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Renaissance and Reformation

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and
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RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION
Editors’ Introduction

Readers who are particularly interested in Voegelin’s critique of modern political ideologies will find this volume of his early writings especially significant. Here he analyzes the breakdown of the unity of imperial Christianity leading to the rise of autonomous reason and sectarian revolt, tendencies that came to fuller development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hence the analysis found in this text is directly relevant for understanding aspects of modern political ideologies. Readers of this text will find that it contains not only Voegelin’s early analysis of modernity but also descriptions and analyses of the immediate roots of many of the modern movements that he addresses in his later works.

I. The Place of This Text in Voegelin’s Work

Although not his first publication, History of Political Ideas was begun early in Voegelin’s career as a teacher.¹ According to his

¹ These texts were written in the forties, and many new works have been published since that time. The literature on the Renaissance and Reformation is so vast that anything like a complete update would be beyond the scope of this note or the purpose of this work. The reader who is interested in the general historical background of this time can consult The New Cambridge Modern History, vol. 1, The Renaissance, 1493–1520, ed. George R. Potter [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957], and vol. 2, The Reformation, ed. Geoffrey R. Elton [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958]. A recent single volume covering this period is Bard Thompson, Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996]. For a specific consideration of the political philosophy of this era as rooted in its historical context, see Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, vol 1, The Renaissance [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], and vol. 2, The Age of Reformation [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978]. In addition to these works, the more recent Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. Quentin Skinner
own reflections, it began as a textbook that was to be about two hundred to two hundred and fifty pages in length. As Voegelin began his study for this textbook, three things took place that led him to reassess his work. First, he discovered that the treatment the materials had been given to date was inadequate. To develop his own knowledge of the material, Voegelin worked through the literature from Greek philosophy to the present. At this point, the material began to expand well beyond the small textbook that he had planned to write.

Second, as Voegelin studied this material, he became convinced that the traditional schema of beginning with Greek philosophy and moving to the present period was inadequate. Each period that Voegelin studied forced him to a consideration of its sources. The Middle Ages pushed him to Christian origins. His study of Christian origins pushed him to a consideration of Jewish and Hebrew sources. Voegelin took up the study of Hebrew with a local rabbi in order to consult the texts in their original language. These studies forced him into a further consideration of the ancient civilizations of the Near East as the matrix out of which Israel emerged. This led to the conclusion, best stated in Voegelin’s own words, that “The pattern of a unilinear development of political ideas, from a supposed constitutionalism of Plato and Aristotle, through a dubious constitutionalism of the Middle Ages, into the splendid constitutionalism of the modern period, broke down.”

The third matter affecting the study became clear when Voegelin was writing about the nineteenth century. As he worked on this period, he came to the conclusion that “the conception of a history of ideas was an ideological deformation of reality. There were no ideas unless there were symbols of immediate experiences.” This led Voegelin to turn from a study of ideas to an examination of the


2. Voegelin’s reflections on this project can be found in Autobiographical Reflections, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), chap. 17.
3. Ibid., 63.
4. Ibid.
experiences that engendered them. These three issues led Voegelin in a direction beyond the scope of a history of ideas.

Of this period in his intellectual development, Voegelin wrote, "I would characterize the five years between 1945 and 1950 as a period of indecision, if not paralysis, in handling the problems that I saw but could not intellectually penetrate to my satisfaction." As every student of Voegelin's thought knows, his breakthrough found expression in the development of the Walgreen Lectures delivered in Chicago in 1951.

The texts in this volume were written in this early period, when Voegelin was struggling to clarify both the meaning of political experience and the implications of the emerging shift from a study of ideas to a study of experience. Yet it is easy to be misled by Voegelin's shift, supposing it to be a radical break with the materials contained in these studies. That was not the case, as the "General Introduction to the Series" endeavors to illustrate and explain. The shift was a deeper penetration into the figures and movements of these times and a more significant interpretation of their meaning. The material in this collection continues to have value not only for an understanding of Voegelin's intellectual development but also as a study of the sources, movements, and persons who have articulated a philosophy of order in history, however formed or deformed that articulation may have been. It was through the specific study of history that Voegelin arrived at the significant conclusions he would later draw about human existence in history and its search for order. One can claim that these studies laid the foundation for one of Voegelin's basic principles: "The order of history emerges from the history of order."

II. Voegelin's Characterization of This Period

This volume in the History of Political Ideas covers the modern period as represented by the Renaissance and the Reformation. The
philosophical dimensions of modernity had been one of the central themes of Voegelin's work as a political scientist, so these studies of the origins of modernity are of special interest to individuals seeking to understand Voegelin's analysis of the roots of our political ideologies today. The roots that gave flower to various modern deformations of consciousness are studied in the persons and movements analyzed in these chapters. In them, Voegelin characterizes the modern period in terms of the breakup of the temporal and spiritual unity of Western society as represented by imperial Christianity. This breaking up of a unified spiritual and temporal authority resulted in the relatively autonomous realms of church and state.

Voegelin argues for two beginnings of the modern period. The first is represented by the work of Machiavelli and, to some extent, that of Erasmus and More. The second is represented by the Reformation. In the course of history the powerful effects of the second beginning have obscured the first. The power of the Reformation, as initiated primarily by the personality of Luther, and continued by Calvin, has attracted the attention of historians and obscured the developments represented by Machiavelli, Erasmus, and More. The Reformation unleashed the pent-up forces of popular religion represented by various sectarian movements that in earlier periods had been able to be absorbed into the larger community. As the earlier absorption deteriorated, those forces erupted, crystallizing around the issues raised by Luther. In many instances the forces unleashed went beyond what Luther had imagined; nevertheless, Voegelin thinks they followed Luther's political insights to their conclusion. These popular forces were more "medieval" than modern. In this, Voegelin joins those contemporary historians who stress the continuity between the medieval and the Reformation periods. But what was new about these forces in the Reformation period was that they were increasingly unable to be contained within the church and burst forth into a schism. It was only in the eighteenth century, with the rise of the so-called Enlightenment, when the forces of Protestantism seem to have been spent, that connections between this period of modernity and the world of Machiavelli, Erasmus, and More were noted. For example, Voltaire can be connected with Erasmus, or Alexander Hamilton with Machiavelli.

The four chapters in this volume are devoted to the explication of these two beginnings and their representatives. Chapters 1 and 2 of Part Four chart the course of the first beginning, the Renaissance, as
represented by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Desiderius Erasmus (1466/69–1536), and Thomas More (1478–1535). Chapter 3 examines the sectarian movements before, during, and after the Reformation and forms a kind of transition. Chapter 1 of Part Five charts the course of the second beginning, the Reformation, by studying the two leading figures connected with Protestantism, Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). Taken together these four chapters constitute a study of the leading sources of the modern period and serve as the basis for understanding various features of modernity that developed well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

III. Outline of the Content

The first chapter is a carefully drawn study of Machiavelli, one of the most intriguing and controversial figures in Western intellectual history. The chapter unfolds in four broad parts. The first is an introduction alerting the reader that Voegelin will endeavor to move beyond the moralistic condemnation that is often connected with Machiavelli and that serves no useful purpose when it comes to a theoretical analysis of his political thought. While the caricature tells us nothing about the content of Machiavelli’s thought, it does alert the historian to the fact that something extraordinary has taken place. For Voegelin, Machiavelli’s significance is to be seen in a unique combination of genius and circumstances.

The second part of the chapter is an effort to examine the circumstances in Machiavelli’s life that prompted his reflection and the sources that shaped his thought. Voegelin uses these sources, including the Italian tradition of statecraft and especially the work of humanistic historians, to conduct a theoretical analysis of Machiavelli’s circumstances. In using the ancient sources, especially Livy, as their model, these historians broke with the Christian tradition of historiography and secularized the understanding of the historical process. The focus was on particular individuals and their action in the world. The statesman and military leader became the key figures, and the arena of action was the secular state. The criterion for action became the advantage of the country, reflecting the disintegration of the empire and of its temporal and spiritual unity. An additional preoccupation of the historians was with Asiatic influences and myths going back to the struggle in classical times between
Europe and Asia. One of the important influences on Machiavelli, Voegelin argues, was the image of Timur (Tamerlane) developed in a series of mythological presentations of his "life." Along with the actual political events in Asia, this image influenced the Italian tradition and its understanding of power and history. Through that influence it came to the work of Machiavelli. Central to this mythology is the hero who acts in history and who in acting with virtue in the face of fortune becomes a source of order in the state.

The third part of the chapter examines three of Machiavelli's works: The Life of Castruccio Castracani, the Discourses and The Prince. In his analysis Voegelin shows how Machiavelli was responding to the experience of the manifestation of power that is thought to be beyond the categories of good and evil. In his response, Machiavelli does not succumb to nihilism. Rather he proposes the strong leader, the prince, who with his virtue in the face of fortune will be a source of order. The myth of the hero or prince is set forth most fully in the Life of Castruccio Castracani, but it is also present in the other works.

The fourth part of this chapter sets forth Voegelin's conclusion and evaluation of Machiavelli. The evaluation is positive in that this historical study has shown why the typical stereotype of Machiavelli is incorrect. Machiavelli is neither amoral nor antimoral; he does have a set of spiritual principles that he is promoting. Voegelin's negative perspective on Machiavelli comes in his assessment of Machiavelli's spirituality, which Voegelin thinks is rooted in the pagan myth of nature. Here again the problem is not that this is wrong per se. Rather, it is wrong historically. A historical differentiation of truth has occurred with the advent of Christianity. One cannot turn the clock back to a pagan time. To try to do so, now that truth has been differentiated into a transcendent reality, is a closure of the soul to that reality and as such a reversion to tribalism. While Voegelin's analysis is fair in that it displays Machiavelli's sources and intent, it is also critical in that it exposes a closure to transcendence that is one of the major characteristics of modernity as Voegelin has experienced it.

The second chapter treats Erasmus and More, writers sharing with Machiavelli a participation in the first beginning of modernity. Voegelin is principally concerned with Erasmus's Institutio principis Christiani and More's Utopia, both written in 1516, a crucial year in Voegelin's analysis.
Erasmus's *Education of a Christian Prince* is a counterpart to Machiavelli's *Prince*. As such it belongs to a common genus of literature. Erasmus wanted a reformation. Since he was skeptical of the masses, he looked to the prince to provide such a reformation of life. In this respect, he shares with Machiavelli the hope that it will be the prince who will be the bearer of order. In Erasmus's case, however, it will not be through his brute power, but through his Christian virtue. Erasmus looked to the Christian prince to be an agent of order through his fidelity to Christian principles. The Christianity of Erasmus, however, differs from the traditional understanding of Christianity embodied in the church and in the sacraments. For Erasmus, Christianity, as set forth in the New Testament, is really the "philosophy of Christ." The Christian follows the teachings of Christ much like any disciple would follow the teaching of any other great philosopher and master.

For Voegelin this simplistic version of Christianity seems to be naive. How could Erasmus, a supposedly educated man, fall into this situation? It can be understood when it is seen as Erasmus's reaction to his experience of the Christianity of his time. The Christianity to which Erasmus was exposed was a kind of epigonic scholasticism. This accounts for Erasmus's intense opposition to scholasticism and to much of the theology he found in his own day. He sought to reform Christianity by developing a philosophy of conduct based on the teachings of the "great philosopher" Jesus Christ and embodied in the life of the prince.

While the desire for reform is admirable, the negative attitude toward scholasticism and its contributions to Christian civilization is a problem in Erasmus's work. It leads to an intellectual arrogance that Voegelin characterizes as Erasmus's being right in his emotional revolt but wrong in his intellectual response. His attitude represents a rejection of the orientation to the divine in favor of an orientation toward intramundane reason that leads to the intellectual hubris that later became so prevalent in Western culture. Erasmus ends up with a reason that becomes a spiritual pride in which a "leader" claims to know, and therefore to be justified in doing, whatever seems personally right. This is the *libido dominandi*, the lust for power.

Additionally, a narrowing of perspective accompanies this secularizing of reason in Erasmus. Erasmus sees the key to reform in the person of the prince whose actions give shape to the life of the
people. The people play little, if any, part in Erasmus's understanding of politics. The prince occupies center stage. The prince moves in a social vacuum, leading Voegelin to conclude that "there is a peculiar historical blindness in Erasmus." Erasmus, for Voegelin, bears the marks of some contemporary intellectuals in that he has closed himself up in his own world. In the end what we find in Erasmus is the pleonexia of the intellectual, caught up in himself and divorced from the reality of historical existence.

More's *Utopia* occupies the remainder of the second chapter. As all who have studied this book know, and as Voegelin clearly appreciates, its small size is in inverse proportion to the density of its thought. Voegelin notes, one suspects somewhat ironically, that More is a saint both of the church and of the communist movement. This points to his complexity. Part of the complexity involves the work itself, and part involves the extent to which the word *utopia* has acquired a considerable wealth of meaning beyond More's text. Voegelin explores the implications of this for reading More in order to establish some historical sense of what More intended in his work.

Reflections on utopian literature in relation to More are followed by an analysis of the text. In part, the text represents More's own struggle. Should he seek to serve the king and his country or withdraw from politics? Already the struggle is secularized in that attunement to a transcendent spiritual power has declined for More. His problems, and the questions they pose, are those of a secularized intellectual. Raphael, the narrator of *Utopia*, represents one possible answer. He travels throughout the world as a "man without a country." He rejects giving philosophical advice, for it will not be heard.

