deemed to have led to the Civil War in England. Hobbes, too, like Machiavelli, might also be seen as *doing something* against each of these particular malaises in order to ensure the contrary outcome, that is – civil peace and order.

Prior to examining the thought of Hobbes in particular and its temporal implications and arguments, we should first attend to the broader context. When Hobbes wrote his *De Cive* in 1642, England was a very different place compared to what it was by 1651 when he completed *Leviathan*. By the time the exiled monarchist finished writing, the king was dead and the monarchy abolished along with the House of Lords and the established church. The very traditional fabric of England had been torn apart. For the first time in the long history, England was now a republic, even if only temporarily, for another two years when a new kind of monarchy, though disguised in the republican clothes, would dawn upon England as Cromwell became the Lord Protector. Far from pursuing the civic virtues of Republican Rome, or Republican Florence for that matter, Cromwell's favourite ideal past was that of Queen Elizabeth's reign. However, England was not the only place that was different. So, too, was in fact the whole of Europe.

In the previous chapter, we have already examined the context of the English Civil War that no doubt had unparalleled influence upon Hobbes's political thought presented in *Leviathan*. However, it would seem to be wrong to limit Hobbes' context to the historical situation created by the English Civil War alone, much as it would be wrong to study Hobbes' ideas and pursuits in the discursive context solely of the political thought of the Civil War. For the English Civil War was by no means the only significant thing that was going in the years preceding Hobbes' *Leviathan*, much as the English political thought was by no means the single tradition that informed, positively or negatively, Hobbes' own outlook and with which he engaged. In what shall form briefer considerations, we shall thus first place Hobbes the thinker in the broader

contemporary European context, and his political thought in the broader tradition of thought upon time and politics.

## **The Quest for Perpetuity**

### **Bodin and the Perpetuity of Sovereignty**

Jean Bodin was a French political and legal thinker that authored a range of historical and political works, including *Method for the Easy Comprehensions of History* as well as most famously *Six Books on the Commonwealth*. Though a remarkable historical thinker of great value, Bodin is nevertheless best known for his elaboration of the theory of sovereignty. In the most simplistic sense, Bodin has been seen as the original author of a theory of sovereign absolutism, though such view has been fiercely contended by historians like J. H. M. Salmon.<sup>739</sup> Salmon has convincingly shown that Bodin was by no means a supporter of sovereign absolutism, instead stressing his character as a *constitutionalist* in a way similar to Bobbitt's reading of Machiavelli in the original interpretation of the Florentine's thought.<sup>740</sup> The interpretation of Machiavelli as a *constitutionalist*, which we have condoned and developed from the prospective of our study, has commendably encouraged a particularly sensitive reading of his context. So with Bodin's interpretation too as an author particularly preoccupied with *constitutional* matters, that is matters of a particular order, historians have called for reading 'Bodin's work on sovereignty in the context of the political turmoil of his time'.<sup>741</sup>

The readings of the context have themselves varied from one historical interpreter to another. For instance, it has been noted how Bodin wrote at the time when the very public order of Europe, 'based on the Holy Roman Empire and the idea of Christian universality, was in fact crumbling under the

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<sup>739</sup> See J.H.M. Salmon, "Theory of Sovereignty", in Jonathan Dewald (ed.) *Europe 1450-1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World* (London, 2004) 447-50.

<sup>740</sup> J.H.M. Salmon, "The Legacy of Jean Bodin: Absolutism, Populism or Constitutionalism", *History of Political Thought* (1996), 500, 522-3.

<sup>741</sup> W. P. Nagan, A. M. Haddad, *Sovereignty in Theory and Practice*, 439.

influence of the Reformation'.<sup>742</sup> In a similar vein, it has been argued that 'demise of the Holy Roman Empire diminished the sense of Christian Universalism in Europe'.<sup>743</sup> A range of internal causes have also been identified that all threatened the stability of the order and the very potential of *stasis* in time. Among them was, above all else, religious strife that had caused unending series of bloody civil conflicts and international wars.<sup>744</sup> It is in this regard that Julian Franklin has observed how Bodin's doctrine of absolute sovereignty was 'a product of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the Huguenot Monarchomach theories, to which Bodin was opposed'.<sup>745</sup> Andrew Edward has, in turn, argued that 'Bodin elaborated his theory of sovereignty in the context of an expanding commercial economy and a centralizing state wracked by religious conflict'. According to his reading, Bodin faced a constitutional dilemma since large parts of what is today France were either independent, or divided between the papal and imperial *loci* of power, thus causing 'the plethora of local customs and jurisdictions' that were inconsistent with the uniformity of law or royal command'.<sup>746</sup> In a similar vein, though for different reasons, Ellen Meiksins Wood too has argued that the chief problem that Bodin faced was primarily *constitutional* by nature. In contrast to England, where the traditional constitutional equilibrium was embodied by 'King-in-Parliament', France was a baronial monarchy with what may be called 'parcellized sovereignty'.<sup>747</sup>

Whatever interpretation one might prefer, all historical interpreters have essentially argued that the challenge before Bodin was to order into a stable form a body politic constituted of a series of unorganised particulars. The true identity of Bodin's mission is also demonstrated by the personality he assumed in his own present. He was neither a Huguenot nor one of the

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<sup>742</sup> E. R. Norman, *The Roman Catholic Church: an illustrated history* (University of California Press, 2007); see also P. H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire 1495-1806* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>743</sup> Nagan and Haddad, *Sovereignty*, 439.

<sup>744</sup> H. Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century", in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (Liberty Fund, 1967), 43-82; G. Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (Yale, 2014).

<sup>745</sup> J. H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), 41. The French word Monarchomaque (Greek *monarchos*, "monarch," and *makhomai*, "to fight") describes an opponent of monarchy.

<sup>746</sup> A. Edward. "Jean Bodin on Sovereignty." *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 2 (June, 2011), 79.

<sup>747</sup> Wood, *Liberty and Property*, 86.

Catholic League, but a *politique*, who ‘had the reputation of caring more for civil peace than doctrinal truth’.<sup>748</sup> And it was in the pursuit of that end precisely that sovereign power could be employed so as to moderate the various conflicts and resolve conflicting claims to sovereignty caused by the unorganised flow of particulars.

Let us, then, turn to some of the aspects of his political thought that are of high relevance to that of Hobbes also. Bodin had an acute sense of politics as a process in time and of the importance of various manifestations of *timing* in general. Commonwealths, Bodin argues, originate either ‘in a family which gradually grows into one’ or through a ‘specific agreement’ among ‘chance assemblage of men’.<sup>749</sup> It is noteworthy how Bodin too, like Machiavelli, Lipsius and Hobbes, designates a pre-political state of being as nothing but a *familial* condition, or a mere *chance* assemblage. As with any chance, this one too exists, to be sure, only in the realm of contingency that is then replaced by a *res publica* where political fate is no longer subject to chance but instead to rational calculation as far as possible. Similarly, like Machiavelli and Lipsius, Bodin is aware of the instability of a political form in time. As he observes, a commonwealth grows ‘little by little in strength till it reaches the height of its perfection, yet it may take far less time for it to see its own demise’. This, in a manner we have already encountered numerous times, is due to ‘the uncertainty and mutability of human affairs’ that make it impossible ‘that this pre-eminence should last long’.<sup>750</sup> Thus the problem that Bodin encounters is the problem that occasioned what Pocock calls the ‘Machiavellian Moment’, the scope of which we have expanded so as to show its authoritarian implications stemming precisely from the realisation that the pursuit of universal values in a finite political form that exists in time and is subject to its ravages. Even great commonwealths, Bodin argues, share the same potential fate and at that ‘very moment when they feel themselves most secure’, though this Bodin stresses is by no means a condemnation for the greater a commonwealth, the more trouble it invites in the form of enemies. In fact, as

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<sup>748</sup> Andrew, “Jean Bodin on Sovereignty”, 75.

<sup>749</sup> Jean Bodin, *Six Books on the Commonwealth* (edited by M. J. Tooley), Book IV, 110.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

‘a general rule the most famous commonwealths suffer the greatest changes of fortune’.<sup>751</sup>

Now, what Bodin specifically means by change is ‘a change in the form of government’. It was the *form of government* that marked either change or continuation. If the constitution of the sovereign body remains unaltered, ‘change in laws, customs, religion, or even change of situation, is not properly a change in the commonwealth’.<sup>752</sup> Interestingly, Bodin then notes how the time of a commonwealth’s life cannot be measured by the length of its *historical time*, but only by the length of its *constitutional time*, that is, to Bodin, the time of statehood in general. Concerned as he was, like Hobbes, with the true meaning of things Bodin observed how Paolo Manucci had inaccurately observed that Venice ‘has endured for twelve hundred years’. In that period, in fact, the alleged mythical continuity had been disrupted three times, because Venice’s constitution had changed that many times. Yet, this came as no surprise to Bodin who observed that it was ‘common knowledge’ how ‘Florence is the nursery of ingenious spirits’. Not only had ‘malady of ambition and sedition’ taken its toll, but the Florentines were *naturally* disposed towards change. They had ‘never ceased to change and change again, behaving like the sick man who keeps on moving from one place to another, thinking thus to cure the illness which is attacking his very life’. Crucially, Bodin immediately proceeded to observe how this only continued until ‘a physician was found to cure her of all her ills’. Florence indeed only found ‘the cure ... of all her ills’ when absolute authority was established. This, as we immediately recognise, is not only an echo of Machiavelli and his political thought (that we have uncovered by our expansion principally of the hermeneutics of his concept of *virtu* in and against time), but is a direct reference to Machiavelli’s thought and in particular to what we have named ‘Temporal Dictatorship’.

Let us, then, now concern Bodin’s idea of sovereignty. In a famous definition, Bodin designated sovereignty to be ‘that absolute and *perpetual* power vested in a commonwealth’. Interestingly, as far as Bodin was concerned, sovereignty must have been ‘perpetual because one can give

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<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

absolute power to a person or group of persons for a period of time', but after that time expires 'they become subjects once more'.<sup>753</sup> Moreover, unless a sovereign power is *perpetual*, even those who enjoy sovereign power 'cannot properly be regarded as sovereign rulers', but only as 'the lieutenants and agents of the sovereign rulers'. Their power shall continue for all time 'till the moment comes when it pleases the prince or the people to revoke the gift' previously given. Bodin's mention of 'the prince or the people' is by no means an accident. Sovereignty, as he conceives it, might rest in one person, or a group of many as it would be the case in the thought of Hobbes also. At any rate, what does matter is the *source* of sovereignty is, for therein really lies true sovereign power. In other words, of prime importance is not who *holds* sovereign power, for this might be subject to temporal limitations, but instead who *owns* it, like God owns time perpetually. This is, to be sure, a crucial distinction and Bodin himself goes at great lengths to demonstrate the same. It is due to the acceptance of the same principles, he observes, that the Roman Dictator was not in fact a sovereign.<sup>754</sup> Similarly, those who have absolute power to govern the commonwealth 'for a certain term only' are no more entitled to the title of the sovereign. Instead, they are only *agents* of sovereignty, appointed for whatever time to serve a particular office. Bodin is thus also the first to develop the rudiments of the notion of *representation* that would be systematised by Hobbes in the famous Chapter XVI of *Leviathan* 'Of Persons, Authors, and Things Personated'.

Also noteworthy is Bodin's conception of the relationship between law and custom. Now, both custom and statute law are binding. However, they originate from a different source, each of which sits in a temporal paradigm. Namely, custom is a creation of the people and 'establishes itself gradually over a long period of years, and by common consent' (or, at least, of the majority), while law is 'made on the instant and draws its force fro' the sovereign who 'has the right to bind all the rest'. Custom establishes itself and can by definition not need a compulsion, while laws are often enacted 'against the wishes of the subject'. However, there is a clear relationship of hierarchy of power between law and custom, for a law can defy custom, while a custom

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<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

cannot defy law. Since custom is the product of human thoughts and actions *across a long period of time*, its revision is in many ways a rebellion against *natural time*. It thus emerges that to Bodin, the sovereign has the role also of a historical messiah, who might *rewrite* all time by refashioning the historically generated boundaries of what is *legitimate* by an instantaneous decision of his own. Thus the sovereign claims ownership of time in two distinct ways: firstly, only they that possess *perpetual* power, limited by no prior condition, can justly be said to hold sovereignty; and secondly, only the sovereign has the power to alter the legal products of history itself in an instantaneous decision.

With these, Bodin anticipates the political thought of Thomas Hobbes in a number of important ways. It is striking how both authors wrote in contexts of severe crisis, during which sovereignty both in theory and even more so in practice was fractured and fiercely contested at the point of a sword. Both men stood apart of the major fractions that were engaged in a physical combat with one another and both sought to provide a cure to ‘the collapse of sovereignty that had caused both civil war and regicide’, of which ‘the political thought of the Interregnum was an attempt to fill’.<sup>755</sup>

We shall turn to a greater comparison of Bodin and Hobbes towards the end of this chapter. In the meantime, however, we might observe that the sort of arrangement that Bodin advocated was what would in fact be known as the ‘Hobbist’ argument during the Civil War. This, primitively put, was to advocate a variety of what would in the legal thought of later centuries be known as ‘legal positivism’ according to which the ‘goodness’ of laws is irrelevant in determining their legitimacy. Laws are laws and must be obeyed, no matter how *good*, or *right*, or *just* they are, or not. The Hobbesian idea of political obligation, itself of crucial importance to the whole of *Leviathan*, is in fact based precisely upon this ethics of legal positivism as well as the ‘Hobbist’ argument, in the context of the Engagement Controversy, that one should engage, that is swear loyalty to, with whoever (and whatever) the *de-facto* power might be, regardless of his moral and political attributes, provided it is able to defend the realm and the principles of natural law.<sup>756</sup> Moreover, and

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<sup>755</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1993), 148.

<sup>756</sup> Q. Skinner, “The context of Hobbes's theory of political obligation”, in *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2002), 264-286.

this is no coincidence, Hobbes' view on custom was remarkably similar to Montaigne's skeptical jesting about human enslavement to custom that we have already encountered and also in tune with Bodin's politics of custom. Hobbes, too, believed that men were disposed 'to make custom and example the rule of his actions' in such a manner as to define that which 'it hath been custom to punish' as unjust and vice-versa 'to think of the impunity and approbation whereof they can produce an example or ... a precedent'. This, to Hobbes is nothing but infantile; humans are truly 'like little children that have no other rule of good and evil manners but the correction they receive'. Yet, worse still, at least children are more 'constant to their rule', while adults are not so and 'appeal from custom to reason, and from reason to custom, as it serves their turn'.<sup>757</sup>

## Hobbes and History

It has often been argued that Hobbes was an 'unhistorical' thinker. This, it would seem, has stemmed primarily from Hobbes' conscious rejection of authorities and the wisdom of the past, much as from his construction of Leviathan as an unhistorical form.<sup>758</sup> In response, Pocock has rightly stressed 'there are simply too many ways in which a man's thought can be said to be "historical," and too many ways of negating each one of these statements'. Pocock then proceeds to call for a clearer definition of the sense or senses of 'historical' available to the contemporaries of that present.<sup>759</sup> Although his call is a noble and useful reminder of the historian's duties, it is no less important to explore the meaning of ideas by placing them in the context of *political practice* — an approach we have encouraged and indeed employed throughout this study. In fact, it is only in so doing that we may see how Hobbes' thought is attended by both 'historical' and 'unhistorical' streams of thought. As we shall see in what follows, Leviathan is actually 'unhistorical' and the reason for that is precisely that Hobbes is himself very 'historical'.

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<sup>757</sup> *Leviathan*, Chapter XI.

<sup>758</sup> Goldsmith has shown that there are ways in which Hobbes' thought may be said to be 'unhistorical'. See M. M. Goldsmith, *Hobbes' Science of Politics* (New York, 1966), 232-42, 251-2.

<sup>759</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago, 1960), 149.



Throughout his long and productive career, Hobbes produced a number of historical texts, ranging from the introduction to his own translation of Thucydides to *The Dialogue of the Common Laws of England*, *Behemoth*, and the *Historical Narration Concerning Heresy and Punishment Thereof*. In Hobbes' earlier humanistic years, he indeed 'kept in touch with history as a means of political education and as a literary genre'.<sup>760</sup> Now, Hobbes's *Leviathan* is a work not of history but of philosophy. Nevertheless, here too one encounters history and certainly historical thought though only indirectly. However, by 1651, history has become something else to Hobbes. In a manner markedly different from the earlier, sixteenth century usage of history that we have encountered in previous times, the new conception of history is something else still. History newly conceived is, to be sure, no longer a reservoir containing *exempla* that should be studied and copied.

Hobbes divided history two parts: natural and civil. Natural history was all 'History of such Facts, or Effects of Nature, as have no dependence on mans Will', while 'Civill History ... is the History of the *Voluntary* Actions of Men in Commonwealths'.<sup>761</sup> Now, in order to understand how Hobbes conceived of history — and this is central not only to this debate, but also to Hobbes' project at large — we should first understand how he conceived of knowledge. In Chapter IX of *Leviathan*, Hobbes classified all knowledge into two sub-categories: history and science. The first category, that of history, was one of the 'Knowledge of fact [and] is nothing else, but Sense and Memory'. In turn, the second category, that of science, is 'knowledge of the consequence of one affirmation to another'. Historical knowledge was 'Absolute Knowledge' and this was 'the Knowledge required in a Witness' in court, while scientific knowledge was 'Conditionall'.<sup>762</sup> History, then, was the 'Register of Knowledge of Fact'. But being 'nothing else but sense and memory', history faced a grave problem. For memory was nothing but imagination of a time past and was 'a decaying sense'. Indeed, 'the longer the time is, after the sight or Sense of any object, the weaker is the imagination ... [since] the continual change of man's body destroys in time the parts which in sense were moved: so that distance of

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<sup>760</sup> L. Borot, "Hobbes on History", in T. Sorell (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, 305.

<sup>761</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 9.

