

THE ATOMIC PRINCE:  
A LUCRETIAN INTERPRETATION OF MACHIAVELLI

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## Abstract

In 1417 Poggio Bracciolini discovered a copy of *De Rerum Natura* or *On the Nature of Things*. Lucretius, a Roman Epicurean philosopher, who lived from approximately 99 to 55 BCE, was its author. This dangerous text argued that religion led men astray from the true nature of things, i.e., that the world is composed of atoms and not the creation of God. A handful of copies of the manuscript languished in monasteries across Europe, forgotten by religious authorities and humanists alike, until Bracciolini found one. The first polemic against Machiavelli's thought, published in 1576, 49 years after Machiavelli's death, accused him of being an Epicurean. Its author was adamant that Machiavelli was neither inspired by Aristotle nor the Stoics. This relationship between Lucretius and Machiavelli is made more plausible with the discovery of a copy of *De Rerum Natura* in Machiavelli's handwriting in the Vatican Library. Indeed, in 1497, Machiavelli had been so interested in Lucretius that he copied the entire text by hand. In 1498, Machiavelli would enter into politics with his election to the Chancery of the Florentine Republic. Thus, understanding Lucretius' impact on Machiavelli is vital for understanding key concepts and themes in Machiavelli's thought.

My dissertation, "The Atomic Prince: A Lucretian Interpretation of Machiavelli," examines the relationship between Lucretius and Machiavelli, through an exegetical study of *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy* book 1. I first examine Louis Althusser's work, given that he was the first to propose that Machiavelli was the first witness after Lucretius to a 'subterranean current' of materialist philosophy, and argue that it is marred by inattentiveness to the specifics of Lucretius' philosophy and Machiavelli's political thought, thus resulting in him overlooking many of the resonances and parallels between Lucretius and Machiavelli (chapter 1). I then offer an alternative account of the relationship. In particular, I examine three problems: state formation

(chapter 2), the relationship between virtue and fortune (chapter 3), and the relationship between political freedom and the development of history (chapter 4). I argue that in all three cases, Machiavelli's political thought bears the strong imprint of Lucretius' philosophy.

Dedicated to the memory of Elang Mulia Lesmana (20), Heri Hertanto (21), Hafidin Royan (22), Hendriawan Sie (20) and the hundreds of others who were wounded or died in the struggle for freedom in the trial and tumult in Indonesia in 1998. Without them and their sacrifice, a young high school student would never have considered reading political theory and have been inspired to political action.

## Acknowledgments

Without the support, guidance, best wishes, inspiration, and occasional prodding, by numerous instructors, colleagues, friends and family, this dissertation simply would not have happened. Indeed, I have been very fortunate to enjoy solitude, but never suffer loneliness. I am deeply grateful for that.

This dissertation started in Jakarta, where I first read Nicollo Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*, two texts that have shaped my life more than any other, and so it is there I must begin. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. James Penha, who successfully helped channel teenage rebellion into reflection. Daniel Gwak's friendship during those years and after, and his constant urging subsequently that I find my own identity and voice no matter how different it may be from his own, has been vital to this dissertation ever having been possible.

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## List of Abbreviations

### Works by Althusser

*MU* = *Machiavelli and Us*. Edited by François Matheron. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: Verso Books, 1999.

*POE* = *Philosophy of the Encounter*. Edited by François Matheron. Translated by G.M. Goshgarian, New York: Verso Books, 2006.

### Works by Machiavelli

*D* = *Discourses on Livy*. Translated by Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

*P* = *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey Mansfield. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

### Works by Others

*DRN* = Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*. Translated by Martin F. Smith, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000; followed by the number of the book and line(s) cited.

*DRP* = Cicero, *De Re Publica*, Translated by Clinton Walker Keyes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928.

*His* = Polybius, *Books 5-8*, in *The Histories* Vol. 3. Translated by W.R. Paton. Revised by revised by Frank W. Walbank and Christian Habicht. Cambridge Harvard University Press, 2011; followed by the number of the book and page(s) cited.

*Pol* = Aristotle, *Politics*, in *Complete Works of Aristotle* Vol. 2. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954; followed by line(s) cited.



And I shall rest, battle-weary rebel, only on the day  
when the wails of the oppressed shall not rend the air and the sky,  
and the scimitar and the sword of the oppressor  
shall not clang in the fierce arena of battle —  
That day my rebel self, weary with fighting,  
shall rest appeased.

I am Bhrigu the rebel, and I stamp my footprints on the bosom of God!  
I shall kill the Creator and shall cleave the heart of capricious God,  
who smites with grief and anguish!  
I am Bhrigu the rebel and will stamp my footprints on the bosom of God!  
I shall cleave the bosom of that capricious being — God!

I am the courageous, rebel eternal —  
Alone, I tower over the universe with my head unbowed.  
- Kazi Nazrul Islam, *The Rebel*, 1922<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Islam, *The Rebel and Other Poems*, 6

## Introduction

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from a swerve of shore  
to bend of bay, bring us by a commodius vicus of  
recirculation back to Howth Castel and Environs.

- James Joyce<sup>2</sup>

It is uncontroversial to argue that Niccolò Machiavelli is one of the most debated theorists in the history of political thought. Indeed, a number of radically differing interpretations exist. To some he is a civic republican or neo-Roman republican, to others a democrat (radical or otherwise), and yet to others a proto-fascist brimming with machismo. Hanna Pitkin asks, “[what], then, could be the point in adding yet another interpretation to the list?”<sup>3</sup> Pitkin explains to her reader in *Fortune is a Woman* she will not supply yet another interpretation to add to the existing list, instead choosing to “focus” on the “very difficulty of interpreting Machiavelli” and “[seeking] to understand the tensions and ambiguities in the texts that give rise to, or at least permit, so diverse an array of readings,” in particular, through the “ambivalence of manhood” in Machiavelli.<sup>4</sup> In the present work, similarly a new interpretation will not be proffered. As Louis Althusser wrote in an initial draft for his posthumously published *Machiavelli and Us* [MU], “I make no claim to say anything new about Machiavelli” (MU, 104). Instead, I will elaborate on a central insight articulated in the first study of Machiavelli by Innocent Gentillet in 1576, a mere 49 years after Machiavelli had died: “it was ‘from’ the ‘school’ of Epicurus that ‘Machiavelli and Machiavellians emerged.’”<sup>5</sup> Gentillet would add, damningly for both Machiavelli and his 20<sup>th</sup> century interpreters, that Machiavelli’s thought did not accord with the ancient philosophers, like

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<sup>2</sup> Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Rahe, “In the Shadow of Lucretius,” 39-40.

the Platonists, Aristotelians, and the Stoics.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the originality of the present study of Machiavelli rests in its deeper appreciation and more robust articulation of the complicated relationship between Lucretius' philosophy and Machiavelli's political thought than has been articulated elsewhere, while agreeing with Gentillet that Machiavelli has been misinterpreted as an advocate of Aristotelianism or Stoicism à la Cicero.

I explore this relationship by relying on a growing body of literature on Lucretius' reception during the Renaissance, and Machiavelli's own transcription of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* [henceforth *DRN*]. I argue that while Machiavelli rejected a central tenet of Epicureanism, namely an antipathy towards politics and the accompanying idealisation of the life of contemplation, he simultaneously adopted key characteristics of Lucretian doctrine, including the atomist account of the world, especially its formation and durability, the three forms of atomic motion, the historical account of the rise of human civilisation, and a theory of history. However, Machiavelli's rejection of Lucretius' antipathy towards politics inaugurated a torsion in atomist philosophy, which rendered all of the aforementioned concepts and theories anew. In effect, Machiavelli was an errant student of the school of Lucretius i.e. he is not content with restating Epicurean doctrine; rather, he continued to explore new continents of thought.

Admittedly an elision between Epicurus and Lucretius has been introduced here. It is unclear whether Machiavelli had access to sufficient texts by Epicurus to be a member of his school; however, his access to Lucretius' central text is not under doubt. What is notable in this elision is that Lucretius not only restates Epicurean doctrine in poetic form, but also introduces one of the most hotly debated philosophical concepts into Epicurean philosophy: the clinamen, swerve, or uncaused causation. The clinamen, in fact, is a break in the chain of causation itself

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<sup>6</sup> Gentillet, *Anti-Machiavel*, 206.

and subsequently results in the formation of a new chain. The significance of this introduction by Lucretius of the clinamen to Epicurean philosophy cannot be overstated, especially when considered in light of Machiavelli's most controversial terms, *virtù* and *fortuna*.

The central wager of this study is that by understanding Lucretius' concepts and account of "the nature of things," it is possible to better understand Machiavelli's political thought. In effect, it seeks to account for and explain the "tensions and ambiguities in the text," in particular his most controversial concepts, *virtù* and *fortuna*. Indeed, what will become apparent is that an examination of the Lucretius-Machiavelli relationship helps address John McCormick's insight that, "[in] fact, the fortune-virtue distinction has become a kind of "set piece" in Machiavelli scholarship and, as such, has come to convey a sense of order that actually defies the spirit of Machiavelli's approach to the issue of contingency."<sup>7</sup> While sustaining the *virtù* and *fortuna* distinction, against McCormick's argument, I argue that Machiavelli's understanding of contingency has been inadequately explored. Thus, as demonstrated by Leo Strauss, McCormick and Pitkin, it is necessary to pay attention to a number of other terms in Machiavelli's vocabulary, like chance (*caso*), accident (*accidenti*), and also freedom. In this respect, McCormick's use of the concept of contingency to understand Machiavelli's conception of political phenomena more generally is shared here, although the conclusions drawn differ quite strongly from McCormick's.

It is unavoidable that in the course of such an investigation a perspective regarding other debates that surround Machiavelli's oeuvre, such as the seeming contradiction between his professed republicanism and monarchism, or the *Discourses* and *The Prince*, will emerge. However, these latter questions are not at the center of the present study. Before outlining the

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<sup>7</sup> McCormick, "Addressing the Political Exception," 888.

argument that will be made in the subsequent chapters, will first briefly reflect on the copious secondary literature that similarly claims to understand Machiavelli.

#### **Four Interpretations of Machiavelli**

While there are myriad interpretations of Machiavelli, it is fair to posit that there are two main political interpretations of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *Discourses*: the civic and/or neo-Roman republican interpretation, most commonly identified with the Cambridge School, and the Straussian interpretation which alleges that Machiavelli created modernity by rejecting the Socratic tradition.<sup>8</sup> Two other notable groups of scholarship can be identified: the radical Machiavelli and soft Lucretian interpretations. In the following section the basic premises of these different interpretations will be outlined with respect to two questions: 1) where in the history of political thought is Machiavelli located? And; 2) what are the implications of this positioning with respect to the relationship between virtù, fortuna and/or history? It is important to note that this is a broad and schematic categorization of the different traditions in Machiavelli interpretation, and numerous differences exist within them.

Within the Republican interpretation, there exist two competing traditions: civic humanism and neo-Roman republicanism. The three most prominent figures of this approach are: Hans Baron, J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Pocock and Skinner, both inspired by Baron, are key members of the Cambridge School. Baron and Pocock both argue that the civic humanist

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<sup>8</sup> It is not possible to map out every interpretation available. However, some notable interpretations that do not follow the schema described below are: Parel argues that Machiavelli's naturalist astrological worldview, while undoubtedly influenced by the ancients, is deeply immersed in debates in Florence about astrology, medicine, and politics. See *The Machiavellian Cosmos*. Hulliung on the other hand, posits that Machiavelli, as proposed by Skinner, was indeed a neo-Roman republican, but that "Machiavelli's innovations within the tradition of Roman thought were nothing less than shocking" as he "took the Roman republicans, whom Cicero had portrayed as pre-Stoics, and turned them into self-conscious power politicians" who advocated a republican imperialism. See *Citizen Machiavelli*, xi.

tradition in Florence was Aristotelian in inspiration, whereas Skinner contends that Cicero was a greater influence. Despite this dispute about whether Aristotle or Cicero was the main influence on Machiavelli's thought, all three agree that an ancient influence was articulated in the Renaissance through a series of conceptual vocabularies. Theoretical concepts, like *virtù* and *fortuna*, Pocock contends, exist within "well-developed conceptual vocabularies ... in which the implications of these and other terms were expanded, and these vocabularies to some extent cohered with one another; so that it is possible, and seems not improper, to reconstruct a scheme of ideas within which the sixteenth-century mind sought to articulate the equivalent of a philosophy of history."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, all three blur differences or diminish the importance of other competing philosophical traditions, like Epicureanism. Indeed, Baron, Pocock and Skinner all fail to acknowledge that, while it is true that Aristotle and Cicero were deeply influential and thus helped establish conceptual vocabularies, this does not mean that particular individuals could not bring different philosophical traditions to life through these conceptual vocabularies themselves.<sup>10</sup> Thus, contra Baron, Pocock and Skinner, this dissertation demonstrates in chapter 2 that Machiavelli's texts share neither Aristotle nor Cicero's positions regarding whether humans are political by nature, the role of divinity in history, and what are the causes for the beginning of societies and polities. Instead, it is argued that Machiavelli's work more closely approximates that of Lucretius.

In his seminal work, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Baron explains that in early Renaissance Florence there were two kinds of humanists: the "literary men" who emphasized classicism and the humanists "nurtured on the political and social experiments of

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<sup>9</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Furley in his influential 1967 study of Greek atomism demonstrates that Epicurus himself was responding to Aristotle's objections to earlier versions of Atomist philosophy. See Furley, *Two Studies in Greek Atomism*, 111-131 and 184-239.

their day.”<sup>11</sup> He further contends that, “[the] civic Humanism of the latter reveals its close affinity to the outlook and sentiment of the citizens of the Greek *polis*.”<sup>12</sup> Baron posits that in the transition between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the intellectual crisis that arose within the “realm of art, the break between the late Trecento schools, still half medieval, and the first Quattrocento generation of Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Masaccio is more radical than that between any other two generations in the course of the Renaissance” and that the changes it wrought were so profound that “in the history of Humanism no less than in the history of art, the beginning of the new century coincides with the emergence of the full pattern of the Renaissance.”<sup>13</sup> Initially, during the Trecento, this humanist intellectual revolution “had not been grounded in civic society, nor had it been closely associated with any particular one of the Italian communes.”<sup>14</sup> It was only in the early days of the Quattrocento that the intellectual culture had been transformed such that no longer did humanists only look back to ancient Athens, but they were also concerned with the future of Florence.<sup>15</sup> A central belief of this cultural revolution was that the development of Florence’s interests, culturally and otherwise, lay in a free city.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, “[there] arose a new historical outlook, a new ethical outlook which opposed the scholars’ withdrawal from social obligations, and a new literature, in Volgare as well as Latin, dealing with family and civic life.”<sup>17</sup> This mainstream ethic concerned with family and civil life Baron argues “[reached] maturity in the days of Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and Giannotti”<sup>18</sup> This new

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<sup>11</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, xxviii.

<sup>12</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, xxviii.

<sup>13</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 6-7.

“critical-philological spirit of the Quattrocento” attempted to “create a valid philosophy based on the authority of the ancients, and in particular of Aristotle”<sup>19</sup>.

With respect to fortuna, Baron argues that Machiavelli was indebted to Gregorio Dati’s theory of history that simultaneously emphasized the hand of God in the form of fortuna, and the “laws under which historical life proceeds.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Machiavelli, infused with this humanist philosophy similarly espoused a civic republicanism. This dissertation agrees with Baron that Machiavelli’s thought was symptomatic of the humanist turn to the concerns of the day.

Pocock agrees with Baron. In *The Machiavellian Moment* he writes, “I here presume that the revival of the republican ideal by civic humanists posed the problem of a society, in which the political nature of man as described by Aristotle was to receive its fulfillment, seeking to exist in the framework of a Christian time-scheme which denied the possibility of any secular fulfillment.”<sup>21</sup> In particular, Pocock argues that the Machiavellian moment can be understood in two ways: the first is a problem of historical self-consciousness that arose due to tensions between different traditions within medieval and early modern European consciousness with respect to the idea of the republic and citizen participation; the second is a problem in conceptualized time which saw the republic itself facing a political existential crisis.<sup>22</sup> The language developed to confront these problems spoke of the confrontation between virtù and

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<sup>19</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 171.

<sup>21</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, vii.

<sup>22</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, vii-viii. Geerken has charged Pocock of relying on a structuralist interpretation of history that emphasises “synchronic as opposed to diachronic structures of thought, with structures of relationships across moments in time instead of development or evolution through time.” This structuralism allows Pocock to argue for a form of universalism in which different moments can re-present themselves repeatedly throughout history. “Pocock and Machiavelli: Structuralist Explanation of History,” 309-311. Intriguingly, Althusser has had similar accusations made against him by his detractors.



fortuna or “corruption.”<sup>23</sup> Corruption is the effect of fortuna overcoming virtue within the republic. In particular it was within this conceptual framework that the “doctrine of *vivere civile* – the ideal of active citizenship in a republic – must struggle to maintain itself.”<sup>24</sup> Animating this ideal was the work of Aristotle.

Pocock posits that the Aristotelian conception of circular history should not be taken literally; rather it ought to be understood as an expression of the intelligibility of the world.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle argues, Pocock writes, that if time “is to be measured by motion” that then this motion would be circular “because the sphere was the most perfect figure” and thus the best possible measure.<sup>26</sup> History, the passage of time, is circular in form as well. Aristotle was well aware of the difficulties of applying this circular conception of history to human affairs, and thus “we can only say that these form a cycle as a means of saying that the whole variety of human experience forms a single gigantic entity having its own self-fulfilling and self-repetitive *physis*.”<sup>27</sup> Pocock effectively diminishes the importance of the particularities of Aristotle’s philosophy with respect to the historical movement of the state through different dyads of governmental forms, until they are exhausted and repeat themselves. Instead, the importance of Aristotle’s philosophy lays in its capacity to articulate the entirety of human experience i.e. all the possible forms of government, in an intelligible manner. Pocock acknowledges “[post-Aristotelian] philosophies existed which were prepared to make this assertion, but we are warned now against overestimating their importance,” instead what they all shared was an understanding – hence their conformity to the *Weltanschauung* of the conceptualized time – that “the application of *physis* to human affairs

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<sup>23</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, viii.

<sup>24</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 6.

was an intellectual convenience and a metaphor” and all it produced was “an intelligible story of how men’s actions produce results other than those they intended.”<sup>28</sup> Pocock thus first diminishes the import of the philosophies of figures like Lucretius on the intellectual landscape at the time, and then, by erasing philosophical differences, simply includes them into his Aristotelian commonsense. In this dissertation, whether or not post-Aristotelian Hellenistic philosophies had great influence in their own time or in the Renaissance is not significant. Rather, the claim concerns the influence of Lucretius on but one man: Machiavelli.

Pocock maps out how this Aristotelianism was adapted and adopted by the Christian intellect.<sup>29</sup> Pocock maps out the tension between Christian doctrines and Greek and Roman thought with respect to the concept of chance or fortuna.<sup>30</sup> Pocock pinpoints this as the fundamental problem that *The Prince* confronts. Pocock writes, “This was the problem of *fortuna*, to which Guicciardini and the lesser *ottimati* had not yet addressed themselves.”<sup>31</sup> The problem of fortuna, as Pocock notes, is both a problematic that Machiavelli identifies and is inextricably tied to the problem of “innovation and its consequences.” Thus the relationship between the epistemological obstacle, fortuna, and the beginning of the new “science,” political science, are internally linked to one another. This central concern with fortuna is also entangled with the problem of beginnings. However, what does Pocock think is the nature of fortuna? Pocock writes that, “If politics be thought of as an art of dealing with the contingent event, it is the art of dealing with *fortuna* as the force which directs such events and thus symbolizes pure,

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<sup>28</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 6-30.

<sup>30</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 31-48.

<sup>31</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 156.

uncontrolled, and unlegitimated contingency.”<sup>32</sup> This relationship between politics, fortuna and contingency is a central concern in this dissertation. I argue that Pocock does not fully realize the innovation that Machiavelli introduces in his political thought, especially with respect to how Machiavelli’s concept of fortuna functions differently in the presence of virtù (chapter 3).

The third piece of Aristotelian inheritance Pocock identifies is the concept of citizenship, or *vita activa*, as a form of *vivere civile*.<sup>33</sup> Predicated on natural law, “men perceive values inherent in nature and pursue them in society.”<sup>34</sup> In particular, Aristotle emphasised that all human activity ought to be aimed at some common good. This common good was only realisable in the polis together. Pocock summarises Aristotle’s position thusly: “[association] with others, and participation in the value-oriented direction of that association, formed both a means to an end and an end – or good – in itself; and participation in the association whose end was the good of all particular associations, and the attainment of all particular goods, was in itself a good of a very high, because universal, character.”<sup>35</sup> The role of the individual was to actively participate in the polis so that the good could be achieved and maintained.<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, Pocock writes, also introduced distinctions between citizens inasmuch as they are distinguishable and particular beings, and recognizes that one thus necessarily engaged in active citizenship in a manner that reflects the “diversity of this social personality” i.e. as the “few” and the “many.”<sup>37</sup> This notion of an active citizenship grounded a particular kind of constitution, the *politeia* or the polity, or republic, which can be distinguished from democracy. While the former and the latter share the

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<sup>32</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 49-80.

<sup>34</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 68.

characteristic of widespread distribution of power throughout the citizenry, democracy renders this distribution “despotically exercised.”<sup>38</sup> This despotic exercise was achieved by an emphasis on the “many” at the expense of the “few,” whereas the polity or republic avoided this, and thus achieved the universal good.<sup>39</sup> This dissertation agrees with the Cambridge School scholars that Machiavelli favoured the republican form of government, but for different reasons than the ones that they articulate. Whereas Pocock and Skinner wish to emphasise the republic as the most stable form of government, in which the many and the few work together to maintain freedom (what Pocock will refer to as a “partnership of citizens”), Machiavelli believes, I contend, that the republic is the best form of government to maintain freedom because of the space that it allows for “trial and tumult.” This dissertation thus stands between the civic humanist and the democratic Machiavelli interpretations as it agrees with the Cambridge School scholars that Machiavelli favoured a republic, but similarly posits that this advocacy for the republic was so that the conditions existed for trial and tumult to take place, thus maintaining freedom. This advocacy for the republic, and thus trial and tumult, and concern with freedom brings us to the problem of corruption.

The problem of corruption led the civic humanists to the work of Polybius and his *Histories*, which took Aristotle’s constitutional dyads and placed them within a circular conception of historical progression that emphasised the role of fortuna.<sup>40</sup> Polybius understood fortuna, Pocock writes, “as an undesired and malignant fate, and in his writings *tyche* and *fortuna* operate rather in the field of external events than in that of internal relations.”<sup>41</sup> The Roman

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<sup>38</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 70-72.

<sup>39</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 72.

<sup>40</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 77.

intellect would juxtapose fortuna to virtue, and having balanced the two, politicise virtue.<sup>42</sup> This politicised virtue, however, was no longer “the heroic manhood of a ruling individual, but a partnership of citizens in a polis.”<sup>43</sup> Pocock deploys this afore-described conceptual framework in his interpretation of the *Discourses*.<sup>44</sup>

Skinner, on the other hand, emphasizes the Roman, especially the Ciceronian, concept of the republic.<sup>45</sup> Skinner argues that Machiavelli’s work reflects the transformation of the study of rhetoric from a scholastic object of study concerned with formal rhetorical rules, to a politically and socially concerned rhetoric.<sup>46</sup> Cicero importantly helped inaugurate this shift.<sup>47</sup> This transformation took the form of guidebooks about the correct ways with which to deal with the “legal, social, and political affairs of the Italian City Republics.”<sup>48</sup> A starting point for these humanist writers was a concern with the ideal of liberty as manifested in Roman self-government.<sup>49</sup> They were deeply concerned with the factionalism within the Italian city-states and the loss of civic liberty caused by the desire for wealth and power.<sup>50</sup> Two approaches arose that tried to respond to these concerns: “One stresses that government is effective whenever its institutions are strong, and corrupt whenever its machinery fails to function adequately ... The other approach suggests by contrast that if men who control the institutions are corrupt, the best possible institutions cannot be expected to shape or constrain them, whereas if the men are

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<sup>42</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 78.

<sup>43</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 183-218.

<sup>45</sup> Skinner has developed his thesis in a number of highly regarded articles and books, see *Machiavelli*, 1-78.

<sup>46</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 36-41.

<sup>48</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 42-43.

virtuous, the health of the institutions will be a matter of secondary importance.”<sup>51</sup> According to Skinner, Machiavelli belongs to the latter tradition and similarly emphasizes “the proper *spirit* of the rulers, the people and the laws which needs above all to be sustained.”<sup>52</sup> Skinner adds that this human corruption was not primarily due to selfishness, but due to self-deception about what is the best way to maintain liberty.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, Skinner argues that Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is part of the mirror-of-princes genre as evidenced by his insistence that “princely conduct be *onesto* as well as *utile*, and accordingly demands that all princes must take as their model” some great figure, whose actions are then studied and copied.<sup>54</sup> The second continuity between Machiavelli and the mirror-of-princes genre is the relationship between *virtù* and *fortuna*.<sup>55</sup> Skinner writes that, “[for] Machiavelli, as for other humanists, the concept of *virtù* is thus used to denote the indispensable quality which enables a ruler to deflect the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and to aspire in consequence to the attainment of honour, glory and fame.”<sup>56</sup> However, Skinner also identifies discontinuities between the humanists and the authors of the mirror-of-princes genre. First, Machiavelli and his contemporaries who were adherents of civic humanism emphasised liberty over and against tyranny, which was implied by the writers of the mirror-of-prince genre.<sup>57</sup> For Skinner this disavowal of tyranny is of vital importance as it grounds Machiavelli’s republicanism. Skinner’s Machiavelli is a prodigal son who “by background and conviction ... was basically a Republican,” but briefly lapsed when writing *The Prince* in the hopes of securing

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<sup>51</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 44-45.

<sup>52</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 44-45.

<sup>53</sup> Skinner, “Machiavelli on *Virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty,” 164.

<sup>54</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 118-119.

<sup>55</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 119-121.

<sup>56</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 123.

employment from the Medici, only to return to the Republican fold after failing to do so and penned his true beliefs in *Discourses*.<sup>58</sup> The second difference concerns the concept of virtù. The mirror-of-prince genre emphasised that virtù was something possessed by princes, rather than the common people. Machiavelli draws upon this new interpretation when he posits that the virtù of the prince is “an astonishingly creative force, the key to ‘maintaining his state’ and enabling him to fight his enemies,” whereas the people are characterised by the tendency towards “benign passivity.”<sup>59</sup> Skinner describes the difference in a manner particularly useful for the present dissertation. He writes that the prince is characterised by movement, while the people’s activity is confined to a few in their midst and can be easily dealt with.<sup>60</sup> Against Skinner, it is contended that this is a mischaracterisation of the different kinds of movement that the prince and the people engage in. Furthermore, Skinner does not provide any intellectual forerunner to this theory of movement. The other element introduced by the mirror-of-princes genre is defining virtù as a series of moral qualities. Machiavelli, of course, famously rejects this.<sup>61</sup> Skinner thus argues that Machiavelli in *The Prince*, despite relying on different theoretical elements from the mirror-of-princes genre, seeks to simultaneously use its rhetorical style to “question or even ridicule some of their values.”<sup>62</sup> However, Machiavelli disagrees with his humanist contemporaries due to their lack of sufficient emphasis on “the significance of sheer power in political life”; moreover he rejects their call for the prince to behave in a Christian virtuous way.<sup>63</sup> Machiavelli instead proffers a new interpretation of virtù that refers “to *whatever* range of

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<sup>58</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 153-154.

<sup>59</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 125.

<sup>60</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 126.

<sup>61</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 126.

<sup>63</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 129 and 131.

qualities the prince may find necessary to acquire in order to ‘maintain his state’ and ‘achieve great things.’”<sup>64</sup> However, Skinner still believes that a notable difference exists between *The Prince* and *Discourses* due to the former’s emphasis on security and the latter’s emphasis on liberty.<sup>65</sup> Skinner defines liberty as the “independence from external aggression and tyranny.”<sup>66</sup> The liberty from tyranny is meant to take the political form of the “power of a free people to govern themselves instead of being governed by a prince.”<sup>67</sup> The people’s power to govern themselves did not take the form of a democracy, Skinner contends, but a “mixed type of republic,” in which a small political elite existed.<sup>68</sup> Skinner as an important corollary posits that Machiavelli believed that virtù was something that the populace could acquire, possess and demonstrate.<sup>69</sup>

This dissertation differs from the Cambridge school with respect to two theoretical points. The first is that while agreeing with them that Machiavelli inherited much of the Aristotelian and Ciceronian language, vocabulary, and rhetoric of the humanist milieu that Pocock and Skinner discuss in such detail, it also contends that their blurring of the precise textual content of the classical thinkers to form one indiscriminate civic humanism or neo-Roman republicanism overlooks how the reception of minor trends, like Epicureanism, were received and mobilized. Indeed, if one compares the mechanics of how concepts, such as virtù and fortuna, function in Machiavelli’s texts, one finds that they do not closely approximate their use by Aristotle, Cicero or Polybius, but Lucretius. I argue that Machiavelli reworked many of the concepts that

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<sup>64</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 156-157.

<sup>66</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 157.

<sup>67</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 158.

<sup>68</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 177; “Skinner, Machiavelli on *Virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty,” 163.



characterized the intellectual milieu, like fortuna and virtù, with the work of Lucretius in mind. The second, as Alissa Ardito has correctly pointed out, demonstrates the limitations of Pocock and Skinner's focus on

ideologies and the specific languages elaborated around them. An exclusive focus on language and intellectual milieu, though an immensely valuable line of inquiry, may overlook the fact that Machiavelli inhabited a collapsed political world characterized by the terrible tension between city-state and territorial state that tormented the writer and unifies his political thought. Machiavelli inherited a vocabulary honed for the world of small city-states that no longer fit the new political world he witnessed, and he knew it.<sup>70</sup>

This "collapsed political world" and inadequate vocabulary helped him articulate the need for a new political form, which Ardito identifies as the "self-governing territorial state – at a time when republics were conceived of solely in terms of smaller city-states."<sup>71</sup> In this respect, there is a confluence between the position adopted here and that of Strauss, who believed that there needs to be both an intellectual and political regeneration.<sup>72</sup> A new intellection and politics that could provide new solutions to existing theoretical and practical problems.

Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli* has inspired a second body of scholarship.<sup>73</sup> Strauss' students' individual books will not be discussed because in the main their interpretation expounds on Strauss' framework. As Mansfield, perhaps the best known of Strauss' students and a renowned Machiavelli scholar, writes,

My own experience is all on the side of achieving, for when studying Machiavelli, every time that I have been thrown upon an uninhabited island I thought might be unexplored, I have come across a small sign saying, "please deposit coin." After I

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<sup>70</sup> Ardito, *Machiavelli and the Modern State*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ardito, *Machiavelli and the Modern State*, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 81.

<sup>73</sup> Most notably Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* and *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*; Rahe, *Against the Altar*; and Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*.

comply, a large sign flashes in neon lights that would have been visible from afar, with this message: Leo Strauss was here.<sup>74</sup>

What is this interpretation that inspires such awe from one of the foremost Machiavelli scholars? Strauss' interpretation begins by reaffirming the conventional representation of Machiavelli as "a teacher of evil" and an "evil man."<sup>75</sup> At the heart of Machiavelli's evil is not his *realpolitik*; instead it is Machiavelli's rejection of the ancients' emphasis on discretion. Strauss states, "Machiavelli proclaims openly and triumphantly a corrupting doctrine which ancient authors had taught covertly or with all signs of repugnance. He says in his own name shocking things which ancient writers had said through the mouths of their characters."<sup>76</sup> Strauss was also the first to point out that Machiavelli's theory of the beginning of the world was Epicurean in nature.<sup>77</sup> However, Strauss, while correctly noting that Machiavelli broke with the Socratic tradition (which Strauss argues is comprised of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Polybius), determines that it was Machiavelli's affinity for Xenophon that inaugurated the break, rather than Lucretius.<sup>78</sup> Machiavelli's thought is thus the advent of a new modern political thought. Mansfield has subsequently suggested that Lucretius and Xenophon were Machiavelli's favorite philosophers, but he has not developed this insight.<sup>79</sup> Only Paul Rahe, amongst the Straussians, has tried to think through the implications of the Lucretius-Machiavelli relationship.

The impact of this break from the Socratic tradition has implications for both *virtù* and *fortuna*. Strauss contends that Machiavelli wants to revive ancient *virtù*.<sup>80</sup> But what is *virtù*?

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<sup>74</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 219.

<sup>75</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 201.

<sup>78</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 291.

<sup>79</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 59.

<sup>80</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 291.

Strauss argues that the concept is ambiguous, as demonstrated by the case of Agathocles, and indicates that Machiavelli has in mind both a moral virtue (which includes religion) and virtue as cleverness and courage combined.<sup>81</sup> Strauss adds a third kind of virtue, which he calls “intermediate” and regards as “political;” he defines this third kind of virtue as the “sum of qualities required for rendering service to political society or for effective patriotism.”<sup>82</sup> Machiavelli’s obfuscation about which definition he is using at any given time is vital for his teaching as it allows the reader, or the prince, to “ascend from the common understanding of virtue to the diametrically opposite meaning.”<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Strauss disagrees with the Cambridge school and their emphasis on collective virtù, writing that “princes are superior to peoples as regarding the founding of states, peoples are superior to princes as regards the preservation of states.”<sup>84</sup> My distinction agrees that Machiavelli saw greater capacity for virtù in princes rather than the people.

Finally, Strauss’ conception of Fortuna denotes a distinction between God or heaven and nature. Strauss argues that, “[by] sometimes identifying Fortuna and heaven, Machiavelli is enabled to present Fortuna not merely as the only superhuman being which thinks and wills, or as the only god, but likewise as the all comprehensive order which does not think and will, or as nature.”<sup>85</sup> Strauss’ emphasis on fortuna as nature will be adopted in this dissertation. I will demonstrate, however, that this notion of fortuna as nature is derived from Lucretius’ theory of atomic motion. Strauss insightfully refers to fortuna as chance, thus effectively linking chance to

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<sup>81</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 47.

<sup>82</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 47.

<sup>84</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 25.

<sup>85</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 217.

nature.<sup>86</sup> Strauss also strikes upon a particularly important point about the relationship of chance to virtù when he writes,

Since the success or failure at any rate of individuals depends then ultimately on unconquerable chance, the rule “Conquer Fortuna” is insufficient. Excellent men will rise above chance. Chance will have no power over them, over their minds. While their fortune varies, they will remain the same. The dignity of man consists, not in conquering chance, but in independence. This freedom, this dignity, this genuine “good fortune” can arise only from a man’s having knowledge of “the world,” i.e. in particular of the place and significance of accidents.<sup>87</sup>

Again Strauss is remarkably close, yet ever so far, from a Lucretian interpretation. Strauss is correct to point out the importance of independence or freedom from chance. This freedom is Lucretius’ *clinamen*. Strauss also places a correct emphasis on accidents, which he connects to the problem of freedom and greatness. This emphasis on the relationship between accidents, freedom and greatness is shared in the present dissertation.

Strauss suggests that the relationship between fortuna and virtù is:

Fortuna is a part, and not the ruling part, of the whole. The whole is ruled by heaven. Heaven establishes for all earthly beings specific life spans beyond which they cannot live. Heaven does not determine, however, that each earthly being should live out its time, for heaven is the cause of plagues, famines, and similar disasters. Heaven leaves room for human causation, for action, for prudence, for art.<sup>88</sup>

It is this “room” left for human causation that gives rise to good fortune. Strauss here strays remarkably close to the core of the third interpretative framework, the radical Machiavelli interpretation, because of his emphasis on the conflict between the nobles and the people in the production of Rome’s greatness. As Strauss notes,

Rome owes her greatness decisively to her virtue and not to Fortuna. Rome, as

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<sup>86</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 218.

<sup>87</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 218.

<sup>88</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 217.

distinguished from Sparta, rose to greatness, not through the prudence of her founder, but through chance or accidents; these accidents however arose from the discord between the nobles and the plebs ... the accidents which made Rome great must then be traced, not to chance, but due to the prudence or generosity of her nobles and the virility of her plebs.<sup>89</sup>

However, Strauss does not realize that this framework demonstrates that Machiavelli was in fact not advocating for Polybius' theory of anacyclosis. Rather, he was articulating a completely different model for making history through conflict. This insight regarding the role of conflict has inspired the third body of interpretation.

In recent years, a third philosophical interpretation, the democratic Machiavelli, has been developing. Figures involved or who have inspired this interpretation most notably include: Claude Lefort, Miguel Vatter and John P. McCormick.<sup>90</sup> These scholars, unlike the other schools discussed above, have disparate interpretations of Machiavelli. Vatter/Lefort and McCormick have very different political projects and this has a meaningful influence on their respective interpretations. Vatter and Lefort are radical democrats, whereas McCormick is a democrat. The difference between radical democracy and democracy is that Lefort and Vatter insist that Machiavelli advocated for a non-state or no-rule, or for the primacy of the political, whereas McCormick posits that Machiavelli advocated for a popular government and a democratic politics in which the masses of people restrain a small minority elite.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, all three share a common methodological approach and a common political insight about Machiavelli's political thought. The common methodology is that none of them interpret Machiavelli in relation to classical political thought. Whereas other philosophical

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<sup>89</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 217.

<sup>90</sup> Others includes Abensour, *Democracy Against the State*; del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza* and Morfino, *Plural Temporality*.

<sup>91</sup> Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 5; Lefort, *Machiavelli in the Making*, 22; McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, vii-viii.

interpretations largely stem from an interrogation of Machiavelli's greater or lesser proximity to the ancients and/or other early modern thinkers, this third philosophical interpretation emphasizes Machiavelli's "discontinuity, singularity and solitude," and pays specific attention to "the construction of concepts and the innovation of vocabularies as a function of the performance of his arguments."<sup>92</sup> However, this approach does "not grant objective reality to the contexts of traditions in which a given text finds itself embedded. The reason is that only the text, but never the context, of a discourse has the capacity to construct new concepts and in so doing can function historically i.e., can make (intellectual) history."<sup>93</sup> Thus, the democratic Machiavelli interpretation selectively deploys the use of history and intellectual traditions to highlight Machiavelli's discontinuities and hence originality.<sup>94</sup> McCormick, in particular, distances Machiavelli from Aristotle and Cicero as he seeks to demonstrate that Machiavelli was a democrat, and not a republican.<sup>95</sup> Whatever may be the differences between the radical democratic and democratic interpretations they do share a common political commitment.

The common political insight is the role that they ascribe to the people in Machiavelli's political thought. For Lefort, conservatives – like the Cambridge school – have constantly tried to cover up the differences within the people, "they obfuscate class division beneath the general division of nature and law, wishing to speak of only the essence of man and society," and in the second have reintroduced class division but have tried to resolve it by arguing that only those who have their appetites met naturally can articulate the common good.<sup>96</sup> Lefort instead argues that Machiavelli's "intention is to bring us to the recognition that the division of desire – as well

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<sup>92</sup> Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 3-4.

<sup>94</sup> Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, viii.

<sup>96</sup> Lefort, *Machiavelli in the Making*, 231.

as the class division ... cannot be disguised with impunity; that political life presupposes the full development of its effects.”<sup>97</sup> The political life is thus the effect of divisions within the political, as organized into classes, and the conflict of desires between the people and the elite, rather than some deliberative procedure trying to achieve some clearly established common good.

The present dissertation similarly draws inspiration from key figures in the radical democratic Machiavelli tradition. However, the present work seeks to emphasize the history of ideas and political thought - and the intellectual traditions (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism etc.) that serve as the foundations for any such inquiry - as they provides greater clarity about Machiavelli’s originality. As opposed to others in the radical Machiavelli interpretation, this dissertation argues that Machiavelli was deeply influenced by Lucretius, and thus his singularity is marked by a torsion of Lucretius’ political philosophy. Thus, this dissertation rejects the distance proposed by many members of the radical Machiavelli interpretation, especially those more predisposed to Lefort and McCormick, between Machiavelli and the ancients. Furthermore, it rejects the more radicalized political implications of the democratic interpretation. Indeed, this dissertation finds little evidence that Machiavelli favored no-rule or a popular government. However, it adopts Lefort’s important insight that the division of desires and the political results in conflict, which is necessary for the maintenance of freedom and the full development of political life. The role of conflict in politics is one that this dissertation explicitly shares.

Finally, let us turn to the fourth philosophical interpretation and the one that this dissertation seeks to more fully explore and defend Althusser’s provocative argument, discussed in chapter 1, that there runs a subterranean aleatory current that included Epicurus and

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<sup>97</sup> Lefort, *Machiavelli in the Making*, 231.

Machiavelli previously could have been summarily dismissed as being historically ungrounded and the kind of speculation that philosophers are wont to engage in. Althusser's account will be discussed in detail because his work helped me arrive at the problematic that concerns this dissertation. Althusser's work, however, while intriguing, is marred by inattentiveness to both the specifics of Lucretius' philosophy and Machiavelli's political thought, thus resulting in him overlooking many of the resonances and parallels between Lucretius and Machiavelli. While being indebted to Althusser, these errors and oversights have provoked me to offer an alternative interpretation of the Lucretius-Machiavelli relationship. This alternative interpretation relies quite heavily on a slowly growing body of scholarship produced by historians such as Alison Brown, Robert Black and Ada Palmer has compellingly demonstrated that there indeed was such a subterranean current of Epicureanism that traversed Italian thought, especially amongst its unorthodox thinkers starting in 1417 when the most famous expansive articulation of Epicurean philosophy, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, was rediscovered by Poggio Bracciolini.<sup>98</sup> These historians also point out that in 1416 other sources of Epicurean philosophy were also newly available, such as Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, which includes an extensive biography of Epicurus and provides an account of Epicurean teaching.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, it is evident that Machiavelli himself was acquainted in the 1490's with these Epicurean-inspired thinkers, especially Marcello Adriani, who lectured at the university of Florence using Epicurean

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<sup>98</sup> Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 1; Brown, "Lucretians and the Epicureans," 11; Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 43-97; and Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance*, 17 and 61. For a thoroughly enjoyable popular non-fiction account see Greenblatt, *The Swerve*. It can no longer be suggested, as DeWitt does, that Pierre Gassendi revived Epicureanism. DeWitt, *Epicurus and his Philosophy*, 356. It is interesting to note that the import of Lucretius on Machiavelli has not only been overlooked or marginalised in studies of Machiavelli, but also in the study of Lucretius. Thus, in the influential *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, the two essays dedicated to Lucretius' reception in the Italian renaissance make no mention of Machiavelli. See Reeve, "Lucretius in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance," 205-213; and Prosperi, "Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance," 214-226.

<sup>99</sup> Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 1.



themes, and his father's friend Bartolomeo Scala, who had penned Epicurean-inspired poetry.<sup>100</sup> The influence of Lucretius is especially clear given that Machiavelli took on the onerous task of producing his own fastidious hand-written transcription of *DRN* in 1497.<sup>101</sup> This transcription attempted to be a "critical edition" and relied on several different versions circulating at the time. However, the project was abandoned before completion.<sup>102</sup> However, Lucretius' influence on Machiavelli should not simply be characterised as the missteps of youth, best forgotten, or as an attraction to Latin poets, or as evidence of a well-grounded humanist education.<sup>103</sup> Rather, as Chauncey Finch wrote in the first essay published after the rediscovery of Machiavelli's handwritten edition of *De Rerum Natura* in the Vatican archives in 1960, having discussed the emendations that Machiavelli made to his copy:

All such readings when taken together, however, would hardly be sufficiently significant to make this an important manuscript for purposes of textual criticism. Its chief importance can be said to lie rather in the increased stimulus it provides for students of the Renaissance to seek for additional traces of the influence of Lucretius in the literary works of Machiavelli.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately students of the Renaissance and/or Machiavelli have made little progress in the intervening 56 years. Indeed, the subterranean history of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* is paralleled by a history of missed opportunities to study its connection to Machiavelli's work.

There are numerous theoretical missteps that must be avoided when discussing the relationship between Machiavelli and Lucretius, most notably the reduction of said relationship

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<sup>100</sup> Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 69; Black, "Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic," 74-75; and Najemy, "Review of *Il Giovane*," 159.

<sup>101</sup> Black, "Machiavelli, servant of the Florentine republic," 74-75; Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 68; Finch, "Machiavelli's Copy of Lucretius," 29-32; Rahe, *In the Shadow of Lucretius*, 42; and Viroli, *Niccolo's Smile*, 9.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 114; Finch, "Machiavelli's Copy of Lucretius," 30-32; and Najemy, "Review of *Il Giovane*," 158.

<sup>103</sup> See Viroli, *Niccolo's Smile*, 9; Black, "Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic," 74-75.

<sup>104</sup> Finch, "Machiavelli's Copy of Lucretius," 32.

to the problem of God and evil.<sup>105</sup> It is apparent from Machiavelli's marginalia that a whole host of other aspects of Lucretius' philosophy intrigued him, such as the relationship between the clinamen, or swerve, and "free will."<sup>106</sup> Palmer and Black have both argued that Machiavelli's attention to book 2 of *De Rerum Natura* is unique when compared to other scholarship at the time. Machiavelli's manuscript, Palmer points out, "has very few poetic annotations, no notabilia, and very few marginal corrections, because he integrated the corrections as he copied them."<sup>107</sup> However, book 2 is distinct because Machiavelli

adds roughly twenty brief summary notes of his own ... these notes focus on the passages that explain how an atomistic universe would function, including the atomic swerve and questions of free will, as well as the creation of the world and the motions of atoms in void. This is precisely the section of the text that received the least attention from the other annotators.<sup>108</sup>

However, as Black has rightly cautioned, these summary notes are typically "standard student's fare" and "do not indicate that Machiavelli subscribed to the views in the text."<sup>109</sup> Black thus poses a formidable challenge: to establish Machiavelli's adherence to Lucretius' teachings without using Machiavelli's own hand-written copy of *De Rerum Natura* as proof of his philosophical affinities. All these themes are discussed in the two available political philosophical interpretations of Machiavelli as a Lucretian, written by Paul Rahe and Robert Roedklein, although both stand at the opposite ends of the interpretative framework.

Rahe is the only Straussian that has explored Machiavelli's relationship to Lucretius. Rahe's Lucretian Machiavelli is predicated on the rejection of God and thus points to the

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<sup>105</sup> See Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 70-71. On religion see Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 71-82; Roedklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 98; Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 35-100; Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, 83-114. On evil see Roedklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 151-153 and 168-195.

<sup>106</sup> Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 74.

<sup>107</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 82.

<sup>108</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 82.

<sup>109</sup> Black, *Machiavelli*, 19.

Lucretian conflation of nature and fortuna.<sup>110</sup> In this respect, Rahe advances beyond Strauss' initial insight, but does not go far enough. Furthermore, Rahe, like Palmer, mentions that Machiavelli adopts Lucretius' emphasis on motion.<sup>111</sup> Rahe writes,

In accepting this doctrine, in denying that man can ever rest, Machiavelli dismissed as utopian not only the political teachings advanced by his classical and Christian predecessors but their moral teachings as well; and under its guidance, he rejected as illusory both the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean and the Epicurean quest of the moderation of the passions and tranquility of the soul.<sup>112</sup>

Unfortunately Rahe, despite the profundity of this insight, does not demonstrate how precisely Lucretius' three forms of motion function in Machiavelli's political thought. He even suggests that Machiavelli's silence about the *clinamen* means that he regarded the concept to be a "dodge" in the contradiction between Epicureanism and the problem of free will.<sup>113</sup> This dissertation argues otherwise and advances an alternate analysis of this relationship. Finally, this dissertation agrees with Rahe that "Machiavelli's critique of ancient Epicureanism is entirely internal," i.e. Machiavelli as an Epicurean saw the limitations of Epicurean thought and thus inaugurated a "breach" from it.<sup>114</sup> However, this dissertation disputes Rahe's claim that Machiavelli has a "breach" with Lucretius, instead preferring to discuss it as a torsion inside Lucretianism.<sup>115</sup> The difference between "breach" and torsion is that the former suggests that while Machiavelli adopted certain positions from Epicureanism – like the critique of religion – he had fundamentally broken from Epicureanism, whereas a torsion recognises that Machiavelli's rejection of political antipathy helped him recast Epicurean theories in a new political way.

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<sup>110</sup> Rahe, *Against Altar and Throne*, 35-39.

<sup>111</sup> Rahe, *Against Altar and Throne*, 42.

<sup>112</sup> Rahe, *Against Altar and Throne*, 43.

<sup>113</sup> Rahe, *Against Altar and Throne*, 39.

<sup>114</sup> Rahe, *Against Altar and Throne*, 41.

<sup>115</sup> Rahe, *Against Altar and Throne*, 41.

Indeed, the implications of Rahe's premature breach is that he does not see the debt incurred by Machiavelli with respect to other concepts in Machiavelli's vocabulary such as virtue and corruption, or how motion functions with respect to the desire for freedom and strife within the republic.<sup>116</sup>

Roecklein's *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, on the other hand, despite many useful insights, is an Aristotelian polemic against Machiavelli on the grounds of his Epicureanism. It becomes quickly apparent that Roecklein's disdain for the Lucretian Machiavelli often dovetails with common misgivings about Strauss and his students. Thus, the Lucretian Machiavelli is also the Straussian Machiavelli for Roecklein. He, for example, argues that Epicurus developed a language that could not be comprehended by anyone but the elect few, and thus adopted an elitist notion of truth.<sup>117</sup> The political implications of this for Roecklein are severe. He posits that Machiavelli's use of rhetoric is predicated on a notion of naming that breaks from the idea of name and object, thus impeding rather than inducing the deliberative process through the use of emotions that cause one to act and not deliberate. He writes,

It was Aristotle who argued that language is *the* political faculty among human beings, the faculty which makes it possible for us to do the uniquely human things: deliberate and choose. In the case of Epicurean philosophy, and indeed is the case of Machiavelli's philosophy which operates under its influence, philosophy has proclaimed its emancipation from a use of names which corresponds to the ordinary human being's assignment of name to object. Machiavelli's rhetoric takes aim at the human passions, impeding rather than assisting the deliberative process.<sup>118</sup>

The problem that Roecklein identifies with Machiavelli's politics is precisely what the radical democratic and democratic Machiavelli interpretations favor: Machiavelli is a thinker of political

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<sup>116</sup> Rahe, *Against the Throne and Altar*, 45-55.

<sup>117</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 63.

<sup>118</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 5.

discord and collision, rather than Aristotelian deliberation.<sup>119</sup> Finally for Roecklein, Lucretius' influence on Machiavelli means that hedonism has been subtly transformed into a celebration of greed and evilness, in the form of an aggressive individualism, of which Machiavelli's "political philosophy" is but a rationalisation.<sup>120</sup>

This dissertation agrees with Roecklein that atomist language, albeit in an altered form, helps Machiavelli usher in a radical change in the conception of politics. Thus, I also agree with him that one should use a translation that reflects this particular use of language, hence I follow Roecklein and rely on translations produced by Mansfield and Tarcov.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Roecklein's attention to Epicurean vocabulary, especially his attention to the word accidents, is commendable, although Strauss already prefigured it.<sup>122</sup> However, this dissertation does not share Roecklein's Aristotelian concerns about the civil discord and conflict, and hews far closer to the radical Machiavelli interpretation in this regard. Furthermore, this dissertation does not assume that either Lucretius or Machiavelli tried to produce a private language that could only be understood by the elect. Rather, Lucretius and Machiavelli meant for their respective works to inspire motion, but also to educate readers about effective truths. Furthermore, the perspective proffered in this dissertation pivots on an interpretation of Lucretius and Machiavelli alike that emphasises the common good, albeit admittedly radically different in its conception. Suffice to say, the influence of Lucretius on Machiavelli's thought has been understudied and often misunderstood. Thus, Machiavelli's relationship to Lucretius philosophy must be clearly demarcated and delineated anew.

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<sup>119</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 168.

<sup>120</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 137-138, 153.

<sup>121</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 128.

<sup>122</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 8.

## Outline of Chapters

In chapter one, Althusser's late writings on aleatory materialism and the posthumously published *MU* will be discussed in detail. Althusser's account is unique given the particular manner in which he situates Machiavelli: on the one hand, Machiavelli is the first "witness," after Epicurus/Lucretius, "in the history of this underground current of the materialism of the encounter"; and on the other he is the founder of a "curious *philosophy which is a 'materialism of the encounter' thought by way of politics*" (*POE*, 171, 173). In effect, Althusser was the first to attempt to outline a strong Lucretian interpretation of Machiavelli, although as will be demonstrated, he is not sufficiently attentive to either Lucretius or Machiavelli's respective texts to fully appreciate the extent of the relationship. Like the present work, Althusser argues that this encounter between the witness of history of "the underground current" and the founder of a "philosophy of the materialism of the encounter thought by the way of politics" rests on Machiavelli's analysis of the relationship between fortuna and virtù and a series of related terms including, the aleatory, the encounter, and the political void. Machiavelli, in turn, Althusser argues, was not only a witness to this subterranean current of materialist philosophy, but also the founder of a new mode of political thought: aleatory political thought. It will be argued that Althusser's inattention to the particularities of Lucretius' philosophy misses the full relationship between Lucretius and Machiavelli, and results in numerous interpretative mistakes. For example, Althusser's impoverished discussion of atomic motion results in him conflating contingency and accident (or chance). This inattention, and Althusser's likely ignorance about Machiavelli's marginalia on book 2 of Lucretius' *DRN*, results in Althusser misunderstanding the relationship between clinamen and virtù. Attention will also be paid to Althusser's discussion

of Machiavelli's desired effect: the formation and endurance of a new state. Again, it will be argued that Althusser's account does not pay sufficient attention to the relationship between the duration of a new state and the problem of freedom, and how atomic motion is vital to understanding this relationship. Thus, Althusser completely misses the influence of Lucretius on Machiavelli's theory of beginnings and history.