This answer to the question of participation in the life of the republic is a challenge to More. To answer the challenge he draws the same distinction that Erasmus does between two types of philosophy: school philosophy and civil philosophy. Civil philosophy strives to be a part of the system, doing the best it can under the circumstances in which it finds itself. This may be More's own answer, but Voegelin is not impressed with it, labeling it that of the collaborator. Voegelin identifies the real problem. The realm of the spirit is denied, and the commonwealth tends to acquire an ultimate authority that is properly reserved for the spirit. We are on the way to a modernity that will end up denying the spirit altogether.
Editors’ Introduction

This study identifies the direction in which the philosophy of this “first beginning” would lead. Although Erasmus and More place restraints on this direction, later thinkers were not so inclined. We thus see in both Erasmus and More the movement of the ratio humana away from orienting human nature by participating in the ratio divina to relying on a set of rules guiding intramundane life.

More recognizes the evil of his society, the evil of the pleonexia of the people, expressed among other ways as the lust for aggrandizement. In this sense he moves beyond Erasmus, who seems to ignore the people and focus on the pleonexia of the prince. For More the symbol of this evil in society is private property. Yet Voegelin criticizes those who want to make More an early communist. Property itself is not the problem. It is only the symbol of the deeper problem of power. The image of the commonwealth that More developed in Utopia is a critique of his society. Unlike later thinkers, there was enough Christian substance left in More for him to know that this ideal society was really “nowhere,” that the commonwealth he describes is an “ideal.” This is the difference between More and the moderns. More knows that his utopia is only an ideal that serves as a social critique and cannot be realized. That truth serves as a limiting concept for him. He does not try to create this state anywhere on earth. Those restraints are lost on others, from the sectarian radicals of the Reformation period to the positivists, socialists, and communists of the modern period.

In spite of these restraints, Voegelin finds the presence of superbia in More’s flights of fancy and imaginative constructs. More’s intellectual ideal gathers unto itself an absoluteness that belongs only to the spirit. This leads to the same intellectual pleonexia that one finds in Erasmus. It is also the same demonism of power displayed by Machiavelli, except that it is disguised as an ideal. Voegelin believes that in Utopia one can see the formation of concepts that would have a profound effect in Western history. The curve that begins in the “playful atrocity of the humanist intellectual” ends with colonialism, imperialism, National Socialism, and communism.

Chapter 3 is a masterly study of the sectarian movements in Christianity presented under the title “The People of God.”

9. See Voegelin’s early treatment of this theme in the Sermon on the Mount, and his reference to the chapter here, in vol. 1, Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity, 160–62.
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its destructive course. The success of the Protestant reformation blinding one to Luther’s negative effects. Voegelin summarizes his analysis of Luther by noting four essential ideas that have significance for Western history. First, Luther attacked and destroyed the nucleus of Christian spiritual culture with his doctrine of justification by faith, which was an attack on the doctrine of the fides caritate formata, the significant civilizational accomplishment of medieval Christianity. Faith becomes for Luther an external act of trust in an externalized revelation codified in Scripture. The personal intimacy of a life formed by grace is lost. Justification becomes an external act that does not affect the empirical life of a person. Body and soul, spirit and world, are separated. Second, and related to the first, Luther bears heavy responsibility for destroying Western intellectual culture through his attack on Aristotelian scholasticism and on learning in general. Like that of Erasmus, his antiphilosophical stance has created a pattern that one can see in Enlightenment philosophers and in the ignorance of contemporary liberals, fascists, and Marxist “intellectuals.” Third, through his doctrine of sola fide, Luther destroyed the balance of human existence. By rejecting the contemplative life and focusing attention on work in this world, since issues with God were settled, he paved the way for a utilitarian pragmatism in society that is unable to respond to modern revolutionary mass movements. Finally, Luther’s own personality, so significant for his revolution, is the prototype of the self-willed person who revolts against traditional order and imposes his will on those around him. One can see again and again examples of this type of person in the history of Western thought since Luther’s time.

The final portion of this last chapter is an analysis of the work of Calvin, and in particular the Institutes. For Voegelin, Calvin was endeavoring to solve the problem that Luther was left with in his revolution—that is, an elect scattered through the wilderness of the reprobate. What should they do? Were they helpless? Would they remain isolated individuals? Should they try to organize into small groups? Should they withdraw from the main body of Christianity? None of these solutions appealed to Calvin. According to Voegelin, Calvin accepted Luther’s idea of the remnant, but then wanted to transform that remnant into a universal church that would supplant the Catholic Church. That is what the Institutes are about, a work of pragmatic politics to set up and justify a universal church, giving
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“bordering on the revolutionary” in some of his thought (his stress on freedom and participation in government, and the role of the independent intellectual, for example). Voegelin even refers to "the almost Protestant spiritualism of Saint Thomas.”

Third, it must be remembered that the analysis that Voegelin is making in this work is not a theological one. It may be argued that one cannot neatly separate theology and political philosophy, particularly in the writings of a thinker like Voegelin. Still, Voegelin is very clear in the text that he is analyzing the writings of Luther and Calvin not with a concern for their doctrinal content but rather with an eye toward the political implications of their work. He does on a number of occasions venture into something of a theological critique, however. For example, he suggests that Calvin may not have had a sufficient theory of symbolism. This evaluation of Calvin needs to be set in the context of the times. The problem did not begin with Calvin, as Voegelin himself clearly indicates. In this regard, it is imperative that the reader of this volume of the History of Political Ideas remember that it is part of the larger series. What Voegelin calls “the enlightened misunderstanding of symbols” and “the Gnostic inclination to extend the operation of the intellect into the realm of faith and myth” is a process that had already begun as early as the twelfth century. He even, in this context, places Saint Thomas “among the sinners.”

A further example of theological interpretation would be Voegelin’s view of Luther’s teaching on justification. This, of course, is a central issue—for Luther the central issue of the Reformation—and Voegelin seems to imply as much by the analysis he sets forth. It is a subtle analysis, and one that is patently pertinent to much of the later history of the effects of the Reformation. Justification is presented as a purely forensic imputation, with no actual transformative effects in human experience. This effectively removes God from the plane of history and fosters a radically deified, autonomous view of human behavior. Again, as with Calvin’s view of symbolism, the historical roots of this thinking in late, medieval nominalism and fideism need to be kept in view.

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as appropriate and added more complete publication information when possible. Occasionally, when current research seemed to require the presentation of an alternative perspective to that offered by Voegelin, we have done so within bracketed comments in the footnotes. We have also provided translations of foreign-language citations.

David L. Morse
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secretary, he was thirty; when his political career under the republic reached its end, he was forty-three. A very important period of his life had been engaged in the republican experiment. In the enforced leisure in which he began to write the Prince in 1513, this period did not sink back to the level of the episode that it actually was in the development of Florence toward the hereditary monarchy of the Medici; it remained the motivation of his political reflections, of his search for the typical in politics so that the mastery of rules of action could become the basis for success in the desired direction. At this point, however, the shares of genius and biographical circumstance cannot be separated clearly.

It would be irresponsible to say that Machiavelli’s political work would not have taken the direction it did unless the enforced removal from political action had lifted the experience of his middle years to a dubious level of absoluteness and generality. But we know that in the case of his younger contemporary Guicciardini (born in 1483) the same basic republicanism, the same contemptuous pessimism with regard to the nature of man, and the even more keenly disillusioned insight into the motivations of political action led not to an attempt at a theorization of politics but, on the contrary, to an acceptance of the flux of history as a moving present of action so intimately differentiated by circumstance that no room was left for the typical as the basis for planning. For Guicciardini, thus, politics is reduced to the day-to-day struggle for power, in diplomatic and military action, among the existing power units, with no breathing space for such dreams as Machiavelli’s unification of Italy. As a consequence, the younger diplomat and historian is frequently accused of a “cynicism” worse than that of his older friend—especially since he engaged actively in the political game, in the service of the Curia, under a man whom he despised both as a pope and as a Medici.

Such moralistic clichés, as we have indicated, are not very helpful in theoretical analysis. We are rather inclined to explain the difference of attitude between the two men by the fact that Guicciardini was too young to be too deeply engaged in the republican period of Florence, that he was an aristocrat and through his family connections had the guarantee of a splendid career either toward the cardinale or in politics, that he actually had a great career as diplomat and administrator, that before he reached the age of
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principles of social justice, ideas concerning political organization, spiritual movements, or religious factions had nothing to do with the event; it was a clear case of a stronger power and better military organization in ruthless victory over a weaker and militarily less-well-equipped power.

We must realize, and perhaps we can realize it better than we could even twenty years ago, that the generation that witnesses such events receives a trauma. The more intelligent and sensitive members of such a generation have seen the reality of power at the moment of its existential starkness when it destroys an order, when the destruction is a brute fact without sense, reason, or ideas. It is difficult to tell such men any stories about morality in politics. With the experienced eye of the moraliste they will diagnose the moralist in politics as the profiteer of the status quo, as the hypocrite who wants everybody to be moral and peace-loving after his own power drive has carried him into a position that he wants to retain. The psychological diagnosis is fundamentally correct and will apply frequently. Under this aspect a man like Machiavelli who theorizes on the basis of his stark experience of power is a healthy and honest figure, most certainly preferable as a man to the contractualists who try to cover the reality of power underneath an established order by the moral, or should we say immoral, swindle of consent.

Nevertheless, the experience is traumatic, for it is apt to blind a man to the fact that the mystery of power is not the whole of politics—for the pertinent reason that lust of power is not all there is to human nature. While Machiavelli was not blind to other factors in politics, his picture of political reality is certainly out of focus; and it is this distortion of view that we must understand historically as caused by the violent distortion of reality through the events of his time. From this trauma (setting aside other causes that we shall discuss presently) stems his concentration, first, on the rationality of political action without regard to principles, moral or otherwise, and second, on the importance of an effective military organization. Italy had been through the overwhelming power of the consolidated national monarchies. The answer to this problem would have to be the equally ruthless construction of a consolidated Italian national power that would eject the invader and protect the country against a repetition of the disaster. The technical instruments of the French conquest had been the artillery that broke the fortresses
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must appear as the "unhistorical mind," as Alfred von Martin characterized him. Only when we see Machiavelli in the context of the Italian tradition do we become aware of how strong the touch of dogmatism and enthusiasm is in his makeup.  

**c. Humanistic Historiography**

With Salutati, the new humanistic learning entered the chancellery of Florence. The humanistic style began to determine the form of diplomatic relations; and the development of an official humanistic historiography became part of the activities of what we would today call the foreign service. Its purpose was the presentation of the history of the republic in such a manner that it would impress governments abroad and increase the prestige of the state. In the wake of Salutati we find the series of Florentine chancellors who were at the same time more or less eminent historians, men such as Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, Benedetto de' Accolti, and Bartolomeo della Scala. The propaganda value of a work such as Bruni's *Historiae Florentinae* (published from 1416 to 1449) did not escape the other Italian states. The governments of the peninsula from Naples to Milan began to employ official historiographers in order to match the glory of Florence with the fame of their own histories. The movement started in the middle of the fifteenth century and continued intensely well into the sixteenth century. Let us mention of this group only one of the latest historians, Donato Gianotti (1492–1573), because his work, and in particular his *Repubblica de' Viniziani*, exerted a considerable influence on the ideas of James Harrington's *Oceana*.

The new style of historiography was established by the *Florentine History* of Bruni, and certain characteristics of the model still determined the treatment of political history in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*, as well as his delimitation of political subject matter at large. Let us briefly enumerate these characteristics. The humanists used Livy as their model. This choice had certain consequences insofar as the treatment of history had to concentrate on such exciting events as wars and revolutions to the exclusion of the permanent

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7. Alfred von Martin, *Coluccio Salutati's Traktat "Vom Tyrannen"* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. Rothschild, 1915); see also the same author's *Coluccio Salutati und das humanistisch Lebensideal* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1916); also Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*. 

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factors and the long-range developments that determine the texture of history. Moreover, in the interest of rhetorical and dramatic effectiveness, the individual had to become the center of action to such a degree that again the permanent determinants that in fact leave not so much room for heroic freedom were obscured. The Roman model had, furthermore, the effect of a radical secularization of political problems. The humanistic concentration on the history of the republic in the Roman manner entailed the break with the Christian view of history. The rigidly closed stream of secular state history did not admit a divine Providence governing a universal history. Such problems as the *translatio imperii* and the speculation on the four world monarchies disappeared without a word of discussion. In the eighteenth century, when Voltaire started his secularization of history, the polemic against the Christian position of Bossuet was of absorbing interest. The humanists of the fifteenth century ignored the Christian problem as if it did not exist. The pope, a somewhat inevitable figure in medieval history, is a territorial prince like the others. To what extent this attitude is enforced by the classic model, and to what extent it reflects an anti-ecclesiastical policy of the writers, is not always easily discerned. Certainly, the statesman and the military leader are the two classic types determining the course of action; the priest, as a third type, has no function in the picture. The emperor suffers the same fate as the pope; he simply disappears. History is written from the point of view of the territorial state; the criterion for judging political action is the advantage of the country; what is implied in this restriction is in fact a theory of national sovereignty independent of the empire. These are the characteristics that are continued into the work of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Their existence and centennial cultivation must be taken into account in a critical interpretation of Machiavelli; otherwise we run the risk of painting him as the creator of a new secular, "antireligious" realism in politics that, indeed, did not originate with him but belonged to a long tradition in which he grew up.  