<sup>762</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 9.

time' obliterates memory also.<sup>763</sup> For that reason, history could never be either reliable or certain. While history was a register of facts, the very health of the memory of these facts — and thus of historical knowledge in general — was negatively dependent on the passage of time. This, to be sure, was to be the fundamental source of Hobbes' skepticism towards history.<sup>764</sup>

The very same would also be the source of Hobbes' skepticism towards the ideas of 'Prudence' and 'Foresight' also. As Hobbes observed, willing to know 'the event of an action', men thinks of 'some like action past, and the events thereof one after another supposing like events will follow like actions'.<sup>765</sup> This, we may remember, is exactly what Machiavelli had called for, lamentably observing how many only *read* histories, without ever trying to *replicate* the great deeds of the past. To Machiavelli, prudence was indeed the apt ability to forecast what may be about to happen based on the factual knowledge of what had happened in similar cases of the times past. It is this common sixteenth-century conception of history that comes under Hobbes' direct attack. He too calls these things 'Prudence', 'Foresight' and 'Providence', yet only to observe that 'such conjecture, through the difficulty of observing all circumstances, be very fallacious'.<sup>766</sup>

It is from Hobbes' epistemological skepticism that his historical skepticism also arises. History being 'a register of facts' the strength of which is based on 'nothing but sense and memory', historical knowledge, then, is only as reliable as is memory itself, which is highly unreliable. In a manner characteristic of almost all authors since the antiquarian times, Hobbes too denies the past and the future any material being. In a manner particularly reminiscent of Augustine's Aristotelian temporal moment, Hobbes observes how 'The Present onely has a being in Nature; things Past have a being in the Memory onely, but things to come have no being at all; the Future being but a fiction of the mind, applying the sequels of actions Past, to the actions that are Present.'<sup>767</sup> The future being non-existent, and the past securely in the realm of memory, itself constantly 'fading, old and past', one can only claim to be prudent but not

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<sup>763</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 2.

<sup>764</sup> Hobbes observes the same in relation to ancient authorities in the *Review and Conclusion*, *Leviathan*, 445.

<sup>765</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 3, 17.

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 3, 17.

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 3, 17.

actually have any certainty of being so. It may well 'be called Prudence, when the Event answereth our Expectation', Hobbes observes, 'yet in its own nature, it is but Presumption'. Anything short of scientific certainty is nothing but an intelligent guess, based entirely on probability. To be sure, a *true* foresight *does* exist, but it belongs 'only to [God] by whose will they are to come'.<sup>768</sup>

It thus follows that, firstly historical knowledge was uncertain and, secondly, history was created by humans who had various disparate passions each striving in a direction of its own. There could, in such a situation, be no order whatsoever. The challenge before Hobbes was accordingly to answer both malaise. The first was to overcome the uncertainty of history, and the second to create a new order of power. As Hobbes observed, 'whereas Sense and Memory are but knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable; Science is the knowledge of Consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another'.<sup>769</sup> The best kind of history, then, one necessary for attaining the right kinds of *political objectives* would be what Hobbes would create in the form of his *civil science* that was at once a history, thus starting from the *absolute knowledge* of the witness, and a science, complemented as it was by a series of deductions stemming from the 'knowledge of the consequence of one affirmation to another'.<sup>770</sup>

Now, as we have observed, the Hobbesian conception of history is two-fold. It may be history of nature, metals and all objective reality in general that exists independently of humans' will and there is also civil history that is entirely dependent on human free choice. This history, Hobbes stresses, consists of mens' *voluntary* actions. Now, it is in *this* sort of understanding of history that the problem lies. So viewed, it is men that have made history into what it is through their exercise of free will. However, they have not been entirely free in so doing, but instead controlled (and limited) by a whole range of vices and passions. They have been politically free to choose, but also free to be dominated by the so many vices. Therein has been the problem of thought and action, for men have thought in terms of their own egoistic interests and followed the appropriate courses of action, thus causing the vile existence of

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<sup>768</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 3, 17.

<sup>769</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 5.

<sup>770</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 26. See also, S. Finn, "Hobbes' Moral Philosophy", in *Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Natural Philosophy* (London, 2006), 64-84.

the state of nature. Men's reason is never strong enough to resist potential depravity caused by passions, vices and appetites that can pervert their wills. 'Hence the absurd and suicidal individual behaviors in the state of nature and the collective ones in the state of society'.<sup>771</sup> The problem, then, conceived from a different perspective is one of morality also. Namely, in the state of nature, during all time before statehood, there is no *common morality*, for there is neither a sense nor a perception of *common good*.

History, then, was made by humans with no shared sense of either past history or destiny. Serving instead their own particular memories, passions and egoistic interests, they all strive for self-perfection, oftentimes at the cost of the other. Hobbes, to be sure, believed that the idea of *good* was never universal, but relative in time and place. There was, in other words, no single *good*, let alone *common good*,<sup>772</sup> towards which all humans strove. Instead, the idea of a *good*, and a *common good*, varied greatly from one political community to another. There was indeed no pre-political *good* and could by definition be no pre-political *common good*. As opposed to the *individual morality* of the state of nature, the *collective morality* of the state of civility was indeed directly political and issued from the Civil Laws that 'is to every Subject, those Rules ... to make use of, for the Distinction of Right and Wrong'.<sup>773</sup> Common morality is thus born only with the birth of civil laws, that is then, Leviathan itself. However, the mere birth of a common morality is by no means sufficient to guaranteeing the health of the overall project. Or rather, such a common morality itself is nothing without a common agreement upon key ideas and doctrines. Good laws, Hobbes observes, are those laws that ensure peace and indisollution of sovereignty; they must be eloquent and simple to understand. History, too, for Hobbes was to be elocutive. Hobbes had praised Thucydides precisely for "truth and elocution". Notably, this is what Hobbes observed in so doing: 'For in truth consisteth the soul, and in elocution the body of history. The latter without the former, is but

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<sup>771</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

<sup>772</sup> Nothing was properly common before the time of statehood, for there was no idea of property. See Ch. 13: 'It is consequent also to the same condition that there be no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct'.

<sup>773</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 26. See also, S. Finn, "Hobbes' Moral Philosophy", in *Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Natural Philosophy* (London, 2006), 64-84.

a picture of history, and the former without the latter, unapt to instruct'.<sup>774</sup> Such harmony between the Hobbesian views of law and history respective are, to be sure, by no means coincidental. Instead, they both portray Hobbes' broad philosophy the product of which was in the event *Leviathan*.

The function of history, as Hobbes saw it, was not only to instruct men with the stories of the past, as was the custom in the *exemplary* genre that we have encountered in earlier times, but also and more importantly to restore true meanings and definitions to words and notions 'used by men to denote their moral and political relations to one another and to the state'.<sup>775</sup> This was an antidote to the various ills and poisons that a wrongful understanding of history and erroneous notions had occasioned. It is such connection between *historical knowledge* and *political thought* and *political action* that many interpreters have missed. In Hobbes' political thought, between *De Cave* and *Leviathan*, historical thought *becomes* at once a civil science and the recommended way of political life. Hobbes, in fact, shows such belief quite explicitly when he observes that 'in this time ... men call not only for peace, but also for truth'. At such a time, then, to offer true doctrines that 'tend to peace and loyalty' is like offering 'new wine, to be put into new casks, that both may be preserved together'. It is precisely in this manner that in Hobbes' thought historical knowledge that restores *true meanings* to words and notions becomes the basis of a civil science that in turn tends to civil peace and stability.

The issue of knowledge was indeed central to the entire project of *Leviathan* that cannot properly be read without appreciating the value of Hobbes' epistemological pursuits. The problem of human knowledge was indeed acute and at the very heart of the many political problems, generally as well as specifically in Hobbes' present. Now, Hobbes believed that men were driven 'to enquire into the causes of things' by 'anxiety for the future time'. This enquiry he deemed to be profoundly important, for it made men 'better able to order the present to their best advantage'. Moreover, such knowledge, essentially archaeological in nature, could be invoked 'in time of distresse' and

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<sup>774</sup> Hobbes, Introduction to Thucydides, xv.

<sup>775</sup> Borot, 'History', 317.

conversely be thanked 'in the time of an expected good success'.<sup>776</sup> In fact, the very trait that distinguished men from beasts was precisely their ability of some degree of 'foresight of the time to come' that beasts were wanting due to the lack of 'observation, and memory of the order, consequence and dependence of the things they see'. In contrast, man 'observeth how one Event hath been produced by another' and draws temporal conclusions concerning historical causation, remembering in them 'Antecedence and Consequence'.<sup>777</sup>

Thus the ability to *think historically* and draw temporal conclusions concerning the relationship between an antecedent and postcedent is a human virtue. It is also one that is deemed by Hobbes as necessary to the realisation of the 'expected good' future. On the contrary, Hobbes believes that those who made little or no enquiry into 'the naturall origin of things' were lacking the knowledge of good and evil in both the utilitarian and consequentialist sense. They thus also lacked the ability to weigh up the worth of political actions in terms of their inevitable consequences. Instead, in the course of explaining events, these men would then be subject to all kinds of ill-thinking and might be easily deceived. For they would 'suppose causes of [events]' when they 'cannot assure [themselves] of the true causes of things', make themselves believe the existence of 'several kinds of Powers invisible', or, worse still, 'trust to the Authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himselfe'.<sup>778</sup> This, Hobbes believes, goes for 'almost all men'. Human failure properly to comprehend history stems from a range of cases, among them from a lack of any 'rule to guess by' save by 'observing and remembering what they have seen to precede the like effect at some other time or times before, without seeing between the antecedent and subsequent event any dependence or connection at all'. In short, men only remember the identity of the past and then 'expect the like things to come', thus often giving way to superstitious hoping from things 'that have no part at all in the causing of it'. With a characteristic wave of irony, Hobbes ridicules men who are unable to explain 'how these Invisible Powers declare to men the things which shall hereafter come to passe', yet are 'very apt ... to take casuall things, after one or two encounters, for Prognostiques of the like encounter ever after' and, worse

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<sup>776</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII.

<sup>777</sup> *Ibid.*, XII.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 22.

still, to believe the ‘prognostiques’ of others whom they take to be authorities.<sup>779</sup>

## Hobbes and Religion

The issue of religion in the political thought of the Civil War has been a major bone of contention.<sup>780</sup> Religion, of course, remained at the heart of the comprehension of universe in the seventeenth century. After all, religion influenced the way in which ‘people understood the nature of the conflict: some called it a *bellum episcopale*, others a *bellum sacri*’.<sup>781</sup> Although religion had always been an issue of public import, in the decades preceding the Civil War it had never had such political gravity as it would do during the heated debates of the Civil War. Although the extent to which religion played a role in preparing the ideological ground for the onset of the Civil War has been a subject of debate among historians, it is generally assumed that the year 1625, when Charles II ascended the throne, was a departure in that ‘religion became a focal point for the opposition’. For Charles indeed inaugurated a series of moves in the realm of religion that immediately met with a Protestant opposition.<sup>782</sup> Among them were a series of controversial reforms concerning ceremonies, including the introduction of enhanced fabric of churches, more conservative practices and a greater control of conformity to standards.<sup>783</sup> However, it was religion that became, in 1637, the very source of a political crisis between England and Scotland as Charles’ England attempted to assimilate the worship of the Scottish Kirk with that of the Church of England. Radically embittered by the attempt of what John Morrill has called ‘ecclesial

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<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 22.

<sup>780</sup> On the issue of religion in the Civil War, see M. J. Braddic, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2008); on religion as a feature of historical explanations of the ideological origins of the Civil War, see G. Burgess, “Introduction: Religion and the Historiography of the English Civil War”, in C. W. A. Prior and G. Burgess (eds.), *England's Wars of Religion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 125.

<sup>781</sup> C. W. A. Prior, “Religion, Political Thought and the English Civil War”, *History Compass* 1 (2013), 24.

<sup>782</sup> See M. Kishlansky, “Charles I: A Case of Mistaken Identity”, *Past and Present*, 189 (2005): 41–80;

<sup>783</sup> K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), Ch. 6; K. Fincham and N. Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c. 1700* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 198–200.

acculturation',<sup>784</sup> early in 1638 the Scottish issued the National Covenant. In response, Charles sought to subdue the Scots through armed offensive only to be defeated by the Covenanters. Such was the gravity of the crisis that had sprung up on a religious basis that Charles even had to recall the Parliament for the first time since 1629. Already in the period between 1640 and 1642, and especially after 1642, religion had become an inseparable part of heated constitutional arguments that were carried out in the press, in the parliament and publicly.<sup>785</sup> Religion was indeed at the heart of the Civil War, which was never a political war alone, but also a religious one.<sup>786</sup> One critical contemporary observer, Thomas Hobbes, was well aware of this. To Thomas Hobbes, Prior aptly observes, 'the contest between kings and priests underpinned all of the wars in Christendom'.<sup>787</sup> As Hobbes himself wrote to Devonshire in the Summer of 1641, a whole army of religious types was to be seen in his contemporary England overtaken by crisis: papists, Anabaptists, Socianians, antinomians, sectaries. And they were all to be blamed for the disorders of the present times.<sup>788</sup>

Now, the issue of the relationship between Hobbes and religion has been a bone of scholarly contention for a very long time. Despite the dominance of Christian paradigms of comprehension and action, the seventeenth century did move away far more than any previous centuries 'from the recognition of a divine authority in the interpretation of human events to an exclusively naturalistic account of this world'.<sup>789</sup> Against the background of such a context, it should come as no surprise that a materialist political thinker who constructed a theory of sovereignty in no need of Divine endorsement should be seen as an atheist. This was indeed the charge levelled at Hobbes by his

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<sup>784</sup> J. Morrill, "A British Patriarchy? Ecclesiastical Imperialism Under the Early Stuarts", in A. Fletcher and P. Roberts (eds.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 209–37.

<sup>785</sup> J. Morrill, "The Attack on the Church of England in the Long Parliament, 1640–1642", in D. Beales and G. Best (eds.), *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 105–24.

<sup>786</sup> G. Burgess, "Wars of Religion and Royalist Political Thought", in Prior and Burgess, *England's Wars of Religion, 169–92*; E. Vallance, "Preaching to the Converted: Religious Justifications for the English Civil Wars", *Huntington Library Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 3/4 (2002), pp. 395–419.

<sup>787</sup> W. A. Prior, "Religion, Political Thought and the English Civil War", 24.

<sup>788</sup> Hobbes to Devonshire, 23 July 1641, cited in J. R. Collins, "Quentin Skinner's Hobbes and the Neo-Republican Project", *Modern Intellectual History*, 6 (2009): 343–67, at 360–61.

<sup>789</sup> Gabriel L. Negretto, "Hobbes' Leviathan. The Irresistible Power of a Mortal God", *Analisi e diritto* (2001), 179.



contemporaries.<sup>790</sup> At a time when Christian morality was still generally seen as the prime mover and motivator of human action, any depiction of man as an egoistically minded animal seeking nothing but his own self-interest would quite naturally invite criticism. Nor could the idea that the function of a political society was no greater than the protection of common peace (and not spiritual advancement) be entirely welcome.

However, like Hobbes' contemporary reception, modern historiography too has remained alarmingly uncritical, or utterly one-sided, in its approaches towards the matter of religion in Hobbes' political thought. That Hobbes devoted an entire Book III, 'Of a Christian Commonwealth', to the examination of the principles of Christian politics and religious matters in general has either been taken for granted, or explained away. No less significant a problem has been the scholarly pursuit of a wrong question, namely, if Hobbes himself was religious. Insofar as we are historians, and not psychologists or biographers, this question remains irrelevant. Regardless of what Hobbes personally believed, and disregarding the extent and intensity of his personal religiosity, what matters to an historian is what Hobbes actually did *write*; that is, then the extent to which religion might be seen as extant in his *political thought* and the exact forms in which it presents itself.

That Hobbes own two books have been disregarded has, albeit in a minor way, been his own doing. For at the very beginning of Book Three, Hobbes himself wrote how the origin, nature and the rights of the sovereign power, much as the obligations and liberties of the subjects that he had discussed in the Book Two of *Leviathan* were derived 'from the nature of Men, known to us by experience'.<sup>791</sup> It was this, especially at the very beginning of a book on Christian principles of politics, that greatly encouraged the traditional view, advanced by historians like Gauthier, that that Biblical interpretation plays only a secondary and inferior role in Hobbes' political thought.<sup>792</sup> It has similarly been argued that that the authorial intention in *Leviathan* was

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<sup>790</sup> S. I Mintz, *The hunting of Leviathan: seventeenth-century reactions to the materialism and moral philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1962); Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 347. See also J. Parkin, "BAITING THE BEAR: THE ANGLICAN ATTACK ON HOBBS IN THE LATER 1660s", *History of Political Thought*, 421-458.

<sup>791</sup> *Leviathan*, Book III.

<sup>792</sup> See D. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 178.

purely to strengthen rational and secular energies,<sup>793</sup> and that *Leviathan* is a work anticipating ‘rational enlightenment’. These views, however, are largely unfounded. As we have observed, religion was already by the 1640s at the very heart of political debates. Moreover, we have seen in the previous chapter how temporal philosophy of various social and political groups remained very much influenced by Christianity.

A contrary interpretation has been advanced by historians such as Timothy Fuller, G. L. Negretto and Paul Dumouchel.<sup>794</sup> Dumouchel has argued that in *Leviathan* ‘religion does not merely appear in the fourth and final part of the work, as an afterthought ... but intervenes right from the beginning in part one’. So the religious dimension ‘is one of the fundamental elements of mankind’ that is to be taken as such by the sovereign and the thinker alike.<sup>795</sup> Fuller has in turn observed that ‘the political issues of the new time are inseparable from its theological issues. Separating the first two parts of *Leviathan* from the latter two parts is arbitrary and misleading.’<sup>796</sup> In turn, Negretto has aptly observed how ‘in an age still dominated by a theo-centric conception of the universe, Hobbes used religious images and theological concepts’ in pursuit of his highly complex political objectives.<sup>797</sup> It is indeed a fact that Hobbes did write the Books III and IV of *Leviathan*, with the same luck with which he wrote the first two books. This, to be sure, was no coincidence but instead a conscious part of a grand project of a *tempus novum*. Thus Fuller is right to observe that the ‘issues of religion and theology run straight through the first thirty-one chapters of *Leviathan*’ and the rest of the two books make ‘frequent references back to the well-known arguments’ of the previous parts.<sup>798</sup>

In fact, the very same reasons for which Hobbes was deemed an atheist by his as well as our own contemporaries are also the very reasons for which he could be seen as remaining in the framework of Christian thought. His insistence that humans, far from being morally or theologically orientated, are

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<sup>793</sup> L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 198.

<sup>794</sup> Negretto, “Immortal God”; P. Dumouchel “Hobbes & Secularization: Christianity and the Political Problem of Religion”; Timothy Fuller, “The Idea of Christianity in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*”.

<sup>795</sup> Dumouchel, 40.

<sup>796</sup> Fuller, 141.

<sup>797</sup> Negretto, 183.

