SELECTIONS FROM THE *DISCOURSES*[1]

Niccolò Machiavelli to Zanobi Buondelmonti and Cosimo Rucellai,[2] Greetings

I send you a present which, if it does not measure up to the obligations I have to you, is unquestionably the most valuable thing Niccolò Machiavelli could send you. For in it I have put in words all that I know and all I have learned from an extensive experience of the affairs of the world and endless reading about them. Neither you nor anybody else could ask more of me, so you have no reason to complain if this is all I have given you. Of course you may regret my inadequate intelligence when you find my discussions inadequate, and my poor judgment when, as I often do, I present a mistaken argument. In the circumstances, I am not sure which of us has least reason to be obliged to the other: I to you, who forced me to write a work which I, left to myself, would never have written, or you to me, if, in writing, I have not given you satisfaction. So accept this gift as we accept all gifts from friends, for then we always give more weight to the intention that lies behind the gift than to the quality of the gift itself.

And please believe that my manuscript gives me only one satisfaction, which is when I think that, even if I have been mistaken in many particular matters I discuss, I know that I have not made a mistake in at least one thing: in having chosen you, to whom above all others my *Discourses* are addressed. I feel that in so doing I have expressed some gratitude for the benefits I have received from you. Moreover, I have avoided adopting the normal practice of authors, for they nearly always

1. For an edition of the *Discourses* which provides extensive notes and apparatus see *The Discourses*, ed. and trans. Leslie J. Walker (2 vols., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950).

2. Buondelmonti and Rucellai were close friends who took part in discussions of politics with Machiavelli in the Oricellari gardens. They were both of distinguished families. Rucellai died in 1519; Buondelmonti in exile in 1527. In the editions of 1531 this letter appears at the end, not the beginning of the *Discourses*. It is possible that Machiavelli intended to substitute it for the preface to book one, or, alternatively, that it survives from an early draft and was intended to be deleted.

dedicate their books to some ruler, and, blinded by ambition and avarice, they praise him as if he had all possible virtuous [*virtuose*] qualities, when they ought to criticize him for having every despicable characteristic. So I, in order to avoid falling into this mistake, have chosen, not princes, but people whose innumerable fine qualities make them worthy to be princes. I have chosen, not rulers who can reward me with titles, honors, and wealth, but private citizens who would reward me if they could. If you want to make sound judgments, you should admire those who are generous in spirit, not those who have the resources to be generous, respect those who know how to rule, not those who have no idea of how to rule, but are in power. Writers praise Hiero of Syracuse more when they describe him while he was still a private citizen than Perseus of Macedon while he was king, for Hiero was fit to be king, even if he had no kingdom, while Perseus had none of the attributes of a true ruler other than a kingdom.[3]

So enjoy this book if you can. You are responsible for what is good in it, and for what is bad. If your judgment is so poor that you continue to enjoy reading me, then I will not fail to complete my commentary on Livy, as I originally promised you I would. Farewell.

Book One

Preface

Men are by nature envious. It has always been as dangerous to propose new ways of thinking and new institutions as it is to seek unknown oceans and undiscovered continents.[4] People are much quicker to criticize than to praise what others have done. Nevertheless, spurred on by an instinctive desire I have always had to do those things that I believe will further the common good and benefit everybody, I have refused to be intimidated. I have resolved to set out on a road no one has travelled before me. My journey may be tiresome and difficult, but I can hope it will prove rewarding, at least if people are willing to judge sympathetically the purpose of my labors. If my limited intelligence, my lack of experience of contemporary politics, and my inadequate knowledge of classical history will make my efforts defective and of very limited use to others, I will at least be pointing out the way to

3. For Hiero, see *The Prince*, chapter six. Perseus, King of Macedon from 179 to 168 B.C., lost his kingdom on the battlefield.

4. Machiavelli presumably had the discoveries of Columbus in mind.

someone with greater ability [*virtù*], more analytical skill, and better judgment, someone who will be capable of achieving what I have aimed at. Perhaps no one will praise my efforts; in any event, I do not deserve to be reproached.

Think of the respect in which we hold antiquity. Often, to take just one example, a single fragment of an antique statue will be purchased at enormous expense by someone who wants to look at it every day. He will give it a place of honor in his house and allow those who aspire to be sculptors to copy it. The sculptors then make every effort to do work comparable to it. Think, on the other hand, of the immensely skillful [*virtuosissime*] deeds the history books record for us, deeds done by ancient kingdoms and classical republics, by kings, generals, citizens, legislators, and others who have worn themselves out for their homelands. These deeds may be admired, but they are scarcely imitated. Indeed, everybody goes to great lengths to avoid copying them, even if it only concerns an insignificant detail. The result is not a trace of the classical military and political skills [*quella antiqua virtù*] survives. I cannot help but be both astonished and dismayed by this. Especially when I notice that when citizens find themselves caught up in legal disagreements, or when they fall ill, they always appeal to the legal decisions of the ancients, they always follow the medical remedies prescribed by them. For the civil laws are nothing other than decisions handed down by classical jurists, decisions that have been codified, and are now taught to lawyers by our own jurists. Similarly, medicine is simply the experience of classical doctors, on the basis of which contemporary doctors make their decisions. Nevertheless, in organizing republics, in administering states, in ruling kingdoms, in training armies and fighting wars, in passing judgment on subjects, and in planning new conquests, when it comes to all these activities, one does not find a single ruler or republic who tries to learn from the ancients.

I do not believe the cause of this is the feebleness contemporary religion has instilled in the world, nor the evil consequences that a supercilious indolence has had for many Christian countries and cities. The real problem is people do not properly understand the history books. When they read them they do not get out of them the meaning that is in them. They chew on them but do not taste them. The result is countless people read them and enjoy discovering in them the great variety of events they record, but never think of imitating them, presuming it would not be just difficult but would be simply impossible to do as the ancients did. As if the heavens, the sun, the elements, human beings had changed in their movement, organization, and capacities, and were quite different from what they were in days gone by. My

intent has been to rescue men from this mistake, so I have decided I must write about all the books of Livy's history that have survived the ravages of time, explaining whatever I think is important if one is to understand them. In doing so, I will draw on my knowledge of ancient and modern affairs. My hope is that those who read my comments will be able without difficulty to draw from them those practical benefits one ought to expect to gain from the study of history. Although my undertaking is a difficult one, nevertheless, helped by those who have encouraged me to embark on this enterprise, I believe I will have so much success that anyone coming after me will only have a little to do before he completes my task.

Chapter One: On the universal origins of any city whatever, and on how Rome began.

Those who read how the city of Rome began, who established its laws, and how it was organized will not marvel that so much excellence [*virtù*] was preserved in that city for so many centuries; and that later it gave birth to the vast empire the Roman republic eventually controlled. Since I want to talk first about its birth, I will start by saying all cities are constructed either by men born in the place where the city is built or by foreigners. In the first case, the inhabitants decide to build a city because they have been spread out in many tiny settlements in which they have not felt secure, for each settlement on its own, because of its location and because of the small number of its inhabitants, is incapable of resisting the assaults of an attacker. Nor are they in a position to assemble in joint defense when they see the enemy coming, either because it takes too long, or because, even if they could assemble in time, they would be obliged to abandon many of their settlements and would soon see them plundered by their enemies. So, to avoid these dangers, urged on either by their own individual judgments or by some one member of their group who has greater influence among them, they gather together to live in a single place they have chosen, one that will be more convenient to live in, and that will be easier to defend.

Athens and Venice are among the many cities that originated in this way. Athens, under the leadership of Theseus, was constructed by scattered inhabitants for the sort of reasons I have outlined.[5] Venice was established by numerous little groups who had taken refuge on certain tiny islands at the end of the Adriatic sea.[6] They were trying

5. According to legend, Theseus founded Athens in 1234 B.C.
6. Settlement of Venice is supposed to have begun in 451.

to escape the wars that continually broke out in Italy in the period following the collapse of the Roman empire as a result of the arrival of new groups of barbarians. They organized themselves, without there being any one individual in overall control, to live according to those laws that were, in their view, most conducive to their preservation. Their enterprise was a success because of the lengthy period of peace the site they had chosen ensured for them, for their lagoon was impenetrable, and the tribes who were invading Italy had no ships with which to attack them. So, from the most humble beginnings, they were able to rise to the eminent position they now occupy.

The second case, when foreigners come and build a city, takes two forms, depending on whether the immigrants are free men or men who owe allegiance to others. In the latter case a republic or a ruler may send out colonists in order to reduce the pressure of population in their existing settlements; or because they have recently conquered new territory and want to defend it effectively and inexpensively (the Romans built many such cities throughout their empire); or such a city may be built by a ruler who does not intend to live there, but to immortalize himself through it, as Alexander did by building Alexandria. Because such cities do not start out free, it rarely happens that they make great strides and come to be regarded as the capital cities of their own countries. It is in this category that we should place the construction of Florence, for (no matter whether it was built by Sulla's soldiers or by the inhabitants of the hilltops of Fiesole, who, given confidence by the long peace that the whole world benefited from under Augustus, came down to live in the plain of the Arno) it was built under Roman rule, nor could it, at the beginning, control any territory beyond what was assigned it at the pleasure of the emperor.

Cities are built by free men when a group of people, either under the command of a ruler or acting on their own, are forced to abandon the land of their birth and to seek new territory because of disease, or hunger, or war. They may occupy the cities that already exist in the territory they conquer, as Moses did, or they may build from scratch, as Aeneas did. It is in this latter case that one can fully appreciate the skill [*virtù*] of the architect as it is reflected in the fate of his city, for the history of the city will be more or less marvelous depending on whether its first founder is more or less skillful [*virtuoso*]. The skill [*virtù*] of the founder can be judged by two things: firstly, by his choice of a site for the construction of the new city; secondly, by the laws he draws up for it.

Men act either out of necessity or free choice. Since it seems that men are the most admirable [*maggior virtù*] where they have the least

freedom of choice, one must consider whether it might not be better to choose an infertile region for the construction of a city so that its inhabitants will be forced to be industrious and prevented from being self-indulgent, and so that they will be more united, having less occasion for conflict because of the poverty of their land. We can see this happened at Ragusa, and in many other cities built in similar locations. Such a choice of location would be without doubt wiser and would lead to the best outcome, if men were content to live off their own possessions and did not want to try to get control of the property of others. But since men can only secure themselves by building up power, one must avoid building a city in a barren location, but rather settle the most fertile land, whose fecundity will make possible growth, so one will be able both to defend oneself against attackers and to defeat anyone who stands in the way of one's own power. In order to ensure the location does not lead to self-indulgence, one must design the laws to force people to do what the location does not force them to do. Thus, one should imitate those wise men who have lived in countries that have been delightful and fertile, countries apt to produce lazy men who are incapable of any manly [*virtuoso*] work. In order to avoid the disadvantages that would result from the delightfulness of the land if it caused self-indulgence, they required all those who were liable to military service to drill, so that by means of such regulations their inhabitants became better soldiers than those living in territory that is naturally harsh and infertile. The Kingdom of Egypt is an example of this: Despite the fact that the country is exceptionally fertile, the artificial necessity imposed by the laws was so effective that Egypt produced the finest men; and if their names had not been lost in antiquity, we would be able to see they deserved more praise than Alexander the Great and many others whose deeds remain fresh in our memory. And if you had examined the state of the sultan, with its regiments of Mamelukes and its Turkish militia, before they were abolished by the Sultan Selim,[7] you would have seen there much drilling of soldiers and would have learned how much the Turks feared the self-indulgence the generosity of their country might induce in them, had they not introduced strict legal penalties to prevent it.