By aleatory political thought, I mean a scientific doctrine that examines politics through an atomist framework. This framework models social and political behaviour of individuals on that of atoms, while societies function like atomic compounds. Thus, like atoms, humans can engage in either voluntary or involuntary actions. Voluntary actions are predicated on more free will and render a given political situation contingent. They also mark a break in a pre-existing chain of causation or situation. Whereas involuntary actions are based on little to no free will and operate on the basis of chance, thus resulting in the continuation of a pre-existing chain of causation. Similarly societies, like compounds, are characterised by tendencies towards growth or aggregation, and decline or disaggregation. However, aleatory political thought is not only a scientific doctrine about politics. Instead, it simultaneously operates within a given situation, or organization of atoms into particular compounds experiencing different levels of aggregation and disaggregation, and attempts to provoke its reader to particular kinds of action, namely voluntary actions to achieve new states or situations. Such attempts to create new states or political situations similarly are not guaranteed to congeal, or "take hold," and whether they do so or not depends on whether a given political actor, or atom, has "more or less" political capacity. This capacity can only be evaluated retrospectively through the study of history. The operation of aleatory political theorists and texts within a given situation to inspire specific kinds of voluntary

actions means that they rely on rhetorical strategies that are not properly scientific, such as exhortations. However, the deployment of such strategies is a conscious choice of the theorist.

In chapter two, the relationship between Machiavelli and Lucretius will be re-examined by a re-examination of *DRN* and *Discourses* 1.1. It will be demonstrated that this was not a relationship that Althusser had fabricated whole cloth. However, Machiavelli's Epicureanism was not concerned with the nature of the cosmos and metaphysics, but rather the manner in which there can be the concrete production of a "new state." Thus, Machiavelli introduced a radical torsion in Lucretius' philosophy, due to its antipathy to politics, and founded an aleatory political thought. It will be argued that Machiavelli jettisons this anti-political aspect of Lucretius' philosophy, but simultaneously retains key elements such as the theory of atoms, atomic motion, and the void. However, this retention is marked by a shift away from metaphysics to physics to politics that Lucretius himself outlines through the course of *DRN*.<sup>123</sup> The narrative shift is paralleled by a linguistic shift as the atomist vocabulary recedes to the background, while sustaining an atomist account of nature and the beginnings of human civilisation, and will be demonstrated through particular attention to book 5 of *DRN*. Finally, it will be argued that Machiavelli's account of the beginnings of human civilisation as outlined in book 1, chapter 1 of *Discourses* neatly reflects Lucretius' account in book 5 of *DRN*, especially when juxtaposed to Aristotle's *Politics* and Cicero's *De Republica*.

Chapters 3 and 4 concern themselves with *The Prince* and *Discourses* respectively. In chapter 3, Lucretius' different forms of atomic motion will be outlined through a critical commentary on book 2 of *DRN*. This critical commentary includes a discussion of Machiavelli's

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<sup>123</sup> Kahn has argued that Machiavelli's definition of truth is pragmatic, rather than ontological or epistemological, and that this is evidence of his humanism, whereas I contend that this pragmatism arises not only due to his humanism, but also this shift from metaphysics to physics to politics. Kahn, "Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's Prince," 65.



marginalia on these passages. In particular, Machiavelli introduces the notion of free will to Lucretius' discussion of the clinamen, hence introducing the conception of voluntary action in juxtaposition to involuntary or necessary action. Machiavelli, it will be demonstrated, displaces this disjunction between voluntary and involuntary action to his two most famous concepts: virtù and fortuna. Through a close analysis of *The Prince* it is thus argued that Machiavelli's aleatory political thought is grounded upon the distinction between those princes with virtù who can help produce an encounter, outside of the chains of causation, and thus create new modes and orders; and those princes who are subject to necessity and hence fortuna. By further examining the latter concept it is argued that there are in fact two forms of fortuna: 1) in cases where atomic compounds (the prince) swerve (clinamen) because of the presence of free will and virtù, fortuna functions as contingency. Indeed, the prince cannot control the situation completely and thus there is an element of indeterminacy functioning; and 2) in those situations when virtù is replaced by accidents (involuntary actions) and is predicated on a series of causal relations grounded on necessity, fortuna operates as chance.

In chapter 4, *Discourses* book 1 will be closely studied to articulate Machiavelli's Lucretian theory of history and how the second form of fortuna, chance, functions in the preservation of freedom. It will be argued that Machiavelli mimics the Polybius' theory of anacyclosis, abandons said cyclical movement and provides another historical account that relies on the aforementioned aleatory framework. First, Polybius' account of the anacyclosis will be discussed. Then Lucretius' account of the development of human governments will be discussed. Having understood the differences between Lucretius and Polybius it will be demonstrated that Machiavelli abandons the theory of anacyclosis and puts forward a very particular account of historical development. Machiavelli's own theory recognizes that the prince has the capacity to

produce politics through voluntary action, while the conflict between the plebs and the nobles is predicated on involuntary actions that result in accidents, or “trial and tumults,” which help maintain the freedom of the republic. This concept of accidents returns to the other form of atomic motion – necessity determined by causal chains i.e. habituated freedom.

## Towards a Lucretian Interpretation of Machiavelli

And since even the unpublished papers and the mere study notes of the classic authors are now being dug up, justifying a certain required idea about these authors, let us be honest enough to recognise that these men, who were advancing in unknown territory, were - whatever their qualities - simple men: they were searching and discovering, but also hesitating, exposed to the mistakes, to the constant need for corrections and to the errors bound up with all research.

- Louis Althusser<sup>124</sup>

In 1971-1972 Althusser presented a seminar on Machiavelli. He repeatedly revised these lectures over the subsequent years, especially in 1975-1976.<sup>125</sup> In 1986 Althusser returned to the 1975-1976 lectures and further emended them to reflect his new emphasis on “aleatory materialism” or the “philosophy of the encounter.”<sup>126</sup> This 1986 text would be posthumously published as *Machiavelli and Us*. Althusser first outlined the contours of aleatory materialism in a 1982 manuscript that remained unpublished till after his death. Entitled, “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” Althusser relocates Machiavelli within a pantheon of philosophers of aleatory materialism, including notably Epicurus and Lucretius.<sup>127</sup> *MU* will thus

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<sup>124</sup> Althusser, “The Crisis of Marxism,” 218.

<sup>125</sup> Althusser also gave an address in 1977 to L’Association Française de Science Politique entitled, “Machiavelli’s Solitude.” His re-reading of Machiavelli in that lecture dovetailed with his intervention into debates within the French Communist Party and inaugurated what Althusser referred to as a “crisis of Marxism.” The 1977 address will not be discussed here as it does little to explore the relationship between Machiavelli and Epicureanism, and because it is heavily circumscribed within a series of ideological debates inside the French Communist Party. For more on the 1977 lecture see Lahtinen, *Politics and Philosophy*, 89-95.

<sup>126</sup> “Aleatory materialism” is the term that will be referred to more commonly because it highlights more strongly the question of contingency and chance in the encounter and allows more easily for a detour by the “way of politics,” or political thought. For a more detailed account that emphasises the ontological interpretation, see Bourdin, “La rencontre du matérialisme et de l’aléatoire chez Louis Althusser,” 140-146.

<sup>127</sup> Bourdin, *La rencontre du matérialisme et de l’aléatoire chez Louis Althusser*, 141. For more information on Althusser late writings in general and their relationship to Althusser’s larger oeuvre, see Elliot, “Ghostlier Demarcations,” 25-29. For the relationship between the late writings and the “crisis of Marxism,” see Navarro, “An Encounter with Althusser,” 96-97.

be analysed, in light of the 1982 text. *MU* is intriguing as the text is an uneven synthesis of Althusser's differing positions. I argue that Althusser provides a preliminary sketch of a strong Lucretian interpretation of Machiavelli. However, his interpretation remains too impressionistic and does not pay sufficient attention to the precise contours of Lucretius' argument and how they influence Machiavelli's own writings. Furthermore, it is not evident that Althusser was even aware that Machiavelli had produced a copy of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* with marginalia, which means that Althusser's interpretation is insufficiently attuned to the affinities between the relevant texts. Indeed, the limits and gaps of his interpretation are such that point to the possibility of an alternative reconstruction of the Lucretius-Machiavelli relationship, which occupies the remaining chapters of the present dissertation.

In the first section of this chapter, Althusser's account of aleatory materialism in the aforementioned 1982 article is laid out with a focus on Epicurus, Lucretius and Machiavelli.<sup>128</sup> Althusser's account suffers from a number of deficiencies: 1) his account of the clinamen, or the infinitesimally small swerve of one atom into another in the void (the collision between these two atoms is referred to as an encounter), suffers because of a prohibition of any account that permits free will, which means that he does not realise the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action; and 2) his inattention to the different kinds of atomic motion laid out by Lucretius, which results in his concept of the aleatory conflating contingency and chance.<sup>129</sup> An alternative account will be outlined in chapter 3. The rest of the chapter is an exegesis of *MU*. In the second section, Althusser's interpretation of the break that Machiavelli's thought inaugurated

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<sup>128</sup> Comments on other authors in the aleatory tradition will not be discussed as they are not within the scope of this present study. Indeed, I regard the list of names that Althusser had put together to be a research programme that needs further and more robust exploration elsewhere. The present work simply tries to discuss the first linkage that Althusser tries to draw: from Epicurus to Machiavelli.

<sup>129</sup> Althusser's interpreters have similarly conflated the two terms, see for example, Tosel, "The Hazards of Aleatory Materialism," 5, 14-15.

is outlined, especially with respect to classical theory. Paradoxically, Althusser de-emphasises the role that Lucretius played in this break, while highlighting key Lucretian themes, like the theory of beginnings. Althusser's account is useful inasmuch as it highlights key elements of the torsion in Epicureanism that Machiavelli introduced. This torsion is significant because Machiavelli is thus rendered the first theorist of aleatory politics, rather than being just another political Epicurean. This theme is revisited in chapter 2. The third section interrogates Althusser's discussion of Machiavelli's theory of history. His interpretation, while astute, is unable to fully realise Machiavelli's critique of Polybius' theory of anacyclosis (a cyclical theory of governments that all states naturally go through: monarchy-tyranny, aristocracy-oligopoly, democracy-mob rule), and outline Machiavelli's post-Lucretian theory of history. I will outline an alternative account in chapter 4. Finally, Althusser's account of the relationship between theory and practice is examined. Again his account is again found to be insufficiently focused on the relationship between fortuna, virtù, and the different forms of atomic motion, and alternate interpretation will be offered in chapter 3. In sum, Althusser's work is a useful starting point in providing a strong Lucretian interpretation of Machiavelli, but alone is insufficient.

### **The Underground Current: Machiavelli The Theorist of Aleatory Politics**

Althusser begins the 1982 manuscript by situating himself in the post-Epicurean tradition: "It is raining" (*POE*, 167). The mention of rain alludes to Lucretius' account of atoms falling in the void, like rain. Althusser argues that there exists an "almost unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy," called "a materialism of the encounter," that includes Epicurus, Lucretius, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Rousseau and others (*POE*, 167).<sup>130</sup> This tradition is

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<sup>130</sup> Althusser does not provide a detailed exegesis of the authors mentioned, instead making brief remarks on each theorist. Montag has discussed this chronology at length, especially in regards to its implications on the history of

concerned with “the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take [prise] ... and therefore of the aleatory and of contingency” (POE, 167). I demonstrate in the following section that Althusser despite initially juxtaposing the aleatory to contingency unfortunately conflates them and thus misses an essential insight about the relationship between chance and contingency. This conflation is due to his inattention to the different kinds of motion outlined by Lucretius and Althusser’s fixation on two kinds of movement: the parallel fall of atoms and the clinamen. The effect is that Althusser’s fails to understand how concepts like contingency, chance and necessity function in Machiavelli’s writings.

Althusser differentiates aleatory materialism from other interpretations of Epicureanism that have “repressed and perverted [it] into an *idealism of freedom*” (POE, 168). Althusser explains this idealism thusly, “[if] Epicurus’ atoms, raining down parallel to each other in the void, *encounter* one another, it is in order to bring out, in the guise of the swerve caused by the clinamen, the existence of human freedom even in the world of necessity” (POE, 168). Althusser effectively rejects any interpretation of the clinamen, or the swerve of one atom into another to produce an encounter, as a manifestation of human free will in a world in which necessity reigns.<sup>131</sup> Althusser’s argument, however, raises a philological quandary, as Machiavelli seems to have related the clinamen to “free will” in the marginalia of his own hand-copied edition of *De Rerum Natura*. The implications of this marginalia will be discussed in chapter 3. The

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philosophy, but has also argued that inaccuracies mar the text, see Montag, “The Late Althusser: Materialism of the Encounter or Philosophy of Nothing?,” 158-169.

<sup>131</sup> Tsel has explained Althusser’s understanding of the idealism of freedom in the following manner: “the bourgeoisie dialectically making way for another class predestined to unite the mode of production according to its own aim.” See Tsel, “The Hazards of Aleatory Materialism,” 17. Althusser himself developed this critique in a 1978 encyclopaedia entry on Marxism and accuses Marx himself of this idealism. Althusser writes, “We do find ... the idea of a philosophy of history of a meaning of history embodied in the succession of ‘progressive epochs’ of determinate modes of production, leading to the transience of Communism. We find in Marx this idealist representation of the ‘realm of freedom’ succeeding the ‘realm of necessity; - the myth of a communist wherein the ‘free development’ of individuals *takes the place of social relations*, which become as superfluous as the State and commodity relations” (PSPS, 271-272).

marginalia suggests that there exists another plausible relationship between Lucretius and Machiavelli that Althusser does not explore, and is outlined in the subsequent three chapters.

Althusser begins his interpretation by introducing Lucretius' ontological void:

before the formation of the world, an infinite of atoms were falling parallel to each other in the void. They still are. This implies both that, before the formation of the world, there was nothing, and also that all the elements of the world existed from all eternity, before any world was. It also implies that, before the formation of the world, there was no Meaning, neither Cause nor End nor Reason nor Unreason. (POE, 168)

Lucretius posits that anterior to the formation of the world there is an infinite rain of atoms in the void. The void is the universe. However, the simultaneous existence of “nothing” and “something” (atoms) appears to be a contradiction.<sup>132</sup> Lucretius, and consequently Althusser, resolves this contradiction by positing that the parallel fall of atoms is “nothing” because ‘something’ is the aggregate of atoms in a compound. When atoms fall parallel to one another there is a lack of contact and without this contact there cannot be an aggregation of atoms into a compound. Atoms become ‘something’ when they agglomerate into a compound referred to as the world i.e. they confer reality onto themselves (POE, 169).<sup>133</sup> This initial contact between atoms is caused by the *clinamen* or swerve. Althusser explains that the

*clinamen* is an infinitesimal *swerve*, ‘as small as possible’; ‘no one knows where, or when, or how’ it occurs, or what causes an atom to ‘swerve’ from its vertical fall in the void, and breaking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, induce *an encounter* with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world - that is to say, of the agglomeration

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<sup>132</sup> Suchting has argued that this contradiction “seems to threaten the intelligibility of the picture just sketched. How can it be the case that there is ‘nothing’ before the formation of a world and also that the elements of the latter, the atoms, exist eternally?” Suchting, “Althusser’s Late Thinking about Materialism,” 13. However, as will become evident the intelligibility of this account is in fact sustained.

<sup>133</sup> If one follows this account then one can adequately answer Suchting’s question that “[this] problem [of the contradiction between nothing before the formation of the world, while the elements for the formation of said world are already present] is hardly cleared up by the assertion that, before the formation of a world, these elements exist in a merely “abstract,” “ghostly,” “unreal” way. What could be meant by this?” Suchting, “Althusser’s Late Thinking about Materialism,” 13. Again, I dispute Suchting’s assertion that it is only through a recourse to Wittgenstein that this question can be explicated.

of atoms induced, in a chain reaction, by the initial swerve and encounter (*POE*, 169).

The clinamen is thus a tiny movement by one atom that disrupts the parallel fall of another atom, effecting contact or “*an encounter*” with the parallel atom. This encounter causes a series of encounters with other atoms, which may (and did) result in atoms “agglomerating” and forming the world.<sup>134</sup> The void is thus not an absolute nothing, rather it is a formless matter or a “disorder” of matter.<sup>135</sup> The encounter thus gives a form to formless matter. Atoms play a dual role: they are physical elements that could accumulate to form compounds and the world *and* they are metaphysical elements as well, indicating the existence of an invariant substratum to the world.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Suchting’s has asked why this swerve is called “‘nothing’? What is understood by ‘event’ and ‘advent’? How can the ‘parallelism’ (of motions) be said to be ‘violated’ if the swerve is indeed ontologically primary?” Suchting, “Althusser’s Late Thinking about Materialism,” 14. Part of Suchting’s confusion rests in his own translation of the aforementioned section, which renders the clinamen more strongly as “nothing,” whereas this translation is more clear inasmuch that it points to “almost nothing.” However, even if we were to assume that Suchting’s translation, what Suchting overlooks is that the clinamen is “nothing” until that time when the encounter successfully takes hold.

<sup>135</sup> Montag has argued that Althusser’s conception of the void is part of a tradition that contested that Lucretius rejected all prior philosophy for being unable to think nature in the context of an imaginary nothingness, and instead argued that nature was the product of diversity, see Montag, “The Late Althusser: Materialism of the Encounter or Philosophy of Nothing?,” 168. As will be demonstrated both accounts are complimentary inasmuch that there is a nothingness in which something minimally more than absolute nothingness, atoms falling parallel to one another, are something through the production of the diverse i.e. the interlocking of atoms into diverse forms. Indeed, this account rejects accounts of Epicureanism and the aleatory encounter which argue that something emerges from swerves ex nihilo, for example, see Sotiris, “Rethinking Aleatory Materialism,” 32. In this matter, I am in complete agreement with Fourtouni who has argued that the void is a formless matter from the perspective of form, see Fourtouni, “An Immense Aspiration to Being,” 52.

<sup>136</sup> Bourdin usefully describes this double role as a “soft” and “hard” version of encounters, which operate at two different levels, but are intertwined. See Bourdin, “La rencontre du matérialisme et de l’aléatoire chez Louis Althusser,” 146. Montag has argued that this void affords philosophy an origin which is nothingness, or that it is “originary non-origin which in no way escapes the implications of the concept of origins,” and introduces an ontological concept, see Montag, “The Late Althusser: Materialism of the Encounter or Philosophy of Nothing?,” 161. Fourtounis, following Montag, has similarly argued that there are two voids, the ontological void and a void that emerges from the encounter, see Fourtounis, “An Immense Aspiration of Being,” 56-57. However, this account overlooks that there is no origin of the void or atoms, rather, they simply are a “there is,” and that the world which confers upon them meaning is what makes them real and an origin. Thus, this nothingness is a lack of form, not a lack of matter. Indeed, the void only emerges from an encounter which takes hold and results in the production of Meaning i.e. an account of void.



This failure becomes further evident when Althusser argues, “[a] successful encounter, one that is not brief, but lasts, never guarantees that it will continue to last tomorrow rather than come undone. Just as it might not have taken place, it may *no longer* take place” (*POE*, 174). Lucretius, as demonstrated in the subsequent chapter and in chapter 4, would agree with Althusser that there is no guarantee that a given successful encounter will continue to enjoy duration. However, Lucretius does introduce a tendency towards disaggregation. All compounds will come undone at some point, even the existing world. This claim will be discussed at greater length in the subsequent chapter and the final chapter. It is this tendency of disaggregation that one can similarly find in Machiavelli. Thus, Althusser over-states his argument when he declares that,

the necessity of the laws that issue from the taking-hold induced by the encounter is, even at its most stable, haunted by a radical instability, which explains something we find it very hard to grasp ... that laws can change - not that they can be valid for a time but not eternally ... but that they can change at the drop of a hat, revealing the aleatory basis that sustains them, and can change without reason, that is, without an intelligible end (*POE*, 195-196).

History thus becomes a series of random encounters that take hold and then become undone by other random encounters without any process of undoing or disaggregation.<sup>137</sup> In chapter 4, the tendency towards aggregation and disaggregation will be used to interpret book 1 of *Discourses*, thus demonstrating that Machiavelli does not adopt this hyper-chaotic randomness.

The significance of the Lucretian account of the beginning of the world is that the world, “and therefore all reality and all meaning,” do not exist because of Reason or Cause, rather they are the effect on an inexplicable swerve undetermined by anything prior to itself (*POE*, 169). As Althusser states, “without swerve and encounter [they] would be nothing but *abstract* elements,

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<sup>137</sup> As Bourdin has pointed out, “laws can change, not for historicist reasons but because they represent only one possible configuration of the effects of an encounter that remains without cause or reason.” “Althusser’s Uncertain Materialism,” 278.

lacking all consistency and existence” (*POE*, 169). The clinamen, or swerve, ensures that atoms have the means to encounter one another in the void and have the possibility of agglomerating into compounds. If they did not encounter one another atoms would continue to exist as abstract entities. They are abstract entities because without a world in which there are thinking beings, like humans, there can be “no Meaning, neither Cause nor End nor Reason nor Unreason.” Discourses about the origin of the world, like religion, are ideological conceptions that cover up this contingent process of agglomeration or aggregation. Philosophy similarly produces an origin. Althusser writes, “[to] say that in the beginning was nothingness or disorder is to take up a position prior to any assembling and ordering, and to give up thinking the origin as Reason or End in order to think it as nothingness” (*POE*, 188). Althusser finds in Lucretius a materialism that shares his rejection of origin and replaces it with an indeterminate beginning (*POE*, 188).

This beginning is indeterminate as the swerve was not an effect of a prior encounter and could not have been predicted. It is, as will be discussed in chapter 3, a break in the chain of causation and the beginning of a new chain. Althusser notes that the clinamen is itself an insufficient account to explain the existence of the world. He writes, “In order for the swerve to give rise to an encounter from which a world is born, that encounter must last; it must be, not a 'brief encounter', but a lasting encounter, which then becomes the basis for all reality, all necessity, all Meaning and all reason” (*POE*, 169). The encounter must “take.” The encounter must have duration for it to result in the formation of all reality. Without duration atoms exist, but only as abstractions i.e. “the *atoms*’ very existence is due to nothing but the swerve and the encounter prior to which they led only to a phantom existence” (*POE*, 169). Atomic existence only becomes concrete when they have “taken hold.” Althusser explains that, “[once] they have thus ‘taken hold’ or ‘collided-interlocked’, the atoms enter the realm of Being that they

inaugurate: they constitute *beings*, assignable, distinct, localizable beings endowed with such-and-such property ... in short, there emerges in them a structure of Being or of the world that assigns each of its elements its place, meaning or role” (*POE*, 192).<sup>138</sup> The world is an aggregate of atoms, or a compound, that has taken a specific form. This form structures Being. To structure Being means that the world assigns roles and meanings to the elements that compose it. Althusser explains an incredibly dense line of argument by gesturing towards the parallel that he wants to establish between Lucretius and Machiavelli: “For a *being* (a body, an animal, a man, state, or Prince) *to be*, an encounter has *to have taken* place (past infinitive)” (*POE*, 192). In sum, all that constitutes something, whether a rock or a prince or the state, is the effect of a prior encounter. The world is an accomplished fact of this entire process of aggregation into a form or compound, that now has meaning. Althusser states,

The world may be called *the accomplished fact* [*fait accompli*] in which, once the fact has been accomplished, is established the reign of Reason, Meaning, Necessity and End [*Fin*]. But *the accomplishment of the fact* is just a pure effect of contingency, since it depends on the aleatory encounter of the atoms due to the swerve of the clinamen. Before the accomplishment of the fact before the world there is only *the non-accomplishment of the fact*, the non-world that is merely the *unreal* existence of the atoms (*POE*, 169-170).

Althusser importantly connects contingency, the aleatory and the clinamen together. The world is the effect of an encounter. This encounter is contingent because there is no prior reason for the swerve of one atom into another to take place. The swerve contingently begins a new chain of causation. The world is an “accomplished fact” or the successful effect of this chain of causation

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<sup>138</sup> Again Suchting has pointed to this passage as further evidence of an incoherence and argued that “[this] passage seems to affirm that atoms have properties *prior* to their encounters with one another and that these properties delimit or constrain the possible outcome of encounters. But this appears to be inconsistent with the previous assertion that atoms are, prior to their encounters, merely ‘abstract.’” Suchting, “Althusser’s Late Thinking about Materialism,” 15. Suchting forgets that atoms indeed, have specific properties that are prior to these encounters, but these properties only become not abstract when there is a logos that can realise that said properties exist. Furthermore, the inter-locking of atoms, new properties emerge from different kinds of inter-locking. Again recourse to Wittgenstein is not required. Suchting, “Althusser’s Late Thinking about Materialism,” 23-24.

as the conditions for Reason, Meaning, Necessity and End to exist has been met. Once Reason, Meaning, Necessity and End exist within the world, they produce discourses about the origin of the world. Althusser ends his discussion of Lucretius here and shifts his attention to Machiavelli. It is thinking through aleatory materialism by the way of politics, which gives a preliminary, but incomplete, account of Machiavelli as the first theorist of aleatory politics.

Althusser refers to Machiavelli as his “second witness in the history of this underground current of the materialism of the encounter” (*POE*, 171). This shift from Lucretius to Machiavelli marks a displacement from ontological concerns to political ones. Whereas, ontology is concerned with an ontological void that demands new Forms to construct a world, the political void requires new Forms in a world that is already an accomplished fact. Althusser argues that Machiavelli’s thought is not simply a political philosophy, but that a “philosophy is simultaneously at work here too. A curious *philosophy which is a ‘materialism of the encounter’ thought by way of politics*, and which, as such, does not take anything for granted. It is in the political *void* that the encounter must come about, and that national unity must ‘take hold’. But *this political void is first a philosophical void.*” (*POE*, 173) Machiavelli is the first witness of aleatory materialism “thought by way of politics” and inaugurates two philosophies simultaneously: 1) the political philosophy: aleatory political thought and; 2) the “curious” philosophy which is the “materialism of the encounter.” The political void is first a philosophical void because

[no] Cause that precedes its effects is to be found in it, no Principle of morality or theology (as in the whole Aristotelian political tradition: the good and bad forms of government, the degeneration of the good into the bad). One reasons here not in terms of the Necessity of the accomplished fact, but in terms of the contingency of the fact to be accomplished. As in the Epicurean world, all the elements are both there and beyond, to come raining down later ... but they do not exist, are only abstract, as long as the unity of a world has not united them in the Encounter that will endow them with existence (*POE*, 173-174).

Machiavelli does not operate within the confines of moral politics or theology. He thus realises that the question is not why does the world exist. Instead it is to think the conditions for giving a new political form or “of the fact to be accomplished.” In doing so, Machiavelli articulates a political philosophy, aleatory political thought. This political philosophy also has a philosophy underlying it, Lucretius’ philosophy. The political philosophy adopts the general outlook, or mechanics, of Lucretius’ philosophy, but instead of dealing with problems of metaphysics is concerned with political problems. Although Althusser is rather useful in articulating the nature of the former, his account of the latter leaves much to be desired. This lacuna is something that will be addressed in the subsequent chapters. Althusser calls this a philosophy of the void, not only because of its emphasis on the void in which atoms rain, but also because it “[*evacuates*] *all philosophical problems*” inasmuch that philosophy has no object per se, except for that of *nothingness* (POE, 174-175). Machiavelli, in particular, “evacuated ... all Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophical concepts in order to think the possibility of making Italy a national state” (POE, 175).

Althusser’s summary of Machiavelli’s project demonstrates strong parallels between Lucretius and Machiavelli. He writes that Machiavelli’s project is “to think, in the impossible conditions of fifteenth-century Italy, the conditions for establishing an Italian national state” (POE, 171). Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was “an atomized country” because its people were divided, the country was fragmented into small and weak city-states, and there existed generalised “disorderly revolt” against “foreign occupation and pillage, and a profound, latent aspiration of the people to unity” i.e. “every atom of which was descending in free fall without encountering its neighbour. It was necessary *to create the conditions for a swerve*, and thus an encounter, if Italian unity was to ‘take hold’” (POE, 171). The people, the fragmented states, and so forth, are

atoms falling downwards without touching one another. This lack of contact means that they are unable to produce something. Althusser refers to this atomisation of Italy as a “political void” in which an encounter must take place (*POE*, 173).<sup>139</sup> The void is now used to conceptualise a conjuncture where there is lack of a political form. The parallel fall of atoms in political void suggests that there is a nothing in the political sphere, i.e. a Form has not successfully taken hold. Althusser’s interpretation of the political void and the need for a swerve by a new prince is correct and will be replicated in the alternative strong Lucretian interpretation of *The Prince* offered in chapter 3.

Althusser reminds his reader that Machiavelli discusses all the existing states in Italy to explain why they are incapable of producing the swerve (*POE*, 171). Althusser writes that Machiavelli was “obsessed” by the case of Cesare Borgia, who was an example of “[a] *man of nothing who has started out from nothing out from an unassignable place*: these are, for Machiavelli, the conditions for regeneration” (*POE*, 172). The example of Borgia suggests that

if there emerges some nameless man who has enough luck and *virtù* to establish himself somewhere, in some *nameless* corner of Italy, and starting out from this atomic point, gradually aggregate the Italians around him in the grand project of founding a national state. This is a completely aleatory line of reasoning, which leaves politically *blank* both the name of the Federator and that of the region which will serve as starting point from the constitution of this federation. Thus the dice are tossed on the gaming table, which is itself empty (but filled with men of valor) (*POE*, 172).

Machiavelli realises that the existing Italian principalities were incapable of effecting a swerve and thus what is needed is a new prince. The inter-changeability of names indicates that many could play this role. Machiavelli’s “silence” with respect to the prince’s name and location is a

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<sup>139</sup> While Sotiris is right to argue that there is no “void” of history inasmuch that there is always a societal configuration already there, he overlooks the fact that some social configurations are barely there, i.e. there is not absolute nothingness, but a nothingness in which the atoms and compounds have yet to have a form, see Sotiris, “Rethinking Aleatory Materialism,” 33-34.

“*political* condition for the encounter” because for an encounter to take hold it must first “*take place*” (POE, 172). Althusser identifies two particular encounters that must take place for an encounter to take hold: the encounter of the prince with the rest of the atoms, or matter, that fills the political void (Italy), and the encounter between fortune and virtù (POE, 172). Althusser writes, “[encountering] *Fortuna*, the Prince must have the *virtù* to treat her as he would treat a woman, to welcome her in order to seduce or do violence to her; in short, to use her to realize his destiny” (POE, 172). Althusser however does not discuss Borgia’s relationship to either virtù or fortuna and does not explain why Borgia was unable to realise his destiny, except for the fact that he fell ill, especially given that the conditions for an encounter to take hold had been met. All that Althusser mentions is that “[the] encounter may not take place *or* may take place. The meeting can be missed. The encounter be brief or lasting: he needs an encounter that lasts” (POE, 172). This failure to explain Borgia’s failure is because Althusser overlooks Lucretius’ discussion of the different forms of motion and how these different kinds of movement are displaced into the political sphere through the categories of fortune and virtù.<sup>140</sup> Althusser does unconsciously allude to it when he later writes,

[take] place between beings with affinities ... between such-and-such individual and such-and-such conjuncture, or Fortune ... the conjuncture itself being junction, con-juncture, congealed (albeit shifting) encounter, since it has taken place, and refers in its turn to the infinite number of its prior causes, just as (let us add) a determinate ... individual (for instance, Borgia) refers to the infinite sequence of prior causes of which it is the result (POE, 192-193).

Althusser is correct to include Borgia within such a causal chain of encounters because he was a prince who benefited from Fortune, something that Althusser fails to mention. Borgia was the effect of a chance encounter, or accident, which arose from his father becoming Pope. This

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<sup>140</sup> Montag passingly points to this third form, but does not discuss it, see Montag, “The Late Althusser: Materialism of the Encounter or Philosophy of Nothing?,” 164.

chance encounter was the product of a kind of atomic motion that Althusser fails to address. Consequently, Althusser does not outline the relationship between fortuna, chance, and chains of causation, especially with consideration to Lucretius' theory of atomic motion.

The importance of the encounter between fortuna and virtù is particularly important as without it, it is not possible to make the encounter between the prince and matter in the void last. Althusser writes, "To make it last, the Prince has to learn to govern fortuna by governing men. He has to structure his state by training up its men, commingling them in the army (see Gramsci), and, above all, endowing this state with constant *laws*" (*POE*, 172-173). To make an encounter last depends on the capacity of virtù to "govern" fortuna by governing men. The governing of men is premised on the giving of a form whether to the state with respect to "constant *laws*," or the "training" of men through the army. In the subsequent chapter the question of the role of law will be expanded upon as it pinpoints a qualitative distinction between Lucretius and Machiavelli with respect to politics. This oversight has greater implication, as discussed in chapter 4, for a strong Lucretian interpretation of Machiavelli's theory of history and the role of habituated freedom in the duration of the state.

Althusser's invocation of Gramsci above hints at the notion of hegemony and Machiavelli's discussion of the centaur: "He has to win them over by accommodating them, while knowing how to keep his distance. This dual procedure gives rise to the theory of seduction and the theory of fear, as well as the theory of ruse" (*POE*, 173). The encounter takes hold through a "winning over" of the people through a dual strategy: persuasion and fear/force. This dual strategy is supplemented by ruse. The theory of ruse is important as it bears on Machiavelli's theory of appearances and ideology. Althusser analyses Machiavelli's theory of appearances and ideology by posing the classical problem of politics: "Should the Prince be



good or wicked?" He proffers the thesis that, "[he] has to learn to be wicked, but in all circumstances he has to know how to *appear to be* good, to possess the moral virtues that will win over the people to his side, even if they earn him the hatred of the mighty, whom he despises, for, from them, nothing else is to be expected" (POE, 173). Support of the people is vital for the encounter to take hold, thus requiring the prince to appear to behave in specific ways. Citing Machiavelli's discussion of the centaur, Althusser emphasises the role of the fox, in comparison to the lion. Althusser writes,

But it has not been sufficiently remarked that *the beast divides* into two in Machiavelli, becoming both lion and fox, and that, ultimately, it is the fox who governs everything. For it is the fox who obliges the Prince either to appear to be evil or to appear to be good — in a word, to fabricate a popular (ideological) image of himself that either does or does not answer to his interests and those of the 'little man'. Consequently, the Prince is governed, internally, by the variations of this other aleatory encounter, that of the fox on the one hand and the lion and man on the other. This encounter *may not take place*, but it may also take place. It has to last long enough for the figure of the Prince to 'take hold', that is, *to take form*, so that, institutionally, he instils of himself as good; and, if possible, so that he ultimately *is* good, but on the absolute condition that he never forget how to be evil if need be (POE, 173).

This discussion of the centaur metaphor is intriguing because it explicitly connects the theory of appearances with the ideological function as the prince is obliged to appear both evil and good so that he can produce an "ideological image" of himself.

Althusser understands that *virtù*'s capacity to govern *fortuna* is limited, however. Althusser emphasises that "the encounter may not take place, just as it may take place. Nothing determines, no principle of decision determines this alternative in advance; it is of the order of a game of dice. 'A throw of the dice will never absolve chance.' Indeed!" (POE, 174) However, Althusser simultaneously defines *virtù* too narrowly as he wishes to distance it from the aforementioned idealism of freedom. The encounter is not the effect of a decision made by the

prince to intervene, Althusser argues, rather the prince simply intervenes.<sup>141</sup> This diminishment of virtù means that the result of any encounter is chance-based because “nothing in the elements of the encounter prefigures, before the actual encounter, the contours and determinations of the being that will emerge from it” (*POE*, 193). The prince with virtù has little control to determine the specific Form that takes hold as an effect of an encounter, rather, it is solely determined by the “structure of the encounter.”<sup>142</sup> As Althusser writes,

Whence *the form of order* and the *form of beings* whose birth is induced by this pile-up, determined as they are by the structure of the encounter; whence, once the encounter has been effected (but not before); whence, finally, what one must call an *affinity* and a complementarity ... of the elements come into play in the encounter, their ‘readiness to collide-interlock’ ... in order that this encounter ‘take hold’, that is to say, ‘take *form*’, *at least give birth to Forms, and new Forms* - just as water ‘takes hold’ when ice there waiting for ... (*POE*, 192).

In doing so, Althusser unfortunately affords no room for skill when throwing dice and how skill reduces the number of possible outcomes. As Machiavelli repeatedly argues a prince with no or limited skill or capacity will depend more on chance or fortuna as compared to prince with more virtù. It is true however that one can only gauge the skill or capacity of the prince in question only after the dice has been thrown i.e. retrospectively through a study of history. I further discuss the relationship between virtù and contingency and chance in chapter 3. The relationship

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<sup>141</sup> Morfino has argued that the late Althusser’s Machiavelli can be distinguished from that of Gramsci’s because of the latter’s emphasis on the decision. “History as ‘Permanent Revocation of the Accomplished Fact,’” 72.

<sup>142</sup> Fourtounis has termed this “aleatory structuralism,” see Fourtonis, “An Immense Aspiration to Being,” 47. Suchting has pointed to this concept of a “structure of encounter” as a sign of an incoherency within Althusser’s aleatory writings, asking, “Does the final remark imply that *before* the encounter there was a structure, but that it did not have a primacy over elements? But what could this structure be but the parallel vertical fall of the atoms in the void? And is it implied that, at this stage, the elements have primacy over the structure?” Suchting, “Althusser’s Late Thinking about Materialism,” 14. Suchting here is confusing two different kinds of encounters at two different levels of analysis: the political and the metaphysical. On the level of the political, the structure of the encounter is precisely the void nature of a given political situation i.e. something exists, but it is nothing inasmuch that it is a decomposed form of something. So the Italian city states, Italian people, the circumstances all structure the encounter. Thus, on the plane of the already existing world of politics there is a structuration of the encounter before. On the metaphysical level there is no structuration prior to the encounter but a structuring of the encounter a posteriori, which is the effect of logos.

between gauging a prince's virtù and history will be explored at greater length in chapter 4 through the concept of habituated freedom. This retrospective capacity to understand whether contingency or chance, virtù or fortuna, are operative in a particular historical conjuncture is why Machiavelli emphasises history so strongly. Althusser points to this when he argues that, "no determination of these elements can be assigned except by *working backwards* from the result to its becoming, in its retroaction" (*POE*, 193). However, he fails to realise that working backward, through an interpretation of history and the retroactive analysis of the effectivity of an encounter, allows the analyst to determine whether a given prince has virtù or not. The analyst is able to determine the relative skill or virtù by examining the conjuncture, the actions taken by political actors, and the effectivity of these actions.

Althusser concludes by admitting that while these comments were "just brief notes which have to be developed" they must be read in conjunction with several questions:

"how is it possible to imagine that his work is, under its political cloak, anything other than an authentically philosophical body of thought? And how is it possible to imagine that the fascination exercised by Machiavelli has been merely political ... when the philosophical resonances of his work have been, unbeknown to Machiavelli himself, among the most profound to have reached us from this painful past?" (*POE*, 175)

Althusser explains that it is not the question of whether he was a republican or not, or whether he founded political science or not, but to his materialism of the encounter that "Machiavelli basically owes the influence he has had on people who do not give a damn about politics, and rightly so — *no one is obliged to 'engage in politics'*" (*POE*, 175). Althusser would try to develop these brief notes more fully in *Machiavelli and Us*, which he had first written in 1972 and continued to re-write and emend. It is to this text that I will turn to next and to thus delineate whether in fact whether Althusser had developed these ideas more fully. It will be argued that

Althusser does not develop these brief notes sufficiently four years later when revising the 1975-1976 lectures, thus necessitating an alternative account.

### ***MU* Foreword and Chapter 1: Beginning a New Thought and New Political Form**

The foreword and first chapter of *MU* demarcate the contours of Machiavelli's advent of a new kind of theory wholly distinct from classical political theory. Althusser argues that Machiavelli is a theorist of two different kinds of beginnings: the beginning of a new kind of thought and the beginning of new political forms. Althusser's account of the former is odd because he distances Machiavelli from the Epicureans. Indeed, two things become evident from Althusser's interpretation: 1) Althusser was not aware in 1986 of Machiavelli's attempt to produce a critical edition of *On the Nature of Things*; and 2) there exists an apparent contradiction between *MU* and the 1982 manuscript. This suggests that *MU* does not take into consideration insights from Lucretius' philosophy. The further implication of this is that Althusser does not fully understand the nature of Machiavelli's break with classical political theory.

Althusser writes that the basic question - which he lifts from Maurice Merleau-Ponty - is "of his comprehension" (MU, 6). Althusser however amends Merleau-Ponty's question to "what should we attribute this capacity to startle?" Althusser claims that Machiavelli answers this question when "he writes that what especially surprises men is something new: the never previously seen," i.e. Machiavelli is "the theorist of something new solely because he is the theorist of beginnings" (MU, 6). Furthermore, Machiavelli is startling not "simply because he is new, but because he represents a beginning" (MU, 7). Althusser points to the opening lines of the *Discourses* about discovering new methods and new lands and the Dedicatory Letter as evidence that "he announces the 'originality' of his work and the 'importance' of its subject matter" (MU, 7). What Machiavelli begins is "[a] true understanding' of history, of rulers, of the art of

governing and making war — in short, everything traditionally designated as the foundation of a positive science, the science of politics” (MU, 7). Machiavelli thus inaugurates knowledge about both the “actual truth” and of “the imaginary representations of history and politics” (MU, 8). As Althusser notes, “Machiavelli considered himself the founder of a theory without precedent, and that between the reigning imaginary representations of history and politics and his knowledge of the ‘actual truth’ there is an abyss, the emptiness of a distance taken, that cannot but startle” (MU, 8). Citing *The Prince* chapter XV where Machiavelli writes that he prefers to talk about things as they really are rather than how they are imagined, he posits, “[this] formula counterposes the ‘actual truth’, hence objective knowledge, of things to imaginary, subjective representation. Objective knowledge of the ‘thing’ with which he deals — politics (i.e. political practice)” (MU, 7). This objective knowledge of politics is distinct from that which had existed prior, “an imaginary representation of politics, an ideology of politics” (MU, 7). Althusser interprets Machiavelli’s “silence” about a whole host of political theorists such as Savonarola, the Christian theologians, and ancient political theorists like Plato, Aristotle and the Epicureans, and their particular perspectives about issues including morality, religion, and aesthetics, as evidence of his rejection of their positions and a “declaration of rupture” (MU, 8). Here Althusser distances Lucretius from Machiavelli, thus demonstrating that Althusser did not fully appreciate the Lucretius-Machiavelli relationship.

This beginning in thought is grounded in Machiavelli’s adoption of a realist method of investigation (MU, 7). This realist method concerns itself with the world as it is, rather than how it ought to be. However, despite Machiavelli’s adherence to a realist method of investigation Althusser does not refer to his thought as a positive science. Althusser argues that Machiavelli’s “object of knowledge is the law of history or politics,” but simultaneously that this object of

knowledge is formulated, or ordered, through the posing of a concrete political problem (*MU*, 16). The laws of history and politics are always indexed to a singular concrete case: the national unity of Italy<sup>143</sup> (*MU*, 16). Indeed, Althusser argues that Claude Lefort does not properly “spot” the “master theme” that Gramsci identifies: “the political problem of the Italian nation’s constitution by means of a national state” (*MU*, 11). To achieve this, a gap must be bridged: between the “need for the existence and constitution of the nature” and the “factual and relatively aleatory conditions of its realisation are another” (*MU*, 11). These “relatively aleatory conditions” are “not only economic, but also pre-existing geographical, historical, linguistic and cultural factors - which in some sense prestructure the aleatory space in which the nation will be able to take shape” (*MU*, 11). All situations are thus relatively aleatory. These “relatively aleatory conditions” then structure the “aleatory space,” or what Althusser will refer to as the “empty space,” in which the encounter can take place and hopefully take hold to form a nation. The nation is “not constituted spontaneously. The pre-existing elements are not unified into a nation of their own accord. An instrument is required to forge its unity, assemble its real or potential elements, defend the unity that has been achieved, and eventually extend its borders. This instrument is the unique national state” (*MU*, 12). The national state is able to only do so by performing a series of functions, including military, “political, juridical, economic, and ideological” (*MU*, 12). Finally, Machiavelli realises that the national state can only be achieved through the use of absolutist power, which is “unique and centralized, but arbitrary” and relies on the combination of violence-coercion *and* persuasion-consent i.e. hegemony (*MU*, 12).

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<sup>143</sup> Elliott has thus referred to Althusser’s Machiavelli is a “nominalist in the stipulated sense: his ‘object’ is not some general general theory of the ‘laws’ of history or of politics, but the conjunctural conditions for the foundation of a durable new principality by a new prince.” Elliott, “Ghostlier Demarcations,” 27. For more on Althusser’s nominalism and his peculiar understanding of nominalism, see Montag, “Althusser’s Nominalism,” 66-73.

The implication of Machiavelli's theoretical singularity is that "we must ... abandon a conception that brings in only theory for one that brings in practice, and since we are dealing with politics, political practice" (*MU*, 17). Machiavelli's relationship to the problem of national unity is not theoretical it is also one of political practice i.e. Machiavelli does not poses the problem of national unity in general; rather he poses it within the context a "*singular conjuncture*" (*MU*, 17). Althusser states,

I believe it is not hazardous to venture that Machiavelli is the first theorist of the conjuncture or the first thinker consciously, if not to think the concept of conjuncture, if not to make it the object of an abstract and systematic reflection, then at least consistently - in an insistent, extremely profound way - to think *in* the conjuncture: that is to say in its concept of an aleatory, singular case (*MU*, 18).

Whereas, classical theorists think politics in an abstract and systematic manner delinked from the conjuncture, Machiavelli is the first to think politics *in* the conjuncture or the "aleatory, singular case."<sup>144</sup> However, the problem of national unification is not one that Machiavelli simply happens to pose within the conjuncture, but is one that the conjuncture poses. Machiavelli "merely registers the problem" which is historically posed within a conjuncture by not only examining and making an inventory of all the determinations, or forces, within it, but also by confronting "their aleatory future" (*MU*, 18). To think *in* the "aleatory, singular case" with respect to the "aleatory future" is to think the necessary relation of forces required to achieve the political objective or the giving of a political form within the relatively aleatory space (*MU*, 19).

A significant force in this relation of forces is the prince. Althusser defines the prince as "[an] exceptional individual, endowed with virtù, who, starting from nothing or from something, will be able to mobilize the forces required to unify Italy under his leadership" (*MU*, 19).

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<sup>144</sup> Hardy has pointed out that "Machiavelli, and by extension Althusser, is not concerned with the conjuncture *qua* conjuncture, but is instead concerned with understanding how the conjuncture 'came to be' and what might destabilise it." "Theory from the Conjuncture," 19.

Althusser concludes that the prince is “produced only under the stimulus of the conjuncture; and no sooner are they produced than they are affected in their modality by their intervention in a conjuncture wholly dominated by the problem it poses, and the political practice required to achieve the objective it proposes” (*MU*, 20). In effect, the new prince is a product of the circumstances at the time and not an abstraction. The prince is a concrete solution within a conjuncture to a particular problem and his *modus operandi* is dictated by the objective it proposes. Machiavelli, Althusser explains, thus effectuates a change in theoretical space from classical theory to thought in political practice, as the former had no subject it articulated abstract principles that are applicable to all subjects. Whereas, for Machiavelli the particular form of the subject (the new prince for Machiavelli and the modern prince for Gramsci) is dictated to by the conjuncture itself and the political objectives it prescribes (*MU*, 20).<sup>145</sup> In chapter 3 Althusser’s argument that the prince’s *modus operandi* is determined by the conjuncture is rejected because he fails to realise that the presence of a prince with *virtù* means that said prince is able to break from the chain of causation, or the determinations of the conjuncture, and create a new beginning.

The political conjuncture is therefore an “*empty place*,” comprised of “opposing and intermingled forces,” that is to be “filled” through the action/intervention of “the individual or the group” who will try to arrange the necessary forces into something “capable of accomplishing the political task” (*MU*, 20). Althusser’s notion of emptiness here again reflects

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<sup>145</sup> Fourtouni seems to suggest that Althusser’s account of the tradition of aleatory materialism is akin to classical theory, thus standing in contrast to his account of Machiavelli which is representative of the second kind of theory, see Fourtouni, “An Immense Aspiration to Being,” 51-54. Instead, it could be argued that in each case of the aleatory tradition there is a partisanship that is established. Thus, Lucretius also has a discourse with a subject, the subject being Memmius.



his Lucretian interpretation of the void as something more than absolute nothing and less than something. As Althusser continues to say,

I say empty, though it is always occupied. I say empty, to mark the vacillation of *theory* at this point: because it is necessary for this place to be filled - in other words, for the individual or party to have the capacity to become sufficiently strong to count among the forces, and strong enough again to rally the allied forces, to become the principal force and overcome the others (*MU*, 20).

The empty space is never truly empty. Something cannot come from nothing. Rather, it is the “vacillation of *theory*” i.e. the wavering between the limits of a given political thought that understands that what exists is almost nothing and that the prevailing thought is insufficient to the immediate tasks, and the need for a practice that will be able to give a political form. As Althusser explains,

what makes the space of political practice so different from the space of theory is that once it is submitted to the analysis of the conjuncture posing the political problem ‘on the agenda’ ... it is *recast* in its modality and disposition by the existence of this place which is empty because it is to be filled, occupied by the ‘subject’ (agent) of political practice: Prince or party (*MU*, 21).

Political practice must submit itself to an analysis of the conjuncture. The analysis of the conjuncture poses which problems need to be solved. Once the analysis of the conjuncture poses the problems that need a solution, political practice changes in ways appropriate to solving that problem. Practice is “*recast*” in the form that is appropriate for the conjuncture. Furthermore, Machiavelli’s “*text*” must be inscribed within the contours of this conjuncture and political practice to be effective (*MU*, 22) Machiavelli’s text, unlike classical theory, does not stand outside of the conjuncture as a truth that takes effect through the enlightenment of the “subject” or “agent.” It is thus a text that “belongs to the world of ideological and political literature” (*MU*, 23).

Althusser's Machiavelli is a political practitioner and theorist, who because of his analysis of the conjuncture, is able to pose new questions and solutions. In doing so, he not only articulates the need for a new political form, but also a new theoretical space. However, I contend that Althusser's distancing of Machiavelli from Lucretius is a regression from his 1982 interpretation inasmuch that he fails to realise the role that Lucretius' insights played in this process despite the chapter's repeated use of terminology and conceptual connections borrowed from Lucretianism. In the subsequent chapter, contra Althusser, it is argued that while Machiavelli does in fact break from classical theory he does so because of his affinity to Epicureanism. However, Machiavelli is not a classical political Epicurean because of his rejection of Lucretius' antipathy to politics.

## **MU Chapter 2: A Step towards a Lucretian Theory of History**

Althusser in chapter 2 turns to Machiavelli's theory of history or "a *general theory of the laws of history*" (MU, 33). Althusser acknowledges from the outset that his interpretation has de-emphasised history in favour of aleatory singular cases and overlooks the existence of a theory of history in Machiavelli's work. Machiavelli, Althusser claims, has a new theory of history as "it is positive, shorn of any religious, moral or aesthetic representation" (MU, 33). Althusser however argues that rejecting representations alone is insufficient to articulate a "knowledge of things," and what is additionally required is the delineation of laws (MU, 32). Machiavelli does so through the use of an "*experimental method*" (MU, 33). Machiavelli's experimental method is premised on his claim that he can write on these matters because of his political experience and his prolonged study of ancient history, which in turns allows for a "*comparison*" of modern and ancient events and circumstances (MU, 33). This comparative experimental method allows

Machiavelli to have a “true understanding of history” (*MU*, 33). Althusser seeks to understand this experimental method and this true understanding through the posing of the following question: “[is] the general theory of history the result of experimental comparisons, or are the ‘laws of history’ their precondition?” (*MU*, 34) Althusser seeks to answer this through an investigation of three theses, which in turn allows him to arrive at Machiavelli’s “position.” What is particularly intriguing is that these three theses circle around the Epicurean philosophy that he admitted in 1982 lurked in Machiavelli’s political theory. Thus, it is not surprising that many of the significant themes that animate this dissertation are present: necessity, chance, origins, duration, the cycle of history and includes explicit mention of Epicurus. What is particularly salient about this chapter is that it clearly demonstrates that Althusser, even in 1986, did not fully comprehend Machiavelli’s post-Epicureanism, especially in regards to history.