<sup>798</sup> Fuller, 141.

instead egoistic creatures constantly seeking one's own self-advancement had always been at the heart of the Christian philosophy that also saw human vice as the prime mover of the Fall and the subsequent start of eschatological history. Moreover, as we have already noted, it was at this moment that man, who had hitherto enjoyed the perfect bliss of *stasis* characteristic of eternity, had now entered time full of flux and change. The Hobbesian perception of man's nature is eminently Augustinian and, as we shall argue in what follows, in fact also has markedly Augustinian political implications. In both the accounts of Hobbes and Augustine, pride is the chief vice that has disastrous consequences. As Hobbes argues, 'perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death' is the reason why 'no society can be great and lasting, which begins from vain glory'.<sup>799</sup> And in the famous characterisation of the state of nature in *Leviathan*, it is pride and wrongful over-appreciation of one's own wits and capabilities stemming therefrom that nurtures the unfounded claim of ownership and is the cause of a constant anticipation of a battle. Augustine, too, was wholly against pride, for it 'hates a fellowship of equality under God and seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men, in place of God's rule'.<sup>800</sup> As in Hobbes' account of the state of war, in Augustine's thought too, pride is the central cause of perpetual conflict in human communities.<sup>801</sup> Such anthropological perceptions eventually lead Augustine to conceive of secular authority as an essentially oppressive phenomenon, vital to ensuring fallen humans co-exist together.<sup>802</sup> The same principle, to be sure, is to be found even earlier in Pauline thought that, for precisely the same reasons, calls upon humans to obey secular authority and even designates such obedience as a Christian virtue.<sup>803</sup> There is thus nothing un-Christian in the Hobbesian designation of man as a fallen and self-centred being. In fact, Hobbes is in perfect harmony with a corpus of Christian Fathers

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<sup>799</sup> *De Cive*, edited by Bernard Gert (Cambridge, 1991), 113.

<sup>800</sup> Augustine, *City of God* (New York, 1984), Book XIX, Ch. 12, 868.

<sup>801</sup> See R. Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism", in *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York, 1953), 119-46.

<sup>802</sup> Augustine locates the origins of political authority in the consequences of the Fall, see J.N. Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St. Augustine's "City of God"* (London, 1921), 6-63; Norman Baynes, "The Political Ideas of St. Augustine's "De Civitas Dei" *The Historical Association* (1968), 6-7; Herbert Deane, "The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine" (Columbia University Press, 1963), 39; Dino Bigongiari, "The Political Ideas of St. Augustine", *Essays on Dante and Medieval Culture* (Biblioteca dell "Archivum Romanicum," 1964).

<sup>803</sup> Cf. Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Michigan 2012).

of the Church. But importantly, as we shall see below, so are also the *political implications* of such anthropology. Not surprisingly, with the neglect of the role of Christianity and Book Three of *Leviathan* in Hobbes' thought, this aspect has also been generally neglected. Now,

Hobbes had a refined appreciation of the complexity of religion. Religion was indeed ambivalent, for it could legitimise the values of obedience, peace and civilised existence.<sup>804</sup> However, it could also nurture superstitious citizens whose reason was clouded. Hobbes believed that man's religiosity consisted of a number of things: firstly, the curiosity to explore the origin of things; secondly, the curiosity to locate the source of good and evil fortune; and thirdly, the 'fear of powers invisible'.<sup>805</sup> Now, in response to each impulse, a clever manipulator could find a whole plethora of suitable interpretations and versions and thus enslave reason all too easily. 'If this superstitious fear of spirits were taken away, and with it, prognostics from dreams, false prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civil obedience'.<sup>806</sup> And of clever manipulators, particularly the apocalyptically inspired ones, we have seen Hobbes himself remark that there was no shortage.<sup>807</sup> There were, after all, Puritan saints, millenarian preachers, as well as various other smaller groups, all of whom lay a claim at divine inspiration and prophetic abilities. To Hobbes, they were no less to be blamed for civil disorders, than were republicans and Schoolmen with their erroneous ideas that simple people had wrongly taken. The challenge before Hobbes, then, was twofold. On the one hand, it was 'to complement the rhetorical divinization of the state with a rational critique of the theological doctrines'.<sup>808</sup> This, in turn, was intended to ensure that Christianity was 'no longer mystified by the confusions and abstractions of the past, less dependent on claims of expertise they have no way to assess'.<sup>809</sup> On the other hand, it was to employ a politics of time so as to ensure the primacy of secular over

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<sup>804</sup> See *Leviathan*, Ch. 12.

<sup>805</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 12.

<sup>806</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 2.

<sup>807</sup> See above: Letter to Devonshire. See also, C. Hill, *Antichrist*.

<sup>808</sup> Negretto, "Irresistible Power", 184.

<sup>809</sup> Fuller, "Christianity", 142.

spiritual authority. This, to be sure, was a highly political objective at the very heart of the Hobbesian project of sovereignty.

Firstly, Hobbes launched an epistemological attack upon erroneous interpretation of the Scriptures, and indeed questioned the very possibility of deriving any certainty from such an act. The difficulty, more precisely, stemmed from the fact that men are in no position to know ‘whether the command be from God, or whether he that commandeth do but abuse God’s name for some private ends of his own’.<sup>810</sup> This was all the more so since, throughout the course of time, a range of erroneous interpretations of the Scriptures had originated, be it in the form of ‘Gentillisme’, or via the self-interested agents of the Roman Catholic Church. For there had indeed always been both in ancient times and ‘in the Church of Christ, false teachers that seek reputation with the people by fantastical and false doctrines’.<sup>811</sup> Both the curiosity about the origin of things, as well as anxiety about future times were fed by ignorance characteristic of multitudes who might be deceived all too easily.<sup>812</sup> It was indeed out of ignorance that all sorts of variations in theoretical belief, as well as practical ceremony originate. It was this, in turn, which had led to the multiplication of ideas of God, each traceable to the personal fears, hopes and expectations of their particular inventors, yet had nothing to do with Christianity. The Scholastics had, for instance, introduced ‘unintelligible’ ideas and in so doing obscured the past, as well as charged humans with a greater anxiety for the future time. Instead of the unproductive anxiety regarding the future, that was a ‘fiction of the mind’ anyway,<sup>813</sup> a restoration of true meanings was necessary. This, to be sure, is to pave the way for his future attack upon the erroneous doctrines of ‘grace’ and ‘transubstantiation’ that he believed had in time littered the original meaning of Christian philosophy.<sup>814</sup> This, however, was by no means a revolution against the Scriptures, but a revolution against the interpretation of the Scriptures. In this too, Hobbes was a historical thinker. Much as historical accounts had been produced by men and might be believed in, or not, so the interpretation of Scriptures were nothing other than products of time. Not to

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<sup>810</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 43.

<sup>811</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 43.

<sup>812</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 37.

<sup>813</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 3.

<sup>814</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 7.

believe an interpretation was thus nothing but a show of disbelief towards the interpreter. The exception to that end was but one and this was rejecting a revelation that issued directly from God.<sup>815</sup>

However, on that too, Hobbes had an answer: the age of epiphanies was over. So, then, was also the age of prophecy, for the only authentic forms of prophecy could be those that originated directly from God and were communicated from him to ‘peculiar’ person(s). All the rest was nothing but a pretentious claim. The fundamental contention Hobbes advanced was very temporal indeed. The very idea of ‘kingdom of God’, he held, was nothing but an ignorant fabrication. Here too, Hobbes assumed the role of a linguistic critic and a historical thinker, much as he did throughout the *whole* of *Leviathan*, observing how ‘by this kingdom of God is properly meant a Commonwealth, instituted (by the consent of those which were to be subject thereto for their civil government and the regulating of their behaviour’.<sup>816</sup> Moreover, such regulation was not only towards God, but ‘towards one another in point of justice’ as well by way of international justice ‘towards other nations both in peace and war’. This, then, was not only a mere theocracy, but also a true *political* Commonwealth, wherein epiphany was commonplace. Therein God ‘was king’ and spoke directly, or via Abraham and Moses, to the subjects upon whom he ruled, as a sovereign rule upon his subjects. God, in other words, ‘had peculiar subjects, whom He commanded by a voice’.<sup>817</sup> The ‘people of Israel’, in turn, were obligated to the laws brought by Moses from the Mount Sinai. However, this kingdom was no longer, but had been ‘cast off in the election of Saul’. But it would surely return, as prophets had foretold, ‘restored by Christ; and the restoration whereof we daily pray for when we say ... “Thy kingdom come”’.<sup>818</sup> The kingdom of God, then, only existed when epiphany was apparent and God ruled by his own voice and commands, or through his viceroys and lieutants such as Abraham and Moses and when Christ had prophesied on his behalf directly to the people. This was the only true sacred history; all other history was profane history. Thus, all time after the Resurrection, and thus the material

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<sup>815</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 7.

<sup>816</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 43.

<sup>817</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 43.

<sup>818</sup> *Leviathan.*, Ch. 43.

disappearance of Jesus Christ, was also in the realm of profane history. The kingdom of God was only to be restored with the *end of time*, in and for *eternity*.

The true prophets had, accordingly, been those who lived in sacred history and enjoyed direct access to revelation through epiphany. After the Resurrection, however, profane history had commenced, that was also the eschatological history flowing ceaselessly towards its ultimate end in eternity with the Day of Judgment. This was the Pauline messianic time, 'the time that remains' from the beginning of the end of time to the end itself. God was no longer an actor in this history, but only an external agent, in the form of Providence that has created all time and knows it all absolutely. Profane history was no longer the place of new revelations, or novel prophecies; Christianity, in its true form, had already been prophesied by true prophets and 'we have no sign left, whereby to acknowledge the pretended revelations, or inspirations of any private men; nor obligation to give ear' to any novel doctrine. The epistemic dilemma of knowledge and the hermeneutic dilemma of interpretation are still very much at the heart of the problem as Hobbes conceives it. The only ways of knowing true Christianity are through reason and revelation that, to Hobbes, denote two separate things, but are entirely inseparable from one another. For right reason may never arrive at conclusions at odds with revelation, and on the contrary, revelation is never against right reason.

At any rate, the age of prophecies and miracles that could rationally be deemed as authentic was all but over. 'In the time of the New Testament', Hobbes observed, 'there was no sovereign prophet, but our Saviour' who was at once God himself and the prophet to whom he spoke.<sup>819</sup> The Hobbesian reorientation of Christianity, that he effects by introducing clear temporal markers, in fact goes so far as to include a redefinition of martyrdom as well. True to his temporal logic, Hobbes delegitimises all forms of martyrdom enacted by those who have not themselves conversed with Christ and seen him rise. This has obvious political implications, for anyone, Hobbes stresses, who has taken up sword under the name of whatever divinely inspired cause – like the hundreds of armed men right before his eyes – has been nothing but

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<sup>819</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 36.

deceived by wrongful interpretations of the Scriptures. Should men decide to martyr themselves anyway, they shall do so not in the name of real Christ but because ‘their antecessors said it’; being ‘witnesses of other men’s testimony’, but not of Christ, they ‘are but second martyrs, or martyr’s of Christ’s witnesses’.<sup>820</sup>

True Christianity consists not of martyrdom in a wrong cause, but of an *inner disposition* to the true teachings of the Scriptures that might only be accessed through a rational reading of revelation. In this regard, Hobbes even goes so far as to redraw the functions of baptism itself, which is no longer presented as an act whereby humans ‘constitute over us another authority’, but is instead a ‘promise to take the doctrine of the apostles for our direction in the way to life eternal’. The kind of *inner Christianity* that Hobbes advocates, one based on reasonable exercise of Christian philosophy in everyday life — much as civil laws represent a kind of transcription in historical time of the timeless and immutable natural laws — reminds us in certain ways of the theology of Gerard Winstanley and his metaphysics of inner light in particular. Yet, to Hobbes, apart from an apparent temporal problem of not having been present at the apostolic time, martyrdom is wrongful for another reason as well. Namely, to set one’s life aside so radically as to be willing to die for a matter of doctrine is a show of certain faithlessness. For in so doing, humans claim that inevitable regeneration has not been guaranteed by Christ’s epiphanous coming into the profane world and history and the very promise of his Second Coming, for which, Hobbes stresses, one prays daily when one says ‘thy Kingdom come’. Instead of imitating divine functions, humans should instead reason and interpret the Scripture accordingly — that is, read Hobbes the theologian who has just done that — and ‘expect the coming of Christ hereafter, in patience and faith, with obedience to their present magistrates’.<sup>821</sup>

In the absence of prophecy in real time, one must be content with what has already been revealed. The very absence of novel prophecy, whose age has ended, relegates the whole importance to the realm of interpretation and interpreters. Who, then, is to be the authoritative interpreter? The sovereign.

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<sup>820</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 42.

<sup>821</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 42.



For, if a sovereign is just, and thus a personality that *must* be obeyed of necessity, then the sovereign is in perfect accord with the *laws of nature*, that are themselves in perfect accord with reason and the Scriptures. This, to be sure, is in a direct connection with the hugely important issue of *political obligation*. In Chapter 43 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes raises the highly important matter concerning obedience to authority. The difficulty in political communities, he observes, is that of obeying ‘at once both God and man ... when their commandments are on the contrary to the other’.<sup>822</sup> Crucially, it is this that causes ‘the most frequent pretext of sedition and civil war in Christian Commonwealths’.<sup>823</sup> Here too, we see Hobbes who is not only indifferent towards the matter of religion, but highly aware of its function and potential in the fate of the life of a political community. However, such has been Hobbes’ own clarification of the Scriptures that this problem should no longer arise. Hobbes’ interpretation has subversively tried to shatter all basis for private claims that there can be a greater interpretative authority of the Scriptures, than the sovereign. Now, should a contradiction arise between the commands of the sovereign and the Scriptures, the subject may legitimately disobey. He may not, however, in the absence of a contradiction, seek to follow erroneous interpretations of the Scripture and disobey the sovereign in so doing. Sovereign is to be the chief interpreter of God’s laws in the Scripture, much as his is also of *natural law*.

It is this that leads Hobbes to reviving Erastianism, an earlier doctrine named after Thomas Erastus, a sixteenth-century Swiss theologian, according to which there must only be a single sovereign.<sup>824</sup> And to do so, Hobbes employs yet another temporal trick, though one essentially in harmony with his temporal project discussed on these pages. Only the apostles, we are again reminded, were the vicars and lieutenants of Christ. All the rest of the ecclesial authorities have instead been chose by fellow men, instead of being ordained by God himself in a direct manner. Interestingly, Hobbes was not alone in putting forward this argument. James Harrington, one of the most formidable republicans of the time, had also actively sought to prove that the first

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<sup>822</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 43.

<sup>823</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 43.

<sup>824</sup> N. Figgis, “Erastus and Erastianism”, in *The Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge University Press, 1922), 293–342.

churchmen had not been ordained in a princely succession,<sup>825</sup> but elected in assemblies — the *ecclesiae* of Primitive Christianity had indeed been like the Athenian *ekklesia*, assembly of the citizens.<sup>826</sup> This, however, is by no means a paradox, for what both Harrington and Hobbes, profoundly different as they were, attempted to do in the years of the collapse of sovereign authority, was to come up with a theory of sovereignty that rested upon nothing but popular consent, though they would have markedly different natures and implications.

The Christianity that Hobbes calls for is then truly a reformed Christianity that has been placed by some historians in the tradition of Erasmian humanist tradition, as well as Reformation theology more generally.<sup>827</sup> Whatever tradition Hobbes may, or not, be seen as belonging to, it is exceedingly clear that Christianity is inseparable to his thought. This is, once again, not to say that Hobbes *was* a Christian — which we do not know and are not interested to know — but that he *uses* Christianity to advance his political objectives. At one level, it may indeed be said that Hobbes is indeed concerned with what he deems to be the *truth* of Christian scriptural doctrine and the liberation of humans from the slavery of ignorance to which they have been escorted by self-interested pseudo-prophets and self-declared messiahs of all sorts. However, his remarkably clever political project goes far beyond than that. Firstly, at a time when the dominant mode of historical interpretation still places Christianity as the chief and sole interpretative framework, wherein history is seen in sacred terms and indeed as a continuation of the apostolic time, Hobbes introduces an idea of history totally different. This is a history that is *outside of apostolic time* and where God is beyond history, even if still very much its author and owner. God is no longer an actor of this history but occupies, in Negretto's apt description, 'a distant past and a distant future'.<sup>828</sup> With the certain end of the apostolic time, the time of prophecy, miracles and martyrdom has also ended. The Christian truths have been told sufficiently and the rest falls upon interpretation that is in turn to be carried out by the sovereign.

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<sup>825</sup> James Harrington, *Prerogative of Popular Government*, Book II (Toland, 304-54); see also Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 397.

<sup>826</sup> Toland, 48; 316-17.

<sup>827</sup> Cf. L. Damrosch, "Hobbes as Reformation Theologian: Implications of the Free-Will Controversy", *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1979), 339-352.

<sup>828</sup> Negretto, "Irresistible Power", 189.

All of these innovations had a profound political importance to which we shall return at the end of this chapter. There was, however, yet another reappraisal of Christian truth left to discuss, which Hobbes enacted in order to prepare temporal and theoretical ground for his sovereign to take over absolutely. This was a reconfiguration of the *politics of death*. Now, this very issue too originated from the same dilemma of obedience to two authorities. Hobbes was well aware of the nature of human inclination in that regard. As he had observed in *De Cive*, ‘no man can serve two masters; nor is he less, but rather more of a master, whom we are to obey for fear of damnation than he whom we obey for fear of temporal death’.<sup>829</sup> The acute problem, best formulated in Hobbes’ *Behemoth* (1681), was indeed that ‘as much as eternal torture is more terrible than death, so much [the people would fear the clergy more than the King]’.<sup>830</sup>

In other words, if men feared eternal torment and damnation, more than they feared political punishment in secular time, sovereignty was never sufficiently safe and civil order not guaranteed. Accordingly, the challenge before Hobbes was to ensure that *this-worldly, profane* punishment was presented as far more dangerous than its otherworldly counterpart, for the existence of which there was at any rate no proof. It was in so doing that Hobbes developed what David Johnston has aptly called ‘mortalism’.<sup>831</sup> Richard Tuck too has observed how ‘the great idea Hobbes seems to have had in Paris in the late 1640s is that there could be a version of Christianity wholly detached from the religion of the gentiles, if the traditional doctrines both of the immateriality of the soul and of hell were overthrown.’<sup>832</sup> Hobbes maintained that the soul had no material existence apart from the body; that is, it had no natural eternity of its own. Now, Hobbes was an advocate of *materiality* of the soul, but *also* one of the *immortality* of the soul. This might be seen as an apparent contradiction and indeed has been seen as such by

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<sup>829</sup> *De Cive*, Ch. 6.

<sup>830</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, edited by F. Tönnies and S. Holmes (Chicago, 1990), 14.

<sup>831</sup> See D. Johnston, “Hobbes’ Mortalism”, in *History of Political Thought*, 4 (1989), 647-663.