So I conclude it is wiser to choose to settle in a fertile place, provided the consequences of that fertility are kept within due limits by legislation. Deinocrates the architect came to Alexander the Great when

7. The Mamelukes ruled Egypt from 1252 to 1516, when they were defeated by the Ottoman Turks.

Alexander wanted to build a city to magnify his own reputation.[8] He showed him how he could build on Mount Athos: The site, apart from being easily defended, could be cut away so the new city would have the shape of a human body, which would be a remarkable and extraordinary thing and worthy of Alexander's greatness. But when Alexander asked him what the inhabitants of the city would live on he replied he had not given the matter any thought. Alexander laughed, and, leaving Mount Athos intact, built Alexandria in a place where people would want to settle because of the fecundity of the countryside and the ease of access to the sea and to the Nile.

Let us now consider the construction of Rome. If you take it that Aeneas was its first founder, you will think of it as one of the cities built by foreigners.[9] If you believe it was founded by Romulus, you will think of it as founded by men born in the vicinity.[10] Either way you will agree it was founded in freedom and was not under any outsider's authority. You will also recognize—we will return to this subject later—the extent to which the laws established by Romulus, Numa, and the other early legislators imposed an artificial necessity upon the inhabitants, so the fertility of the site, the ease of access to the sea, the frequent victories of their armies, and the extensive territory that fell under Roman control could not corrupt them even over the course of many centuries. Their laws ensured they had more admirable qualities [*virtù*] than any other city or republic has ever been able to boast of in its citizens.

The deeds of the Romans that are celebrated in Livy's history occurred either as a result of public or of private decisions and either inside or outside the city. I will begin by discussing those things that happened inside the city and as a result of public decision-making, that I take to be worthy of more detailed discussion, and we will need to explore all the consequences that flowed from them. This first book, or at least this first part, will be taken up with a discussion of these matters.

Chapter Two: On the different types of republic that exist, and on how to categorize the Roman republic.

I want to leave aside any discussion of those cities that were under the authority of outsiders from the beginning, and to discuss only those

8. Deinocrates designed Alexandria in 322 B.C.

9. Aeneas's flight from the defeat of Troy to Italy is recounted by Livy.

10. Livy prefers the story of Romulus and Remus, sons of Mars and wolf-children, but, unlike Machiavelli, he treats it as myth, not history.

that began completely free of external domination and were ruled by their own wills from the beginning, whether as republics or as principedoms. These cities, since they began in a variety of ways, have had a variety of constitutions and legal systems. In some, either at the very beginning or soon after their foundation, a single individual wrote all the laws at once—Lycurgus, for example, gave the Spartans their laws[11]—while others acquired their laws by chance, little by little, according to the circumstances, as happened in Rome. We can call fortunate any republic in which there appears a leader so prudent he is able to give them a code of law they have no need to revise, but under which they can live securely. We know the Spartans obeyed the laws of Lycurgus for eight hundred years without corrupting them and without any serious internal conflict. On the other hand, we can call in some degree unfortunate any city that does not chance upon a prudent lawmaker, and is obliged to revise its laws for itself. And among these cities, moreover, those are most unfortunate that are furthest from having the right laws; and those are furthest astray whose constitution is quite unlike the one that would lead them to their true and ideal goal. For it is almost impossible for a city that finds itself in this situation to have enough good luck to be able to sort itself out. Those others that, if they do not have a perfect constitution, yet have started out in the right direction and are in a position to improve, can, as opportunity presents itself, become perfect. But this is certainly true: One never establishes a constitution without encountering danger. For enough men will never agree to a new law that changes the constitution of the city unless they are persuaded it is essential to pass it, and they will only be persuaded of this if they see themselves to be in danger, so it can easily happen that the republic is destroyed before she arrives at a perfect constitution. The republic of Florence is a good example of this: Defeat in the Battle of Arezzo led to her reorganization;[12] defeat in the Battle of Prato in 1512 led to her dissolution.[13]

I want now to discuss the constitution of Rome and the events that made it possible for her to achieve perfection. Some who have written about constitutions say they are of three types, which they call "monarchy," "aristocracy," and "democracy."[14] They say anyone drawing up

11. Lycurgus is supposed to have drawn up his laws ca. 884 B.C.

12. Defeat in 1502, and pressure from Cesare Borgia, led to Piero Soderini being made gonfaloniere for life.

13. I.e., the restoration of the Medici.

14. The rest of this chapter is profoundly influenced by Polybius, *Histories*, bk. 6.

the constitution of a city must choose from these the one he thinks most appropriate. Others, who are widely thought to be wiser, say there are six types of constitution, of which three are inherently bad and three are inherently good, although even the good ones are so easily corrupted they, too, can quickly become pernicious. The good ones are the three I have already mentioned; the bad ones are three others that derive from these three, and each of which is so like the good constitution it most resembles that it is easy for one to turn into the other. Thus, monarchies easily become tyrannies, aristocracies become oligarchies, and democracies slide into anarchy. The result is that if a lawmaker establishes a constitution for a city that corresponds to one of the three good forms of government it will not last long, for no precaution is sufficient to ensure it will not slip into its opposite, for the good [*la virtute*] and the bad are, when it comes to constitutions, closely related.

These different types of government developed among men by accident. When the world began, it had few inhabitants, and they lived for a while apart from one another as the animals do. As their numbers multiplied they gathered together, and in order to be better able to defend themselves, they began to defer to one among their number who was stronger and braver than the rest. They made him, as it were, their leader and obeyed him. This was the origin of knowledge of those things that are good and honest as opposed to those that are pernicious and evil. For men saw that, if someone harmed his benefactor, his associates despised him and felt compassion for his victim. They learned to think ill of the ungrateful and to approve of those who were grateful. They came to realize the injuries that were done to someone else could equally be done to themselves. In order to avoid such evils, they gathered together to make laws and to lay down punishments for those who broke them: This was the invention of justice. Thereafter, when they had to choose a ruler, they no longer obeyed the strongest, but he who was most prudent and most just.

Later, however, they began to appoint their ruler by hereditary succession, not by election, with the immediate result that power was inherited by men who were inferior to their ancestors. They no longer acted virtuously [*lasciando l'opere virtuose*], but thought rulers were simply there to outdo other men in extravagance, lasciviousness, and in every other type of vice. The result was that rulers began to be hated, and, because they were hated, to be afraid. Because they were afraid, they went on the attack, and before long kings had become tyrants. These rulers faced the possibility of being destroyed. The conspiracies and plots hatched against them were not begun by those who were

fearful or weak, but by those who surpassed their fellows in generosity, spiritedness, wealth, and nobility, for such men could no longer tolerate the dishonorable lives of their rulers. The masses then followed the lead provided by the elite and armed themselves against their ruler, and, when they had got rid of him, obeyed the elite as their liberators. The new rulers hated the idea of one-man rule and, so, established themselves collectively in power.

At first, remembering the evils of tyranny, they governed according to the laws they had established, putting their own interests second and the public good first. They directed and protected both public and private matters with great care. In due course, this government was inherited by their sons, who had never seen power change hands, had never suffered under evil government, and who were unwilling to continue treating their fellow subjects as their equals. They gave themselves over to avarice, to ambition, to chasing other men's wives. So aristocracy degenerated into an oligarchy in which the norms of civilized life were flouted. In a short time, the oligarchs suffered the same fate as the tyrants, for the masses became fed up with their government and gave their support to anyone who was planning any sort of resistance to their rule. Soon someone, with the assistance of the masses, was able to destroy them. Since they could still clearly remember one-man rule, and the harm it had done them, when they destroyed oligarchy they had no desire to restore monarchy, but instead established popular rule. This they organized in such a manner that neither the elite nor a powerful individual could have any influence whatsoever.

In the beginning, all states can command a certain amount of respect, so popular government survived for a while, but not for long, especially once the generation that had established it had passed away. It quickly degenerated into anarchy, in which neither private individuals nor public officials could command any respect. Each person did as he chose, with the result that every day innumerable crimes were committed. So, compelled by necessity, or advised by some good man, or desperate to escape from anarchy, they established once more the rule of one man. And from monarchy, step by step, they degenerated once again into anarchy, repeating the sequence I have already described.

This is the cycle through which all states revolve, and power is still passed, as it always has been, from hand to hand. But it rarely happens that the same people return to power, for scarcely a single state has survived long enough to travel several times through this cycle without being destroyed. Usually, while a state is torn apart by internal dissent, and as a result is weakened and deprived of good leadership, it is

conquered by a neighboring state better organized than it is. But if this did not happen, then a state could repeat this cycle of constitutions over and over again.

I conclude all these forms of government are pestilential: The three good ones do not last long, and the three bad ones are evil. Those who know how to construct constitutions wisely have identified this problem and have avoided each one of these types of constitution in its pure form, constructing a constitution with elements of each. They have been convinced such a constitution would be more solid and stable, would be preserved by checks and balances, there being present in the one city a monarch, an aristocracy, and a democracy.

Lycurgus is the most admirable of those who have established constitutions of this sort. He constructed the constitution of Sparta so that it gave distinct roles to king, aristocracy, and people, with the result the state survived for eight hundred years, throughout which time his name was revered and the city lived in harmony. Matters turned out differently for Solon, who drew up the constitution of Athens.[15] Because he constructed a democracy, it survived such a short time that before Solon died he saw Athens under the tyranny of Pisistratus. Although forty years later Pisistratus's heirs were driven into exile and freedom was restored, because the Athenians re-established the democratic constitution drawn up by Solon, their freedom lasted no more than a century, despite the fact that in order to preserve it they introduced numerous reforms Solon had not considered. They did their best to control the insolence of the powerful and the license of the masses. Nevertheless, because they did not allow a proper role for one-man rule and for aristocracy, Athens survived, by comparison with Sparta, a very short time.

Let us turn to Rome. Even though Rome did not have a Lycurgus to establish from the beginning a constitution that would enable her to live free for centuries, nevertheless, she underwent so many political crises, because of the conflicts between the people and the senate, that chance eventually brought about something no legislator had been able to accomplish. For if Rome did not have the first type of good fortune, she had the second, and although her first constitution was defective, nevertheless, it did not cause her to turn off the right path that could lead her to perfection.

Romulus and all the other kings of Rome made many excellent laws, ones appropriate for a free state. But their goal was the establishment of a kingdom, not a republic, so when Rome became free she lacked

15. Solon's reforms began in 595 B.C.

many of the laws free government required, for these they had omitted to decree. And although the kings of Rome lost their power for the reasons and in the way I have outlined, nevertheless, those who threw them out quickly established two consuls who played the same role as the kings, so that they expelled from Rome the name of king but not the authority of kingship. The new republic was ruled by the consuls and the senate, so it was a mixture of only two of the three types of power I have described: of monarchy and aristocracy. It failed to give any authority to the populace.