Althusser’s first thesis hinges on Machiavelli’s statement in the dedicatory letter, book 1 chapter 39 and the preface to book 2 of *Discourses* that suggests that the world does not change inasmuch as “the course of natural things and humans is immutable” (*MU*, 34). Althusser argues that Machiavelli’s comments are not a “theoretico-scientific proposition on history,” but instead constitute a philosophical thesis because it serves as the basis from which theoretico-scientific statements are produced and the comparison between cases is made possible (*MU*, 34). If the human world did not have “constants” or “invariants” between antiquity and the present, then “it would not be able to know it” (*MU*, 35).

The second thesis pivots on Machiavelli’s argument in *Discourses* book 1 chapter 6 that,

since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall; and to many things that reason does not bring you, necessity brings you. So when a republic that has been ordered so as to be capable of maintaining itself does not expand, and necessity leads it to expand, this would come to take away its foundations and makes it come to ruin sooner (*D*, 1.6.4).

Althusser summarises this as “everything is in continual, unstable motion, subject to an unpredictable necessity,” and notes that this “positively contradicts” the first premise (*MU*, 35).<sup>146</sup> As Althusser points out, there are numerous examples in *The Prince* and *Discourses* where “fortune is liable to unpredictable changes” (*MU*, 35). Althusser introduces the concept of law here, arguing that “[its] law is change, and this law sums up historical time, hence of history: times change, conjunctures change, men change” (*MU*, 35). This law allows for the articulation of an “aleatory” philosophical thesis: “founding not the possibility of an objective knowledge of history and the comparative experimental method, but the possibility of comparative variations on the one hand, and the possibility of revolution on the other” (*MU*, 35). The aleatory thesis is opposed to the first thesis inasmuch that it does not pivot on the objective knowledge of history, or the discernment of laws, predicated on the immutability of nature and humans, instead it allows for the rise of a new category: “comparative variations,” or cases, and revolution i.e. the production of a new variation. These cases are particular conjunctures.

Althusser thus arrives at this third thesis: given the contradiction between the first and second theses there must be a solution. He writes, “Machiavelli furnishes it in the synthesis of the immutable order of things with their continual change: in a *cyclical* theory of history” (*MU*, 35). Althusser’s reinterpretation of Polybius’ theory of anacyclosis is intriguing as he poses it as a problem of duration. Althusser argues that Machiavelli adopts Polybius’ theory of anacyclosis, but fails to realise — as will be argued in chapter 4 — that what appears to be a positive account is in fact the preface for a post-Lucretian critique. Althusser’s initial comments on the theory of anacyclosis is worth quoting at length because of its attention to the beginnings of societies:

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<sup>146</sup> Hardy has correctly argued that “[fortuna] corresponds closely to chance events, general good fortune, and to ‘circumstances.’” “Theory from the Conjuncture,” 19.

at the origin of all governments (and, before them, every society) we find *chance*, which we cannot relate to fortune in some way. To say that chance is at the origin of societies and governments, and to say at the outset human beings were scattered - dispersion is inherent in chance, from Democritus and Epicurus up to Rousseau ... - is obviously to reject any anthropological ontology of society and politics. In particular, it is to reject the theory of Aristotle (that great absentee from Machiavelli's thought) according to which man is 'by nature' a political animal. But it is also - and this is my second observation - to reject (unlike Epicurus) any *contractual* theory of the origin of society and government (*MU*, 36).

Althusser here arrives markedly close to the account of fortune that will be provided in chapters 3 and 4. Althusser links fortuna "in some way" to chance, although, it is apparent that he does not connect to Lucretius' theory of atomic motion and contingency. Furthermore, chance is correctly linked to beginnings given that *virtù* does not yet exist. Additionally, Althusser's remarks are noteworthy because they negate Aristotelian political anthropology, which insists on the ontological predisposition of men towards political society, and instead finds philosophical resources in Epicurus and his emphasis on concrete circumstances (the need to defend oneself). This negation of Aristotelianism is discussed at length in the following chapter where it will be demonstrated that Machiavelli's account is indeed more similar to that of Lucretius and Polybius than Aristotle or Cicero. Althusser, unfortunately elides the significance of this, instead shifting his attention to the different stages of the anacycle. A detailed summary of Polybius' theory of cyclical history will not be reproduced here given that it will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Althusser argues the movement from scattered men as beasts to monarchy is particularly important as it further animates the problem of beginnings and the significance of the rejection of the social contract. Althusser explains, "laws postdate the beginning of society, postdate government by the most powerful, but predate the establishment of monarchy. It is no accident that Machiavelli allots this eminent place to juridical and political laws" (*MU*, 36). Laws are an effect of the beginning of a society and the rule by the most powerful. The importance of this

“eminent place” will become clear when discussing Machiavelli’s “position and stand” shortly. Althusser concludes that the anacycle allows Machiavelli to synthesise “in the vulgar-Hegelian sense, the first thesis (immutable order) and the second (universal mobility),” through an account that simultaneously permits for the universal mobility through different forms of governments in an immutable cycle i.e. historical recurrence (*MU*, 37-38).

These three theses “define Machiavelli’s position and stand” (*MU*, 36). Althusser begins his explanation through a useful detour through a discussion of the

presence of chance at the origin of societies and governments, and then the presence of laws prior to monarchy. We now note that that monarchy is the first form of government. We also note that the degeneration of governments delivers them into *tyranny*, which figures here as the *bête noire* of the people *and* Machiavelli. We further observe that the rebellions inducing revolutions in the forms of government are always the deed of the people, who start hating their leaders and change them. These are only indications (*MU*, 38).

Kingship, or the rule of the powerful individual, gives a society laws, but is not a proper form of government. It is not a proper form of government because the rule of the powerful *does not* function on the basis of laws, nor does it degenerate into a “bad” form. Instead it gives rise to monarchy through the establishment of laws. Monarchy is thus the first form of government because it functions on the basis of laws. Monarchy also does have a “bad” form that it can degenerate into: tyranny. This degenerated form of government is something that “the people *and* Machiavelli” are both opposed to. Althusser is thus gesturing to Machiavelli’s partisanship in favour of the people against the nobility. Thus rebellions and revolutions are always against degenerated forms of government because they are hated by the people. Althusser cites Machiavelli’s statement in book 1 chapter 2 where he “[says] thus that all said modes are pestiferous because of the brevity of life in the three good ones and because of the malignity in the three bad” (*D*, 1.2.5). Althusser points to a particular oddity in Machiavelli’s account:

“[whereas] Polybius ... carefully contrasted *good* governments with those *bad* governments ... Machiavelli pronounces them *all* defective - the bad ones because they are bad, the good ones on account of their ‘brief duration.’” (MU, 39)

There appears to be a contradiction between the inevitable movement of the theory of anacyclosis and the capacity of a state to endure (MU, 40). Indeed, Machiavelli wishes to interrupt the cyclical movement of governments by introducing a completely “*original* form of government” that is “*durable* and capable ... of rendering the state Machiavelli has in mind *durable*” (MU, 40). Althusser argues that Machiavelli’s position is to form a new kind of state that is capable of having duration and escaping “the immutable necessity of the endless cycle of the same revolutions” (MU, 41). Althusser’s account unfortunately becomes untenable when he insists that Machiavelli’s unique contribution to Polybius’ typology was the inclusion of republican form of government because it was “a form of government absent from Polybius” and “because it is ‘steadier and more stable’ - in short, because it is capable of ‘lasting’ eight hundred years in Sparta!” (MU, 39). While Althusser is correct to point out that Machiavelli is concerned with the problem of duration, his argument is incorrect as 1) the republic is not actually absent in Polybius, as discussed in chapter 4, and; 2) Machiavelli’s republic differs from Polybius’ precisely because it does not function on the basis of stability, but instead on dynamism, and will also be discussed at greater length in chapter 4.

A characteristic of Machiavelli’s position is that “there is a significant space, a vacuum, a leap into the theoretical void” (MU, 42). This theoretical void means that Machiavelli cannot rely on classical theory, but that he must “open up his own space: he must leap into the void. Machiavelli is no longer content to furnish the theoretical conditions of possibility for thinking his discourse on history and politics, objectivity, the aleatory ‘dialectic’, forms in the process of

development” (MU, 42). Machiavelli through the process of thinking through his discourse on history and politics actually leaps into the theoretical void i.e. he must think the problem of the new state, and in doing so, must discover new lands. The effects of this position were profound for Machiavelli’s thought. Althusser articulates three such effects, however, the first is most pertinent to understanding the relationship between contingency and chance inasmuch as the first pivots on the relationship between Good, Evil, and virtù.

To explain the first effect, Althusser returns to the first thesis on history and notes that since the world does not change the quantity of good and evil similarly does not change, however, this quantity is distributed unevenly from one province to another and different times a province may have more or less of it (MU, 43). This good, Althusser asserts, citing the Preface to *Discourses* book 2 is virtù (D, 124; MU, 43). Althusser then notes that this “law of conservation of the same sum of good and evil is simultaneously the law of the alteration of the point of insertion - the geographical displacement - of good and evil in history” (MU, 44). The “law of the alteration of the point of insertion” is the variation of quantities of good and evil among different states at a specific moment of time in history.

Althusser then makes a startling assertion:

In truth, *there is no longer a cycle, but displacement and distribution*. It is no longer a question of the various *forms* of government, but of *virtù* and its opposite. Thus this law disregards the cycle, the regular forms of government, and their respective quality (good, bad) What is virtù? ... in Machiavelli *virtù* is quintessentially the quality specific to the *subjective* conditions for the constitution of a state that endures (MU, 44).

“There is no longer a cycle” is thus the achievement of the good that arrests the cycle. Given the shift from the forms of government, it is possible to argue that “*virtù* remains constant in history, while its point of application varies” (MU, 44). The world does not lack virtù, rather, Italy lacks it while other states possess it. Thus, the lack or presence of virtù is a question of the distribution



and displacement of virtù across space and time, and has two implications for Machiavelli: 1) it allows him to think that this problem of the lack of virtù “can and must be fixed, since all the objective conditions are assembled for it to ‘take’ in Italy”; and 2) it allows him to “search in Rome and its history for the exemplary historical *rehearsal* of those laws of political practice to be observed to ensure the triumph of Italian unity” (*MU*, 45). If virtù were not a constant then it could be assumed that virtù is lost forever. However, given that it is a constant, the problem changes to finding the prince with the appropriate virtù and training said prince with the necessary knowledge to be successful. Althusser’s introduction of virtù is intriguing as it: 1) results in a shift away from the question of the form of governments to the problem of the presence of virtù. This shift occurs because the definition of virtù is the capacity of a prince to establish of a state that can endure, *not* the formation of a particular form of government; and 2) virtù has an opposite, but this opposite is not defined. In chapters 3 and 4 it is argued that the opposite of virtù is fortuna.

Althusser rejects Rousseau’s claim that Machiavelli was secretly a crypto-republican who intended to instruct the people about the nature of the tyrannical king (*MU*, 47). Rather, Althusser argues that what is unique about Rome for Machiavelli in the *Discourses* is that it “affords the singular peculiarity of *being a republic founded by kings*, which would never have been what it was without them” (*MU*, 47). The importance of this, Althusser argues, is that it heralds the emergence of a new term: “that of the *beginning*, the *foundation*” (*MU*, 48). Machiavelli is not interested in the opposition between monarchies and republics. Instead he is interested in the “foundation and beginning of a durable state which, once founded by a prince, will prove durable as a result of a ‘composite’ government” (*MU*, 48). Machiavelli’s focus is clear: he is interested in Rome because it was a State that endured and that this capacity to

endure was due to the peculiar nature of its beginnings i.e. it was founded as a monarchy and subsequently became a composite form of government “*that persisted under the guise of the republic*” (MU, 48). Rome endured because it was founded by Kings and because of the laws that were given to it (MU, 48). Again this speaks directly to Machiavelli’s present concerns and is thus evidence of this to-ing and fro-ing between antiquity and the present. Machiavelli does not speak to isolate in antiquity the moment, which mirrors Italy, currently, rather he seeks to understand what are the invariant structures that allowed Rome to endure.

### **MU Chapters 3 and 4: Founding the New State**

In this section, Althusser’s account of the theory and practice of the new prince will be taken into consideration. Althusser discusses these issues over the final two chapters. The first is concerned with the theory and the second with the practice. However, here they will be discussed together as the precise practice of the new prince is not the concern of this current exegesis. In this chapter Althusser brings together the various elements that he outlined earlier and examines the necessary political practice to form a new state, including the need for a prince to hand over political power to the people, and the need for the prince to operate alone. The chapter on the theory of the new prince is important because of its interpretation of book 1 of *Discourses* and *The Prince*, with a particular focus on novelty or the problem of beginnings. Indeed, a strong Lucretian interpretation of *The Prince* and book 1 of *Discourses* will be proffered in the subsequent chapters.

The first aspect of Machiavelli’s theory of the new prince concerns the founding an Italian national unity in a political void (MU, 53). “The form will be a *New Principality* under a New prince, who unifies the country not under a tyrant, but under a king governing by laws. The

*matter* is the condition of Italy at ‘the present time’” (MU, 54). Althusser points out that for Machiavelli it is the King or the new prince who is capable of accomplishing this task. As it will be argued in chapter 4, the people as a whole are incapable of such a task because they lack virtù, they can only maintain freedom through “habituated freedom.” Althusser notes that the present conjuncture has three features: 1) because of the great misery of Italy it is close to “emptiness” inasmuch as it is “*formless*, and hence ready - more so than an already formed country - to be shaped by a new sculptor”; 2) because of this “political vacuum” there is an “immense aspiration to political *being*” i.e. the people are looking for a new prince “who will unify Italy, suppress its divisions, and prevent the intervention of other, *foreign* states”; and 3) what is lacking in Italy is not individual virtù, as evidenced by Machiavelli’s recognition that there are capable and skilled men in Italy, but the “weakness of the leaders” and lack of “military virtù, which derives from leaders, and political virtù, which issues from the Prince” (MU, 54-55). In effect, the conjuncture is ripe for a new Form given the formless state of matter that is Italy and the desire for a new Form, but what is lacking is the necessary military and political virtù i.e. leaders and a prince who possesses the virtù to articulate new Forms. Althusser explains, “Machiavelli finds himself in a situation that obliges him to reason in *ultimate terms*, to think at the limits of the possible in order to think about the real. Machiavelli’s insistence on referring to a new prince and a new principality is located in this extreme position, where he is condemned to thinking the possible at the boundary of the impossible” (MU, 56). Machiavelli is not content with simply reforming the existing matter into new configurations; instead he is interested in provoking a new prince to give a new form for a new principality.

Althusser turns to book 1 of *Discourses* to analyse this theme. In particular, Althusser is concerned with the beginning of new States and their laws. He points to a dilemma lurking in

*Discourses* book 1, chapter 1: “the exclusion of one term in favour of another, the closure of one space inducing the opening of another” i.e. the relationship between necessity and choice (*MU*, 56). It initially appears that Machiavelli argues that choice should be minimised in favour of necessity inasmuch as it compels ability (cities should be founded on barren lands), however Machiavelli in fact rejects this proposal (*MU*, 56). Machiavelli, Althusser argues, writes that they “must” be founded on fertile lands despite the men being condemned by vice, and thus have laws imposed on them to compel them to virtù (*MU*, 56-57). In doing so, Machiavelli abandons any discourse of an ideal republic and/or understanding of the people as inherently good (*MU*, 57). The role of laws is to induce in people, not moral or virtuous behaviour, but political and military virtù (*MU*, 57). Althusser argues that the point of *Discourses* book 1, chapter 2, is that irrespective of whether one forms a republic or a principality, the laws of said State must be its own (*MU*, 57)

Analysing Machiavelli’s comments on the trial and tumult caused in the aftermath of the Tarquins, Althusser argues that there is a dialectic of laws and fear, which results in laws “[appearing] as a *function* of the conflicts between antagonistic social groups in the state, sometimes called nobles and people by Machiavelli, sometimes ‘opposing humours’ and sometimes *classes*” (*MU*, 58). Laws are always understood in “their relationship with the class struggle from a double angle. In their *outcome* they stabilize the balance of forces between classes and then operate ... as an ‘intermediary,’ engendering ‘liberty’. But in their ‘cause’, they prioritize the people, whose ‘disturbances’ result in the conquest of laws” (*MU*, 59). Once again Machiavelli is a partisan for the people given his consistent advocacy that the King always take the side of the people in such disturbances (*MU*, 59-60). The import of the trials and tumults is not lost on Althusser. When discussing *Discourses* book 1 chapter 6 he notes that the conditions

that ensured that the Spartan and Venetian republics avoided such disturbances, resulted in them also being weak and incapable of expanding (*MU*, 60-61). Althusser derives two lessons from this: first, “using the plebeians in warfare and being able to assimilate foreigners - in other words, increasing the people’s strength”; and second, if one strengthens the people then one strengthens the State (*MU*, 61) Althusser concludes that for Machiavelli one can either chose to be great like Rome and “pay the price” of class struggle which is a necessary condition, or “to remain within narrow limits” (*MU*, 62) Althusser overlooks two points in his account however: 1) the similarities between Lucretius’ account of the beginning of societies and Machiavelli’s; and 2) the aleatory dynamics at play in the trial and tumult between the plebs and the grandis, especially with respect to necessity and habituated freedom. An alternative account can be found in chapter 4.

Althusser concludes, in his discussion of *Discourses* book 1 chapters 9 and 10, that Machiavelli was opposed to tyrannies and that “we understand that *not every end* justifies ‘illegal’ means” (*MU*, 63). Romulus’ murder of his brother was justified only insofar as Romulus needed to be ‘alone’ “as to organise the republic (or kingdom!)” (*MU*, 64). Althusser writes that the thesis “it is necessary to be *alone* to found a new republic or completely reform it” is “fundamental” for Machiavelli (*MU*, 64). All beginnings require the solitude of the prince, which “is the precise correlate of the *vacuum* of the conjuncture” (*MU*, 64). This need for solitude is due to the “exceptional circumstances of his enterprises, which demands that he should possess undivided powers” (*MU*, 64). The exceptionality of this enterprise is that to form a new State from nothing, the prince must be “omnipotent before the *vacuum* of the conjuncture and its aleatory future” (*MU*, 64). Althusser’s connection between solitude, omnipotence the vacuum of the conjuncture and the aleatory future is particularly insightful, although Althusser

himself is not cognisant of this, because it first denotes – as Machiavelli argues in book 1 of *Discourses* as will be seen in chapter 4 – that virtù is not a collective capacity, it is an individual one. The people can never have virtù, whereas an individual may or may not have it. Secondly, given that this lonely virtù is presented before the vacuum - or void - suggests that the conjuncture consists of a formless matter. And thirdly, virtù is connected to the future through the aleatory i.e. the possibility that a given future may exist, but does not already exist and may come to exist depending on a series of contingencies. This aleatory future is the product of a clinamen in which an atom in the void swerves into another atom and forces an encounter. However, Machiavelli's aleatory future is not a tyranny and thus, it is incumbent on the new prince to not “wield this total power arbitrarily. He is the founder of a state (worthy of the name) only if he gives it laws and, through these laws, resigns his exclusive powers and emerges from the solitude” (*MU*, 64). In effect, a sign that a given new prince actually has virtù is that having founded a new State, he gives it laws and then relinquishes his “total power” and “solitude.”

Althusser's “decisive conclusion” is that there are “*two moments* in the constitution of a state”: the first, is “that of the absolute *beginnings*, which is necessarily the deed of one man alone, “a single individual.” Althusser explains, “this moment is itself unstable, for ultimately it can as readily tip over into tyranny as into an authentic state” (*MU*, 64-65). This interpretation is shared in chapter 4. However, Althusser's interpretation of why this is the case again demonstrates a lacunae in his consideration of the aleatory. Althusser is right to note the instability of the absolute beginning, but unfortunately does not relate it back to the question of “accidents,” nor does he discuss the relationship between tyranny and freedom. “Accidents,” as will be discussed in chapter 4, are similarly predicated on “chance” as the beginning of the state, but differ inasmuch that the former is predicated on the State being founded on the basis of

freedom. Althusser does not realise that the formation of a tyrannical state for Machiavelli would mean that the prince lacks virtù. Althusser arrives remarkably close to this realisation when he outlines the second moment of beginning: which is “of duration, which can be ensured only by a double process: the settlement of laws and emergence from solitude ... Now we know that laws are linked to the existence of contending classes, and that they above all establish recognition of the people” (MU, 65). The prince with virtù realises the problem of duration and creating a durable State, and thus establishes laws that pivot on the “existence of contending classes.” “Duration obtains, then, exclusively through laws, by which the Prince can ‘take root’ in his people” (MU, 65). Althusser thus returns to his claim in the previous chapter that although these two moments do exist in Machiavelli’s work, their difference in fact allows to think their “non-difference, their profound unity” (MU, 65). *The Prince* emphasises the first moment and is a study of “the absolute form of the beginning of the state,” whereas the *Discourses* emphasises the second, “the moment of the forms which permit state to take root in the people, via the intermediary of the laws, and render the state capable of both *enduring* and *expanding*” (MU, 65). Althusser account misses the fact that this unity hinges on the two forms of motion in Lucretius and Machiavelli’s displacement of them, as demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4.

Machiavelli interrogates the necessary conditions for beginning a new state in chapter 1 of *The Prince* by posing two questions: the first, what different kinds of principalities are there?; and second, and for Althusser the more important question, “*how* are they acquired?” (MU, 68) Althusser immediately points out that the question of acquisition is different from that of beginnings, but suggests that “it include the question of beginnings, but it seems broader,” and notes that this differentiation needs to be further clarified (MU, 68) Althusser thus will clarify this through an interpretation of chapters I - XI of *The Prince*. Althusser writes, “the next ten

chapters (II - XI) are presented as an exhaustive inventory of *possible* kinds, *potential* because real cases. One thinks of the Cartesian operation of “complete enumeration,” a speculative review” (MU, 68). The complete enumeration of the different kinds of principalities is based on a series of differentiations, the hereditary versus the new state etc., (MU, 69). This enumeration results in Althusser realising that those new States formed by a combining of a hereditary State with annexed ones are “acquired either (a) ‘through luck’ or (b) ‘*through ability*’” (MU, 69). Althusser thus importantly equates fortuna to chance, and juxtaposes it to ability (*virtù*) (MU, 69). Unfortunately, Althusser does not either reflect further on this equation or juxtaposition, and their implications on the concept of the aleatory.

Machiavelli, while acknowledging principalities like ecclesiastical principalities, tyrannies, hereditary states, and republics, exist, excludes them from his study and opts to study “new principalities acquired by conquest, so-called ‘*mixed* principalities’ (chapter III); and *completely new* principalities, acquired either by someone else’s arms or by one’s own, by luck or *virtù*” (MU, 70). Althusser infers that Machiavelli regards the excluded forms of principality to be “outdated” and argues, “Machiavelli can set up his political problem only on condition of *making a clean sweep of existing feudal forms as incompatible with the objective of Italian unity*” (MU, 70). In effect, Italian national unity can only be achieved through the formation of a new form of principality. The old feudal forms are incapable of being the basis of a new State, and thus must be treated as “raw material” in the formation of a new one (MU, 71) This formation of course occurs through the expansion of one State by the conquest of existing feudal states (raw material), to include more and more of the nation, and the formation of “mixed principalities” (the new State) (MU, 71). Althusser however, overlooks the similarity between



the composition of mixed principalities and Lucretius' discussion of the formation of compounds as will be discussed in chapter 3.

This entire problematic of how to form a mixed principality, Althusser suggests, allows a "glimpse" of the "horizon of Machiavelli's whole problematic ... and with it the theme of beginnings" (MU, 73). Althusser, relying on Machiavelli's metaphor of skilful archers who must aim higher to hit their target because of far distance, writes "to aim at a much higher point = to aim *beyond what exists*, so as to attain a goal *that does not exist* but must exist = to aim above all existing principalities, beyond their *limits*" (MU, 73). Once again it is simply not possible to begin a new Principality without addressing the beginning of a new form. Althusser argues that the difficulty of going beyond the limits of what already exists is that

everything is new, that the processes of becoming-the-Prince and becoming-the-Principality are one and the same: the process of the new development, the beginning. The Prince does not pre-exist the New Principality; the New Principality does not precede the New Prince (MU, 73).

The new prince and the new principality begin together. This beginning together is predicted on three conditions, which it is important to detail here because here Althusser brings together the encounter, fortuna and virtù together. Interestingly Althusser does not draw any Lucretian implications from these conditions, especially with respect to atomic movement.

The first condition, Althusser mentions, is precisely that for a beginning to occur it must "assume the form of a favourable '*encounter*' between two terms: on the one hand, the objective conditions of the conjuncture X of an unspecific region — *fortuna* — and on the other, the subjective conditions of an equally indeterminate individual Y - *virtù*" (MU, 74). There are three possible forms for this encounter: 1) correspondence: this is the "limit-form" or a "favourable" form inasmuch that there a correspondence between "good fortune" - "an auspicious 'opportunity', 'matter' ready to receive a form" - and political virtù on the part of the individual,

“which consists in determining the shape to give the pre-existing material in order to found a durable principality”; 2) non-correspondence: the “negative form” where “fortuna does everything - as regards to the conjuncture and individual - but *the individual is not endowed with corresponding virtù*,” thus the prince will not be able to endure when fortuna leaves him and is unable to form a durable state; and 3) deferred correspondence: this is a situation in which the individual can initially benefit from fortuna and “[*fortuna*] once again takes charge of everything, without the *virtù* of the individual having any hand in it,” but will subsequently through the practice of virtù will “*recapture*” fortuna and “transform the fortuna of an instant into political duration” and will be able to found a state with necessary “foundations” (MU, 74). Althusser concludes his discussion of this first condition by noting that “everything revolves around the *encounter and non-encounter*, the correspondence and non-correspondence, of *fortuna and virtù*” (MU, 74).

The second condition, Althusser extends the trifold schematic described above to the particular case of an individual prince who relies on the arms of another, and notes that this operates in relation to virtù in a manner akin to that of fortuna (MU, 74-75). Again there are two cases at work here: 1) the prince who relies on the arms of others and has no virtù of his own - thus rendering him incapable of deferred correspondence - and is thus doomed to serving others and will be unable to form a durable State; and 2) the prince through deferred correspondence is able to “*master his beginnings*, and found a state that endures. If he can master this initial dependence, as in the case of fortuna, this will be *virtù*” (MU, 75).

Finally, the third condition is “the effect of the encounter/correspondence: the conversion of *fortuna* into *virtù*, the casting of *fortuna* as *virtù*” (MU, 75). Althusser states that the political significance of this is indicated in chapter VII, using the examples of chapter VI (MU, 75 For

Althusser casting fortuna into virtù is both the turning of an instant of fortuna into political duration, and the structuring of the matter of fortuna through political virtù to produce the foundations of a new State (*MU*, 75). Althusser writes that he will put aside the “philosophical implications of this astonishing theory,” but notes that a specific theory for the formation of a new principality by a new prince are “sketched” i.e. fortuna “must arrange the ‘matter’ that is to receive a form. At the same time, an individual must emerge who is endowed with *virtù* ... and finally capable of laying ‘very strong foundations for his future power’, by rooting himself in the people through *virtù*” (*MU*, 75-76). Again Althusser does not provide a particularly Lucretian analysis of the manner in which fortuna “arranges” the “matter” that the prince must give form to vis-a-vis “accidents.” However, it is clear that once the matter is arranged then a new prince can give it a form through the practice of his virtù, which roots him amongst the people, and allows him to lay down strong foundations for a new principality. As Althusser notes, this new prince is the appearance of politics (*MU*, 76).

Althusser’s closing chapter focuses on the practice of the new prince and analyses chapters XII - XXIII. Althusser argues that there are three points that need to be made in respect to practice: 1) the need for a new prince who is rooted in the people and forms a popular State; 2) the practice of power through the State; and 3) the State itself can be divided into three elements: the apparatus of force (the army), the apparatus of consent (religion and ideology), and the political-juridical apparatus between the two which functions through laws (*MU*, 81-82). Althusser notes that he has already discussed the law, and will now focus on the army and religion. Putting aside the study of new political-military form because it is not a focus of the present study, it is necessary to address the question of religion briefly because it will be discussed briefly in the subsequent chapters in respect to the relationship between virtù and

fortuna. Althusser argues that religion functions as mass ideological state apparatus. Machiavelli however, “does not confront religion with the question of its origin and religious credentials. He considers it from an exclusively political, factual point of view, as an instrument, alongside the army, for the foundation, constitution and duration of the state” (MU, 90). Althusser correctly notes that while Romulus “had only laid the initial foundations of Rome and designed its laws; it still remained to secure the people’s obedience and ‘mould’ it” (MU, 90). Thus, it was Numa who, wishing to bring civil obedience to the people, used religion as “absolutely necessary for maintaining a civilised society” (MU, 90). This ideological use of religion was not absolutely new as in the past the “Roman kings, consuls and commanders” had also made themselves “masters” over the results of any form of religious practice (MU, 90). Althusser however, completely overlooks the role of accident and its relationship to freedom. Althusser does not notice, as will be discussed in chapter 4, that Rome was the beneficiary of an accident — finding a man with virtù (Numa) — because of the good laws put into place by Romulus and because he built the foundations of Rome on freedom.

Althusser then asks, “What is the Prince?” (MU, 92) Althusser argues that the prince is *not* “some ordinary, private individual,” rather “he is a political individual, wholly defined by his political function, by the necessary existence of the state in the guise of an individual, the individual existence of the state” (MU, 92). The prince is solely defined in relation to virtù and his capacity to found a new State. The Prince is not swayed by satisfying needs or “assuagement of his passions,” “[he] is beyond moral categories of vice and virtue” (MU, 92). Instead he is motivated by a “historical goal - founding, consolidating and expanding a state that endures. His perfection resides in *moral virtue*, not political *virtù* - that is to say, in the excellence of all political virtues - of character, intelligence, etc. - appropriate to accomplishment of his task.”

(MU, 92) Althusser even goes further when he argues that moral virtues and political virtù are not opposites, but “of a *different order*” (MU, 93). Althusser cites Machiavelli’s recognition that the Prince may have to act immorally, such as parricide, assassination etc. (MU, 93). Althusser argues that the only criterion by which to verify “this level of existence ... success” (MU, 92). What “counts” for Machiavelli is whether the prince successfully founded the State and achieved well being for its people, and it is on the basis of this successes, or lack thereof, by which all of the prince’s moral trespasses will be judged (MU, 93).

Althusser closes the chapter by returning to the metaphor of Chiron the Centaur in a manner that is nearly identical to the 1982 manuscript. He again overlooks Lucretius’ discussion of centaurs. He posits that there are three principles of political practice: law, force, and fraud. Althusser explains that, “[it] is no accident, says Machiavelli, that the ancients made the Centaur the political teacher of their great men, suggesting that rulers should become like this strange being: half-man, half-beast” (MU, 94). Althusser notes that Chiron the Centaur is divided into three parts: 1) the human, which is meant to denote rule by human means, especially “by laws,” which Althusser infers to mean moral laws; 2) the lion, which signifies violence; and 3) the fox, which characterises fraud (MU, 94-95). Althusser introduces an innovative interpretation of the role of fraud. He posits that whereas laws and violence exist as human institutions and the army, fraud does not exist inasmuch as it is not a form of government, rather “*it is government to the second degree, a manner of governing the other two forms of government: force and laws*” (MU, 95). In effect, “[fraud] thus opens up a space, beyond force and laws, for diverting their existence - a space in which force and law are substituted for, feigned, deformed, and circumvented” (MU, 96). This “master of fraud” allows the prince to ignore every “existing political form” in the formation of a New Principality (MU, 96-97). The new prince, to practice

virtù, must “take the reality of the popular ideology into account, and inscribe therein his own representation, which is the public face of the state. But his ideological policy must be a politics, not an ideological demagogy” (*MU*, 99). Thus, the new prince’s virtù will only be successful in founding a new State, which is what really determines whether he had virtù in the first place (the function of history), by taking into account the existing popular ideology (the ideology of a humanist Rome) and inscribing himself in it (writing the *Discourses*), however, it must be a politics (the founding of a State that can endure through the correct relationship between prince and the people) and not ideological demagogy (simply conforming to the reputation that one has gained through the necessary measure to form the State) (*MU*, 99). Thus, the prince must not be hated by his people, and not should solely rely on love, but must instead be feared without being hated by using ideology (*MU*, 99-101).

Althusser then, in conclusion, reminds his reader that fear and force alike must be subordinated to the political goal: unifying Italy (*MU*, 101). There must first be the “matter” which lacks a “suitable form” (Italy), and second a new prince with virtù because the existing political forms that exist are incapable of giving rise to this new political form (*MU*, 101-102). To form such a new principality, a new political base is required and the old political forms must be gotten rid of. However, this does not occur in a vacuum and the prince “will have to ‘mould’ existing men, who bear the scars of feudal forms of political domination, in their customs, and their religious and moral lives” (*MU*, 102). It is worth bearing in mind that the void still has formless matter, it is not pure nothingness. Furthermore, Althusser argues that Machiavelli does not want to ‘reform’ existing States, but to form a new “radically new *political base*” (*MU*, 102). Machiavelli wishes to form a new State that expands and is able to include new populations in the State, because he intends to mould them through education (*MU*, 102). This moulding

consists of educating the people in fear, but not hatred, as the prince's power must be "popular," not tyrannical, "and that by means of his power the popular Prince circumscribes the class struggle between nobles and people, to the advantage of the latter" (MU, 103). While agreeing with Althusser here, it is worth remembering that Machiavelli regards this to be a characteristic of free principalities. The question of freedom of course does not ever get discussed by Althusser because he regards it to be an idealism, but it is an idealism that he cannot avoid.

In 1982 and 1986, Althusser would outline the first strong Lucretian interpretation of Machiavelli. Machiavelli was the first witness after Epicurus/Lucretius to aleatory materialism, and thus belonged to the underground current of aleatory materialism, but also innovative inasmuch that he thought it in a political way. Althusser would subsequently try to map out Machiavelli's concepts, in an admittedly loose fashion, onto his interpretation of Lucretius, which precluded a discourse of freedom and will, and indexed to a political problem: the foundation of a new State. Through this indexation, Althusser explores the theory of the aleatory, which has been argued is too close to "chance" and did not permit a theory of "contingency"; a theory of history, which, while correctly arguing that there is no contradiction between conjunctures and structures, but hems too close to Polybius' account and does not realise how accident and virtù function; and a positive theory of virtù, which once again does not fully realise its Lucretian import. It is thus necessary to return to Lucretius, and Machiavelli's attempt to write a critical edition of Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*. While Althusser has pointed a line of inquiry, his inattention to the precise contours of Lucretius' thought and its implications on Machiavelli means that it is necessary that another interpretation, a strong Lucretian account, be articulated.

### A New Beginning

“One must philosophize and at the same time laugh and take care of one’s household and use the rest of our personal goods, and never stop proclaiming the utterances of correct philosophy.” - Epicurus<sup>147</sup>

In this chapter, the beginnings of an alternative account of the Lucretius-Machiavelli relationship are laid out. The first element of this alternative is Machiavelli’s rejection of Lucretius’ political apathy and Lucretius’ conception of the “common good,” a life of contemplation. Machiavelli does not, however, follow in the footsteps of other political Epicureans like Philodemus. Instead he produces an aleatory political thought. Yet despite rejecting this central tenet of Lucretius’ philosophy Machiavelli continues to adhere to other significant aspects of the doctrine, especially Lucretius’ theory of beginnings and atomic. Thus, in the second and third sections key aspects of Lucretius’ philosophy are presented. The second section introduces atoms, compounds, and the tendencies towards aggregation and disaggregation by paying particular attention to book 1 and book 3 lines 830 – 1093 of *De Rerum Natura*. Through a commentary on book 5 lines 1 - 1030, the third section delineates Lucretius’ philosophical shift from metaphysics to physics. This shift is vital for understanding how Lucretius uses his atomist account of the world and motion to explain phenomena in the everyday world. This movement from philosophical abstraction about the cosmos and its components to phenomenon in the world is completed in the final section with the introduction of human societies and the problem of their beginnings. Through a comparative analysis of Aristotle’s *Politics*, Cicero’s *Des Republica*, Lucretius’ *DRN* book 5 lines 1 - 1030, and Machiavelli’s *Discourses* book 1 chapter 1 it is

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<sup>147</sup> Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader*, 38.



demonstrated that Machiavelli's theory of the beginnings of human society and state formation is influenced by Lucretius, rather than Aristotle and Cicero. Furthermore, I argue that Machiavelli's conceives of the "common good" as the foundation of a state grounded in freedom and virtù.

### ***DRN Book 1 Lines 1 - 110: Philosophy, Politics and Aleatory Political Thought***

The Epicurean distaste for politics contrasts sharply with Machiavelli's emphasis on politics.<sup>148</sup> At first blush it seems impossible to reconcile Lucretius' philosophy with Machiavelli's political thought. It is obvious that Machiavelli rejects this aversion to political engagement and refuses to retreat to the "garden of Epicurus." Before proceeding to demonstrate how Machiavelli relates to Lucretius' philosophy, the relationship between philosophy and politics in Lucretius' doctrine must be outlined. Political apathy is clearly articulated in Lucretius' own writings.<sup>149</sup> Lucretius prefigures this apathy as evident in his intention for writing *De Rerum Natura*. However, this critique of political engagement is only fully established when Lucretius articulates his concept of the "good life," the life of contemplation, and the need to avoid the fear of death. The fear of

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<sup>148</sup> There is considerable debate whether Lucretius is in fact a political philosopher. Colman, for example, argues that Lucretius is a theorist of political life but outlines a theory that is premised on the avoidance of politics. Whereas, Fish notes that Lucretius could not have argued for a form of political "living unnoticed" because of the trying nature of Roman politics at the time, and thus articulated a more robust form of political Epicureanism. While Roecklein, disagreeing with both Colman and Fish, writes that Lucretius is a political rhetorician, interested in only saving himself through the development of a private language, incomprehensible to those not versed in Epicureanism. This latter interpretation, in particular, is unviable when one takes into account that all scholars agree that Lucretius is trying to convince Memmius of Epicurean doctrine and cannot be putting forward a private language. Roskam, in agreement, with Colman writes that Lucretius did use political imagery and did theorise political life, but in turn argued against political participation and preferred to "live unnoticed." Roskam's position is likely the most viable as he demonstrates, through outlining Lucretius' examples of political involvement and his negative account of political ambition, that Lucretius' overall intention is to clarify that politics is the source of more pains than pleasures. See Colman, *Lucretius as Theorist of Political Life*, 3; Fish, "Not all Politicians are Sisyphus," 87; Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicurean Philosophy*, 84-85; Roskam, *Live Unnoticed*, 85-99.

<sup>149</sup> Minyard has argued that from whichever vantage point of analysis one approaches Lucretius' work the reader is made to see the "inadequacies" of civic life, which in turn provokes a disbelief in the existing civic account of reality and thus facilitates a rejection of "the practice of civic virtue," and a search for a new non-civic account of reality. See Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 68. In part this is marked by a shift from *civitas Romanas* to a *communis salus* predicated on *voluptas*, *amicitia* etc. Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 70.

death is vital to Lucretius' account of political apathy as it is the emotion that animates the life of politics.

Lucretius wrote the poem with the intention of winning the friendship of the politically ambitious Memmius who is unable to dedicate sufficient time to the study of the nature of the cosmos because of his undivided attention to the civic life of Rome. The desire to befriend Memmius becomes evident in the opening lines of the poem. Lucretius begins with an address to Venus, who Lucretius notes was the "[mother] of Aeneas' people," in effect she is mother of the Roman people and also the patron goddess of Memmius' clan, and asks her to give his words "charm that will ensure their immortality" by convincing Memmius of his message (*DRN*, 1: 1-30). Venus has already gifted Memmius "with all fine qualities" (*DRN*, 1: 20-30). Lucretius states,

For you alone have the influence to obtain for mortals the blessing of tranquil peace, since barbarous war is the province of Mars mighty in arms who often stretches himself back upon your lap, vanquished by the never-healing wound of love; throwing back his handsome neck and gazing up at you, in open-mouthed wonderment he feasts his greedy eyes with love; and, as he reclines, his breath hangs upon your lips. As he rests upon your holy bed, bend, goddess, to enfold him in your arms; and from your lips, worshipful lady, let a stream of sweet, coaxing words flow in an appeal on behalf of the Romans for placid peace. For at this tempestuous time in my country's history, I cannot tackle my task with tranquil mind, and the gravity of the situation is such that the noble descendent of the Memmii cannot fail the cause of public security (*DRN*, 1: 30-50).

Lucretius thus asks Venus to convince Mars to cease the Roman republic's civil wars and wars of expansion.<sup>150</sup> Machiavelli would of course have fewer qualms about wars for expansion and

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<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, Minyard situates Lucretius in the context of a crisis that "was general and from it emerged, first, the Augustan arrangement, or *pax*, and, last, the reorientation of life by Christianity. The crisis was, at least, political, military, cultural, and intellectual. It was perhaps also social and economic." See Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 1. In particular, three major fault lines are evident in *De Rerum Natura*: 1) a crisis in Roman social structures "where movement was produced by the various shocks resulting proximately or ultimately from the process of Roman expansion"; 2) a crisis caused within the polis of the Greek East caused by Roman expansion; and

will advocate for “trial and tumult” within the republic, while simultaneously disparaging factionalism. All of this political tumult resulted in Lucretius being troubled as he could not pursue the Epicurean common good, nor could “the noble descendent of Memmii” who was concerned with the affairs of state. Indeed, Lucretius directly appeals to Memmius to put aside the “cause of public security” and focus on his argument. He writes, “As for what follows Memmius, lend open ears and an alert mind, released from cares, to true philosophy ... be sure that you do not contemptuously discard them without having understood them” (*DRN*, 1: 50-60). Lucretius believes that if, with Venus’ help, Memmius was to listen to the “true philosophy” he would not only understand how things truly are, thus joining the Epicurean flock, but also potentially abandon the political life. The goal of Epicurean philosophy is thus to compel a particular practice of living through which the practitioner can attain the pleasurable life, defined as the life of contemplation. The pleasurable life is attained through knowledge about the world as it really is and no longer being fearful of death and abandoning superstitions. Before continuing with the exegesis of book 1 and Lucretius’ introduction of the basic concepts of atomism, it is necessary to further explain Lucretius’ position in respect to the relationship between politics and death, as it allows for an understanding of the goals of Epicurean philosophy and its relationship to politics.

Lucretius turns to the problem of death in book 3. He writes, “my next task is to illuminate in my verses the nature of the mind and the spirit, and send packing that fear of Acheron which disturbs human life from its deepest depths, suffusing all with the darkness of death, and allows no pleasure to remain unclouded and pure” (*DRN*, 3: 30-41). The goal of Epicurean philosophy

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3) the clash between Roman and Hellenistic civilisations on all fronts including military, culture, politics and economics; indeed, this amounted to a crisis in “civitas Romana.” See Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 1-2.

is to enjoy “unclouded and pure” pleasure. The precise nature of Lucretius’ concept of pleasure will be discussed later, but it is important to highlight here that the “tranquil mind” and the problem with fearing death is that it does not allow for the enjoyment of Epicurean pleasure. “[The] lesson is this: it is advisable to appraise people in doubt and danger and to discover how they behave in adversity; for then and only then is the truth elicited from the bottom of their hearts: the mask is ripped off; the reality remains” (*DRN*, 3: 50-59). As Lucretius explains,

For as a rule the ignominy of humble position and the sting of penury are considered to be incompatible with a life of enjoyment and security, and are thought to imply a premature loitering before the portals of death from which people, under the impulse of unfounded terror, desire to flee far away and be far removed. To this end, they swell their fortune through the bloodshed of civil war and greedily multiply their wealth, heaping up murder on murder ... Similarly it is often the same fear that makes them fret with envy that before their eyes another person possess power and, parading in the brilliant array of office, attracts the gaze of all, while they complain that their own lot is to wallow in murk and mire. Some throw away their lives in an effort to gain statues and renown. And often, in consequence of dread of death ... forgetting that the source of their sorrows is this very fear, which prompts one person to outrage decency, another to break bonds of friendship, and, in short, to overthrow all sense of natural duty (*DRN*, 3: 60-90).

The fear of death is not only in contradiction with the goal of Epicurean philosophy i.e. “the life of enjoyment and security,” but in order to avoid a “humble position” or poverty people try to gain great wealth through civil war or to be involved in politics. The involvement in politics is due to the fear of death. More egregiously the involvement in politics or war, in turn, further aggravates existing fears introduced by political instability (civil war, for example). It is not necessary to explain why, for Lucretius, death is not to be feared as his explanation takes us afield from the relationship between politics and philosophy. Instead, what is vital to comprehend is the course of action that Lucretius advocates. Lucretius argues,

Death, then, is nothing to us and does not affect us in the least, now that the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal. And as in times past we feel no distress when the advancing Punic hosts were threatening Rome on every side,

when the whole earth, rocked by the terrifying tumult of war, shuddering quaked beneath the coasts of high heaven, while the entire human race was doubtful into whose possession the sovereignty of the land and the sea was destined to fall; so, when we are no more, when body and soul, upon whose union our being depends, are divorced, you may be sure that nothing at all will have the power to affect us or awaken sensation in us, who shall not then exist (*DRN*, 3: 830-841).

Lucretius is thus suggesting to Memmius that he too feel no distress about the political strife that wracked Rome internally, or due to the disputes regarding sovereignty, and instead abandon his underlying fear of death and understand the true philosophy and thus live a life of pleasure. Worse still the fear of death causes one to retreat from reason into the hands of the “fable-mongers” and unreason, i.e. into superstition and religion (*DRN*, 1: 100-110). Lucretius writes that, “[when] all could see that human life lay grovelling ignominiously in the dust, crushed beneath the grinding weight of superstition, which from the celestial religions displayed its face, lowering over mortals with hideous scowl,” it was Epicurus who was the first to “confront it boldly” (*DRN*, 1: 60-70). Addressing Memmius directly, he states,

The time may come when you yourself, terrorised by the fearsome pronouncements of the fable-mongers, will attempt to defect from us. Consider how numerous are the fantasies they invent, capable of confounding your calculated plan of life and clouding all of your fortunes with fear. And with reason; for if people somehow realized that there was a limit set to their tribulations, they would somehow find strength to defy irrational beliefs and the threats of fable-mongers. As it is, they have no way, no ability, to offer resistance, because they fear death brings punishment with no end (*DRN*, 1: 100-120).

The pleasurable life is thus one that is concerned with contemplation and achieves restfulness in thought and body alike through a proper knowledge of things. Politics and religion both are a distraction from true philosophy and its practice. Lucretius instructs Memmius that, “[this] terrifying darkness that enshrouds the mind must be dispelled not by the sun’s rays and the dazzling darts of day, but by study of the superficial aspect and underlying principle of nature”

(*DRN*, 1: 140-150). Lucretius had already previously mentioned, when discussing the role of religion in distracting one from the true philosophy, that he “[will] proceed to explain to you the working of heaven above and the nature of the gods, and will unfold the primary elements of things from which nature creates, increases and sustains all things, and into which she again resolves them when they perish” (*DRN*, 1: 50-60). And that these “primary elements” of things are synonymously referred to as “matter,” “generative particles of things,” “seeds of things” and “ultimate particles” (*DRN*, 1: 50-61)

Before discussing the nature of atoms, it is important to mention that Machiavelli rejects whole cloth Lucretius’ discussion of politics and death. Indeed, as noted by a proponent of a soft Lucretian interpretation: “Machiavelli does not want us to either lose heart for politics in the manner of Lucretius or try to transcend necessity à la Kant.<sup>151</sup>” Distancing himself from any philosophy that diverts the reader away not only from political responsibility, but also political action, Machiavelli rejects philosophies that prioritize contemplation. His rejection is evident when he juxtaposes the ancient religion of the Gentiles to Christianity:

Our religion [Christianity] has glorified humble and contemplative more than active people. It has then placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human; the other placed it in greatness of spirit, strength of body, and all other things capable of making men strong (*D*, 2.2.2).

Machiavelli thus brackets the life of contemplation, but also the cosmos, and focuses exclusively on the world as it exists and the need for political action. His rejection of the life of contemplation demarcates ancient from modern Epicureans.<sup>152</sup> However, he not only rejects the Epicurean distance from politics, but also introduces a theoretical torsion into Epicurean philosophy. Machiavelli’s torsion simultaneously rejects Lucretius’ anti-political attitudes and

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<sup>151</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 82.

<sup>152</sup> Colman, *Lucretius as Theorist of Political Life*, 131.

sustains other fundamental aspects of the doctrine, especially atomic motion, but also the theory of beginnings, and relocates them as political thought rather than philosophy. However, given the centrality of political antipathy to Lucretius' thought, Machiavelli's rejection cannot but alter how other concepts within Lucretius' philosophy function. This altering of concepts is what Althusser had regarded as a "materialism of the encounter" thought by way of politics" or aleatory political thought. Aleatory political thought distinguishes Machiavelli from "political Epicureanism."<sup>153</sup>

There was a long legacy of political Epicureanism prior to Machiavelli's exposure to Lucretius.<sup>154</sup> Political Epicureanism, for example, hypothetically began with Epicurus' now lost work, *On Kingship*. Despite all of the evidence presented about the anti-political nature of the Epicureans, the Epicureans apparently did recognise that under extraordinary situations they were allowed to engage in politics.<sup>155</sup> However, given that there is no evidence that Machiavelli ever had access to Epicurus' *On Kingship*, or other political Epicurean writings like Philodemus' *On the Good King According to Homer*, it is important to differentiate his thought from the political Epicureans of antiquity. Distinguishing Machiavelli from the political Epicurean tradition is made even more tenable a position as there is no evidence that Lucretius and Philodemus influenced one another despite being contemporaries.<sup>156</sup> In the subsequent sections, key concepts that Machiavelli adopts from Lucretius are discussed: in particular, the concepts of atom and void, the theories of aggregation and disaggregation, and the account of how primitive humans began to form society. Explaining the precise concepts that Machiavelli draws from

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<sup>153</sup> To read accounts that argue that Machiavelli was a political Epicurean see Rahe, *In the Shadow of Lucretius*, 48.

<sup>154</sup> It is difficult to determine who was a Roman political Epicurean. On this problem see Castner, "Difficulties in Identifying Roman Epicureans," 138-147.

<sup>155</sup> Fowler, "Lucretius and Politics," 127.

<sup>156</sup> See Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, 66.

Lucretius' philosophy also helps map the shift from metaphysics to physics, physics to the world, and the world to politics in the latter's work.

### **Book 1, Lines 140 - 920: Atoms, Void and Compounds**

In this section, the two basic components of Lucretius' atomist philosophy, void and atom, along with their properties, are outlined. Furthermore, how these concepts operate in Machiavelli's system will be mentioned in passing. Outlining these two concepts necessarily results in discussions about other Lucretian ideas such as the principle that nothing arises from nothing. Following the discussion of these two concepts, Lucretius' discussion of compounds is explored. The discussion of compounds also helps introduce Lucretius' argument that compounds return to their primitive state as atoms because of internal or external forces. Understanding the formation of compounds is vital as it pivots on the twin processes of aggregation and disaggregation.

Lucretius introduces atoms by first positing that people turn to religion because they do not understand why things exist as they do (*DRN*, 1: 150-160). He thus explains to Memmius that it is necessary to "study the superficial aspect and underlying principle of nature" (*DRN*, 1: 140-150). Lucretius thus introduces two levels of nature: a superficial layer and an underlying principle. In Machiavelli's political thought the former constitute "accidents" and the latter is the "effective truth." To study the disparity between the two, Lucretius introduces a rule: "nothing ever springs miraculously out of nothing" (*DRN*, 1: 150-160). Lucretius posits that "things are created from a definite, appointed substance, and it is firmly laid down what this substance can produce" (*DRN*, 1: 200-210). The world and all of the things in it are created from definite substances. Seeds constitute these multiple substances. These seeds will be referred to as atoms, or constituent particles.



Elementary particles, or atoms, cannot be infinitesimally subdivided into objects without any bulk, “because objects that are insufficiently bulky to have any parts cannot possess the essential characteristics of generative matter, namely the variety of interlacements, weights, collisions, concurrences, and movements that cause all things to happen” (*DRN*, 1: 630-640). Atoms are simple bulky particles that through atomic motion (“interlacements, weights, collisions, and movements”) “cause all things to happen” and function as “generative matter.” Lucretius’ refutes other Greek philosophies’ claims about whether substances like fire, water, air or earth are the primary elements of all things, and considers all of these substances to be compounds that are the product of different combinations of generative matter (*DRN*, 1: 630-830). The same applies to things required for human life, like blood. Lucretius in his rebuke of Anaxagoras argues that blood is not composed of blood primary elements rather it is composed of primary elements that in a specific arrangement generate blood (*DRN*, 1: 830 - 920).