<sup>832</sup> R. Tuck, “The civil religion of Thomas Hobbes”, in N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (eds), *Political discourse in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 120-38.

historians like Tuck who observed how although Hobbes ‘described the soul as material ... he was at pains to insist that it was *nevertheless* immortal.’<sup>833</sup>

However, such a reading has missed Hobbes’ own contextualisation of the immortality of the soul. The belief ‘of the immortality of the soul’, that Hobbes declares as a fundamental Christian belief, is one ‘without which we cannot believe he is a Saviour’. It is in this context of the Second Coming of Christ, and thus amid the dawn of eternity that soul *regains* immortality. Likewise, in *Leviathan*, we are told how the doctrine ‘that the soul of man is in its own nature eternal, and a living creature independent on the body’ or that ‘any man is immortal otherwise than by the resurrection in the last day ... is ... not apparent in Scripture.’<sup>834</sup> Yet, it was ‘this window’ that had given ‘entrance to the Dark Doctrine, first of eternal torments, and afterwards of purgatory’. Worse still, from these stemmed even more ridiculous beliefs ‘of the walking abroad, especially in places consecrated, solitary or dark, of the ghosts of men deceased’ and all sorts of ‘pretences of exorcism and conjuration of phantasms’.<sup>835</sup> None of this, however, had any connection with true Christianity revealed in the Scriptures. It is no coincidence that Hobbes made this observation at the very beginning of the Book Four entitled ‘Of the Kingdom of Darkness’ that in great part originated from ‘Misinterpretation of Scripture’.

All of this, however, was again to stress that the spiritual Commonwealth, or the kingdom of God is not visible in secular history, but had a past existence and will have a future existence. In the meantime, however, all that exists is the sovereign, the interpreter of God’s will and the author of morality. Between one’s death and the Day of Judgement, there is nothing but a temporal oblivion, yet neither any eternal torment nor a state of perfect bliss, for any of which we have no evidence.

‘But spiritual Commonwealth there is none in this world: for it is the same thing with the kingdom of Christ; which he himself saith is not of this world, but

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<sup>833</sup> Introduction to his edition of *Leviathan*. On the early Enlightenment discourse, see the wonderful account by Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>834</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 38.

<sup>835</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 44.

shall be in the *next world*, at the resurrection, when they that have lived justly, and believed he was Christ, shall though they died natural bodies, rise *spiritual bodies*; and then it is that our Saviour shall judge the world, and conquer his adversaries and make a spiritual commonwealth<sup>836</sup>

In the strictly profanised history wherein the real time of God, miracles, prophecies and the like has but finished, ‘all that is necessary to salvation is contained in two virtues, faith in Christ, and obedience to the laws.’<sup>837</sup> To that end, it has been aptly observed that ‘this doctrine is part of a political strategy. By undermining the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, Hobbes hopes to make men understand that there is no greater power than the sovereign, nor greater evil than corporeal death’.<sup>838</sup> Remarkably, at the heart of both operations is a temporal reorientation of a highly political nature.

## **Leviathan and History: Change and Conservation**

Now, Leviathan is a human creation, an artifice. Therefore, it has a beginning and an end in time, for ‘nothing can be immortal, which mortals make’.<sup>839</sup> and in a famous metaphor Hobbes later refers to Leviathan as the ‘mortall God’ extant under the ‘immortal God’.<sup>840</sup> However, Hobbes designates the maintenance of Leviathan as the single most important political objective for humans, if they wish to ‘live out their time’ peacefully. Thus, from the very outset, the temporal psychology of Leviathan is based directly on the radical opposition between its *possible end* and the difficult task of guaranteeing that such a thing never happens. The life of Leviathan is thus never an easy one, for it constantly faces a whole range of possible complications all of which might prove to be its very end. Among these might be malicious ideas, lack of state indoctrination, improper feeding of Leviathan (what we would call ‘political economy’ of the state) as well as dissent against established authority — a

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<sup>836</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 34.

<sup>837</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 43; see also, *De Cive*, Ch. 18.

<sup>838</sup> Negretto, “The Irresistible Power of a Mortal God”, 36.

<sup>839</sup> *Leviathan*, 221

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, 120

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fairly typical set of threats faced by any totalitarian political society based on fear and terror. The life of Leviathan, then, and indeed life in Leviathan, is already by definition always *exceptional*. However, as we shall see below, so is also the temporal philosophy of Hobbes.

Let us, first, examine the relationship between Leviathan and history. Now, as an artificial construction, Leviathan is neither historical, nor temporal, for Leviathan is created as a negation of the state of nature that is itself neither a historical phenomenon, nor portrayed by Hobbes as being such.<sup>841</sup> Nor could the state of war be a historical phenomenon, for the dynamics of such a state of war are driven by passions that are not a feature of any particular historical time, but instead constantly present in humans of all times.<sup>842</sup> In fact, Hobbes himself is perfectly clear that the state of war ‘was never generally so, over all the world’.<sup>843</sup> But he is equally aware that ‘there are many places where they live so now’, even proceeding to compare the ‘brutish manner’ of life of the native dwellers of America who live ‘without government’ with that of those ‘who have formerly lived under a peacefull government’ but have subsequently degenerated ‘in[to] a civill Warre’. Moreover, ‘in all times, Kings, and persons of Sovereigne authority, because of their Independency, are in continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators’.<sup>844</sup>

Leviathan is therefore an ahistorical construction. It is neither of the past, of the present or of the future, for what it seeks to negate is not a characteristic feature of any one time but, to a certain degree, a characteristic itself constantly present in humans. Yet, far from being good news, it is *this* that proves to be the most radical challenge that Hobbesian political thought is faced with. Insofar as the makers and subjects of the Commonwealth are human beings, passions constitute a continuous anthropological present that is part of both the state of nature and the state of civility. Thus, the return to the state of nature is possible *at any time*. Since degeneration is indeed an ever present possibility, so is then, also the possibility of returning to the condition of the state of nature:

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<sup>841</sup> On this see, D. Gauthier, “Hobbes’ Social Contract” in V. Chappelle (ed.) *Essays on Early Modern Philosophers from Descartes and Hobbes to Newton and Leibniz* (New York, 1992).

<sup>842</sup> *Leviathan*, 117.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>844</sup> *Lev.*, 89-90.

‘Whatsoever is therefore consequent to a time of Warre ...  
the same is consequent to the time wherein men  
live without other security than what their own  
strength and their own invention shall furnish  
them withall’.<sup>845</sup>

However, what *may* differ is the degree and intensity of the *realisation* of the passions that in sum make up the qualitative present – the violent state of nature. The key difference between the two states of nature and civility consists of the respective degrees of association with and dissociation from such an anthropological constant of the two modes of existence. The state of nature, which knows no authority and manifests the results of human passions most radically, is almost identical with the anthropological present while the state of civility necessarily represents a detachment from it, to be sure, a detachment so absolute that it seeks to negate such an anthropological present.

If controlled, passions may not disrupt the orderly flow of time, while left uncontrolled they are going to destroy the future and with it the ‘expected good outcome’ too. However, to ensure this, a strong resolution was required. This was Leviathan. However, whatever its strength, Leviathan either exists, or not. Therefore, it is either extant in order to negate the state of war or not. This is why stability in time becomes one of the greatest possible virtues of Leviathan. Leviathan must exist if time is to flow orderly and men are to be able ‘to live out their time’. This, in fact, Hobbes almost proportionately links with the ability of Leviathan to detach itself from the continuous anthropological present of mankind, which constantly threatens to regain its hold over the present. It is here, at this moment in his thought, that the terrorist potential is given its full course. For it is here that the total claim to the total control of time is first asserted.

Thus, in the stead of Christian negative anthropological perception of human nature as fallen and ill, and in continuation of Machiavelli’s Christian negative anthropology, Hobbes also sees human nature as fallen, driven as it is by passions that themselves *ahistorical* and thus equally present in all ages. And,

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<sup>845</sup> *Leviathan.*, 89.

as we have seen, Hobbes blames precisely these passions for causing the disastrous present of the civil strife. Now, we should here remember how Machiavelli viewed human nature as guilty of having caused the high amount of *historical recurrence* that he saw in history. Accordingly, his political challenge was to equip human *virtu* with the kind of resilience that was sufficient to overcome the ‘malice of time’. In the thought of Hobbes too, and this has serious temporal implications, it is the sum total of human passions that drives the whole dynamics of the state of war.

Like Machiavelli, Hobbes also sets out to defeat *historical time* in its various manifestations. Faced with crisis that was itself caused by the repetition of yet another cycle of time, itself nurtured by human vice, Machiavelli set out to develop a political theory *against time*. It was in this process that he developed a theory of ‘temporal dictatorship’ intended to overcome the tyranny of time and refashion history. Hobbes too, dismayed as he was by the irrationality and disorders of the present, proceeded to provide a radical solution. However, apart from time, place and the immediate context, another important trait distinguished the two projects. If the republican Machiavelli, whose ultimate goal was an Italian republic, consciously theorised about the importance of human agency in defeating the tyranny of time, the absolutist Hobbes decided to cancel the human agency and the role of particular *virtu* entirely. This Hobbes deemed to be the surest way of avenging history.

The very creation of the Leviathan is also the negation of the present of the state of nature dominated by ‘continuall feare, and danger of violent death’.<sup>846</sup> What, then, is the state of nature like? In short, the state of nature is the stage of a perpetual war of ‘every man against every man’.<sup>847</sup> There being between men ‘the equality of ability’, which gives rise to ‘the equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends’,<sup>848</sup> and all men possessing equal rights to all things,<sup>849</sup> a certain enmity becomes inevitable. ‘Nature hath given to *every one a right to all*’, vaingloriously reassured of the superiority of their personal qualities and abilities, men continuously try to possess more and ‘to make themselves

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<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.



masters of other mens persons, wives, children, and cattle'.<sup>850</sup> This 'miserable condition of Warre' is indeed 'necessarily consequent ... to the natural Passions of Men'.<sup>851</sup> Earlier in *De Cive*, too, Hobbes had written how conflict arose from the fact that 'men at the same time have an Appetite to the same thing'.<sup>852</sup> However, such a willingness of, and indeed absolute right to, all things generates diffidence. Now, diffidence itself results in a universal *anticipation* of some such *future* action that contributes to the fear of the other. In the event, fearful anticipation becomes the most reasonable way of securing oneself.<sup>853</sup>

Importantly, the eminent Hobbesian 'Warre', too, is a form of anticipation. As Hobbes notes, war is not to be understood as the 'act of fighting' in the purely physical sense, but as a mode of anticipation of a possible future: 'For Warre, consisteth not in Battel onely, or the act of fighting; but in a *tract of time*'.<sup>854</sup> Like the nature of foul weather which is essentially not just a 'showre or two of rain' but a lengthier 'inclination thereto of many dayes together', so the Hobbesian war of all against all consists of a prolonged period of time 'wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known'. Therefore, that which is perpetual in the conflict endured by mankind in the state of nature is the expectation—'the known disposition thereto'—of the potential materialisation of that ever present possibility of an imminent conflict.<sup>855</sup> Therefore, the state of nature opens up to a present dominated by fear and diffidence: it is the present looking anxiously to that future moment which might hold within itself the possibility of an untimely and violent termination of their life. As the disarrayed multitude leads an existence dominated by misery and fear, life at such a time is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.<sup>856</sup>

But Hobbes does not at all intend to accuse the passions of men for generating such a miserable state of existence; passions 'are in themselves no Sin'.<sup>857</sup> The problem lies not in the presence of passions, but rather in the

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<sup>850</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>852</sup> *De Cive*, 6.

<sup>853</sup> *Leviathan*, 87-8.

<sup>854</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-8.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

absence of laws that would control them. For it is only normal that ‘before such time as men had engag’d themselves by any Covenants’, they would all exercise that which is by right of nature and thus from time immemorial, theirs.<sup>858</sup> The existence of laws, however, requires the existence of ‘the Person that shall make it’.<sup>859</sup> But the state of nature knows no common authority and indeed no authority at all. Therefore, there are at such a time no laws—and therefore no justice and injustice—no notions of right and wrong, and indeed no property and dominion.<sup>860</sup> In short, this is the state of war and it acquires identity with ‘the time that men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe’.<sup>861</sup> ‘For what is WAR’, Hobbes declares in *De Cive*, ‘but that same time in which the will of contesting by force, is fully declar’d either by Words, or Deeds? The time remaining, is termed PEACE’.<sup>862</sup>

This characterisation remains the same in *Leviathan*: ‘all other time is peace’.<sup>863</sup> This ‘other time’, however, is the offspring of Leviathan, for it is precisely the generation of Leviathan that facilitates the emergence of a new temporal order. This the emergence of Leviathan does by ‘providing the assurance to the contrary’ from the constant, diffident anticipation of conflict characteristic of the state of nature.<sup>864</sup> In fact, Leviathan comes into existence with the instantaneous negation precisely of such a present — that of perpetual war. It is the analysis of this moment—which lies between the two modes of existence: natural and civil—that provides the point of departure for the subsequent two considerations that are to follow. For it is this moment of the institution of Leviathan that looks, like Janus, both to the past, the state of war, and to the future. It is also precisely *at* and *with* this moment that the Hobbesian political *chiaroscuro* is born. Importantly, there also emerges in Hobbes’ thought a perfect realisation that the momentariness of the negation of the state of nature shall not suffice. If Leviathan is to live, it should be endowed with political stability in time — continuity.

Let us first explore the emergence of Leviathan, the moment of its generation. Now, this is a moment of crucial importance, for it is *at* this

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<sup>858</sup> *De Cive*, X.

<sup>859</sup> *Leviathan*, 89.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>861</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>862</sup> *De Cive*, X.

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>864</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

moment that the new temporal phase, the present of statehood, comes into existence. Now, since ‘the condition of Man is a condition of Warre of every one against every one’—thus representing a continuous anthropological present—the challenge before men is somehow to ‘live out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live’.<sup>865</sup> It is thus ‘weary of irregular justling and hewing one another’ that men at last wholeheartedly desire to erect a common edifice that is ‘firm and lasting’. But Hobbes is perfectly clear that neither just *any* kind of joining together of men, nor simply covenanting will, do.<sup>866</sup> Indeed, if men are to construct something ‘other than a crasie building’, hardly capable of something more is required. Firstly, the *act* of the institution has to be proper, for the infirmities of the commonwealth arise precisely ‘from an Imperfect Institution’ that resembles ‘a Defectous Procreation’.<sup>867</sup> The ‘perfectness’ of institution requires two things: firstly, the people’s willingness to contend to the loss of ‘the rude and combersome points of their *present greatness*’ and an able architect to construct a new artifice.<sup>868</sup> Secondly, however, ‘there be somewhat else required to make their Agreement *constant and lasting*’.<sup>869</sup> What, then, is this ‘somewhat else’? It is, in fact, the ‘able architect’ — the sovereign, who ‘carryeth this person’ and endows the agreement with a lasting constancy. However, neither the commonwealth, nor the sovereign exist naturally but ‘by Covenant only, which is Artificiall.’<sup>870</sup> In other words, they both have to be created *in time*; and the sovereign, too, so created is an ‘Artificiall Soul’.<sup>871</sup>

Now, the only way to erect the common power is for the multitude ‘to conferre all their power and strength upon One’, be it a monarch or an assembly of men. This is a moment of an absolutely pivotal significance in the temporal paradigm of Hobbes, for it is indeed in so doing—and *at this moment*—that the hitherto disunited multitude appoints one actor ‘to beare their Person’. Indeed, men come to unite *in* the person of the sovereign by

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<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>866</sup> Cf.: Chapter 17.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>870</sup> *Leviathan*, 121.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

submitting their wills ‘every one to <sup>872</sup>his Will’ and ‘their Judgements, to his Judgement’.<sup>873</sup> In fact, in so doing, men effectively resign a part of their natural person in order to create the mighty transhuman artifice: at once ‘the Artificall Man’ and ‘the mortall God’.<sup>874</sup> But by imposing such a ‘restraint’ upon themselves, men also necessarily disable themselves, for by having instituted sovereignty with ‘the *foresight* of their own preservation and a more contended life thereby’, they have granted the sovereign the right to ‘use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient’ in order to procure common peace and defence. This is not mere consent or concord, Hobbes tells us, but ‘a reall Unitie of them all’: ‘This is the Generation of that Great Leviathan’.<sup>875</sup>

But the generation of Leviathan is not merely the act of creating a collectivity, but also the act of endowing the commonwealth with a sovereign power.<sup>876</sup> For it is the sovereign that is ‘the Essence of the Commonwealth’, ‘the publique Soule’ that grants ‘Life and Motion to the Commonwealth’.<sup>877</sup> Now, in Chapter 18, Hobbes endows the sovereign with a broad range of rights, ‘conferring so much Power and Strength’ upon him that is sufficient for securing conformity ‘by terror thereof’.<sup>878</sup> These Hobbes then reaffirms strongly in Chapter 30 as the true ends of sovereignty.<sup>879</sup> And it is precisely in these rights that the very capability, possessed by Leviathan, of negating the state of war resides. Now, without the sovereign power, the Leviathan would be nothing but an immobile and a defunct body, like the ‘Carcasse of a man’ whose soul has expired.<sup>880</sup> Therefore, it is the moment of the institution of the commonwealth—and of endowing it with the spirit of sovereignty—that

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<sup>872</sup>*Ibid.*,

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<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>874</sup>*Ibid.*,

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<sup>875</sup>*Ibid.*,

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<sup>876</sup> M. M. Goldsmith, “Hobbes’s “Mortall God”: Is There a Fallacy In Hobbes’s Theory of Sovereignty?”, in C. W. Morris (ed.) *The Social Contract Theorists: Critical Essays on Hobbes, Locke and Rouseau* (Oxford, 1999), 23.

<sup>877</sup> *Leviathan*, 230.

<sup>878</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>879</sup> See Chapter 30: “The Office of the Sovereign, (be it a Monarch, or an Assembly, consisteth in the end, for which he was trusted with the Sovereign Power”, *Ibid.*, 231

<sup>880</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

instantly marks the end of the present of the state of nature and the beginning of the present of statehood.

This the generation of Leviathan initiates by initiating two processes. Firstly, it unites and centralises that which had already existed in the state of nature. Secondly, it generates a range of beginnings of things that had not existed *until now*. Of the first order, centralised are particular wills, particular judgements as well as particular fears,<sup>881</sup> while contrary opinions are subjected to normative criteria. Now, Hobbes has by this stage in the argument already determined a very clear end of sovereignty: the peace and defence of the commonwealth. The rights of sovereignty he then proceeds to lay down in Chapter 18 are tailored precisely to rendering such ends attainable. Now, since it is the sovereign's task to deliver the ends, it is the sovereign who is the judge both of the means of peace and defence;<sup>882</sup> and the right of making war and peace is also annexed solely to sovereignty.<sup>883</sup> The sovereign is also 'the Judge of what Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what conducing to Peace'.<sup>884</sup> Moreover, the sovereign is granted the right of prescribing rules, which include 'Rules of Propriety (or *Meum* and *Tuum*)' and civil laws of particular states, which renders possible the understanding of what is '*Good, Evill, Lawfull, and Unlawfull* in the actions of subjects'.<sup>885</sup> Lastly, granted to the sovereignty is the right of judicature, that is, 'of hearing and deciding all Controversies ... concerning Law ... or concerning Fact'.<sup>886</sup>

Here, then, is simultaneously the 'assurance to the contrary' from the diffident anticipation, which had been central to the dynamics of the state of war, and a shattering attack on the 'contrariety of mens Opinions',<sup>887</sup> infirmity of resolution and ineffectiveness of disunited efforts, characteristic not only of the state of war, but of all times without a firm power to keep all men in awe. In short, Hobbes has set with exceeding clarity both the *universal* end to be attained and the *present* means of attaining them as part of the exposition the

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<sup>881</sup> *Ibid.*, 120. See also *Ibid.*, C. Ginzburg, "Fear Reverence Terror. Reading Hobbes Today". Lecture Delivered February 13th 2008. MAX WEBER LECTURE, European University Institute

[[http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8711/MWP\\_LS\\_2008\\_05.pdf?sequence=1](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8711/MWP_LS_2008_05.pdf?sequence=1)]

<sup>882</sup> *Leviathan*, 124.