§4. The Asiatic Background

The historiography of Western political ideas is beset with many curiosities. One of them is the bland complacency with which

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8. I am summarizing these characteristics from the account given of humanistic historiography in Eduard Fueter, *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, 3d ed. [Munich and Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1936], 9–55.
historians ignore the fact that Western civilization did not unfold in a vacuum but led a dangerous existence in the shadow of Asia. In the course of our study, we have had frequent occasion to touch on the Asiatic problem. Let us now survey the moments of contact and the traces that they left, for one of these contacts has strongly influenced the idea of the prince as it was formed in the fifteenth century.

a. The Shadow of Asia

The very foundation of Western civilization on the ethnic basis of the Germanic tribes of the Great Migration is intimately connected with Asiatic events. The great drive that carried the Vandals into Africa and the Visigoths to the sack of Rome in 410 is the most westernly effect of a chain of events that started with the unification of China through Ch’in Shi Huang Ti in 221 B.C. The formation of the Chinese empire was followed by the counterformation of a Hiung-nu empire north of the Great Wall. The intermittent war between the two empires ended toward the end of the first century of our era with the destruction of the Hiung-nu organization; this was the beginning of the slow westward movement of the northern Hiung-nu, carrying the Germanic tribes before it, and running out only with the defeat of Attila in the Battle of Chalons in 451. The great literary result in the West was the Civitas Dei. Saint Augustine began to write it as an intervention in the political debate that had been aroused by the fall of Rome in 410; and he died in Hippo, in 431, while the city was besieged by the Vandals.

After the end of the Roman empire, the Asiatic pressure on the newly established Germanic realms continued intermittently well into the tenth century; the last of the formidable waves, the Magyaric, was finally broken only in the Battle of Lechfeld in 955. The ordeal of the migration, in which whole peoples, like the Ostrogoths, disappeared without leaving a trace, crystallized in the traumatic epic of the Germanic peoples, the Nibelungenlied; the first version of the oldest parts of this poem must probably be placed toward the end of the tenth century, shortly after the defeat of the Magyars.

The next Asiatic movement, threatening the existence of Western civilization, came with the expansion of the Mongol empire in the thirteenth century. By 1241, the Mongols had advanced in three columns to Silesia, western Hungary, and the Adriatic.
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Persia. Under Mohammed I (1413–1421) the Ottoman empire was reorganized; and his successor carried the expansion into central Europe. The fall of Byzantium and the rise of the Ottoman empire, accompanied by the threat to the West, were enough to capture the imagination of contemporaries. These were changes on the political scene of a magnitude that reduced the struggles between Western princes to smallish domestic affairs by comparison; here was power without tradition, on a scale of rational organization and effectiveness in empire building beyond the possibilities of any single Western power unit. Against this background of dark threat appeared the meteoric figure of Timur—as far as the Westerners were concerned, another power out of nowhere—stopping abruptly the victorious Turkish advance, which, at the same time, had already eaten deep into Bulgaria and Macedonia; ending the danger to Byzantium and the West; and then receding as inexplicably as it had risen. Such an outburst of power in the raw, with its ups and downs of threat and salvation, would be as fascinating as it was unsettling. The Italian historians of the fifteenth century, who were closest to the events and felt their repercussions firsthand through the Greek emigration, were, indeed, intensely occupied with the new phenomenon of power on a world scale; and in particular the dramatic intervention of Timur, the almost savior, gave occasion to evoke the image of the man of destiny, the fateful conquering prince. While Machiavelli himself did not reflect on Asiatic events, the image of Timur that had been shaped by the preceding generations is very noticeable as an influence in the creation of his own image of the Prince. Hence, we shall now consider in more detail the formation of the image of Timur in the humanistic literature.  

10. The shadow of Asia continued to fall on the West. The elimination of the Turkish danger in the eighteenth century was immediately followed by the rise of Russia, which has developed into the most formidable menace to the existence of the West. For the growing awareness of the Russian problem in the realm of ideas the reader should refer to The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 25, History of Political Ideas, vol. VII, The New Order and Last Orientation, edited by Jürgen Gebhardt and Thomas A. Hollweck [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, forthcoming], the section on Nietzsche, and The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 26, History of Political Ideas, vol. VIII, Crisis and the Apocalypse of Man, ed. David Walsh [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, forthcoming], the sections on Napoleon, Comte, Bakunin, Bauer, and Marx. For a late transformation of the image of Timur, and its transfer to Napoleon in Russia, see Goethe’s Der Winter und Timur in the West-Ostlicher Divan [West-eastern Divan, trans. J. Whaley with German text [London: Wolff, 1974]].
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to the frank brutality of the collectivist era, which acknowledges with a shrug that shavings will fly when planing is going on.

In spite of his humanistic foibles and his self-salvation through the cultivation of letters, Poggio, thus, is not a megalomaniac intellectual. He is a diplomat and administrator, he not only knows that even the historian cannot achieve the immortality of fame unless the man of action furnishes the story but is also passionately fascinated by the fatality of power in his age. As a consequence, we find a penchant in his work that we would not expect in a man who in his fanatical hunt for the treasures of antiquity goes to the extreme of bribing librarians and practically stealing manuscripts. If we may express his state of feeling succinctly: Poggio is fed up with antiquity and the classics. The humanist cannot achieve fame by rehearsing the glory that was Greece and Rome; he must achieve it by praising the greatness of his own age. Belligerently he announces: “I am not one of those whose remembrance of the past has made them forget the present; I am not so much engrossed by antiquity that I depend on it wholly and despise the men of our age, that I believe no deeds of our time to be comparable with those of the ancients.”¹⁵ And where does he find this greatness of the age? Not in the disorders of Europe; not in the paralysis of the councils; not in the disintegration of the Christianitas—but in the rise of Timur. In the opinion of Poggio, the victories of Timur surpass the most famous battles of antiquity by their magnitude as well as by their generalship. Nevertheless, the world is filled with the fame of Marathon and Alexander, while Timur is an almost forgotten figure. This state of things reopens the question of fame. Why should the fame of antiquity, conferred by ancient historians, be final? If so much greater actions are close at hand, why should we admire the lesser feats of the ancients? And why should we set so much store by the ancient authors, if all we have to do to equal them in greatness is to tell the story of our own time? The pride of the age breaks through and revolts against this oppression by the ancient model. It is a desperate pride that the time may be miserable but that at least in the grandeur of its misery it is superior to antiquity.¹⁶

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¹⁵. De varietate fortunae, 36.

¹⁶. For the attack on the achievements of antiquity and on the ancient historians see ibid., 77, 37 ff. For the tone of the attack the passage on p. 38 is characteristic, where Poggio rattles off the clichés of Roman war reports in order to praise
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The broader elaboration serves the purpose of sharpening the issues that we find already in Poggio. The materials are historical, but they are used for the creation of a mythical image. In particular, the Vita has no historical background. If it were to contain a detailed account of battles, reflections on strategy, or information on Mongol history and political organization, the effect of the mythical image would be damaged. Timur is a pure appearance out of nothing, a terror gentium and an ira Dei, symbolizing the naked fanaticism of expanding power, the lust and horror of destruction, the blindness of a fate that crushes one existence in its march and thereby perhaps saves another. Anecdotes and materials are selected or omitted according to their function in heightening the effect. Hence, the Vita always contains a feature that we may call the “parade of names”—that is, a lengthy catalog of peoples conquered and cities reduced and destroyed. If the facts do not quite serve the purpose, they are twisted somewhat. The strategically necessary campaign against Syria and Egypt, for instance, is deprived of its reason, and appears as the expression of an inexhaustible, expansive drive. The retreat from Arabia, which was forced by the difficulties of desert warfare and diseases, is interpreted as a hesitation to penetrate to the holy sites of Islam. The not at all miraculous rise of Timur is deprived of its social setting and transformed into a mythical rise from social insignificance to world power. Throughout the Vita, Timur is a man without purpose beyond conquest. His actions are oriented with strict rationality toward the aim of his expansion without regard to the cost in destruction, criminality, and human misery. The result of these principles of presentation is a glowing symbol of the nihilistic grandeur of power without meaning.  

21. After Enea Silvio, the more important Vitae Tamerlani are those of Andrea Cambini in his Commentario della origine de’ Turchi, et imperio della Casa Ottomanna [Venice, 1538], fol. 4r–7v; of Paolo Giovio in his Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium [Basel, 1561], 165–73; and of Pero Mexia in his Silva de varia lection [Venice, 1553], fol. 187v–192v. The title of Mexia’s Vita is of interest because it stresses the points that seemed relevant to his contemporaries: Del excellentsimo Capitán y muy poderoso rey el gran Tamarlan, delos reynos y provincias que conquisto, y de su disciplina e arte militar. Very elaborate, finally, is Pietro Perondino’s Magni Tamerlani Scytharum Imperatoris Vita printed with the Opera of Laonicus Chalcocondyles [1556], 235–48. Perondino’s Vita is the basis for Louis LeRoy’s; for this latter one, see The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 23, History of Political Ideas, vol. V, Religion and the Rise of Modernity, edited by James L. Wiser [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, forthcoming], chap. 5.
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The *Vita* is ostensibly a biography of Castruccio Castracani (1281-1328), successively lord, imperial vicar, and duke of Lucca. In truth, however, Machiavelli has used the well-known facts of Castruccio’s life most cavalierly—selecting some, omitting others, and inventing a good deal—for creating the image of an Italian hero who through his *virtù* becomes the founder of a state (*stato*), frustrated in his great enterprise only through *fortuna*, who cuts his life in the middle of its course and thus ends the ascent toward the glory that so many felicitous successes seemed to promise.  

The creation is conscious. The dedication to his friends opens with the reflection that marvelously those who have worked great things in this world are so frequently of obscure origin. Fortune seems to persecute them in every way. At their birth they are surrendered to wild beasts; or they have such humble parents that they must pose as sons of Zeus or some other God. The examples of this kind are well known to everybody. This curiosity seems due to the fact that Fortune wants to show to the world that she, and not *prudenza*, makes men great; and, therefore, she begins the shaping of a man’s life at a time when there can be no doubt that prudence has no share in it. The life of Castruccio is of this kind, and it should be recalled to the memory of men because it is most instructive (*grandissimo esempio*) for the operation both of *virtù* and of *fortuna*.  

The irony of the reflection introduces the *Vita* as a conscious play, with the serious purpose of creating a *grandissimo esempio* of the forces that shape the life of the hero.

The *Vita* itself follows the classical pattern of the myth of the hero that we saw employed in the *Vita Tamerlani*. The consciousness of the construction will appear most clearly when we characterize the sequence of scenes in the same manner as we did for the Timur image. The main phases of the *Vita* are the following:

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reflecting on the present in the light of the past. This formulation of Machiavelli's intention seems more cautious than the unqualified assertion that he was in search of general rules for successful political conduct. In the absence of systematic, theoretical elaboration, we cannot say with certainty what his intention actually was; and we cannot even say with certainty that he was not a scientific thinker, moved by the ambition of finding laws of politics in emulating laws of nature. He assumed regularities and recurrences in history, indeed, based on the constancy of human nature. "Since men have and had always the same passions, they will of necessity produce the same effect." This principle, however, does not become the basis for a psychologization of politics; history does not break apart into the psychologically determined course of individual action; we are not on the brink of a pleasure-pain psychology, or a psychology of self-interest, or a materialism of passions. The nature of man is for Machiavelli part of the nature of political society in history. Hence, the constancy of passions determines recurrences in the gestalt of history. Constellations of circumstance in a society, forms of government and sequences of events, are the units that recur. Under this aspect, the history of antiquity, and in particular of Roman antiquity, acquires a specific importance for the study of politics because it offers the spectacle of a completed sequence of political events from the foundation to the fall of a republic. Machiavelli does not generalize from an indiscriminate collection of cases, for all cases fall into the great classes of ancient and postancient events. Against the background of the ancient course, all later events acquire the nature of a déjà vu, while the ancient model becomes a mythical paradigm of which the later events are the "repetition." "Who wants to see what is going to be, must consider what has been; for all things in the world, at all times, meet with their counterpart in antiquity." 32

The units of history, thus, are the problem that Machiavelli set himself for investigation; and the units of ancient history have

32. Discorsi III.43, in Opere, 257: "perché tutte le cose del mondo, in ogni tempo, hanno il proprio riscontro con gli antichi tempi." We do not want to press this passage too far—but, literally, Machiavelli identifies "world" and "time" with medieval and contemporary history, while the "tempi antichi" become a paradigmatic, mythical aeon. We have stressed the absence of systematic elaboration in Machiavelli; and it seems a bit hazardous to build an interpretation on small, concentrated passages of this kind. Nevertheless, I suspect that a better understanding of Machiavellian problems will ultimately be achieved by taking his formulations seriously, instead of editorializing them in accordance with preconceived notions.