Lucretius’ second vital concept is the void. The void’s importance cannot be overstated because without it “movement would be absolutely impossible. For the obvious province of matter, namely to prevent and obstruct, would operate against all things all the time, with the result that nothing could advance because nothing would begin to give way” (*DRN*, 1: 330-340). The different kinds of atomic movement possible and how they relate to fortuna and virtù will be addressed more fully in the subsequent chapter. The notion of void in effect introduces the concept of space in which matter exists and moves. Lucretius points to, but does not develop at this juncture in the text, a form of motion that Althusser repeatedly neglects to mention and is vital for understanding Machiavelli’s notion of fortuna and accident. However, given its significance within the entire interpretation proffered in the subsequent sections and chapters it is necessary to briefly introduce it here. Lucretius pithily summarises it thusly,

But as it is, throughout the seas and lands and heights of heaven we plainly perceive countless things moving in countless different ways; whereas if void does not exist, things would not so much be robbed and deprived of restless motion, as could never under any circumstances have been produced at all, since on every side matter would be packed solid in a motionless matter (*DRN*, 1: 340-350).

The neglected form of atomic movement is quite different from the parallel fall of atoms and clinamen as it is a restless motion resulting in “countless things moving in countless different ways.” The importance of restless movement by atoms in different directions is that such motion result in encounters between different atoms. In Machiavelli’s vocabulary this form of motion is represented by two terms: necessity and accidents.

Lucretius’ concept of space is not limited to explaining the void in which atoms exist, but also describes the space between atoms within a compound. All compounds are composed of both void and atoms. Lucretius refers to the space between atoms within a compound as “porous consistency” (*DRN*, 1: 350-360). The space between atoms within a compound implies that movement occurs within the compound. Movement means that the processes of aggregation and disaggregation are present within the compound and result in changes to the composite body itself, including “internal” disintegration. Although a given composite body may be “stable,” it would be incorrect to assume that stability means that there is a complete arresting of movement. Rather, there is constant movement within the composite body by the particular elements in it. The relationship between stability and constant movement will be further expanded on chapter 4 with respect to the differences between Machiavelli and Polybius’ accounts of the stable nature of the republic. Lucretius concludes that there is no third constituent (*DRN*, 1: 420-450). Everything is a composite of matter and void.

The composite of different elements of matter and void between them is called compound. Lucretius contends, “two kinds of bodies are to be distinguished: there are primary elements of

things, and objects compounded of primary elements” (*DRN*, 1: 480-490). The two kinds of bodies are dissimilar from one another as atoms are solid and do not contain a void in them, whereas compounds are composed of atoms and void simultaneously (*DRN*, 1: 500-520). Lucretius posits that the combination, or interlacing, of constituent particles into a substance gives rise to a compound or a body. Thus, everything in the world is the product of a number of constituent particles, or atoms, interlacing with one another to create combinations called compounds. The process of interlacing is referred to as aggregation. It is mirrored by its reverse: disaggregation.

Because primary elements contain no void and are solid they cannot be destroyed, however, because compounds are an “aggregate of matter” they can “suffer dissolution” (*DRN*, 1: 510-520). The existence of void in an “aggregate of matter,” or compound, means that atomic motion exists within the compound, which in turns allows for processes of aggregation or disaggregation/dissolution. The fact that compounds can “suffer dissolution” means that through force, internal or external to the compound, they can be returned to their state as disaggregated primary elements (*DRN*, 1: 520-540). However, it is important to differentiate disaggregation, destruction and annihilation. Lucretius writes,

The complement of the foregoing doctrine is the principle that, although nature resolves everything into its constituent particles, she never annihilates anything. For if anything were subject to destruction in all its parts, anything might be whisked out of sight in a flash and cease to exist: no force would be needed to effect the dispersion of its parts by unraveling its interlaced fabric. But as it is, because all things are composed of imperishable seeds, nature does not allow us to witness the destruction of anything until it has encountered a force that dashes it to pieces or works its way through the interstices and so breaks it up (*DRM*, 1: 210-230).

The process of disaggregation is different from both “destruction” and “destruction in all its parts.” Lucretius posits that “destruction in all its parts,” or the complete annihilation of a

thing, is not possible because the possibility of duration is undermined as anything can simply disappear. There is not a hyper-chaos in which in one instance something, like the world, exists, and in another it does not. One can see a clear disparity between Althusser and Lucretius. Althusser forgets the second process or tendency towards disaggregation; instead he simply posits that things can just become undone. In effect, Althusser adopts a hyper-chaotic account. Lucretius opposes any purely chance-based notion of annihilation because of his emphasis on the duration of a compound, and thus “destruction” of a thing is when it encounters a force that “breaks it up.” The process of disaggregation happens through two means: the first is through an external force that impacts a compound; and the second is vis-a-vis internal process “through the interstices” which results in its breaking up. Lucretius thus posits that the process of disaggregation does not include the destroying of primary elements, or atoms. Rather, they are “endowed with an immortal nature” (*DRN*, 1: 230-240). Instead, the immortal nature of atoms results in the creation of new compounds through the re-aggregation of the atoms into new forms (*DRN*, 1: 230-240). If primary elements were destroyable by force then the compound would have no stability because a “mere touch would be enough to cause their death, since there would be no imperishable elements to form a web that in each case could be unwoven only by a real force” (*DRN*, 1: 240-250).

Lucretius notes that “the more void each thing holds within it, the more its internal structure is weakened by assaults of these forces” (*DRN*, 1: 530-540). Thus, society, like a compound, that has a growing political void inside it, has a structure that is consistently being weakened by internal or external forces that assault it, thus resulting in its eventual disaggregation. Significantly Lucretius argues that all compounds necessarily over time weaken, disaggregate and decompose, otherwise there will be nothing new. Disaggregation over time

through a process of weakening and decomposing is thus in contrast to the suddenness of Althusser's undoing. Lucretius writes, "once born ... the first elements must consist of imperishable substance, into which everything can be resolved at its last hour, so that a constant supply of matter may be available for the renewal of things" (*DRN*, 1: 540-550). While elementary particles must be composed of imperishable matter, compounds must be perishable, so that there can be a "renewal of things." The significance of the perishability and renewability of compounds will become apparent in chapter 4 when discussing Polybius' theory of anacyclosis.

Lucretius posits that, "the first elements must consist of imperishable substance, into which everything can be resolved in the final hour, so that the constant supply of matter may be available for the renewal of things" (*DRN*, 1: 540-550). Lucretius notes that the process of disintegration is far quicker than that of aggregation. He writes, "it is an observable fact that anything can be destroyed faster than it can be reconstructed," but realises that with "eternity's long duration of days and all time past would already have been disarranged and disintegrated [and] could never be repaired in the rest of time" (*DRN*, 1: 550-561). Lucretius thus introduces "a definite and permanent limit to the process of destruction has been established, since we observe that each thing is renewed, and that for every kind of being there is established a specific period of time in which it is able to attain the bloom of maturity" (*DRN*, 1: 560-570). This "blooming of maturity" is a period of aggregation of atoms and compounds into ever-larger compounds. After a given compound has attained its bloom of maturity, the process of disaggregation and destruction comes to the fore (*DRN*, 1: 580-591). Lucretius further explains that generative matter as it aggregates into compounds or disaggregates back into simpler compounds or atoms, also gains or losses properties. Lucretius writes, in the context of the

polemic against Heraclitus, “every change that involves a thing outstepping its own limits means the instantaneous death of what previously existed” (*DRN*, 1: 670-680). As generative matter aggregates more matter, or a given compound disaggregates, the form of the compound changes. The elementary particles do not change, but their arrangement as compounds that generates the different properties and accidents does.

These processes of aggregation and disaggregation are fundamentally important for Machiavelli as he will employ them to articulate the conditions for the beginning of new principalities as demonstrated in the last section of the present chapter, and the destruction of an existing state due to war (external) and the undermining of freedom (internal) as discussed in the following two chapters. Furthermore, this account of the relationship between these two processes and the state neatly dovetails with Althusser’s interpretation of Machiavelli as Althusser argues that Italy was a void in which the necessary elements already existed but lacking only a form. If the elements had been destroyed then it would have been nigh impossible for the construction of a new form unless they were imported somehow. As Lucretius says, “[nothing, therefore, returns to nothing, but everything dissolves and returns to the elements of matter” (*DRN*, 1: 240-250). Similarly, it will be argued that Machiavelli’s notion of the decrepit state of Italy, which Althusser correctly identified as a void, has all of the necessary elements, but lacks a form, because the previous forms had been dissolved due to force (external invasions and internal factionalism), and thus returned to their elements of matter. Machiavelli’s optimism about the possibility of a future for Italy reflects Lucretius’ conclusion that, “[and] so no visible object ever suffers total destruction, since nature renews one thing from another, and does not sanction the birth of anything unless she receives the compensation of another’s death” (*DRN*, 1: 260-270). It ought to be noted that Lucretius process of destruction can be so gradual at times

that it cannot be seen, whereas at other times things can fall apart at alarming speed. Lucretius writes, “[likewise], whenever things waste away, decayed by age ... you cannot see what they lose at any single moment” (*DRN*, 1: 320-330).

Lucretius ends the chapter through a brief discussion of atomic motion in the context of two questions: whether there is a limit to the number of elementary particles that exist, and whether the void is finite or infinite? Again the precise arguments that Lucretius makes for his conclusions do need not to be rehearsed here, but how these conclusions reflect on the problem of atomic motion is important for the present study, and will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. However, now that an outline has been provided regarding the basic components of the Epicurean system, and the basic argument for a shift from metaphysics to physics has been made, there needs to be a further demonstration of the shift from physics to politics through a discussion of Lucretius’ account of the beginning of the world book 5, lines 91 - 508, and the beginning of civilisation in book 5, lines 772 - 1104. These will be later juxtaposed to Machiavelli’s argument in book 1 chapter 1 of *Discourses*.

### **Book 1, Lines 470-490 and Book 5, Lines 91-1030: From Metaphysics to Physics to World**

In this section, Lucretius’ explanation that the existence of the world, especially the social world, is qualitatively different from the existence of the void and atoms is explored through a commentary on book 1, lines 470-490. Lucretius’ differentiation between natural properties and accidental properties helps introduce a shift from metaphysics to physics. Thus, the process of the beginnings of the world and life on it will be explored through an examination of book 5 lines 91-508 and 772-924. An exploration of these lines will complete the passage from metaphysics to physics to society and politics in the world as it exists. Indeed, it will be

demonstrated that Lucretius account of atomic motion underpins this entire shift and that there is a terminological displacement functioning here.

Lucretius returns to the difference between the superficial and underlying aspect of things by introducing the distinction between accidental occurrences and properties. Lucretius writes, “You will find that all predictable things are either properties or accidents of matter and void” (*DRN*, 1: 450-460). Lucretius explains the difference between the two: “[a] property is that what cannot under any circumstances be severed and separated from the body,” and examples include the relationship of “heaviness to rocks,” “touch to all matter” or “intangibility to void,” whereas “to slavery, poverty and wealth, freedom, war, concord, all those things whose coming and going does not impair the essential nature of a thing, we regularly apply the appropriate term accidents” (*DRN*, 1: 450-460). Properties are inherent and essential aspects of a thing, whereas accidents are not essential attributes to a thing, rather they are phenomena that operate at a social level.<sup>157</sup> All of the “accidents” Lucretius identifies are social relationships. Even “concords,” the basis of human society, are ‘accidents’ and not natural in the same sense as weight or texture. The accidental nature of concords between humans is the basis of a Lucretius’ rejection of Aristotle’s account of politics and is similarly repeated by Machiavelli as will be demonstrated in the last section of the present chapter.

Lucretius suggests that war, or even society, is not essential and does not effect the real nature of a thing. The constituents of the world, atoms and void, but also physical compounds, like rocks, are indifferent to the social and political that functions at the level of accidents. Lucretius extends this concept of “accidents” to notions of time and history. Lucretius states,

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<sup>157</sup> Minyard points out that, “[social] institutions are founded on an ethical delusion. They are not natural, in the sense that they do not flow from nature’s demands and so are not connected to nature by knowledge.” See Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 54. This artificiality of social institutions is vital inasmuch that it contravenes Aristotle’s notion of the polis as will be argued later in the present chapter.



Likewise time has no independent existence: rather from events themselves is derived a sense of what has occurred in time past, of what is happening at present, and of what is to follow in the future; and it must be admitted that no one has a sense of time as an independent entity, but only as something relative to the movement of things and their restful calm (*DRN*, 1: 460-470).

Lucretius explains that one's interpretation of the past (history), analysis of the present, and predictions about the future depends on the context in which one is in, rather than some objective account about the "essential" nature of historical events. History also functions at the level of appearance, like poverty and wealth. Lucretius writes,

Again, when people assert that the rape of Tyndareus' daughter and the subjugation of the people of Troy in war are facts, beware of possibly being trapped by them into an acknowledgment that these events have an independent existence, simply because those generations of human beings, of whom they were accidents, have been swept away beyond recall by ages past (*DRN*, 1: 460-470).

Three points need to be made. First, Lucretius, concerned by "possibly being trapped" into acknowledging the facticity of a given narrative of events as having an "independent existence" i.e. objectivity, argues that history performs an ideological function. Lucretius' insight about the superficiality, or accidental, nature of history and historical writing resonates with Machiavelli's use of historical narratives to construct his own arguments in favour of particular courses of action. His historical writing was written from a perspective meant to compel specific kinds of action.

Second, Lucretius claims that the "independent existence" of these events is uncertain because "those generations of human beings ... have been swept away beyond recall by ages past." This claim is reminiscent of Machiavelli's evidence for his own claim in *Discourses* 1.1 that to avoid idleness, laws should compel people to engage in particular behaviour patterns:

the kingdom of the Egyptians, in which necessity ordered by laws was able to do so much that the most excellent men arose there, notwithstanding that the country is very agreeable. If their names had not been eliminated by antiquity, they would

be seen to merit more praise than Alexander the Great and many others whose memory is still fresh (*D*, 1.1.4).

While Althusser correctly pointed out that Machiavelli rejects the idea of beginning a new state on “sterile lands” to constrain it by necessity, instead insisting on forming the new state on fertile lands with the necessary laws to constrain the behaviour of men, he fails to note the resonances between these two passages and how Machiavelli’s specific mode of historical writing pivots on this Lucretian insight.

And finally, “accidents” are the effects of people. They did not occur naturally, but are caused by actors. Thus, Lucretius concludes that, “you may clearly see that all events without exception have, unlike matter, no independent existence, and cannot be said to exist in the same sense as void; rather you may with justification term them accidents of matter, or of space in which all things happen” (*DRN*, 1: 470-490). Lucretius introduces two levels of analysis: the metaphysical level of the void and atoms, and the level of accidents caused by human actions. The latter “cannot be said to exist in the same sense” as the former. Given this differentiation, one can effectively bracket the metaphysical level, while retaining the principles of atomic motion. Indeed, despite the two levels existing in different senses, the principles of atomic motion, for example, continue to function in both. The manner in which the concepts atoms and void operate on the level of accidents, or the world as it exists, will be interrogated for the remainder of the present section.

Lucretius paradoxically begins his explanation of the beginnings of the world by first noting that the world “sustained for countless years, will collapse” (*DRN*, 5: 90-100). Indeed, Lucretius states that the world will eventually end. He admits that “I am well aware how strange and stupendous to the mind is the notion that heaven and earth are destined to be destroyed” (*DRN*, 5: 90-100) Lucretius here refers to sea, the earth and the sky as three “huge fabrics” [tria

talia texta], and as one commentator writes, “the atomic structure of matter is kept in view here” and that it is “used repeatedly in this sense.”<sup>158</sup> “Fabric” suggests a weaving metaphor in which atoms are “woven” together, but can also be “picked apart again, just as any fabric can.”<sup>159</sup> This fabric-like nature of the three huge fabrics assumes Lucretius’ theory of disintegration and once again repeats the initial assertion that everything will come apart at some point, except for elementary particles. I will be returned to this point when discussing the crumbling of rocks.

Despite acknowledging that it may take the actual occurrence of the world’s destruction for him to convince Memmius, he says that he will explain regardless (*DRN*, 5: 100-110). Lucretius then, intriguingly, writes, “[but] may piloting fortune steer this catastrophe far from us, and may reasoning rather than reality convince you that the whole world may give way and collapse with a horrendous crash” (*DRN*, 5: 100-110). Lucretius suggests that not only may the world be steered away from crashing, but also that steering consists of “piloting fortune.” Monica Gale points out that “piloting fortune” must be juxtaposed to Lucretius’ emphasis on natural laws.<sup>160</sup> The two phrases in question are: “the necessity for each thing to abide by the law that governs its creation” (*DRN*, 5: 50-60) and to “piloting nature” in respect to the motion of the sun and the moon (*DRN*, 5: 70-80). As C.D.N Costa explains, “[one] of the most difficult problems in Epicurean and Lucretian cosmology is the relationship between necessity ... and chance ... in the formation of the world ... *Natura*, usually regarded as here as a controlling principle of the world, seems to allow for the operation of both *vis* [necessity] and *causes* [chance].”<sup>161</sup> In book 2 one finds both narratives, an account predicated on chance and another on necessity. Lucretius’

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<sup>158</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 58.

<sup>159</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 119.

<sup>160</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 120.

<sup>161</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 56-57.

juxtaposition of “piloting fortune” to natural law/”piloting nature,” and necessity and chance, is particularly significant in the context of Machiavelli’s parallel juxtaposition of fortuna and virtù. While the tension within Lucretius own thought will not be resolved there, it will be argued that Machiavelli proffers a particular interpretation of this relationship which groups ‘necessity’ and ‘chance’ together under the category of fortuna, in juxtaposition to contingency - or “piloted fortune” - which relies on clinamen and is an aspect of virtù.

Lucretius offers a materialist interpretation of the beginning of the world, contra a religious one, and argues that the world does not “endure eternally” and is “far from being divine,” and should “be regarded as outstanding examples of the inanimate and insensible” (*DRN*, 5: 110-130). Furthermore, Lucretius argues against religious beliefs that the gods created the world (*DRN*, 5: 120-170). It is worth noting that this consistent thread of explaining away the divine is something that leads Machiavelli to argue for the deployment of religion for political reasons. Lucretius’ argument that “fish cannot live in fields,” for example, means that “[the] place where each thing may grow and exist is fixed and determined” (*DRN*, 5: 120-130). Gale explains that the significance of these materialist explanations for phenomenon is that it “helps underline the notion - crucial to Epicurean physics - that the natural world behaves in regular and predictable ways, despite the underlying randomness of atomic motion.”<sup>162</sup> This insight regarding the regularity and predictability of the world and the “underlying randomness of atomic motion” has two particular resonances: it recalls the ontological distinction that Lucretius introduces between the metaphysics (atomic motion) and the physics (the regularity of the natural world), and Althusser’s discussion of the contradictory nature of Machiavelli’s first two theses about history:

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<sup>162</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 122.

i.e. historical development and human nature remain eternally consistent (thesis 1), simultaneously noting that everything is subject to constant and unpredictable motion (thesis 2).

Lucretius' last argument against the divine origins of the world is worth recounting briefly his account of the aggregation of the world. Lucretius writes,

And how did they [the gods] ever recognise the capacity of the primary particles and the potential effect of their different arrangements, if nature herself did not furnish them with a pattern for creation? The fact is that from time everlasting countless elements, impelled by blows and by their weight, have never ceased to move in manifold ways, making all kinds of unions and experimenting with everything they could combine to create. It is not surprising therefore that they have at last fallen into such arrangements, and acquired such movements, as those where this aggregate of things is maintained and constantly renewed (*DRN*, 5: 180-200).

Lucretius argues that the void and atoms are eternal and have constantly been experimenting with new combinations of atoms to create different forms vis-à-vis atomic movement. "Again it is stressed that everything has come into being merely by the chance combination of atoms."<sup>163</sup> Lucretius' account of the accretion of the universe thus relies on a form of atomic motion not found in Althusser, i.e. movement "in manifold ways." The world that currently exists is an arrangement of atoms into compounds that has endured and continues to have duration because of its capacity to constantly renew itself.

Lucretius explains that given that "the substance of earth and the water and the light breezes of air and the fiery heart that manifestly constitute this aggregate of things all consist of a substance subject to birth and death, we must consider the whole world to be of the same nature" (*DRN*, 5: 235-250). Lucretius then provides a series of naturalist examples of substances being destroyed in one form but then replenishing the substance over time, such as earth being turned to dust due to heat and being dispersed by the air (*DRN*, 5: 250-265). Gale notes, "[the] argument

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<sup>163</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 63.

relies on the fundamental axiom ... that change necessarily implies (the possibility of) decay: anything that can undergo alteration must have separable constituent parts and is thus - unlike the immutable atoms - doomed sooner or later to disintegration and destruction.”<sup>164</sup> Lucretius gives similar examples for water, air and light (*DRN*, 5: 260-310). Once again arguing against religion, Lucretius asks, “Do you not see the shrines and the statues of the gods succumbing to the stress and strain of age, their sanctity being powerless to extend the limits of destiny or defy the laws of nature?” (*DRN*, 5: 300-310). Again, “the limits of destiny” is not intended to suggest “fate” or “predestination,” but again to emphasise that there is a tendency towards disintegration and decay.<sup>165</sup> Lucretius also alludes to his theory of the disintegration of compounds when discussing the case of rocks falling from mountains: “[the] truth is that they would not suddenly be wrenched away and fall, if from time everlasting they had successfully withstood all the assault and battery of time and remained unscathed” (*DRN*, 5: 310-320). Lucretius relocates his theory of atomic motion, specifically the theory of disintegration, from metaphysics to physics. There is no explicit mention of atoms rather they are replaced by “time,” and the “assault and battery” that substances experience over time. Time is the duration in which atoms have moved and assaulted one another, thus resulting in disintegration. A terminological shift accompanies the epistemological shift from metaphysical notions of atomic movement to physical movement. Thus, in the subsequent chapters, it will not be argued that Machiavelli literally uses words such as atoms, void etc., but that his conception of social and political movement relies on this atomism.

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<sup>164</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 122.

<sup>165</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 131-2.

Lucretius relies on a parallelism between levels of reality (atomic and social). He argues that the laws that concern one level of reality govern others as well. He gives two examples of this parallelism. In the first, he posits that given that rocks over time crumble and become part of the earth again and can help produce new forms. As he writes, “it [the earth] produces all things from its own substance and takes them back again when they perish, it must itself consist of matter subject to birth and death” (*DRN*, 5: 320-330). Because matter is born and dies, the substance which that matter is composed similarly is born and dies. The parallel between earth/substance is then relocated in the second case to the realm of social reality. Lucretius argues, “[moreover], if heaven and earth never had a beginning or birth, but have existed from everlasting, why have there not been other poets to sign of other events prior to the Theban war and the tragedy of Troy?” (*DRN*, 5: 320-330). The beginning of the world here is thus linked to the beginning of civilisation. Lucretius suggests that since antiquity (the Theban war and tragedy of Troy) was the first period of history from which we have poetry the world must be young, for if the world had been much older then other forms of poetry would similarly exist. Lucretius states as much: “The true explanation, in my judgement, is that our world is in its youth: it was not created long ago, but is of comparatively recent origin” (*DRN*, 5: 330-340). It has been pointed out that this passage seems to contradict Lucretius’ argument in book 2, line 1150 “that the earth is weak and worn-out with age,” which suggests that the focus has shifted to human history, which is still at its relative beginning.<sup>166</sup> This supposed contradiction between the youthfulness of the world and the agedness of the earth reaffirms the thesis that there is a shift from physics to human civilisation in Lucretius’ narrative.

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<sup>166</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 133-4.

Again the evidence that the world is of recent origin is that existing civilisations have seen the further development of the arts, like improvements in shipbuilding, or the composition of melodious music, or the invention of the true philosophy of Epicureanism (*DRN*, 5: 330-340). If the world had been everlasting then one would have had arrived at a near perfection of these arts. However, immediately a contradiction arises: if there is a parallel between the beginning and destruction of the world and of civilisations then why could not the destruction of previous civilisations not explain the lack of poetry that tells of events prior to that of the Theban war and the sack of Troy? Lucretius anticipates this objection and explains that,

If by chance you believe that all these same things happened before, but that the races of human beings perished in a great conflagration, or that their cities were razed by a mighty convulsion of the world, or that rivers, rapacious over unremitting rains, inundated the earth and submerged towns, there is all the more necessity for you to admit defeat and acknowledge that heaven and earth are destined to be destroyed. For the fact that the world was assailed by such serious disorders and dangers indicates that, if it had been attacked by a fiercer force, it would have collapsed in ruins (*DRN*, 5: 340-350).

The rise and fall of civilisations here means the same thing as “beginning” and “death.” The fact that civilisations have beginnings and deaths means that the earth similarly has a beginning and death, again relying on the reasoning of the first example of the parallelism. The very forces that caused the death of earlier civilisations, at greater intensity, could cause the destruction of the world as well. The manner in which civilisations rise and fall is something that will be returned to shortly when comparing Lucretius’ account of the beginnings of civilisations or societies and Machiavelli’s. However, it is important to recognise that Lucretius’ here suggests a tendency for all civilisations to have a beginning, duration, and then a death. The death of a given civilization then gives rise to the possibility of a new beginning. The implications of cycling of civilisations between phases of birth, growth and death will be explored more in chapter 4, when discussing Polybius’ theory of anacylosis.



Lucretius continues, giving further evidence of the parallel between the differing levels of reality, when he shifts his narrative back to the realm of metaphysics. Lucretius writes,

Furthermore, all things that subsist eternally must either be composed of solid substance, so that they repel blows and are impenetrable to anything that might destroy the close cohesion of their parts from within — like the elements of matter ... or their ability to survive throughout all time must be due to their immunity from blows — as in the case of the void, which is always intangible and never experiences any impact; or else the cause of their indestructibility must be the absence of any surrounding space into which their substance might disperse and dissolve — as is the case of with the totality of the universe: for outside the universe there is no space into which its substance can fly apart, and no matter capable of striking it and shattering it with a powerful blow (*DRN*, 5: 350-370).

What differentiates atoms and void from societies and bodies (whether human or rocks), or the universe from the world, is that atoms are solid and lack void and thus cannot be destroyed (atoms), and the void is intangible and cannot experience impacts because there is no outside of it into which it can dissipate. The latter argument similarly applies to the universe. The only things that are eternal are thus the universe, atoms and the void. Compounds (the earth, rocks, or human bodies) are a combination of atoms and void and thus experience impacts that result in their disaggregation into the space that surrounds them. Again, even here there are two forces at play: external forces and inter-penetrating forces i.e. forces within the compound, which are similarly interacting with one another.<sup>167</sup> Thus, the laws of generation and destruction apply to all compounds, whether the earth or societies (*DRN*, 5: 360-380).

Significantly, Lucretius regards the accretion of matter into earth to be “fortuitous”: i.e. it comes about through chance, rather, than by being directed to accumulate by the gods. The process of aggregation through chance encounters of atoms either impacting one another is a particular kind of atomic motion. Lucretius relies on a metaphor to explain this fortuitous impact.

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<sup>167</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 74-75.

Lucretius writes, “since the massive members of the world fight so furiously with one another, engaging in an unrighteous war, do you not see that some end may be assigned to their long struggle?” (*DRN*, 5: 380-390). Although Lucretius is describing the constant interaction of different elements (“the massive members of the world”), he uses war imagery, which analogises the constant interaction of atoms and compounds to humans fighting wars (*DRN*, 5: 390-400). Lucretius’ use of the phrase, “unrighteous war,” is likely also a reference to civil war and thus acts as a reminder that conflict can be internal to the compound itself, and that is not simply caused by external collisions.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, this allusion to civil war and the conflict within a compound suggests that wars themselves occur against the backdrop of a void, although this void is a political void rather than an ontological void.

Finally, Lucretius relies, as one regularly finds in Machiavelli, on the metaphor of flowing rivers. Earlier rivers were described as rapacious and could submerge towns and again, when describing the civil war between elements like fire and water, rivers again “make up the supply of water and moreover threaten to inundate the whole world” (*DRN*, 5: 380-390). The movement of rivers is similar to this particular form of atomic motion as well.

Lucretius shifts to an account of how the world began. Lucretius summarises the purpose of the subsequent passages: “I will now explain in order how that great concourse of matter established the earth and the sky and the sun and the moon and their courses” (*DRN*, 5: 410-420). For Lucretius the world was not the product of an intention or “acute intelligence,” “nor did they [primary elements] covenant to produce their respective motions” (*DRN*, 5: 420-430). Again the way in which the world came into existence is not a result of “piloted fortune,” which relies on acute intelligence, but is instead a process that occurs on the basis of a specific kind of motion.

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<sup>168</sup> Gale, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura V*, 138.

As Lucretius states, “from time everlasting countless elements of things, impelled by blows and by their own weight, have never ceased to move in manifold ways, making all kinds of unions and experimenting with everything they could combine to create” (*DRN*, 5: 420-430). This motion is the same kind as the one that he had mentioned in book 1 i.e. wayward motion. The world, like earth, sea and sky, are the products of atoms that “when suddenly dashed together, often form the foundations of mighty fabrics” (*DRN*, 5: 430-440). In effect, they are a combination of atoms and void, which over time have been aggregating, disaggregating and forming new combinations until they have finally formed these substances. Prior to their aggregation into this specific combination,

“[there] was only a newly formed, turbulent mass of primary elements of every kind; and these were discordantly waging a war that involved constant confusion of interspaces, courses, interlacements, weights, impacts, concurrences, and motions, because, owing to the diversity of their shapes and the variety of their forms, they could not all form lasting unions or intercommunicate appropriate motions” (*DRN*, 5: 430-450).

This constant “war” of primary elements results in atoms coming into contact with another vis-à-vis a war-like motion. This contact results in them impacting one another, interlacing with one another, and rebounding against one another, which gives rise to specific forms. The sun is one form that these primary elements have taken because of a specific arrangement of primary elements and void. Previous arrangements of atoms and void had not “taken” or “form lasting unions,” which result in their decomposition and allowed the matter to be returned and renewed in a different combination. “Then the different parts began to separate, and like elements begin to unite with like, thus starting the evolution of the world, the distribution of its members, and the disposition of its vast components” i.e. the division of the mass into separate parts like earth, heaven, oceans etc., (*DRN*, 5: 440-450).

Lucretius proceeds with his discussion of how life came to exist in the world by marking another transition, from physics to the world as it exists. Lucretius writes, “And now that I have explained these phenomena [astronomical phenomena], I return to the time when the world was young and the fields were soft, to show what in her first fecundity the earth resolved to raise into the shores of light and entrust to the capricious winds” (*DRN*, 5: 780-790). Lucretius’ statement points to two salient factors: 1) the world “is.” The transition away from metaphysics is completed inasmuch as the world now “is”; and 2) the earth in its youth had “fecundity.” Again, despite the terminological shift, atomic motion is still operational. Thus, the world that is young is one that has yet to take form, but has “fecundity” i.e. it is ready to assume a form, thus paralleling the void and atomic motion. In the void there was formless matter that through collisions assumed a form.

Lucretius’ discussion of the rise of plants and animals need not be reproduced here in full, however, it is worth noting that Lucretius’ argument that the earth “gave”/“produced” [*dedit*] various forms of grasses (*DRN*, 5: 784). These then allowed the earth to “create” [*creavit*] many different species of animals (*DRN*, 5: 793). The earth can be considered a “mother” “since from the earth all things have been created” [*e terra quoniam sunt cuncta coorta*] (*DRN*, 5: 796). Lucretius in effect argues that inanimate matter can give rise to living organisms.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, the manner of its creation is notable inasmuch as it speaks to a specific form of atomic motion, but also reintroduces the process of disaggregation.

The process of disaggregation is evident when Lucretius writes that even those people who understand that gods do not intervene into the world often relapse into superstition because of their “ignorance of what can be and what cannot, and again by what law each thing has its scope

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<sup>169</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 100.

restricted, and its deeply implanted boundary stone” (*DRN*, 5: 80-90).<sup>170</sup> The earth has given the conditions for the creation of a multitude of different animals, plants and other forms of life, and also places limitations on what kinds of things can grow, due to properties such as climate. So as Lucretius explains, “[the] earth, you see first produced animals at that time because there was a great abundance of warmth and moisture in the ground. So wherever a suitable spot offered, wombs grew up, adhering to the earth by roots ...” (*DRN*, 5: 800-810). Furthermore, as Lucretius states, after having noted that earth produces a wide myriad of life, that “[but] because there must be some limit to her fecundity, she stopped bearing, like a woman worn out by lapse of years. For time transforms the nature of the entire world, and everything inevitably passes on from one stage to another” (*DRN*, 5: 820-830). This limit on her fecundity means that there is a limit to what can grow and for how long it will exist. After a point, it will decline and the earth will be renewed with new forms of life.

Lucretius does not use the language of atomic motion and the theory of disintegration that he had outlined in book 2, and will be the focus of the subsequent chapter, but they still are operational. Thus, Lucretius continues, “[nothing] remains constant: everything is in flux; everything is altered by nature and compelled to change. As one thing decays and declines and droops with age, another rises and emerges from obscurity” (*DRN*, 5: 830-840). Flux is caused by atomic motion, or alterations by nature, and thus results in the change. Because there is no stability, or inertness, there is always change. Lucretius’ dynamic notion of history rests on this dynamism. Furthermore, because of the specific form of atomic motion at work here, nature does produce compounds that were experimental. Lucretius writes, “at that time the earth experimented with the creation of many prodigious things, which were born with bodies of

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<sup>170</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 57-58.

grotesque appearance ... But they were created in vain, since nature denied them growth and they were unable to attain the coveted bloom of maturity or find food or be united in the act of Venus” (*DRN* 5: 830-850). Thus, even in the case of experiments with different forms of life, the atomic principle that certain forms do not take or have duration is functional. As Lucretius states, “many species must have perished and failed to propagate and perpetuate their race. For every species that you see breathing the breath of life has been protected and preserved from the beginning of its existence either by cunning or by courage or by speed” (*DRN*, 5: 850-860). The manner by which princes, like animals, have ‘protected and preserved from the beginning’ through the use of cunning or courage will be the focus of the next chapter, and cannot but recall Machiavelli’s description of virtù. Indeed, this dynamic conception of beginning and enduring is similarly constant in Lucretius’ account of human civilisational development and will be adopted by Machiavelli as demonstrated in the subsequent section.

### ***Discourses* Book 1, Chapter 1: The Beginning of Society and Politics**

Contra the Cambridge school, I argue that Machiavelli does not share the key component of Aristotle’s political philosophy, namely his assumption that all humans are inherently political animals and that the polis is the natural realisation of their telos. Instead, Machiavelli points to other factors like hunger, war and pestilence as the reason why political societies and states were formed. Political society is founded for mutual protection rather than a natural tendency towards the polis. Furthermore, Machiavelli differs with Cicero’s account of the foundation of Rome, especially in respect to the selection of the site upon which Rome would be founded. Cicero’s theory, in contrast to Machiavelli’s, emphasises divine influence in conjunction with political virtue, instead of Machiavelli’s sole emphasis on virtù. It is not the contention here that

Machiavelli was not influenced by the neo-Roman tradition, but rather, to demonstrate that Skinner's emphasis on Cicero is overstated. Finally, it will be demonstrated that Lucretius' account of the beginnings of human life and the subsequent development of civilisation serves as the source material for Machiavelli's own account of the beginnings of societies and states. While Machiavelli does not recount Lucretius' anthropology, his account of the beginning of cities in *Discourses* 1.1 is markedly similar to Lucretius' considerations on the formation of political societies. First, Aristotle's account in *Politics* book 1, chapters 1 and 2 about the origins and naturalness of the polis, and Cicero's history of the birth of Rome in book 2 of *De Re Publica* will be reconstructed. Lucretius' anthropology of the beginnings of society and states will subsequently be discussed, in particular lines 925-1104 of book 5 of *De Rerum Natura*. These different understandings will finally be juxtaposed to Machiavelli's *Discourses* 1.1, and it will be demonstrated that Machiavelli's account of the beginning of society parallels that of Lucretius rather than Aristotle and Cicero.<sup>171</sup> Additionally, in passing, Polybius, Lucretius and Machiavelli's shared catastrophism is commented upon.

Aristotle regards humans to be political animals, and the union of man-woman, the village and the formation state to be natural, and the state as being the only formation in which man can achieve his ends, and is what Pocock refers to as, "vivere civile."<sup>172</sup> Aristotle's notion of "political animal" is defined "as a living being whose natural goal or purpose (*telos*) may be

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<sup>171</sup> It has been pointed out by J[ohn] D. Minyard that Lucretius' argument in lines 772-1457 should be "juxtaposed to Cicero's record of the development of Rome in the *De Re Republica*, in which exactly opposite conclusions are reached about the value of human society as it developed historically and the origin of vices and evils." Indeed, for Lucretius, humans are put at a greater and greater distance from truth and reality as social forms are founded, whereas for Cicero it is only by testing philosophy against the "civic experience" that truth can be determined. Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic*, 65. For more comparisons between Cicero and Lucretius see Schiesaro, "Lucretius and Roman politics and history," 41-58.

<sup>172</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 4.

pushed only within the concept of a *polis*.”<sup>173</sup> This definition is evidenced in the very opening lines of *Politics*. Aristotle writes,

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good (*Pol*: 1252a1-1252a8).

Aristotle’s argument for the birth, or establishment, of the community seemingly approximates Lucretius’ inasmuch that it pivots on the achievement of a particular end: “some good.” This “good” hypothetically could be the warding off of external threats, which is the reason that Lucretius will give for the formation of societies and states. Aristotle disagrees. In particular, his emphasis on the political community, or state, in juxtaposition to any other community rests on his belief that the political community is the “highest of all” and “aims at good in a greater degree.” He differentiates between the state and other forms of community on the basis of, not size or quantity, but in their quality. Aristotle thus emphasises that the political community is the “highest of all” because it is able to subsume the other forms of community under itself and that what distinguishes the king from the statesman (he opts for the latter) is that the former is predicated on a notion of “personal” rule, whereas the latter pivots on “the citizens rule and are ruled in turn” (*Pol*: 1252a9-1252a16). In effect, unlike the patriarchal family or a kingship all citizens are able to achieve their telos under the state.

Aristotle’s interrupts his own argument and states that one must first seek to understand the “elements or least parts of the whole,” and then discern how qualitative differences emerge from the different reorganizations of said elements (*Pol*: 1252a17-1252a23). Aristotle continues, “[he]

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<sup>173</sup> Koen, *Atoms, Pleasure, Virtue*, 8.



who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them” (*Pol*: 1252a24-1252b9). This line of argument importantly leads to Aristotle’s theory of the whole. The theory of the whole declares that the state is, by nature, prior to the family and to the individual, since the “whole is of necessity prior to the part” (*Pol*: 1253a19-125a39). The state conceptually pre-exists the family and the individual precisely because it is that which allows for distinctions between the concepts of family and society. If there was no state then one could not arrive at the qualitative distinctions that Aristotle’s theory pivots on. Strauss argues, as will be seen in the final part of this section, that Machiavelli’s use of the word, “chance,” distances him from Aristotle’s theory of the whole.

Unlike Lucretius however, Aristotle’s consideration of the growth and origin of the state does not begin with an account of how men and women came to cohabit. Rather, Aristotle simply assumes cohabitation in his narrative. There are no primitive humans prior to the male-female couple. Aristotle writes,

In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of choice, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved (*Pol*: 1252a24-1252b9).

Unlike Lucretius who argued that the sexual encounter between primitive men and women was only temporary, did not result in the formation of a permanent couple, and that any such unity of male-female was due to the mutual advantages it offered. Aristotle regards the unity between male-female to be “natural.” Aristotle imputes that humans have a natural tendency towards reproduction and then asserts that said natural tendency results in a “union.” The naturalness of this union is important for Aristotle because it serves as the cornerstone for his political

philosophy because it is from this natural unity that Aristotle then draws a parallel between the male-female couple and that of “natural ruler and subject.”

For Aristotle it is only natural that over time these dispersed couples would in turn unite to form a village, and in turn several villages would form a community or the state. Aristotle argues that while such a parallel exists, there is also a qualitative difference between each of these different developments. Thus, the family exists to supply immediate needs, whereas the village – a collection of families – “aims at something more than the supply of daily needs” (*Pol*: 1252b10-1252b27). To mark this qualitative difference, Aristotle introduces the concept of “society” to describe the village (*Pol*: 1252b10-1252b27). Similarly, Aristotle explains the rise of the state as being qualitatively different from that of society given that the state is concerned with the “good life.” Aristotle writes, “When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life” (*Pol*: 1252b28-1253a2). Again Aristotle insists that this entire process is natural. He states that, “therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end” (*Pol*: 1252b28-1253a2). This argument about the naturalness of society and state thus rests upon a teleological understanding between forms and ends, which pivots on the Aristotelian theory of the whole as only through the realisation of an end can one understand the nature of a given thing.

Since the couple, the village society and the state are natural, and “the nature of a thing is its end,” Aristotle logically concludes, “It is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity” (*Pol*: 1253a3-1253a7). Given that the nature of

humans is to be political animals, they must achieve their telos, or end, through the formation of the state. Aristotle uses the concept of the political animal to introduce a moral dimension. When he speaks about situations in which a state has not been formed, he clearly states such men are “bad” because they have not achieved their telos. This morality has little resonance for Machiavelli. Rather, Machiavelli does not speak of the “good” or the “bad,” but of free and unfree beginnings. This moral injunction again is a necessary compliment to Aristotle’s “theory of the whole.”

Aristotle insists that this naturalist account of the development of social formations is premised on “[a] social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors” (*Pol*: 1253a19-125a39). In effect, Aristotle repeats his argument that all humans naturally form unions, societies and states together, but then differentiates between this “social instinct” and the “great benefactors” who, because of their particular role in the foundation of states, are distinct. Machiavelli similarly regards those who found states, albeit only free states, to be “the greatest of benefactors,” but does not adhere to Aristotle’s emphasis on the natural “social instinct” towards political life and instead advocates the role of laws in keeping men industrious in a political society. For Machiavelli the role of a great founder is not only to found, or begin, a free state, but also to give laws that help determine behavior. For Aristotle, the role of laws and justice is meant to ensure that men do not engage themselves in “armed injustice,” which he likens to the savagery of animals, “lust and gluttony” (*Pol*: 1253a19-125a39). While Machiavelli initially appears to agree with Aristotle that the role of laws is to serve as a bond between men, or allow for the greater duration of the state, Aristotle argues that the laws are intended to allow for the “the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society” (*Pol*: 1253a19-

125a39). For Machiavelli there is no such transcendental notion of “the just,” rather, and as will be discussed near the end of this chapter, Machiavelli provides a different justification for the formation of laws: a means of combatting idleness and producing necessities that compelled men to act in specific ways. There is no necessary harmony between the inner principle of the state, the laws and justice, and the natural tendencies of humanity for Machiavelli.

Having laid out in brief Aristotle’s account of the beginnings of human society and the state and its basic premise of the theory of the whole, we can now turn to Cicero’s contending history of the birth of Rome. Cicero does not provide a competing narrative to the rise of human civilisation as a whole, but focuses specifically on the foundation of Rome. Even within this limited narrative, Cicero’s account differs quite notably from Machiavelli’s. Not only are aspects of Cicero’s account notably absent from Machiavelli’s, such as the murder of King Amulius, but Cicero’s reasons for the wise selection of the site upon which Rome was founded are considerably different from that of Machiavelli. Cicero’s proffers his reasons because he wishes to emphasise the role of divine intimation in the selection of sites because the task of forming a political state such as Rome far exceeds the capacity of one man.

Cicero argues that Rome’s constitution was “superior to those of other States on account of the fact that almost every other one of these other commonwealths had been established by one man, the author of their laws and institutions” (*DRP*: 111). The superiority of Rome “was based upon the genius, not of one man, but of many; it was founded, not in one generation, but in a long period of several centuries and many ages of men” (*DRP*: 113). Indeed, it was not only impossible for one man to possess sufficient “genius that nothing could escape him,” but also for “all the men living at one time” to “make all necessary provisions for the future without the

aid of actual experience and the test of time” (*DRP*: 113). Cicero seeks to prove this argument and in doing so discuss “the origin of the Roman people” (*DRP*: 113).

Cicero recounts the story of Romulus, initially suckled by wolves, who was then rescued and raised by shepherds in the countryside (*DRP*: 113). Cicero then writes that as Romulus grew “he was so far superior to his companions in bodily strength and boldness of spirit that all who then lived in the rural district where our city now stands were willing and glad to be ruled by him” (*DRP*: 115). Cicero presumes that the social compound already pre-exists Romulus, hence suggesting an Aristotelian assumption that human cohabitation is natural inasmuch that the rural district was already sufficiently populated that he could emerge as a leader. Cicero continues, Romulus “[after] becoming the leader of such forces as these ... with their assistance ... overthrew Alba Longa, a strong and powerful city for those times, and put King Amulius to death” (*DRP*: 115). Cicero’s account here notably differs from Machiavelli’s, as Machiavelli makes no mention of this incident. Cicero extols Romulus for killing King Amulius, calling it a “glorious deed,” and for conceiving a plan at this point of founding a new city and establishing a commonwealth (*DRP*: 115).

Cicero writes, in a manner strongly reminiscent of Machiavelli’s concept of *virtù*, “[as] regards the site of his city – a matter which calls for the most careful foresight on the part of one who hopes to plant a commonwealth that will endure – he made an incredibly wise choice” (*DRP*: 115). However, Cicero’s subsequent account differs increasingly from Machiavelli’s. The first feature of this “wise choice” is that “he did not build it by the sea,” or invade another territory, or found his new city at the mouth of the Tiber, because he “perceived that a site on the sea-coast is not the most desirable for cities founded in the hope of long life and extended domination, primarily because maritime cities are exposed to dangers which are both manifold

and impossible to foresee,” including unexpected seaborne invasion and “a certain corruption and degeneration of morals” due to outside cultural influences (*DRP*: 115-117). Cicero emphasises the wisdom of founding a city on the mainland by a river that carries water into the sea, allowing it to benefit from trade (*DRP*: 115, 119). Machiavelli does not share Cicero’s injunction against building cities by the sea.

However, a far more significant difference is Cicero’s introduction of divine intimation. He writes,

[consequently] it seems to me that Romulus must at the very beginning have had a divine intimation that the city would one day be the seat and the hearthstone of a mighty empire; for scarcely could a city placed upon any other site in Italy have more easily maintained our present widespread domination (*DRP*: 121).

Nowhere does Machiavelli suggest that Romulus had such a ‘divine intimation,’ but rather emphasises the prince’s virtù. Cicero on the other hand diminishes the role of virtù and the virtuous actions of multiple generations by pointing to the necessity of divine intimation. Indeed, Cicero’s relative lack of belief in human capacity is not only limited to the virtù of the founding prince, but also the political virtue of successive generations inasmuch that Cicero commends Romulus for the natural defenses that came with the site, including the placement of walls “on the everywhere steep and precipitous hillsides,” and the “precipices” that accompany it. Cicero’s advocacy for this location is despite his own admission that the area was a “pestilential region” and just buttresses the selection of the site by pointing out that there were numerous springs and the site itself was healthy (*DRP*: 121). Again, Machiavelli distances himself from Cicero as he diminishes the importance of natural defenses and promotes the selection of sites on fertile lands, and instead stresses the importance of good laws as the only appropriate manner in which to defend the city.

Having now recounted both Aristotle's and Cicero's respective accounts, I will explain Lucretius' anthropology so as to understand the precise conditions in which he believes that human societies and the state emerged in, and his argument that human society was not due to some natural desire to form the polis. Lucretius' discussion of the beginnings of human civilisation is a small part of a larger chapter that outlines the accretion of the Earth and the development of geological formations, and the appearance of animal life. What is particularly salient is the lack of any natural tendency towards formation of the state in Lucretius account and his attention to the specific conditions that leads to the birth of human society and civilisations. These conditions closely approximate those that Machiavelli himself outlines in *Discourses* 1.1.

Human life, like animal life, for Lucretius, was a product of the earth. Indeed, unlike Aristotle who as previously mentioned wanted to distinguish human from animal life, Lucretius does not proffer such a sharp distinction. Lucretius explains that,

human beings who lived on earth in those early days were far tougher than we are, as one would expect, seeing that they were children of the tough earth: larger and more solid bones formed the inner framework of their bodies, while their flesh was knit with strong sinews, and they were not easily affected by heat or cold or unaccustomed food or any physical malady. During many lusters of the sun revolving through the sky they lived random-roving lives like wild beasts (*DRN*, 5: 920-940).

Lucretius regards humans to have evolved from a prior form, which had been given to it by nature and was the outcome of innumerable prior experiments with different forms. Additionally, humans originally lived like "wild beasts" i.e. they did not immediately come together to form societies. They also lacked farming implements and were dependent on the food that they naturally found around them in nature (*DRN*, 5: 930-950). They had not dug wells to drink water from, did not have fire, and relied on animal skins to cloth themselves (*DRN*, 5: 940-960). In effect, humans were similar to animals.

Lucretius, contra Aristotle, argues that humans have “no ‘natural’ leanings towards community life.”<sup>174</sup> Lucretius explains that, “[they] [primitive humans] were unable to look to the common interest, and had no knowledge of the mutual benefits of any customs or laws. Individuals instinctively seized whatever prize fortune had offered to them, trained as they were to live and use their strength for themselves alone.” [quod cuique obtulerat praedae fortuna, ferebat sponte sua sibi quisque valere et vivere doctus] (*DRN*, 5: 950-970) Interestingly, ‘ductos’ here means “by instinct, experience, or necessity.”<sup>175</sup> Primitive humans behaved on the basis of necessities and their natural instincts, much like other animals do. They were naturally predisposed to living alone on the basis of their experience and the logic of necessity and not naturally endowed with a notion of the common good or a desire for cohabitation. Primitive humans thus had an atomic existence and had yet to form a social compound. Even Aristotle’s most basic element, the male-female couple, was not natural. Lucretius explains that primitive humans reproduced because “Venus united the bodies of lovers in the woods. The women either yielded from mutual desire, or was mastered by the man’s impetuous might and inordinate lust, or sold her favours” for food (*DRN*, 5: 960—970). Even cohabitation was not natural and needed to be learned.

Primitive humans did form social compounds because they were consistently “panic-stricken” during the night and waited for the day, and were deeply concerned by the “way in which the tribes of wild beasts often made rest perilous and wretched from them” (*DRN*, 5: 970-990). The situation was so bad that human populations could not even reach the numbers that they have now because they were often preyed upon and eaten by wild beasts, or because they

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<sup>174</sup> Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 70.

<sup>175</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 114.



lacked medicines to cure from what ailed them (DRN, 5: 990-1000). Lucretius adds that there were also no wars between men (DRN, 5: 990-1010). In effect, they were pre-social and pre-political.

It was due to their lack of security from animals or other men, or hunger, that men, Lucretius writes, “provided themselves with huts and skins and fire, and woman, united to man, went to live in one [place with him. The advantages (?) of cohabitation] were learned, and they saw the birth of their own offspring” (DRN, 5: 970-1010). These advantages of cohabitation included the reduction of the possible risks caused by living alone. “It was then, too, that neighbours, in their eagerness neither to harm nor be harmed, began to form mutual pacts of friendship, and claimed protection for their children and womenfolk” (DRN, 5: 1010-1020). The beginnings of human society was not because of some intrinsic sociality, rather, it was due to external stimuli or forces that had forced them to found a social compound, or accident. Lucretius acknowledges that, “[although] it was not possible for concord to be achieved universally, the great majority kept their compacts loyally. Otherwise the human race would have been entirely extinguished at that early stage and could not have propagated and preserved itself to the present day” (DRN, 5: 1020-1030). The contract here is not natural, rather it is predicated on a utilitarian logic.<sup>176</sup> If the compacts had not been maintained then external forces, like wild animals, would have been able to prey on humans and they would not have survived. The formation of the social compact resulted in a compound that was able to endure such physical attacks from outside.

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<sup>176</sup> Schiesaro argues that this compact is in fact a form of “*aequum*,” which he then equates to “natural law.” I dispute this interpretation of the social compact inasmuch that for Lucretius natural laws are reserved for non-accidental properties, like the law of the aggregation and disaggregation of atoms. Indeed, Schiesaro consistently does not distinguish between the two ontological orders, which is not sustainable when considering Lucretius’ argument in book 1. Schiesaro, “Lucretius and Roman politics and history,” 47.

Machiavelli titles *Discourses* 1.1, “[what] have been universally the beginnings of any city whatever, and what was that of Rome” (*D*, 1.1). Machiavelli thus declares from the outset that he is outlining a universal account of the beginning of cities. This claim is reiterated when he writes that the Egyptian kings would have similarly provided such an example, if only their names had not been “eliminated by antiquity” (*D*, 1.1.4). Machiavelli’s specific focus on Rome however, is not because of his desire to re-examine the Roman case study due to the popularity of Roman art, as he argues in the Preface, but because the Roman case speaks of a specific kind of beginning within the larger account i.e. of free beginnings. As Machiavelli states, “[those] who read what the beginning was of the city of Rome and by what legislators and how it was ordered will not marvel that so much virtue was maintained for many centuries in that city” (*D*, 1.1.1). Mansfield has noted that Machiavelli differs from Livy here because Livy did marvel at Rome’s beginnings and attributed it to “divine aid,” which is lacking in Machiavelli’s account.<sup>177</sup> In this respect, Livy and Cicero are far more similar, than Machiavelli and Livy, or Cicero for that matter. Rome began, according to Machiavelli, with “so much virtù,” rather than due to “divine aid” or Cicero’s “divine intimation.”