<sup>883</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

sovereign's rights. Indeed, the generation of Leviathan has introduced a radically new order of things. This is the 'other time' of peace.

But importantly, it is also a new present—the present of statehood—which looks to a new kind of future. In fact, future is as central for the present of statehood as it had been to the present of the state of nature. The future, however, provides the present of statehood with two chief possibilities. The first is the dissolution of Leviathan; and the second the continuation of that which exists. Let us first attend to the former. Now, such is the gravity of the *possibility* of dissolution of that real unity attained by instituting the commonwealth that it in fact serves to condition the very character of the present of statehood. This is well reflected in the extraordinary might of absolute control that Hobbes grants the sovereign in Chapter 18. It is precisely this that forms the Hobbesian *chiaroscuro*: a warning bell ceaselessly rung by Hobbes as he forewarns of the potential of degeneration into the state of anarchy.

In fact, it is also the future possibility of destruction that conditions the character of sovereignty as a kind of closure.<sup>888</sup> In order to survive, sovereignty must be based on total obedience. However, since Leviathan seeks to negate the state of war, which, as we have already established, is not of any one time but an ever present possibility, sovereignty refers back to itself—by requiring obedience for its survival—as it is trapped between both the experience and the possibility of the time of anarchy. There is, after all, no greater inconvenience in any commonwealth than 'what proceeds from the Subjects' disobedience, and breach of Covenants, from which the Commonwealth had its being'.<sup>889</sup> The structure of the work reflects this also. If in Chapter 18 Hobbes lays down the rights of the sovereign, in Chapter 29 he then discusses those things that weaken and eventually dissolve the commonwealth and, finally, in Chapter 30, he proceeds to reaffirm the sovereign's rights as the true ends of the sovereign office. These rights are both necessary and useful, for if they be taken away 'the Commonwealth is thereby dissolved' and every man returns to the 'condition and calamity' of universal war.<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>888</sup> See Goldsmith, "Mortall God", 23.

<sup>889</sup> *Leviathan*, 140.

<sup>890</sup> *Leviathan*, 140.

But what exactly marks the commonwealth dissolved? The dawning of the time when, due to external or internal conflicts, the spirit of sovereignty has expired and is no longer able to provide protection for the subjects.<sup>891</sup> As we have seen, at the very heart of the negation of the state of nature lay precisely the sovereign. However, where the act of the institution of sovereignty was proper, there was a lasting edifice constructed. Conversely, where the physico-political unity of the commonwealth was in the event torn apart (if due to intestinal disorders) the fault lay with the men not as matter, but as ‘the Makers and orderers’ of the commonwealth.<sup>892</sup>

Now, mortal though they are, by the nature of its institution commonwealths are designed to live ‘as long as Mankind, or as the Lawes of Nature, or as Justice it selfe’ which give it life.<sup>893</sup> But could a Law of Nature be finite in time? Had Hobbes himself, like some of the English republicans before him and indeed all theorists of natural law not maintained that ‘The Lawes of Nature are immutable, and eternall? The claim indeed was and would be that independently of the nature of time, what the laws of nature ‘forbid, can never be lawfull; what they command, can never be unlawfull’. How, then, was it even possible to ask such a question? As a matter of fact, although a law of nature was in and of itself *eternal*, it could still be finite in time. For a Law of Nature is ‘a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason’. It is thus an outcome of a particular kind of correct activity in the present, namely applying reason.<sup>894</sup> Therefore, what Hobbes has in mind in this passage, regarding the relationship of the lifetime of Leviathan and the lawes of nature, is clearly the *constant adherence* by the makers of the commonwealth to the Lawes of Nature.

That is, in other words, the application of reason to the present, for a Law of Nature is a rule found out by reason by which men are forbidden to do that which is ‘destructive of their life’.<sup>895</sup> Indeed, for so long as reason is regnant, Leviathan does not fear time, for it was reason that led men to institute the sovereignty and negate the state of war. This is precisely why Hobbes noted that commonwealths are ‘by the nature of their Institution’ fit to last for long if

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<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>895</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

men use reason, for the kind of institution Hobbes had himself suggested was based on none other than solid reasoning. In fact, towards the end of discourse on civil government, Hobbes would also note that long after mankind had begun instituting imperfect commonwealths ‘apt to relapse into disorder’, it was nevertheless possible by the employment of reason and ‘industrious meditation, to make their constitution (excepting by externall violence) everlasting’. Notably, to this he added that he had himself just done that.<sup>896</sup>

### **Hobbes Against Natural Time: Artificial Chains and Artificial Eternity**

Hobbes proceeds to freeze the particulars constituting time, in an attempt to freeze *natural time* itself and generate *political time* instead. In a temporal mood remarkably characteristic of the manner in which Machiavelli proceeds to develop a theory of what we have called ‘temporal dictatorship’, and in a manner in which the Treaty of Westphalia lay the past to the ground of oblivion in order to create a peaceful and stable future shared by many, Hobbes too declared how the fifth precept of the law of nature was ‘that we must forgive him who repents, and asketh pardon for what is *past*; having first taken caution for the time to come’.<sup>897</sup> The moment of the generation of Leviathan had to be a perfect moment of institution in every way, or else, as we have observed, the artifice thereby created would be neither *constant* nor *lasting*. The total rightness of the moment was essential to Hobbes and here too we see his absolutist and totalitarian inclinations out of which originated also his claim at absolute precision and perfection. As Hobbes observed, if the people gathered with the aim of creating a sovereign ‘depart and break up the Convent, and appoint no time ... when they shall meet again, the publick weal returns to Anarchy, and the same state it stood in before their meeting’. Perhaps even more strikingly, Hobbes then proceeds to observe how, in case there is no ‘certain day and place publicly appointed’ and people risk

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<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*, 232

<sup>897</sup> *De Cive*, X, 44.



meeting at 'diverse times', 'the People ... retains the supreme power no longer'.<sup>898</sup>

Now, that the theoretician of absolute and indivisible sovereignty makes recourse to the 'supreme power' of the people is a rarely noticed and a particularly interesting feature of his thought. But why should the people lose such a 'supreme authority', in case they do not set the exact time of a future meeting? This, Hobbes argues, is so because the people are at this point nothing but a 'dissolute multitude', but still not 'a Democratie'. Yet, neither 'any Action, or Right' might be attributed to a dissolute multitude devoid of representation – the person, or persons to 'carry their Person'.<sup>899</sup> For two things, according to Hobbes characterise a democracy, one of which is 'perpetuall prescription of Convents', that is pacts and covenants. It is thus essential that the people thus far still only a multitude be kept united with nothing but time, an anticipation of a concrete moment in very near future when they shall carry on instituting the sovereign. It is this knowledge, and nothing else, that keeps people, while still only a dissolute multitude, away from war. For the knowledge of the expected continuation keeps the people away from diffident anticipation of future enmity that is at the heart of social conflict prior to the institution of authority. Yet, even with these temporal details settled with such exactitude, Hobbes is not entirely content. It will not be sufficient for the people 'so as to maintain its supremacy' to have a clear knowledge of a predetermined future moment when the institution of sovereignty is set to continue. In addition to this, Hobbes stipulates that such a moment must not be so distant in time as to enable 'anything in the mean time [to] happen whereby ... the City may be brought into some danger'.<sup>900</sup>

Such temporal exactitude does not apply only to people that are still a 'dissolute multitude', but also to aristocracy as well, as a social group. Now, what unites both democracy and aristocracy in this regard is their multitude. As democracy is not a holder of 'supreme power' if it have no clear time set in advance, so aristocracy 'without an appointment of some certain times, and places, at which the Court of Nobles may meet, it is no longer a Court, or one Person, but a dissolute multitude without any supreme power'. Similarly,

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<sup>898</sup> *De Cive*, X, 44.

<sup>899</sup> *Ibid.*, V.

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.

aristocracy might not be 'disjoyned by long intervalls' or else risk causing 'prejudice to the supreme powers'.<sup>901</sup> Unless, of course, the power be transferred onto one man entirely. Now, this brings us to monarchy in time, only to find that monarchy is exempt from the same limitation in time. If the 'People, or the Nobles not being *one naturall Person*' must necessarily subject themselves to the above temporal discipline, the monarch has no such needs, for he is 'one by nature, is alwayes in a present capacity to execute his authority'. In fact, already in *Leviathan*, Hobbes would extol this virtue of monarchy of being fast and effective as one of the factors for which he favoured this particular form to all others. Monarchy was precisely what Hobbes sought. And that was by no means only due to his own immediate contextual allegiance to a royal house, but also because monarchy was *the* form that enabled his wish to avenge history in the form of *natural time* to realise.

In a chapter on representation, itself of immense importance to the tradition of Western political thought, Hobbes observed that 'A multitude of men are made 'one' person when they are by one man or one person represented'.<sup>902</sup> To be sure, Hobbes also stipulated that this should be done 'with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular'. Whether Hobbes was speaking of everyone's consent only metaphorically, or not is debatable. Yet, two things are clear. For one, there were precedents of unanimous corporate agreement in his own immediate past such was, for instance, the *A Solemne Engagement of the Army* of 1647 that represented a remarkable example of a comprehensive and binding corporate unity. Secondly, Hobbes's earlier discussion of the ways of *continuing* the act of instituting a sovereign suggests that he does have in mind a real unity of *all* and thereby a real consent of all as well as people institute the sovereign. Be that as it may, what matters to Hobbes is the theoretical claim that general consent is essential, for the chief task is to introduce 'Oneness' so as to cancel *natural time* and usher in *political time*. And to this end, it is 'the 'unity' of the representer, not the 'unity' of the represented, that maketh the person 'one'.<sup>903</sup> It is, in other words, the One that should be absolutely and properly united in its representative

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<sup>901</sup> *Ibid.*, X.

<sup>902</sup> *Leviathan*, XVI.

<sup>903</sup> *Ibid.*, XVI.

capacity — that is, in more practical terms and as we shall see better below — be *the* sole representative of *all* for *all time*.

This, then, is a form of cancellation not only of variety at a general level, but of human agency itself. We have already outlined some of the particulars of such freezing of human agency. Suffice it here to observe that the moment the *dissolute multitude* that was at that moment a democracy with ‘supreme power’ (a trait of Hobbes thought that is almost ignored due precisely to the lack of temporal analysis), becomes ‘One’ in every possible way and abandons its multitudinous claim to creating the present and accordingly its authorship of history. From the moment of its institution, it is the absolute and indivisible sovereign that becomes the author of time and history. If the dissolute multitude had in its foolish pursuit of self-interest created a feeble present and caused the ‘high point in time’, as Hobbes called the crisis of the present in his *Behemoth*, this had been the doings not only of irrational beings but also of what was *natural time* created by such human agents of history. As the radical opposite of such situation, the Hobbesian sovereign instead promised not only to eradicate such *natural time*, but also, and no doubt most importantly, *to become time*.

As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, Hobbes was very well aware of the effect of what he deemed as false Doctrines [that] are by time generally received. These had caused the disorders of the present times and not surprisingly he would call for the eradication of such ideas in the new time of statehood of his making. Among these ideas, perhaps most centrally, was the republican idea of liberty that became subject of Hobbes’ famous attack.<sup>904</sup> Conceiving this idea of liberty as erroneous and noting how ‘when the same error is confirmed by the authority of men in reputation for their writings on this subject [of liberty], it is no wonder if it produce sedition and change of government’.<sup>905</sup> The wrongful perception of liberty, as we know at the very heart of the political language of mid-seventeenth century crisis, was indeed to be blamed for the disasters of the present. Now, this idea of liberty had arrived ‘in these Western parts of the world’ from a study of ‘Aristotle, Cicero, and other men, Greeks and Romans’.<sup>906</sup> But where had *they* derived it from?

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<sup>904</sup> On this see Q. Skinner, *Hobbes and republican liberty* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>905</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

<sup>906</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

Hobbes had a clear answer to that, itself temporal, that he in turn believed to be perhaps the greatest source of the wrongfulness at hand. The Greeks and Romans had ‘derived those rights, not from the *principles of nature*, but transcribed them into their books out of the practice of their own Commonwealths, which were popular’, that is – republics. They had done so ‘just like grammarians describe the rules of language out of the practice of the time’.<sup>907</sup>

Moreover, Hobbes here exposes a ‘governing myth’ that he sees extant in Athens. This is namely that Athenians were wrongfully indoctrinated into believing they were freemen, as opposed to those who lived in monarchies and thus necessarily in the condition of slavery, in order ‘to keep them from desire of changing their government’.<sup>908</sup> Therefore, the republican language of liberty derived from the ancients was erroneous for two reasons. Firstly, because it was a simple transcript of ‘a practice of the [present] time’; and, secondly, because such practice itself was based on a myth generated by the ruling elites trying to prevent the degeneration of the prevailing socio-political order. Yet, such an understanding of liberty had no basis in *natural law* that was *atemporal* and thus in and of itself right independently of the flow of time. Instead, such conception of liberty was a product of a single present that was a ‘popular Commonwealth’.

Not surprisingly to Hobbes, then, this kind of temporal and logical fallacy had nurtured the fictitious idea of liberty in Hobbes’ own present, according to which men mistook ‘that for their private inheritance and *birthright* which is the right of the public only’.<sup>909</sup> For the liberty of which so much had been spoken in ancient political thought was ‘not the liberty of particular men, but the liberty of the Commonwealth’. Yet, individual liberty in such a political form amounted to nothing greater or more effective than what one enjoyed in a monarchy. As Hobbes stressed, ‘The Athenians and Romans were free; that is, free Commonwealths: not that any particular men had the liberty to resist their own representative’.<sup>910</sup> Why, then, Hobbes famously asked, was a citizen

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<sup>907</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

<sup>908</sup> Aristotle had indeed written, as Hobbes himself cites in the very same paragraph, that: ‘In democracy, liberty is to be supposed: for it is commonly held that no man is free in any other government.’

<sup>909</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

<sup>910</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

of the republic of Lucca, that had 'LIBERTAS' inscribed onto its gates, more free than the subject of the Sultan of Constantinople? As a matter of fact, she was not. Yet, through their learning of ancient authors, 'men from their childhood have gotten a habit, under a false show of liberty, of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their sovereigns'.<sup>911</sup>

To Hobbes, the true kind of liberty, however, was different and would have different sources too. For one thing, Hobbes deemed, it would stem from the atemporal *principles of nature* and not from the mere practices of a particular present and its corresponding political myths. And no less importantly, it would be the true liberty of a subject individually as well as of the political association collectively. Now, the new Hobbesian idea of liberty, itself truly revolutionary, was based on the belief already described that *all plurality* had to be cancelled and instead *new time* had to issue from the sovereign. This included centralisation of fear, of various particular ideas into a set of 'right' and 'wrong' ideas, in turn promoted or punished, as well as in the new idea of liberty that was central to Hobbes' *novus tempus*. Just as men had 'for the attaining of peace and conservation of themselves thereby have made an artificial man', so as to live out their time, so also they have made 'artificial chains, called civil laws'.<sup>912</sup>

Now, if *natural law* and the *right of nature* were both exempt from time and always already possessed by all men, civil laws are artificial creations *in time* by humans and according to the principles of the law of nature. The civil laws are precepts derived from the law of nature, yet markedly practical, to be used in the everyday life of a political association in real historical present. The law of nature being itself atemporal, civil laws thus *transcribe* atemporality into the flow of real historical time. It is in this way that Leviathan, being generally 'mortal', might in fact be timeless. If the institution of the edifice has been right, if the 'One' has been endowed by the 'real unitie of them all' and if accordingly the civil laws are proper, Leviathan will then have subsumed the atemporal wisdom of the law of nature via a set of civil laws, itself human temporal creations of the present, and eventually be based upon right reason. If it be based upon right reason, Leviathan will last out. This is precisely what

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<sup>911</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

<sup>912</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

Hobbes means, again, when he says that Leviathan shall endure for ‘as long as ... the Lawes of Nature, or as Justice it selfe’ which give it life shall endure.<sup>913</sup>

Now, civil laws, too, are essentially bonds, as is more generally also the whole process of instituting the sovereign that binds men together. We might here remember that the state of nature was ‘a tract of time’ that was to be seen occurring ‘before such time as men had engag’d themselves by any Covenants, or Bonds, to doe what hee would’. We have further also seen that ‘convents’, that is covenants, that the very ‘supreme power’ of democracy had to be characterised by the ‘perpetual prescription to Convents’, that is covenants, or pacts. And we have shown how Hobbes subjects the democratic procedure of instituting a sovereign that shall issue *novus tempus* to the rigid requirements of a temporal hygiene. It is thus evident that in this vitally important regard too, which is that of properly laying down binding pacts and covenants, Hobbes is acutely aware of time above all else.

This is even clearer if we now consider what he has to say about contract in general. Hobbes maintains that if in the course of setting a contract ‘there be no other Token extant of our will either to quit, or convey our Rights, but onely Words, those words must either relate to the present, or time past; for if they be of the future onely, they convey nothing’. For he who speaks in future tense alone says really very little, other than a promise of an act to come. By saying ‘I will give to morrow’, Hobbes says, the person has declared hoe she ‘yet he hath not given’ that very thing.<sup>914</sup> Yet, if one is to utter the sentence in a present, or past tense, then one necessarily declares the fact of having *already* given something. This is no mere fanciful reminder from Hobbes who is at any rate indeed obsessed with temporal precision both of political thought and practice. The example Hobbes cites here is in fact strikingly relevant to the case of ‘democratie’ endeavouring to institute a sovereign. It is this: ‘*I doe give, or have given you this to be received to morrow*’.<sup>915</sup> In so doing, Hobbes thus observes how *today* it is possible by putting the contract in the right tense to create a power-structure of *tomorrow*. It is in this way that a ‘democratie’, itself held only by the power of time as we know, is actually and not only in an imaginary way, able to create a power structure of tomorrow by

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<sup>913</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 21.

<sup>914</sup> *De Cive*, VI.