When the Roman nobility became overbearing, for reasons I will explain later, the people rose up against them, with the result that, in order not to lose all power, the nobles were obliged to concede a share of power to the people. On the other hand, the consuls and the senate retained enough authority to be able to hold on to a share of power in the republic. So the tribunes of the people came to be established, after which the constitution of the republic became more stable, for now all three types of authority had a fair share in power. And fortune was so favorable to Rome that, although she passed from monarchy, to aristocracy, to democracy, going through each of the stages I have described for the reasons I have outlined, nevertheless, the aristocracy never seized all power from the monarchical element; nor did the people ever seize all power from the aristocracy; instead, power was added to power, and the mixture that resulted made for a perfect republic. Rome achieved this perfection because of the conflict between senate and people, as I will show at length in the next two chapters.

Chapter Three: On the circumstances under which the tribunes of the people came to be established in Rome, a development that made the constitution nearly perfect.

There is one thing that all those who discuss political life emphasize, and that is evident from the history of every state: It is essential that anyone setting up a republic and establishing a constitution for it should assume that all men are wicked and will always give vent to their evil impulses whenever they have the chance to do so. Even when some evil impulse is restrained and concealed for a time, there is always some hidden reason for this, one we do not recognize because we have not seen the vicious behavior the evil impulse would normally give rise to. But time will make clear what it is, for time, as they say, gives birth to truth.

When the Tarquins were expelled from Rome, there appeared to

be a close collaboration between the populace and the senate.[16] The nobles seemed to have given up their pride and to have become democratic in their outlook. One would have thought anyone would have been able to tolerate their rule, even someone from the lowest social class. The hypocrisy of the nobility continued to lie hidden as long as the Tarquins were alive, and during this period the reason for their behavior was invisible. For the nobles were afraid of the Tarquins and afraid, too, that if the populace were badly treated they would form an alliance with them; so they treated the populace well. But as soon as the Tarquins died and the nobles felt they had nothing to fear, they began to treat the populace as outrageously as they had always wanted to, and they now harmed them in every way they could. This confirms what I just said: Men never do anything that is good except when forced to. Where there is a good deal of freedom of choice, and this freedom can be abused, then everything quickly becomes buried in confusion and disorder. Therefore, people say hunger and poverty make men industrious, while laws make them good. Where something works well on its own, without the support of the law, then there is no need for a law. But as soon as good habits break down, then laws at once become necessary. So with the Tarquins gone, fear of whom had kept the nobility in check, it was necessary to think of a new institution that would have the same effect as the Tarquins had had while they were alive. And so, after many conflicts, outcries, and crises had arisen between the populace and the nobility, it was decided to establish the tribunes in order to protect the populace. They were given so much authority and so high a status that thereafter they were always able to act as mediators between the populace and the senate and to control the arrogance of the nobility.

Chapter Four: On the tensions between the populace and the Roman senate, which made that republic free and powerful.

It would be wrong not to discuss those popular disorders that occurred in Rome between the death of the Tarquins and the creation of the tribunes. Afterwards, I will say a few things in reply to the many people who say Rome was a disorderly republic, one full of so much confusion that if good luck and military discipline [*virtù militare*] had not made up for its defects, it would have been inferior to every other republic. I cannot deny good luck and the army were causes of Rome's imperial

16. The last king was expelled in 510 B.C.

greatness, though it seems to me these people do not realize that where there is a good army there must be a good constitution, and one will nearly always find a good army can make its own good luck.

But let us turn to the other particular characteristics of that city. I maintain those who criticize the clashes between the nobility and the populace attack what was, I would argue, the primary factor making for Rome's continuing freedom. They pay more attention to the shouts and cries that rise from such conflicts than to the good effects that derive from them. They do not take into account the fact that there are two distinct viewpoints in every republic: that of the populace and that of the elite. All the laws made in order to foster liberty result from the tensions between them, as one can easily see was the case in the history of Rome. For from Tarquin to the Gracchi,[17] a period of more than three hundred years, the conflicts that broke out in Rome rarely resulted in men's being sent into exile, and even more rarely led to bloodshed. One cannot judge these conflicts as harmful, or the republic as divided, when over such a long period of time the differences between the parties led to no more than eight or ten citizens' being sent into exile, to a tiny number's being murdered, and indeed to only a few's being fined. Nor can there be any good grounds for calling a republic disorderly when it contains so many examples of individual excellence [*virtù*], for good individuals cannot exist without good education, and good education cannot exist without good laws, and good laws were the result of those very conflicts many people unthinkingly criticize. Anyone who scrutinizes the outcome of these conflicts will find they never led to exiles or murders that were contrary to the public good but always led to laws and institutions that favored public liberty.

And if someone were to argue the methods employed were extralegal and almost bestial—the people in a mob shouting abuse at the senate, the senate replying in kind, mobs running through the streets, shops boarded up, the entire populace of Rome leaving the city—I would reply such things only frighten those who read about them. Every city ought to have practices that enable the populace to give expression to its aspirations, especially those cities that want to be able to rely on the populace at times of crisis. The city of Rome had a number of practices of this kind. For example, when the populace wanted a law passed, either they demonstrated, as I have described, or they refused to enroll for military service, so that in order to pacify them it was necessary to give them at least part of what they wanted. The demands of a free people are rarely harmful to the cause of liberty, for they are

17. From 510 to ca.121 B.C.

a response either to oppression or to the prospect of oppression. When the populace is mistaken, then there is a remedy to hand in the open-air speech. Some sensible man has to get up and harangue them, showing them how they are wrong. The populace, as Cicero says, although they are ignorant, are capable of recognizing the truth, and it is easy for a man whom they have reason to respect to persuade them to change their mind by telling them the truth.[18]

So people ought to be more sparing in their criticisms of the political system of Rome. If you consider all the good things the Romans achieved, you will have to admit the system that gave rise to such achievements must have been excellent. If popular demonstrations resulted in the creation of the tribunate, they should be praised without reserve, for, beyond giving the populace a role in government, the tribunes were set up to be the guardians of Roman liberty, as the next chapter will show.

Chapter Five: On whether the protection of liberty is best entrusted to the populace or to the elite, and on whether those who want to acquire power or those who want to maintain it are most likely to riot.

Those who have understood how to establish a republic have recognized one of the most urgent tasks is that of identifying a group with an interest in protecting liberty. Depending on whether this task is entrusted to the right group or not, political liberty will be preserved for a longer or a shorter time. Because in every state there is an elite and a populace, the question has been raised as to which group it is best to entrust with the task of protecting liberty. The Spartans and, in modern days, the Venetians have relied on the nobles; but the Romans relied on the populace. So we must ask ourselves which of these republics made the better choice. If we argue from first principles, we will find something to say on either side; but if we look at what happened in practice, we will conclude the nobility are more reliable, for liberty in Sparta and Venice has been longer-lived than in Rome. Let us look at the principles involved and first consider the arguments in favor of Rome's policy.

It would seem one ought to entrust something to people who have no desire to steal it. Now there is no question that if one considers the objectives of the nobles and the non-nobles, one must admit the former are very keen to dominate, and the latter want only not to be dominated. Consequently, the populace have a greater desire to live

18. Cicero, *De amicitia*, chs. 25–26.

as free men, having less prospect of seizing power for themselves than the elite has. So if you put the populace in charge of protecting liberty, it is reasonable to believe that they will do a better job, and since they cannot hope to monopolize power themselves, they will ensure nobody else does. On the other hand, if you are defending the Spartan and Venetian policy you will say those who entrust the protection of liberty to the powerful accomplish two good things. In the first place, you satisfy some of the nobility's aspirations, and, because they have a greater role in the state as a result of having this power in their hands, they are more likely to be content. In the second, you take away a measure of authority from the populace, who are restless and insatiable. It is the populace who are responsible for innumerable conflicts and clashes in a republic. Their behavior is likely to make the nobility desperate, which in the long run will have evil consequences. You will cite Rome herself as an example. Because the tribunes of the people could claim to be the guardians of liberty, they were not satisfied with ensuring one consul was chosen from among the populace,[19] but insisted both should be. Next they wanted the censor, the praetor, and all the other officials of the city government to be plebeians. Even this was not enough, for, driven on by the same madness, they began in time to worship those men whom they thought were capable of defeating the nobility. The result was the rise of Marius and the ruin of Rome.[20] And indeed, anyone who balanced one set of arguments against the other would have difficulty making up his mind as to which group he should choose as the guardians of liberty, for he would be unable to decide which human aspiration was more dangerous for a republic: defending a status that has already been acquired, or acquiring a status one does not yet have.

In the end, anyone who examines the pros and cons with care will reach the conclusion that you are either thinking in terms of a republic whose goal is to conquer an empire, as Rome's was, or of one that merely wants to defend itself. If the first, then you must do everything as the Romans did; if the second, then you can copy Venice and Sparta, for the reasons I have already given and for others we will come to in the next chapter.

But let us turn to a discussion of which men are more dangerous to a republic, those who want to acquire new power, or those anxious not to lose the power they have. Marcus Menenius was appointed dictator, and Marcus Fulvius general of the horse.[21] Both of them were

19. A concession obtained in 367 B.C.

20. Marius was first consul in 107 B.C. and died in 86 B.C.

21. In 314 B.C. See Livy, bk. 9, ch. 26.

plebeians. Their mission was to uncover certain conspiracies against Rome that had been hatched in Capua. The populace also gave them authority to enquire whether there were people in Rome who, out of ambition, were scheming to use extralegal means to be elected to the consulate or to other prestigious offices. The nobility thought the dictator had been given this mandate so he could attack them, and so they spread the word around Rome that it was not the nobles who were driven by ambition to use extralegal means to acquire honors, but the non-nobles. Unable to rely on their own abilities [*virtù*] or their inherited status, it was they who sought to acquire honors by corrupt means. In particular, they attacked Menenius, the dictator. This charge was so damaging that Menenius, having made a speech in which he protested against the calumnies directed at him by the nobles, resigned the dictatorship, and submitted himself to the judgment of the people. When his case had been considered, he was found to be innocent.

In such cases, it is easy to disagree as to who was the more ambitious, those who wanted to hold on to power or those who wanted to acquire it. For either aspiration can easily be the cause of tremendous conflict. Nevertheless, for the most part such conflicts are caused by those who already have power, for the fear of losing it gives them exactly the same ambitions as those who want to acquire power. Men do not feel they are secure in the possession of their property unless they are constantly acquiring more from someone else. Moreover, those who already have power are in a better position to use their influence and their resources to bring about change. In addition, their improper and self-interested behavior excites in the hearts of the powerless the desire to have power, either in order to take their revenge on their enemies by taking what they have from them, or in order to acquire for themselves that wealth and those honors they see their opponents abusing.

Chapter Six: On whether it would have been possible to give Rome a constitution that would have prevented conflict between the populace and the senate.

We have discussed above the effects of the conflicts between the populace and the senate. Since these continued until the time of the Gracchi, when they were the cause of the destruction of political freedom,[22] some may wish that Rome's remarkable accomplishments had been achieved without such internal conflicts. So I thought it

22. The Gracchi were followed a generation later by Marius, Marius by Caesar.

would be worth considering whether it would have been possible to give Rome a constitution that would have prevented these conflicts. In order to examine this question we must return to those republics that managed to stay free for a long time without such conflicts and riots, analyze their constitutions, and consider whether key elements from them could have been introduced into Rome.