Machiavelli begins his theory of the beginnings of cities and political societies by briefly outlining his views on the conditions under which cities are begun. Machiavelli writes,

Wishing first to discourse of its birth, I say that all cities are built either by men native to the place where they are built or by foreigners. The first chance<sup>178</sup> occurs when it does not appear, to inhabitants dispersed in many small parts, that they live securely, since each part by itself, both because of the site and because of the small number, cannot resist the thrust of whoever assaults it; and when the enemy comes, they do not have the time for their defense (*D*, 1.1.1).

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<sup>177</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders*, 28.

<sup>178</sup> The translation itself uses “case,” rather than chance, although the translators write that “case” can be replaced by “chance.”

As Mansfield notes, Machiavelli does not provide an account of “a first beginning before Rome’s when men were not divided into natives and foreigners.”<sup>179</sup> Machiavelli effectively puts aside Lucretius’ anthropology, but adopts his catastrophism. However, like Lucretius, Machiavelli’s account pivots on an external threat creating the conditions that necessitate that the people domestic to a place, but so “dispersed” and in disparate “small parts,” to build social organisations that had a mutually advantageous effect and provides them the necessary infrastructure for their defence, which without they would be vanquished. His account is reminiscent of Lucretius’ argument that people began to live together because of external threats like wild animals. Lucretius argues, “[driven] from their homes by the arrival of a foaming boar or powerful lion, they would flee panic-stricken from their rocky shelters and at dead of night surrender their leaf-strewn beds to their ruthless guests” (*DRN*, 5: 980-990). This discussion of the fears that plagued ancient humans is strikingly reminiscent of Machiavelli’s argument that if there is an external force that does arrive “they would be required to leave many of their strongholds abandoned; and so they would come at once to be the prey of their enemies” (*D*, 1.1.1). Lucretius had previously mentioned that humans did not like travelling in the dark because of wild beasts, and their expulsion by a boar or lion resulted in them being vulnerable in the dark. In Machiavelli’s case, the problem is not the dark, but his insistence that once outside of their strongholds people are “prey of their enemies.” Thus people do not form these social organisations, or cities, because of some inherent desire for sociability to achieve the common good, but rather “to flee these dangers ... they are restrained to inhabit together a place elected by them, more advantageous to live in and easier to defend” (*D*, 1.1.1). Cicero and Aristotle both contend that men do not keep the company of others simply due to weakness, but also because of

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<sup>179</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders*, 28.

an inherent desire to do so.<sup>180</sup> Thus, Lucretius is not only in opposition to Aristotle's account, but also Cicero's, and as is shown below, Polybius' as well.

It is worth noting that Polybius, like Lucretius and Machiavelli, begins his account with a previous catastrophe.<sup>181</sup> However, even though the most often cited source of Machiavelli's "account of the origin of society" is supposed to be Polybius, the "precise echo" is actually that of Lucretius rather than that of Polybius.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, Polybius' own theory is deeply indebted to Plato as evidenced when he writes that the "theory of natural transformations into each other of the different forms of government," which underpins his entire account, "is more elaborately set forth by Plato and certain other philosophers ... I will therefore give a short summary of the theory, as far as I consider it to apply to the actual history of facts and to appeal to the common intelligence of mankind" (*His*, 301). Polybius' own account of beginnings is as follows,

What then are the beginnings I speak of and what is the first origin of political societies? When owing to floods, plagues, failure of crops or other such causes there occurs such a destruction of the human race as tradition tells has more than once happened, and we must believe all often happen again, all arts and crafts perishing at the same time, then in the course of time, when springing from the survivors as from seeds have again increased in numbers and just like other animals form herds - it being a matter of course that they too should herd together with those of their kind owing to natural weakness - it is a necessary consequence that the man who excels in bodily strength and in courage will lead and rule over the rest (*His*, 303).

Machiavelli, much like Polybius, does not spend much time on this "birth," indeed dedicating only book 1 chapter 1 to the question, and similarly emphasises catastrophic beginning as a stage upon which he establishes his division between free and unfree peoples. Polybius and Machiavelli's accounts effectively parallel one another. Polybius' account is thus in agreement

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<sup>180</sup> Schiesaro, "Lucretius and Roman politics and history," 46.

<sup>181</sup> Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence*, 7.

<sup>182</sup> Brown, "Lucretius and the Epicureans," 59.

with Lucretius and Machiavelli's accounts inasmuch as all argued that following a natural catastrophe the effected population banded together for survival. Machiavelli parallels Polybius' catastrophism as the initial causation that creates the conditions for the beginning is a catastrophe, or what in chapter 3 will be referred to as a "political void." However, as was noted in the outset, and will be discussed at great length in chapter 4, is where the notable parallels between Machiavelli and Polybius end as Machiavelli will distance himself from the rest of the Polybian anacyclical account. Thus, even with respect to the inherent desire to live together, Polybius mimics Aristotle and Cicero. He writes in explaining the rise of monarchies that,

We observe and should regard as a most genuine work of nature this very phenomenon in the case of the other animals which act purely by instinct and among whom the strongest are always indisputably the masters — I speak of bulls, boars, cocks, and the like. It is probable that at the beginning men lived thus, herding together like animals and following the lead of the strongest and the bravest, the ruler's strength being here the criterion of his real power and the name we should give to this being monarchy (*His*, 303).

There is no textual evidence in *Discourses* 1.1 of either claim that Polybius makes here. As argued above, the initial claim about the instinctual desire by animals and humans to live in herds is not something that Machiavelli adheres to. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, Machiavelli similarly distances himself from the argument that it is natural that the strongest man will necessarily lead the newly formed principality. He places greater emphasis on virtù instead.

Machiavelli turns to the first case or chance (*caso*), Athens and Venice (*D*, 1.1.2). Before discussing the particular cases or chances of Athens and Rome it is worth dwelling for a moment on the use of the word case or chance (*caso*) here. Strauss, as mentioned earlier, writes "Machiavelli indicates his fundamental disagreement with Aristotle's doctrine of the whole by substituting "chance" (*caso*) for "nature" in the only context in which he speaks of "the

beginnings of the world.”<sup>183</sup> Chance does not mean “at random or haphazardly,” but “in opposition to “prudence”: the cyclical change of regimes does not occur because it has been planned by any being or because it serves an end.”<sup>184</sup> Strauss suggests that Machiavelli’s use of the word is meant to mark his rejection of an Aristotelian teleology because the chance/case of Athens and Venice is not meant to signify the realisation of a telos in the form of the state. Indeed, Strauss goes one step further, but not a step far enough, as he attributes this particular word selection to Democritus and Epicurus, rather than Lucretius.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, this teleology is similarly functional in Polybius, albeit in a naturalised form, thus suggesting a distance between Machiavelli and Polybius’ political thought.

In both examples of the first case, the possibility of an external threat was the impetus for founding cities. Athens was formed by “dispersed inhabitants under the authority of Theseus” to avoid external threats or “for like causes” (*D*, 1.1.2). Venice similarly was formed “so as to flee the wars that arose every day in Italy because of the coming of new barbarians after the decline of the Roman empire” (*D*, 1.1.2). Not only is there is no natural desire for the polity, but also there is no natural necessity as per Aristotle for ‘natural ruler and subject’ as evidenced by the case of Venice. The foundation of Venice, Machiavelli explains, was a group of people who “began among themselves, without any other particular prince who might order them, to live under the laws that appeared to them most apt to maintain them” (*D*, 1.1.2). Venice does not need to function through a natural ruler and subject relationship, as Aristotle or Polybius have suggested. Furthermore, Machiavelli’s account of Venice describes how it was founded by “many peoples reduced to certain small islands” protected by the sea from both emigration and

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<sup>183</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 222.

<sup>184</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 222.

<sup>185</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 222.

invasion who were able to transition from dispersed peoples to societies with laws because of people with “exceptional tales and mental power,” but who were not princes. Furthermore, whereas Cicero had argued that one issue with a seaside city is the moral degeneration that sea trade causes, Machiavelli instead insists that it is the idleness of the site that led them to achieve the greatness that they did (*D*, 1.1.2). Machiavelli thus disagrees with Cicero with respect to the wisdom of choosing to form a city by the sea. Whereas, Cicero, as has been demonstrated, recommended against seaside sites, Machiavelli gives no such injunction and instead commends Venice for its site selection.

Machiavelli proceeds to explain the second “chance,” the colonisation of new lands. Machiavelli argues that in such cases, including Florence, since they are unfree cities they are incapable of true greatness and are formed due to either 1) a problem of overpopulation in the lands of an existing republic or principality or 2) for the inexpensive defence of the existing republic/principality (*D*, 1.1.3). Again, none of the reasons given are because of some desire to achieve the ‘common good’ through the polis. Machiavelli adds, “[because] these cities do not have a free origin, it rarely occurs that they make great strides and can be numbered among the capitals of kingdoms” (*D*, 1.1.3). For Machiavelli the salient difference between the first and second chance is not their choice of a good or bad form of government, or poor selection of site, rather it is their free or unfree founding.

Machiavelli’s analysis then pivots to the foundation of free cities, of which Rome is an exemplar. Again, their beginnings were not premised on some desire to form cities due to a natural tendency. Machiavelli writes, “[the] builders of cities are free when peoples, either under a prince or by themselves, are constrained by disease, hunger, or war to abandon the ancestral city and to seek for themselves a new seat” (*D*, 1.1.4). Even in cases of free cities, the reason to

found them is because of external forces that require the formation of new compounds. Machiavelli affirms his belief that humans are not naturally political beings who wish to live in a polis when he writes, “This choice [of picking a site and ordering laws] would without doubt be wiser and more useful if men were content to live off their own and did not wish to seek to command others” (*D*, 1.1.4). Machiavelli thus ties the ‘marvellousness’ of a given city to the city’s founder’s virtù (*D*, 1.1.4). It is virtù that distinguishes a free from an unfree republic, not Cicero’s “divine intimation.”

Machiavelli argues that the founder of a city demonstrates his virtù through the “choice of site” and the “ordering of laws” (*D*, 1.1.4). This parallels Lucretius’ argument that “[kings] began to build cities, and to choose sites for citadels to be strongholds and places of refuge for themselves” (*DRN*, 5: 1000-1100). Machiavelli’s account further resembles that of Lucretius when the latter explains the transition from primitive human societies to kingships which “more and more every day those endowed with exceptional talents and mental power showed the others how to exchange their former way of life for new practices” (*DRN*, 5: 1100-1110). Lucretius thus introduces for the first time a social phase that “sees the rise of outstandingly gifted individuals as leaders.”<sup>186</sup> However, Machiavelli’s argument is seemingly similar to Polybius’ and Cicero’s as well. Mansfield argues that Machiavelli’s discussion of the choice of sites does not resemble Cicero’s as he intends to “show how much the choice of legislation owes to gifts of chance or nature, to suggest the limitations of human freedom, and thus to hint at the necessary criminality

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<sup>186</sup> Costa, *De Rerum Natura V*, 126. It has been argued by Schiesaro that kingships are thus a natural form of social organisation for Lucretius. However, it is not clear in what respect Schiesaro means “natural” here inasmuch that it is evident that for Lucretius this entire form of government is not natural in the same way that it is for Aristotle. Rather it is a form of political artifice created by humans to ward off external threats. Schiesaro, “Lucretius and Roman politics and history,” 45.



of every human beginning.”<sup>187</sup> In effect, Cicero places greater emphasis on “divine intimation” than Machiavelli. Machiavelli differs from Polybius inasmuch as the latter places great emphasis on strength, whereas Machiavelli does not.

At this juncture however, Machiavelli and Lucretius also partially depart from one another, because of their differing conception of politics. Machiavelli first appears to suggest “it is better to choose sterile places for the building of cities so that men, constrained to be industrious and less seized by idleness, live more united, having less cause for discord, because of the poverty of the site” (*D*, 1.1.4). Machiavelli believes that men are more likely to demonstrate their virtù in the context of necessity. He adds, “[this] choice would without doubt be wiser and more useful if men were content to live off their own and did not wish to seek to command others” (*D*, 1.1.4). He however does not really articulate why men are not content to do so, or why they seek to command one another.<sup>188</sup> Machiavelli does not regard this relationship between those who seek to command and who are commanded to be a natural unity in the sense that Aristotle articulates, and instead suggests that it results in the need to “secure themselves” with the use of power (*D*, 1.1.4). Again looking at *DRN* book 5, Lucretius, after having explained that kings choose sites for citadels and found cities, writes,

And yet if human beings would guide their lives by true principles, great wealth consists in living on a little with a contented mind; for of a little there is never a lack. But people wanted to win fame and power for themselves, in order that their fortune might be based on a firm foundation and their wealth might enable them to lead a peaceful life. But all in vain; for they strove to climb to the summit of success, they made their path perilous (*DRN*, 5: 1110-1130).

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<sup>187</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 29.

<sup>188</sup> Mansfield has referred to this desire to command others as “an unnecessary human wish to seek to master others.” Mansfield is correct to note that this is “unnecessary,” but does not link this to Lucretianism, rather he tries to tie this to an attempt to overcome original sin because men can, for Machiavelli, if they chose an appropriate site and order the appropriate laws, “live under necessity and be free.” Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 29. Although I agree with Mansfield in general, I do not agree that this is because of some desire to overcome original sin, but rather premised on an understanding of human habit.

While there is no evidence that Machiavelli shared Lucretius' psychological explanation for the compulsion to "secure themselves" i.e. the lack of a contented mind and lack of guidance regarding true principles, both Machiavelli and Lucretius agree that the role of power is to aid in one's own security. However, both similarly recognise that the majority of people do not exercise this option. Lucretius adds,

Let them [those who aspire to fame and power], then, sweat out their blood and weary themselves in vain, struggling along the narrow path of ambition, since their wisdom is derived from the mouths of others and their aims are determined by hearsay rather than by their own sensations; and such folly does not succeed today and will not succeed tomorrow any more than it succeeded yesterday (*DRN*, 5: 1130-1140).

Machiavelli does not fully adopt Lucretius' position outlined here given his abandonment of Epicurean political apathy in favour of his own unique post-Lucretian political thought. Machiavelli however, adopts his analysis and positions himself within the world of fame, ambition and blood, in order to achieve an admittedly less expansive notion of the common good than to "live peacefully as a subject," as Lucretius suggests (*DRN*, 5: 1130).

Returning to Machiavelli's discussion about the selection of the site in favour of fertility, Machiavelli adds "since it [the city] can expand because of the abundance of the site, it can both defend itself from whoever might assault it and crush anyone who might oppose its greatness" (*D*, 1.1.4). By exploring Machiavelli's own proposal of how to deal with the issues that rise from selecting a fertile site and the need to secure ones-self we can see that he not only reiterates Lucretius' position that cities are founded to provide defence from external threats, but also simultaneously distances himself from Cicero. Whereas Cicero had emphasised the natural defenses of Rome, such as the steep hillsides, and admits that the general region in which Rome was founded was "pestilential" and that the site alone was healthy, Machiavelli emphasises the

importance of the fertility of the land especially with respect to the defensive opportunities it provides. Machiavelli admits that founding a city on fertile land will result in men being less industrious and idle, causing them to be disunited and engaged in discord. He thus recommends that,

laws should be ordered to constrain it [idleness] by imposing such necessities as the site does not provide. Those should be imitated who have inhabited very agreeable and fertile countries, apt to produce men who are idle and unfit for any virtuous exercise, and who have had the wisdom to prevent the harms that the agreeableness of the country would have caused through idleness by imposing a necessity to exercise on those who had to be soldiers” (*D*, 1.1.4).

The effect that Machiavelli is after is evident, “imposing a necessity to exercise on those who had to be soldiers” and the means to achieve this end is “very strong laws.” The laws are not guided by some Aristotelian concept of justice that distinguishes men from animals. This military prowess of course will allow the city to expand, thus re-starting the process of beginnings by those “who are sent out either by a republic or by a prince so as to relieve their lands of inhabitants or for the defense of a country newly acquired that they wish to maintain securely and without expense” (*D*, 1.1.3). The failure to have such laws is the case of the sultan and the order of the Mamelukes (*D*, 1.1.4). Machiavelli reiterates this point when he writes again, “I say, thus, that it is a more prudent choice to settle in a fertile place, if that fertility is restrained within proper limits by laws” (*D*, 1.1.5). Machiavelli gives further evidence for his claim by deploying the example of Alexander the Great who dismissed Deinocrates the architect’s suggestion that they build Alexandria on Mount Athos and built it “where the inhabitants would have to stay willingly because of the fatness of the country” (*D*, 1.1.5). Again, it appears that Deinocrates and Cicero share an affinity for difficult terrains, and differ from Machiavelli about the need for the “country,” which is not reducible to the “site,” to be fertile. In Cicero’s case, he holds a more pessimistic perspective about human agency to defend oneself.

Machiavelli then returns to the two possible beginnings for cities: Aeneas and Romulus (*D*, 1.1.5). As Mansfield notes, “Machiavelli disregards his distinction between native and foreign beginnings.”<sup>189</sup> Aeneas of course symbolises “cities built by foreigners,” whereas, those who refer to Romulus will in turn refer to a city

built by men native to the place; and in whichever mode, he will see that it had a free beginning, without depending on anyone. He will also see, as will be said below, how many necessities the laws made by Romulus, Numa, and others imposed, so that the fertility of the site, the advantages of the sea, the frequent victories, and the greatness of the empire could not corrupt it for many centuries, and that they maintained it full of as much virtue as has ever adorned any other city or republic (*D*, 1.1.5).

For Machiavelli both are acceptable as they rely on free beginnings, on virtù, which in part includes “without depending on anyone,” thus enabling Rome to become a great city (*D*, 1.1.5). The importance placed on the greatness of the city is meant to stoke the ambitions of the reader, but is also intended to have an effect: the formation of a free city that functions within a system of laws (necessities) that allows them to maintain the city through virtuousness.

Thus far, it has been argued that Machiavelli abandons Lucretius political antipathy in favour of an aleatory political thought. Machiavelli does not, however, belong to the tradition of political Epicureanism because of his ignorance of this tradition, which is further buttressed by Lucretius’ own distance from the tradition’s key figure, Philodemus. Despite having abandoned this political antipathy Machiavelli continues to adopt a number of characteristics of Lucretian doctrine, such as an atomistic conception of reality and anthropology. Furthermore, because Lucretius inaugurates a shift from metaphysics to physics to life and human civilisation, paralleled by a terminological one, within his own narrative, Machiavelli is able to bracket the

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<sup>189</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders*, 30.

question of philosophy and focus on the world of accidents. This world of accidents functions on laws that parallel that of the physical world, but also the metaphysical. Furthermore, Lucretius' shift from metaphysics to the world as it exists is also possible given Lucretius' own insistence that ontology and the world operate on two different levels of reality. Finally, it was argued that Althusser's account of the beginning of human civilisation and cities parallels more closely Lucretius', rather than Aristotle's. It is now necessary to examine more precisely the different forms of atomic motion, and how they relate to Machiavelli's concepts of virtù and fortuna.

### The Atomic Prince

Look man, I do what I can do to help y'all. But the game is out there, and it's either play or get played.

- Omar Little, *The Wire*, "The Lessons," 1:8

I want to conquer the world  
 Give all the idiots a brand new religion  
 Put an end to poverty, uncleanliness and toil  
 Promote equality in all of my decisions  
 With a quick wink of the eye and a "god you must be joking!"  
 - Bad Religion, "I Want to Conquer the World"

Having introduced Lucretius' philosophy and its relationship to Machiavelli's political thought, we now turn to the most controversial set of concepts in Lucretius' philosophy, those concerning atomic motion. In the secondary literature on Machiavelli's Epicureanism, save Ada Palmer and Althusser, there has not been significant attention paid to the connection between Machiavelli and atomic motion.<sup>190</sup> In the present chapter this lacunae will be addressed. Drawing on Palmer's research about Machiavelli's interest in Lucretius' theory of atomic motion, and Althusser's insight that the prince who founds new modes and orders is akin to a clinamen or swerve, it is argued that Machiavelli adopted Lucretius' three forms of atomic motion into his political thought. This adoption and transformation of the different forms of atomic motion animates Machiavelli's most famous concepts, *virtù* and *fortuna*. Althusser, as pointed out in chapter 1, provides a very limited account that argues that Machiavelli relies on Lucretius' theory of the clinamen. However, Althusser does not discuss the first and second forms of motion, movement "in manifold ways" and weight, and realise their implications for Machiavelli's thought. Thus, the following interpretation will expand the scope of the inquiry to all three forms of motion.

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<sup>190</sup> Rahe, *In the shadow of Lucretius*, 50.

I propose that there are in fact two kinds of actions operative in Lucretius and Machiavelli's work. The first are involuntary actions. Involuntary actions occur as a result of internal or external necessity (downward motion or wayward motion). Furthermore, they add to existing chains of causation, i.e. they are reactions to previous causes that do not break the chain, but further perpetuate it. The second are those actions that occasion a break with necessity and the chains of causation. They are referred to as voluntary actions. To demonstrate this distinction between the two kinds of actions, first a short account of Lucretius' theory of atomic motion will be outlined. Subsequently, the relationship between *clinamen*, or swerve, and free will will be discussed, especially with respect to Machiavelli's own *marginalia*. Finally, the two different kinds of actions will be mapped out onto the concepts of *fortuna* and *virtù* through an exegesis of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. I posit that Machiavelli's *virtù* can be defined as the capacity of a prince to act with free will. To act in such a manner requires the prince to engage in actions that are not reactions to a prior cause, but constitute an uncaused causation i.e. to carry out a swerve. Historically, the results of such swerves are the foundation of new modes and orders. They, thus, tend to be quite rare. Most princes have "less or more" *virtù* and should mimic exemplary princes so that they may maximise what they are able to do. Furthermore, in situations where there is the practice of voluntary action, there is a transformation of *fortuna* from chance into contingency, which can either result in the successful formation of a new compound/the new state or failure in which there is a rebounding of the atoms. The presence of *fortuna* thus marks whether princes have *virtù* or not. Machiavelli does use a number of other terms to denote the presence of *fortuna*. The significant one that is paid attention to is, "necessity." In the first section, Lucretius' account of atomic motion in book 1 lines 950 - 1120 and book 2 lines 62-332 will be recounted. In the second section, the significance of Machiavelli's emendations and

marginalia will be examined. While responding to the Robert Black challenge I argue that Machiavelli provides an alternative interpretation to book 2 that will animate his future concepts. The Robert Black challenge is Black's correct insight that the marginalia in itself is insufficient to determine whether Machiavelli was a Lucretian or not. Thus, in the final sections, the concepts, virtù and fortuna will be explored through an exegesis of *The Prince*.

### **Book 1, Lines 950-1050 and Book 2, Lines 62-332: The Three Forms of Atomic Motion**

In book 1 lines 950-1050, Lucretius briefly introduces atomic motion in the context of a discussion about the attributes of the void. However, he only mentions the first kind of motion and does not introduce the second and third forms. Furthermore, Lucretius does not offer a distinction between voluntary and involuntary action with respect to these different kinds of motion. In book 2 Lucretius returns to the question of atomic motion with a rather detailed discussion. Lucretius frames his account of atomic motion in book 2 by exploring three questions: “by what motion do the generative particles of matter produce different things and then disintegrate them? By what force are they compelled to do this? What speed of movement through the vast void has been granted to them?” (*DRN*, 2: 62-70). The discussion of atomic motion is also firmly ensconced in an inquiry regarding the processes of aggregation and disintegration, and suggests – unsurprisingly – a strong relationship between motion, aggregation and disaggregation. The present section first lays out Lucretius' discussion of the first form of atomic action in book 1. Subsequently Lucretius' account of the second and third forms is outlined. Third, Lucretius' distinction between voluntary and involuntary action is examined. Finally, it is demonstrated that Lucretius believes that this kind of motion is characteristic not only of atoms, but also of all living creatures and is thus also applicable to politics.



Having explained the concept of atoms, how they compose compounds and everything in the world to Memmius, Lucretius writes that, “since [he has] demonstrated that indestructible particles of absolutely solid matter fly about incessantly throughout eternity,” he will now turn to questions such as whether there is a limit to the number of atoms that exist and whether the void is infinite (*DRN*, 1: 950-959). This flying about incessantly is the first form of atomic motion and is the form of atomic motion that Althusser notably fails to mention. Lucretius argues that the universe, which he uses interchangeably here with the term “void,” “is not bounded in any direction” because anything that is bounded must have something to bind it, “[and] since we must admit that there is nothing outside the aggregate of things, it has no extremity and therefore has no limit” (*DRN*, 1: 960-970). The void thus has no border and there is nothing outside the void. The significance of these characteristics of the void for atomic motion is that had there been such an extremity “the fund of matter, impelled by its solid weight, would have streamed together from all sides to the bottom; nothing could happen beneath the pavilion of the sky” (*DRN*, 1:980-990). If there had been a limit then all of the matter would have, over time, accumulated in one place because of the weight of atoms and thus all motion would have ceased because it would have been rendered into an “inert mass” (*DRN*, 1: 990-1000). If all matter had become an “inert mass” then the world would not have come into existence and there would be no possibility for change. Since there is no limit to the universe, “the ultimate particles are assuredly given no respite from movement, because there is no bottom at all where they can congregate and settle. All activity on all sides always takes place in perpetual, and the particles of matter are supplied from below, darting out of infinite space” (*DRN*, 1: 990-1000). The result is that there will be “perpetual motion.” Furthermore, there cannot be a limit to the amount of matter that exists in the void because if such a limit existed then the compounds of matter would,

through the process of disaggregation caused due to collisions, lose their matter in the infinite void and be unable to regenerate themselves. In fact no compound would come into existence “since its disconnected elements could not have been united” (*DRN*, 1:1010-1020).

Lucretius’ returns to his argument about the reasons for why things exist as they do:

Certainly the primary elements did not intentionally and with acute intelligence dispose themselves in their respective positions, nor did they covenant to produce their respective motions; but because throughout the universe from time everlasting countless numbers of them, buffeted and impelled by blows, have shifted in countless ways, experimentation with every kind of movement and combination has at last resulted in arrangements such as those that created and compose our world, and the world, guaranteed preservation through many long years once it had been directed into harmonious movements, in its turn ensures that the rivers replenish the insatiable sea with plentiful streams of water ... (*DRN*, 1: 1020-1040).

Lucretius here makes it clear that he does not think that a God-like intelligence has imposed a design onto the world. Instead the world is the effect of “everlasting countless numbers of them [motions]” which because of “blows,” or encounters, has experimented with numerous different forms and finally arrived upon an arrangement that is able to “preserve” itself because of its capacity to replenish itself. Without constant atomic motion the world would not be able to preserve itself through constant “replenishment” of its matter. This passage is particularly important because Machiavelli’s account of the rise of Rome similarly is an unintentional process and the result of different encounters between atoms and compounds. Furthermore, the collapse of great empires is due to their incapacity to replenish themselves. However, Lucretius also understands that because of this constant motion it is impossible for the world to remain static. He writes, “external blows on all sides cannot conserve the whole of any world formed by the combination of atoms. By dint of repeat hammering, the atoms can keep part of it in check temporarily until reinforcements arrive to make up the sum” (*DRN*, 1: 1040-1050). Because of

repeated collisions the world is constantly changing as it loses matter and regains it. There are constant alterations to the order of atoms that compose the world.

Lucretius begins his exposition on atomic action in book 2 by first noting that atoms do not cohere into a “solid mass” since “everything loses its substance” (*DRN*, 2: 60-70). However, the loss of substance from one object does not change the overall aggregate matter in the universe “because, although the particles that withdraw from each object diminish it by their departure, they join another object and favour it with increase. They cause some things to decline, others to mature, but never stay with them” (*DRN*, 2: 70-80). The laws of aggregation and disaggregation apply only to compounds, rather than the universe. The universe is indifferent to the precise state of the atoms and compounds in the world. Lucretius writes, “[so] the aggregate of things is constantly refreshed, and mortal creatures live by mutual exchange. Some species grow, others dwindle; at short intervals the generations of living things are replaced and, like runners, pass on the torch of life from hand to hand” (*DRN*, 2: 70-80). It is worth remembering that Althusser had similarly pointed out that the aggregate amount of *virtù* does not change in the world, but that specific places can have increased or decreased amounts of it in comparison to others, which would account for the rise and fall of polities over time. Thus, rather than specific species growing and dwindling/dying, states and polities similarly can grow and dwindle over time.

Lucretius then abruptly introduces the central theme of the book, atomic motion. He writes, “[if] you suppose that the primary elements of things can stay still, and by staying still can produce new motions in compound bodies, you are straying from the path of sound judgement” (*DRN*, 2: 80-90). Immediately Lucretius argues for a dynamic account of aggregation and disaggregation i.e. constant motion by atoms within compounds is required for motions to be carried out by the bodies. However, Lucretius is cognisant that he needs to provide an

explanation of what causes this motion. He explains that, “primary elements of things must all be propelled either by their own weight or by a chance blow from another atoms. For the consequence of the frequent meetings and collisions that occur as they move is that they rebound instantly in different direction” (*DRN*, 2: 80-90). Lucretius’ exposition is intriguing because he seemingly suggests that there are two causes for motion: the impact of previous collisions (the first form) and weight (the second form). Both pivot on necessity, the former because it is a reaction to a previous action, the latter as it is a physical property of atoms that compels certain kinds of behaviour. However, as will be discussed shortly, Lucretius identifies a third kind of motion. However, this third variety does not operate according to necessity.

Lucretius argues that this kind of necessary motion, which is also involuntary in nature, is “incessant and various” because there is no “bottom” to the universe where the atoms “could settle” (*DRN*, 2: 90-100). There are two possibilities for the inevitable collisions that this form of motion produces: the rebounding of atoms of one another to a great distance or to a short distance. The former means that no new compound is formed and the atoms simply move in different directions, whereas the latter bounce off one another such a short distance that they are actually entangled and form compounds (*DRN*, 2: 90-110). The short distance between atoms within a compound is the space between them. Lucretius intends for this to be a physical argument, not a metaphysical one, as evidenced by his examples of rock, steel and sunlight (*DRN*, 2: 100-120). Lucretius posits that if one looks at how particles react when one looks at a ray of light in a darkened room then one can see that “under the impulse of unseen blows, changing course and being forcibly turned back, now this way, now that way, in every direction. It is evident that they all derive this random movement from the atoms” (*DRN*, 2: 130-140). This constant interaction between the different atoms is not predetermined and is random because of

the force and collisions caused by the movement of the atoms/compounds. These kinds of collisions are, as demonstrated in a latter section, are what Machiavelli refers to as fortuna or accident.<sup>191</sup>

Lucretius then introduces his most famous concept, the third form of motion: the clinamen or swerve. Lucretius puts aside the second form of atomic movement, motion caused by collisions, and uses the first form of movement, movement downwards caused by the weight, as the background for this third form of motion because as he had previously argued in book 2 lines 184-215 that downward motion is the natural motion of atoms.<sup>192</sup> In his introduction to the clinamen Lucretius mentions another characteristic of the first kind of atomic motion that he had not previously mentioned: the fall of atoms due to their weight is such that they fall parallel to one another. Lucretius rejects arguments that the varying weights of atoms caused by their differing sizes could cause an encounter (*DRN*, 2: 220-250). Because this fall occurs in a parallel fashion, Lucretius must account for encounters. Lucretius writes that

at absolutely unpredictable times and places they deflect slightly from their straight course, to a degree that could be described as no more than a shift of movement. If they were not apt to swerve, all would fall downward through the unfathomable void like drops of rain; no collisions between primary elements would occur, and no blows would be effected, with the result that nature would never have created anything (*DRN*, 2: 210-230).

As noted previously, these necessary forms of movement create the world and give it reality. The swerve is necessary as a first cause, not of all atomic motion, but of collisions that result in the formation of compounds. The swerve disrupts the fall of atoms at undetermined times and places by swerving one atom/compound into another thus ensuring the collision of two atoms or

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<sup>191</sup> Ghita has provided a short history of the concept of fortuna, from the Greeks to the Middle Ages, but overlooks Lucretius. However, Ghita does believe that Machiavelli's own interpretation is a "turning point." "The Concept of Fortuna in Machiavelli's *Prince*," 80-83.

<sup>192</sup> Fowler, *Lucretius on Atomic Motion*, 301.

compounds which can either rebound far apart or cohere into a new compound. O'Keefe explains that, "[the] natural downward motion accounts for there being any motion at all, while the swerve accounts for entanglements and collisions. Atomic weight is needed as an explanatory *archê* of atomic motion, while the swerve is needed as an explanatory *archê* of atomic collisions."<sup>193</sup> Lucretius' account of the swerve does two things: 1) provide an interpretative lens through which one could explain the beginning of collisions and 2) distance his philosophy from a strict determinism by "sometimes [creating] new beginnings by swerving."<sup>194</sup>

Lucretius speaks to the latter point, which is vital for the analysis of the relationship to Machiavelli, when he clearly states that,

if all movements are invariably linked, if new movement arises from the old in unalterable succession, if there is no atomic swerve to initiate movement that can annul the decrees of destiny and prevent the existence of an endless chain of causation, what is the source of this free will possessed by living creatures all over the earth? What I ask, is the source of this power of will wrested from destiny, which enables all of us to advance where pleasure leads us, and to alter our movements not at a fixed time and place, but at the direction of our minds? [Denique si semper motus conectitur omnis et vetere exoritur semper novus ordine certo nec declinando faciunt primordia motus principium quoddam quod fati foedera rumpat, ex infinito ne causam causa sequatur, libera per terras unde haec animantibus exstat, unde est haec, inquam, fati avulsa voluntas per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluptas, declinamus item motus nec tempore certo nec regione loci certa, sed ubi ipsa tulit mens?] (*DRN*, 2: 251-260).

The swerve posits that chains of causation cannot be infinitely regressive i.e. they must have a beginning. Given that they are not infinitely regressive, Lucretius allows for possible breaks in chains of causation. New beginnings are indeed possible. These new beginnings will produce new chains of causation predicated on the first and second form of motion. However, the swerve alone is insufficient for the purposes of escaping the straitjacket of determinism. The swerve is

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<sup>193</sup> O'Keefe, "Does Epicurus need the Swerve, 317.

<sup>194</sup> Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 58.

accompanied by indeterminacy i.e. through the unpredictability of the time and location in which a swerve occurs.

Furthermore, this new motion has no predictable prior conditions that cause it. Rather, it is the effect of a voluntary will. Lucretius writes, “For undoubtedly in each case it is the individual will that gives the initial impulse to such actions and channels the movement through the limbs” (*DRN*, 2: 261-262). The individual will of a living creature forces an encounter through the impulse to act and the subsequent movement through the body. To demonstrate this claim, Lucretius offers the example of horses at a race who, despite the fact that the starting gates have been opened, are unable to immediately “burst forward” despite their strength, impatience and desire to do so (*DRN*, 2: 260-270). What becomes evident from this example is that the swerve not only concerns the cosmos, but also individual actions. Again Lucretius vitally shifts from cosmological to physical phenomena, and regards the underlying laws and tendencies of the former as being operative in the latter. It suggests, as Koen has argued, that Lucretius believed that “individuals may be conceived to behave much like atoms. The human world evolves out of the swerving actions of individuals much as the natural world comes about through the swerving deviations of atoms.”<sup>195</sup> Thus, actions not caused by necessity, but because of the capacity of animals or men to initiate actions, are *clinamens* or swerves. We refer to this kind of action as being voluntary or free.

This kind of action is juxtaposed to involuntary forms of motion. Lucretius, returning to the first form of atomic motion (collisions), writes, “[but] what is a quite different matter when we are thrust forward by a blow delivered with a formidable force and powerful pressure by another person; for in that event it is transparently clear that the whole bulk of our body moves and is

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<sup>195</sup> Koen, *Atoms, Pleasure, Virtue*, 58.

swept along involuntarily until the will has reined back all our limbs” (*DRN*, 2: 270-280). A person, like an atom, collides into another person resulting in the “bulk of our body” being forced to move. The difference between the third form of motion (*clinamen*) and the first form of motion (collisions) is that the former is a break with chain of causation, whereas the latter is another link added to an existing chain. What is even more intriguing is the example that Lucretius gives of collisions, especially in the context of Machiavelli’s discussion about “trials and tumults.” Lucretius writes, “So do you now see that, even though an external force pushes a crowd of us, often compelling us to move forward against our will and sweeping us along precipitately, there is something in our breasts something with the ability to oppose and resist it?” (*DRN*, 2: 270-280). External circumstances can cause individuals or groups of people to move along against their will i.e. involuntary actions.

Lucretius thus also identifies two forms of necessity: external and internal. External necessity is a formidable force that acts from outside an atom, like a force that pushes a crowd of people. On the other hand, there is internal necessity: weight. As Lucretius writes, “Weight ensures that all movements are not caused by blows, that is to say by external force” (*DRN*, 2: 280-290). Weight is internal necessity because it forces specific kinds of motions due to intrinsic properties. Thus, Lucretius argues, “the factor that saves the mind itself from being governed in all its actions by an internal necessity, and from being constrained to submit passively to its domination, is the minute swerve of the atoms at unpredictable places and times” (*DRN*, 2: 290-300). It is argued in the latter half of the present chapter and the subsequent chapter that this internal and external necessity, or involuntary action, are the forms of *fortuna* and characterise a certain kind of political action i.e. politics governed by *fortuna*. *Virtù* describes all voluntary actions that break the chain of causation and create new beginnings.



Lucretius then closes the section on atomic motion with a brief discussion about why compound bodies, despite the internal movement of atoms, appear to remain still (*DRN*, 2: 308-311). Again this conception of the constant dynamism internal to compounds is vital to better understand the uniqueness of Machiavelli's conception of Rome's development, especially when juxtaposed to Polybius (the subject of the subsequent chapter). Compound bodies are subject to both external and internal forces or movement. Lucretius explains that since "the ultimate particles lie far beneath the range of our senses ... they themselves are imperceptible to you, their movements also must be hidden from sight — an inference confirmed by the fact that even perceptible objects often conceal their movements when they are separated from us by a wide space (*DRN*, 2: 310-320). Again, Lucretius does not offer any cosmological examples, instead providing mundane examples from daily life. Thus, Lucretius points to herds of sheep or great legions of soldiers that, while constantly characterised by motion, from afar seem to be stationary (*DRN*, 2: 310-340).

What is significant about book 2 for Machiavelli is that Lucretius argues that there are two broad categories of action: voluntary and involuntary. Involuntary action is either necessitated internally or externally, and is part of existing chains of causation. Internal necessity is caused by intrinsic properties and externally through forces and blows by other atoms. Voluntary action however, is a break with the chain of causation and through a infinitely small swerve into another atom which produces, in some instances, a new chain of causation. Furthermore, Lucretius appears to gesture towards something akin to free will, but does not use the term. Rather he connects "freedom" to the "will" through pleasure. This connection between freedom, will and pleasure is vital to understand because it is the removal of the intermediary pleasure that is precisely the theoretical step that Machiavelli will make, as will become evident in the

subsequent section. Finally, Lucretius himself realises that all living beings behave in this manner. Having outlined Lucretius' own philosophical views, Machiavelli's perspective will be outlined. This intermediary step, while not conclusive, strongly gestures to the interpretation of *The Prince* that will be proffered.

### **Machiavelli's Comments on Book 2: The Robert Black Challenge**

As was noted in the Introduction, Robert Black, a noted Machiavelli scholar and historian, has argued that Machiavelli's marginalia on his copy of *De Rerum Natura* is insufficient to determine whether Machiavelli adhered to Lucretius' philosophy. This necessitates relying on a careful analysis of *The Prince* and *Discourses* with respect to key philosophical components of Epicureanism. Before demonstrating how Machiavelli subscribed to these views and used them to animate his political thought, it is worth pointing out some important connections that Machiavelli makes with respect to this section that cannot simply be attributed to "standard student's fare." Indeed, Machiavelli's attention to book 2 is also reflected in an intriguing interpretation of the clinamen, as is evidenced by three particular pieces of marginalia and his emendation to a key point in Lucretius' text. Machiavelli's interpretation of the clinamen is intriguing because he takes the step of identifying the clinamen and voluntary actions with "free will."

Machiavelli writes in the margin of book 2 line 218, where Lucretius introduces the clinamen, that, "[quoniam] declinare principia" (because fundamental elements swerve).<sup>196</sup> Lucretius at this juncture introduces the idea that despite the weight that atoms have, at undetermined times and places, they swerve. In third piece of marginalia concerning atomic

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<sup>196</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 82.

motion found at book 2 line 285, Machiavelli notes, ““in seminibus else pondus plagas et clinamen (in the seeds there are weight, thrust, and swerve).”<sup>197</sup> Machiavelli, unlike Althusser, remembers that are in fact three forms of atomic motion. Subsequently, at book 2 line 252 (the passage has been reproduced below with Machiavelli’s modifications), Machiavelli writes, ““motium varium else et ex eo nos liberam habere mentim” (that motion is variable, and from this we have free will).”<sup>198</sup> Machiavelli here directly links the variable motions of atoms to free will or the free mind (liberam habere mentim). Machiavelli, as demonstrated in the subsequent sections, repeatedly returns to the connection between variable motion and freedom in *The Prince*. Machiavelli however, directly connects the two without any concept of pleasure. Furthermore, he strengthens the role of the mind over the body.

These two points are reflected in emendations that Machiavelli introduces at precisely this point in the text. For ease of reference, the passage has been reproduced below with Machiavelli’s alterations:

Moreover, if all movements are invariably interlinked, if new movement arises from the old in unalterable succession, if there is no atomic swerve to initiative movement that can annul the decrees of destiny and prevent the existence of an endless chain of causation, what is the source of this free will possessed by living creatures all over the earth? What I ask, is the source of this power of will wrested from destiny, [Machiavelli here omits the next line that reads, “which enables each of us to advance where pleasure leads us”], and to alter our movements not at a fixed time or place, but at the direction of our own minds? For undoubtedly in each case it is the individual will that gives the initial impulse to such actions and men are ruled [the previous translation read, “For undoubtedly in each case it is the individual will that gives the initial impulse to such actions and channels the movements through the limbs”].<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 82.

<sup>198</sup> Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 82.

<sup>199</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 41; amendments are proposed by Brown, *The Return of Lucretius*, 74.

These changes may initially seem to be minimal and unimportant, however such a conclusion is hasty. Lucretius-Machiavelli is not speaking here generally of all actions, but those actions that are the “will wrested from destiny” i.e. voluntary actions. By omitting the first sentence directly Machiavelli connects the question of atomic swerve to “free will” or “the free mind.” Lucretius-Machiavelli regards the source of “free will” to be the atomic swerve. The omitted line suggests that free will is mediated by pleasure. Furthermore, Machiavelli’s emendation to the second sentence again emphasises the role of the will or mind over human actions. Furthermore, there is also another possible interpretation of this sentence that resonates with Machiavelli’s political theory: the individual will of one man and his actions allows him to rule over men i.e. the individual will of a prince gives an initial impulse to such actions that allows him to rule over men. Machiavelli will sustain this strengthened role of the will through the concept of “prudence,” which allows a prince to overcome necessity and aids in breaking with the chain of causation to forge new beginnings.

Machiavelli thinks that very little in politics is actually the effect of voluntary actions. Voluntary actions and *clinamens* are rare. Rather, most political actions are involuntary actions i.e. reactions to previous actions. The rareness of the presence of such talents is something that Machiavelli himself notes when he writes,

Because the making of a republic from a province suited to be a kingdom, and the making of a kingdom from one suited to be a republic, is matter for a man who is rare in brain and authority, there may have been many who have wished to do it and few who have been known how to conduct it. For the greatness of the past partly terrifies men, partly impedes them so that they fail in the first beginnings (*D*, 1.55.5).

It is only those men who can act with free will who are able to engage in such voluntary actions. The incidence of such men is rare, something that Machiavelli repeats throughout *The Prince* and *Discourses*. As it will become evident, Machiavelli identifies encounters that are the result of

necessity or involuntary actions with the presence of fortuna, and those encounters that are characterised by the clinamen or free will or voluntary actions with virtù.

Machiavelli is thus constantly searching for those princes who can act outside of the chains of causation, found new beginnings and could possibly be great. It is this swerve that Machiavelli wishes to compel through his writings in hopes that they do not simply cause a rebounding of atoms, hence sustaining the continuing state of political disarray that Florence was experiencing, but that it cohere into a new compound i.e. a new state. Machiavelli realises, through his rejection of the Aristotelian political animal, that to achieve the desired beginnings of the new state requires a “free will” by which one atom/compound, or prince, deviates or swerves from the norms of politics to actively intervene into a given situation. There is of course no guarantee that the effect of such a deviation, or intervention, will in fact result in the desired beginnings. However, what it makes possible is the encounter of two different atoms that could result in the production of a new compound. In the subsequent section this analysis of voluntary and involuntary actions will be brought to bear on *The Prince*.

### **Chapters I-XI and XV-XXIII: Voluntary and Involuntary Actions**

To respond to the Robert Black challenge, Machiavelli’s adherence to Lucretius will be mapped through his two key concepts, virtù and fortuna, and their relationship to voluntary and involuntary action. These relations are common to *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Because of the conceptual uniformity, Machiavelli is able to write in the respective dedicatory letters in *The Prince* and *Discourses* that these works contain “all that I have learned” (*P*, 3) and “in it I have expressed as much as I know” (*D*, Dedicatory Letter). Virtù is the rare capacity to initiate voluntary actions, which in turn permits princes to achieve greatness. The relationship between

virtù and religion is also briefly discussed because religion is a useful tool that princes can utilise to found and maintain new states. Fortuna, on the other hand, marks out involuntary or forced actions. Other words Machiavelli uses to describe fortuna are “necessity” and “accidents.” Furthermore, those who depend on fortuna in fact simply rely on chance and are engaged in forms of involuntary action. Fortuna is caused by either internal or external causes. Machiavelli will refer to such actions and their results as “accidents.” Any effects of these involuntary actions are accidental and create the historical conditions in which a prince with virtù must act. However, there is a second definition of fortuna that is also functional, that is fortuna as opportunity and contingency. Those who possess virtù and thus are able to intervene into the accretion of accidents, or the situation, to produce new encounters that could produce new beginnings, render Fortuna into this second form. This second form is contingent because a) those with virtù have no guarantee that they will produce an encounter that will have duration, and b) those with virtù do not have the capacity to control all movements in a given political situation by other compounds, or actors. Thus there will be encounters that the prince of virtù can have some prior foresight into, but are not caused by them, which also changes the terrain of the situation. There are two possible forms of change in Machiavelli’s work: 1) changes caused by nature i.e. the domination of fortuna over men because of a lack of virtù and; 2) changes caused by men i.e. the domination of virtù over fortuna.<sup>200</sup> Given that it is not possible to provide a line-by-line exegesis of the entire *The Prince* here, particular attention will be paid to chapters I-XI and XV-XXVI.

Machiavelli starts with a discussion of beginnings by noting that principalities are either acquired: 1) through hereditary means or b) new. Machiavelli gives two examples for the latter,

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<sup>200</sup> Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 129.

Francesco Sforza and Ferdinand the Catholic (*P*, 5). Both, Machiavelli will write in subsequent chapters, possessed virtù (*P*, 26, 88). This latter category is further divided into two subtypes: completely new principalities founded through colonial resettlement, and those relatively newly founded principalities that are the agglomeration of several pre-existing principalities (*P*, 5). The two modalities through which such beginnings are created and greatness achieved are: new principalities are either acquired through the arms of others (being conquered) or with one's own arms (conquering or founding anew) (*P*, 6). Machiavelli then draws a parallel between the modalities and fortuna and virtù when he writes, "either by fortune or virtue" (*P*, 6). This disjunction between fortune (fortuna) and virtue (virtù) is vital for our thesis. Fortuna operates on the basis of a chain of causation i.e. one is conquered by others. Virtù on the other hand is the capacity to promulgate new beginnings and break from the chain of causation i.e. one founds a new principality by conquering others. It is also possible to see this disjunction between fortuna and virtù functioning with respect to "accustomed to living under a prince or used to being free" and "the arms of others or with one's own." All of these binary pairings can be interpreted with respect to involuntary action (accustomed/habit and arms of others) and voluntary action (used to being free and one's own arms). The distinction between 'accustomed to living under a prince or used to being free' will animate chapter 4.

This disjunction appears in the very next chapter, "Of Hereditary Principalities." Machiavelli remarks that he will explore the aforementioned themes, but also introduces another: "how these principalities may be governed and maintained" (*P*, 6). Before turning to this latter theme, it is noteworthy that "virtù" does not appear even once in this chapter. Indeed, Machiavelli's entire argument is that hereditary princes do not need to rely on virtù, but can sustain their principalities on the basis of habits and fortuna i.e. on chains of causation. Breiner

contrasts hereditary princes who rely on habits and fortuna to the “new prince” who “must rely thoroughly on his virtù.”<sup>201</sup> Machiavelli’s very first sentence gestures towards the definition of fortuna as a chain of causation. Machiavelli writes, “in hereditary states accustomed to the bloodline of their prince the difficulties in maintaining them are much less than in new states because it is enough only not to depart from the order of his ancestors, and then to temporize in the face of accidents” (*P*, 6). There are three aspects worth considering. First, the word, “accustomed,” suggests habit i.e. something that does not occur on the basis of free volition. This chain of causation, habit, is interior to the principality and functions as an internal necessity, like weight. Second, Machiavelli notes that hereditary princes can maintain their principalities by not “depart[ing] from the order of [their] ancestors.” The “order of ancestors” further implies a chain of causation. Third, Machiavelli further hints at this chain of causation, when he uses the word “accident.” “Accident” only appears when there is a lack of virtù.

The hereditary prince does not need to engage in voluntary actions and just needs to rely on accidents or fortuna. A hereditary prince must “temporise.” Machiavelli writes,

[in] this way, if such a prince is of ordinary industry, he will always maintain himself in his state unless there is an extraordinary and excessive force which deprives him of it; and should he be deprived of it, if any mishap whatever befalls the occupier, he reacquires it (*P*, 6-7).

The prince who relies on habit or internal necessity does not need to have great industry or virtù, but can maintain or regain their principality through “ordinary industry.” Machiavelli juxtaposes this internal necessity to an external one i.e. “an extraordinary and excessive force” (the Venetians in ’84 and Pope Julius in ’10). These are Lucretius’ external blows. Significantly, Machiavelli does not suggest that this external force is a force of virtù, which allows him to

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<sup>201</sup> Breiner, “Machiavelli’s “New Prince” and the Primordial Moment of Acquisition,” 68.



subsequently posit that a mishap may befall the occupier, thus allowing the hereditary prince to regain his throne. If the external force had virtù then Machiavelli would be prohibited from speaking about a prince reacquiring his principality because it would have been a contradiction in terms. The duke of Ferrara, in Machiavelli's opinion, is so bereft of any virtù that he can keep his principality "for no other cause than his line was ancient" (*P*, 7). Machiavelli ends the chapter by using a housing metaphor that neatly represents the chain of causation: "[in] the antiquity and continuity of the dominion the memories and causes of innovation are eliminated; for one change always leaves a dentation for the building of another" (*P*, 7). As Mansfield explains, Machiavelli's "metaphor compares the hereditary, or "natural," principality to a row of houses continually added to but never finished, and, as it were, not begun from the beginning" (*P*, 7 n. 6). This 'row of houses' metaphor is reminiscent of Lucretius' contention that the addition to atoms can change the compound itself.

Chapter III, "Of Mixed Principalities," is the second longest chapter of *The Prince*, a distinction it shares with the chapter concerning new principalities (chapter VII). The only chapter longer concerns the thorny problem "Of Avoiding Contempt and Hatred" (chapter XIX). Machiavelli dedicates the three longest chapters to new beginnings and maintaining the newly founded state. In the opening lines of chapter III, the prince of ordinary industry is juxtaposed to the prince of virtù. Gesturing towards the row of houses metaphor, he writes that mixed principalities are "not altogether new but like an added member" (*P*, 7). The mixed principality presents a contradiction however: it is simultaneously a new principality, but "it is not altogether new" (*P*, 7). This is a contradiction because a key distinction between virtù and fortuna is precisely the new beginnings of a principality. Machiavelli's parentheses solve the contradiction and introduce a different kind of new beginnings: a new beginning predicated on a qualitative

change. Machiavelli writes, “so that taken as a whole it can be called almost mixed” (*P*, 7). Even though the mixed principality seemingly runs afoul of the definition by being part of a chain of causation given that it is predicated on addition, particular kinds of additions can result in a new whole.

Machiavelli further suggests that mixed principalities are products of voluntary action, when he considers the

natural difficulty that exists in all new principalities. That is men willingly change their lords in the belief that that they will fare better: this belief makes them take up arms against him, in which they are deceived because they see later by experience that they have done worse (*P*, 7-8).