<sup>915</sup> *De Cive*, VI.

a proper contact of today. In *Leviathan*, too, Hobbes stresses the very same thing observing how ‘both parts may contract now, to performe hereafter: in which cases, he that is to performe in time to come, being trusted, his performance is called Keeping Of Promise, or Faith’.<sup>916</sup> Here too, Hobbesian absolutist pretence at temporal hygiene is clear. Both the understanding of liberty and that of custom were unstable and had no solid temporal basis; in fact, Hobbes deemed common law as nothing but a set of often contradictory precedents that ultimately represent decision of judges in the present.<sup>917</sup>

That Hobbesian conception of his present as one of crisis in a manner remarkably similar to that of Machiavelli is evident in *Behemoth* in his designation of crisis as ‘a high point in time’. Importantly, *Behemoth*, we should be reminded, is a work of history and thus one that places the present under discussion against the backdrop of *chronotic time* in general. However, perhaps more importantly, the same is the case in *Leviathan* too and that in the context of a discussion with profound temporal significance. As a child has a need for ‘a Tutor, or Protector, to preserve his Person’, so also the sovereign assembly ‘in all great dangers and troubles’ has a need for ‘Custodes Libertatis; that is of Dictators, or Protectors’.<sup>918</sup> Hobbes observes that these are ‘as much as Temporary Monarchs, to whom for a time, they may commit the entire exercise of their Power; and have (at the end of that time)’ deprive them of the same power.<sup>919</sup> However, Hobbes then reminds us how he has identified three possible forms of sovereignty - monarchy, democracy and aristocracy - and proceeds to attack the idea that there could be other kinds of sovereignties too. Some, he protests, ‘think there be other Formes, arising from these mingled together’, such as Elective Kingdomes ‘where Kings have the Soveraigne Power put into their hands for a time’, limited monarchies, and countries governed by ‘a President, Procurator, or other Magistrate’. Hobbes radically refutes the idea, maintaining how there are nevertheless *three* kinds of sovereignty and to do so he deploys temporal analysis that it in itself hugely important. ‘But it is not so’, Hobbes stresses, for ‘Elective Kings, are not Soveraignes, but Ministers of the Soveraigne; nor limited Kings Soveraignes, but Ministers of them that

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<sup>916</sup> *Leviathan*, XIV.

<sup>917</sup> On this see L. Mary, “Concept of Law”, in *Limiting Leviathan: Hobbes on Law and International Affairs* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>918</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch.19.

<sup>919</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 19.

have the Sovereign Power'.<sup>920</sup> How then, the question arises, does Hobbes define who is and who not a sovereign?

Now, the Leviathan, as we already know is an 'artificial person' created *in time* by certain acts of humans themselves subject to temporal hygiene. Moreover, we have observed that Leviathan is a 'mortal God', yet *could* be rendered immortal if only the laws of nature, themselves atemporal but translated into a set of civil laws, 'artificial chains' designed to order time, were to be *constantly* adhered to. And we have already learnt, from a range of perspectives, that for all this, and indeed for the success of the whole project, a sovereign is required that shall bind all in awe and terror. Yet, matter being mortal, 'not only monarchs, but also whole assemblies' were subject to the very same end, death - finitude in time. And so, it was necessary for the conservation of the peace of men that 'there be order also taken for an artificial eternity of life'. Here too, we see Hobbes who is entirely consciously defying history and generating a new kind of *novus tempus* that should itself be rendered timeless, or else the historical situation be returned to the 'time-before' of the state of nature.

Yet, in a world of change and finitude, such timelessness has to be *artificial*, as is indeed the entire new time that Hobbes has constructed. Now, 'This artificial eternity is that which men call the right of succession'. And it is a hugely important one, for 'there is no perfect form of government, where the disposing of the succession is not in the present sovereign'.<sup>921</sup> Hobbes, then, defines sovereign as he, or they, who exercise command of time. True and proper sovereignty resided in the person or a group of persons in whom lies the ability to generate the very 'artificial eternity' that is vital to the entire project of the Hobbesian new time. For with the moment of his death, the election falls again to people as a dissolute multitude. Thus, the historical situation returns to the state of anarchy where each man is his own heir. Therefore, it is essential to the logic of Hobbesian *novus tempus* that the right to command all time and the fate of artificial eternity be in the monarch himself, who is himself finite in time but atemporal by the right precisely of commanding the 'artificial eternity'. Loyal to the very same principle, Hobbes

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<sup>920</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 19.

<sup>921</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 19.



observes that if a king does not have the ‘Right to appoint his Successor, he is no more Elective but Hereditary’.<sup>922</sup> If a king is not in a position to appoint the successor of his own choosing, then sovereignty was never truly his, but only of a temporary nature. Thus, with the moment of his death, the election falls again to people as a dissolute multitude. Thus, the historical situation returns to the state of anarchy where each man is his own heir. Such sovereignty, in fact, always resided in those who maintained the power to grant it a *continuation* and in so doing to generate *artificial eternity*, coincident with the Hobbesian *political time*, and to command time itself.

### **Hobbes and exception**

In what has been an enjoyable and challenging journey through the highly complex thought of Thomas Hobbes, we have first devised the broader European *historical* and the broader *discursive* contexts of thought to which Hobbes might be seen as consciously responding. Moreover, we have employed a range of critical literature and see how historians in their magnificent interpretative pursuits have written of the Hobbesian pursuit of ‘cultural reformation’, his ‘skepticism towards reason’, his historicity and unhistoricity. However, it is remarkably unfortunate that his thought has not been analysed in terms of its highly rich variety of temporal points and implications. Yet, Hobbes’ thought cannot properly be separated from such a study. It is also unfortunate that even J. G. A. Pocock, *the* historian who has demonstrated highest possible appreciation of the importance of the notion of time in the history of political thought, has himself not always followed his own abstract remarks about human thought and conduct and *political time*. We have attempted in our chapter on Machiavelli to redress some of that imbalance by expanding the hermeneutic scope of the crucial idea of *virtù* and in so doing discovered highly *practical political* implications that Machiavelli’s temporal philosophy had upon his political philosophy. Likewise, in the context of Hobbes, we have thus far been engaged in doing something very similar. It is Pocock, for instance, who has with great elegance and aptitude observed how in response to contingency in early modern England

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<sup>922</sup> *Leviathan*, Ch. 19.

the modality of temporal thought was to institutionalize time. Pocock is here speaking mostly of the eighteenth century and not the seventeenth, observing how ‘what is institutionalized is now the capacity to act in response to contingency, and the institutional structure is now a continuous capacity for action rather than a continuous transmission of legitimacy’.<sup>923</sup>

Now this is a remarkable declaration that may have been far more accurate if applied to the thought of Hobbes also in the seventeenth century who is indeed, as we have shown, first to *institutionalise time* by altering its trajectory. In the remainder of the chapter, we shall now conclude some of the broader considerations discussed earlier and attempt to show how Leviathan becomes both time and indeed God himself.

Let us, now, bring together our considerations in this chapter. Perhaps the first should be concerning the nature of the period itself in which Hobbes was writing and to which we have seen him very consciously respond. That was a time of severe historical crises is beyond any doubt.<sup>924</sup> Yet, this was also a time of novel legal and political innovations caused by the very same crises both in England and in Europe. Times were exceptional and unprecedented and such were also the solutions posed by the humans.

We may remember Raab’s argument that all the major themes and manifestations of the last two-thirds of the sixteenth century and the first third of the seventeenth were either ‘a means of escape from or ... an acceptance of confusion [and] could also be regarded as desperate attempts to find *a new order* amidst disintegration’; moreover, various forms of mysticism too were precisely ‘a search of control’.<sup>925</sup> However, we have also seen that political thought between Machiavelli and Lipsius grew remarkably resigned to the fact that republican life was all but dying out. This, to be sure, had a basis in historical reality wherein by 1530 most of the republics had indeed vanished and given way to principalities or rising territorial monarchies. However, the urge to *control* never actually disappeared; it simply went off the stage only to

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<sup>923</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 92.

<sup>924</sup> For various historical explanations of crisis see H. Trevor-Roper, “The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century”, in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (Liberty Fund, 1967), 43-82; G. Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (Yale, 2014). For Marxist interpretations of crisis, see: M. Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London, 1967). E. J. Hobsbawm “The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century”, in Trevor Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660* (London, 1965).

<sup>925</sup> T. Raab, *The Struggle for stability in early modern Europe* (Oxford, 1975), 52-3.

return in a new mask. This was in the form of absolutist political thought that, whether in favour of monarchy or a republic, lay a claim at *controlling* the ceaseless flow of particulars that had constituted times of crisis. To that end, we should remember that *res publica* to many authors, including Bodin, referred to a constitutional polity in general and not necessarily a republic. Moreover, absolutism could in fact take a parliamentary form as well, as it did during the *Interregnum* in England.

The practice of the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 to achieve order, much as Bodin's work so devoted to achieving control are both attempts in one and the same tradition. The Treaty of Westphalia was undoubtedly the most successful, and indeed the most lasting, of the practical attempts of this nature. What the Treaty of Augsburg could not achieve in practice was achieved in a secular manner by the Treaty of Westphalia. And what the political thought of Bodin could not fully overcome, because not entirely systematic, was overcome by Thomas Hobbes in England. Hobbes' *Leviathan* came after all these and in response to a crisis that none of these remedies had cured, nor could they. However, each and every one of these occurrences would have a grave influence upon its own political thought.

*The Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes, being written at the very same time as the temporal politics of the Treaty was being declared, represented a continuation of the early modern traditional quest for order. Yet, Hobbes added its own radical contribution to the broader European inclination towards a new temporal order. As the two respective temporal languages show with full clarity, both the Treaty and *Leviathan* advanced a pretentious claim at creating a *perpetual, constant, lasting* and *eternal* order of things. That, for instance, both the Treaty and *Leviathan* included a politics of forgiveness in search of a joint, stable future is no coincidence at all. The two enterprises were as a matter of fact engaged in an almost identical temporal operation, though at different levels of action. And in the service of these temporal objectives, both in turn introduced a rather strict temporal hygiene.

Here it already befits briefly to re-examine collectively the role of history, religion and morality in the thought of Hobbes. He conceived of history as a movement of time constituted of unruly particulars. It was this that had caused all sorts of disasters. Namely, erroneous ideas of all kinds had caused

history to be made into a potentially perpetual war of all men against all the others.

The principal reason behind Hobbes' attack on the uncertainty of history was to prepare a solid ground for declaring a new science of politics. This, as we have seen, was not at all to think ahistorically, but on the very contrary stemmed instead from his realisation that all history might offer is not but circumstantial knowledge 'that be very fallacious'. The problem of religion, too, was essentially epistemic in nature. Religion was born of the 'anxiety for future time' and 'ignorance of the origin of things', both of them, then, markedly temporal. The backward-looking ignorance about the causes of things was coupled with a forward-looking compendium of false beliefs concerning all sorts of miracles, prophecies and 'invisible powers'. This was the very poisonous mixture at the heart of civil strife. For it was this that caused the generation of a multitude of ideas about God, true Christianity and God's will in general by the legion of prophetically inspired Christian politicians, preachers and activists. For that reason, Hobbes cleverly altered the very *politics of time*, so as to devoid the arguments of the opponents of their very temporal ground and render all sorts of self-designated prophets intellectually bankrupt. In a direct refutation of the views of Milton about 'Christian liberty' in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Hobbes thus designated sovereign as the only interpreter of God's word and also proceeded to alter the *politics of death*, as part of which he rebelled against the 'Dark Doctrines' of eternal damnation and salvation, so as to ensure greater obedience to political authority. Truly revolutionary of Hobbes' reorientation of Christian interpretation was his claim that God, as the agent of history, had but left history. Of course, God always *is* and temporal language never applies. However, this is not to say that God is always himself an actor in history. The Hobbesian designation of God as at once a *past* and *future* actor was profoundly important, for it stressed the existence in real time of profane history wherein *voluntary* actions of men constituted the nature of time and thus – history. Therefore, whatever men were to be like, such also was to be the future of politics; it was, after all, the characteristics of men 'as makers' of the commonwealth that determined the health of its institution and by

extension its longevity also. This history was nothing but the eschatological present of Christianity, leading tirelessly towards eternity.

But history being the sum total of nothing but *voluntary* actions of men, it was thus possible to change its course by changing the trajectory of various wills by artificially, and where need be forcefully, disciplining their passions and ‘rude ornaments’. This was the Hobbesian challenge already in *De Cive*, but far more so in *Leviathan* ‘embodies a new and far more pessimistic sense of what the powers of unaided reason can hope to achieve.’<sup>926</sup> Hobbes was by no means resigned about human ability to find out and follow truths. Hobbes did, after all, believe, as Pocock has show in his excellent essay on eschatology in Hobbes, that ‘the human mind ... dealth with secular happenings by recollecting’ phenomena resembling one another. Therefore, ‘a sufficiently lengthy accumulation of similar experiences would equip us with a tradition of usage’.<sup>927</sup>

So much is clear also from his own *Review and Conclusion* of the work, where he observes that the situations created by passions are pose ‘indeed great difficulties, but not impossibilities: for by education and discipline, they may be, and are sometimes, reconciled’.<sup>928</sup> However, Skinner is right to observe that Hobbes is far more skeptical by the time he is writing *Leviathan*.<sup>929</sup> In his *De Corpore* (1656), Hobbes observed that ‘I am not ignorant how hard a thing it is to weed out of men's mind such inveterate opinions as have taken root there, and been confirmed in them by the authority of most eloquent writers’.<sup>930</sup> However, what Hobbes at any rate wanted to do was to affect a ‘cultural transformation’, by bringing people ‘to see their own blindness, thereby leading “men toward that enlightened, rational understanding of their own interests’.<sup>931</sup> This, however, required an absolute sovereign whose sovereignty would not be contested. His right to set

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<sup>926</sup> Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), 347.

<sup>927</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago, 1989), 153.

<sup>928</sup> *Leviathan*, “Review and Conclusion”, 438.

<sup>929</sup> Cf. *Leviathan*, Chs. 5, 12, 37.

<sup>930</sup> Hobbes, *De Corpore*, edited by J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford, 1994), 186.

<sup>931</sup> L. Nauta, “Hobbes on Religion and the Church between The Elements of Law and Leviathan: A Dramatic Change of Direction?”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2002), 577.

what was right was to be inviolable, be it concerning Biblical interpretation, or deciding upon matters of *common morality*.

Having devoid the 'religious arguments' of his opponents of temporal legitimacy, Hobbes then proceeded to construct a political system that was also a moral system. Now, as Hobbes realised all too well, the lack of a *common morality* in the state of nature had represented a grave problem. For men had hitherto lived without either a shared sense of history, or a shared sense of morality. From now on, the civil laws would become the basis of a morality shared by all. It is to this end that fear acquired a particularly novel sense. As Hobbes saw his present, the chief source of problems had been none other than a *diffident anticipation of future* that fueled passions already anyway present in the most radical way possible, causing a perpetual state of war. Yet, as we know, such perpetuity was not in fact actually perpetual, but only denoted an *ever present possibility* of a conflict. It was precisely in response to such *psychological disposition* that Hobbes introduced a new politics of fear that was now to be centralised and issue from but one source alone, which was the sovereign. This was, above all else, a change in the politics of fear, for instead of abolishing already available energies, Hobbes instead conveniently places them in the service of a new cause.

Ginzburg has aptly observed how Hobbes 'does not want to destroy fear; on the contrary, he turns fear into the very base of the State'.<sup>932</sup> However, he never took this argument to where it might legitimately be seen as going. Indeed, far from doing away with fear, Hobbes in fact created an ever more powerful locus of fear. And far from ensuring the disappearance of the *ever present possibility* of a negative outcome, he very much maintained it as a central part of his conception, though he changed its nature. If before the time of civility, the *ever present possibility* of a demise was seen as coming from other men, already in the state of civility, where the sovereign authored all aspects of time and history, the *ever present possibility* was in place in the form of a possible punishment for *all* acts unauthorised by such sovereign.

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<sup>932</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, "Fear, Reverence, Terror: Reading Hobbes Today" (Max Weber Lecture Series (MWP - LS 2008/05), delivered at the European University Institute, February 2008), 8.

Thus, the temporality of the Hobbesian statehood was indeed one of a permanent exception all time throughout which the state exists is a time of exception accompanied by awe and terror; or else, this time seizes and is replaced by the *original* time of no-time and non-civility. The life of Leviathan, then, is already by definition always *exceptional*; for every aspect of its life is controlled, and the temporal hygiene dictated, by the ever present possibility of a future demise. The very same *rationale*, wherein *Fortuna* was the source of a constant ‘state of exception’, guided Machiavelli also. In response, he too resorted to the temporal extreme of instituting a temporal dictatorship. Like Machiavelli and Lipsius before him, Hobbes is also, though in a different way, rebelled against *natural time*. What was this natural time like? Above all else, it was full of contingency – uncontrolled, and worse still, uncontrollable sequence of possible events. Yet, such possibility was no mere possibility to a person like Hobbes who was in his own present observing just such a contingency that had resulted from erroneous ideas that had grown in time and by human frailty at large. Among one of the characteristics of *natural time* was the very feature of there being ‘no account of time’ present in Hobbes’ own characterisation of the state of nature. By this, Hobbes might have been making a reference to a pure accounting of time that results in a calendar, or something far more important that he would no doubt have known all too well from reading Machiavelli. This, as I believe he is referring to, is *kairos*, as a special instant of time that is, as we already know, a form of time, yet not *of* time as an orderly progression of minutes and seconds, but a rupture from it, a tract that is qualitatively *apart* from the normality of *chronos* – time in general.

However, the outcome of the Hobbesian project was far more radical, as were also the ways of realising such a project. Now, we have already seen how Machiavelli, faced with crisis, resorted to the extreme of creating ‘temporal dictatorship’, designed to avert the malice of the tyranny of time. However, we have already established that Machiavelli’s most likely preference was ultimately for a republic into which the temporal dictatorship would in time convert. Machiavelli was no great believer in humans and his anthropology was certainly far from being a positive anthropology. However, Machiavelli still retained a degree of hope for humanity, believing that strengthening *virtu*

might enable them to overcome the malice of *Fortuna*. We should here remember how, for that very reason, Machiavelli consciously weakened the idea of *Fortuna*, granting her only ‘one half’ of influence in the process of making history, while leaving the other half to human *virtu* – the ability of humans to act virtuously and shape history. This was essentially one of the chief tenets of Machiavelli’s republican temporal philosophy. In fact, here too, in the difference between the two projects of Machiavelli and Hobbes that arose out of very similar contexts, we see the most fundamental difference between the two authors as well, one a republican, the other – an absolutist.