The crucial example among the ancients is that of Sparta, among the moderns, Venice, as I have already mentioned. Sparta established a king and a small senate to share power. Venice did not divide authority among different institutions, but gave one title, that of gentleman, to all those who had a right to participate in government. This arrangement was the result more of chance than of the forethought of a legislator. A large group of inhabitants having established themselves on the reefs where Venice now stands (for the reasons I described above), they found they had become so numerous that they needed to pass laws if they were to continue to live together, and decided to draw up a form of government. The citizens met regularly in the deliberative councils of the city, and when they felt that there were more than enough of them to sustain a participatory system of politics, they excluded from membership of their assemblies all those who might arrive to live there in future.

As time passed, many of Venice's inhabitants were excluded from power.[23] In order to uphold the status of those who participated in politics, they called them gentlemen, while the others they called commoners. This system of government could come into existence and maintain itself without conflict; for when it was established everyone who at the time lived in Venice had a right to participate in government, so that nobody had reason to complain. Those who came afterwards to live there, finding the constitution well-established and fixed, had no excuse or opportunity to provoke a conflict. They had no excuse, because they had been deprived of nothing; they had no opportunity, because those in power kept them in check and did not employ them in tasks where they could acquire political authority. Moreover, those who came to live in Venice after the constitution was established were not that numerous: Those who governed were not hopelessly outnumbered by those over whom they ruled. In fact, there are as many gentlemen as commoners, if not more. This is the explanation of Venice's ability to establish her constitution and maintain it without internal conflict.

Sparta, as I said, was ruled by a king and a small senate. The

23. As a result of the "closing" of the Great Council in 1297.

constitution survived for such a long time because there were few inhabitants in Sparta; they had made it impossible for immigrants to move there; and they had adopted and respected the laws of Lycurgus (for, so long as they obeyed them, they could have no occasion for conflict). So they were able to live united for centuries. Lycurgus's laws established more equality of wealth in Sparta than there would otherwise have been and less equality of status. Everyone was equally poor, and the populace was less ambitious for power, for only a few citizens held positions of status, and they lived cut off from the people. Moreover, the elite did not treat the populace badly, so they never felt the need to acquire power.

This was a consequence of the particular character of Spartan kingship. The kings were appointed to office and surrounded by the nobility; so they had no better means of preserving their authority than protecting the people from any injury. The result was that the people did not fear their rulers and did not want to rule. Because they had no power and did not fear those who did, they did not feel in competition with the nobility, so there was no occasion for conflict. They were able to live together harmoniously for centuries. There were two principal causes of this harmony: The fact that Sparta had few inhabitants meant that power could be concentrated in the hands of a few; and the fact that there was a ban on immigration meant that the subjects had little opportunity to become corrupt, or to become so numerous that they could not be managed by the elite who governed them.

So, having considered these matters, we can see that the legislators who drew up the constitution of Rome would have had to do one of two things if they wanted to ensure that Rome was as harmonious as the two republics we have been discussing. Either they would have had to exclude the populace from the army, as the Venetians did, or to prevent immigration, as the Spartans did. They did neither, which meant that the populace were strong and grew in numbers, and so had innumerable opportunities to riot. But if the Roman political system had been more orderly, it would have had the unfortunate consequence that Rome would have been weaker and she would no longer have been able to achieve that greatness she did in fact achieve. If Rome had avoided those tensions that led to conflict, she would also have prevented herself from acquiring new territory.

In all human affairs we see, if we analyze things carefully, that you cannot get rid of one cause of trouble without introducing another. Thus, if you want to make a populace numerous and well-armed, so that they can conquer a vast empire, then you must accept that you will not be able to get them to do everything you want. If you keep

the population small or unarmed so that you can get them to do what you want, then if you do conquer territory you will not be able to hold on to it, and your subjects will become so feeble that you will be defenseless when anyone chooses to attack you. So in all discussions about policy, we should decide which course of action has the fewest disadvantages and we should regard that policy as the best, for you will never find a policy that gives you no grounds for anxiety, that involves no costs. Rome could, like Sparta, have appointed a ruler for life, and made its senate small; but if it wanted to have an empire, it could not, like Sparta, prevent the number of its citizens from growing. Unless it had done this, however, a king for life and a small senate would have been of little use in ensuring harmony.

So if someone wanted to organize a republic from scratch, he would have to ask himself if he wanted it to grow in power and territory as Rome did or to remain limited in both. If he chose the first, then he would have to organize it along the same lines as Rome and take into account as best he could the inevitability of riots and large-scale conflicts. Unless he was prepared to have many inhabitants and to arm them well he could not hope to have a republic that would grow, or, if it grew, would be able to defend itself. If he chose the second, then he could organize it like Sparta and Venice; but because territorial expansion is fatal to such republics, he would be obliged, in every way that he could, to prevent his republic from acquiring new territory. For such acquisitions, if undertaken by a weak state, are bound to bring about its destruction, which is what happened to both Sparta and Venice. In the case of Sparta, which had conquered almost the whole of Greece, a little local difficulty exposed the weakness of its power base. After the successful rebellion of Thebes under the leadership of Pelopidas, the other cities all rebelled, too, destroying the whole Spartan empire.[24] Similarly, Venice occupied a large proportion of Italy, acquiring most of it not on the battlefield but through cunning and bribery, and when she finally had to prove her strength, she lost everything in a single battle.[25]

I certainly think that if one wanted to establish a republic that would last for centuries one ought to imitate the constitution of either Sparta or Venice, and one ought to situate one's city somewhere where it would be easy to defend, giving it sufficient military might to ensure that no one would think they could conquer it in a hurry, while on the other hand

24. In 379 B.C.

25. The Battle of Agnadello or Vailà, 1509.

not giving it so much that its neighbors would feel threatened by it. Such a state could flourish for centuries. For there are two reasons why one attacks another state: in order to rule over it, or out of fear that it will invade you. A state organized as I have described would provide scarcely any motivation for someone to attack it for either reason. For granted my presupposition that it has well-prepared defenses, it will be difficult to seize, and so it will be rare indeed for anyone to think he can devise a way of conquering it. If it stays within its own boundaries, and people see from experience that it is not interested in making conquests, then no one will ever go to war against it out of fear of being attacked by it. This will be all the more true if the constitution or laws of this republic prohibit the acquisition of new territory. I have no doubt that if you could establish a balance between weakness and strength in this way, then you would have a city that was genuinely harmonious and within which you could lead an ideal civic life.

But in life nothing stands still. Since things cannot stay in the same place, they must be either rising or falling. There are many things that you would not choose to do, but that you are obliged to do. So if you set up a republic that was well-equipped to defend itself without expanding its territory, and then circumstances forced expansion upon it, you would see the foundations of its strength undermined, and it would quickly be destroyed. On the other hand, if heaven so smiled upon it that it was under no necessity to go to war, then idleness would lead either to internal divisions or to effeminacy; either of these, or both of them together, would bring about its collapse. So in my view it is impossible to find a balance between weakness and strength; impossible to find a middle way successfully. In drawing up the constitution of a republic one should, therefore, aim high and construct it in such a fashion that if circumstances force it to expand it will be able to hold on to what it has acquired.

To return to the original question, I think one is obliged to copy the Roman model, and that it would be wrong to imitate any other republic; nor do I think there is a compromise to be found between the two types of republic. Those conflicts that may break out between the populace and the senate have to be tolerated and accepted as a price that must be paid if one wants to attain the grandeur of Rome. For, besides the reasons I have already given for thinking that the authority of the tribunes was a necessary bastion of liberty, one can easily recognize the benefits the republic derived from the right of public accusation, which was one of the rights held by the tribunes, a right I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: On how essential it is that there should be a right of public accusation in a republic if it is to retain its freedom.

There is no authority more useful and necessary for those who are entrusted by a city with the task of guarding its liberty than the right of publicly accusing, before the people or before some magistrate or council, citizens who do anything that is a threat to public liberty. This right has two extremely useful consequences for any state. The first is that citizens, for fear of being accused, dare not attempt to do anything that might harm the state, and if they do try to do anything they are immediately and impartially crushed. The other is that one gives an outlet to those resentments that build up in a city, for whatever reason, against individual citizens; otherwise, when these resentments have no institutionalized outlet, they cause people to act outside the law, which leads to the collapse of the whole political system. There is nothing that makes a republic more stable and more solid than that its laws should provide for the expression of those resentments that have built up within the community. There are lots of examples that illustrate this. The best is Livy's account of Coriolanus.[26] There he says that the Roman nobility had lost patience with the populace because it seemed to them that the populace had acquired too much authority as a result of the establishment of the tribunate, which was biased in their favor. Rome, as occasionally happened, was acutely short of foodstuffs, and the senate had sent to Sicily for grain. Coriolanus, who was hostile to the popular faction, argued that the time had come when the people could be punished and when the authority they had acquired to the detriment of the nobility could be reclaimed from them. They should be allowed to starve, and supplies of grain should be withheld from them. When the populace heard what Coriolanus had said, they were so indignant that a mob of them would have killed him as he was coming out of the senate, had the tribunes not cited him to appear before them and answer charges. This incident confirms what I said above: It is useful and necessary that republics should have laws that enable the mass of the population to give vent to the hostility it feels towards a particular citizen, for when there are no institutionalized mechanisms to allow this, extralegal methods will be employed, and without doubt these have much worse consequences than legal ones.

If the law makes it possible for an individual citizen to be executed when he does not deserve to be, this does little or nothing to undermine

26. Livy, bk. 2, chs. 33–35.

the political stability of the republic. The law is enforced without private violence or foreign troops being involved, and it is these that destroy political freedom. It is the ordinary power of the state that is employed. This power is confined within established limits; it does not breach them and place the political system in danger. There are examples that can be cited to support this view. As far as ancient history is concerned, the case of Coriolanus is sufficient: Everyone should consider the evil consequences for the Roman republic if he had been killed in a riot, for this would have been an attack by private individuals on a private individual. Numerous people would have been frightened as a result; because they were frightened, they would have prepared to defend themselves; in order to defend themselves, they would have sought out allies. Consequently, they would have banded together into factions within the city, and such factional strife can destroy a city. But because the appropriate authorities took charge of the matter, all those evil consequences that could have resulted from unauthorized violence were avoided.

In our own day, we have seen upheavals within the Florentine political system because the masses could not give vent to their hostility towards a particular citizen through institutionalized means, for example at the time when Francesco Valori was more or less ruler of the city.[27] Valori was thought by many to be ambitious, and believed to be someone whose audacity and boldness would lead him to destroy political freedom. There was no legal mechanism that could be employed against him; the only thing to do was to build up a faction in opposition to his own. The result was that he, having nothing to fear except an illegal attack, began to surround himself with supporters prepared to defend him; on the other hand, his opponents had no legal recourse against him, but had to consider extralegal action; in the end the two sides came to blows. If it had been possible to appeal to the courts against Valori, his power could have been destroyed and he alone would have had to pay the price; because extralegal means had to be employed, he was not the only one who suffered, but many other members of the elite suffered with him.