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the function of paradigms to be imitated by the moderns. In other fields—in art, legislation, and medicine—the paradigmatic achievement of the ancients is gladly accepted; when it comes to imitation with regard to ordering, maintaining, and restoring a republic, such imitation is considered difficult, if not impossible, by his contemporaries. The cause of such hesitation must not be sought in the general decadence of the world through Christianity, or in that ambitious lethargy to which so many western polities are a prey, but in the lack of a true understanding of history, in the habit of reading history as an entertaining series of events without extracting from them the meaning that they have for us as well as the flavor that is their own. Men do not think of the paradigmatic importance of history because they are unaware that “heaven, sun, elements, and men” do not vary in “their movement, order, and forces.” The history of the republics is part of the cosmic order, if we want to know how to orient ourselves in the bewildering age, we must attempt an understanding of the cosmic order of politics. Machiavelli wants to compare the *antique e moderne cose* for the double purpose of establishing the paradigmatic values of the course of the Roman republic and of showing the possibilities of imitative political conduct that will cure the evils of the time.33

The order is, indeed, cosmic. Machiavelli not only returns to Roman history as paradigmatic subject matter; he also returns to Polybius’ interpretation of its course as a cosmic cycle. The comprehensive political unit is the *politeion anakyklosis*, the cyclical revolution of political forms, as determined by *physeos oikonomia*, the order of nature.34 And the Nature of Polybius is the Stoic world ground that synonymously can also be designated as *tyche*, *nomos*, and *logos*. We have the six forms of government, the three good ones and the three bad ones. None of them is desirable: the bad ones because they are bad in themselves; the good ones because they are short-lived and soon reestablished as a monarchy—they will run through the forms of tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and its licentious degeneration, and then a monarchy will be reestablished in order to curb the licentiousness of the people. This is the circle (*cerchio*) in which the republics move; but rarely do they return to the original forms, for hardly does a

33. Discorsi, introduction to bk. I.
34. Polybius, The Histories VI.9, 10.
republic have such vitality (può essere di tanta vita) that it can go through the ordeal several times. Ordinarily, when the degeneration has advanced, the republic will become a prey to stronger neighbors and lose its independent historical existence. A wise legislator will, therefore, avoid any of these forms in ordering a republic; he will try to create an order that integrates all three of the political forces and, thus, will produce a more stable balance. The commencement of such a cycle lies in the realm of historical accident. Still following Polybius, Machiavelli retells his account of the origin of government. At the beginning of the world, men were few and lived isolated like animals. With the increase of population they associated; and, for better defense, they chose the strongest as their head. Such association was the origin of the notion of noble and good in opposition to pernicious and evil. For he who injured the common benefactor aroused hatred and sympathy; the ingrates were reproved, the grateful praised, everybody being aware that the same injuries might happen to him. In order to avoid such evils, laws were made inflicting punishment on the violators; and thus originated the understanding of justice. Under this new condition of legal order, no longer would the strongest be chosen as prince, but the most prudent and just. When this primitive elective monarchy became hereditary, the evils emerged that started the cycle of political forms.35

There is nothing original in this part of Machiavelli’s ideas; they are substantially a condensation of the respective passages in Polybius’ Histories, book II. Precisely because of this reliance on Polybius, however, these pages are of the greatest importance because they definitely exclude certain modernistic misinterpretations of which Machiavelli is a favorite victim. Organized society is conceived as a “natural” growth within the cosmos, partaking of its order; it is accepted as a whole, complete with its political, religious, and civilizational order. The “nature” of this growth is the Stoic nature that comprises the life of the spirit and the intellect. Hence, the naturalism of Machiavelli is an attempt at reviving the ancient Myth of Nature; it has nothing to do with a determinism of nature that would exclude freedom of action. The decline of a republic is inevitable, for nothing that is born can live forever, the vital

35. Discorsi 1.2.
force that has brought it into being will be exhausted sooner or later; but the law of the *anakyklosis* leaves ample room for prudent foundation as well as energetic preservation and restoration. We must, furthermore, beware of misunderstanding this freedom of action as a freedom for rational planning; the political ethics of Machiavelli is not utilitarian. The founding and restoring activities are a manifestation of that part of the cosmic force that lives in human individuals; this force itself is the substance of order; and while in the course of political action means must be rationally related to their ends, these ends themselves are of interest only insofar as they are manifestations of the ordering *virtù*. Without relation to the myth of the hero and his *virtù*, the ethics of Machiavelli makes no sense. Hence, we must finally beware of misunderstanding him as the propagator of an ethics of self-interest, or as an "expert" who gives advice for gaining power regardless of its substance. The great Christian orienting experience of morality, the *amor Dei*, has disappeared, but that does not mean that now the *amor sui* has become the determinant of action. The *virtù* of the hero is the substantive force that drives toward expression in the order of the republic; it is not a self-centered lust for power. The myth of the Prince can never be understood unless we see it against the background of Machiavelli's loving and extensive treatment of conspiracies, that is, of the great remedy against the uncosphic, criminal force of a strong individual who mistakes his ambition for princely *virtù*.

The republic is a natural growth in the sense of an articulate manifestation of cosmic order. That this particular type of articulation exists is a fact to be accepted, not to be explained. Republics are a cosmic articulation in the same manner as plants, or animals, or men, or celestial bodies. That republics are a natural growth with an exhaustible, vital force does not mean, however, that they are an organic growth. Republics as well as religious communities are not organisms; they are *corpi misti*, that is, composite bodies. Their composing elements are men; and men are not collectivist automata but exist in the tension between their self-will and the will to public order. This tension is ineluctable; and it is the cause of the decline of even the best-ordered republics. "Human desires are insatiable; for from nature they have the power and will to grasp

36. On conspiracies see *Discorsi* III.6 and *Istorie Fiorentine* VIII.
for everything, while from fortune they have the power only to reach very few things. As a consequence, the minds of men are permanently filled with discontent and a weariness of the things which they possess. Therefore, without our good reason they criticize the present, praise the past, and desire the future."38 Such is the unpromising material out of which the order of the republic has to grow. The order of growth and decay, therefore, is no more than a framework that will allow for an infinity of historical variations. There is no guarantee that any particular assemblage of men will ever develop a political order; when the vitality for a start exists, the attempt may miscarry and result in an unstable order; and when the start was good, the course may still be cut short when in a moment of crisis the renovating powers do not appear. Lucky is the republic that at its foundation, or shortly afterward, produced a sage who gave it laws by which it could live for centuries—as Sparta lived by the laws of Lycurgus.39 In most cases, however, the beginnings will be less auspicious—as in the case of Rome. Hence, the history of the Roman republic is worth our special attention; for in this case we can study the conditions under which a republic is successful without such inimitable strokes of luck as a founding sage.

With regard to the secret of Roman success, Machiavelli again follows Polybius and his conception of the tripolity. Rome started in the usual manner with kings who degenerated into tyrants. The expulsion of the tyrants, however, was not followed by the normal, fatal cycle because the rebels replaced them with a mixture of monarchical and aristocratic elements in the consul and the senate. This pattern of construction was followed when the next wave of revolt was due—that is, the people's revolt against the aristocrats. The tribunes of the people received their share in government, without destroying the authority of the consuls and the senate. The fatal succession of forms, thus, was transformed into a balanced simultaneity. Certainly, there was a considerable amount of domestic strife between patricians and plebeians that, to the superficial observer, may not seem to recommend Rome as a model. Such civil disturbances, however, must be considered the price that had to be paid for the continued existence and conquering expansion of the republic. In particular, this latter point is of importance. One can
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that perhaps these effects are the fault not of Christianity but of a villainous interpretation that made it subservient to inaction (ozio) rather than virtù. For, after all, Christianity permits exaltation and defense of the country and wants us to love and honor it and to fight for it. Hence the false interpretation rather than Christianity itself is the cause of a diminished love of freedom. And we should not overlook that the Roman empire has broken the freedom of the conquered republics; and quite possibly this was a blow from which they could never recover, even after the dissolution of the empire. 47

This state of things cannot be repaired easily; there is no alternative religion at hand; one can only hope for a reform (rinnovazione) through return to Christianity’s more healthy beginnings. Such renovations have happened before. Without the restorative work of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, Christianity would long ago have become extinct. The imitation of the life of Christ through the mendicant orders has given a new lease on life to a church that would have been ruined by the dishonorable conduct of its prelates and heads. 48 And such renovations are still possible, though the town populations are less responsive to spiritual revival than more primitive people. The people of Florence, for instance, were neither ignorant nor crude; and still they let themselves be persuaded that Savonarola talked with God. "I do not want to judge whether that was true or not; for of such a man one must speak with reverence." Nevertheless, if that was possible nobody should despair that even today he could do what others have done before him—"for as it was said in the preface, men are born, live, and die forever under the same order." 49

The outlines of Machiavelli’s system are becoming clear. At the center is a metaphysic of cosmic force that manifests itself in the production of the various forms of being, among them the republics. In the case of the republics, the entities are composite; political form comes into being through the operation of cosmic force in rare individuals—that is, through the virtù of founders and restorers. The very effectiveness of this founding force determines the cyclical rise and fall of republics: "Virtù engenders tranquillity, tranquillity leisure, leisure disorder, disorder ruin; and similarly, from

47. Discorsi II.2, in Opere, 141 ff.
48. Discorsi III.1, in ibid., 195.
49. Discorsi I.11, in ibid., 77 ff.
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political purpose. Nevertheless, the book has an order of its own, and there is no difficulty in discovering its division into three main parts:

[1] The title De principatibus covers the systematic intention of chapters I through XI. This first part of the Prince is a tract on lordships, supplementing the treatment of republics in the Discorsi. All states (stati) are divided into republics and lordships (principati). The latter are subdivided into hereditary and newly acquired; and a special class of ecclesiastical lordships is added. Hereditary and ecclesiastical lordships are treated briefly in chapters II and XI; while the main body of this part, that is, chapters III through X, deals with the newly acquired lordships.

[2] The second part comprises chapters XII through XIV. It deals with problems of military organization. The true systematic function of this part, however, is not covered by simply naming its subject matter. Machiavelli intended to have his varieties of lordships followed by a section on the “foundations” on which they all must rest; and these fondamenti are “good laws and good arms.” “Since, however, there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and since where there are good arms the laws must also be good, I leave aside a discussion of the laws and shall speak only of the arms.”

[3] The section on the fondamenti, finally, is followed by the part on the prince, in the narrower sense, beginning with chapter XV. It is a study of the principles of conduct that a prince will have to adopt if he wants to become the renovator of Italy. This part is again related to the Discorsi insofar as the problem of book III, the renovation of the republic, is now sharpened to the analysis of the redeemer under concrete Italian conditions.

These are the three parts as far as subject matter is concerned. The internal structure of the Prince, however, will not become intelligible if we restrict ourselves to this flat account. On the contrary, if we fix our attention on the three topics, the Prince must appear as a badly organized book, resuming problems in the second and third parts that should have been exhausted on occasion of their appearance in the first part. On the basis of this account, one must derail, as has happened, into speculations about whether Machiavelli had

55. See Prince I and the opening sentence of II.
56. Prince XII, in Opere, 24.
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hopelessness of the situation is the invitation to the great leader to show his quality as the creator of a new order. The rise of the hero is not easy because he has to overcome the resistance of the vested interests who have tradition and the law on their side, as well as the suspicion of the unbelieving who do not believe "the truth of new things" before they are established. Fear and unimaginativeness must be overcome; and for that purpose persuasion is ineffective unless it is supported by force. "As a consequence, the prophets in arms have always been victorious, while those without arms perished." Virtù dello animo and an army make the victorious prince; the prophets in arms (profeti armati) furnish the model for the savior of Italy.