The “natural difficulty” being discussed is a habit of the people, and a bad one at that, because it results in the people “[having] done worse.” An immediate objection to this line of argument appears in the very next line because of the conjunction of necessity with *virtù*: “That follows from another natural and ordinary necessity which requires that one must always offend those over whom he becomes a new prince, both with men-at-arms and with infinite other injuries that the new acquisition brings in its wake” (*P*, 8). However, it is incorrect to regard this conjunction of necessity with *virtù* as an objection when one realises that Machiavelli is describing the next link in the chain of causation that is “in [the] wake” of a “new acquisition” by “a new prince.” The new prince necessarily needs to establish a new chain of causation because there will be “all those whom you have offended in seizing that principality, and you cannot keep as friends those who have put you there because you cannot satisfy them ... and because you cannot use strong medicines against them, since you are obligated to them” (*P*, 8). The last part of the sentence distinguishes the qualitative new beginning of the mixed republic from the absolute new beginning of “principalities that are altogether new both in prince and in state” (*P*, 21). This latter kind of new principality is discussed later. The qualitative new beginning may result in a

chain reaction that leads to a rebellion because the people who “opened the gates to him ... were unable to tolerate the vexations of the new prince” and in possibly losing the principality (*P*, 8). However, if the prince truly does have virtù then he will be able to regain it by “seizing the opportunity offered by the rebellion” and will subsequently only lose it “with more difficulty” (*P*, 8-9).

Oddly, Machiavelli’s example to buttress his argument, the case of Louis XII and his capture of Milan, suggests otherwise. Indeed, Louis XII was unable to successfully create a mixed principality. However, Machiavelli’s example of Louis XII is constantly accompanied by his own advice about how things could have been easily otherwise. He notes that to make Louis XII lose Milan the second time “the whole world had to be against him, and his armies eliminated or chased from Italy: this arises from the causes given above” (*P*, 9). Machiavelli is aware that he needs to explain this disparity, writing that, “it remains now to say what were the causes of the second, and to see what remedies there were to him” (*P*, 9). Machiavelli does not think that losing Milan the second time was an absolutely necessary outcome; rather, it was due to Louis XII’s lack of virtù.

Machiavelli gestures towards internal necessity when he writes that those newly acquired states that are part of the same province or share a common language with the ancient acquiring state, “especially if they are not used to living free,” can be “held with great ease” and all that is required is ending the competing blood line and maintaining the order of things as they already exist (no new taxes etc.) (*P*, 9). The real difficulties arise when one is forming an almost new state, a mixed state composed of disparate peoples (*P*, 9). Machiavelli writes, “here one needs to have great fortune and great industry to hold them” (*P*, 9-10). Immediately, the observant reader would point to Machiavelli’s conjunction of an “almost new state,” “great fortune” and “great

industry” together and argue that the basic propositions being advanced in this chapter have been disproven. However, Machiavelli sustains a terminological rigour. He prefers to use “grande industria” rather than virtù. Virtù and fortuna are not connected. Furthermore, it is worth examining the course of action that Machiavelli recommends to solve this problem, “one of the greatest and quickest remedies would be for whoever acquires it to go there to live in person” (*P*, 10). Indeed, Machiavelli despite his superlatives about this course of action does not regard it to be one that demonstrates virtù. Machiavelli states as much in the subsequent paragraph, “[the] other, better remedy is to send colonies that are, as it were, fetters of that state, to one or two places” (*P*, 10). Furthermore, Machiavelli recommends that the newly acquiring prince “should also make himself head and defender of the neighbouring lesser powers and contrive to weaken the powerful in that province and to take care that through some accident a foreigner does not enter there” (*P*, 11). The use of “accident” suggests that one is not speaking of virtù, but of “great fortune and great industry.” The Romans, the paragons of virtù, put into effect the policies of forming colonies, indulging the weaker neighbours and ensuring that powerful foreign princes did not enter into the province (*P*, 11-12). They are thus a powerful counter-example to Louis XII. Initially Machiavelli demurs from speaking of the Romans’ virtù. When presenting the example of Roman actions in Greece, he writes that

the Romans did in these cases what all wise princes should do: they not only have to have regard for present troubles but also for future ones, and they have to avoid these with all their industry because, when one foresees from afar, one can easily find a remedy for them but when you wait until they come close to you, the medicines is not in time because the disease has become incurable (*P*, 12).

Machiavelli here still refers to “industry” rather than virtù because he has introduced two components of virtù: industry and the capacity to foresee troubles and take appropriate steps. Machiavelli introduces for the first time in the chapter the term virtù and immediately juxtaposes

it to fortuna. He writes, “[nor] did that saying ever please them which is every day in the mouths of the wise men of our times — to enjoy the benefit of time — but rather, they enjoyed the benefit of their virtue [virtù] and prudence. For time sweeps everything before it and can bring with good as well as evil and evil as well as good” (*P*, 13). Machiavelli does not think that one should rely on the times, or fortuna, rather one should rely on one’s virtù and prudence.

Machiavelli, returning to the example of Louis XII, argues that Louis XII was “forced” to take the help of others (the “ambition of the Venetians”) i.e. he was enacting an involuntary action (*P*, 13). Machiavelli is sympathetic to Louis XII because of the situation that he found himself in, and writes, “he would have succeeded in in managing other things he had not made some error” (*P*, 13). Machavelli’s sympathy helps pinpoint another aspect about the relationship between necessity and the break in chains of causation. Machiavelli does not reject any and all actions necessitated by a situation. Indeed, such actions are required for survival. He simultaneously believes that princes with virtù will overcome these necessities, not keep responding to them, and produce new modes and orders or new beginnings. For example, Louis XII erred when he allowed a powerful foreigner (Pope Alexander) to enter the province, because the Venetians had ambition, but no virtù of their own, they “were always under a necessity to stay with him [Louis XII]” (*P*, 14). This error resulted in him “weakening himself” and having to take an undesirable course of action to curb the ambitions of Pope Alexander (*P*, 14). As Machiavelli writes, “he was compelled to come into Italy” (*P*, 14). Louis XII was forced to engage in an involuntary action again. Machiavelli similarly notes that Louis XII’s desire to acquire was a “very natural and ordinary thing” and that “if France could have attacked Naples with his own forces, he should have done so; if he could not, he should not have divided Naples” (*P*, 15). Machiavelli’s emphasis on the need for Louis XII to act alone, further evidence that

virtù is based on a cutting of a chain of causation and absolutely new beginnings, and his failure to do so means that Louis XII was never able to overcome the situation. Machiavelli does not blame Louis XII for desiring to create a new beginning through the formation of a mixed state, but notes that his actions in Lombardy “[were] not excused by that necessity” (*P*, 15). Indeed, his actions were erroneous as Machiavelli demonstrates in the following paragraph.

In chapter IV, Machiavelli is concerned with the capacity to maintain a principality through a focus on internal causation. In particular, Machiavelli gestures towards the importance of freedom, albeit outside of the republican form of state. Machiavelli first draws a key distinction between “principalities of which memory remains” and those where “memory was eliminated” (*P*, 17 and 19). This distinction is between principalities that recently have been acquired, thus the memory remains, and those that have not been, hence causing the elimination of memory. Principalities living through the first links in a chain of causation produced by a new beginning have memory; whereas those whose new beginnings are in the distant past and are thus much further back in a given chain of causation do not.

He further subdivides the category of “principalities of which memories remain” into two subcategories or “two diverse modes: either by one prince, and all the others servants who as ministers help govern the kingdom by his favour and appointment; or by a prince and by barons who hold that rank not by favour of the lord but by antiquity of bloodlines” (*P*, 17). Modes are the configurations in which atoms inside a compound are internally organised. Different organisations of atoms result in various compounds or modes, or “kinds of government.” In the case of one prince the people hold him in greater authority than anyone else, whereas in the case of a prince with multiple powerful barons, the people love their respective barons (*P*, 17). The significance of this distinction is their respective abilities to maintain the state. Thus, in the

Turkish kingdom, emblematic of the former mode, acquiring the state is difficult, but maintaining it is easy because the people around the king “are slaves and bound by obligation, they can be corrupted with much difficulty, and even if they are corrupted, one can hope but for little use from it, as they cannot bring their peoples with them” (*P*, 18). Slavish habits means that while it is difficult for an external force to break the compound and acquire it, when it does break it is easy to maintain this newly acquired state. There are no “tumults,” which as will be discussed in the following chapter, are fundamentally important for the maintenance of freedom and the achievement of greatness. On the other hand, the French kingdom was a looser compound thus making it is easier for an external force to capture it, but it is simultaneously much harder to maintain. Machiavelli points to internal characteristics, which are worth noting: “malcontents and those who desire to innovate” (*P*, 18). Machiavelli ties this “desire to innovate” to the ‘frequent rebellions’ against Rome in kingdoms like France (*P*, 19). This changes when the memory of the acquisition recedes and a new mode is established, thus allowing them to become “secure possessors of them,” as the Romans were able to do (*P*, 19).

Machiavelli’s sole mention of *virtù* comes at the end of chapter IV, when he questions whether Alexander actually had it. He writes,

no one should marvel at the ease with which Alexander held the state of Asia and at the difficulties other such as Pyrrhus ... had in keeping their acquisitions. This has not come from much or little virtue in the victor but from the disparity of the subject (*P*, 19).

Machiavelli distances both Alexander and Pyrrhus from *virtù*. Alexander lacks it because of his use of slavish habits in his empire, and Pyrrhus because of his incapacity to get past the first links in the new chain of causation, resulting in him losing Sicily. Machiavelli thus rejects modes of rule that are predicated on slavish habits and a lack of freedom.

Machiavelli, having discounted the mode of rule that relies on slavish habits, turns to the more difficult to maintain states, which are founded on the habit of freedom and the desire to innovate in chapter V. Machiavelli refers to this habit as being “accustomed to living by their own laws and in liberty” (*P*, 20). Machiavelli recognises that there are three possibilities for how to maintain such states after they have been acquired: “ruin[ing] them; second, go there and live personally; third let them live by their laws, taking tribute from them and creating within them an oligarchical state which keeps them friendly to you” (*P*, 20). Machiavelli seemingly advocates for the third option, but in fact really supports the first and the second. Machiavelli dispenses with the third option by noting that neither the Spartans or the Romans were able to securely maintain free principalities because they are “accustomed to living free ... for it always has as a refuge in rebellion the name of liberty and its own ancient orders which are never forgotten either through the length of time or because of benefits received” (*P*, 21). Orders are the particular manner in which people are accustomed to living within a given mode i.e. their habits. People accustomed to freedom will rely on their memories and ideas about how one behaves. These orders, or habits, are so powerful that they can, even after a century of servitude, result in the people overthrowing those who enslaved them (*P*, 21).

However, Machiavelli remains steadfast in his rejection of slavish habits and attacks such principalities immediately after having dismissed the third option. He writes,

[but], when cities or provinces are used to living under a prince, and his bloodline is eliminated - since on the other hand they are used to obeying, and on the other they do not have the old prince - they will not agree to make one from among themselves and they do not know how to live free. So they are slower to take up arms, and a prince can gain them with greater ease and can secure himself against them (*P*, 21).

Such states are unable to maintain themselves because they are internally weak bodies. This weakness is caused by their incapacity to innovate new modes and new orders because of the



weaknesses endemic to their existing order i.e. slavish habits. Machiavelli thus argues that the prince who is trying to form a new compound, Italy, either “eliminate them [free states] or live in them” (*P*, 21). The reason to eliminate them is that there may be too many such states and a single prince cannot live in them all, and given their rebellious nature they cannot exist securely within the newly forming principality.<sup>202</sup>

It is to this new principality that Machiavelli shifts in chapter VII, titled: “Of new principalities that are acquired by one’s own arms and virtue.” Machiavelli begins the chapter by arguing that voluntary actions are rare. Machiavelli states that he will “bring up the greatest examples,” and admits that the majority of people lack the necessary virtù to form such new principalities (*P*, 22). Machiavelli writes,

For since men almost always walk on paths beaten by others and proceed in their actions by imitation, unable either to stay on the paths of others altogether or to attain the virtue of those whom you imitate, a prudent man should always enter upon the paths beaten by great men, and imitate those who have been most excellent, so that if his own virtue does not reach that far, it is at least in the odor of it (*P*, 22).

Machiavelli pessimistically argues here that men “almost always” are engaged in chains of causation i.e. they “walk on paths beaten by others” or imitate them. They are unable to create new paths or beginnings of their own.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, the reason that men cannot “stay on the paths altogether” of great men is because if they were able to do so, they would effectively be able to attain virtù, found new beginnings and possibly achieve greatness. Machiavelli posits that since they are unable to “attain the virtue of those whom you imitate,” prudent men should

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<sup>202</sup> Dietz provocatively asks given the “vengeful nature of former republicans - why should a prince live in their midst?” “Trapping the Prince,” 783. Unfortunately Dietz overlooks the reason that Machiavelli gives. Machiavelli states, “a city used to living free may be held more easily by means of its own citizens than in any other mode, if one wants to preserve it” (*P*, 20).

<sup>203</sup> In this respect I disagree with Breiner who has argued that, “[for] Machiavelli, there are no new actions - that is, actions that are purely original.” Rather, I posit that for Machiavelli, there are rarely new actions. “Machiavelli’s “New Prince” and the Primordial Moment of Acquisition, 76.

imitate these great men as closely as possible so that they may achieve a lesser form of greatness. In effect, Machiavelli thinks that the majority of men will never break from the chain of causation in which they are enmeshed and the best option available to them is just to imitate better ones. Virtù is thus as rare as are new beginnings. Kahn thus aptly summarises Machiavelli's purpose in writing *The Prince* when she writes, "[like] the humanists, he wants to educate his reader's practical judgment, the faculty of deliberation that allows for effective action within the contingent realm of fortune," but overstates the case when she adds, "and like them he recognizes that such education must therefore focus on particular examples rather than on the general precepts appropriate to theoretical reason."<sup>204</sup> As ought to be evident thus far from the present work Kahn's latter statement cannot be reconciled with Machiavelli's consistent articulation and deployment of "general precepts" and unfortunately serves to reduce Machiavelli to a political practitioner, rather than a political theorist.

In chapter XXII, when discussing the selection of secretaries, Machiavelli reaffirms the rarity of the prince with virtù by arguing that there are three types of brains that a prince could possess. The first is "one that understands itself, another that discerns what others understand, the third that understands neither by itself nor through others" (*P*, 92). While Machiavelli does not explicitly make the connection, it is possible to derive it by noting that these brains neatly map onto Machiavelli's discussion of mediocrity described above. Princes with brains that understand by themselves do not require counsel because they are creating new modes and orders i.e. they are independent and self-sufficient. Princes who lack sufficient virtù to create new modes and orders of their own should emulate great princes. The second kind of brain corresponds to the capacity to imitate. The third kind of brain are what princes of fortune have as

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<sup>204</sup> Kahn, "Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*," 64.

they neither understand by themselves, nor do they act prudently or with fortunate astuteness by listening to others. They are solely dependent on fortuna.

Returning to chapter VII, Machiavelli notes that a new prince in an altogether new principality is able to maintain it “according to whether the one who acquires them is more or less virtuous” (*P*, 22). Machiavelli’s use of the phrase “more or less” introduces a scale for how much virtù one can have. No one can have absolute virtù, but one can have ‘more’ than others. This “more” virtù is connected to those “private individuals” who become princes because of their virtù and thus are able to maintain their states (*P*, 22). This distinction between “more” and absolute virtù will become more important when later juxtaposing contingency to chance because princes cannot be absolutely sure that their virtù will result in a successful encounter and thus any attempt to break from the chain of causation is “contingent.” Princes with “less” virtù are those who become princes because of fortuna and are more susceptible to fortuna’s whims. In such cases, fortuna decides whether an encounter will be successful or not. Fortuna in such situations operates as chance.

Machiavelli’s examples of princes of virtù are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus.<sup>205</sup> However, he distinguishes Moses from the others because “he should be admired if only for that grace which made him deserving of speaking with God” (*P*, 22). If princes of virtù do not enjoy the grace of God, as most do not, one notices from a study of their lives and actions that they differ little from Moses because “they had nothing else from fortune than the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they please. Without that opportunity their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated, and without that virtue the opportunity would

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<sup>205</sup> Breiner writes that these examples are imitable, but unattainable. He then notes that they “cannot be imitated precisely,” because that would be to imitate something that is *sui generis*. Thus any imitation would be “only in the most ephemeral sense.” In this respect I agree with him for the reasons stated above. “Machiavelli’s “New Prince” and the Primordial Moment of Acquisition, 76-77.

have come to vain” (*P*, 22-23).<sup>206</sup> Fortuna is an existing chain of causation that produces ‘opportunities’ for the prince of virtù to introduce a new form through the swerve, or production of an encounter. This new form, if it takes hold, would be the first link in a new chain of causation.

Machiavelli, in his discussion of princes of virtù, uses a peculiar word, “matter,” again suggesting an atomistic conception of the world. Machiavelli writes, “[it] was necessary then for Moses to find the people of Israel in Egypt, enslaved and oppressed by the Egyptians, so that they would be disposed to follow him” (*P*, 23). The ‘matter’ that Moses was fortuitous to be given were the Israelites in a state of enslavement, thus rendering them open to new forms. Furthermore, it was “necessary” inasmuch that without the chain of causation offering an “opportunity” it would have not been possible for Moses to found new modes and orders. Similarly, “Cyrus needed to find the Persians malcontent with the empire of the Medes, and the Medes soft and effeminate because of a long peace.” The Persians, like the Israelites, were susceptible to Cyrus’ new form because of their unhappiness with the Medes, but Machiavelli includes in his “matter” the weaknesses of the Medes themselves. Finally, “Theseus could have not demonstrated his virtue if he has not found the Athenians dispersed” (*P*, 23). In all of these cases, the matter, or the people and the formal institutions that are lacking, allows these men to intervene and be “happy,” and “their excellent virtue . . . to be recognised; hence their fatherlands were ennobled by it and became very happy” (*P*, 23). It is worth noting in passing that happiness resonates with the Epicurean emphasis on pleasure.

Machiavelli notes that

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<sup>206</sup> Nederman has argued that by likening Cyrus to Moses, Machiavelli intends to argue that grace of God permits princes to overcome fortune, human nature and individual character. See Nederman, “Amazing Grace: Fortune, God, and Free Will in Machiavelli’s Thought,” 631-632.

these men, who became princes by the paths of virtue, acquire their principality with difficulty but hold it with ease; and the difficulties they have in acquiring their principality arise in part from the new orders and modes that they are forced to introduce so as to found their state and security. And it should be considered that there is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders (*P*, 23).

Breaking from the existing chains of causation is incredibly difficult, as Machiavelli argues here. Machiavelli's use of "forced" seemingly contravenes the argument proffered thus far as it suggests that the prince is still caught within the chain of causation and is acting against his will, or engaged in involuntary actions. However, the prince of virtù initiates his actions because of a prior chain of causation that offers an opportunity, but breaks from it to "introduce" new orders or a new chain of causation. As was noted earlier, the prince cannot simply disregard elements of the prior causation. Machiavelli points out, "the introducer has all those who benefit from the old orders as enemies, and he has lukewarm defenders in all those who might benefit from the new orders" (*P*, 23). It is these enemies and "lukewarm defenders" that the prince must overcome to prove that he does have virtù. Machiavelli repeats his advice against relying on others and argues in favour of depending on one's self (*P*, 24).

Machiavelli conceptualises the nature of people in a manner reminiscent of Lucretius: "besides the things have been said, the nature of peoples is variable; and it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion. And thus things must be ordered in such a mode that when they no longer believe, one can make them believe by force" (*P*, 24). Machiavelli in his transcription of *De Rerum Natura* had remarked that since motion was variable we had free will. Here, however, Machiavelli points to how the majority of people are fickle. This fickleness is evidence of a minimal amount of free will on their part. But given that this minimal free will undermines the newly established mode, Machiavelli thus

recommends the establishment of orders that forces them to behave in particular ways (“in such a mode”) to ensure the continuity of the state, while maintaining their freedom. Machiavelli buttresses his argument by giving the examples of Moses, Cyrus, Theseus and Romulus again. Machiavelli writes, “[men] such as these, therefore, find great difficulty in conducting their affairs; all their dangers are along the path, and they must overcome them with virtue” (*P*, 24). Thus, the prince cannot simply dismiss elements from the prior order rather he must overcome them. Only having overcome said elements through the use of force, or “having eliminated those who had envied them for their quality, they remain powerful, secure, honoured, and happy” (*P*, 24-25). Machiavelli’s emphasis on happiness as a positive outcome from such new orders is further proof of his Epicurean fidelity, but his attention to being “powerful” and “secure” first reflects the torsion in his Epicureanism.

Machiavelli sharply juxtaposes the princes of virtù to princes of fortuna. Whereas, the former with great difficulty become princes but are able to maintain themselves easily, the latter easily become princes but have great difficulty in maintaining themselves (*P*, 25). Machiavelli’s reason for disparaging the princes of fortuna similarly has resonances with Lucretius. He writes,

These persons rest simply on the will and fortune of whoever has given a state to them, which are two very inconstant and unstable things. They do not know how to hold and they cannot hold that rank ... Then, too, states that come to be suddenly, like all other things in nature that are born and grow quickly, cannot have roots and branches, so that the first adverse weather eliminates them - unless, indeed, as was said, those who have suddenly become princes have so much virtue that they know immediately how to prepare to keep what fortuna has placed in their laps; and the foundation that others have laid before becoming princes they lay afterwards (*P*, 26).

Machiavelli’s argument pivots on two terms that are reminiscent of atomic motion: inconstant and unstable. The reason that the prince of fortune has great difficulty is because he is subject to the whims of others and as Machiavelli often reminds us, people’s natures are variable and

constantly changing, i.e. uncontrollable like the weather. Thus, any encounter between such atomic compounds is “sudden” and there is good chance that it will not take hold. Instead, the encounter will likely result in compounds rebounding off one another, or fail to take hold, because the prince must lay down the necessary foundations after the encounter takes place. When an encounter “takes hold,” a new social compound is formed. Garver has insightfully pointed out that Machiavelli’s last sentence in the above paragraph makes it clear that, “acquisition through fortune does not make preservation impossible, and hence, virtù and success are not synonymous.”<sup>207</sup> Garver, however, does not address why the two are not synonymous. The reason has been hinted at before, when discussing “more” and “less” virtù i.e. incredibly few princes have absolute virtù and is never the sole political determinant. Rather, virtù reduces the scope of indeterminacy. This reduced scope is called contingency.<sup>208</sup> Other princes, because of their reliance on others and fortuna, have a far greater scope and thus depend on chance.<sup>209</sup>

Machiavelli gives the examples of Francesco Sforza and Cesare Borgia to demonstrate his argument. The former is a prince of virtù, whereas the latter is a prince of fortune. What is noteworthy about Borgia is that although he “he made use of every deed and did all of those things that should be done by a prudent and virtuous man to put his roots in the states that the arms and fortune of others had given him,” he was unable to succeed in laying down sufficiently the necessary foundations and was unable to “profit” from them “because this arose from an

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<sup>207</sup> Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 32.

<sup>208</sup> Breiner has similarly noted that the new prince “still cannot conquer one things: fortuna,” but does not then analyse this in relation with necessity, or contingency and chance. “Machiavelli’s “New Prince” and the Primordial Moment of Acquisition, 76-77.

<sup>209</sup> Scholars, like Kahn, who are typically so attentive to the rhetorical use of words unfortunately do not differentiate between contingency and chance, and simply define fortuna as contingency. Kahn, “Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli’s Prince,” 74.

extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune” (*P*, 27). In effect, those princes who depend on chance and do not break from chains of causation early on, struggle later to do so.

It is not necessary to recount here Machiavelli’s account of how Borgia was able to begin laying down the necessary foundations. However, the only foundation that Borgia was unable to establish was his failure in capturing Pisa, Lucca and Siena. If he had done so, “he would have acquired such force and reputation that he would have stood by himself and would no longer have depended on the fortune and force of someone else, but on his own power and virtue” (*P*, 31). However, in spite of the military opponents he had “on his back” and his having fallen ill, he may have been able to find “a remedy for everything,” but since this did not occur he fell victim to fortune (*P*, 32). Machiavelli struggles to “[sum] up the actions of the duke” as he is the model of the prince of fortuna. “For with his great spirit and high intention, he could not have conducted himself otherwise and the only things in the way of his plans were the brevity of Alexander’s life and his own sickness” (*P*, 32). Machiavelli’s emphasis on how “he could not have conducted himself otherwise” is because Borgia followed what Machiavelli regards as prudent actions, and also because he was deeply enmeshed in the chain of causation or involuntary actions.

In chapters VIII and IX, Machiavelli turns to two kinds of modes of becoming a prince “which cannot be altogether attributed either to fortune or to virtue”: principalities attained through crime and civic principalities (*P*, 34). Machiavelli writes about the former, relying on the example of Agathocles the Sicilian. Because of his actions the Carthaginians

were compelled of necessity to come to an agreement with him ... Thus, whoever might consider the actions and virtue of this man will see nothing or little that can be attributed to fortune ... Yet one cannot call it virtue to kill one’s citizens, betray one’s friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire empire, but not glory ... his savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes, do not permit him to be celebrated



among the most excellent men. Thus, one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he achieved without either (*P*, 35).

Machiavelli argues that Agathocles the Sicilian could have been considered a prince of virtù as he depended on no one but himself.<sup>210</sup> He was able to break from the chain of causation. Indeed, his virtù was so great that “nothing or little” could be attributed to fortune. However, what stops Agathocles the Sicilian from being considered a prince of virtù is that his actions were such that no one could “celebrate” him and he could not acquire glory. To be a prince of virtù is not simply to acquire an empire, but also to be hailed as glorious.

Machiavelli admits that cruelties can be “badly used or well used,” and what characterises the latter is that they “are done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can. Those are cruelties are badly used which, though few in the beginning, rather grow with time than are eliminated” (*P*, 37-38). Machiavelli does not condemn Agathocles the Sicilian for relying on cruelties, rather he argues that he badly used them given the kinds of cruelties he engaged in and their “infinite” nature. By doing so, he ensured that he could not acquire glory. If he had done them all in one “stroke” because then “being tasted less, they offend less; and benefits should be done little by little so that they may be tasted better” (*P*, 38). An inglorious prince is unable to begin new orders that his inheritors can rely on to maintain the principality.

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<sup>210</sup> Kahn points out that there have been typically two significant interpretations of this example. The first are those scholars like J.H. Whitfield and Claude Lefort who argue that the case of Agathocles demonstrates Machiavelli’s discomfort with his own definition of virtù, whereas others argue that it is a demonstration of cruel but effective violence and debate amongst themselves whether this was immoral or amoral. Kahn herself advocates neither position. She instead argues that crime cannot be called virtù because virtù has no positive definition, rather it is defined conjuncturally or practically. Kahn argues that this demonstrates a theatrical use of the example of Agathocles. Kahn, “Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli’s Prince,” 68-74. I prefer Lefort’s interpretation, as outlined by Kahn, that emphasises the role of glory in determining whether one has virtù or not, regardless of actual crimes.

Machiavelli closes the chapter by speaking about having to react in the face of accidents and necessities. He writes,

Above all, a prince should live with his subjects so that no single accident whether bad or good has to make him change, for when necessities come in adverse times you will not be in time for evil, and the good that you do does not help you, because it is judged to be forced on you, and cannot bring you any gratitude (P, 38).

Machiavelli re-enforces what has been said before, accidents and necessities are “forced on you” from outside, and thus constitute involuntary actions. There can be good and bad accidents and necessities, but these are determined by fortuna or chance. These of course can take the form of internal or external forces.

Machiavelli shifts his attention in chapter IX to the second mode through which private citizens can become princes without relying on either fortuna or virtù: civil principalities. Machiavelli introduces a new category, “fortunate astuteness,” to explain their rise (P, 39). A private citizen with fortunate astuteness becomes a prince with “the support of his fellow citizens,” who are then divided into the “people” and the “great” (P, 39). Machiavelli proceeds to describe a political situation strongly reminiscent of his discussion of “trial and tumult” in Rome in *Discourses* book 1. Machiavelli writes, “in every city these two diverse humours are found, which arises from this: that the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, and the great desire to command oppress the people” (P, 39). The character of a conflict that appears in cities is dictated by the modes and orders established by the prince who founded the principality. Thus, the prince who arises from within this conflict is not a prince of absolute new beginnings, or of relative new beginnings, but a prince that seeks to settle a conflict about the maintenance of freedom between these two humours. Machiavelli writes that both the greats and the people, in situations when they are losing to the other, will pick a prince from one

amongst themselves so that they can either “vent their appetite under his shadow” (the great) or “be defended with his authority” (the people) (*P*, 39). Machiavelli recommends to such princes that they rely on the people, rather than the great, because when the people anoint a prince he is alone, whereas if he is the prince of the great then he is amongst peers (*P*, 39).<sup>211</sup> The role of fortunate astuteness in such situations is the capacity to make correct decisions. He does not need to have extraordinary virtù because he is not founding a new state. Machiavelli argues the people ought to be the ones that the prince relies on because they are more easily satiated as “they ask of him only that they not be oppressed” i.e. they seek the maintenance of their freedom (*P*, 40). This desire to not be oppressed by the greats will be referred to in the following chapter as habituated freedom.

Machiavelli’s judgement that “the qualities of these principalities ... must admit another consideration” pivots precisely on whether the prince who founded them, or maintained them, breaks from the chain of causation or is simply another link in it i.e. “that is, whether a prince has enough of a state that he can rule by himself when he needs to, or whether he is always under the necessity of being defended by others” (*P*, 42). This capacity to rule by himself, or virtù, is premised on whether one can effect a break in the chain of causation, or if one is “always under the necessity” of the existing chain of causation. Machiavelli re-emphasises this line of interrogation in the following lines:

I judge those capable of ruling by themselves who can, by abundance of either men or money, put together an adequate army and fight a battle against whoever comes to attack them; and I judge as well that those always have necessity of others who cannot appear in the field against an enemy, but are compelled of necessity to take refuge behind walls and to guard them (*P*, 43).

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<sup>211</sup> Bonadeo argues that in *The Prince*, “the 'grandi' appear as the most fear- some enemies of the prince: their independence is nearly absolute, they constitute virtually a second power within the state, and they are a constant threat to the security of his political creature, the 'principato.’” Bonadeo, “The Role of the 'Grandi' in the Political World of Machiavelli,” 16.

Machiavelli says that he will not discourse on the former as he has already covered this material elsewhere, and turns his attention to the second case. This second case is odd, as it initially appears that his comments undo the previous argument that discounts involuntary actions (“always have necessity of others,” “are compelled of necessity to take refuge”), because his account endorses this course of action (“I judge as well”). However, any endorsement of these actions is similar to his discussion in the initial chapter on “hereditary principalities” that princes of ordinary industry can maintain themselves by relying on the order of their ancestors. Machiavelli himself notes that, “whoever has fortified his town well, and has managed the other governing of his subjects as was said above and will be said below, will always be attacked with great hesitation” (*P*, 43). Machiavelli suggests that the prudent course of action, or fortunate astuteness, is that they fortify their town “well” because one can expect, in a typical chain of causation, that they will likely not be attacked because of the slavish habits (“great hesitation”) of their opponents. Machiavelli continues this argument when he writes, “for men are always hostile to undertakings where difficulties may be seen, and one can see it is not easy to attack one who has a strong town and is not hated by the people” (*P*, 43). Typically, opponents who lack *virtù* will hesitantly attack “a strong town” under good governance as evidenced by the cities of Germany (*P*, 43-44).

Thus, when discussing whether a people can endure a long siege, Machiavelli writes, “I respond that a powerful and spirited prince will always overcome all these difficulties, now by giving hope to his subjects that the evil will not last long, by giving them fear of the enemy’s cruelty, now by securing himself skilfully against those who appear to him too bold” (*P*, 44). If a prince of *virtù* does not appear on the scene, the prince with relatively more *virtù* than the prince of fortune can maintain himself and secure his principality through an appropriate course of

action. The appropriate course of action pivots on encouraging and guiding the internal necessities, or the passions of the people, within the principality by engendering in them a fear of external forces/necessities. Machiavelli writes, “if one considers all this well, it should not be difficult for a prudent prince to keep the spirit of his citizens firm in the siege, at first and later, provided he does not lack the wherewithal for life and for defence” (*P*, 44). There is little virtù here.

Machiavelli finally examines the last type of principality: ecclesiastical principalities. He immediately dispels any suggestion that they are qualitatively different from other kinds of principalities. The only difference is the manner through which they are maintained. He does so by reminding his reader of his opening lines of *The Prince*:

All difficulties regarding them come before they are possessed, because they are acquired either by virtue or by fortune and are maintained without the one of the other, for they are sustained by orders that have grown old with religion, which have been so powerful and of such a kind that they keep their princes in the state however they proceed and live (*P*, 45).

Through such repetition, Machiavelli rids the reader of any illusions that it was the “grace of God” that resulted in the beginning of ecclesiastical principalities i.e. they are either founded by princes of virtù or fortuna like any other principality. They are indeed unique in the mode of their maintenance. Whereas, other principalities relied on virtù or fortuna to maintain themselves, ecclesiastical principalities rely on religion. Religion functions similarly to the order of ancestors in the case of hereditary principalities. However, the power of the order of ancestors is less than religion. This additional power of religion is such that even if an ecclesiastical prince is not of ordinary industry, he will still be able to maintain himself regardless of how he proceeds and how he lives. The power of religion enables such states to not need to be defended, governed, or fearful of estrangement from others, “[thus], only these principalities are secure and

happy” (*P*, 45). Indeed, God, not men, maintains ecclesiastical states (*P*, 45). Or at least the modes ordered by the idea of God.

However, Machiavelli demurs from discussing the idea of God and prefers to discuss “how it came about that the Church has come to such greatness in temporal affairs” when until quite recently she was “held in low esteem in temporal affairs” (*P*, 45). After explaining the general disarray of Italy prior to Alexander VI, the divisions between the different Italian powers, and noting that occasionally princes of fortuna and wisdom like Sixtus did occasionally emerge, Machiavelli writes, “[then] Alexander VI arose; of all the pontiffs there have ever been he showed how far a pope could prevail with money and forces” (*P*, 46). Alexander VI was able to achieve temporal greatness for the Church because he was able to “use” Cesare Borgia “as his instrument” (*P*, 46). Neither Alexander VI nor Cesare Borgia is described as having virtù because the former relied on the order of religion, and the latter relied on the former’s office. But the actions of Cesare Borgia, because they almost demonstrated virtù, “did redounded to the greatness of the Church” (*P*, 47). His actions gave greatness to the Church because after he was “eliminated, the Church fell heir to his labours” (*P*, 47). The Church did not achieve greatness because of the will of God or because of its own virtù, but because of the money and arms it was able to supply to its instrument, Cesare Borgia. They, because of the chain of causation, benefitted from his labours. The Church effectively gained glory through fortuna. Pope Julius found himself in possession of a Church made great from the labor of others and “found the path still open to a mode of accumulating money” (*P*, 47). Through this revenue he was able to further expand and bring praise to himself, because it was the Church that was benefitting again from his labours on its behalf (*P*, 47). The Church has also benefitted from “disorders and tumults among the barons” (*P*, 47). However, Machiavelli hopes that Pope Leo, the son of

Lorenzo de' Medici to whom *The Prince* is addressed, finding himself in possession of a powerful pontificate that "others made ... great with arms" will be able, "with his goodness and infinite other virtues ... make it very great and venerable" (*P*, 47).

Chapter XV opens by posing the problem of internal necessity. He writes, "[it] remains now to see what the modes and government of a prince should be with subjects and with friends" (*P*, 61). Machiavelli wishes to discourse on internal necessity because he is aware that internal politics, or motion, is as dynamic and important as external politics and forces. Indeed, one finds him conceptualising the entire problematic in terms of voluntary and involuntary actions.

He grounds his advice in his own voluntary action or swerve. He rewrites, "I fear that in writing of it again, I may be held presumptuous, especially in disputing this matter I depart from the orders of others" (*P*, 61). Machiavelli's departure from 'orders of others' is break from existing chains of causation. What is the nature of this break? In a manner reminiscent of Lucretius' warnings to Memmius that he should not be led astray by incorrect ideas, Machiavelli declares that "my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it" (*P*, 61). Two points need to be made here. First, Machiavelli's intent is to write for "whoever understands it," unlike previously where he directed his comments at "you" [Lorenzo de' Medici]. The significance of the "whoever" was highlighted in chapter 1 when Althusser comments that this anonymity replicates the structure of Lucretius' clinamen: the voluntary action occurs at an undetermined time and place by an undetermined "whoever." Second, Machiavelli famously advocates realism rather than imaginary constructions of what a state is or ought to be. This advocacy for realism parallels Lucretius' consistent emphasis to Memmius that

he too realise the effectual truth of atomism. Machiavelli famously extends this realism to an analysis of principalities. He states,

many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation (*P*, 61).

He distances himself from any discussion of ideal states and only talks about states that have existed. His previous discussion about all the different types of principalities is evidence of this realism. Machiavelli ties this realism to involuntary and voluntary action. He writes, “Hence it is necessary to be a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity” (*P*, 61). The prince arises from a previous chain of causation, but must break the chain of causation by effecting a voluntary action. The voluntariness of this action is denoted by the prince choosing to “use or not use” being good, even if the resultant actions fall outside of acceptable morality.<sup>212</sup> Machiavelli states,

And I know that everyone will confess that it would be very praiseworthy thing to find in a prince all of the above-mentioned qualities that are held good. But because he cannot have them, nor wholly observe them, since human conditions do not permit it, it is necessary to be prudent as to know how to avoid infamy of those vices that would take his state from him and to be on guard against those that do not, if that is possible; but if one cannot, one can let them go on with less hesitation (*P*, 62).

It is impossible for a prince to be wholly good and do only praiseworthy things, because then he will not be able to maintain his state. Rather, he is compelled by necessity “to be prudent” and “know how to avoid infamy,” but also to mitigate his own uncontrollable vices. This compulsion

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<sup>212</sup> Kahn notes the implications of this on Machiavelli’s relationship to Cicero when she writes that, “[in] rejecting the Ciceronian and humanist equation between *honestas* and *utilitas*, the faith that practical reason or prudence is inseparable from moral virtue, Machiavelli thus turns prudence into what the humanists (and their detractors) always feared it would become- the amoral skill of *versutia* or mere cleverness, which in turn implies the ethically unrestrained use of force-in short, *virtù*.” Kahn, “Kahn, “Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli’s Prince,” 65.



by necessity to behave in particular ways returns us to Machiavelli's earlier statement that one has "more or less" virtù. Although the prince of virtù effectuates a break in the chain of causation through the production of new modes and orders, he is simultaneously partially limited by the situation in which he finds himself and his own vices. These limitations mean that the prince does not determine every outcome.

It is not necessary to discuss chapters XVI-XIX with any great detail as Machiavelli repeats this framework when discussing in detail each of the qualities mentioned in chapter XV to demonstrate when they should be used and not used. However, chapter XVIII is worth focusing on briefly because Machiavelli's most famous metaphor is to be found here: the metaphor of Chiron.<sup>213</sup> This metaphor is useful to understand Lucretius' influence on Machiavelli.<sup>214</sup>

Machiavelli explains that there are two kinds of combats: laws and force. "The first is proper to man, the second to beasts; but because the first is often not enough one must have recourse to the second. There it is necessary for a prince to know well how to use the beast and the man" (*P*, 69). Chiron the Centaur who trained Achilles is Machiavelli's metaphor for this dual nature. Before continuing it is worth briefly reflecting on Lucretius' discussion on the existence of centaurs as it helps guide a strong Lucretian interpretation of this famous metaphor. Lucretius writes, "Centaur never existed, and at no time can there be creatures with a dual nature and double body, so composed of heterogeneous limbs that the powers derived from the two parts can be sufficiently harmonious" (*DRN*, 5: 870-890). It may initially appear that

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<sup>213</sup> Ingman has pointed out that Machiavelli's discussion of Chiron the Centaur is unique inasmuch that it is "almost a complete break with the traditional interpretation of the Chiron legend," which emphasised the humanist ideal of education, rather than the bestial nature of Chiron. "Machiavelli and the Interpretation of the Chiron myth in France," 217-218.

<sup>214</sup> Ingman points out that Gentillet opposes Machiavelli's interpretation of the myth to Xenophon's. "Machiavelli and the Interpretation of the Chiron myth in France," 217-218.

Machiavelli rejects Lucretius' argument regarding the impossibility of a creature having two natures as the concept of *virtù* rests precisely on the dual nature of the prince. However, two considerations need to be taken into account: the first is that the centaur functions as a metaphor. This metaphorical quality makes Lucretius' discussion pertinent because while reaffirming that "no creature ever existed," Lucretius provides an explanation why people think that they did exist. Lucretius writes, "when the images of a horse and a human being chance to meet, they instantly and easily cohere, as we have said before, on account of the subtlety of their substance and the tenuity of their texture" (*DRN*, 4: 740-750). Machiavelli parallels Lucretius' discussion of centaurs when he explains, "it is not necessary for a prince to have all the above-mentioned qualities, but it is indeed necessary to appear to have them" (*P*, 70). More important than actually having the different qualities of the centaur is the appearance of having them. Machiavelli even goes one step further, he writes,

Nay, I dare say this, that by having them and observing them, they are harmful; and by appearing to have them, they are useful, as it is to appear merciful, faithful, humane, honest, and religious, and to be so; but to remain with a spirit built so that, if you need not to be those things, you are able and know how to change to the contrary (*P*, 70).

Machiavelli suggests that the possession of all the virtues and 'observing them' is in fact harmful; instead one must appear to observe them. However, Machiavelli must be distanced from the parodies of him that constitute "Machiavellianisms." Thus, Machiavelli importantly supplements this need to appear to have those qualities with the need to also "be so." The prince should have all of those qualities, but must be able and know when to suspend them – through his peculiarly built spirit – so that he is supple enough to change when needed. This suppleness emerges from the gap between appearance and "being so." This gap parallels Lucretius' distinction between accidents and properties that was discussed in the previous chapter.

In the very next line, Machiavelli relates appearance to necessity and subsequently fortuna. He also seems to put the interpretation offered thus far into doubt because of his insistence on adapting to fortuna. He writes,

This has to be understood: that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since he is often under a necessity to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion. And he needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him, and as I said above, not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil when forced by necessity (*P*, 70).

Appearances are necessary to maintain the state, and the necessity to which these appearances respond is “the winds of fortune and variations of things.” Appearances, necessity and fortuna thus all operate in tandem to one another and are part of the same chain of causation. However, while this quote seems to confirm the relationship between these three terms, it simultaneously puts into doubt the interpretation of *virtù* as a voluntary action or break in the chain of causation inasmuch that fortuna appears to still be strongly present and the prince must adapt to necessity, thus violating the initial juxtaposition of fortuna and *virtù*. The presence of fortuna is unsurprising for two reasons: first, incredibly few princes have absolute *virtù*, more often that not one has more or less *virtù*, which means that the prince must parry with fortuna. Fortuna in this case is contingency because of the presence of some *virtù*. However, due to the properties endemic to *virtù* a prince of *virtù* will adopt the appropriate measures to maintain the state. The second point is that Machiavelli is discussing a link subsequent to the beginning of the state i.e. he is expounding on the maintenance of the new state already begun by *virtù*. Machiavelli is thus discussing the new chain of causation, rather than the beginning of a chain of causation. All chains of causation rely on involuntary actions and necessity. Newly begun chains of causation are no exception.

Machiavelli re-emphasises the need to appear to have these qualities because few get to “touch what you are” and thus rely on appearances, while those who do get to regularly meet the prince are too few to go against the majority (*P*, 71). If the prince maintains these appearances for the majority, then they will “let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honourable, and will be praised by everyone” (*P*, 71). The implication of this need to maintain appearances to win and maintain one’s state through positive public opinion, Kahn explains, is that “power becomes in part, if not entirely, an effect of the representational illusion of truth.”<sup>215</sup> Machiavelli further endorses the second reason offered above as he temporally distinguishes between winning the state and maintaining it. Maintenance of the state is a problem of the chain of causation.

Furthermore, alluding to Machiavelli’s theory of history, the role of history is to retroactively determine whether a prince had virtù. Evidence of this virtù would be his ability to maintain his state and achieve glory. Given that a given prince has achieved glory indicates that he had sufficient virtù to enter into evil in such a manner as to minimise its damage to his public appearance. This minimisation renders such actions honourable and worthy of glory. The prince must ensure not to do things that “make him hateful and contemptible” because, as seen in cases of princes who acquire their state through criminality, they undermine his glory (*P*, 72). The role of history, for Machiavelli, is to have an effectual truth about states as they are, but also as a method to locate instances of virtù and fortuna.

This entire discussion speaks to the two fears that Machiavelli identifies in chapter XIX, again alluding to internal and external necessity: “a prince should have two fears: one within, on account of his subjects; the other outside, on account of external powers” (*P*, 72). To deal with

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<sup>215</sup> Kahn, “Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli’s Prince,” 65.

external powers, one should have good arms and the good friends that result from good arms (*P*, 72). With respect to the internal fear Machiavelli writes in strongly atomistic terms that,

And things inside will always remain steady, if things outside are steady, unless indeed they are disturbed by conspiracy; and even if things outside are in motion, provided he has ordered and lived as I said, as long as he does not forsake himself he will always withstand every thrust (*P*, 72).

Machiavelli seems to reject Lucretius' argument that there is perpetual movement internally and externally and proposes that it is possible for things to remain steady instead. However, Machiavelli's use of the phrase, "in motion," alludes to an enduring fidelity. Machiavelli, in fact, undermines this emphasis on steadiness in the very next sentence by introducing political intrigue. Machiavelli continues, "[but], as to subjects, when things outside are not moving, one has to fear that they may be conspiring secretly. From this the prince may secure himself sufficiently if he avoids being hated or despised and keeps the people satisfied with him" (*P*, 72-73). Political intrigue reinserts motion into the narrative because it results in the prince behaving in specific ways. Indeed, it cannot but remind us of Lucretius' example of the flock of sheep that appear from afar to be steady and unmoving, but in fact are constantly moving within their herd. Ironically, conspiracies mirror the clinamen as they occur at undetermined times and places. The need to avoid the possibility of a conspiracy, despite the supposed steadiness external to the principality, is another link in the chain of causation. To ward off a conspiracy requires "well ordered-states and wise princes" who "have thought with all diligence how not to make the great desperate and how to satisfy the people and keep them content" (*P*, 74).

This emphasis on internal movement comes to the fore in chapter XX. Machiavelli favours arming one's subjects, especially in the case of a new prince, because "when they are armed, those arms become yours; those whom you suspected become faithful, and those who were

faithful remain so; and from subjects they are made into your partisans” (*P*, 83).<sup>216</sup> The new prince creates a new mode of citizenship that reflects a new chain of causation. This new form of citizenship, which in truth only results in partial arming of the citizenry, makes “others excuse you [the new prince], judging it necessary that those who have more danger and more obligation deserve more” (*P*, 83). The unarmed citizenry not only understands why they cannot be armed, but why an entire social order of differentiated tasks and benefits is necessary.

Similarly in a newly acquired state that is an addition to an existing state, “it is necessary to disarm that state except for those who were your partisans in acquiring it. These, too, it is necessary to render soft and effeminate” (*P*, 84). Both the absolutely new state and the composite state are contrasted with the prince who does not arm his people and thus “must turn to a mercenary army,” which is always of suspect quality etc., (*P*, 84). Machiavelli’s use of “must” here gestures towards necessity and the chain of causation, whereas, “a new prince of a new principality always has ordered the arms there” (*P*, 84). The new prince here is not compelled by the same kind of necessity and is the active agent in the ordering.

Furthermore, when discussing the usefulness of fortresses, Machiavelli introduces a supple qualification about divisions within cities. Machiavelli appears to dismiss the central tenet of the democratic (radical or otherwise) interpretation of his work i.e. Machiavelli advocates a democratic politics on the basis of contestation between the people and the great. Machiavelli writes that in the past “those who were esteemed wise” argued “it was necessary to hold Pistoia with parties and Pisa with fortresses; and because of this they nourished differences in some

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<sup>216</sup> Dietz has pointed out that this advice, “if taken to be sincere, fails to account for the possibility, indeed the probability, that arms may facilitate plots, incite insurrection, and inspire rebels.” “Trapping the Prince,” 786. However, what Dietz fails to recognise is that arming the people will lead to a greater likelihood of such conspiracies; and that by arming the people, the inevitable conspiracies that will arise against the prince, will be unsuccessful precisely because the majority of the people are armed and indebted to the prince.

towns subject to them” (*P*, 84). Two things ought to be pointed out here: the first is that Machiavelli speaks of the ancients “who were esteemed wise,” but does not say that he himself regards them to be wise. Instead he suggests that they appear to others to be wise. These two things are worth pointing out because Machiavelli will repeat this rhetorical device in *Discourses* when talking about Polybius’ theory of anacyclosis. And second, Machiavelli seems to account for differences that arise within one compound polity between different modes and orders for individual cities through regional variation. We will return to this second point shortly.

Machiavelli continues, after historicising this advice, “I do not believe that divisions ever do any good; on the contrary, when the enemy approaches, of necessity divided cities are immediately lost, because the weaker party always joins the external forces and the other will not be able to rule” (*P*, 84). Machiavelli returns to his argument that he made in chapters III and IV of *The Prince*, but from the vantage point of the internal necessity. The necessity being examined here is the internal necessity (the weaker party) joining hands with the external force, resulting in the city being lost. Machiavelli seems to be definitive here that factions are something that he is opposed to. Machiavelli buttresses his argument in the next paragraph, when explaining that the Venetians “nourished the Guelf and Ghibelline sects” and how this led to one faction capturing the entire state (*P*, 84-85). The key word is “sect.” Machiavelli is always opposed to hardened factions or sects. Sects cause divisions that are intractable and cannot be properly resolved. They are qualitatively distinct from the ‘trial and tumult’ that emerges from the over-reach of the great. This entire discussion is brought to a theoretical synthetic point when Machiavelli writes that,

Without doubt princes become great when they overcome difficulties made for them and opposition made to them. So fortune, especially when she wants to

make a new prince great — since he has a greater necessity to acquire reputation than a hereditary prince — makes enemies arise for him and makes them undertake enterprises against him, so that he has cause to overcome them and climb on the ladder that his enemies have brought to him (*P*, 85).

Machiavelli reaffirms the theoretical schema that was established earlier. The prince is “necessitated” to do something because fortune “makes enemies arise for him.” If the prince can overcome these difficulties then he will acquire the reputation that he seeks: greatness.

Machiavelli shifts his vantage point again when returning to the aforementioned scenario of internal division that results in the weakening of a state that allows an external force to capture it, by taking the perspective of an external force. He writes,

I do not want to leave out a reminder to princes who have taken a new state through internal support within it, they consider all what cause moved those who supported them to support them. If it is not natural affection towards them but only because those supporters were not content with that state, he will be able to keep them his friends with trouble and great difficulty, because it is impossible for him to make them content ... he will see that it is much easier to gain as friends to himself men who were content with the state beforehand, and therefore were his enemies (*P*, 86).

Machiavelli gives the same advice to the prince who newly acquired the state: do not trust those people that were part of the internal necessity that helped him capture the state because they will behave similarly in the newly formed principality. Instead, one must break the chain of causation by winning over one’s enemies through the process of arming them and winning them over.

Machiavelli finally returns to the theme of fortresses and arrives at an interesting solution: he argues that he is neutral with respect to the usefulness of fortress because they are of limited use in the current context, and instead regards not being hated by the people to be the best possible fortress (*P*, 87). The question is thus not regional variation, but is instead the internal



composition of the state. Physical fortresses can be useful, however their effectiveness is determined by the virtù of the prince, rather than some intrinsic defensive value.<sup>217</sup>

Machiavelli re-emphasises the rarity of princes with virtù in chapter XXI. Machiavelli writes, “[nothing] makes a prince so much esteemed as to carry on great enterprises and to give rare examples of himself” (*P*, 87). In the case of Ferdinand of Aragon one can see repeatedly encounters between atoms/compounds, but these encounters are not guided by fortune. Rather, they are an effect of the prince’s capacity and break the chain of causation by creating a new beginning. Thus, having taken into consideration a number of different factors Ferdinand attacks Granada, and using ‘innovation’ overcomes them (*P*, 88). He also “[undertook] greater enterprises” and used religion to deal with enemies without besmirching his own reputation (*P*, 88). He also created new orders i.e. he successfully intervened within the compound, or state, and reorganised the constituent atoms or internal forces. Thus, “when the opportunity arises of someone who works for something extraordinary in civil life, either for good or for ill, and of picking a mode of reward or punishing him of which much will be said” (*P*, 89). Machiavelli re-emphasises against “being at the discretion of others” (*P*, 90). The prince should create orders so that the internal life of the state is as “virtuous” as possible, and “prepare rewards for whoever wants to do these things, and for anyone who thinks up any way of expanding his city or his state” (*P*, 91). Machiavelli, as will be seen in the subsequent chapter, will distinguish between

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<sup>217</sup> Dietz has argued that Machiavelli’s advice against building a fortress is meant to further weaken the prince against possible attacks because without a fortress the prince is more vulnerable to the passions of a formerly republican people. “Trapping the Prince,” 788. However, Machiavelli does not, as has been argued, advise against it. Rather, the question of whether to build one or not is conjuncturally decided. What is of greater import is winning the support of the people because that is truly the best defense. Indeed, Dietz’s argument that Lorenzo did not go into public places much, and often under heavy guard, because of such fears, ignores Machiavelli’s point that this will continue until Lorenzo takes deliberate step to end the antagonism between himself and the people.

virtuousness and virtù. However, the dynamic is the same: virtuousness is the effect of good orders put into place by the prince of virtù.