In addition, in support of my argument, I could cite the incident that happened in Florence with regard to Piero Soderini. This only occurred because Florence has no mechanism for bringing charges against powerful citizens suspected of seeking to undermine the consti-

27. From 1494 to 1498. Valori was a supporter of Savonarola and was murdered in the early stages of the coup d'état that led to Savonarola's execution. Shortly after this, Machiavelli entered government service.

tution. It is not sufficient for a republic to have a panel of eight judges before whom a powerful man can be accused; you need to have a large number of judges, for an elite will always share the viewpoint of other members of the elite. If there had been an adequate mechanism for bringing Soderini to justice, either the citizens would have charged him, if he deserved it, and in this way, without calling in the Spanish army, they would have been able to vent their anger; or, if he did not deserve it, they would not have dared move against him, for fear they themselves might be charged. One way or another, the hostility towards him would have been appeased, and a crisis would have been avoided.[28]

So we can reach the following conclusion: Whenever we see foreign troops being called in by one faction living within a city, we can conclude that there is something faulty in the constitution, for otherwise there would be internal mechanisms that, without recourse to extralegal means, would enable men to give vent to their bitter feelings. All one needs is to allow charges to be brought before a large enough number of judges and to give these judges adequate authority. In Rome, such excellent provision was made for this that, despite all the conflicts that there were between the populace and the senate, neither the senate, nor the populace, nor any individual citizen ever thought of turning to outside forces. For they had a remedy to hand, so they did not have to look abroad for one.

Although the examples I have already given are quite enough to make my point; nevertheless, I will add one more, which appears in Livy's history.[29] He reports that in the city of Clusium, at that time one of the wealthiest in Tuscany, one of the sisters of a man called Aruns was raped by a Tuscan noble.[30] Aruns could not obtain redress because the assailant was too well connected, so he went to the French tribes that at that time controlled the territory now called Lombardy. He urged them to bring their troops to Clusium, explaining to them how they would benefit while helping him obtain redress for the injury done his family. If Aruns had believed that he could obtain redress by appealing to the city's laws, he would not have involved himself with barbarian forces. But just as it is important that a republic should have mechanisms to enable people to bring charges against the powerful,

28. The crisis is that of 1512, when Florence was defeated at Prato, Soderini forced into exile, the Medici restored, and Machiavelli lost his job.

29. Livy, bk. 5, ch. 33. The date is 391 B.C.

30. Machiavelli uses the technical term for an Etruscan noble, *lucumone*. Here and elsewhere I have used Tuscan where we would now say Etruscan because, as in the case of Gauls and Frenchmen, Machiavelli sees no distinction.

so it is dangerous and harmful if irresponsible individuals can slander other citizens, as I will explain in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: On how slander is just as damaging to a republic as public accusations are beneficial.

Despite the fact that the excellent qualities of Furius Camillus, after he liberated Rome from the oppression of the French tribes, were so generally recognized that all the citizens of Rome deferred to him without feeling that in doing so they were diminishing their own reputation or status, Manlius Capitolinus could not tolerate the fact that his rival was given so much respect and so much glory.[31] It seemed to him that, as far as the safety of Rome was concerned, his own achievement in saving the Capitol was as admirable as anything Camillus had done, and that he deserved just as much praise as Camillus did if the other aspects of their military careers were compared. So he was eaten up with jealousy and could not rest content while Furius Camillus was admired. Seeing that he had no hope of spreading hostility to him among the senators, he turned to the populace and spread among them various rumors that placed Camillus in a bad light. One of the things he said was that the treasure that had been collected to give to the French, but that in the end had not been given to them, had been embezzled by private citizens, and that if it was restored it could be put to public use, reducing the burden of taxes on the populace, or paying off their private debts. The populace was very taken with this claim: They began to gather in crowds and, as often as they felt like it, they rioted in the city. The senate was not pleased, and, believing the situation to be urgent and dangerous, established a dictator to sort the matter out and put a halt to Manlius's attacks. The dictator at once summoned Manlius. They went to meet each other in public, the dictator surrounded by the nobility, Manlius by the populace. Manlius was asked what he had to say on the question of who had the treasure he had been talking about, because the senate was as eager as the populace to hear him on the subject. Manlius did not reply directly to the question, but avoided it by saying that there was no need to tell them what they already knew. So the dictator had him locked up.

This example serves to show how detestable slanders are, both in free cities and in other types of political system. In order to suppress

31. Manlius Capitolinus had saved the Capitol in 390 B.C., but Camillus was acknowledged Rome's second founder for defeating the Gauls. Relations between the two reached a crisis in 386 B.C.

them, one should not omit any legislation that may be of use. Nor can there be any more effective way of suppressing them than by providing numerous channels through which charges can be laid, for slanders are as bad for republics as public accusations are good. Between the two there is this difference: Slanders do not need a witness to be believed, nor do they have to pass any test before they are regarded as proven, so that anyone can be slandered by anyone. But it is not the case that anyone can bring charges against anyone else, for in order to bring a charge you have to produce evidence and give grounds for thinking that the charge is well founded. Men bring charges against each other in front of the magistrates, the councils, the public assembly; they slander each other on street corners and in places of business. Slander is more common where public accusations are less common and where the legal system is ill-adapted to the bringing of charges. So someone drawing up a constitution for a republic ought to ensure that one can bring charges in it against any citizen, without intimidation and without favoritism. If this principle is properly recognized in practice, he should then punish harshly those who spread slanders. They will have no grounds to complain when they are punished, for there were courts to hear their accusations, so there was no excuse for spreading them around the streets. And where proper provision is not made in this matter there will always be serious disorders, for slanders upset people without punishing them; and those who have been upset think of getting their revenge, for the things that are said against them do not so much frighten them as anger them.

In this matter, as I have said, the Romans did things in the right way, while in our city of Florence they have always been handled badly. Just as in Rome their arrangements had excellent consequences, so in Florence our failure to make arrangements has had evil consequences. If you read the histories of this city, you will see how many slanders have been, in every period, directed at those citizens who have played an important role in the city's affairs. One was accused of stealing the city's money; another was said to have lost a battle because he had taken a bribe; a third to have done things that were bad for the city because he stood to gain increased power by it. The result was that hatred was whipped up on all sides; hatred led to division; division led to factions; factions led to ruin. If there had been provision in Florence for individuals to bring charges against citizens and for slanderers to be punished, then innumerable political crises that have occurred would have been avoided. For individual citizens, whether they were condemned or cleared of the charges, would have been unable to do harm to the city and would have been brought to trial less often than they were

attacked by rumor, for, as I have said, you have to have some grounds to justify bringing charges, while you can slander anyone you choose.

And among the other means citizens have used to accumulate power has been that of spreading slanders. They have used them to considerable effect against powerful citizens who opposed their wishes, for they have claimed to be taking the side of the people, and, by confirming them in the bad opinion they had of the city's political leaders, won their allegiance. One could point to quite a few examples, but I will restrict myself to one only. The Florentine army laying siege to Lucca was commanded by Mr. Giovanni Guicciardini who held the post of commissioner.[32] Either his bad planning or his bad luck was responsible for the fact that the city did not fall. Whatever the real cause, it was Mr. Giovanni who took the blame, for people said that he had been bribed by the city of Lucca. This slander, which was spread about by his enemies, made Mr. Giovanni so depressed he was close to suicide. Although in order to clear his name he gave himself up to the chief of police, nevertheless, he could never establish his innocence, for the republic of Florence provided no procedure through which he could defend himself. This state of affairs was the cause of a good deal of tension between the allies of Mr. Giovanni, who included most of the political elite, on the one hand, and those who favored political innovation on the other. This tension, for this and other similar reasons, grew so acute that it brought about the ruin of the republic.[33]

So Manlius Capitolinus was a slanderer, not someone prepared to bring charges; and the Romans showed by the way they treated him exactly how slanderers ought to be punished. For one should require them to bring charges, and, if their charges are upheld, either reward them or at least not punish them; but if they are not upheld, one should punish them, as Manlius was punished.

Chapter Nine: On how it is necessary to act alone if you want to draw up the constitution for a new republic from scratch, or reform an old one by completely changing its established laws.

Perhaps some people will think that I have jumped too far ahead in the history of ancient Rome, for I have not yet said anything about the men who drew up the Roman constitution, nor have I discussed those laws that dealt with religion or with military service. Since I do not

32. In 1430 to 1433.

33. With the restoration of the Medici in 1432.

want to keep those who want to read something about these matters waiting any longer, let me say that many will probably think the founding of Rome presents a bad example, for Romulus, in order to establish constitutional government, first killed his brother and then agreed to the killing of Titus Tatius, the Sabine, who had been elected to share office with him. You might think that the citizens of a state founded in this manner could claim that they were only following the example of their ruler if they attacked those who opposed their wishes while they sought to acquire power and authority. You would be right to think this, so long as you did not stop to consider the reasons that had led him to commit murder.

One ought to recognize this as a general principle: It rarely (if ever) happens that a republic or a kingdom has good institutions from the beginning, or is completely reformed along lines quite different from those on which it was previously organized, unless one person has sole responsibility. So one person alone must decide on the strategy, and he must make all the key decisions. A wise legislator when establishing a republic, if he wants to serve not his own interests but the public good, not to benefit his own heirs but the nation as a whole, should make every effort to ensure that all power lies in his own hands. A wise man will never criticize someone for an extralegal action undertaken to organize a kingdom or establish a republic. He will agree that if his deed accuses him, its consequences excuse him. When the consequences are good, as were the consequences of Romulus's act, then he will always be excused, for it is those who are violent in order to destroy who should be found guilty, not those who are violent in order to build anew.

A legislator should, however, use care and skill [*virtuoso*] to ensure that the power he has seized is not inherited by a successor; for, since men are more inclined to do evil than good, his successor is likely to use for selfish purposes the power he has been using for the public good. Moreover, one person alone may be best at drawing up plans, but the institutions he has designed will not survive long if they continue to depend on the decisions of one man. They will do better if many share the responsibilities, and if many are concerned to preserve them. For just as it is a bad idea to have many people plan something, for they will not agree about what is best, since there will be many differing opinions among them, so, too, when once they know what is right, they will not be able to agree to act contrary to it. Romulus deserved to be pardoned for the death of his brother and his colleague, for his actions were aimed at the public good and not at self-advancement. This is evident from the fact that he quickly established a senate to whose views he listened and whose advice he took. If you analyze the

powers Romulus kept in his own hands, you will find that the only powers he kept were those of commanding the armies once war had been declared and of summoning the senate. This became apparent when Rome acquired freedom by driving out the Tarquins, for the Romans did not alter their established constitution at all, beyond replacing an hereditary monarch with two consuls elected annually. This shows that the original institutions of Rome were better adapted for a constitutional and participatory political system than for an absolute and tyrannical one.

There are an infinite number of examples that could be produced in support of what I have said in this chapter, such as Moses, Lycurgus, Solon, and other founders of monarchies and republics who could, because they had laid claim to a certain personal authority, establish laws aimed at the common good. But I want to leave these aside, as the point is obvious. Let me give only one additional example, not such a well-known one, but worth considering if one wants to establish a good constitution. Agis, King of Sparta,[34] wanted to confine the Spartans within the limits that had been established for them by the laws of Lycurgus. He felt that his city, because it had in some measure deviated from its original constitution, had lost a good deal of its traditional excellence [*antica virtù*] and, with it, much of its strength and power. He had no sooner begun his reforms than he was assassinated by the Spartan ephors[35] on the grounds that he was trying to establish a tyranny. But Cleomenes was appointed king to succeed him,[36] and he developed the same aspirations, for he came across some memoranda and memoirs written by Agis. From them he learned the true opinions and intentions of his predecessor. He recognized that he could not do his country the service he intended if he did not concentrate all power in his own hands, for he thought that human beings were so self-interested that one could not do good to the majority if faced with the opposition of a powerful minority. So he seized on a suitable opportunity and had all the ephors and anyone else in a position to oppose him killed. Then he completely overhauled the laws of Lycurgus. This would probably have given Sparta a new lease on life and established for Cleomenes a reputation as great as that of Lycurgus, if the Macedonians had not been establishing their predominance, and if the other Greek cities had not been incapable of resisting them. For after Cleomenes' reforms, the Spartans were attacked by the Macedonians

34. King from 244 to 240 B.C.

35. The ephors, like the Roman tribunes, were elected by the people.

36. He ruled from 237 to 221 B.C.

and discovered that, on their own, they were not strong enough to resist them. Their forces had nowhere to retreat and were defeated.[37] So Cleomenes' plans, although wise and admirable, never came to fruition.