The prophet in arms is the first of a series of types. The second type is the prince who acquires his lordship "through foreign arms and fortune." While the first type has great difficulties on his way to power, the second type finds his difficulties in consolidating a position to which circumstances have raised him, as did Cesare Borgia, who could start with the Romagna but then had to employ his considerable virtù for securing and expanding his rule against numerous competitors. While the first type must show his virtù in creating an order out of nothing, the second type must show it in transforming an accident of power into a stable reality. The third type is the man "who reaches his lordship through crime." The example of this case is the Sicilian Agathocles, who had a brilliant but otherwise normal career toward the high magistracy of Syracuse, and then resolved to transform his constitutional office into an autocratic lordship. On a suitable occasion, he had his soldiers slaughter the leading citizens; and from then on he could hold his princely position uncontested. Agathocles owed little, if anything, to fortuna; but neither did he owe anything to virtù. "For, massacring one's fellow citizens, betraying one's friends, and being without faith, piety, and religion cannot be called virtù; by such means one can acquire power but not fame." If one considers the courage of Agathocles in facing danger, and his greatness of soul in bearing and overcoming misfortune, he is the equal of the most excellent captains. But his ferocious cruelty and inhumanity, and his infinite infamies, exclude him from the rank of true excellence. The fourth and last type is the civil lord, the man who rises to a princely position within the political order of his community.
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aspect, "men can only act in conformance with fortuna but not oppose her." This apparently deterministic formulation, however, is again deflected by the demand of hope: men must never abandon themselves to fortune, for they do not know its plans. "And since its ways are devious and unknown, you must always hope, and hoping not abandon yourself, in whatever situation and distress you may be." 65

This hope inspires and pervades the closing "Exhortation to take Italy and liberate her from the barbarians." The situation is desperate; the depth of misery is mythic, like the depth from which Moses, Cyrus, and Theseus have risen. Hence no time seems to be more propitious for the rise of a new prince; the country had to sink so deep in order to know to the full "la virtù d’uno spirito italiano." Italy cries to God for the redeemer; and there is no greater hope than the house of Medici, distinguished visibly by God through the papacy. The constellation is most favorable, and all difficulties can be overcome if the prince will follow the example held up to him. Then Machiavelli's tone rises to the invocation of apocalyptic portents sent by God: "The sea has opened, a cloud has shown the way; the rock has spouted water, and manna has rained from heaven." God will not do everything; the rest is left to free will and to our glory. This reflection leads back to a short recapitulation of the necessary military reform. And the exhortation closes with the appeal to the Medici to let come true the prophecy of Petrarch: "Virtù takes arms against barbarian rage; the fight is short: for in Italian hearts the valor of the ancients has not yet died." 66

65. Discorsi II.29, in Opere, 187.

66. Professor Friedrich von Engel-Lanos, who had the kindness of reading and criticizing this chapter, thinks that the reader may be left with the erroneous impression that, in the last analysis, Machiavelli's evocation goes back to the type created by the Vita Tamerlani. He suggests that the apocalypse of Machiavelli, as to its substance, belongs rather in "the series of the Dux e Babylone, Veltro, etc." I must confess I had not thought of pursuing the problem of either Machiavelli's apocalypse or the Vita Tamerlani further in this direction. The suggestion is most valuable. Once it is made, the structure of the Italian apocalyptic political evocations gains considerably in clearness. I should say that the background of Dante, of Joachitic Franciscanism, and of Rienzo must be taken into account as an important determinant in the formation of the images of the great prince. If we adopt this view then it also becomes possible to distinguish more clearly between the apocalyptic element proper [which is Christian, not ancient] and the categorization that stems from ancient sources. Both the Vita Tamerlani and the Vita di Castruccio Castracani have absorbed [besides elements of the biblical account of Moses] the account of the youth of Cyrus, as told by Herodotus in his History 1.108 ff. This part of the mythical
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intellectual who knows all about the course of history; on the plane of finite existence, history will still be shaped by the virtù that has faith in its own substance. And, finally, Machiavelli is clear about the substance of this faith and strength. In formulations that remind us of the Epistle to the Hebrews, he insists on hope as the substance of the faith in political salvation, even in the rationally most desperate situation. The apocalyptic vision at the end of the Principe, therefore, is not at all out of style with the attitude that he displays in other parts of the book. On the contrary, by the logique du cœur the apocalypse of the redeemer is the inevitable climax of the faith of virtù. It is hardly necessary to say that a man who had these subtle insights into the life of the spirit was not an irreligious man—though quite certainly, Machiavelli was not a Christian spiritualist.67

This leaves us with the problem of Machiavelli’s paganism itself. Let us first consider its positive aspect. In the earlier sections of this chapter, we have sketched the background against which Machiavelli’s ideas must be understood, that is, the disintegration of imperial Christianity, the humanistic historiography, the Asiatic events, and the trauma of 1494. A world scene of politics had opened, with a structure of its own, and the idea of the Christian imperium had become irrelevant. When the meaning of history in the sense of Saint Augustine’s Civitas Dei disappears, the “natural” structure of history, in the ancient sense, becomes visible again. The Myth of Nature, in fact, is not a piece of obsolete nonsense; it only is defective insofar as the problems of the spirit are not sufficiently differentiated. The reader will remember Plato’s struggle with this problem. The Christian religiousness of the spirit, on the other hand, while certainly an advancement in the differentiation of spiritual life, has produced an interpretation of history (through Saint Augustine and Orosius) that is seriously defective because of the narrowness of its horizon as well as because it neglects the problem of the natural course of a political civilization that had already been developed most promisingly by Plato. Hence, Machiavelli’s resumption of the natural cycle of politics in its Polybian form is a notable feat of theoretical instinct, however imperfect it was in the execution. We must see this feat against the alternative

67. I should like to draw attention to the close relation between Machiavelli’s pagan symbolizations of the dialectics of Providence and Goethe’s Orphische Urworte.
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of which the nature and strength hitherto have not been suspected. The introduction of this new element is the most serious obstacle to an adequate understanding of the early sixteenth century, as long as we insist on using such terms as medieval and modern as if they designated well-defined periods, following each other in simple chronological succession. This new element of popular religiousness (which we shall discuss in detail in the following chapter, "The People of God") is not "modern"; it is "medieval"; but it is "new" in the sense that during the Middle Ages it had been suppressed and never determined the public institutions on a major scale, though it exerted reforming pressure on them. Hence, the "second start" brings a new wave of medieval forces to the fore that for generations supersede the much more "modern" beginnings of the "first start." Only in the eighteenth century, in the period of the Enlightenment, when the impetus of the Protestant centuries had been spent, do we again find a "modern" rationalism comparable to that of the first decades of the sixteenth century. Over the long interval we can recognize the affinities of Voltaire with Erasmus, or of Alexander Hamilton with Machiavelli. While the Reformation, thus, reverses the "modernism" of the first start and delays its revival for a considerable time, it has impressed its signature so thoroughly on the history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that its essentially medieval sectarianism has acquired the connotation of "modernity" κατ’ εξοχήν. In retrospect from our time, the thinkers and ideas from before 1517 appear strangely old-fashioned, in spite of their revolutionary character, because they were not touched by the Reformation. In 1516, indeed, nobody could foresee that in the following year the comparatively innocuous promulgation of theses by a very industrious but not too important monk would release an avalanche of pent-up forces. The change of the intellectual scene was radical; and we may say that none of the great works that were being written or published in 1516 would have been written or published by their authors in 1526—including Machiavelli's Prince.

§1. The Year 1516

Once our eye has been sharpened for a phase of "modern" political thought before the Reformation, Machiavelli and his Prince immediately lose their grandeur of solitude as the opening act of
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of the three languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew) is required. The study should not be undertaken out of curiosity but with reverence: Christian philosophy is not a doctrine to be committed to memory but a way of life, realized in the person of Christ and to be followed with devotion by the man whose heart has been penetrated with the example.

It all sounds very Christian—but the reader will have noticed that this conception of Christianity does not differ so very much from the attitude of an Averroist in the time of Siger de Brabant toward Aristotle. He will have asked himself perhaps with some astonishment how the church fits into this conception, and what has become of the intellectual penetration of Christianity and its evolution into a vast system of speculative theology through the patres and the scholastics? After fifteen hundred years of ecclesiastical history, was Erasmus unaware of the possible consequence of reforming Christianity by having every Christian rely on his personal understanding of a complicated literary source in Greek and Hebrew, with half a dozen Latin commentaries thrown in?

Apparently he was—just as much as the contemporary generation of reformers before experience taught them better. The reasons for this unawareness are fairly clear; they are partly to be found in the objective structure of the intellectual situation, partly in personal traits of Erasmus. The theological training that a man like Erasmus underwent must have been highly unsatisfactory: an epigonic scholasticism, degenerated into hairsplitting distinctions of peripheral, irrelevant problems, and administered by masters who were quite frequently ignorant of the biblical texts, whose active intellectual penetration of the great scholastic systems was practically nonexistent, who were unable to make the conceptual distinctions of doctrine intelligible in the light of spiritual experiences or historical circumstances, in brief who were most likely to convey the impression to an intelligent, sensitive young man that Christianity could be found anywhere in the world except in the stuff that they dished out.

This situation must be understood as the background for the expression of Erasmian wrath against the scholastics. In the Paraclesis he asks why more time should be spent on the scholastics than on the Gospel; who are Albert and Thomas, Ockham and Scotus, compared with Christ? Let us prefer piety to disputations; let us be invincible in virtue rather than in argument. In the Encomium Moriae
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right in his emotional revolt but totally wrong in his intellectual response. The reformism of Erasmus, in its positive as well as its negative aspects, has its historical importance because it shows the extent to which the intellectual and spiritual traditions of Western civilization had disintegrated before the great upheaval of 1517 changed the situation radically through the injection of the spiritual resources of the sectarian movements into the public life of the Western nations. The ambivalence of Erasmus’s reaction toward the Reformation, his sympathy with the revolt, and his disgust with its forms (very much reminiscent of our contemporary so haben wir es nicht gemeint) show best the difficulties arising from an escape into a humanistic private existence in an age of crisis, from the escape into an existence that is pious, learned, and reasonable but deficient in strength of intellect and spirit.

§3. The Ascetic Prince and the Vulgus

But we are still in the happy year 1516, the year in which Erasmus evoked the image of the Christian prince for the future emperor. In the dedication, Erasmus states his program in Platonic terms. The republic will not be happy unless it is ruled by philosophers, or unless the rulers embrace philosophy. Charles is the ruler and Erasmus will try a philosophical education. But what is this philosophy? It is not the “philosophy” that deals with cosmic origins, with primary causes and matter, with motion and infinity. Like his friend More in the same year, in his Utopia, Erasmus distinguishes between such school philosophy and the more courtly kind that is fit for princes. His is a philosophy that “frees the mind from the false opinions and the vicious predilections of the masses,” and this cathartic function will be supplemented by a doctrine of rulership “according to the example of the Eternal Power.” The program sounds “philosophical” but not specifically Christian. In spite of his ready warning that he is not going to molest the prince with the intricacies of Aristotelian metaphysics, Erasmus is even afraid that courtiers will protest against the idea of forming princely conduct by Platonic criteria of good and evil. The product would be “a philosopher, not a prince.” On this point, however, Erasmus is adamant. One cannot be a prince without being a philosopher; the

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the essence of all things. Analogically, the ruling center of the commonwealth, the prince, should excel all others in goodness, wisdom, and watchfulness. It would be contrary to nature if evils should spread from the mind to the body; and equally would it be contrary to nature if the disorders of the commonwealth should spring from the prince, whose excellence in its turn should lay to rest the storms stirred up "by the folly of the common folk."

The single elements of the aggregate of metaphors have their ancient models, and the piling up of metaphors is turgid; no precise theoretical expression of its meaning could be founded unequivocally on the text. Nevertheless, the persuasive flow as a whole has a distinct flavor: in spite of the classic and Christian models, the aggregate has an Oriental touch. When we read that a prince should be superior to his officers, not in the hierarchy of command but in the hierarchy of essence, in the same degree in which his officers are superior to the common people, we are reminded of an Egyptian hierarchic conception. And when we read of the prince who does not order the commonwealth through his statecraft, but mystically preserves and restores its harmony through the essence of his ascetic being, we are reminded of nothing so much as of a Chinese Son of Heaven. There is something of a Confucian literary gentleman in Erasmus and his idea of ordering a commonwealth through maintaining a restrained, self-controlled, reasonable essence at its center.

§4. The Range of Princely Asceticism

The asceticism of the prince should extend over the whole range of possibilities from ordinary human indulgence, pride in skills and possessions, to the specific indulgences of power.

The prince should avoid the trappings of gems, gold, royal purple, a retinue of courtiers, marks of honor, and statues; for what is more ridiculous than to see a man bedecked in such a manner and to find him inferior in real goodness to a man at the bottom of society.\(^17\)

The reasoning is characteristically Erasmian. He does not dare to say outright (what he implies in another passage, p. 151) that the life and appearance of the prince should be one of "frugality and simple neatness" but insinuates invidiously that anybody who appears in

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 150.
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"disastrous and criminal affair," even in the case of a "just war"—
"if there really is any war that can be called 'just.'" Erasmus does
not want to commit himself on the thesis that all wars are unjust
(though rather obviously that is his opinion), but he reflects that
everybody will find his war just and that reasons can always be
found considering the complexity and vicissitude of human affairs.
In particular, treaties are a rich source of wars because one can
always construe a violation of agreement. Hence, the fewer treaties
the better it will be for peace—an opinion in which he coincides
with More's *Utopia*. Saint Augustine has considered the possibility
of situations in which a war is "just," but why should we bow to the
authority of a father when the Gospel is clear in its condemnation of
violence? There is, of course, the problem that rights should not be
forsaken. But, in fact, the rights of princes spring from agreements
concerning their private affairs, as for instance marriage alliances.
Of what conceivable interest could such affairs be for the subjects?
The prince must consider that his subjects are men and must not
utilize them like animals. "A large part of the ruling authority is
in the consent of the people, which is the factor that first created
kings." If, therefore, a serious disagreement between princes should
arise, they should have resort to arbitration through bishops, abbots,
magistrates, and learned men.

Although, as a rule, the private affairs and ambitions of princes
are the cause of war, Erasmus is not unaware that the people may
furnish some cause, too. He reflects on the collective hatreds be-
tween English and French, Irish and English, Italians and Germans,
Swabians and Swiss, "and so through the list"; and he asks, "Why
do these stupid names do more to divide us than the common name
of Christ does to unite us?" But here, precisely, lies one of the great
obstacles to peace, for the priests who should deflect the minds of
commoners and princes from war are supporting it and blessing it.
And they do it on all sides so that we have the ridiculous situation
of a Christ in both camps "as if He were fighting against himself."31

§6. The Problem of Power

We have concentrated the problem of Erasmian politics in the idea
of the "ascetic prince." We have chosen this term—in preference to

31. Condensed from *Education* XI, "On Beginning War."
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tradition, the importance of the life of the intellect and its discipline in history—all these factors have disappeared from the picture of politics. This world has only one glory: the ascetic intellectual and the prince who administers his trust of power in the ascetic spirit. At the core of this dream we find the very evil that is the topic of Erasmian politics, the lust of power, in the form of the pleonexia of the intellectual.