Although engaged in a similar task, Hobbes went to hitherto unprecedented extremes. He first canceled human agency entirely, far more radically than Machiavelli, Lipsius and Bodin before him, and fashioned sovereignty in the sense precisely of an *absolute command over time*. The Hobbesian *novus tempus* is to be characterised at once by freezing particulars, made possible by human thought and action, by a new artificially ordered beginning in time that is followed by the artificial political economy of time thereafter, and eventually the absolute propriety of all time to follow. It was in so doing that the state had negated the constant anthropological present of humankind left without authority and had given rise to new regulatory beginning in time – all of them artificial. Now, before civility, the *right of nature* was the only thing immune from time – atemporal like God itself, without a moment of *origin* much like the custom law of Hobbes’ republican adversaries; however, empowering all to act in pursuit of their self-interests, the right of nature was itself the cause of human diffidence. The new Hobbesian God, however, is the new source of time and one at that with a claim at an artificial eternity of its own that it seeks to attain with artificial laws.

Now, like Machiavelli, Hobbes also conceived of freezing time as a process whereby *natural time* was overcome by *political time*. If the Machiavellian polis was constantly faced by the irregular force of *natural time* in the person of *Fortuna*, the goddess of contingency, the Hobbesian *civitas* would no longer face such contingency. But why should that be so? It is only now, at this point of argumentation, that we might expose the effects of the temporal modes of thought of the turbulent preceding decade upon Hobbes’ own thought. If the decade had had an acute sense of the *shortness of time*, itself



representing a Christian *state of exception* as the eschatological present of history anticipated its own imminent *kairotic* end, so too did Hobbes' Leviathan. An inseparable part of millenarian conception of time was the notion that time was about to end, but due to this realisation precisely it was also that time had to be cleansed. The categorisation of history into 'impure' and 'pure' tracts of time had been, as we have seen, characteristic of almost all the various social and political groups of the 1640s in England. Underlying such perception was the idea that time had gradually, over the course of history, become littered and thus had to be cleansed. This was a very much totalitarian mode of thought, the effects of which are apparent in Hobbes' own outlook, much as in the political thought and practice of a range of totalitarian movements, of which separately. This radical sense of the need for a new and pure time, cleansed of dissent, erroneous ideas and *temporal debris* in general, was precisely what informed Hobbes' own outlook.

This is precisely what caused Hobbes actually to constitute a millenarian deity in the form of Leviathan. Leviathan had to become not only time, but also assume the functions of God. It is only then that time itself could properly be seen as issuing from Leviathan. Hobbes may have wished to avoid the charge of heresy (though he eventually failed to do so anyway), thus calling Leviathan a 'mortal God' under the immortal God. However, such was the Hobbesian absolute adoration of his own artificial creation that in fact he very much designed Leviathan itself as a potential God. Hobbes himself never shied away from giving to his arguments about the centralisation of fear an explicitly theological flavour. As Hobbes observed in *De Cive*, 'the institution of eternall punishment was before sin, and had regard to this onely, that men might dread to commit sinne for the time to come.'<sup>933</sup> Moreover, in *Leviathan* he further stressed how 'there is nothing that can strengthen a Covenant of Peace agreed on ... but the feare of that Invisible Power'.<sup>934</sup>

The aim of such an institution had, according to Hobbes, been to pre-empt wrongful action. So too, then, was also to be the sovereign with its own artificial chains designed to ensure its artificial eternity. The Hobbesian sovereign was indeed a millenarian deity, yet one that represented *shortness*

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<sup>933</sup> *De Cive*, 4.

<sup>934</sup> *Leviathan*, XIV.

*of time* in itself and by virtue of which represented *ever-present millennium*, thus eternally postponing the fear of the end of time. Having become Time itself, and thereby having absorbed the psychology of millenarian anxiety, the Hobbesian sovereign at once became the sole source of time and history and that very fear that had led to its creation. The future moment of demise would no longer ever *be*, for Leviathan itself, if it existed at all, was *eternity*. The Hobbesian sovereign would become the messiah of sorts, the very embodiment of God as the source of all time and yet Himself always outside time. It is no coincidence that the Hobbesian sovereign is both visually (on the frontispiece of *Leviathan*) and theoretically (permanently outside the law as the very author of the law) always already outside of the 'political sphere' that it commands. It is in this way that at once the early modern millenarian sensibilities, some of the most important innovative tendencies of political thought, as well as the early modern quest for order came to fruition hitherto unprecedented.



## Conclusion

In this study, we set out to examine temporal perceptions during times of crises and their implications on political thought in the period between 1500 and 1660s. Considering the vast quantity of written material produced as a result of the proliferation of the cultures of printing, reading and writing, we have had to be selective in our choice of periods of crises and indeed of authors examined. We have thus concentrated on the Italian, French and English crises that have enabled this work to concentrate on temporal perceptions during crises across time and space. Broadly speaking, this work has belonged to the tradition of the Cambridge School of intellectual history. However, with the realization of the shortfalls of this school's exclusive concentration on discursive contexts at the expense of social, economic and cultural contexts, we have also sought to broaden the context somewhat so as to contextualize not just discursively, but also socially and culturally to the extent possible. This has affected our approach to the idea of 'time' as well. Instead of engaging with the frozen 'concept of time', we have chosen to study temporal discourses in their various socio-cultural and political manifestations. There is a difference at hand here. If a study of conceptual transformations, with its consequent focus on discursive contexts entails a narrower focus on the social and cultural contexts, what we have been interested to uncover here is not what the *concept* of time was, but how humans conceived of time in its broad manifestations: social, cultural and political. This is why we have also concentrated on 'time in context', thus uncovering how different presents of crisis felt time and how they employed temporal discourses to invest them with political significance.

Time was indeed hugely important to many early modern intellectuals. Importantly, this was the case not only culturally and socially, but also politically. As far as culture and the social realm were concerned — that is one's way of life in the everyday flow of history — time acquired a range of meanings. On the one hand, time was seen as the dimension of one's existence. But it was also seen as an agent that was itself very much active, had its own ways and wills and affected the course of human life. Contrary to the

contemporary perceptions of time, in the period of our study time was seen as an actor itself influencing things. This was important, and especially so politically. For if time were not just a dimension and a framework of existence but also an actor of its own accord, there were then things that ought to be planned accordingly, in order to harmonize one's political actions with the powerful co-actor in the form of time. Politically, then, particular acts undertaken by historical actors had a significance in time – they were viewed as temporal acts. This way of seeing life and action is of course already foreign to us in the contemporary times. Yet, it made every difference to those inhabiting the presents with which this study is preoccupied.

As we have seen, the period between 1500 and 1660s was not preoccupied by a single and homogenous temporal theme. In this regard, the present work has remained true to our normative ideal of historiography as a field of enquiry into autonomous presents of thought and action. Instead of interpreting historical presents as *anticipating* any one future thing or indeed as *heading* to some predestined point and therefore realizing some teleological destiny, we have let the historical presents speak as much as possible *for themselves*. The value of historiography is, indeed, in presenting the variety – of thoughts, fears, preoccupations and dispositions. And variety we have indeed presented. In the place of identifying a single dominant theme across the entire period of our study, we have instead uncovered a range of dominant themes.

Of course it is fair to say that there are things that persist throughout much of the period. One of them, for instance, is a broadly negative attitude towards time in general. This is no coincidence, for all statements made about time were uttered during times of crises, when the objective present time was negative; time as an agent of history was seen as guilty. Moreover, the realization of the fleeting nature of time might be seen as one of the other themes that persist rather consistently during our period of study. This theme is present in the thought of Petrarch in the fifteenth century, much as in that of Milton in the seventeenth century. However, apart from such broader similarities, there are more nuanced details in the temporal philosophy of various presents. Each of these tracts of time indeed provide their own approaches to time. If in the sixteenth-century Florence the key theme is the devouring and unreliable nature of time, against which one ought to wage a

battle, in France and Holland of the later sixteenth century the key theme is resignation before the might of time. The ethics of obedience to absolute power and the call to resign the patriotic fervor that instructed individual actions fitted perfectly well with this idea of time. The English Civil War, in turn, presents us with a conservative mode of temporal thought that is best characterized by the willingness of historical actors to reinstate some lost perfection. The chief temporal characteristic of their thought, be they a Royalist or a Republican, a Digger or a Leveller, is indeed the willingness to restore the *pure time*.

These temporal views had a remarkably direct effect on political philosophy as well. By virtue precisely of his temporal philosophy, I have cast Machiavelli as the author of a revolutionary paradigm. His mode of temporal thought was indeed one of action, battle and creation. Quite on the contrary, the examination of the temporal modes of thought available during the English Civil War (a war indeed and precisely for this reason not a 'revolution') in turn draws the picture of a far more conservative enterprise. As far as temporal thought is concerned, even the most radical and progressive Englishmen were themselves conservative. Their demands for social progress were based not on the conception of a new time, but on the restoration of some older, purer time. Their argumentative legitimacy was consistently sought in the past.

Interestingly, we have seen how the rise of various strands of thought also had an impact on temporal perceptions. To that end, however, we ought to observe that as with so many other matters in intellectual history, here too it is very hard to uncover what impact came first. Was it the case that temporal perceptions were affected by the rise of new traditions of thought? Or was it inversely that the shift in the way one thought about time gave way also to the shift in the preferred schools of thought? One can never know with any certainty. It is clear, for instance, that the rise of Neo-Stoicism owed so much to the nature of the times, and indeed to the disposition that humans came to have towards time, as the development of a resigned attitude towards citizenship in time owed to the rise of Neo-Stoicism in turn.

One thing remains clear. The shift in ethics of citizenship to a more resigned mode of existence was paralleled by the return of Stoic and Skeptic ideas. So did also the gradual appearance of a centralizing, rational constitutional state.

What we have further contributed to this knowledge about the appearance of a new ethics of statehood, and indeed new sort of constitutionalism in practice, is the narrative of the appearance of a way of thinking about politics in time that immediately translated into the endorsement of some form of absolutism, be it monarchical or parliamentary, so as to freeze the unorganized flow of particulars. In other words, we have shown that the rise of ‘the early modern state’ was paralleled by the rise of a mode of thought in the tradition of *the state of exception* that was itself a fruit of the transformation of temporal perceptions during crises. To this we return briefly again below.

### **Crisis as collapse of history and experience**

Gramsci was indeed highly perceptive when he observed that crises are those times when the old is dying and the new is not born. Such too seems to be the state of the world at this writing. In this study, the chief preoccupation has been the *subjective* sense of crisis and the temporal views and discourses available during crises. Our quest has not been to uncover if there *was* indeed a crisis, and of what sort and intensity it was. Yet, it might be observed here that the period of our consideration was a particularly novel one. In the one-hundred-and-fifty years encompassed broadly in this study, Europe changed out of all recognition. When Machiavelli was born, the Christian house was still mostly united. There was very limited knowledge of the peoples beyond Europe, and none of the peoples in America. The Christian Church stood mostly united, with the exception of Eastern Christians that were at any rate of little import to Western Europeans, and the Pope reigned supreme. When Hobbes was writing his conclusion, the world was already hugely different. The sciences had progressed, as had the knowledge of other cultures and religions of which Montaigne had in-between already written in terms reminiscent of what we now know as ‘cultural relativism’. Skeptical doubts were being cast about all things sacred and profane. Even England itself was utterly different – the King was dead, and the established church and the House of Lords abolished. The one-hundred-and-fifty year period witnessed the battle of republicanism, absolutism and the reemergence of utopian thought also. The period at hand, then, evolved as a sequence of Gramscian

crises indeed. It was always getting newer, but never quite comprehending the novelty. The present lay beyond the realm of experience and was thus *critical*.

In this work, we have concentrated on a range of authors, some of them far from political but only theological or literary. Yet, these too have a political value, for political thought of a society is not always confined to political theory *stricto sensu*. While we have attempted to broaden the hermeneutic breadths of the context in so doing, our chief protagonists have nevertheless been political thinkers, Machiavelli and Hobbes *in primis*. Justus Lipsius, no doubt a highly important author in his own right, or Jean Bodin have formed a transitory part of the work. This, again, is not to diminish their importance, and especially that of Lipsius, to the broader argument of this thesis. Quite on the contrary, it is Lipsius that brings together the various threads advanced by Machiavelli and refines it with his own specific sense of the ‘political space’ that paves the way for what is to come in the thought of Hobbes whom we have seen to use eminently Lipsian metaphors of body politics and sovereignty. These can hardly be coincidences.

While our chief preoccupation here has been to expose the thought on time manifest during different times of crises, in so doing we have also engaged in a range of historiographical debates on Machiavelli, Lipsius and Hobbes among other issues. We have, to a degree, reinterpreted both Machiavelli and Hobbes, not just in terms of the meanings of their theory, but also in terms of *what they were doing* — that is, then, ‘Temporal Thought in Historical Context’. For their ideas of time, as they were received, reworked and transmitted by them across their immediate historical time, were indeed used very politically. We have also, one might hope, enriched the inner textual understanding of Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Hobbes’ *Leviathan* from the perspective of temporal thought. We have, for instance, shown that in Machiavelli’s political thought each idea of *virtù* is vested with its own corresponding temporal meaning in the realm of political action. We have also seen, to note but one instance, that Hobbes is far from being an ‘unhistorical thinker’, but instead very much a historical thinker; it is, in fact, this that leads him to develop the sort of ahistorical political form that he proceeds to design in the form of *Leviathan*. We have also seen how Hobbes alters the politics not just of time, but of death and ‘eternal torture’ so as to achieve the specific highly political



argumentative ends of his own. But to know how time was *used* politically has been one part of our exploration; the other, and equally important, has been to uncover how it has been *experienced* and *felt*. For the way in which time was felt in the present was the surest precondition also for the sorts of uses to which the politics of time was later placed — a useful reminder, one might say, for our times also.

As the research for this work progressed, it was being made ever clearer that this has always been the case. It has indeed been bewildering to see just how similarly humans responded to a sense of heightened crisis, especially in terms of their perception of the temporality of their social existence and of crisis itself. For indeed it is true across historical time that humans are always fearful of a thing they do not know. The reason of course is that the greatest source of certainty resides in the realm of experience, while the unknown by definition lies beyond the realm of experience. The human intellect being an interpretative machine that is constantly at work, it has always needed time to adjust to new phenomena, novel ways of life and hitherto unknown modes of organization. Equally interesting has been to see how in each of these cases the sense of crisis originated precisely from the sense — whether objectively grounded or not — that forms, customs, cultures and modes of organization were no longer comprehensible. And crisis is a tract of time beyond knowledge. The present was accordingly seen as falling outside the realm of experience. In a way, then, this has been a story of the gradual collapse of experience. Not at all coincidentally, all of the three most important protagonists of this account of early modern intellectual life, Machiavelli, Lipsius and Hobbes, conceived of experience in a remarkably similar way. It may be true to say that most of the sixteenth and seventeenth century thinkers did indeed conceive of experience and *similitudo temporum* in a similar way (though, we have seen that they did not all conceive of it *the same way*), these three had another important characteristic in common. This was precisely their disbelief in the *absolute* nature of experience. Accordingly, in each of their theories experience and *similitudo temporum* takes an eminent place, but they are all conscious theorists also of the collapse of experience. Machiavelli theorized most explicitly about conditionality, even designating different scenarios of action in response to different social and political

configurations, but Lipsius and Hobbes too have a high appreciation that experience alone will not do absolutely. While history, experience and example have a value, that value might not be that great after all. For time is always novel and at best history may only rhyme. Instead, something far greater was required. Something like Machiavelli's "Wise Physician", Montaigne's and Lipsius' "Skilled Physician" and Hobbes' 'Able Architect'. Not at all coincidentally, all authors write of these skilled and able extra-powers in pursuit of constancy, durability and stability in time. The conclusion at which political thought arrived as it faced instability in time was that not experience in general, but only the experience systematized into absolute political control that there might be a hope of attaining the desired ends.

## **Creating Political Time**

One of the particularly salient themes that we have seen emerge in our period of study are the polarity of *natural time* versus *political time*. We ought to remember once again that these are not terms used by the contemporaries themselves. Nor do they need to be, so long as they might justifiably be employed in order to categorise the thought of historical actors. This work, I believe, has shown that to be the case, especially in the context of Machiavelli's political thought, and by extension in the thought of Lipsius and Montaigne also whose broader philosophies of time itself remain not far removed from that of Machiavelli, though the practical implications of such an outlook vary. In fact, we have even detected the presence of this mode of temporal thought in the Eastern Roman Republic. Indeed, as early as the 470s, Priskos of Panion's *History* already imparted a clearly republican temporality — the notion that institutional order stood against chance and contingency, in other words that where institutional context was lacking, there natural time reined. The only way of defying natural time was by creating political time that was institutionalised, and endowed one's social existence in time with certainty and a degree of guarantee. It is remarkable that philosophical republicanism of all following has remained loyal to this noble pursuit. Machiavelli's new modes and orders were designed precisely to eradicate the tyranny of time — the rich range of fortune's onslaughts that destabilized the world of unruly

particulars. The English Republicans, in turn, might be seen as contesting precisely this against the King-in-Parliament. What parliamentarians as well as Levellers might be seen as demanding is precisely *guarantees* in time. It is not at all coincidental that the right to calling and dissolving the parliament should have become such a major bone of contention. This striving for stability in time, and indeed *ownership of time*, found a most eminent exposition in the parliamentarians' own act to grant the parliament of a perpetual status. Strikingly, at the very heart of contemporary republican theory, too, there is a very considerable analytic and argumentative emphasis on the aspect of *eradicating uncertainty* as a necessary precondition to the fulfillment of the republican normative ideal.

Absolutists, to be sure, also saw the benefits of *political time*. We have seen that Bodin envisaged the *res publica* (though to him this was a state broadly speaking, not a republic in its specific normative sense) as a transformation away from the mere pre-political 'chance assemblage' to a sphere of rational calculation and low contingency. Equally importantly, it is useful to observe how Bodin pits law and custom against one another, laws being artificial and thus instruments of *political time* and custom being traditional and thus a form of *natural time*. Bodin explicitly states that *political time* ought to force where necessary the *natural time*. This was only to take a more extreme form in the thought of Hobbes who indeed took the early modern yearning for stability to its most radical extreme. The Leviathan either exists, or it does not. If it does not, than *natural time* reigns and no one and nothing might be *guaranteed* immunity from degenerative state of things. Here too, emphasis should really fall on *guarantee*, for Hobbes never argued things were absolutely and constantly wrong in the pre-political phase. The point was, rather, that they *could be* and most often were — as they were in his frail present. The way Hobbes positioned temporally was that it was either Leviathan or *natural time* that would emerge as a victor. But Leviathan was neither of the past, of the present or of the future, for what it sought to negate was a characteristic itself constantly present in humans. This could, then, show itself *at any time*.