Having considered all these matters, I conclude that in order to establish the constitution of a republic one needs to have sole power; and that Romulus should be forgiven, not blamed, for the deaths of Remus and of Titus Tatius.

Chapter Ten: On how, just as the founders of a republic or a kingdom deserve praise, so the founders of a tyranny should be held in contempt.

Of all the types of men who are praised, it is the heads and founders of religions who are the most highly praised. After them come those who founded either republics or kingdoms. After them, the most famous are those who have commanded armies and have expanded either their own territory or that of their nation. To these we may add authors. These are of different types, and each is celebrated according to its ranking. All other men who are praiseworthy—and there are an infinite number of them—acquire a measure of reputation through their skill or craft. On the other hand, those who destroy religions, undermine kingdoms and republics, are hostile to excellence, to literature, and to all the arts and crafts that are useful or honorable to mankind, these men are infamous and detestable. These are the impious, the violent, the ignorant, the good-for-nothings, the lazy, the base. There never will be anybody so crazy or so wise, so devilish or so saintly, that, offered a choice between the two types of man, will not praise those who deserve to be praised and criticize those who deserve to be criticized. Nevertheless, almost all men, misled by a false idea of what is good and a false notion of what is praiseworthy, slip, either willfully or foolishly, into the ranks of those who deserve more blame than praise. Put in a position where they can win eternal praise by founding either a republic or a kingdom, they become tyrants and do not even realize how much reputation, glory, honor, security, peace of mind, and satisfaction of spirit they are giving up, and how much infamy, vituperation, criticism, danger, and unease they are going to incur.

It is impossible for a private citizen living in a republic, if he reads his history books and makes good use of the records of past events,

37. In 222 B.C.

not to want to live in his homeland as a Scipio[38] rather than a Caesar. If by chance or skill [*virtù*] he becomes a ruler, he is bound to prefer being an Agesilaus,[39] a Timoleon, a Dion,[40] to being a Nabis,[41] a Phalaris,[42] or a Dionysius. For everyone can see that the latter are held in complete contempt, while the former are immoderately praised. They also see that Timoleon and the others had no less authority in their countries than Dionysius and Phalaris had in theirs, but they had a great deal more security.

There is nobody who is taken in by the glory of Caesar, even when they see him praised in the highest terms by those who write about him; for those who praise him have been corrupted by his success and frightened by the long endurance of the Roman empire. Since the rulers of that empire continued to call themselves Caesars, writers could not discuss Caesar freely. But if you want to know what writers would say about him if they were free to speak their minds, look at what they say about Catiline.[43] Caesar is more to be censured than Catiline; just as he who does evil is more blameworthy than he who merely tries to do it. Look, too, at the praise with which authors refer to Brutus. Afraid to criticize Caesar because of his power, they acclaim his enemy.

If you become an absolute ruler in a republic you should also consider how much more praise, once Rome was ruled by emperors, was awarded to those emperors who abided by the laws and were benevolent than to those who were the opposite.[44] Note that Titus, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus, and Marcus had no need of praetorian guards or of multitudes of legions to defend themselves, because their own way

38. Scipio (234–183 B.C.) defeated the Carthaginians.

39. King of Sparta from 398–360 B.C. and praised by Plutarch.

40. First Dion (d. 354 B.C.) and then Timoleon (d. 337 B.C.) led successful revolts against the tyranny of Dionysius II of Syracuse, who ruled from 367 to 343 B.C. Again, the source is Plutarch.

41. Tyrant of Sparta from 207 to 192 B.C. The source is Polybius, bk. 13. chs. 6–8.

42. Tyrant of Agrigentum from 570 to 554 B.C., referred to by Aristole in the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*.

43. Catiline conspired to overthrow the government from 66 to 63 B.C., when he was killed at the head of an uprising. Cicero's attacks on him were well-known rhetorical models.

44. In this paragraph, Machiavelli discusses the emperors up to and including Marcus Aurelius (d. 180). Their successors are discussed in *The Prince*, ch. nineteen.

of life, the good will of the populace, and the love of the senate served to defend them. On the other hand, the entire armies of the eastern and western empires were not large enough to protect Caligula, Nero, Vitellius, and many other wicked rulers against the enemies they had acquired by their foul practices and evil lives. Any ruler who gives due consideration to the history of these emperors will be taught clearly enough which is the way to acquire glory, and which the way to deserve censure; what to do in order to be safe, and what to do to live a life of fear.

Of the first twenty-six emperors, from Caesar to Maximinus,[45] sixteen were assassinated, and ten died of natural causes. It is true that among those who were killed the odd good ruler is to be found, Galba for example, or Pertinax, but their deaths were the result of the corruption among the soldiers they had inherited from their predecessors. Among those who died of natural causes the occasional wicked ruler is to be found—Severus, for example—but these were men of extraordinary good fortune and skill [*virtù*]: Few men can count on both of these. He will also learn by reading the history of Rome how one should organize a good kingdom, for all the emperors who inherited power, with the exception of Titus, were wicked; those who were appointed to succeed without being blood relatives were all good, for example the five emperors from Nerva to Marcus.[46] When power fell once more into the hands of hereditary rulers, the empire declined once again.

Let our ruler consider the period of time that runs from Nerva to Marcus and compare those rulers with those who went before and those who came after; then let us ask him when he would rather have been born, and over which type of state he would rather rule. When the empire was governed by good men, he will find rulers lived in security, surrounded by their citizens who had nothing to fear, and he will find that the world was peaceable and that justice prevailed. He will see that the senate had its due authority, the magistrates their honors, that the rich citizens were able to enjoy their wealth, and that nobility and virtue [*virtù*] were admired. Everything was peaceable, and all was right with the world. Rancor, license, corruption, and ambition, for their part, were nowhere to be found. These were golden times, when everyone could hold and defend whatever view he wished. In short, everybody benefited: The prince was treated with reverence

45. Caesar died in 44 B.C. (though he was never officially emperor); Maximinus in 238.

46. That is, from 96 to 180.

and esteem, the people were loving and secure. If he then looks carefully at the periods before and after this one, he will find them horrifying because of the frequent wars, unstable because of the frequent seditions, and full of cruelty during both peace and war. Everywhere he looks he will see rulers murdered, civil wars, international conflicts. He will see Italy afflicted and full of unprecedented misfortunes, her cities ruined and sacked. He will see Rome burned, the Capitol destroyed by her own citizens, the ancient temples desolate, religious ceremonies corrupted, the cities full of adultery. On the seas, ships carry men into exile; the rocks on the shores are stained with blood. In Rome itself innumerable atrocities occur; breeding, wealth, previous honors, and above all virtue [*virtù*] are thought to be capital offenses. Slanderers are rewarded, slaves are bribed to turn against their masters, servants against their employers. Those who are not overwhelmed by their enemies find their own friends will do them down. Then he will really know just how much Rome, Italy, and the whole world owe to Caesar.

Doubtless, if he has blood in his veins, he will be appalled at the thought of imitating the evil times and will burn with an immense desire to copy the good. Truly, if a ruler wants to acquire worldly glory, he ought to want to rule over a corrupt city, not in order to destroy it completely, as Caesar destroyed Rome, but to re-establish it, as Romulus did. In truth, the heavens cannot offer a man a greater opportunity to win glory, nor can men desire any reputation more than this one. If, in order to establish a good constitution for a city, there were no alternative to giving up power, then there would be some excuse for anyone who, in order to hold on to power, failed to introduce a good constitution. But since one can introduce a good constitution and still retain power, there is no excuse for such people at all. So those to whom heaven gives such an opportunity should recognize that they stand at a crossroads: One path leads to security in this life and to glory after death; the other leads to continuous anxiety in this life and to perpetual infamy after death.

Chapter Eleven: On the religion of the Romans.

Rome's first founder was Romulus, and she owed her birth and education to him, as a child is indebted to its father. Nevertheless, fate took the view that the institutions established by Romulus were not adequate for the vast empire that Rome was to have; so it inspired the Roman senate to appoint Numa Pompilius as Romulus's successor, so that those things Romulus had omitted to take care of could be dealt

with by Numa. The Romans of his day were completely wild, not domesticated; he wanted to train them to live a sociable life and to practice the arts of peace. So he turned to religion because it is essential for the maintenance of a civilized way of life, and he founded a religion such that for many centuries there was more fear of God in Rome than there has ever been anywhere else. Such piety was of considerable assistance whenever the senate or one of Rome's great leaders undertook any enterprise. If you look over the whole record of Roman history, taking into consideration both the Romans as a community and the behavior of individual citizens, you will find that the citizens of Rome were a good deal more afraid of the consequences of breaking their oaths than of breaking the laws, for they were more afraid of God's power than man's.

This is evident from the cases of Scipio and Manlius Torquatus. After Hannibal had routed the Romans at Cannae[47] many of the citizens gathered together and, despairing of their homeland, resolved to abandon Italy and retreat to Sicily. When Scipio heard this he went to meet them and, with a naked sword in his hand, forced them to swear never to abandon the land of their birth. Lucius Manlius, father of Titus Manlius, who was later called Torquatus, had been accused by Marcus Pomponius, tribune of the people. Before the day of judgment came, Titus went to find Marcus and threatened to kill him if he did not promise to lift the charges against his father.[48] He forced him to swear that he would do so, and Marcus, having sworn out of fear, kept his word. Thus, those citizens who could not be kept in Italy by love of country or fear of the laws were held there by an oath they had been forced to take against their wills; and that tribune set aside the hatred he had for the father, ignored the injury the son had done him, and sacrificed his honor, in order to keep an oath he had been forced to take. The sole cause of this behavior was the religion Numa had established in the city.

Anyone who reads the history of Rome with care will recognize how useful religion was when it came to commanding armies, to inspiring the populace, to keeping men on the straight and narrow, to making criminals ashamed of themselves. So that if one had to debate to which ruler Rome owed more, to Romulus or to Numa, I rather think that Numa would come in first. For where religion is well-established it is

47. In 216 B.C.

48. In 362 B.C. Among the charges was that he had been cruel to his own son.

easy to introduce military prowess; but where there is military prowess without religion it is hard to introduce piety. One can see that there was no need for Romulus, who was trying to establish the senate and construct other civil and military institutions, to claim that his actions were authorized by God; but this was a claim Numa was obliged to make. He pretended to be on friendly terms with a nymph who advised him on everything before he made recommendations to the people. This came about because he wanted to establish new and unaccustomed institutions in Rome, and he feared his own authority might be insufficient.