§7. Utopia and America

The more or less hidden tensions of the Erasmian position become fully articulate in More and his Utopia. That they become articulate, however, does not mean that in the Utopia we find a discursive, easily intelligible exposition of the problems. Sir Thomas More is distinguished among men for being a saint of the Catholic Church as well as of the Communist movement. Such abundance of historical honors points to complexities, not easy to unravel, in the work to which he owes his lasting fame. The process of unraveling, indeed, is far from being ended; but at least a concerted effort is under way so that today we have a considerably better understanding of the work than was possible even twenty years ago. The unclearness that surrounds the work is in part a consequence of its success; hence, we shall devote a few preliminary remarks to the removal of certain obscurities that originate in its literary fame.

32. [The material from here to the end of this chapter was published as “More’s Utopia,” Österreichische Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht, n.s. 3 (1931), 451–68.]

33. The basis for an interpretation of Utopia is today R. W. Chambers, Thomas More [New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1935]. The best recent monograph, continuing the work of Chambers, is Henry W. Donner, Introduction to Utopia [Uppsala [London]: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1945, rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969]. A valuable essay is Tommaso Fiore’s Saggio su Tommaso More, which serves as an introduction to Fiore’s Italian translation of Utopia, in L’Utopia, ed. Tommaso Fiore [Bari: G. Laterza e figli, 1942]. The interest in Morean problems has been strongly stirred up by German historians who, after the First World War, interpreted Utopia as a kind of manual for British imperialism and exploitation of colonial peoples. This line of interpretation was started by Hermann Oncken, Die Utopie des Thomas Morus und das Machtproblem in der Staatslehre, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist.Klasse, 13 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1922), its results are contained in Oncken’s introduction to Gerhard Ritter’s German translation of Utopia [Berlin: R. Hobbing, 1922]. For the further vicissitudes of this interpretation see the notes in Donner’s Introduction to Utopia. Oncken’s projection of British “imperialism” and “cant” into More was a gross mistake; and this interlude can be considered as finished as far as the principle of the interpretation
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serious level of political literature. The exhaustion of the original substance, however, does not prevent the use of the literary form once it is established. In the nineteenth century, utopian literature fills up with socialistic and scientific content, and the distance in space tends to be replaced by distance in time. The variety of purpose to which the form can be put may be indicated by Samuel Butler's Erewhon, H. G. Wells's Modern Utopia, and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World.

§8. Somewhere and Nowhere

The Utopia is a dialogue. Its scene is Antwerp in 1515, when More was in the Lowlands as a member of an English embassy. The interlocutors are More himself; Petrus Aegidius, his friend in Antwerp; and Raphael Hythlodaeus, the "teller of idle tales," the humanistically educated sailor, the companion of Amerigo Vespucci on his travels to the New World, who has brought with him the tale of Utopia. The dialogue is organized in two books. Book II contains Raphael's tale of the institutions of Utopia. It was written first, while More was still in Antwerp. Book I, written after his return to England, contains the introductory dialogue on the evils of the time, on the practical impossibility of reform through counsel to rulers, on the atmosphere of courts where the voice of the philosopher and statesman goes unheard, on the root of social iniquities in the institution of private property, leading up to Raphael's tale of the island where social happiness has been insured through wise institutions.

At the center of meaning lies the autobiographical part of the dialogue. More is in doubt as to whether there is any sense in taking office in the king's service, a single man cannot stem the tide of the time; instead of doing any good he will be corrupted himself through inevitable connivance in measures of which he disapproves. The argument that must have been going on in the soul of More at the time is distributed in the dialogue between More and Raphael. More is in favor of royal service, "for from the prince, as from a perennial foundation, flows the stream of good and evil down to the people."41 The man experienced in affairs and of wide education is under the duty (boni vitri officium) of benefiting

the public by his advice to rulers. More is disturbed, more than Erasmus, by the Platonic theme of the Parable of the Cave, by the philosopher’s duty of participating in the affairs of the polis. And, indeed, More invokes the Platonic formula that a commonwealth would be happy if philosophers were kings, or kings would become philosophers. “How, then, shall a republic ever become happy when the philosophers reject service in the king’s council?”

That was not quite the idea of Plato, who, even under the conditions of the all-embracing Hellenic polis, knew that times may come when nonparticipation is the duty. Still less is this reflection Christian. The Christian’s first duty is the orientation of life toward the *sumnum bonum*—and that is not at all the happiness of the republic. The question of More implies that spiritual power had declined as an ordering power in the commonwealth so far that the problem of the happy republic presented itself to him without a doubt as the problem of a joint rule of the prince and the secular philosopher. In his argumentation the spiritual power is a *quantité négligeable*. In More as in Erasmus we can observe the transformation of the spiritual power into the power of the secular intellectual; a development that was foreshadowed already in Dante’s idea of the double headship of emperor and philosopher now becomes greatly intensified. The secular intellectual, however, is in a difficult position insofar as he has no place to go. Unless he becomes a political intellectual, and as such an adjunct to the powers that be or will be, what shall he do? The existential answer—to More apparently the only one he could imagine—is Raphael, the man who has divested himself of his property in favor of his family and leads a traveling life as a man without a country. He is, by disposition, a man “who is more concerned about wandering than about the place where he will find his grave; for he used often to say ‘He that has no grave is covered by the sky’ and ‘From all places the way to heaven is equally far.’”

This humanistic traveler now answers the question of More, and with ample examples he shows that counsel of the kind he would be obliged to tender had no chance of finding acceptance considering the state of things in politics.

More agrees; but he can defend his position by drawing a distinction between two types of philosophy, the same distinction his

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42. Ibid., 79 ff.
43. Ibid., 28.
friend Erasmus drew at the same time in the *Institutio*. One must
distinguish between school philosophy (*philosophia scholastica*)
and polite philosophy (*philosophia civilior*). The first has its place
in discussions among friends, not in political relations. How could
one seriously expect courtiers to agree with unheard-of propositions
(*sermo insolens*) that run counter to their habit of thought? “Polite
philosophy” knows its place, does not abstractly hold a truth to be
opportune in every situation, does not talk out of turn, and does
not, like a bad actor, disturb the play at hand. One cannot root out
bad opinions and traditional vices at a moment’s notice—but that
is no reason for deserting the commonwealth, like a ship in a storm.
One must not pester people with strange notions but use the arts
and tricks of persuasion so that “if you cannot turn things to the
good, at least you can make them less bad.” “For all things cannot
be well, as long as all men are not good—and that I do not expect
to happen for quite a few years.”

The answer is not impressive. It is neither Platonic nor otherwise
profound. It is persuasive common sense for a man who wants to
play a role in politics, who is intelligent and sensitive enough to
feel the responsibilities he may incur, and who needs a little opiate
to overcome his scruples. Today we call it the argument of the
“collaborator.” The skill in dodging the issues is remarkable. An
abstract truth, indeed, is not fit for every situation; but there are
situations where the abstract truth must be pronounced in order to
break out of the morass of moral confusion. One can, indeed, not
root out traditional vices at a moment’s notice; but there is a limit
beyond which delay is impermissible. And that all men are not
good and therefore all things cannot be well is sound admonition
to a perfectionist; but it easily can become a cover for condoning
crimes. What makes this argument so flat is the renunciation of the
spirit as the ultimate authority beyond the temporal order and its
insufficiencies. The commonwealth tends to acquire an ultimacy
that properly belongs to the spirit. The ominous symptom of the
shift of accents is More’s distinction between scholastic and polite
philosophy. The meaning of philosophy as the intellectual dimen-
sion of the life of the spirit, as the intellectual articulation of an
order that culminates in the life of the spirit and the orientation of

44. Ibid., 97–100.
the soul toward the realissimum, apparently had been lost for More quite as much as for Erasmus. The Erasmian princely philosophy, as well as More’s polite philosophy, is wisdom that draws on classic and Christian traditions; but it has lost the savageness that cannot come from the past but only from the eternal presence of the source.

The Utopia is a dialogue. More’s argument represents only one side of his position; our criticism touches only one aspect of the tension in which he lived. More knew quite well that there were counterarguments; he represented them in Raphael; and the debate remains inconclusive. We must consider the tension as a whole. The elements of the problem are already known. The argument of More is disappointing because it is opportunistic and dodges the spiritual issues. At the other pole of the tension we would expect to find the spiritual position. But again we are disappointed, for at this other pole we find the humanistic traveler who has withdrawn in resignation. The tension as a whole occurs in the field of humanistic, political sentiments. The true alternative, the life of the spirit, remains beyond the horizon. This structure of the Morean problem is somewhat surprising because in his earlier years More had hesitated between taking Holy Orders [as a Carthusian or Observant Franciscan] and the study of law. His choice had been a family, the law, and the commonwealth. Nevertheless, setting aside his thorough and comprehensive theological knowledge, one would expect that a man who existentially was on the verge of becoming a monk would understand the problem of the “world” and not attempt to evade it by argument that is an insult to intelligence.

The key to this enigma can perhaps be found in a passage of the Utopia in which Raphael describes the attitude of the islanders toward the members of a strict, sectarian order that has formed among them. The Utopians tolerate this order because they respect every conduct that is motivated by “religion” as long as it does not disturb the more easygoing creed of the others. They themselves, however, are hedonists and rationalists. “Anybody who would prefer celibacy to matrimony, or a hard life to an easy one, as a matter of reason would be laughed at.”45 Ratio and religio are opposed as principles of ordering conduct. The utopian commonwealth lives by the order of reason; religion is reduced to a deistic minimum dogma

45. Ibid., 282.
consisting of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, punishment and reward in the beyond, and the rule of Providence.\footnote{Ibid., 274.} And even this minimum dogma is retained only for the utilitarian reason that without it the laws of the commonwealth might not be sufficient to keep the good people on the narrow path.\footnote{Raphael relates the incident of a Utopian who, like many others, was converted by them to Christianity but took his new creed a bit too seriously. He started arguing about it in public and assured his fellow citizens that eternal damnation was their lot unless they followed his example. The man was properly arrested and banished as a disturber of the peace. The point is that the culprit was removed, not because he cast aspersions on the established religion, but because he stirred up the people \textit{(irex excitati in populo tumultus)}. The scene foreshadows the problem that later was treated by Dostoevsky in the \textit{Grand Inquisitor} [\textit{Utopia}, ed. Lupton, 270].} The construction of More agrees in all essential points with the later Lockeian idea of tolerance and the separation of church and state. The official Deism with its rites, but without a systematic theology that might stir up problems, lets everybody believe what he wants, provided that he does not claim public recognition. Assuming the obvious, that nobody can conceive and with loving care elaborate this idea unless it occupies his imagination intensely, we may say that the idea of the \textit{Christianitas} as the mystical body of Christ, articulated into its spiritual and temporal orders with equal public rank, had lost its hold over the sentiments of More at least to the degree that, at least in this phase of his life, the spiritual order was no longer experienced as a representative public order in the commonwealth. The life of the spirit had become a private affair and, since as a mystic his personality was not strong enough to stand for itself, the temporal order had become the secular commonwealth, with the monopoly of public representation, retaining as much of Christian traditions as historical circumstance had left at the moment.

The separation of \textit{ratio} and \textit{religio}, of church and state, of the spheres of the natural and supernatural, the reduction of the temporal order to the secular commonwealth, and the corresponding privatization of "religion" permit us to understand the dilemma of More as well as the peculiar form it assumes in the tension of the utopian dialogue. When the natural, rational, secular commonwealth has monopolized public status, when it closes the horizon of human existence in society, then indeed it becomes difficult to find one's way in times of worldly disorder. The commonwealth
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that does not mean that it has to run amuck. The commonwealth without *superbia* is the counteridea to the surrounding historical reality of the decaying feudal age in which More sees *superbia* working its destruction without restraint. The critical point is sharpened because More endows his islanders with a philosophy of conduct and a system of virtues that is essentially pagan. They are hedonists, going after their pleasure under the guidance of nature and reason. They are restrained in their indulgence by temperance and justice so that they will not damage their neighbors. They recognize the virtues of the intellectual soul and find pleasure in the life of contemplation. They detest technical metaphysics, but they have developed a philosophy of morals and a science of nature and the useful arts. They recognize human nature as social and consider it their duty to aid one’s fellowman individually, as well as to organize social institutions (schools, hospitals, care of the aged and infirm, etc.) which through collective provision make life as agreeable as possible for everybody. They have a nonhereditary class of learned men into which everybody can rise who shows special gifts. They do not mar this pleasant life by acquisitiveness but hold all property in common; the simple needs of everybody are amply provided for from the common warehouses; and their meals are organized collectively through refectories. The point in this peaceful, happy life—ascetic and hedonistic at the same time—is the absence of Christianity. Such individual and social happiness is possible even under the conditions of a primitive, pagan civilization—forgetting about the little vanishing trick with the *superbia*; that is the moral.  