### **Chapters XXV-XXVI: An Exhortation for a New Beginning**

In the last three chapters of *The Prince* Machiavelli synthesises his argument and brings it to its political fruition. It has been argued that the concepts, virtù and fortuna, are derived from Lucretius' discussion of atomic motion in book 2 of *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretius' clinamen was a rare instance in which an atom at unknown time and place makes an infinitesimally small swerve and encounters another atom, and is different from the other forms of motion that Lucretius describes: internal necessity (weight) and external necessity (blows from outside). The distinction between the clinamen and these two forms of necessity was that the former is premised on a break in the chain of causation, whereas the latter two are additional links in a previous chain of causation. Machiavelli's concept of virtù is similar as it a rare instance when a prince with exceptional virtù is able to break with existing chains of causation and through the creation of a new principality implement new modes and orders, whereas the prince of fortuna is consistently forced by either internal or external necessity to act in constrained ways. Thus, in closing, chapters XXV, which concerns fortune directly, and XXVI will be discussed to bring these themes to the fore.

In chapter XXV Machiavelli disagrees with "the many" that hold the position that puts whole emphasis on fortuna's capacity to dictate human affairs. They argue "men cannot correct them with their prudence, indeed that they have no remedy at all" (*P*, 98). Machiavelli admits he has "been in some part inclined to their opinions" and agrees that most men, despite their prudence, are unable to correct the whims of fortune and are "governed by chance" (*P*, 98). But

Machiavelli adds an important provision that parallels the narrative of Lucretius. He writes, “[nonetheless], so that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our actions, but also that she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern” (*P*, 98). Like Lucretius, Machiavelli is concerned that the position of “the many” abandons any notion of “free will.” He thus introduces the argument that fortune and our own actions weigh on a situation equally. Machiavelli then proposes his famous river analogy. This analogy parallels Lucretius’ imagery of rivers that “inundated the earth and submerged towns.” Machiavelli writes in strikingly reminiscent manner that,

And I liken her [fortuna] to one of these violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plans, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging. It happens similarly with fortune, which demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her and therefore turn her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her (*P*, 98-99).

The original theoretical framework established at the outset of this dissertation was that *virtù* and *fortuna* are exclusive terms. However, here Machiavelli appears to conjoin them. Again, it seems like the paradigm established thus far has fallen apart. However, it was later acknowledged that given that there was “more or less” *virtù*, *fortuna* continues to play some role, which is the basis of differentiating between contingency and chance. The cases of absolute *virtù* are truly rare. *Fortuna* operates as contingency when there is more *virtù* and *fortuna* is largely kept in check, while *fortuna* functions as chance when there is a paucity of *virtù*. *Fortuna* and *virtù* are exclusive terms only retroactively as history reveals whether *virtù* or *fortuna* is predominately functioning in a given historical case. Thus, the schema that had been proposed holds. Machiavelli in this passage sheds further light on this differentiation between contingency and

chance. Fortuna is always present, in the form of contingency, because the prince cannot have absolute knowledge about the actions of other actors and thus cannot determine the precise outcomes of an encounter. The prince can limit the number of possible outcomes by creating the appropriate modes and orders, or “dikes and dams” in this analogy, through his virtù. If the prince does not do so, which is evidence of a lack of virtù, then fortuna will be able to flow roughshod over the earth and submerge the cities and towns. In the very next line after the above passage, Machiavelli again gestures to Lucretius’ theory of motion. He writes,

And if you consider Italy, which is the seat of these variations and that which has given them motion, you will see a country with dams and without any dike. If it had been diked by a suitable virtue, like Germany, Spain, and France, either this flood would not have brought the great variations it has, or it would have not come here (*P*, 99).

Machiavelli’s emphasis on “variations and that which has given them motion” has been repeatedly been commented on and reminds the reader of his marginalia on his hand-copied edition of *De Rerum Natura*. Machiavelli links the preceding discussion of fortuna and virtù to motion and the variations that arise from different kinds of motion. He further connects this theoretical framework to the political problematic of the time i.e. the situation in Italy. Because Italy has been subject to the whims of fortuna and the logic of necessity it has had wide variations. Machiavelli repeats his warning that any prince “who leans entirely on his fortune comes to ruin as it varies” (*P*, 99). Thus, Machiavelli advocates that the prince should “[adapt] his mode of proceeding to the qualities of the times” (*P*, 99). This capacity to alter is a pivotal aspect of “more” virtù.

Machiavelli distinguishes between this capacity to adapt to the times and cautiousness (*P*, 99). This capacity is vital for the break in the chain of causation. Machiavelli argues cautious men are not impetuous and are thus dependent on fortuna and her whims. He writes, “[one] also

sees two cautious persons, one attaining his plan, the other not” (*P*, 99). The reason that one succeeds and the other does not is not due to any of their own actions, rather it is due to whether or not the times conform to their actions i.e. whether fortuna favours them. Machiavelli explains that, “[this] arises from nothing other than the quality of the times that they conform to or not in their procedure” (*P*, 99). This quality of the times “depends [on] the variability of the good” (*P*, 100). “The good” is when fortune decides to conform to the actions of the prince, “but if the times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding” (*P*, 100).

Machiavelli now introduces a confusing sentence. He states,

Nor may a man be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to this, whether because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to or also because, when one has always flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it (*P*, 100).

Machiavelli seems to argue that men cannot be sufficiently prudent enough, due to their nature, to consistently adapt to new circumstances and thus they will always be ruined. It appears that *virtù* is not possible because men are always limited by their nature or their habit. However, this confusion is due to a mistaken equivalence of prudence to *virtù*. Prudence is one part of *virtù*. If a prince is only prudent then he will be ruined. Machiavelli’s pessimism is reflective of the rarity of the impetuous man who is able to create a break in the chain of causation. Most men are cautious in their actions and are dependent on necessity/fortuna. Machiavelli juxtaposes this cautious man to the man of impetuosity again when he writes, “so the cautious man, when it is time to come to impetuosity, does not know how to do it, hence comes to ruin” (*P*, 100). The prince of *virtù* is not simply a prudent man, he is man that is both prudent and impetuous, and has the ability to know when to use one or the other. Pope Julius II is evidence of the correct use of impetuosity, however, he is not evidence of a prince of *virtù* because ecclesiastical

principalities do not function on virtù (*P*, 100). The King of France, on the other hand, lacked impetuosity, and like Lucretius' weight/internal necessity, "would never have deviated from those modes to which nature inclined him" (*P*, 101). Machiavelli's use of the word "deviate" similarly resonates with Lucretius' discussion of the clinamen as a slight deviation.

Machiavelli concludes the chapter with the most controversial quotation from *The Prince*:

I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is a friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity (*P*, 101).

Machiavelli clearly sides with impetuosity. He does so because impetuosity allows for a break in the chain of causation i.e. the suppression of fortune. Machiavelli's use of "necessary" further corroborates this emphasis on impetuosity. Rather than being necessitated by fortuna, impetuosity helps bind fortuna and begins a new chain of causation. Impetuosity is a manifestation of "free will." Machiavelli finally gestures towards the subsequent chapter by putting aside "those who proceed coldly" - the common stereotype of the Machiavellian - and exhorting the young because they are by nature impetuous, "less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity."

Machiavelli's exhortation reminds us of Lucretius' exhortation to Memmius that he adopt Epicureanism and abandon politics. Machiavelli, however, aims to do the very opposite. He makes an argument in favour of a break in the chain of causation through the advent of a new prince. Machiavelli writes,

Thus, having considered everything discussed above, and thinking to myself whether in Italy at present the times have been tending to the honour of a new prince, and whether there is matter to give opportunity to someone prudent and virtuous to introduce a form that would bring honour to him and good to the community of men there, it appears to me that so many things are tending to the

benefit of a new prince that I do not know what time has been more apt for it (*P*, 101-102).

Machiavelli's adherence to Lucretius' philosophy is on display as he refers to the people and conditions of Italy as "matter." His advocacy for a break in the chain of causation becomes evident from the following lines when Machiavelli gives a number of examples like Moses ("the people of Israel"), Cyrus ("the spirit") and Theseus ("the Athenians be dispersed") (*P*, 102). Furthermore, the "military virtue had died out in her" and "her ancient orders were not good" (*P*, 103). Machiavelli reaffirms that in Italy "matter is not lacking for introducing every form; here there is great virtue in the limbs, if it were lacking in the heads" (*P*, 104). Disaggregation of compounds does not mean that the necessary matter does not exist, rather it means that the compounds have lost their previous forms. The reference to "limbs" and "heads" is a further reminder of Lucretius' discussion of the limbs of the horse at the gates. However, what is lacking is the "head" that can inaugurate the *clinamen*. The "head" is not only Machiavelli's teachings, but also Lucretius'. Machiavelli writes, in a manner reminiscent of Lucretius when warning Memmius about being led astray by wrong teachings, that "everything follows from the weakness at the head, because those who know are not obeyed, and each thinks he knows, since up to now no one has been able to raise himself, both by virtue and by fortune, to a point where the others yield to him" (*P*, 104). If Italy could just have a head that has the correct teachings, then the potential of realising a new form could be achieved.

As Althusser had pointed out, this new prince who is both "prudent and virtuous" (which reaffirms the discussion of the disjunction between prudence/cautiousness and impetuosity) is asked to introduce a new form into a political void. This political void, Machiavelli describes as following:

so at present to know the virtue of an Italian spirit it was necessary that Italy be reduced to the condition in which she is at present, which is more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more dispersed than the Athenians, without a head, without order, beaten, despoiled, torn, pillaged, and having endured ruin of every sort (*P*, 102).

The Italian people are basically next to nothing because of the process of disaggregation.<sup>218</sup> They are not absolutely nothing, as the conditions for something do exist. Much like Lucretius' void and atoms, Italy is a political void in which the component parts - the atoms - exist for something to exist. All that is required is a clinamen. It is this clinamen that Machiavelli is exhorting the prince to impetuously cause. Until now, all princes who have sought to intervene have been "repulsed by fortune" because of "the highest course of his actions" (*P*, 102). Given this situation, Machiavelli deduces that "[one] may also see her ready and disposed to follow a flag, provided that there be someone to pick it up" (*P*, 102).

Machiavelli thinks that it is the house of Medici is best suited to this task, suggesting that this could have not been the case in the past and may not be the case in the future. Thus the present time is an opportune one for them. He explains that "[nor] may one see at present anyone in whom she can hope more than in your illustrious house, which with its fortune and virtue, supported by God and by the Church of which it is now prince, can put itself at the head of this redemption" (*P*, 102-103). The conjunction of fortune and virtù seems to challenge the initial thesis that Machiavelli separates the two concepts, but in this particular usage, Machiavelli is speaking about the "house of Medici," not an individual member of the Medici. It is not possible for a complete house, which is comprised of many members, to have virtù, rather, some will have "more or less" virtù. Machiavelli reaffirms the rarity of such new beginnings when he notes

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<sup>218</sup> Ardito has argued that, "After 1494, Renaissance Italy was never the same, shattered beyond recognition by the decades of war, destruction, political tumult, and misery that followed Charles VIII's procession through Florence beneath a canopy of gold. To Italians, it was the ruin of the known world." Ardito, *Machiavelli and the Modern State*, 14.



that “these men are rare and marvellous,” and then points out - as to not scare away Lorenzo - that they did so with “less opportunity than the present” (*P*, 103). Furthermore, Machiavelli, as is apparent from the outset, does not think that Lorenzo has extraordinary virtù, but may have the adequate amount of virtù to emulate the great princes.

He further restates his commitment to free will, the theme that intrigued him so upon reading *De Rerum Natura* and which he commented upon: “God does not want to do everything, so as not to take free will from us and that part of the glory falls to us” (*P*, 103). God, or fortune, has given the house of Medici the conditions, or the matter, so that they can achieve greatness, but they must break the chain of causation and commit to a swerve. Until now, Machiavelli argues, “there has not been anyone who has known how to find new ones [orders because the ‘ancient orders were not good’]; and nothing brings so much honour to a man rising newly as the new laws and orders found by him” (*P*, 103-104). Machiavelli, as was noted previously, recommits himself to the torsion he introduced to Epicureanism, thus rendering the prince similarly great and honorific, by consistently appealing to the very honour that Lucretius considered the path to unhappiness. Machiavelli concludes that this new prince must depend on himself through the provision of new arms (*P*, 104). This provision of new arms is not through the hiring of a mercenary army. The prince of virtù must begin the break with the chain of causation by “order[ing] a new one that would resist horse and not be afraid of infantry; this will be done by a regeneration of arms and a change in orders” (*P*, 104). He must invent a new military form as well as a political form. Luckily for Lorenzo, Machiavelli – a political practitioner and theorist – has created both and is offering his services for hire.

Through this rather detailed exegesis of *The Prince*, Robert Black's challenge has been met. Through an interpretation of Lucretius' book 2 of *De Rerum Natura* with a focus on atomic motion and variations and Machiavelli's "student fare" marginalia that hinted at his deep interest in the problem of free will it has been demonstrated that Machiavelli did adhere to Lucretius' theories and used them to animate the relationship between virtù and fortuna. In the next chapter, two themes that have been raised, but inadequately explored thus far, will be returned to: Machiavelli's theory of history and habituated freedom/involuntary action. However, rather than examine these themes with respect to *The Prince*, they were be explored through an exegesis of book 1 of *Discourses* because they are more carefully outlined there, and also benefits the proffered interpretation in three ways: 1) it demonstrates that Machiavelli is remarkably consistent with respect to his aleatory political thought throughout his major works; 2) it distances Machiavelli from Polybius and brings him into greater proximity with Lucretius; and 3) emphasises the role of involuntary action in the maintenance of freedom.

### Habituated Freedom

Now no one knows how it started  
 why the windows were shattered  
 But deep in the dark, someone set the spark  
 And then it no longer mattered.  
 Down the streets they were rumbling  
 All the tempers were ragin  
 Oh, where, oh, where are the white silver tongues  
 Who forgot to listen to the warnings?  
 - Phil Ochs, "In the Heat of the Summer"

Machiavelli has yet to articulate how to recognise the presence of *virtù* and *fortuna*. The importance of history for Machiavelli is precisely its role in helping determine the presence of either. Machiavelli's theory of history demonstrates Lucretius' influence on his work. Machiavelli scholars have routinely argued that Polybius' theory of anacyclosis influenced Machiavelli. However, it will be demonstrated that Machiavelli, while mimicking Polybius' theory of anacyclosis, rejects it and provides an alternative account that relies on a Lucretian aleatory framework, especially the process of aggregation and disaggregation and the concept of involuntary actions. First, Lucretius' account of the historical development from kingship to aristocracy in book 5 lines 1105-1160 will be narrated. Subsequently, Polybius' theory of anacyclosis is outlined and notable differences between Polybius and Machiavelli will be highlighted. For example, Machiavelli rejects Polybius' differentiation between monarchy and kingship. Having understood the salient differences between Machiavelli and Polybius' respective works it is argued that Machiavelli, in abandoning the theory of anacyclosis, puts forward an alternative that emphasises the need to maintain greatness of a state through habituated freedom. This argument will be advanced through a commentary of *Discourses* book 1.

### **Book 5, Lines 1105 - 1160: Theory of History**

Lucretius' theory of the historical movement from one constitution to another, as briefly outlined in book 5 lines 1105 – 1160, should be understood within the context of the processes of aggregation and disaggregation. It must be noted from the outset that nowhere in *De Rerum Natura* is there an account of all the possible different constitutions and the movement from one to another. However, Lucretius' account of causality is important to better understand Machiavelli's rejection of Polybius' theory of anacyclosis.

In chapter 2, it was pointed out that Lucretius, Polybius and Machiavelli all share a catastrophist account of beginnings. A catastrophe creates a political void. It is in this political void that a king emerges who gives the preliminary form of monarchy. However, Lucretius and Machiavelli differ from Polybius with respect to preliminary stage. Polybius emphasises that the distinction between the people and the king is that the latter has greater individual strength than any other member of the people (*His*, 6: 303). For Polybius it is “when in time feelings of sociability and companionship begin to grow in such gatherings of men, then kingship has struck root; and the notions of goodness, justice, and their opposites begin to arise in men” (*His* 303-305). Effectively in kingships the emphasis is on the strength of an individual king, whereas in monarchies there is a shift of emphasis to laws that enable the pursuit of goodness, justice etc. In effect, there are two stages in the formation of the first principalities: monarchies and then kingships. Lucretius, on the other hand, does not differentiate between monarchies and kingships. Rather, the founders of these political societies for Lucretius already possess “exceptional talents and mental power” (*DRN*, 5: 1105-1110). As noted in chapter 2, Lucretius writes that these kings “began to build cities, and to choose sites for citadels to be strongholds

and places of refuge for themselves” (*DRN*, 5: 1105-1110). Lucretius thus dismisses the two-stage process that Polybius describes. It is demonstrated in a following section that Machiavelli adopts Lucretius’ model.

Lucretius’ theory of aggregation and disaggregation describes two obverse tendencies. On the one hand, individuals aggregate into herds and subsequently into cities. On the other hand, the tendency towards disaggregation is caused by wealth and a lack of a contented mind. Lucretius writes, “[later] wealth was invented and gold discovered, and this easily robbed the strong and handsome of their prestige; for as a general rule, no matter how much physical strength and beauty people possess, they follow in the train of the rich” (*DRN*, 5: 1110-1120). Lucretius does not assume that the discovery of wealth was natural. This “train of the rich” and their followers results in people lacking contented minds, makes them choose “perilous” paths, “[and] even when they reach the summit, envy, like lightening, sometimes strikes them and hurls them down into a hideous hell of ignominy” (*DRN*, 5: 1120-1130). The rich and their followers all seek to aggregate as much wealth, but simultaneously contend with the tendency towards disaggregation that causes them to be “hurled down.”

This same process effects states and constitutional formations as well. Lucretius writes,

[so] the kings were slain, the time honored majesty of thrones and proud scepters tumbled down in the dust, and the glorious crown that adorned the sovereign head, now blood-bespattered beneath the feet of the rabble, mourned the loss of its high prerogative; for people eagerly trample on what once they intensely feared. Thus the situation sank to the lowest dregs of anarchy, with all seeking sovereignty and supremacy for themselves (*DRN*, 5: 1130-1150).

The invention of wealth and the desires that arise from it results in the disaggregation of the kingship because the rabble also desires said wealth, and thus tears down the rich and powerful. Lucretius’ narrative is influenced by naturalism. Lucretius’ phrase “tumbled down in the dust” reminds Memmius of the disintegration of rocks into dust due to heat described earlier in book 5,

as discussed in chapter 2. Because of the infighting amongst the people who “seek sovereignty and supremacy for themselves,” like “dust,” the principality is no more and in its place is a “political void.” However, dust is barely something. This dispersion of matter begins a new process of aggregation.

At length some of them taught the others to create magistracies and established laws, to induce them to obey ordinances. The human race, utterly weary as it was of leading a life of violence and worn out with feuds, was the more ready to submit voluntarily to the restraint of ordinances and stringent laws. The reason why people were sick and tired of violence was that each individual was prompted by anger to exact vengeance more cruelly than is now allowed by equitable laws (*DRN*, 5: 1140-1150).

From the ashes of the complete collapse of the previous principality, a new one “takes hold.” Although Machiavelli disagrees with the precise sequence of events of how this process occurred, it is worth noting a parallel. Machiavelli in the chapter on “civil principalities” in *The Prince* describes how in periods of great strife between the plebs and the nobles, both sides are ready to submit to a new prince. Furthermore, when describing the political void in Italy in the “exhortation,” Machiavelli similarly notes that the people are ready for a new prince and a new form. Lucretius similarly says that in the context of a “void” the people are “sick and tired of violence” it wrought, and look to “some” people who “taught the others to create magistracies and established laws,” the people “[were] the more ready to submit voluntarily” to such laws.

Machiavelli does adhere to the principle tenets of the Lucretian account. There is a process of aggregation, but within this process is a counter-tendency towards disaggregation. This tendency towards disaggregation over a period of time, or duration, overwhelms the process of aggregation and results in the collapse of the principality. A political void is created. Due to this “political void,” the people look for individuals to instruct them in new modes and orders, and

voluntarily accept them. Having outlined Lucretius' brief theory of history, and alluded to the commonalities shared with Machiavelli, we will now juxtapose Polybius and Machiavelli.

### ***Histories* Book 6: A Brief Introduction to Polybius' Anacyclosis**

Polybius' influence on Machiavelli, supposedly evidenced in *Discourses* book 1 chapter 2, has often been noted and serves as a 'puzzle' for scholars as Machiavelli was unable to read Greek, and there exists debate as to whether Machiavelli had access to Lascari's translation of Polybius' *Histories* book 6 in Latin.<sup>219</sup> Putting aside this philological problem that Monsfani has convincingly concluded in favour of Hexter's thesis, Machiavelli's familiarity with the text is not under dispute. Hexter points out that the importance of Polybius' influence on Machiavelli is that "[never] before and never again did Machiavelli concern himself in so concentrated a way with the higher and more ghostly issues of political theory. Never before and never again was Machiavelli literally so un-Machiavellian."<sup>220</sup> This influence is complicated given that, as Hexter notes, "In *The Prince* there are half-a-dozen places where observations drawn from book VI would have been natural and apposite. Yet not a single reference, not a single observation, in *The Prince* has its model or its source in Polybius VI."<sup>221</sup> The question thus rises as to whether Machiavelli adopted, albeit with notable changes, the theory of anacyclosis? My contention is that Machiavelli while presenting Polybius' position in book 1, chapter 2, distances himself from it and uses it as a negative example to articulate his own model of history. Prior to proceeding to this line of argument, Polybius' theory of anacyclosis will be outlined.

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<sup>219</sup> Hexter, "Seysssel, Machiavelli and Polybius," 75-96; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 35; Momigliano, "Polybius' Reappearance in Western Europe," 87-88; and Monsfani, "Machiavelli, Polybius, and Janus Monfasani," 39-48. Monsfani does a wonderful job retracing the entire argument within the existing scholarship on the question and concludes that Machiavelli did have access to Lascari's translation.

<sup>220</sup> Hexter, "Seysssel, Machiavelli and Polybius," 75.

<sup>221</sup> Hexter, "Seysssel, Machiavelli and Polybius," 94.

Polybius' theory of anacyclosis articulates a historical cycle: the rise and fall of a state. Polybius writes, "In the case of those Greek states which have often risen to greatness and have often experienced a complete change of fortune, it is an easy matter both to describe their past and to pronounce as to their future" (*HIS*, 295-297). The problem Polybius encounters with such a rise and fall narrative, 'often' characteristic of the Greek states, is that it does not apply to the case of Rome due its peculiar constitution. Polybius writes, "But about the Roman state it is neither at all easy to explain the present situation owing to the complicated character of the constitution, nor to foretell the future owing of the peculiar features of public and private life at Rome in the past" (*His*, 297). Polybius seeks to explain Rome by paying "particular attention" to the "distinctive qualities of their constitution" (*His*, 297).

Polybius answers this problem by first challenging the existing wisdom that there exist three kinds of constitutions and which is 'the best': kingship, aristocracy and democracy (*His*, 297). Instead, Polybius argues in favour of an admixture of the best elements from the aforementioned constitutions (*His* 6: 297). Furthermore, he rejects the idea that there are but three kinds of constitutions by adding three more: tyrannies, oligarchies and lawlessness (*His*, 299). Polybius introduces the theory of anacyclosis thusly,

Now the first of these to come into being is monarchy, its growth being natural and unaided; and next arises kingship derived from monarchy by the aid of art and by the correction of defects. Kingship changes into its vicious allied form, tyranny; and next, the abolishment of both gives birth to aristocracy. Aristocracy by its very nature degenerates into oligarchy; and when the commons inflamed by anger take vengeance on this government for unjust rule, democracy comes into being; and in due course the license and lawlessness of this form of government produces mob rule to complete the series. The truth of what I have just said will be quite clear to anyone who pays attention to such beginnings, origins, and changes are in each case natural (*HIS*, 299-301).

Akin to Aristotelian dyads, Polybius' six constitutional types basically were two triads that mirrored one another: kingship-tyranny, aristocracy-oligarchy, and democracy-mob rule. These



dyads were in effect virtuous or vice-ridden versions of one another. The movement between these different pairings is because of a desire to achieve the “common good” on the one hand, and the degeneration of said polity into its mirror image. Each movement between the two constitutions undergoes a period of ascendancy, zenith, and decline that in turn results in the next constitutional dyad. This movement between constitutions is located within a larger cyclical revolution that sees the rise of a given state from pre-political to political state, and eventually results in the decline of the said state to its initial pre-political beginnings. As Trompf notes the “*Anacyclōsis* was the natural course or order in which constitutions change, are transformed, and return again to their original stage ... Identifying six types of constitutions, he [Polybius] tried to show how they followed one another in a fixed sequence.”<sup>222</sup>

The transition from monarchy to kingship is caused because the people “formed naturally” a “notion of goodness and justice,” which in turn results in them “[choosing] their kings and rulers no longer for their bodily strength and brute courage, but for the excellence of their judgement and reasoning powers” (*His*, 309). Machiavelli’s own account differs from Polybius’ because, as noted in chapter 2, he argues that Aeneas’ *virtù* was characterised by “the choice of site, the other in ordering of laws” (*D*, 1.1.4). Similarly, what distinguishes Aeneas from Romulus is not this capacity for ‘judgement and reasoning powers,’ rather it is whether Rome is founded by foreigners or natives (*D*, 1.1.5). Machiavelli does not have a two-stage process.

Having transitioned from a monarchy to a kingship, Polybius argues that kings who “received their office by hereditary succession and found their safety now provided for, and more than sufficient provision of food, they gave way to their appetites owing to this superabundance,” which in turn leads them to believe that they should be distinguished from the

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<sup>222</sup> Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence*, 5.

ruled by “a peculiar luxury and variety in the dressing and serving of their viands, and that they should meet with no denial in the pursuit of their amours, however lawless” (*His*, 309). This belief that the rulers ought to be distinguished from the ruled leads to “envy and offence and in the other to an outburst of hatred and passionate resentment, the kingship changed into a tyranny,” which in turn bred “the first steps towards its overthrow” (*His*, 309-311). In many respects, this account is remarkably similar to that of Lucretius, except that Lucretius did not include a tyrannical stage and argued that the “envy and offence” led to a political collapse. The tyrannical form of government soon gives way to the rise of aristocracies because of the success of the aforementioned conspiracies (*His*, 311).

The “noblest of men” who successfully overthrow the tyrannical regime are elevated by the people to leadership and initially “regarded nothing as of greater importance than the common interest, administering the private and public affairs of the people with paternal solicitude” (*His*, 311). However, this zenith under aristocracy in time gives way to its own downfall. Similar to kingships, the next generation of leadership comes from the children of the noble men who had captured power and formed the aristocratic system. These children, “having no experience of misfortune and none at all of civil equality and liberty of speech, and having been brought up from the cradle amid the evidences of the power and high position of their fathers” abuse their power, pursue selfish pleasures etc., (*His*, 311). This abuse of power and pursuit of pleasures results in the formation of oligarchies, again causing envy and offence, and the people eventually rid themselves of this government (*His*, 311-312).

The oligarchical government similarly is gotten rid of by “anyone” who had “the courage to speak or act against the chiefs of the state” and who “has the whole mass of the people ready to back him” (*His*, 313). The people, having gotten rid of the oligarchs, establish a democratic

government as they have become wary of any kind of king ruling over them (*His*, 313). This system works until the children of the founders come to the fore and because “they have become so accustomed to freedom and equality that they no longer value them, and begin to aim at preeminence; and it is chiefly those of ample fortune who fall into this error” (*His*, 313). The wealthy among them try to establish their preeminent reputations amongst the people by giving them gifts “and the habit of receiving them,” which results in democracy collapsing into “a rule of force and violence” because the people become accustomed to supporting the wealthy individual who gives them gifts (*His*, 313-315). Finally, this collapse of democracy results in these leaders “uniting their forces [to] massacre, banish, and plunder, until they degenerate again into perfect savages and find once more a master and a monarch” (*His*, 315). The collapse of democracy and degeneration into perfect savagery is the end of this particular historical cycle, and the process restarts.

Polybius posits that the “course” of this cycle was “appointed by nature” (*His*, 315). The cyclical nature of this course means that one can identify where one is and “as to the form into which it will change,” including the Roman state (*His*, 315). Polybius in effect argues that the Roman state will similarly go through this process and finally collapse. He thus turns to the one form of government that seems to arrest the natural course of this cycle: the republic. Lycurgus, on the other hand, “perfectly well understood that all the above changes take place necessarily and naturally,” and understood that picking any one form of government would inevitably result in its degenerated form coming to the fore (*His*, 317). Lycurgus, cognisant of the cyclical nature of governments,

did not make his constitution simple and uniform, but united in it all the good and distinctive features of the best governments, so that none of the principles should grow unduly and be perverted into its allied evil, but that, the force of each being neutralised by the others, neither of them should prevail and outbalance another,

but the constitution should remain for long thanks to the principle of reciprocity (*His*, 317).

This balancing of different attributes and features from different governments into one synthetic constitutional form, the republic, “preserved liberty for a longer period than is recorded elsewhere” because it establishes a constitutional equilibrium. This constitutional equilibrium either brings the anacycle to rest or slows down the process of rise, zenith and deformation. It is not grounded in a dynamic form of politics, but rather a constitutional stasis. Polybius writes,

Such being the power that each part has of hampering the others or cooperating with them, their union is adequate to all emergencies, so that it is impossible to find a better political system than this. For whenever the menace of some common danger from abroad compels them to act in concord and support each other, so great does the strength of the state become, that nothing which is requisite can be neglected, as all are zealously competing in revising means of meeting the need of the hour, nor can a decision fail to be executed promptly, as all are cooperating both in public and in private to the accomplishment of the task they have set themselves; and consequently this peculiar form of constitution possesses an irresistible power of attaining every object upon which it is resolved. When again they are freed from external menace, and reap the harvest of good fortune and affluence which is the result of their success, and in the enjoyment of this prosperity are corrupted by flattery and idleness and wax insolent and overbearing, as indeed happens often enough, it is then especially that we see the state providing itself a remedy for the evil it suffers. For when one part having grown out of proportion to the others aims at supremacy and tends to become too predominant, it is evident that, as for the reasons above given none of the three is absolute, but the purpose of the one can be counterworked and thwarted by the others, none of them will excessively outgrow the others or treat them with contempt (*His*, 345).

For Polybius the republic, because of its constitution, is able to suspend, at least for a while, the decay that is endemic to all political systems because it is able to stave off external threats due to the capacity of the people inside the given republic to combat said threats. Simultaneously it is able to not allow the appetites of any given class of peoples within a given republic to outgrow those of others, and thus establishes a system of internal checks and balances that ensures a level of political freedom.

Polybius argues, in a manner relevant to contemporary debates about whether Machiavelli advocates for a democracy or a republic, that “such fairness and propriety in all respects are shown in the use of these three elements [the aforementioned good kinds of government] and its subsequent administration that it was impossible for even a native to pronounce with certainty whether the whole system was aristocratic, democratic, or monarchial” (*His*, 329). Indeed, if one looks at the consuls one would regard it to be monarchial, whereas if “one looked at the power of the masses, it seemed clearly to be a democracy” (*His*, 329-331). However, if one examines the political power that is given to the masses, it is incredibly limited in comparison to other organs of state power like the consuls (*His*, 335). Polybius writes, “nevertheless there is a part and a very important part left for the people. For it is the people which alone has the right to confer honours and inflict punishment, the only bonds by which kingdoms and states and in a word human society in general are held together” (*His*, 335). They decide who in power is worthy of praise or punishment (*His*, 337). The power to decide who is “worthy of praise or punishment” becomes significant because the senate must listen to the people as only they can approve or reject legal changes to the powers of the senate (*His*, 341). However, this power and the guarantees that the people are afforded by the state, including freedom from harassment by the senate without due senatorial approval for such actions, are simultaneously balanced by the people’s responsibility to “be submissive to the senate and respects its members both in public and in private” (*His*, 341-343).

Having briefly outlined the Polybian account of historical change, it is now possible to compare Polybius to Machiavelli. In particular, it will be demonstrated that Machiavelli arrives at a very different analysis of historical change and consequently abandons Polybius’ account and adopts one inspired by Lucretius.

## **Book 1, Chapter 2: Machiavelli the Polybian?**

As noted in chapter 2, Polybius's account of beginnings parallels Machiavelli's as it similarly begins with a form of political catastrophism. However, the two diverge precisely with respect to the movement from this political void, caused by the catastrophe, to a political system predicated on the brute force of given individuals i.e. kingship, which in turn is replaced by a monarchy grounded in intellect and reason. In this section it is demonstrated that besides this qualitative difference about monarchy in Polybius, Lucretius and Machiavelli's respective accounts, a more serious difference concerns their theories of historical development. I argue that despite Machiavelli's apparent adherence to Polybius' theory of anacyclosis, he offers a post-Lucretian critique of the theory of anacyclosis and proffers an alternative model of historical development grounded in the aforementioned sections of Lucretius.

Machiavelli opens the chapter by putting aside an analysis of those who live under external servitude, and focuses on the differences between two republics: Sparta and Rome (*D*, 1.2.1). Machiavelli hopes to answer the question posed by the title of the chapter, “[of] how many species are republics, and which was the Roman republic” (*D*, 1.2.1). Machiavelli notes that different republics

have had diverse laws and orders, as they have had diverse beginnings. For some were given laws by one alone and at a stroke, either in their beginning or after not much time, like those that were given by Lycurgus to the Spartans; some of them by chance and at many different times, and according to accidents, as had Rome (*D*, 1.2.1).

Machiavelli seems to gesture towards Sparta as the ideal model of the republic as the Spartans were able to establish in one stroke a republic and the necessary laws that allowed them to exist “for more than eight hundred years without corrupting them or without dangerous tumult” (*D*,

1.2.1). Indeed, Machiavelli refers to Sparta as “happy” and able to “live securely” because of the prudence of its founder (*D*, 1.2.1). Rome’s laws, in comparison, were not founded in one stroke, but by chances and accidents. Rome is “unhappy” and “forced of necessity to reorder itself” (*D*, 1.2.1). His descriptions of Sparta and Rome appear to be damning evidence against the strong Lucretian interpretation as Machiavelli opts to use Rome as a model republic and not Sparta, despite the fact that the latter’s achievements more closely approximating Lucretius’ philosophy. Sparta, more so than Rome, meets the requirements of a political Epicureanism: happiness, living securely, and no dangerous tumult. However, Machiavelli’s advocacy of Rome as a model republic simply further differentiates his Epicureanism, or aleatory political thought, from political Epicureanism.

Before proceeding to compare Machiavelli to Polybius, one final important introductory distinction needs to be made. Machiavelli explains that while Rome was relatively unhappy in comparison to Sparta because of the reordering it required, it was still qualitatively better off than those states that were “farthest from order, and that one is farthest from it that by its orders is altogether off the right road that might lead it to the perfect and true end” (*D*, 1.2.1). Rome, for all of its faults, is still preferable to states that lack free beginnings and have orders that would not permit them to achieve the perfect end. Machiavelli explains that, “[it] is impossible for those in this degree to repair themselves by any accident whatever; the others that, if they do not have a perfect order, have taken a beginning that is good, and capable of becoming better, can by the occurrence of accidents become perfect” (*D*, 1.2.1). Machiavelli’s differentiation between states in which accidents can perfect the existing order through the promulgation of new laws, and states where this is “impossible,” is demonstrative of the preferable modes that citizens of freely founded states enjoy. Those states not founded by a prince of virtù are incapable of – through

accidents or involuntary action – perfecting themselves because 1) involuntary actions (like accidents) cannot promulgate new beginnings; and 2) they lack the orders to promote what will be referred to as habituated freedom among the people.

Let us now juxtapose Machiavelli and Polybius, and gauge Machiavelli's adherence to the latter's theory of the anacyclosis. Machiavelli accurately reproduces Polybius' anacyclosis, recounted above (*D*, 1.2.2-1.2.4). However, Machiavelli's use of "I" in this chapter suggests that he did not necessarily agree with Polybius. Machiavelli does not use the word "I" in the sections dedicated to the anacyclosis and only re-introduces the "I" to articulate his own position after he recounts Polybius' model. Machiavelli's first use of "I" appears in the opening sentence of the chapter. He states, "I wish to put aside reasoning on cities that have had their beginning subject to another; and I shall speak of those that had a beginning far from all external servitude and were governed by their own will" (*D*, 1.2.1). He then uses "I" in the section where he introduces the theory of anacyclosis when he writes, "Wishing thus to discourse of what were the orders of Rome and what accidents led it to its perfection, I say that some who have written on republics say that in them is one of three states" (*D*, 1.2.2). Machiavelli does not say whether he agrees with those "who have written on republics" in either three or six-form variants. Rather, Machiavelli simply writes, "Some others, wiser according to the opinion of many, have the opinion that there are six types of government" (*D*, 1.2.2). Instead of using personal nouns, he uses indefinite pronouns. These are the opinions of others. Machiavelli only reintroduces the personal pronoun after concluding his synopsis of the theory of anacyclosis. He declares,

I say thus that all the said modes are pestiferous because of the brevity of life in the three good ones and because of the malignity in the three bad. So those who prudently order laws having recognised this defect, avoiding each of these modes by itself, chose one that shared in all, judging it firmer and more stable; for the one guards the other, since in one and the same city there are the principality, the aristocrats, and the popular government (*D*, 1.2.5).



Machiavelli again does not state his agreement with either proponents of three or six-forms of government. Rather, he agrees with a specific characteristic of the theory of anacyclosis i.e. that each mode is “pestiferous.” As noted in chapter 2, Lucretius similarly believed that everything, ranging from rocks to governments, had a period of duration and was pestiferous because of a tendency towards disintegration. It is thus not surprising that both Polybius and Lucretius alike share the one salient feature of Polybius’ account that Machiavelli explicitly agrees with. Machiavelli also agrees with the usefulness of the republican constitution, not because of some perceived stability but rather due to its emphasis on freedom.

Machiavelli further parallels Polybius’ argument with his choice of examples: Lycurgus and the republic of Sparta (*D*, 1.2.6). Lycurgus “made a state that lasted more eight hundred years, achieving the highest praise for himself and quiet in the city” (*D*, 1.2.6). Machiavelli contrasts this “highest praise” for Lycurgus and Sparta to “the greatness” achieved by Athens. Machiavelli explains why Athens is not the model of state that he wishes to pursue. He writes, “the contrary happened to Solon, who ordered the laws in Athens: by ordering only the popular state there, he made it of such short life that before he died he saw the tyranny of Pisistratus” (*D*, 1.2.6). With respect to Athens Machiavelli seems to deploy Polybius’ theory of anacyclosis: kingship leads to tyranny. However, Machiavelli’s account of Athens considerably differs from Polybius’. Whereas Polybius, given the natural course of the cycle, posits that an aristocracy should have replaced the tyranny established by Pisistratus, Machiavelli instead reminds his readers that Pisistratus’ heirs were removed and replaced by another popular state (*D*, 1.2.6). Machiavelli argues that this repeated return to the popular state is what caused the subsequent downfall of Athens (*D*, 1.2.6). As an aside, this latter point suggests that one should be wary of

accounts that propose a democratic Machiavelli given that he states that the popular, or democratic, state is not as effective an order as the republic.

Machiavelli's differences with Polybius continue in the next section, which establishes the grounds for the rest of book 1. Indeed, one cannot but wonder why, if Lycurgus and Sparta were deserving of the "highest praise," Sparta had eight hundred year duration and was happy, why they do not serve as the model for a new principality or republic? Why should Rome serve as the example? Especially since Machiavelli has already told his readers that Rome was unhappy (*D*, 1.2.1), was marred by greater disunion and hence instability (*D*, 1.2.7), and as he notes in book 1 chapter 5 had a shorter life than Sparta (*D*, 1.5.2). There seems to be little that recommends Rome as a model, and thus it is also necessary to be attentive to two words that Machiavelli also uses to describe Sparta: stable and quiet. Machiavelli does not, unlike Polybius, think that these two features are desirable.<sup>223</sup> As Lucchese argues, "Machiavelli already radically rejects the classical apologia for internal harmony in the state, counter-posing to this tradition his 'conflictual' model, which he regards as the 'first cause' of the greatness of Rome."<sup>224</sup> Machiavelli declares,

In the end, he who subtly examines the whole will draw this conclusion from it: you are reasoning either about a republic that wishes to make an empire, such as Rome, or about one for whom it is enough to maintain itself. In the first case, it is necessary to do everything as did Rome; in the second, it can imitate Venice and Sparta (*D*, 1.5.2).

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<sup>223</sup> Lucchese has correctly pointed out that the Cambridge school and McCormick alike "have sought to 'save' Machiavelli from himself and his own radicalism" inasmuch that "they have constructed an image of Machiavelli consistent with the values of the common good, the rule of law and institutional equilibrium," and have instead advocated a classical or civil republican version of Machiavelli. Lucchese, "Crisis and Power," 76-77 and 77n5.

<sup>224</sup> Lucchese, "Crisis and Power," 78.

Polybius arrives at a very similar position to Machiavelli's when he writes that the political order in Sparta was perfect, but lacking only because of its inattentiveness to matters of foreign policy.

Polybius argues that,

It is to show from actual evidence of facts, that for the purpose of remaining in secure possession of their own territory and maintaining their freedom in the legislation of Lycurgus is amply sufficient, and to those who maintain this to be the object of political constitutions we must admit that there is not and never was any system or constitution superior to that of Lycurgus. But if anyone is ambitious of greater things, and esteems it finer and more glorious than that to be a leader of many men and to rule and lord it over many and have the eyes of the world turned to him, it must be admitted that from this point of view the Laconian constitution is defective, while that of Rome is superior and more effective, as is indeed evident from the actual course of event. For when the Lacedaemonians endeavoured to obtain supremacy in Greece, they very soon ran the risk of losing their own liberty; whereas Romans, who had aimed merely at the subjection of Italy, in a short time brought the whole world under their sway, the abundance of supplies they had at their command conducting in small measure to this result (*His*, 425).

Polybius does not realise that what makes Sparta inferior to Rome, and incapable of achieving the same greatness that the latter gained, is the emphasis on stability and quiet. Machiavelli prefers Rome to Sparta. He wants to aggregate an empire and induce "trial and tumult." This desire for aggregation of empire and 'trial and tumult' within the republic are symptomatic of Lucretius' emphasis on dynamism. Machiavelli recognises dynamism's import in achieving greatness.

This dynamism pivots on the question of freedom and habituated freedom. The latter concept will be developed in the subsequent section, and for now the focus will be on the former. As noted above, only states founded with freedom can perfect their orders (*D*, 1.2.1). Machiavelli realises that few states are actually fortunate enough to be endowed with the first fortune, i.e. a founder who is able to establish the ideal republic with one stroke. Polybius even suggests that the formation of Sparta was likely due to a divine intervention. Polybius writes,

“To me it seems that as far as regards the maintenance of the concord among the citizens, the security of the Laconian territory and the preservation of the freedom of Sparta, the legislation of Lycurgus and the foresight he exhibited were so admirable that one is forced to regard his institutions as of divine rather than human origin” (*His*, 419). Machiavelli de-romanticises Lycurgus in a manner similar to how he discusses Moses in *The Prince* insofar that if one examines the history of Rome one finds that fortuna gave it opportunities to introduce any form, and did not require divine intervention. Thus, in Rome “so many accidents arose in it through the disunion of plebs and Senate that what an orderer had not done, chance did” (*D*, 1.2.7). Machiavelli reaffirms the relationship between fortuna, accidents, and chance as outlined in the previous chapter. Polybius agrees with Machiavelli here when Polybius writes,

Lycurgus then, foreseeing, by a process of reasoning, whence and how events naturally happen, constructed his constitution untaught by adversity, but the Romans while they have arrived at the same final result as regards their form of government, have not reached it by any process of reasoning, but by the discipline of many struggles and troubles, always choosing the best by the light of the experience gained in disaster have thus reached the same results as Lycurgus and the best of all existing constitutions (*His*, 319).

What differentiates Machiavelli and Polybius is that the latter regards the “concord among the citizen” as being “so admirable” that it must be the effect of divine intervention, whereas for Machiavelli the key emphasis is on the “disunion of the plebs and Senate,” which caused the Roman republic to experience “accidents” that allowed it to perfect itself and also achieve the greatness that Polybius recognises differentiates Rome from Sparta.

The implications of this dynamism return us to Machiavelli’s rejection of the natural cyclical course. So, like Lucretius and Polybius, Machiavelli agrees that the perfidious nature of governments results in the kings of Rome losing their monarchy (*D*, 1.2.7). However, much like the case of Athens, Machiavelli’s discussion of subsequent developments in Rome does not

correspond to the theory of anacyclosis. The kingdom did not degenerate into tyranny nor did it result in the formation of an aristocracy. Rather, as Machiavelli points out the kingdom was only removed in name, not in form, inasmuch as the newly formed republic divided its power between two consuls and the Senate, or a mixing of the principality and the aristocrats (*D*, 1.2.7). This form of government was subsequently further altered, because “the Roman nobility became insolent,” leading the plebs to rise up (*D*, 1.2.7). A republic with all three qualities was created, with the addition of the tribunes, because the nobles and the aristocrats did not want to lose their power and thus “yielded” to the people (*D*, 1.2.7). These three qualities resulted in greater stability “since all three kinds of governments had their part” (*D*, 1.2.7). Machiavelli arrives at a position similar to Polybius’, but through a process remarkably dissimilar to the theory of anacyclosis. This process is highlighted at the end of book 1 chapter 2 and serves as the foundation of the next two chapters of *Discourses*. He writes, “[but], remaining mixed, it made a perfect republic, to which perfection it came through the disunion of the plebs and the Senate” (*D*, 1.2.7).

Where Machiavelli agrees with Polybius is the “pestiferous” nature of all modes of government. However, this feature of government is not unique to Polybius. Rather, he shares this belief about the pestiferous nature of governments with Lucretius. Given this affinity between Lucretius and Polybius on this matter, it is not surprising that Machiavelli similarly is in concord with them. However, the differences between Polybius and Machiavelli are more conceptually significant. For Polybius, what makes Sparta great is that it adopted the republican form of government that allowed it to become an exception to the natural cycle of governments because of its supposed firmness and stability. Machiavelli differs from Polybius in two ways: first, he does not necessarily believe in the natural cyclical order and; second, and more

significantly, while Polybius emphasises the qualities of firmness, stability and quiet, Machiavelli prefers Rome because of its dynamic system predicated on freedom. This freedom differs from Polybius' inasmuch that Machiavelli's freedom pivots on "disunion," whereas Polybius insists on "concord." In the next section, Machiavelli's theory of accidents and habituated freedom will be articulated.

### **Book 1, Chapters 3-60: Accidents and Habituated Freedom**

This section argues that Machiavelli does not believe the majority of people possess *virtù*, and the people as a collective subject cannot have *virtù* and found new states. Rather, when they act it is because of a series of habits or necessities i.e. they are involved in politics due to involuntary action. These involuntary actions, or habituated freedom, are an effect of the prince's *virtù* and the new chain of causation that the prince has begun. This habituated freedom is the desire to not be oppressed by the great. This desire emerges because of a social distinction amongst the people. The importance of involuntary action and this disunity between the two humours is that it is evidence of perpetual movement within the republic, which in turn helps sustain the compound body itself. In effect, Lucretius' theory of atomic motion inspires Machiavelli's theory of habituated freedom and his theory of history. It ought to be noted that the subsequent chapters are replete with mention of accidents and necessity with little *virtù* mentioned. Indeed, when *virtù* is mentioned, it is never collectively possessed by the people, but by one man.

Machiavelli sustains his critique of Polybius' conception of the republic in the opening lines of the second paragraph of book 1 chapter 3. Machiavelli writes, "It appears that in Rome there was a very great union between the plebs and the Senate after the Tarquins were expelled, and that the nobles had put away that pride of theirs, had taken on a popular spirit, and were

tolerable to anyone, however mean” (*D*, 1.3.2). However, after the Tarquins were expelled, the nobles demonstrated their deep malice towards the plebs and “spit out that poison” and “they offended it in all modes they could” (*D*, 1.3.2). Their actions reintroduced the political void that existed in Rome in the aftermath of the Tarquin expulsion. Machiavelli notes, “Such a thing is testimony to what I said above, that men never work any good unless through necessity, but where choice abounds and one can make use of license, at one everything is full of confusion and disorder” (*D*, 1.3.2). Machiavelli thus draws a parallel between the political conjuncture that Rome was experiencing post-Tarquin expulsion and the founding of new free cities by a prince or “by themselves” when they “are constrained by disease, hunger, or war to abandon the ancestral country and to seek for themselves a new seat” (*D*, 1.1.4). Machiavelli re-emphasises this parallel when he concludes, “[therefore] it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and the laws make them good” (*D*, 1.3.2).

Furthermore, it is necessity that compels the nobles to form tribunals. Machiavelli states,

When a thing works well on its own without the law, the law is not necessary; but when some good custom is lacking, at once the law is necessary. Therefore when the Tarquins, who had kept the nobility in check with fear of themselves, were missing it was fitting to think of a new order that would have the same effect as the Tarquins had had when they were alive. Therefore, after many confusions, noises, and dangers of scandals that arose between the plebs and the nobility, they arrived at the creation of the tribunes for the security of the plebs. They ordered them with so much eminence and reputation that they could ever after be intermediaries between the plebs and the Senate and prevent the insolence of the nobles (*D*, 1.3.2).

Interestingly *virtù* is not mentioned in this paragraph, nor is it mentioned once in book 1 chapter 3. Rather, the foundation of the tribunes was necessary due to the “many confusions, noises, and dangers of scandal” i.e. a context where there is a lack of law, a situation akin to a political void.

Machiavelli uses the word “accidents” to designate forms of political action that do not rely on *virtù*, but on necessity. The accidents caused the tribunes because the plebs and the nobility of

Rome engaged in behaviour patterns, or involuntary actions, that necessarily arose from their structural positions in society. The nobles did not treat the plebs badly while the Tarquins were alive because they wanted the plebs to help them in removing them (*D*, 1.3.2). Again the nobility did not act because of virtù; instead they acted due to fear (*D*, 1.3.2). Machiavelli explains, in a manner paralleling Lucretius discussion of internal and external motion, that while accidents can have internal or external causes, “accidents such as these [which have become so great to cause fear in everyone] arise in a republic more often through an intrinsic than an extrinsic cause” (*D*, 1.3.2).

It is possible to contend that the interpretation offered does not take into account the mention of virtù with respect to tumult in book 1 chapter 4. Machiavelli writes,

Nor can one in any mode, with reason, call a republic disordered where there are so many examples of virtue; for good examples arise from good education, good education from good laws, and good laws from those tumults that many inconsiderately damn (*D*, 1.4.1).

It appears as if he is suggesting that the many examples of virtù in the Roman republic have at their root the “tumults that many inconsiderately damn,” and if this were the case then it would make sense to dismiss the proffered interpretation. However, Machiavelli does not regard the tumults to be a *clinamen* that begins a chain of causation. Rather, he begins the chapter by noting, “I cannot deny that fortune and the military were causes of the Roman Empire; but it quite appears to me they are not aware that where the military is good, there must be good order; and too, it rarely occurs that good fortune will not be there” (*D*, 1.4.1). This good order is the result of Romulus’ virtù. The free beginnings of Rome meant that it had a good order that was able to adapt and change according to fortune in ways that led it to perfect itself.

Romulus’ virtù grounds these tumults in the desire for freedom. Machiavelli states,



I say that to me it appears that those who damn tumults between the nobles and the plebs blame those things that were the first cause of keeping Rome free, and that they consider the noises and the cries that would arise in such tumults than the good effects that they engendered. They do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humours that of the people and that of the great, and that all the laws that are made in favour of freedom arise from their disunion, as can easily be seen to have occurred in Rome (*D*, 1.4.1).

The tumults helped perfect the Roman republic and were only possible due to the metaphorical division of the people into two humours: the people and the greats. However, it was not sufficient to just have these two humours. They need to be supplemented with a good order in which “the laws that are made in favour of freedom” could be implemented i.e. a principality firmly grounded in freedom. The tumults ensured that the freedom that Rome enjoyed endured, and were simultaneously vital for the process of perfection.<sup>225</sup> As Machiavelli concludes book 1 chapter 4: “And if the tumults were the cause of the creation of the tribunes, they deserve higher praise; for besides giving popular administration its part, they were constituted as a guard of Roman freedom” (*D*, 1.4.2).

These tumults that resulted in laws that favour freedom were caused due to a desire for freedom on the part of the people. Machiavelli explains that, “The desire of free peoples are rarely pernicious to freedom because they arise either from being oppressed or from suspicion that they may be oppressed” (*D*, 1.4.1). This desire for laws that ensured freedom, as Machiavelli notes in book 1 chapter 1, exists because the principality was begun on the basis of freedom. Neither the people nor the nobles caused this freedom and the resulting desire for freedom; rather they are simply “a guard for freedom” (*D*, 1.5.1).<sup>226</sup> Machiavelli clearly states as much, “For

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<sup>225</sup> Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discourse* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas,” 135.