Indeed, there has not been a single founder of an exceptional constitution for a nation who has not had recourse to divine authority, for otherwise it would have been impossible for him to win acceptance for his proposals. For there are many fine principles that a wise man will acknowledge but that are not sufficiently self-evident to be accepted by ordinary people. So intelligent men who want to overcome this problem turn to God. This is what Lycurgus did, and Solon, and many others whose objectives were the same as theirs. The Roman populace, astonished at Numa's goodness and wisdom, fell in with every proposal he made. It is certainly true that in those days people were very religious, and that the people with whom Numa had to deal were unsophisticated. This made it much easier for him to accomplish what he set out to do, for he could easily manipulate them in any way he chose. Doubtless anyone who in our own day set out to construct a republic would find it easier to do it among the inhabitants of the mountains, who are completely uncivilized, than he would among those who are accustomed to living in the cities, who are civilized but corrupt. A sculptor finds it easier to make a fine sculpture out of a rough block of marble than out of one that has been poorly worked on by somebody else.

Taking everything into account, I conclude that the religion introduced by Numa was one of the primary reasons for the success of Rome, for a good religion leads to good institutions, good institutions lead to good fortune, and good fortune ensures the success of everything one undertakes. And, just as religious worship is the foundation of the greatness of a republic, so the neglect of it will bring about its ruin. For where the fear of God is missing, either the state will collapse, or if it is held together it will only be by fear of a ruler who is able to make up for an inadequate religion. And since rulers do not live long, such a state is bound to fail soon, once the force [*virtù*] holding it together is gone. So those states that depend entirely on the strength [*virtù*] of a single individual do not last long, for his strength cannot

outlive him. It is rare for his successor to be able to take over where he leaves off, as Dante has the good sense to note:

> It is rare for human integrity to be inherited.
> God wants it this way, so that people will turn to him for it.[49]

The best thing for a republic or a monarchy is not to have someone in charge who governs well for as long as he lives; it is better to have someone who organizes the state so that when he dies it will continue without him.

Although it is easier to persuade unrefined men to adopt a new institution or a new belief, this does not mean it is impossible to persuade people who are sophisticated and who pride themselves on being refined to do so. The people of Florence do not think of themselves as either ignorant or unsophisticated; nevertheless, Friar Girolamo Savonarola persuaded them that he talked with God. I do not want to say if I think this was true or not; for one should talk with reverence of such a great man. But I certainly will say that innumerable people believed him, although they had not seen anything extraordinary that might lead them to think it true. His way of life, his doctrine, and his message were enough to make them believe him. No one should despair of being able to achieve things that others have achieved before them, for men, as I said in my preface, are born, live, and die in the same way as they always have done.

Chapter Twelve: On how important it is to give due weight to religion, and on how Italy, having been deprived of faith by the Church of Rome, has been ruined as a consequence.

Those rulers and those republics who want to keep their political systems free of corruption must above all else prevent the ceremonies of their religion from being corrupted and must keep them always in due veneration. For one can have no better indication of the prospective ruin of a society than to see that divine worship is held in contempt. It is easy to see why this is so, since we saw above that religions are established wherever men are born. Every religion grounds its spiritual life in one particular doctrine or practice. The religious life of the pagans was based on the replies given them by their oracles and on the cult of divination and augury. All their other ceremonies, sacrifices,

49. Dante, *Il Purgatorio*, Canto 4, ll. 121–3.

and rites depended on these, for it was easy for them to believe that a god who could foretell the good or evil that was going to happen to you could also determine your fate. It was this belief that gave rise to temples, to sacrifices, to prayers, and to all the other ceremonies with which the gods were venerated. They were authorized by the oracle of Delos, the temple of Jupiter Ammon, and by other celebrated oracles who were universally admired and worshipped. These oracles in time came to speak as they were instructed to by the powerful, and the deception involved was recognized by the populace. Thus, men came to be sceptics and became inclined to overthrow every good institution.

So the rulers of a republic or of a kingdom should uphold the basic principles of the religion to which they are committed. If they do this it will be easy for them to keep their state religious and, as a consequence, law-abiding and united. Everything that happens that fosters religious faith, even if they privately judge it to be false, they should support and encourage; the more prudent they are, the more scientific their outlook, the more they should do this. It is because sensible men have adopted this policy that belief in miracles has taken hold, even in religions that we know to be false. For wise men supported them without worrying about the truth of their claims, and their authority served to encourage belief in society as a whole.

There were many such miracles reported in Rome: for example, when the Roman soldiers were sacking the city of Veii[50] some of them entered the temple of Juno. They went up to her statue and said, "Do you want to come to Rome?" Some thought she nodded in response; others heard her say yes. Since these men had a genuine religious faith (Livy's account makes this plain, for he reports that they entered the temple without being raucous, but acting devoutly and full of reverence)[51] they thought they had heard the reply to their question that they had, perhaps, expected. This simple-minded belief was unhesitatingly encouraged and favored by Camillus and by the other rulers of the city.

If, when Christianity first became a state religion, such piety had been encouraged (as the founder of the religion instructed it should be), the Christian states and republics would now be more united and a good deal happier than they are. Nor is there any clearer indication of the decline of Christianity than the fact that those peoples who live closest to Rome, whose Church is the head of our religion, have the least faith. If you look back to the founding principles of Christianity,

50. Veii fell after a ten-year siege in 395 B.C.

51. Livy, bk. 5, ch. 22.

and contrast them with present practices, you will be bound to conclude that our religion will soon be destroyed or scourged.

Since many are of the view that the welfare of the cities of Italy depends on the Roman church, I want to argue the contrary case, employing those reasons that occur to me. I will appeal to two powerful arguments that, I believe, are compatible with each other. The first is that the wicked examples presented by the papal court have caused the whole of Italy to lose all piety and all religious devotion. This has innumerable unfortunate consequences and is the cause of numerous disorders. For just as respect for religion has a whole range of beneficial consequences, so contempt for religion has a whole range of evil consequences. Thus, we Italians owe this much to our Church and to our clergy: They have made us irreligious and wicked.

But this is not the half of what we owe them, for there is another reason why the Church is the cause of our ruin: the Church has been and still is responsible for keeping Italy divided. In truth, no geographical region has ever been unified or happy if it has not been brought under the political control of a single republic or ruler, as has happened in France and Spain. And the only reason why Italy has not been unified as they have been, the only reason why she does not have a republic or a prince who has been able to acquire control of the whole territory, is the existence of the church. The pope lives in Italy and has a temporal authority there, but he has not been powerful or skillful [*virtù*] enough to acquire absolute power throughout Italy and make himself her ruler; but on the other hand he has never been so weak that, faced with the prospect of losing his temporal possessions, he has been unable to call on some other state to defend him against whatever power has been on the rise in Italy. There is plenty of evidence for this in the past, for example when the papacy employed Charlemagne to kick out the Lombards, who had become rulers of almost the whole of Italy.[52] In our own day the papacy destroyed the power of the Venetians by obtaining the support of the French;[53] and then got rid of the French with the help of the Swiss.[54] So the church has not been powerful enough to conquer Italy, but has prevented anyone else from conquering her. This is the reason why Italy has never been united under one ruler, but has been divided among numerous princes and rulers, which has resulted in so much division and weakness that she has been reduced to being the victim, not only of powerful foreign

52. In 774.
53. Battle of Agnadello, 1509.
54. Campaign of 1512.

states, but of anyone who cares to attack her. We Italians owe all this to our Italian church and to no one else.

If you wanted to have an incontrovertible test of the truth of my argument, you would need to be powerful enough to transport the court of Rome, with its temporal authority, from Italy to Switzerland. For the Swiss are the only people who still live as the ancients did, being uncorrupted in both their religion and their military service. You would see that in a short time the evil habits of the court of Rome would introduce more disorder into the territory of the Swiss than anything else that could ever happen there.

Chapter Thirteen: On how the Romans used religion to reorganize their city, to carry out their enterprises, and to put a stop to internal dissensions.

I think it might be helpful if I gave a few examples of occasions when the Romans used religion to reorganize their city and to carry out their enterprises. Although there are lots of examples to be found in Livy, nevertheless, I intend to confine myself to the few that follow. In the year after the Roman populace established tribunes with consular authority, all of whom, with one exception, were plebeians, there was plague and famine, and a number of prodigious events occurred.[55] The nobles took advantage of this when it came to the election of new tribunes. They said the gods were angry because Rome had ill-treated its constituted authorities, and that there was no way of placating the gods except to elect the proper people as tribunes. The result was that the populace, unable to argue against these pious sentiments, elected tribunes who were all nobles.

Again, one can see how, when the city of Veii was under siege, the military commanders made use of religion to keep the soldiers ready for an attack. That same year[56] the Alban lake had expanded remarkably. The Roman soldiers were weary with the lengthy siege and wanted to return home. Their commanders discovered that Apollo and some other oracles had declared that the year that Veii would be taken would be the year that the Alban lake overflowed its banks. This made the soldiers willing to put up with the frustrations of the siege, for they were seized with the hope that they would be able to take the town. They were willing to go on with the task, with the result that Camillus, once he was made dictator, took that city after it had been under siege

55. In 399–398 B.C.
56. I.e., 398 B.C.

for ten years. So religion, skillfully employed, helped the Romans seize Veii and helped, too, to restore the tribunate to the nobility. Without its help it would have been difficult to accomplish either objective.

I would not want to omit another example relevant to this subject. Terentillus, when he was tribune, provoked numerous conflicts in Rome.[57] He wanted to propose some legislation for reasons I will outline below in the appropriate place. One of the first means employed by the nobility to resist him was religion, which they put to work in two different ways. In the first place, they had the Sibylline books consulted; they were interpreted as saying that the city was in danger of losing its liberty that year as a result of civil conflict. Although the tribunes exposed this as a stratagem, nevertheless, the prophecy so frightened the populace that they cooled in their support for Terentillus. The second was a response to the fact that a certain Appius Herdonius, with a throng of exiles and slaves, four thousand men in all, had occupied the Capitol by night, giving grounds to fear that if the Aequi and the Volsci, who were longstanding enemies of the Romans, took the opportunity to attack, they would be able to seize the city. Despite this, the tribunes did not let up in the determined insistence with which they advocated the adoption of Terentillus's law, dismissing Herdonius's attack as a fake. So a certain Publius Ruberius, a citizen whose manner was solemn and authoritative, came out of the senate and addressed the populace. Using words that were partly affectionate and partly threatening, he pointed out to them the danger in which the city stood and the untimely nature of their demands. He succeeded in compelling the populace to swear an oath that it would not go against the wishes of the consul. Restored to obedience, the populace retook the Capitol by force. But Publius Valerius, one of the consuls, died during the attack, and Titus Quintius was hurriedly appointed to replace him. He, in order to prevent the populace from catching its breath, and in order to ensure they did not have time to turn their thoughts to Terentillus's law, ordered them to march out of Rome against the Volsci, saying that the oath they had taken to stand by the consul obliged them to follow him. The tribunes argued against him, saying that the oath had been taken to the dead consul and not to him. Nevertheless, Livy describes how the populace, for fear of religion, preferred to obey the consul rather than believe the tribunes. He says this in praise of the old religion: "That negligence towards the gods that characterizes our own age had not yet developed. People did not yet feel free to reinterpret oaths and laws to suit themselves."[58] Because of this, the tribunes were afraid that they would lose all their authority if they held out. They agreed with the consul that they would remain obedient to him, and that for one year there would be no more talk of the law of Terentillus, while the consuls agreed that for one year they would not lead the populace out to war. And so religion made it possible for the senate to overcome problems that, without its assistance, they would never have been able to overcome.