*Superbia* without restraint is More’s accusation against the society of his time. The problem is fundamentally the same as that of Erasmus, but More’s horizon is much wider. He recognizes the evil not only in the *pleonexia* of the princes but generally among all classes of people; the lust for power and political aggrandizement is only one manifestation among others. For More’s famous description of the state of England and of Western society at large, the reader should refer to the monographic literature, or better to the *Utopia* itself. Let us recollect only the lords who, after a war,

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51. This point of the contrast between pagan happiness and Christian corruption has been finely brought out by Chambers, *Thomas More*, 125 ff., “The Meaning of Utopia.”
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“where nothing is private, everybody is concerned about the public business.”

We have the elements of More’s construction in hand and can now appraise its political meaning. First of all, More was not a socialist. He constructed a socialist commonwealth in order to show what a society looks like when the principal instrument for the satisfaction of pride is removed. The elimination of pride was his primary problem, not the elimination of property. The question then arises whether he actually believed that the “wise institutions” of his Utopia would remedy the evil? This question must be answered in the negative. As a conscious Christian and trained theologian, More knew that superbia cannot be abolished by institutional devices. If he knew it, the next question must be, why did he indulge in this game? Here we touch the center of More’s problem, his spiritual weakness and pessimism, but here we touch also a fundamental problem of modern politics.

Once More had diagnosed the evils of the time as a rampage of superbia, the Christian answer would have been the restoration of spiritual order, for instance through a reform of the church. Like Machiavelli, however, More seems to have had no confidence in this possibility. In this impasse of sentiment we have to look for the origin of the half-serious play with the idea of a society in which the evils of superbia are removed through wise institutions. The goodness of the institutions substitutes for the goodness of man; a technical device solves the problem of the substantive order of the soul. More himself still had enough substance to know that such stuff can lead only to Nowhere. Nevertheless, he indulged in the play; and the results of the play do not differ from the results at which the thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries arrived seriously when the spiritual weakness of More had degenerated into spiritual impotence. The overall result is the renunciation of spiritual order both in the soul and in society. The spiritual order is replaced by the social ideal. The “ideal” gains its supreme importance in modern politics because it seems to open the way toward a stable social order through pragmatic devices.

56. Ibid., 299.
57. This, by the way, would also have been the Platonic answer. We have warned already against accepting the “Platonism” of constructors of “ideal” commonwealths at its face value.
instead of through the sanctification of life. It is, on principle, already the situation that T. S. Eliot has castigated as the dream of an order "so perfect that no one will need to be good." Still, the "ideal" must have a content. And again, More has pointed the way toward a hedonistic ratio, without spiritual guidance, that will provide the idea of a moderate economic existence for everybody, with a hundred great books thrown in for culture.

But here we reach the parting of the ways between More and the later moderns; for More not only knew that the realization of the ideal presupposed the impossible (that is, the abolition of *superbia*) but also had enough joy of the world himself in order to see that the ideal existence was a somewhat drab affair. A definite number of independent fallacies follow when the balance in which More kept them is disturbed. The political thinker—if by courtesy we may so call him—may understand that ideal institutions will not work unless the *superbia* is really abolished; hence, he will embark on its abolition as the prelude to the establishment of the perfect realm. This is the way of the activist mystics—from the Paracletes of the Reformation to the Paracletes of Positivism and Communism, that is, to Comte and Marx. Or he may accept unlimited *superbia* as an ineradicable part of human nature and devise political institutions that will either suppress its drive by absolute force, as in the Hobbesian Leviathan, or let the individual drives balance each other, as did Locke, Hamilton, and Madison. This latter system has achieved considerable practical importance in politics because it works quite well as long as there are human and natural resources to be exploited so that there is enough to go around for satisfying the "democracy of cupidity"—as this system recently has been characterized. And then, of course, there are the innocents of the Pelagian persuasion who would take an ideal at its face value, who believe that man is good and that with effort and propaganda the perfect state will ultimately be realized. In spite of their futility, their social importance also is considerable, for they provide the muddiness that enables the less innocent to catch their fish.

§10. Utopian Warfare

In conclusion, let us consider More's much debated ideals with regard to warfare.
On principle, his islanders are peaceable. War they consider a beastly thing, though no species of beasts used it as much as man; they hold it in abomination; "contrary to the custom of almost all other nations, they count nothing as inglorious as glory gained in war." 58 Nevertheless, they are no lambs; they are excellently equipped for war through strenuous military training as well as by virtue of the vast treasure that accumulates through trade and the land rents that are paid by foreign countries as war indemnities. The Utopians never conduct wars for national aggrandizement; all their wars are just wars in the sense that they are sanctions for violations of law committed by others; and the aims of these wars are strictly limited to obtaining by force what is their legal due, or, if that proves impossible, to inflicting enough terror to dissuade the enemy from trying anything a second time.

More, thus, unlike Erasmus, recognizes a bellum justum. Hence, the question arises: when is a war just? On this problem, More is elaborate. Wars are just, in the first place, when they serve the purpose of establishing colonies in territories occupied by other people. Due to their prosperous and healthy life, the islanders have an increasing population; the overflow is settled on the neighboring continent where the natives do not make proper use of their acreage. The indigenous population can live in symbiosis with the colonizers, under their institutions; if they resist, then the justissima causa belli is given, for the law of nature (praescriptum naturae) commands that the earth be properly used for the nutrition of those who need it. 59 Other just causes are not missing. The Utopians defend their own territories as well as those of their friends against any invasion; and they are circumspect enough not to wait for an aggression but to conduct a war of prevention if they notice war preparations anywhere directed against them. Moreover, out of humanitarian sentiment, they aid oppressed peoples to free themselves from the yoke of tyranny and servitude. They aid their friends not only in the defense of their country but also in offensive warfare when they have been consulted on the issue and are convinced that all peaceful means of settlement are exhausted. They aid them in particular when their merchants are oppressed in a foreign country.

58. Utopia, ed. Lupton, 243. All of the subject matter discussed in the text is contained, unless marked otherwise, in the section De re militari, 243–65.
59. Ibid., 155.
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by definition, is a moral absolute. [4] The further consequence is a peculiar variant of intentionalist ethics insofar as the ideal now sanctifies the means necessary for its realization—a consequence that becomes particularly visible in More’s principles. [5] Since the carrier of the ideal can only act morally, everybody who is in conflict with him is automatically wrong; the Utopians can only conduct just wars—after having defined the principles of justice in such a manner that their application inevitably results in the preservation and expansion of their own power. [6] As a consequence, the tragedy of existential conflict is eliminated from history; the enemy is not fighting for the manifestation of his existence with the same right as the idealist; anybody who wants to lead his own way of life, unmolested by the idealist, is a criminal. [7] And more generally, the ideal abolishes the meaning of history as the unfolding of human potentiality through the plurality of historical civilizations; for only one civilization realizes the idea of man, and that is the civilization of the idealist. [8] And finally, and most dangerously, the brutal attack on the historical realization of all values that do not happen to be incorporated in the ideal forces everybody else into a defensive position in which the worst atrocities and crimes may seem justified in order to ward off this insult to human dignity.

At the core of More’s utopian idealism we find the same pleonexia of the intellectual as at the core of Erasmus’s asceticism. Moreover, it is the same demonism of power without the grace of spirit as in Machiavelli, only aggravated by its disguise as an ideal. The conception of More, thus, is of considerably more general importance than any realization of his precepts in British imperialism. More has the dubious historical merit of having expressed for the first time to the full the pleonexia of secular reason, justice, and morality. His expression of the ideal is not the cause of what followed afterward, but it is the first tangible symptom of the great spiritual disease that was to grip Western civilization in the following centuries. And the first systematic elaboration of this idea is not due to the British (as the German critics seem to assume) but to the Spaniards, in particular to Vitória’s Relectiones de Indis—not because of any particular nefariousness of the Spaniards, but because they were the first who had to grapple with the justification of their pleonexia in the Conquest. The Utopia shows the problem of spiritual disintegration even at a more advanced stage than the work of either Machiavelli or of Erasmus, insofar as the pleonexia has now spread
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in immediacy to God would prove the permanent irritant against the institutions. The idea of the Christian person would function doubly as an agent of revolt against the institutionalization of the relations between the soul and God and as an agent of regeneration of the institutions. Let us elaborate a bit on these statements of principle.

Apolitism is a permanent problem in every political culture. Institutions can do no more than stabilize and order the field of social forces that exist at the time of their creation; even the best institutional creation is not perfect; there will always be groups and individuals who are dissatisfied with the settlement of the historical moment; and as time goes on and circumstances change, new causes of dissatisfaction will arise. An institution must be constantly engaged in the process of restabilizing itself through the solution of problems that would destroy its value and meaning if they remained unsolved. If the ruling group of an institution fails in such adaptation, an increasing number of persons will feel "left out." If the number of such persons becomes large enough in a given society, and if they express their sentiments and ideas in a philosophy of conduct suitable to persons who live with their "bodies" in a community but do not participate in it with their "souls" (to use the Platonic formulation), then we have given the phenomenon of apolitism on a socially relevant scale. If, furthermore, such persons form communities and organize themselves for political action, then the situation is ripe for a revolution.

Tensions of this nature, as we said, occur in every civilization, but their forms vary widely in accordance with the differences of spiritual structure. In the case of the Hellenic civilization we have seen that the form of the tension was determined by the conflict between the collective myth of the polis and the myth of the soul of the mystic-philosophers. The surge of apolitism in Hellas, if successful, could only result in the disintegration of the polis; the polytheistic collectivism of the polis world could react only with collapse against the essentially monotheistic and universal mysticism of the soul. In a Christian civilization, the determinants of the situation are entirely different. The public institutions of imperial Christianity [church and empire] have, from their beginning, absorbed the problems of the spiritual soul and its destiny into their pattern. It would seem impossible, on principle, that situations like the popular dissatisfaction with the empire religion
of Ikhnaton, or the apolitism of the Hellenic schools, or the Chinese “associationism” in conflict with the Confucian public order could arise in a Christian civilization. As a matter of fact, situations of this particular kind do not arise; the tensions assume specifically different forms. For the designation of this specific difference we may appropriately use the term *reformation*. The movement of the spirit has become institutionalized in the church; hence, the spiritual movements from the bottom of society cannot be in generic opposition to the institutions. The oppositional movement is intimately related to the spirit of the institution itself and must express itself in a call for reform. The spiritualism of Christianity, and in particular the spiritualism of the Sermon on the Mount, is a standard that can be invoked against the institution that is supposed to represent it; if the spiritual order of Christianity is grossly violated through the conduct of the ruling groups, the appeal can go to standards that are, on principle, accepted by the ruling groups themselves. The answer to a spiritual movement from the bottom need not be a collapse; it can be the reformation of the institution. The category of reformation, thus, becomes an idea that distinguishes medieval and modern Western civilization from the Hellenic. As a matter of fact, the five centuries from 1000 to 1500 are characterized by the digestion of radical spiritual movements through a series of minor reformations as well as by the social, sometimes bloody, suppression of the indigestible dregs of such movements.

We have just spoken of indigestible dregs of the movements and of their suppression. When a popular movement of mass relevance is forming in opposition to an institution, this formation is the definite proof that the institution has somehow failed in handling the problems entrusted to its care; to this extent, the idea of *vox populi, vox Dei* is golden wisdom. The formation of such a movement, however, is never a proof that the direction in which it is moving is endowed with any intrinsic value. The movement may represent a drive toward the social realization of spiritual values; but this drive may be no more than a nucleus that is surrounded by wide fringes of destructive hatred against the institution that has failed with regard to a specific task. From this possibility arise peculiar dangers of the tensions between institutions and movements, some of them generic in all civilizations, some of them specific for Western civilization. The legitimate grievances of a spiritual movement,
its call for reform in the Christian sense, may be accompanied by a hostile attitude toward civilizational values. This admixture of civilizational hostility is a practically inevitable feature of movements from the bottom of the social scale; the resentment against intellectual and aesthetic values realized by the upper class will supply a good deal of motive power in the call for reform. The cry for spiritual reform is typically coupled with demands for a "burning of the books," for the suppression of literary and artistic culture, and for the abolition of the prevalent property order.