<sup>226</sup> Bonadeo, correctly I believe, argues that in *Discourses* Machiavelli further develops his analysis of the “grandi” or “the great,” within the context of the republic, and finds that the people are keen to maintain their freedom from the great due to a fear of their ambitiousness, while the great are always a menace to freedom and can only be stopped by the activity of the people. Bonadeo, “The Role of the ‘Grandi’ in the Political World of Machiavelli,” 18.

those who have prudently constituted a republic, among the most necessary things ordered by them has been to constitute a guard for freedom, and according as this is well placed, that free way of life lasts more or less” (*D*, 1.5.1). Here Machiavelli fundamentally breaks from Polybius’ account as he emphasises disunion, rather than the union, of the people and the nobility as a reason for the success of the Roman republic. There is little mention of the “stability and firmness” that is supposed to characterise the republic, rather there is an emphasis on the dynamism of the political situation that ultimately results in stability. Machiavelli further subverts Polybius’ conception of stability and firmness by articulating a very different vision of it. He writes, “there is nothing that makes a republic so stable and steady that as to order it in a mode so that those alternating humours that agitate can be vented in a way ordered by laws” (*D*, 1.7.1). Machiavelli’s notion of stability is thus premised on tumults and habituated freedom.

Machiavelli introduces the first element of habituated freedom in book 1 chapter 2, prior to introducing the theory of anacyclosis. He writes, “it is indeed true that they will never order themselves without danger, because enough men never agree to a new law that looks to a new order in a city unless they are shown by a necessity that they need to do it” (*D*, 1.2.1). Machiavelli’s statement resonates with Lucretius’ argument that because of the experience of anarchy the people become more open to new orders and laws. This openness to new orders and laws does not mean that accidents do not come without danger. As Machiavelli notes, “this necessity cannot come without danger, it is an easy thing for the republic to be ruined before it can be led to a perfection of order” (*D*, 1.2.1). That people are willing to undertake this danger and try to perfect the order through accidents is because they have been habituated to maintain

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Bonadeo insightfully also points out that the people for Machiavelli “[do] not appear to be qualified to deal with intricate political problems, it strives nonetheless for some basic goals, namely the preservation of political, social and economic freedom.” Bonadeo, “The Role of the People in the Works and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli,” 354.

freedom. Furthermore, it is apparent that Machiavelli's attitude towards accidents and necessity thus remains consistent between *The Prince* and *Discourses*.

The second element of habituated freedom is that it is an effect of virtù. Machiavelli hints at this relationship between habituated freedom and virtù when he writes in book 1 chapter 2, discussing the differences between Rome and Sparta, that

if the first fortune did not fall to Rome, the second fell to it: for if its first orders were defective, nonetheless they did not deviate from the right way that could lead them to perfection. For Romulus and all the other kings made many and good laws conforming also to a free way of life; but because their end was to found a kingdom and not a republic, when that city was left free, many things were necessary to order in favour of freedom were lacking, not having been ordered by those kings (*D*, 1.2.7).

Rome was only able to “perfect” itself because of the second fortune that “fell to it.” However, it was only able to benefit from this second fortune because Romulus' virtù resulted in the beginning of Rome on the basis of freedom. This prior virtù ensured that the necessary conditions were in place so that when second fortune “fell to it,” the city was able to re-order itself - as noted by the first element - in favour of freedom.

Machiavelli juxtaposes this dynamic conception of politics to the more stable and firm politics of Sparta and Venice, which as noted previously had “a longer life.” Machiavelli writes that the effect of the Spartan and Venetian constitutions placing the role of guardianship of freedom in the hands of the great is “that they satisfy their ambition more and ... they have more cause to be more content; the other is that they take away a quality of authority from the restless spirits of the plebs that is the cause of infinite dissensions and scandals in a republic and is apt to reduce the nobility to a certain desperation that with time produces bad effects” (*D*, 1.5.2). The problem with Sparta and Venice was that the tendency towards aggregation, which is premised on dynamism, is removed, thus allowing disaggregation to come to the fore.

This dynamism is something that Machiavelli explicitly wants to preserve.

If anyone said the modes were extraordinary and almost wild, to see the people together crying out against the Senate, the Senate against the people, running tumultuously through the streets, closing shops, the whole plebs leaving Rome — all of which things frighten whoever does no other than read of them — I say that every city ought to have its modes with which the people can vent its ambition and especially those cities that wish to avail themselves of the people in important things (*D*, 1.4.1).

The desire to preserve dynamism in the sphere of politics emphasises the necessity for collisions between different atoms and compounds to occur that result in the formation of new compound bodies that can replace others which have dissolved or are dissolving. In a manner reminiscent of Lucretius, Machiavelli notes, “since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall; and to many things that reason does not bring you, necessity brings you” (*D*, 1.6.4).

However, Machiavelli’s advocacy for dynamism has been rebuked for rejecting a politics based on the politically quiet state and that emphasises political deliberation. Roecklein argues,

There is a great deal of difference between coping with the tensions that exist between the different elements of a political society, and actively promoting and indeed requiring such collisions on the other hand. Not only can Machiavelli be seen belonging to the latter cause; but he is urging indeed that the collisions between the plebs and the nobles, the democrats and the aristocrats, be full of animus and resentment, lending to politics a swell of blind frustration and almost insurmountable paralysis - factors which are certain to limit the said state in the kind of politics that it is ultimately able to practice.<sup>227</sup>

This objection may parallel Polybius’ desire for political stability, but it completely fails to understand Machiavelli’s account, which, while emphasising collisions, tries to surmount the self-imposed political paralysis that resulted in the collapse of Sparta through an emphasis on internal and external political dynamism. As Machiavelli explains, “Since the plebs” in Sparta

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<sup>227</sup> Roecklein, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism*, 148.

“neither had nor feared rule, the rivalry that it could have had with the nobility was taken away, as well as the cause of tumults; and they could live united a long time” (*D*, 1.6.2). This unity however, results in the stagnation and the degeneration of Sparta. The “unsurmountable paralysis” that is a possible risk of endless political deadlock mirrors the unity that caused the stagnation of Sparta. Thus, Machiavelli explicitly wants to avoid this kind of internal balance, although he recognises that it could have been equally established in Rome, arguing that,

if the Roman state had come to be quieter, this inconvenience would have followed: that it would have become weaker because it cut off the way by which it could have come to the greatness it achieved, so that if Rome wished to remove the causes of tumults, it removed too the causes of expansion (*D*, 1.6.3).

The people and the nobles alike play the role of being guardians of freedom in Rome, whereas in Venice and Sparta the nobles alone are made guards of freedom. Additionally, to ensure the “internal balance” is maintained the people are made servile, which in turn results in Venice and Sparta’s stagnation.

Machiavelli further develops the theme of habituated freedom when he points out that the prudent organiser of the republic introduces a chain of necessity that necessitates a guardian of freedom. The people are not acting on the basis of reason, but a desire that forces a kind of necessary behaviour i.e. involuntary action. Machiavelli makes it clear that the republic is not the arresting of Polybius’ natural cycle. Rather, it is a mode made possible through the desire to guard freedoms established by “those who have prudently constituted” the orders in a republic. Thus, the republic is always pregnant with the possibility that it will be quickly transformed by either the nobles or the people into a mode that benefits them alone. Rome resists this possibility, hence avoiding becoming a static republic like Venice and Sparta, as a result of the prudential constitution of the Roman people as free. One could argue that “those who have prudently [constitute]” are either the people or the nobles. However, such an interpretation is unsustainable

in light of Machiavelli's "general rule: that it never or rarely happens that any republic or kingdom is ordered well from the beginning or reformed altogether anew outside its old orders unless it is organized by one individual" (*D*, 1.9.2). Who is this one individual in the case of Rome? Machiavelli tells us: Romulus (*D*, 1.9.1). Regardless of the weak laws that Romulus establishes in Rome, his true greatness lies in the fact that Rome was established firmly on the basis of freedom. Machiavelli returns to his argument from book 1 chapter 1.

McCormick argues that for Machiavelli "[if] the concept of the republic stands for depoliticisation and aversion to the popular element in ancient and modern political communities ... democracy represents the repoliticisation of these communities, and a political and conceptual empowerment of the popular element."<sup>228</sup> The population however is not being politicised in the sense of demonstrating virtù, rather, it is taking recourse to the popular element's habit that seeks to maintain liberty. This distinction rests on the difference between actions no longer grounded in necessity but in voluntary action, and those caused by necessity i.e. involuntary actions. As noted earlier, the popular element does not possess virtù. Rather, the people's habit to maintain liberty is because the individual prince with prudence and virtù established a given state on the basis of freedom. In Rome, it is Romulus, who despite having committed fratricide (Remus) and subsequently regicide (co-King Titus Tatius the Sabine), "deserves excuse in the deaths of his brother and his partner, and that what he did was for the common good and not his own ambition, is demonstrated by his having at once ordered a Senate with which he took counsel and by whose opinion he decided" (*D*, 1.9.1). Romulus, because of his prudence and virtù, took the responsibility of ordering the state upon himself, but realised that "its maintenance stays with many" (*D*, 1.9.2). The individual prudent organiser of the state knows that the task of

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<sup>228</sup> Del Lucchese, Review of the book *Machiavellian Democracy*, 233.

maintaining the state cannot remain in the hands of the few because of the inevitable corruption that leads to the state's disaggregation. The task thus falls to the many. Machiavelli writes, "[for] as many are not capable of ordering a thing because they do not know its good, which is because of the diverse opinions among them, so when they come to know it, they do not agree to abandon it" (*D*, 1.9.2). Indeed, Machiavelli is explicit that the discord between the plebs and the nobles of Rome did not create new orders, rather they refined existing ones. Machiavelli writes,

when Rome became free through the expulsion of the Tarquins; then no ancient order was innovated by the Romans, except that in place of a perpetual king there were two annual consuls. This testifies that all of the first orders of that city were more conformable to a civil and free way of line than to an absolute and tyrannical one (*D*, 1.9.2).

The fact that the removal of the kingship results in Rome adopting a different order, particularly not an ancient one, demonstrates that Romulus created a principality grounded in freedom. It was willing to innovate and adopt new orders. Romulus has so much *virtù* that Machiavelli concludes, "to order a republic it is necessary to be alone; and for the death of Remus and Titus Tatius, Romulus deserves excuse and not blame." (*D*, 1.9.2) In chapter 10 however, Machiavelli is clear that the prince's *virtù* does not give him the excuse to become a tyrant. The rise of a tyrant results "in those to whom the heavens give such an opportunity" to "live in continual anxieties and after death leaves them a sempiternal infamy." (*D*, 1.10.6) This mention of anxiety recalls Lucretius' entire injunction against any involvement in politics and isolates it to life under tyranny.

In chapter 11, through what initially appears to be a negative example, Machiavelli develops his argument about the importance of freedom and the disunity between the people and the greats for the perfection of Rome. Machiavelli argues that the foundation of religion in Rome

was the result of the disunity and is further evidence that Rome's free beginnings allowed it to benefit from fortune. Machiavelli writes,

Although Rome had Romulus as its first orderer and has to acknowledge, as daughter, its birth and education as from him, nonetheless, since the heavens judged that the orders of Romulus would not suffice for such an empire, they inspired in the breast of the Roman Senate the choosing of Numa Pompilius as successor to Romulus so that those those things omitted by him might be ordered by Numa. As he found a very ferocious people and wished to reduce it to civil obedience with the arts of peace, he turned to religion as a thing altogether necessary if he wished to maintain a civilization; and he constituted it so that for many centuries there was never so much fear of God as in that republic, which made easier whatever enterprise the Senate or the great men of Rome might plan to make (*D*, 1.11.1).

Machiavelli re-invokes the good education that he previously states is a symptom of *virtù* and ties it to Romulus' role as the first orderer of Rome. Romulus' *virtù* founds a state and a chain of causation that, because of trial and tumult and the 'ferociousness' of the people, results in the Senate picking a successor, Numa, capable of supplementing Romulus' orders with 'those things omitted by him'. Thus, Numa is a fortuitous pick because he possessed sufficient *virtù* to amend Romulus' orders such that the underlying love for freedom is sustained, and Rome achieved perfection. The fortuitous nature of Numa's pick was not an act of *virtù*. Numa's own actions were acts of *virtù* because he founded new orders.

Numa founds new orders by establishing and deploying religion. Machiavelli argues that Numa used religion "because he wished to put new and unaccustomed orders in the city and doubted that his authority would suffice." (*D*, 1.11.2) The import of these new orders cannot be underestimated. Religion reaffirmed dynamism in two spheres: trial and tumult or internal necessity, and war or external necessity. Machiavelli writes, "[whoever] considers well the Roman histories sees how much religion served to command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep good men good, to shame the wicked." (*D*, 1.11.1) This dovetails neatly with Machiavelli's



analysis of religion in *The Prince*: religion is even more powerful than hereditary ancestry in the maintenance of the state. Numa's contribution was so important for the development of the Roman republic towards its perfection that Machiavelli states, "[so] if one had to dispute over which prince Rome was more obligated to, Romulus or Numa, I believe rather that Numa would obtain the first rank; for where there is religion, arms can easily be introduced" (*D*, 1.11.2).

Numa, being prudent, "doubted his authority would suffice" and thus deploys his virtù in the form of religion. Machiavelli states,

One sees that for Romulus to order the Senate and to make the other civil and military orders, the authority of God was not necessary, but it was quite necessary to Numa, who pretended to be intimate with a nymph who counseled him on what he had to counsel the people (*D*, 1.11.2).

The internal conditions in which Numa found himself 'necessitated' him to 'pretend' and thus construct an ideology. Numa demonstrates his virtù by creating a break in the chain of causation. Numa is not 'necessitated' to create a religion, but he thought it was the best way. Numa's virtù responds to the internal necessity of a situation in such a manner that it allows him to begin a new chain of causation. Machiavelli explains, "For a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others. Thus wise men who wish to take away this difficulty have recourse to God." (*D*, 1.11.3) Ironically, Numa's use of religion helps Rome achieve a central theme of Lucretius' doctrine: happiness. Machiavelli states, "I conclude that the religion introduced by Numa was among the first causes of the happiness of that city. For it caused good orders; good orders make good fortune; and from good fortune arose the happy success of enterprises." (*D*, 1.11.4) Religion plays an important role in the development of Rome because it helps reorder the compound (Rome) to achieve greatness.

The significance of religion is such that the collapse of religion heralded the disaggregation of the state. Machiavelli writes, "[for] where the fear of God fails, it must be either that the

kingdom comes to ruin or that it is sustained by the fear of a prince, which supplies the defects of religion.” (*D*, 1.11.4) In either case the tendency towards disaggregation overtakes aggregation. Machiavelli reminds his readers: “[because] princes are of short life, it must be that the kingdom will fail soon, as his virtue fails. Hence it arises that kingdoms that depend solely on the virtue of one man are hardly durable, because that virtue fails with the life of that one; and it rarely happens that it is restored by succession” (*D*, 1.11.4). Machiavelli interestingly downplays the importance of Sparta without mentioning it by name. Machiavelli’s argument pivots on the earlier insight that only a prince can begin a principality alone, but the state’s maintenance requires free beginnings that allows the state to adapt to new situations presented by fortuna as accidents. Machiavelli concludes, “[thus] it is the safety of a republic or a kingdom to have not one prince who governs prudently while he lives, but one individual who orders it so that it is also maintained when he dies.” (*D*, 1.11.5)

Religion has a powerful capacity for aggregation, but also disaggregation. In particular, this disaggregation is caused by the corruption of religion by princes or republics. Machiavelli states, “[those] princes or those republics that wish to maintain themselves uncorrupt have above everything to maintain the ceremonies of their religion uncorrupt and hold them always in veneration; for one can have no greater indication of the ruin of a prince than to see the divine cult disdained.” (*D*, 1.12.1) Religion thus plays the role of a linchpin in the maintenance of principalities or republics that rely on religion for their orders. Machiavelli points to this locus for the weakness of states like Italy. Machiavelli provocatively states,

If such religion had been maintained by the princes of the Christian republic as was ordered by its giver, the Christian states and republics would be more united, much happier than they are. Nor can one make any better conjecture as to its decline to see that those peoples who are closest to the Roman church, the head of our religion, have less religion. Whoever might consider its foundations and see

how much present usage is different from them might judge, without doubt, that either its ruin or its scourging is near (*D*, 1.12.1).

Machiavelli's advocacy for religion and an uncorrupted Christianity is precisely because the corruption of Christianity has resulted in the disaggregation of the states and republics that adhere to it. Machiavelli is not religious in the sense that he actually believes in divinity and in this respect he is a member of Lucretius' school. He regards religion to be a means by which to order societies in more or less favourable orders. Where he differs from Lucretius is that he believes that religion can be used to achieve many of the same ends, such as happiness. Machiavelli's scorn for the Roman church is because its corruption renders it unable to produce the necessary orders that would aid in the aggregation of the united state of Italy. Machiavelli chastises the Roman church for two reasons: the "first is that because of the wicked examples of that court, this province has lost all devotion and all religion — which brings with it infinite inconveniences and infinite disorders"; and second "the church has kept and keeps this province divided" (*D*, 1.12.2). The church has not only been too weak to do so, it has also caused the province to be divided under numerous different states and leaders (*D*, 1.12.2).

Machiavelli animates his argument by juxtaposing Christianity to the Roman pagan religion. He wishes to demonstrate how the Roman religion aided in the reordering of orders. But it also clarifies that Machiavelli is not always in favour of tumult as he notes in the title of book 1, chapter 13: "How the Romans made religion serve to reorder the city and to carry out their enterprises and to stop tumults" (*D*, 1.13). Machiavelli provides three examples of how religion is used effectively to achieve happiness in Rome's endeavours: 1) the creation of tribunes by the people with only nobles as members due to fear caused by the religion (*D*, 1.13.1); 2) the emboldening of soldiers in the midst of a difficult military campaign (*D*, 1.13.1); and 3) the quelling of tumult in a situation where disorder actually threatens the republic's freedom (*D*,

1.13.2). Machiavelli concludes that, “[so] religion made the Senate overcome the difficulties that would never have become overcome without it” (*D*, 1.13.2). Rome was able to overcome its difficulties because it used elements from within its religion to achieve goals “according to necessity” (*D*, 1.14). The example he gives is auguries. He explains that “the Romans took more care of them than any other order in it and used them in consular assemblies, in beginning enterprises, in leading out armies, in making battles, and in every important action of theirs, civil or military” (*D*, 1.14.1). Because the people and nobles are habituated by certain orders to behave in particular ways, it was vital for the Romans to “take care of them” and manipulate them to achieve their desired ends, like sending men out on an expedition. As he points out, “when reason showed them a thing they ought to do — notwithstanding that the auspices had been adverse — they did it in any mode. But they turned it around with means and modes so aptly that it did not appear that they had done it with disdain for religion” (*D*, 1.14.1).

Machiavelli’s argument in chapter 56 with respect to reading the signs that forecast great accidents is similar. He admits that he does know “whence it arises,” but notes every accident is preceded by diviners and others foretelling its occurrence (*D*, 1.56.1). It appears as if he acknowledges their role, but rejects this possibility because it requires a “man who has knowledge of things and supernatural, which we do not have” (*D*, 1.56.1). He then turns to the position of “some philosopher” that “since this air is full of intelligences that foresee future things by their natural virtues, and since they have compassion for men, they warn them with signs” (*D*, 1.56.1). Machiavelli, while acknowledging this position, writes, “[yet] however this may be, one sees it thus to be the truth, and that always after such accidents extraordinary and new things supervene in princes” (*D*, 1.57.1). He dismisses this position and adopts another i.e. since “one sees it thus to be truth” then that is how it occurs. Machiavelli has already repeatedly

told his reader to get beyond appearances and to strive for the “effectual truth,” and in fact has offered another manner through which to discern the causes of great accidents i.e. through an understanding of the relationship between *virtù* and necessity, which produces accidents, as demonstrated through a study of history.

The problem with the Roman church is that its corruption demonstrates a disdain for religion. The difference, Machiavelli notes, between Appius Pulcher and Consul Papirius is not that “one had won and the other lost as because one had acted against the auspices prudently and the other rashly” (*D*, 1.14.3). Chapter 15 shows how the Samnites, similar to Rome, used religion to try overcome the Romans in a manner similar to how the Romans used religion. However, “the Samnites were overcome, because Roman virtue and the fear conceived out of past defeats overcame whatever obstinacy they were able to overcome by virtue of religion and of the oath they had taken” (*D*, 1.15.1). While religion played a positive role for the Samnites, it is insufficient in itself without the prior *virtù* that Rome enjoyed.

Machiavelli returns to the theme about habituated freedom and involuntary servitude in chapter 16 as indicated by the title: “A people used to living under a prince maintains its freedom with difficulty, if by some accident it becomes free” (*D*, 1.16). Machiavelli repeats his argument that only through a prince’s *virtù* and the free beginnings that he initiates can a people live freely, whereas if the people by accident do become free they struggle to maintain it because they are not habituated to living freely. Machiavelli writes, “[infinite] examples read in the remembrances of ancient histories demonstrates how much difficulty there is for a people used to living under a prince to preserve its freedom afterward, if by some accident it acquires it” (*D*, 1.16.1). Machiavelli’s expression “used to living” is symptomatic of this habituated behaviour. The people are habituated to living freely. As Machiavelli writes, in a manner reminiscent of

Lucretius, “[such] difficulty is reasonable; for that people is nothing other than a brute animal that, although of a ferocious and feral nature, has always been nourished in prison and servitude” (*D*, 1.16.1). Like any other animal people who by accident gain their freedom are likely to behave according to their base animal instincts and the habits that they have been inculcated with. As Machiavelli notes, “[then], if it is left free to its fate, it becomes the prey of the first one who seeks to rechain it, not being used to feed itself and not knowing places where it may have to take refuge” (*D*, 1.16.1). Machiavelli’s claims are reminiscent of Lucretius’ discussion of humans prior to the formation of societies. However, having formed societies it is not possible for the people to return to a pre-social state because they have forgotten how to live that way, and have become habituated to live according to specific modes and orders. Machiavelli makes this precise point when he draws a parallel between brute animals and men who live under a government. He writes, “[the] same happens to a people: since it is used to living under the government of others, not knowing how to reason about either public defense or public offence, neither knowing princes nor known by them, it quickly returns beneath a yoke that is most often harder than the one it had removed from its neck” (*D*, 1.16.2).

In this context Machiavelli again gestures towards a Lucretian influence when he alludes to the people as matter. He posits that, “[it] finds itself in these difficulties whenever the matter is corrupt. For a people into which corruption has entered in everything cannot live free” (*D*, 1.16.2). Machiavelli had, as discussed in the previous chapter, spoken of the people as matter in *The Prince* as well, and he continues to do so in *Discourses*. In *The Prince* the matter lacked a form, whereas in *Discourses* the people have a corrupted form. The corruption of the matter means that the tendency towards disaggregation has come to the fore and the tendency towards aggregation has receded, thus undermining the very reason to form a society in the first place.

Indeed, Machiavelli's discussion of uncorrupted peoples reflects Lucretius' reasons for why the people decided to form a society. Machiavelli states that,

the common utility that is drawn from a free way of life is not recognised by anyone while it is possessed: this is being able to enjoy one's things freely, without any suspicion, not fearing for the honour of wives and of children, not to be afraid for oneself. For no one confesses that he has an obligation to one who does not offend him (*D*, 1.16.3).

Machiavelli warns his readers that if a prince wants to remove the difficulties and inconveniences that are inevitable in the formation of a new state, he should order the society such that the people actually are and feel free. Those princes who do not do so will have the multitude of the people against them and will be unable to secure themselves (*D*, 1.16.4). Indeed, for a prince to secure himself he must do two things: first, he must side with the people who would oppress them i.e. the aristocrats; and second, he must ensure that the people's desire for freedom to live securely is realised (*D*, 1.16.5). "If a prince does this, and the people see that he does not break such laws because of any accident, in a short time he will begin to live secure and content" (*D*, 1.16.5). Machiavelli concludes chapter 16 by noting that in the case of principalities, like Rome, which do not secure themselves in their beginning because they lacked a Lycurgus, must do so at the first opportunity (*D*, 1.16.5). However, if the people have been corrupted it is not possible for them to maintain their free modes and orders (*D*, 1.16.6).

Corruption is thus one of the main modalities through which the tendency of disaggregation is realised. This tendency of disaggregation in the form of corruption is especially pertinent in the case of kings. Machiavelli returns to Lucretius and Polybius' point about the perfidious nature of state formations. As Machiavelli states, "I judge it was necessary that the kings be extinguished in Rome or that Rome in a very short time become weak and of no value" (*D*, 1.17.1). Because of the organisation of power in a kingship, the effects of the corruption of

the king are quickly realised and spread quickly throughout the society. Also, if the king does not take the step to relinquish his power, and order his state on the basis of freedom, the people are not habituated to fight this corruption through trial and tumult. Machiavelli explains,

For considering how much corruption those kings had come to, if two or three such had followed in succession, and the corruption that was in them had begun to spread through the members, as soon as the members had been corrupted it would have been impossible ever to reform it. But since they lost the head when the trunk was sound they could easily be brought to live free and ordered (*D*, 1.17.1).

Machiavelli makes it clear that the Roman republic was not stable and did not enjoy some happy equilibrium. Rather it was a deeply contested space. The Marian parties had corrupted the people of Rome, and “so could blind the multitude that it did not recognise the yoke that it was putting on its own neck” (*D*, 1.17.1). In such cases, accidents are not useful in making the necessary corrections to the corrupted republic. Machiavelli unequivocally states that, “Therefore I say that no accident, even through grave and violent, could ever make Milan or Naples free because their members are all corrupt” (*D*, 1.17.2). Milan and Naples could never become free through an accident because, as suggested earlier, accidents can only change laws, however, they cannot change orders. Machiavelli explains, “If laws vary according to the accidents in a city, its orders never vary, or rarely; this makes new laws insufficient because the orders, which remain fixed, corrupt them” (*D*, 1.18.1). Rather, Machiavelli explicitly states that a prince is required who is then able to “give a beginning to freedom” through the difficult task of voluntary action.

One can draw this conclusion: that where the matter is now corrupt, tumults and other scandals do not hurt; where it is corrupt, well-ordered laws do not help unless they have been put in motion by one individual who with an extreme force ensures their observance so that the matter becomes good. I do not know whether this has ever occurred or whether it is possible for it is seen, as I said above, that if a city that has fallen into decline through corruption of matter ever happens to rise, it happens through the virtue of one man who is alive then, not through the virtue of the collectivity that sustains good orders (*D*, 1.17.3).



This passage demonstrates three aspects of Machiavelli's aleatory political thought: 1) the people are referred to as "matter"; 2) if the matter is corrupt then an accident will not suffice, what is needed is virtù of one individual prince; and 3) the republic having been corrupted does not necessarily become a democracy and subsequently further degenerate into mob rule, as suggested by Polybius, but instead can become a tyranny that serves as a political void in which a prince can engage in a voluntary action. Thus Machiavelli argues that,

[if] Rome wished to maintain itself free in corruption, therefore, it was necessary that it should have made new orders, as in the course of its life it had made new laws. For one should order different orders and modes of life in a bad subject and in a good one; nor can there be a similar form in a matter altogether contrary. But because these orders have to be renewed all at a stroke, when they are discovered to be no longer good, or little by little, before they are recognised by everyone, I say both of these two things are almost impossible (*D*, 1.18.4).

The difficulty in creating new orders in a corrupt state is that it is unlikely for a man of virtù to emerge in such corrupted polities because he will be unable to convince corrupted peoples to change the orders, little by little, because they grow accustomed to them (*D*, 1.18.4). Thus, again Machiavelli notes the need for extraordinary' modes

such as violence and arms, and before anything else become prince of that city, able to dispose of it in one's own mode. Because the reordering of a city for a political way of life presupposes a good man, and becoming prince of a republic by violence presupposes a bad man, one will find that it very rarely happens that someone good wishes to become prince by bad ways, even though this his end be good, and that someone wicked, having become prince, wishes to work well, and that it will ever occur to his mind to use well the authority he has acquired (*D*, 1.18.4).

Machiavelli regards the virtù and capacity for a good man to engage in "bad ways," while retaining the common good, as something that "very rarely" occurs. It is far more likely that once the tendency towards disaggregation comes to the fore that the state will tend towards becoming

a political void, which awaits a new prince of virtù. Machiavelli thus argues that is important that new orders are established which turns the kingly state into a popular one (*D*, 1.18.5).

Machiavelli reminds his reader of the overall theme that has animated his inquiry in the opening paragraph of book 1 Chapter 19. He writes,

Having considered the virtue and mode of proceeding of Romulus, Numa, and Tullus, the first three Roman kings, one sees that Rome chanced upon very great fortune when it had the first king very fierce and bellicose, the next quiet and religious, and third similar in ferocity to Romulus and more of a lover of war than of peace. For in Rome it was necessary that in its first beginnings an orderer of a civil way of life emerge, but it was indeed necessary that other kings take up again the virtue of Romulus; otherwise that city would have become effeminate and the prey of its neighbours. Hence one can note that a successor of not so much virtue as the first can maintain a state through the virtue of him who set it straight and can enjoy the labours of the first. But if it happens either that he has a long life or that after him another does not emerge to assume the virtue of first, the kingdom of necessity comes to ruin (*D*, 1.19.1).

Machiavelli emphasises that Rome “chanced upon a very great fortune” inasmuch that Romulus ordered Rome with the common good of a free way of life in mind. Rome was similarly fortunate to have Numa and Tullus as neither deviated from Romulus’ orders, but simply strengthened them through two new modes respectively: Numa founded a religion, whereas Tullus put into practice the expansionist state. Machiavelli concludes “the virtue of Romulus was so much that it could give space to Numa Pompilius to enable him to rule Rome for many years with the art of peace. But after him succeeded Tullus, who by his ferocity regained the reputation of Romulus, and after whom came Ancus, gifted by nature into a mode that enabled him to use peace and endure war” (*D*, 1.19.3). The parallel between Romulus and Tullus is not surprising as Tullus’ implemented the expansionist state, thus recalling Machiavelli’s analysis in book 1 chapter 1 about the beginnings of states being either the effect of a people in an area coming together to form a society, or colonies being sent out by an existing principality. Rome was incredibly fortunate, and this is why Romulus is to be commended so much, to have selected a

third king with virtù who was able to put into place orders that helped Rome thrive and not come to ruin (D, 1.19.4).

Machiavelli points that there are two ways for a republic to remain free: “one to acquire, the other to maintain itself free — it must be that in one thing or the other it errs through too much love” (D, 1.29.3). Rome was unique as it had accidents internal to the state through which it was able to maintain its freedom, and was also able to develop the means by which to acquire. Tullus realised “how to give it back its reputation with arms” (D, 1.19.4). Tullus, like Romulus and Numa, found a political void during his tenure as king and demonstrated great virtù by his capacity to effectively intervene in the situation and produce a new order. Machiavelli explains that when Tullus “succeeded to the kingdom, Tullus did not find a man who had ever been in war, since Rome had been at peace for forty years” (D, 1.21.1). Tullus fixed an existing defect in the existing orders of Rome. Machiavelli notes, “if where there are men there are no soldiers, it arises through a defect of the prince and not through any other defect, either of the site or nature” (D, 1.21.1). What Tullus did differently from other kings is that “when he planned to make war, he did not think to avail himself of either the Samnites or the Tusans who were accustomed to being in arms” (D, 1.21.1). Tullus, unlike other kings who desired conquest but did not have the means by which to conduct said war, did not rely on the fortunes of others, rather, using his virtù opted to create his own good fortune. Tullus “as a very prudent man ... decided to avail himself of his own. So much was his virtue that in a stroke, under his government, he was able to make very excellent soldiers” (D, 1.21.1). Tullus thus gave himself, and Rome, the means to avoid the political stagnation through the deployment of virtù in the form of military conquest. Machiavelli is clear however, and this is keeping with his comments in both *The Prince* and book 1 chapter 1 of *Discourses*, that “[the] best remedy whoever becomes prince of either a city or a state has for

holding that principality is to make everything in that state anew, since he is a new prince, and so much the more when his foundations are weak and he may not turn to civil life by way either of kingdom or of republic” (*D*, 1.26.1). It is only through the introduction of a new chain of causation that one can maintain oneself.

With respect to the second method for maintaining one’s freedom: “to maintain itself free,” Machiavelli explains that Rome replaced the expelled kings with the consuls, who did not gain power through deception but through popular franchise (*D*, 1.20.1). This popular franchise is worth taking note of as it once again relies on the people and Rome’s free beginnings. If instead the consuls had been formed by deception then the process of corruption would have been further deepened. The advantages enjoyed by the republic that arose from this popular franchise are that “through the mode of electing it has not only two in succession but infinite most virtuous princes who are successors to one another. This virtuous succession will always exist in every well-ordered republic” (*D*, 1.20.1). However, Machiavelli complicates this analysis when he argues that one cannot simply establish new modes and orders through a radical break with the past, even though that is precisely what one is doing in this situation. In effect, any prince to succeed must take into account the habituation of the people. Machiavelli argues that “[if] someone who desires or who wishes to reform a state in a city wishes it to be accepted and capable of being maintained to the satisfaction of everyone, he is under the necessity of retaining at least the shadow of its ancient modes so that it may not appear to the peoples to have changed its order even if in fact the new orders are altogether alien to the past ones” (*D*, 1.25.1). If the new orders are seen to be completely alien to the old ones then it is likely that the people will reject them because of their prior habituation. Only after the new orders take hold will the people become habituated to them and no longer care about the ancient modes that were replaced.

Recalling Machiavelli and Lucretius' emphasis on effectual truth, Machiavelli plainly states that the majority of people do not act on the basis of the underlying truths, but on the basis of appearances. "For the generality of men feed on what appears as much as on what is; indeed, many times they are moved more by things that appear than by things that are" (*D*, 1.25.1). Thus, deception is only acceptable if it helps introduce the necessary new modes and orders required to maintain the state freely. However, if it seeks to undermine the people's freedom then it contributes to the tendency towards disaggregation. As Machiavelli points out in chapter 53, "deceived by a false image of good, the people desires its own ruin; and if it is not made aware that this is bad and what the good is, by someone in whom it has faith, infinite dangers are brought into republics" (*D*, 1.53.1). Indeed, when by 'fate' there is no such person, then "it of necessity comes to ruin" (*D*, 1.53.1). Machiavelli explains this argument in chapter 28 when he juxtaposes Rome to Athens. In the case of Rome, "freedom was never taken away by any of its citizens, so that there was no great cause for suspecting them and, in consequence, for offending them inconsiderately" (*D*, 1.28.1). The same cannot be said of Athens where freedom was taken away under a "deception of goodness," which resulted in the people attacking those who usurped their freedom, but in such a manner that resulted in an increase in violence and suspicion (*D*, 1.28.1). This suspicion in turn results in ingratitude on the part of the people (*D*, 1.29.1). Suspicion and ingratitude are deeply dangerous as they too are part of the tendency towards disaggregation and is why Machiavelli in chapter 32 states that it is unwise to grant people a necessity, like relieving the people of the salt tax, and then to subsequently take it away from them because it causes them to be fearful (*D*, 1.32.1).

Machiavelli's analysis of the creation of dictators however, seems to question the entire analysis proffered thus far as the dictator is a retreat from freedom. And yet Machiavelli seems to

extol Rome for doing so. The context in which Rome adopted the need to create the post of a dictator is worth bearing in mind as it was exceptional as Rome was threatened existentially (*D*, 1.33.1). Indeed, what differentiates Rome from weak republics is that the latter are “irresolute, so that all the policies they take up are taken up by force; and if any good comes to be done by them, they do it forced and not by their prudence” (*D*, 1.38.2). Rome on the other hand was prudent and chose to implement a controversial policy of creating a dictator. To respond to this crisis situation “among the other usual remedies they made for themselves in urgent dangers, the Romans turned to creating the dictator — that is, to giving power to one man who could decide without any consultation and execute his decisions without any appeal” (*D*, 1.33.1). The role of the dictator was structurally the same as the prince as it allows for a demonstration of virtù that overcomes the political void that existed within a state. Machiavelli writes, “that remedy was useful then and was the cause that they overcame the impending dangers, so it was most useful in all those accidents that arose at any time against the republic in the increasing empire” (*D*, 1.33.1). The Romans through the creation of a new mode, the dictator, were able to ensure that the internal accidents caused by the inevitable problems associated with attempting to acquire could be successfully mitigated. It is important to note however, that Machiavelli regards the new mode of the dictator, as not being the cause of the tyranny that Rome would later experience (*D*, 1.34.1). Machiavelli defends the dictator arguing that “it was neither the name nor the rank of dictator that made Rome servile, but it was the authority taken by citizens because of the length of command” (*D*, 1.34.1). The dictator was a unique mode, unlike that of the tyrant, because the Roman order allowed for the selection of a dictator, the dictator did not usurp power for himself, was limited by time mandates, and thus remaining intrinsically tied to the common good of the republic (*D*, 1.34.2). Furthermore, despite the creation of the mode of dictator, “the tribunes,

consuls, and Senate remained with their authority; nor was the dictator able to take it away from them,” and resulted in them functioning as a guard against tyranny (*D*, 1.34.2). However, this mode was only effective when Rome was composed of uncorrupted people.

Instead Machiavelli blames the Decemvirate, created by the votes of the plebs, because “they annulled the consuls and tribunes; they gave themselves authority to make laws and do any other thing,” which allowed them to become insolent (*D*, 1.35.1). It is through the example of the Decemvirate and the accidents that arose from its rule that one can understand how the tendency towards disaggregation comes to the fore in Rome. Machiavelli explains that it is by studying the Decemvirate that “one will see many errors made by the Senate and by the plebs unfavourable to freedom, and many errors made by Appius, head of the Decemvirate, unfavourable to tyranny that he had supposed he would stabilise in Rome” (*D*, 1.40.1). These accidents included taking power from the people and the Senate and giving it to the Ten, thus ceding the role of the guardianship of freedom to the latter (*D*, 1.40.7). Appius maintained his tyranny, through the form or mode, of the Decemvirate using deception as evidenced by his claim that he was a friend of the people (*D*, 1.41.1). This transfer of power and deception led to the people’s corruption (*D*, 1.42.1). However, the example of the Decemvirate is also useful because it demonstrates that the people, even if they do wish to regain their freedom, cannot do so on their own and must have a “head” (*D*, 1.44.1).

Machiavelli is clear in chapter 57 that the multitude without a head is weak as it “is often bold in speaking against the decisions of their prince; then, when they look at the penalty in the face, not trusting one another, they run to obey” (*D*, 1.57.1). As has been repeatedly noted the people behave according to habit, and it is not surprising that when faced with significant penalties they would adopt political quietism. Machiavelli notes, “[for] on one side there is

nothing more formidable than an unshackled multitude without a head, and, on the other side, there is nothing weaker; for even though it has arms in hand, it is easy to put to down provided that you have a stronghold that enables you to escape the first thrust” (*D*, 1.57.1). The role of the “head” thus includes dispelling wrong images of the good and explaining to the people whether a policy is a gain or a loss for them, thus undermining deception (*D*, 1.53.2). This “head” should be a man with gravity and who has merits such that even when he disagrees with the ‘excited multitude’ he knows how to behave so that the people are persuaded of his course of action (*D*, 1.54.1). However, Machiavelli adamantly disagrees with those historians, like Titus Livy, who suggest that the people are “inconstant” (*D*, 1.58.1). Instead, Machiavelli insists that princes who do feel the need to follow laws are as inconstant as a multitude who are not regulated by laws (*D*, 1.58.2). The people, unlike the king, are more constant, prudent and stable than a prince because they will listen to competing opinions and more often than not accept the better one, or are better at picking magistrates than the prince (*D*, 1.59.3). Machiavelli restates his position thusly, “[if] princes are superior to peoples in ordering laws, forming civil lives, and ordering new statutes and orders, peoples are so much superior in maintaining things ordered that without doubt they attain the glory of those who order them” (*D*, 1.59.4). Indeed, the “cruelties of the multitude” are primarily against those who undermine the common good i.e. freedom and the state.

The restoration of freedom to Rome, one would assume, ought to have resulted in political quietness for some time, but this was not the case (*D*, 1.46.1). Almost immediately the dynamics outlined at the beginning restarted i.e., the trial and tumults, or accidents, between the people and the nobles. Indeed, the nobles again wanted to oppress the people and the people desired to safeguard their freedoms (*D*, 1.46.1). Again these dynamics are caused due to the ambitiousness of some who live in the republic and their attempts to use deception to gain greater power from



themselves (*D*, 1.46.1). It is not difficult to see how the aforementioned process restarts. Yet, as should be evident by now, there is little evidence of Polybius' anacycle here. It also demonstrates Machiavelli's initial thesis that "[the] course of the Roman republic demonstrates very well how difficult it is, in ordering a republic, to provide for all the laws to maintain it free" (*D*, 1.49.1). However, it is also evidence for two claims that this chapter has made. The first is that Machiavelli does not adhere to Polybius' theory of anacyclosis. Indeed, there is no evidence that Machiavelli moved through the fixed order of types of state. The second is that Machiavelli's advocacy for the republic is predicated on a theory of aggregation and disaggregation, and dynamism rather than stability. Machiavelli believes that it is freedom that ensures that the state is able to endure because of its susceptibility to adapting to accidents. Machiavelli writes, "new necessities in managing that city were always discovered, and it was necessary to create new orders, as happened when they created the censors, which were one of those provisions that helped keep Rome free for the time that it lived in freedom" (*D*, 1.49.1). The discovery of new necessities does not mean to suggest that Rome was not perfected over time, including by the prudence of Mamercus the dictator (*D*, 1.49.1). Again it was because Rome was well-ordered in a manner that allowed for direct appeals to the people to maintain their freedom that they were able to consistently ward off corruption, whereas if power was only in the hands of the dictator and the nobles they would have been easily corrupted (*D*, 1.49.3). Machiavelli thus marvels at the fact that

in Rome, ordered by itself and so by so many prudent men, every day new causes emerged for which it had to make new orders in favour of a free way of life, it is not marvellous if in other cities that have a more disordered beginning so many difficulties emerge that they are never able to reorder themselves (*D*, 1.49.3).

*Discourses* book 1, it has been shown, similarly functions on the basis of the strong Lucretian framework laid out in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that Machiavelli does not adopt Polybius' model of the anacyclosis. Rather, Machiavelli restates Polybius' position so that he can juxtapose it to his own Lucretian-inspired interpretation of the history of Rome. The key point in Polybius' account that Machiavelli does adopt is the one that Polybius shares with Lucretius i.e., the pestiferous nature of modes. However, for Lucretius and Machiavelli alike this pestiferous nature is not predicated on a natural cycle through states, but on the tendencies towards aggregation and disaggregation. Machiavelli's own account pivots on the distinction between virtù, or voluntary action, and necessity/accidents, or involuntary action. Machiavelli is adamant throughout the text that the people do not have virtù. Instead, due to a prior virtù, which entails the foundation of a principality on the basis of freedom, they are habituated to behave freely. This habituation results in them opposing anyone who would take away their freedom. This opposition produces trial and tumults that aid Rome in perfecting its orders and maintaining freedom. This perfection of orders and the maintenance of freedom allow Rome to achieve the kind of greatness that Machiavelli advocates because it sustains the tendency towards aggregation. When corruption reigns and freedom is eroded, the process of disaggregation comes to the fore and one sees the decline of states, until a point in which they become a political void.

## Conclusion

At the outset of the present study it was stated that, as Althusser said, a new interpretation of Machiavelli would not be offered to the reader. Instead, drawing upon an insight made 440 years ago in the first polemic against Machiavelli's thought and the moral corruption it supposedly wrought, and relying on a growing body of recent scholarly secondary literature, an elaboration and a deeper appreciation of the relationship between Lucretius' philosophy and Machiavelli's political thought is presented. This relationship is vital because it animates Machiavelli's work and his central concepts. Machiavelli was the first "witness," Althusser insightfully argued, after Lucretius, of a subterranean current that traversed the history of philosophy and political thought from Epicurus to Marx: aleatory materialism. However, Machiavelli was not a political Epicurean. He had "decided to take a path as yet untrodden by anyone," he introduced a new mode of thought: aleatory political thought. This new mode of thought was inaugurated with Machiavelli's rejection of Lucretius' antipathy to politics. However, Machiavelli simultaneously sustains other important elements of Lucretius' philosophy, especially his theory of the beginnings of human society and state formation and the three kinds of atomic motion. This tension between rejecting and sustaining produces torsion in atomist philosophy. This torsion produces Machiavelli's new mode of thought.

Althusser was the first to attempt to delineate the political relationship between Lucretius and Machiavelli. Prior to Althusser's posthumously published late writings, "The Subterranean Current of the Materialism of the Encounter" and *Machiavelli and Us*, only Strauss posited that Epicureanism inspired Machiavelli's irreligiosity. However, Strauss emphasizes Machiavelli's indebtedness to Epicureanism in general, and not Lucretius specifically. Furthermore, Strauss' students, like Mansfield and Rahe, while admitting the specific influence of Lucretius on

Machiavelli, similarly solely focus on the question of religion and evil. Althusser's analysis is thus unique as he offers a more determinate account of the relationship. Althusser argues that Machiavelli arrives at a new theoretical problem: how to begin a national state. To arrive at this new theoretical problem, Machiavelli had to break from existing philosophical tendencies, such as Aristotelianism. This break helped constitute a philosophical void that needed to be filled. This philosophical void was paralleled by a political void. The political situation in Italy was such that it lacked an appropriate form. Althusser thus proposes that Machiavelli was looking for a prince who could initiate a swerve, or *clinamen*, and give form to the existing formless matter. This form was Italy. Althusser thus prefigured Palmer's recent historical scholarship that suggests Machiavelli's central interest in Lucretius' philosophy was not the critique of religion, but the theory of atomic motion.

However, Althusser's discussion remains highly impressionistic and fragmentary. Althusser focuses on only one form of atomic motion: the swerve. Althusser mentions another form of atomic motion, the fall of atoms parallel to one another, but does not tie this form of atomic motion to an analysis of *fortuna*. Additionally, Althusser is inattentive to another form of atomic motion that Lucretius describes, collisions between atoms, thus failing to note another form of *fortuna*. The serious repercussions that this inattention had on Althusser's analysis are: 1) his failure to understand how *virtù* transforms *fortuna* into contingency, and thus over-emphasises the role of chance; 2) his inability to fully comprehend the relationship between *virtù* and voluntary/involuntary actions; and 3) his incapacity to delineate Machiavelli's critique of Polybius' theory of *anacyclosis* and Machiavelli's subsequently developed theory of history. Althusser is thus unable to fully articulate Lucretius' influence on Machiavelli, but provides some preliminary reference points for a strong Lucretian interpretation of Machiavelli, thus

necessitating a return to Lucretius and Machiavelli.

It must be acknowledged that Machiavelli radically differs from Lucretius with respect to the latter's antipathy to politics. Indeed, Machiavelli rejects it. This rejection inaugurates a torsion in Lucretius' philosophy that renders Machiavelli, as Althusser suggested, the first theorist of aleatory politics as opposed to a political Epicureanism à la Philodemus. This torsion relies on Machiavelli retaining key concepts from Lucretius, like the latter's account of the beginnings of society and state formation and the various forms of atomic motion. Furthermore, Machiavelli abandons Lucretius' emphasis on contemplation, but follows Lucretius' own narrative from metaphysics to physics to the rise of human societies and politics. This torsion is demonstrated in chapter 2, when comparing Machiavelli's *Discourses* book 1, chapter 1 to Aristotle's *Politics*, Cicero's *Des Republica*, and Lucretius' *DRN* book 5. Indeed, Machiavelli hews quite closely to Lucretius' account of the beginnings of societies, but differs with Lucretius with respect to politics and advocates the role of laws to guide people towards virtuous behaviour. However, it would be erroneous to suggest as the advocates of the Cambridge school have, that Machiavelli was indebted to Aristotle or Cicero on the basis of a shared language.

However, Machiavelli's indebtedness to Lucretius' philosophy does not end there. Drawing upon Althusser's initial insight that the prince must produce a swerve in the political void to inaugurate a new beginning, Machiavelli's relationship to Lucretius' theory of atomic motion is further explored. After recounting Lucretius' three different kinds of motion in *DRN* book 2, I examine Machiavelli's marginalia on the relevant sections where Lucretius outlines his theory in his hand-copied edition of *DRN* and argue that Machiavelli had a specific interpretation of Lucretius: clinamens, or voluntary actions, are incredibly rare. However, as Black correctly argues, the marginalia is insufficient to determine whether Machiavelli in fact endorsed

Lucretius' theory of atomic motion, and constitutes the Robert Black challenge. Given that no positive determination can be ascertained by just analysing *DRN*, the concepts of virtù and fortuna are analysed in relation to the three forms of atomic motion through a commentary on *The Prince*. I argue that virtù is consistently used throughout *The Prince* to demarcate voluntary actions, while fortuna is predicated on involuntary actions, as outlined by Lucretius in *DRN* book 2 and Machiavelli's marginalia. Additionally, Machiavelli, as Althusser suggests, exhorts the prince to inaugurate new beginnings in Italy by producing a swerve in an existing political void. However, Machiavelli does differ from Lucretius with respect to the usefulness of religion. Whereas for Lucretius religion leads men astray from the truth, Machiavelli regards it to be a useful device through which to maintain chains of causation.

In the last chapter, Machiavelli's relationship to Polybius' theory of anacyclosis is examined through a commentary on *Discourses book 1* chapters 2-60 and it is demonstrated that again Machiavelli does not adhere to Polybius' theory of history. Machiavelli only agrees with Polybius' catastrophism. However, given that Polybius and Lucretius share catastrophism, it is difficult to state either way whether Machiavelli adopted this element from Polybius or Lucretius. Machiavelli's account of history in general is more indebted to Lucretius' theory about the processes of aggregation and disaggregation of compounds than to Polybius' theory of anacyclosis. Whereas Polybius argues that the republic is able to achieve a stable state that permits it to endure over long periods of time, Machiavelli emphasises dynamism. This dynamism functions on the basis of the aforementioned relationship between virtù, fortuna and the three forms of atomic motion. Machiavelli makes it clear that only the prince with virtù can begin a society, or a chain of causation, but maintaining the new state requires the active participation of the people. The people intervene politically vis-à-vis fortuna and involuntary

motions i.e. habituated freedom. The people are not capable of creating new beginnings, but if habituated to freedom, will involuntarily move in ways (trial and tumult) that allows the process of aggregation to remain at the fore, and limit the effects of disaggregation.

Through critical commentaries on *The Prince* and *Discourses* book 1 and comparative analyses of Machiavelli, Lucretius and other classical thinkers, a significant response to Robert Black's challenge. Machiavelli's marginalia may not be sufficient in itself, but having interrogated Machiavelli's texts with this marginalia in mind, and with Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* in hand, it is possible to establish that Machiavelli was not only interested in Lucretius out of a humanist interest in Roman antiquity; Lucretius helped inaugurate his innovative political thought. However, work remains to be done to definitively prove this thesis.

The present work does not deal with sections concerning military affairs in *The Prince*, *Discourses* book 1, but also book 2. A central figure in such a study would be Xenophon. Any future work must fill this gap, especially as Machiavelli spent so much time and energy on the problem of the military form. Thus, a study of the Xenophon-Epicurus/Lucretius-Machiavelli triangle is needed to supplement the analysis proffered here. Furthermore, it is vital that a commentary on *Discourses* book 3 also be produced. Only then can it be definitively stated that both of Machiavelli's central texts are indebted to Lucretius' philosophy. Finally, Machiavelli's third key work, *Florentine Histories*, needs to be similarly interrogated with an eye as to whether it too is influenced by the thought of aleatory politics.

A little further afield, Machiavelli's relationship to Lucretius is important for the broader investigation into other figures in the subterranean current of aleatory materialism, as Althusser argued, most notably Hobbes, Spinoza and Rousseau. Indeed, similar to the growing literature about Lucretius-Machiavelli, scholars are carrying out important research projects into the

relationship between Lucretius and Hobbes or Rousseau. Given their common indebtedness to Lucretianism and the fact that these figures were themselves also responding to Machiavelli suggests that a larger debate needs to occur about the lessons of Lucretius' philosophy for modern political thought.

This dissertation began with Gentillet, writing 49 years after Machiavelli's death, denouncing Machiavelli for being an Epicurean. Let it end 52 years before Machiavelli was born. In 1417, Poggio Bracciolini rediscovered Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* in a Christian monastery. He could not have even begun to imagine the impact that this discovery would have on the subsequent 600 years. 80 years after Poggio found the manuscript a young Niccolò Machiavelli painstakingly copied the entire poem by hand and made numerous emendations to it, hoping to produce a critical edition. Machiavelli would abandon this project, but did not abandon Lucretius' teachings. Disregarding Lucretius' political quietism, Machiavelli found in Lucretius something else. He found a philosophy that explained how the world came to be, how the world really is, and how the world can be changed. *The Prince* and *Discourses* did not immediately produce the swerve that Machiavelli hoped they would. However, with the help of Lucretius he made the world modern. Time and time again, men and women have turned to these two famous texts and inspired by what they read have tried to swerve, hoping to begin anew.

The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 628



- James Joyce

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