So the entire Hobbesian project became fearful towards the *future moment* of degeneration when *natural time* might overpower *political time*. It was

driven precisely by this sense of a permanent *coming exception* in response to which Hobbes developed the most serious and radical theory to attack the malice of time. Using the Machiavellian paradigm of the *future moment of contingency*, and the Lipsian paradigm of the ‘political sphere’, Hobbes thus generated a new kind of temporal mode of existence. It was this that gave rise to the strictest and most coherent theory of absolute sovereignty.

## **States of exception**

In this work, we have traced the emergence of the mentalité of a state of exception that lay at the very heart of the gradual evolution of early modern statehood. At the outset, we argued that there were a number of possible modes of temporal perception available. An especially powerful and popular mode was *kairotic* way of thinking about time. We have seen that many distinguished historians, including Le Goff, Panofsky, and Thomas, have seen the presence of this way of thinking. But since their preoccupation has not been a study of temporal perceptions, they have never sought either to name this phenomenon, or to trace its intellectual roots. Yet, they are perfectly traceable to the classical Greek idea of *kairos*.

Now, *kairos* was by definition a special tract of time — ‘time out of joint’ as Shakespeare’s famous metaphor has it. Its specialness lay not just in its formal anatomy, but in its qualitative nature also. Since the antiquity, *kairotic* time had been seen as a *special time* of anticipating judgment, or exercising critical medical involvement. Most generally anatomized, it was at once time out of *chronotic* joint, as well as the *time that remained* between the *now-time* (Benjamin’s ‘jetzeit’) and some crucial end that was being awaited. The perception of crisis as ‘time out of joint’, and as a tract of time extant outside the realm of experience, was perfectly *kairotic*. As we have argued, such was precisely the early modern perception of crisis. Crucially, *kairotic* time and time of crisis shared another valuable characteristic — they were both tracts of time endowed with a *transformative potential*. This is where the timeless metaphor of ‘crisis as opportunity’ has stemmed from. Here it befits to note that this was by no means solely a Greco-Roman and later Western European way of comprehending crisis. As is well known, the Chinese language has two

characters in the word corresponding to the word ‘crisis’. One denotes ‘danger’, and the other – opportunity. No less famous is the Gramscian definition of crisis as a condition when ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born’<sup>935</sup> that is also an instance of the *kairotic* perception of crisis – an unusual opening from the mundane time that is highly important and very possibly also transformative. *Kairos*, itself, was then a form of temporal exceptionality. It was indeed neither expected or normal, nor safe. It was beyond the realm of anticipated, known and experienced phenomena. It was, therefore, highly dangerous, as the wisdom buried in the ancient Chinese language also has it. Yet another sense in which *kairos* was part of temporal exceptionality was that it was generated by *Fortuna*, the very source of all sorts of *accidenti*, *cyclicity*, *chance* and, accordingly – instability in time.

It has been profoundly interesting to observe how the classical idea of dictatorship, with its very distinct temporal philosophy, reemerged in the context of doubtless the most *kairotic* perception of crisis in early modern intellectual history – the perception of Italian crisis in the political thought of Machiavelli. Strikingly, this occurred as part of a pursuit to overcome the tyranny of time precisely and indeed as a defensive mechanism leveled against the prolonged ‘state of exception’ that *Fortuna* was seen to be generating. Machiavelli was the earliest and most intelligent theorist of *accident*; but he was not just that. By virtue precisely of his sophisticated treatment of *accident*, *luck*, *chance* and thus time at large, Machiavelli also became the earliest theorist of the *state of exception*. While he inherited the contemporary temporal theories and languages available during the fifteenth century, he theorized further and produced a complex vision of time as not just a dimension of one’s social existence and not just an agent in itself, as his contemporaries had also viewed time, but also as a source of *permanent exception*.

To this end, Machiavelli’s qualitative reading of time was especially important. By virtue precisely of being *such as it was*, time provided a source of *exception* indeed. It was the awareness of such tyranny of time over the human free will that drew Machiavelli to rather radical conclusions. In order

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<sup>935</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, “Wave of Materialism” and “Crisis of Authority” (NY: International Publishers, 1971), 275-276.

to overcome the malice of time — that in practice took the form of changeability, instability and cyclicity caused by the unorganized particulars — Machiavelli sought to establish a counter-dictatorship to the tyranny of time. However, this is an instance when one's inner psychology, insofar as an historian might hope to be able to uncover it, is of essence. This is so for at least two good reasons. The first is that Machiavelli was a republican at heart and, though unfortunate and neglected, a conscious servant of the republican cause nevertheless. The second, stemming in a way from the first, is that Machiavelli had a contempt for the rising large territorial monarchies, France and Spain, both of which played a role in his personal malaise. He was indeed a theorist of a dying species of polity, a republic, and not at all coincidentally, the idea of dictatorship too was very much a republican idea. Machiavelli's pursuit, as shown by the perfect coincidence between his psychology, as well as the contextual and theoretical circumstances, was indeed the establishment of a 'temporal dictatorship'. This was to be temporal in two senses. Firstly, it was to be temporally bound, like a good and decent dictatorship of classical political theory. Secondly, it was to overcome the harm that *Fortuna's* unruly particulars and accidents had brought upon the miserable lands of Italy. Having equipped the princely *virtu* with a knowledge sufficient to resist to the best possible degree the onslaughts of fortune, Machiavelli also helped the prince to identify a *kairos*, itself so hard to see on time, but went further and also suggested the framework for a new constitutional time. This was indeed a grand plan for a new Italy that, we have here argued, ought to have taken the form of a large republic at first ruled absolutely, as the unorganized matter took the form, and then in a more republican manner, endowed with a 'free way of life'. After all, as Machiavelli made clear, all political forms including his beloved republics, needed sole legislators to give the matter an orderly republican form.

A heightened sense of emergency, even when the latter term is not used, is to be seen during the entire period of our study. Even Montaigne, generally so very calm, rational and indeed resigned, had a clear sense of emergency and the subsequent need to adjust the laws accordingly, not to mention Lipsius, Bodin and Hobbes — political theorists of emergency. Interestingly, as we have seen, Henry Parker's parliamentary absolutism was also an instance of

political thought in the tradition of state of exception. These were, to be sure, far from being coincidental. These, in fact, are how men saw time during periods of crises. But yet another part of our exploration is how they *reacted* to it. To this end, we have uncovered a range of responses that varied from a call to arms to an outright resignation. However, all *political* responses ultimately developed a theory of politics that was designed to *overcome* the malice of time. The Machiavellian paradigm of exception was indeed present in the political theory of the entire period even when no reference was made to the Italian thinker.

The sense of emergency itself came in a number of forms. The most common form was again that time the agent was itself a source of emergency. The other form manifested itself as part of the paradigm of ‘shortness of time’ that gave way to the psychology of radicalism and millenarianism, urging men to engage in radical activities of eradication and purification of the political present from the evil influences. We have seen the prevalence of this paradigm in Savonarola’s Florence most eminently, as the city was anticipating an impending doom. The figures of *Fortuna* and *Death* were seen as extra-historical agents, and indeed as attacks of the supernatural to the order of events, increasing the intensity with which ‘shortness of time’ was experienced. To that end, we might remember the exclamations of John Donne who, believing to be on his deathbed, desperately complained of the shortness of time precisely. Interestingly, both Machiavelli and Montaigne had mused upon death precisely *in defiance* of time. Machiavelli wrote Vettori observing how he did not ever fear death after his imaginary time-travels that resulted in the writing of *The Prince*. While Montaigne declared to have defeated the fear of death thanks largely to his stolid complexion, thanks largely to his ability to philosophize properly. In portraying their willingness to defeat the fear of death, these men spoke about themselves above all else. In a manner truly against the current, and especially in those times that they inhabited, these authors consciously declared how the paradigm of ‘shortness of time’ was of no import to them. They all also called for a specific kind of stability, though their practical political ideas of stability themselves differed. This was the sort of stability that could not be found out if the fearful temporal paradigms, such as the apocalyptic announcement ‘that time is short’ were to

remain effective. For the prevalence of heightened millenarian preoccupations and the consequent paradigm of ‘shortness of time’ was almost always immediately followed by radical civic and political action, be it in Savonarola’s Florence or indeed during the English Civil War.

Yet, in this regard too, it was Thomas Hobbes who made the most decisive discursive step. Hobbes not only altered the politics of death and punishment, but he secularized the Christian paradigm of temporal state of exception in order to create a ground strong enough to support his theory of sovereignty in the *saeculum*. Secularising the Christian *state of exception*, Hobbes provided a view of Leviathan that was itself living in the *time that remains* – the time between its generation and its possible end. The political life of a subject were to be subordinate to this grand scheme of things with the fearful possibility of Leviathan’s dissolution in mind, just as the religious life of a Christian had to redeem oneself of its sins in anticipation of the End of Time. The ideas of Leviathan were endowed by the psychology of eschaton – where judgment, discipline and economy of thought and power were all allocated accordingly. This was the Hobbesian grand transfer of Divine political economy to the secular sovereign. In so doing, Hobbes designated the Leviathan as the instrument of secular eschaton – thereby institutionalizing the economy of time and death, reward and punishment, fear and damnation – while at the same time appointing the sovereign as the true messiah of life extant in the *time that remains*.

## **Exception and sovereignty**

In contemporary scholarly understanding, sovereignty and exception often associate. As is well known, this has its origins in the legal theory of Carl Schmitt whose renowned concept of *Ausnahmezustand* (‘the state of exception’) argued for a view of sovereignty as the *ability* to transcend the law in the name of some greater good. This is well encapsulated in Schmitt’s equally famous statement that ‘the sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception’.<sup>936</sup> Temporally speaking, when Schmitt wrote of *Ausnahmezustand*,

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<sup>936</sup> C. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago, 2005), 5.



he was also writing of *extra-legal time*. In other words, *Ausnahmezustand* is itself the duration of all time when the laws are annulled by the sovereign. World history remembers many such instances. In April 1861, for example, President Abraham Lincoln acted as an absolute dictator. Nazi Germany, in turn, represented an extended state of exception wherein the constitution and the laws of Germany were frozen.<sup>937</sup> In all these cases, time was of central importance. For time defines the legality, and thus the very essence, of the state of exception — as it defined the legality of the classical Roman dictatorship also. All contemporary constitutions of consolidated democracies grant provisions regarding the temporality of the state of exception. To bring but one example, presidents of parliamentary republics, who often nominally command the state of exception and the armed forces, have 48 hours of exception that has to be approved by the parliament. During these 48 hours, the otherwise often insignificant political actor in fact commands *bare sovereignty*. But this continues only for so long as the said official is not limited temporally. The very moment that ends the time-frame of autonomous action, in this case the hypothetical 48 hours, then sovereignty is already shared with others — in this case, the parliament. Sovereign, then, is not he who decides on the state of exception *sensu stricto*, but he who has an executive control over *political time* and has no need of sharing his *bare sovereignty* with anyone.

Bodin and Hobbes, both so anxious to freeze the particulars of time so as not to let anything slip from their absolute control, knew this very well. As we have seen, what really matters is not who *holds* sovereignty, but who *owns* it, that is then who *holds it perpetually*. Machiavelli, too, was deeply concerned with *perpetuity* in time. His political project, though never enacted in his own time, did envisage the attainment of this end. Machiavelli was a sixteenth century intellect and, though he may have been working towards a new constitution as it has been argued here and elsewhere, he was nevertheless not the offspring of a constitutionally minded time yet. In contrast, however, such were indeed both Bodin and, even more so, the English republicans and Thomas Hobbes. Did they, then, also have this sort of definition of sovereignty? They did. The English republicans understood that true

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<sup>937</sup> See G. Agamben, *State of Exception* (London, 2005).

sovereignty lay in perpetuity. We have already seen them contest precisely the *perpetuity* and *continuity* of the sovereign discretion, not the right to temporary decision-making — a thing they enjoyed anyway, but from time to time, at the king's arbitrary will. Yet, such arbitrariness meant the servitude to uncertainty, much like servitude to *natural time* as against *political time* endowed by rules, norms and guarantees in time — that is, the institutional order of a state that was to them a republic. What of Hobbes, then? He too is concerned with none other than *eternity*. At the very heart of his revolutionary theory of sovereignty is precisely the imperative that sovereignty be not only indissoluble as has often been stressed in scholarship, but also *continuous*.

This has been neglected as insignificant in much of the scholarship, yet Hobbes stipulated very hard that this be so. And he had a very good reason for that. If a sovereign's command is temporally unconditional, and indeed if the sovereign does not have a command over succession, then the *artificial eternity*, the very central tenet of the entire project is rendered null. In such a case, the sovereign was not truly, or was no more, a sovereign but only a servant to the *true sovereign*. While we should like to remain historians of political thought in this work, and not political theorists, drawing from our exploration of the evolution of early modern theories of sovereignty as a result of a revision of temporal philosophies amid crisis, we might revise the Schmittean formulation of sovereignty in the following way:

True sovereign is he who commands time; all others are but mere agents of the sovereign.

It is remarkable to see that this understanding of sovereignty, that seems to be far more sophisticated than that of Schmitt, was present in its incipient form already in the political thought of Bodin and in a mature form in the thought of Hobbes also. Equally importantly, we have argued that this idea has represented a secularized version of the Christian theology.

### ***In inceptum finis est***

All things that have a beginning have an end also. This was a dominant early modern realization and this is now our realization at the end of this work as well. In what has proved to be a remarkable journey across time and political

cultures, this work has examined the evolution of Western political thought in the period between 1500 and 1660s from the prism of temporal discourses. In so doing, we have uncovered that time did indeed matter most considerably. We have further established that, while several broader themes persisted, temporal discourses in fact shifted no less considerably over the course of our period of study. Above all else, what shifted was the practical political meaning attached to the ideas of time. Indeed, this work contributes to the way of thinking that stresses that ideas of time *do* have a highly political meaning. Much of this remains to be studied for the contemporary period. As the exploration of the tumultuous period between 1500 and 1660s has shown, the study of how humans perceived time and used it politically can be very fruitful indeed in enlightening us about not just the temporality of a given culture, but its very intimate thoughts and political actions as well. It was in so doing that we have seen how the early modern theory of sovereignty was born as a result of a gradual radicalization of Western political thought precisely as the human intellect sought to respond to the *exceptionality* generated by time. We have thus also established that *all sovereignty*, and not just infamous dictators, has philosophically always been geared towards generating *a state of exception* – its very tool of survival.

In a way, I believe that all dictatorships and autocracies have been characterized by a certain paradigm of the ‘shortness of time’. Secularised versions of the Christian eschatological paradigm, permeated Western political thought in early modernity, but continued to exist well into the twentieth century. All three of the horrific disasters endured by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nazism, Fascism and Communism, had a certain idea of ‘shortness of time’ at the heart of their paradigm. They were all movements that conceived of themselves as *leading* to some greater perfection. Indeed, as is well known, the Soviet Union was leading to communism; the German Third Reich was leading to a state of Aryan superiority dominated by Germanic peoples and the like. In all cases of dictatorship, a certain idea of ‘shortness of time’ was indeed prevalent.

The sense of the present, too, was most often that of *the time that remains*, that is between the *now-time* (the ‘jetztzeit’) and the end of time. Yet, the end of time, in the context of these political practices, was often a secularized sense

of the Christian literal end of time. The endpoint was instead the attainment of the ideal end — the victory of Communism, the racially purified European society and the like. Here, too, at work was the psychology of ideal perfection. Like eternity in Christian thought, that knew no change and was perfect, so the end-result of these movements was deemed by its agents as the true perfection of the state of things. Whatever the actual contents with which a particular movement was endowed, a certain degree of eschatology indeed seems to have been present in all of them. In the framework so viewed, the present became a part of the eschaton, the *time that remains*, a succession of time between the *now-time* and the eternal glory. Upon further scholarly examination, this could prove to be a fruitful direction of thought upon time and politics and indeed their great dangers.

To a degree, the challenge that lay before Hobbes was exactly the challenge that lay before Machiavelli and Lipsius as well. For the malice of time was constantly nurtured by wrongful human dispositions. Now, Machiavelli's answer to that was twofold — found a lasting order to minimize the effects of that which is unfortunately permanent in human nature. With any luck, human nature might then be civilized over the course of time. The challenge then also had a lot to do with psychology, the *inner disposition* of humans that was not what it ought to be. Like the Neo-Stoics before him, Hobbes also understood all too well that this *inward disposition* had to be dealt with. Exactly like Lipsius and Montaigne, he called for an ethics of obedience — albeit a far more radical one. Unlike them, he never introduced Stoic reasoning on the *good way of life* in order to justify his theory of obedience. All the same, the practical significance of this was identical.

However, and this is of profound importance, Hobbes did far more than just argue for obedience. He went so far as to revisit the very ideas of death, judgment and divine sacred presence in profane history. The neglect of Hobbes' Third Book has caused the neglect also of this hugely important aspect of his thought. What Hobbes did there was indeed far from just attacking the false prophets that had sprung up so prolifically in his times. Crucially, there Hobbes argued that the Kingdom of God was *not yet come*, and *not in England*, as many had thought. Instead, humans inhibited profane history that was outside of *apostolic time* and thus knew no prophets any

more, no new revelations and no God as an actor of history. That was all from the realm of sacred history when divine epiphany was normality and prophets lived to receive revelation. This had a number of considerable discursive implications. For one thing, since the prophetic sacred time had already ended, the world that one inhabited was the *eschaton*, the time that remains. There being no new prophecies of any value in this time, the true meaning of Christianity was not any longer in martyrdom for a possibly wrong cause, but in the right sort of inner disposition. With this, in a mode perfectly recognizable to us, Hobbes invokes an argument akin the Lipsian Neo-Stoic argument against patriotism, or indeed the Montaignean argument against civil service. Hobbes, however, does so in the context of Christianity — such a sensitive and contested ground. What Hobbes sought to achieve with these two streams of thought was remarkably clever. Residents as they were not of sacred but of profane history, of *the time that remains*, in the absence of any new prophetic truths, the subjects had to resign themselves not just politically, but also theologically to the interpretation of the sovereign. Crucially, apparently fearful that this alone may not do, Hobbes goes so far as to redraw the interpretation of the immortality of the soul — there too, doing none other than redrawing the politics of time. Indeed, the very temporality of the soul's immortality is Hobbes. As he stresses, no literal interpretation of the soul's corporeal existence, or its unconditional eternality, might be inferred from the Scripture, save before the Day of Judgment. This, too, is a pursuit intended to strengthen his specific temporal paradigm. The very design here, as we have seen, was to alter the politics of fear away from the fear of Divine eternal torture to that of the very real punishment due from the sovereign here and now. Or else, and Hobbes never concealed this, the fear of the clergy would always outshine the fear of the sovereign. What Hobbes did, accordingly, was to render the sovereign the ultimate dispenser not just of religious truth, but also of the ruling upon death and life, torment and damnation — the true commander of time itself. It was thus that the Englishman created a 'mortal God' indeed in the *saeculum*. The rest was the time that remained.

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