These anticivilizational admixtures are doubly a danger to the institutions. They are a danger through their immediate attack on civilizational values; and they are an even worse danger because this admixture lends legitimacy to the institutional resistance against movements: the anticivilizational elements in movements become the excuse for the ruling groups not to satisfy legitimate grievances; and the momentary victory of the institution may become, as a consequence, the cause of even worse outbreaks in the future. This cumulative effect of resistance against legitimate calls for reform has especially grave consequences in a civilization of the Western Christian type. If the reforms are not forthcoming, the resentment that always is easily directed against the civilizational values embodied in institutions may turn against the spiritual values themselves. The process that has started with movements for spiritual reform may end with movements against the spirit. This has, in fact, been the course of the movements in Western civilization: the course begins with movements of the Albigensian type; it ends with movements of the Communist and National Socialist type. The development is without parallel in history. Western Christian civilization has a peculiar vulnerability and shows peculiar problems of decline: while in Greco-Roman civilization the tension of the decline was caused by movements that represented an advance of the spirit, in Western Christian civilization the tension of the decline is caused by movements that are spiritually regressive.²

It is of the greatest importance to distinguish between these various components in movements because the lack of such distinction

². Let us remark, incidentally, that this peculiarity of Western civilization should make historians hesitate to indulge in predictions with regard to the further course of Western decline. Under such conditions catastrophes of disorder without parallel are possible, while on the other hand recuperative forces without parallel are immanent to the civilization.
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righteousness *sola fide*. All the more it is necessary to trace the implications and consequences of this new philosophical anthropology. The deep incision in the nature of man between his soul and his bodily existence makes the members of the dichotomy highly movable against each other. Not only has the dichotomy as a whole a career of its own in the so-called classic period of modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant; but we can also observe the development from Luther's righteous soul toward a morality that abstracts from the conditions of existence as well as the development of his corrupt nature toward a psychology of motives without orientation toward a *summum bonum*. In such developments we recognize the overall effects of Luther's faith on the later history of Western civilization that will occupy us amply. Setting aside these general consequences for the present, we should like to stress one aftermath of Luther's bisection on the level of political movements to which, as far as I can see, hardly any attention is ever paid. We have seen how the insistence on the irredeemably corrupt nature saved Luther himself from derailment into chiliastic politics. The justification through faith extends to the soul alone; man and society cannot be transfigured into a spiritual realm in history. Such realism in itself is quite admirable; but it could, and did, lead into a quite different derailment in the nineteenth century, when the first part of the doctrine, the justification through faith, broke down with the breakdown of Protestantism in Germany. The Lutheran realism of understanding corrupt nature as the characteristic of the aeon of history remained—but what should men do for whom righteousness through faith was unbelievable? At this point occurred the amalgamation of Lutheran realism with the chiliasm of the sectarian movements in Marx. The world was corrupt beyond salvation; a realm of freedom could not be established either as the Christian freedom of the soul, to be perfected in the beyond, or as the sectarian transfiguration of history through the indwelling of the spirit in man. Since a realm of freedom had to exist nevertheless, the solution was found in the justification of man and society *sola revolutione*. For the details of this problem the reader should refer to the chapter on Marx.16


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RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

small a thing as picking up a straw. If confidence is absent, or if he
doubts, the work is not good." The decision of the heart solves all
complications and conflicts of values. In the "heart" of Luther we
see preformed the "conscience" of Kant. For Luther, however, just
as for Kant, the ethics of conscience could in practice be filled up
with the acceptance of ethical conventions and the concrete order of
society. With Kant, the categorical imperative most obligingly de-
levered the concrete idea of a community of free householders with
independent economic status. And Luther’s heart revealed to him
as desirable an economically simple society, mainly agricultural,
with a sprinkling of artisans and tradespeople; the heart is clear on
the point that great merchants and financiers like the Fuggers must
be curbed, and that an interest rate of 20 percent is un-Christian.

§7. Afterthoughts

The year 1520 marked the high point in Luther’s doctrinal de-
velopment. In the following year the practical complications began to
force him into corollaries, modifications, and qualifications that,
in the aggregate, amounted to a breakdown of his position of 1520.
There is no purpose in tracing this miserable story in detail; it hardly
belongs in a history of political ideas at all, but is in fact already part
of the chain of catastrophic events that culminated in the Thirty
Years War. We shall restrict our analysis of this complicated and
drearly aftermath to the tract Von weitlicher Oberkeit, wie weit
man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei, of 1523.²⁴

Historians of political ideas usually favor this tract with special
attention because it is supposed to contain Luther’s most detailed
exposition of his ideas concerning governmental authority, or, as it
is frequently called, of his "theory of the state." In our opinion, this
view is at least distorted, if not entirely wrong. Luther had no theory
of the state, and could not have one, because the term state was not
yet part of the Western vocabulary; and because the state itself, in
the sense of a secular, world-immanent, absolute organization of
a people, was yet very much in the making. The tract, as the title
indicates, deals with temporal authority in the medieval sense; and

²³. Luther, On Good Works, 189.
²⁴. [See Werke, vol. 11 (1959) 245–80. The original MS, again, does not indicate
which German text Voegelin is using. For an English version of this text see Luther’s
Works, vol. 45 (1962), 81–129, and Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, ed.
Lull, 655–703.]
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matter of purchasing a book and using it according to Luther’s interpretation; if you follow the directions and trust in God you are saved, otherwise you are not. The existential unilateralism of Luther’s faith bears no fruit in making righteousness empirically experienceable; the civitas Dei becomes empirically visible in the consciousness of the righteous. That is the point where the trouble starts—for the consciousness of being a righteous Christian is not so difficult to obtain; and what shall we do when individuals whose actions obviously need some curbing tell us that they are righteous Christians and that the power of the sword must not be used against them, and when we are perhaps faced by a mass movement of righteous Christians who demand that governmental authority be altogether abolished because everybody is empirically in the civitas Dei? Luther was plagued by this question. He saw quite well that “evil men under the Christian name would misuse evangelical freedom; they would indulge in their rascalities and say that they are Christians and not subject to law or sword—as even now quite a few are raving.” His solution of this predicament is the distinction between the true Christians of the Reich Gottes and the others—“for the world and the mass are and will be non-Christians however much they are baptized and called Christians.” For this mass, temporal authority will provide restraint. Thus we are thrown back on the government. But what if the government does not use its powers properly and, instead of restraining the non-Christians, interferes with the Christians in reading their Bible? Then the righteous Christian must resist—and thus we are thrown back again on the individual conscience, which tells everybody whether he is a righteous Christian or not.

Obviously there is no way out of this mess. When the order of tradition and institutions is destroyed, when order is put at the decisionist mercy of the individual conscience, we have descended to the level of the war of all against all. A respite from such anarchy can come only through the formation of new community orders in which tradition is in part recaptured and, with socially effective force, imposed as an objective public order on rebellious consciences. This is the situation from which emerges the new order of necessity, the secular state, with the raison d’état as its rule of conduct, while the churches must accept a monopolistic or pluralistic regulation of their status according to the interest of the state. At the moment of Luther, however, we are at the beginning
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The *Institutes* is, properly speaking, not one book, but a work in progress. It was first published in 1536, in Latin, as *Christianae Religionis Instituo*. It was meant, as the "Letter to the Reader" indicates, as a guide to a more rapid and effective understanding of Christian doctrine based on Scripture for evangelical Christians; Calvin himself appeared in the role of the charismatically endowed teacher whose duty it was to render this service to simpler minds. While the "Letter to the Reader" stresses the character of the work as a *summa*, the "Letter to the King" emphasizes its character as a defense and confession of evangelical Christian doctrine. From these beginnings the work grew into the considerably enlarged edition of 1539 (Latin) and 1541 (French), organized in seventeen chapters. In this form, and especially in the French translation of 1541, the work has become the classic of the new creed. The further enlargements and revisions finally culminated in the edition of 1559 (Latin) and 1561 (French) in which the subject matter was organized in four parts (Father, Son, Spirit, church) according to the divisions of the Apostolic Creed.

The doctrine of predestination reveals its function gradually in the course of this literary history. In the early edition of 1536, the doctrine has no noteworthy place at all. In the edition of 1539/1541 it is developed at length in chapter VIII; but at least within this chapter it is still coupled in the traditional manner with the subject of Providence. That something new is brewing we can gather, however, from the fact that the chapter on predestination and providence has its place after the chapters on faith and not, where it would belong according to systematic requirements, as a sequel to the first chapter on the knowledge of God. The edition of 1559/1561, finally, shows the full meaning of the doctrine. The subject of providence has been moved to part I (on God) where it belongs; while the extended treatment of predestination has been torn out of this context and is now placed in part III (on Spirit) subsequent to the treatment of justification through faith. Only in this last edition has the function of predestination fully unfolded, and the most important key to its understanding is its curious place in a context that we may characterize as the "cure of souls." Our analysis will be based on this final organization of doctrine.

The literary preliminaries indicate that the function of the doctrine is to be found not in its content but in its systematic place. This reflection brings us back to the general character of Calvin's
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this aspect it contains little that is surprising, the Institutes is famous for the comprehensiveness of its codification, not for its originality. Nevertheless, between Luther’s debacle and Calvin’s conception a decade had elapsed. The dust over many a debate had settled; the arguments of the opponents were known, as well as the weaknesses of their own side; the dangers of derailment into chiliastic movements and social revolutions had impressed themselves through bloody events; uncautious formulations of the first zeal could now be qualified; and, above all, the trickling out of the evangelical movement into an infinity of schisms had become a painful prospect. While the Institutes is not original in doctrine, it is pervaded by an intense atmosphere of diplomatic circumspection in its presentation.

The core of the assembled materials is Luther’s justification sola fide. The central position of the doctrine is accentuated insofar as Calvin uses it for his definition of the “true church.”28 The supporting doctrines are sharpened. The fides caritate formata is ruled out by declaring the love of God a command of the law, with reference to Matthew 22. Under pressure of the intervening debate, the opposition to justification through works must now declare itself more clearly as opposition to the sacramental system of the church, especially to the sacrament of penance. The commands of the law still have the function of arousing the consciousness of imperfection; but as a fright and terror to the sinner they are now supplemented by the doctrine of predestination. The experience of true faith is now more carefully defined as “a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.”29 The appearance of chiliastic mystics made it necessary to define regeneration through faith carefully as a transformation that does not restore Adamitic innocence but leaves the scars of Original Sin; the regeneration gives power to resist sinful inclinations but does not destroy them. This new precision also

28. Institutes IV.i.1.
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of their ingratitude, and strikes with greater blindness." 41 What are the implications of this case? Does God sometimes amuse himself by assuring man of his salvation and then drop him teasingly? Or does God change his decrees when man does not respond to the assurance of salvation by exemplary conduct? Are we perhaps to assume a justification through works—with a crudeness that no Christian thinker ever before displayed? 42 The Institutes offers no answer to such questions. We can only say that Calvin clearly intended to use the doctrine of predestination as an instrument for keeping the elect with the reprobate in one, universal church. But it also seems that a closer study of the varieties of spiritual experience would lead to results that might endanger the assurance of election through the call.

We have followed Calvin into his doctrine of predestination on his own terms; the problem emerged for him experientially from the certitudo salutis of the elect, from the assurance of predestined election through the experience of vocation. The providential decrees of God, unknowable to man except insofar as they are revealed, are drawn into human consciousness at the point of the "call." Calvin struggles against the attempt of making the invisible church visible; but he is drawn into the problem of predestination, nevertheless, because he wants a touch of visibility himself. Giving way to his construction—which seems to have been pressed on him rather by the historical situation than by a personal experience—he lets God grow into the formidable proportions of the despot who, at his pleasure, shows mercy to a few while he metes out the just punishment of damnation to the mass in order to show the majesty of his omnipotence and justice. It is the construction that, sedimented in the Westminster Confession of 1647, aroused Milton's famous comment that such a God did not command his respect, even if he had to go to hell for it. Taken at its face value, this


42 See Saint Thomas, Summa theologiae, pt. I, qu. 23, art. 5: "Nullus ergo fuit ita insanae mentis, qui diceret merita esse causam divinae praedestinationis ex parte actus praedestinationis" ("Wherefore nobody has been so insane as to say that merit is the cause of divine predestination as regards the act of the predestinator"); trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947-1948], 1:129).
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All this is possible only in a disintegrating society where the more vital human specimens take matters in their own hands, and where the nuclei of a new order are formed around men endowed with the charisma of leadership. Calvin's immanentization of predestination in the consciousness of the elect is what today we would call the theory of a new elite. The awareness [of] the problem of the elite inevitably becomes sharpened in times of disorder, and with equal inevitability arises the problem of the transfer of authority that we know so well from Plato's Gorgias. Calvin's struggle for a new universal church is no more than the struggle for the new elite and its authority. Certainly nobody would compare Calvin with Plato with regard to rank and substance of personality; but his problem is the same, and his experience of crisis is no less intense than Plato's. In times of crisis—if we may use this metaphor—the invisible church acquires a degree of visibility; there is the parting of the ways, and it becomes all too visible who follows the one and who the other; in such situations where it becomes historically manifest who is the reprobate, the problem of election and reprobation shifts from the inscrutable decree of God to the unmistakable experience of man. In theorizing about his new elite, Calvin could use the symbols of the New Testament because they had arisen from a similar situation in which decisions were forced on men, and where conduct became a test of true metanoia.

Calvin was fully aware of this problem. As a shrewd empiricist, he had a good eye for the charismatic qualities that form the nucleus of new order in every walk of life: and he knew that his predestined elect were one variety of a more general type. In his discussion of the natural faculties of man, he finds that they excel in civil polity, domestic economy, and all the mechanical arts and liberal sciences; and he concedes that God endowed the pagans splendidly in this respect; no Christian should refuse to learn from them because that would be an insult to the gifts of God. And then he continues: "But whereas some excel in penetration, others possess superior judgment, and others have a greater aptitude to learn this or that art, in this variety God displays his goodness to us, that no one may arrogate to himself as his own what proceeds merely from the divine liberality. For whence is it that one is more excellent than another, unless it be to exalt in our common nature the special goodness of God, which in the preterition of many proclaims that
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