57. In 462 B.C.

Chapter Sixteen: On how a people who have been accustomed to being ruled by one man, if by some chance they become free, have difficulty in holding on to their liberty.

There are numerous examples to be found in ancient history that show how difficult it is for a people who are accustomed to being ruled by one man to preserve their liberty if by some chance they acquire it, as Rome acquired its liberty when it threw out the Tarquins. This is as you would expect, for such a people are no different from a wild beast which, although by nature savage and untamed, has been raised from birth in a prison and in slavery. If it is then allowed to wander freely in the countryside, because it has no experience of hunting for its food and no knowledge of where to take refuge, it will be recaptured by the first person who sets out to hunt it down.

The same thing happens with a people. Being used to living at the command of others, having no experience of debating questions of strategy, whether of defense or offense, having no knowledge of the neighboring rulers, and being unknown to them, they quickly succumb once again to a ruler's yoke and usually end up under a harsher tyranny than the one from which they have just escaped. They encounter these problems even if their character is not corrupted. For a people who have been entirely corrupted cannot live free for even a short period of time, not even for a moment, as I will explain later. So here I want to discuss those peoples who are not extensively corrupted and who have more that is good in them than is rotten.

In addition, there is another problem, which is that a state that becomes free acquires bitter enemies, but not loyal allies. All those who benefited under the previous tyranny, who fed off the wealth of the ruler, become bitter enemies. They have lost the opportunity to become rich, and so cannot live content. Each one of them is forced to try to reconstruct the old tyranny in order to recover his old influence.

58. Livy, bk. 3, ch. 20.

On the other hand, the new state does not acquire, as I said, loyal allies, because political freedom distributes honors and rewards for honest and impartial reasons, and no one gets honored or rewarded who does not meet the criteria. When someone has the honors and benefits he thinks he deserves, he does not feel indebted to those who gave them to him. Moreover, no one feels grateful to anyone for those benefits of freedom that all share in common, at least so long as they enjoy them. They are able to enjoy their own property without fear of losing it; they do not have to fear that their women will be seduced or their sons corrupted, or be anxious for their own safety. But no one ever feels obliged to anyone else merely because they have left them in peace.

So, as I have already said, a state that has recently acquired freedom acquires bitter enemies without acquiring loyal allies. If you want to find a remedy for these problems and for the conflicts that the above-mentioned difficulties bring with them, there is no more effective solution, none that is more justifiable, reliable, and necessary, than to kill the sons of Brutus.[59] They, as history records, were provoked to conspire with other young Romans against their fatherland by the simple fact that they could not monopolize influence under the consuls as they had been able to under the kings. The freedom of the nation seemed to be the cause of their own enslavement. If you set out to rule over a multitude, whether you do so within a system of political freedom or as sole ruler, and you fail to neutralize those who are hostile to the new constitution, then you are building a state that will be short-lived. It is true that, in my view, those who rule alone and who, in order to consolidate their system of government, have to employ extra-legal means, are unfortunate, for they will find themselves opposed by the populace as a whole. If you are opposed by a minority, it is easy to neutralize them, and your actions need not cause much resentment; but if you are opposed by the vast majority, then you are never going to be safe, and the more blood you shed, the weaker your hold on power becomes. So the best policy you can pursue is to try to win the allegiance of the populace.

What I have just said is something of a digression, for I have been discussing the problems of sole rulers, where I set out to talk about republics. Nevertheless, because I do not want to have to come back to this subject again, let me briefly finish what I have to say about it. If a ruler wants to win over a populace that is hostile to him—I am

59. Killed by their father shortly after the expulsion of the last king in 510 B.C.

speaking about a ruler who has become a tyrant in his own homeland—I would say he should first ask himself what the populace wants. He will always find that there are two things it wants: In the first place, it wants to revenge itself on those who brought about its enslavement; and in the second, it wants to be free again. As far as their first wish is concerned, their ruler can satisfy it completely; the second he can only partially satisfy. There is a good example of a prince letting his subjects have their revenge. Clearchus had been tyrant of Heraclea but had been driven into exile.[60] The populace and the elite within the city fell out among themselves. The elite, finding themselves on the losing side, began to support Clearchus and conspired with him to restore him to power in the face of popular opposition. So they took the people's liberty away from them. Clearchus found himself caught between the insatiable demands of the elite, whom he could find no way of either satisfying or reforming, and the hatred of the people, who were furious at having lost their liberty. He decided to free himself of the elite, who had become a nuisance, and win over the people. So he seized an appropriate opportunity and hacked all the members of the elite into pieces, much to the delight of the populace. By this means he satisfied one of the two desires that such populaces have, the desire to revenge themselves.

But as far as the populace's other desire, the desire to regain its liberty, is concerned, a sole ruler cannot satisfy it, so he should ask himself why it wants to be free. He will find that a very small number of the people want to be free in order to exercise authority; but all the rest, who are the vast majority, want liberty in order to live in security. For in all republics, no matter what particular type of constitution they have, at the most forty or fifty citizens get to occupy positions of authority. Because this is such a small number, it is easy to neutralize this group of people, either by killing them or by offering them positions so attractive (when compared to what they might expect in a free political system) that most of them decide they are better off accepting the status quo. As for the rest, who merely want to live in security, it is easy to satisfy them by constructing institutions and passing laws such that your own power is reconciled with the security of the public. If a ruler does this, and the populace sees that he is careful not to break any of these laws no matter what happens, they will quickly come to feel secure and to be content. An example of this is provided by the Kingdom of France, where people only feel secure because the kings of France have obliged themselves to respect innumerable laws,

60. His rule began in 365 B.C. and is described in Justin, *Histories*, bk. 16.

laws that provide for the security of all their subjects. The constitution of that kingdom allows the king to do as he pleases in matters of war and taxes; but in all other affairs his actions are constrained by the laws.

So a ruler, whether prince or republic, who does not have secure control of the state at the beginning, must, as the Romans did, take the first opportunity to secure his position. If you let that moment slip by, you will later regret not having done what you ought to have done. Because the people of Rome were not yet corrupt when they recovered their freedom, and because they killed the sons of Brutus and eliminated the Tarquins, they were able to hold on to what they had won and to make good use of all those institutions and practices that I have already described. But if the people are corrupt, then they will be unable to discover (no matter who they are, Romans or non-Romans) policies that are effective in preserving freedom: This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Seventeen: On how a corrupt people who come to be free can only hold on to their freedom with the greatest of difficulty.

In my view, if the kings of Rome had not been abolished, Rome would in a very short time have become weak and worthless. For if you consider the extent of the corruption that had set in among the kings, you will recognize that if there had been two or three generations of such rulers, then the corruption of the rulers would have infected the body of the nation. Once the society as a whole was corrupt, it would never again have been possible to reform it. But because the head was struck off before the body was infected, it was easy for them to accustom themselves to a free and well-organized political system. One should recognize as an indubitable truth that if a corrupt city, accustomed to one-man rule, acquires freedom and sees its ruler and all his relatives killed, it will never know what to do with its newfound liberty. It would be better for it to have a new ruler step into the shoes of the old. Without a new ruler it will never settle down, unless some individual who combines exceptional goodness with exceptional skill [*virtù*] keeps freedom alive in its midst; but this freedom will only survive as long as he does.

This is what happened at Syracuse with Dion and Timoleon. They both had the skill [*virtù*], under differing circumstances, to keep freedom alive in their city while they lived; but as soon as they died the old tyranny was restored. But the best example is that of Rome. When the Tarquins were thrown out the Romans were able to seize and maintain their freedom; but when Caesar was killed, when Gaius

Caligula was killed, when Nero was killed, when the whole house of Caesar had been eliminated, at no point were they able so much as to lay claim to freedom, let alone maintain it. Events took a very different course, although all this happened in the same city, simply because, in the days of the Tarquins, the Roman people were not yet corrupt, while in later centuries they were rotten to the core. In the early days, in order to keep themselves firm of purpose and determined to prevent the restoration of the monarchy, all that was necessary was that they should swear that they would never agree to there being a king in Rome; in later centuries the authority and severity of Brutus,[61] backed up by all the legions of the eastern empire, were insufficient to keep them committed to preserving the liberty that he, like the first Brutus, had restored to them. This was the result of the corruption that the faction of Marius had introduced into the populace; Caesar, having put himself at the head of this party, had been able to blind the populace to the fact that they were being enslaved, even as he himself placed the yoke upon their necks.

Although this example from the history of Rome is more important than any other, nevertheless, I would like to introduce some further examples of popular corruption drawn from contemporary history. I would say that nothing that could happen, no matter how destructive and violent, could accustom the peoples of Milan and of Naples to freedom, for those societies are completely corrupt. This was apparent after the death of Filippo Visconti,[62] for although the Milanese sought to re-establish liberty, they could not do so, and had not the least idea of how to maintain it. Rome was therefore extremely lucky that her kings became corrupt quickly, so that they were soon kicked out, before their corruption had spread to the guts of the city. It is because the populace of Rome was not corrupt that the innumerable conflicts that broke out in Rome did not harm but actually helped the republic, for her citizens at least had the right objectives.

So we can draw this conclusion: Where the individuals are not corrupt, conflicts and other crises do no harm; where they are corrupt, the best-planned laws are useless, unless the laws are imposed by someone who uses ruthless methods to make people obey him, until the individuals themselves become good. I do not know if this has ever happened, or if it could ever happen. In practice one finds, as I said just before, that where a city has gone into decline because the individuals who make it up are corrupt, if it ever happens that it acquires freedom,

61. This is the Brutus who killed Caesar in 44 B.C.
62. In 1447.

it happens because of the skill [*virtù*] of one individual who is present by chance, not because of the strength [*virtù*] of the population as a whole, which is what is needed to maintain good institutions. As soon as the one leader dies, the city returns to its old habits. This is what happened in Thebes which, because of the skill [*virtù*] of Epaminondas, was able, so long as he was alive, to maintain a republican structure and to hold down an empire; but, as soon as he died,[63] Thebes returned to its old internal conflicts. The problem is that an individual cannot live long enough to have time to discipline properly a city that has long been spoiled. One leader of exceptional longevity or two skilled [*virtuose*] leaders succeeding each other are not enough to establish order; but without one or the other, as I have said, there is no hope. By the time you discover this, however, you have undergone many dangers, and much blood has been spilled, and still liberty is not reborn. For this sort of corruption, this sort of incapacity for political freedom, is the result of the social inequality that has developed within the city. In order to restore equality, one would have to use quite exceptional measures. Few know how to use them, or, if they do know, are prepared to face what is involved, as I will explain in greater detail elsewhere.

Chapter Eighteen: On the way to preserve political freedom in a corrupt but free city; or to establish it in a corrupt and unfree city.

I think it is relevant to what we have been discussing, and it would not be out of place, to consider whether one can preserve political freedom in a corrupt but free city, or whether one can establish it in a corrupt and unfree city. On this subject, I say that it is very difficult to do either one or the other; and although it is almost impossible to formulate general rules, for one would have to adjust one's policies in the light of the extent of the corruption, nevertheless, since it is good to think through every problem, I do not want to omit a discussion of this one. Let us assume we are dealing with an extremely corrupt city, so that we can consider the most difficult case. Indeed, the case would seem hopeless, for there are neither laws nor institutions that will serve to restrain a universal corruption. For just as good habits need good laws if they are to survive, so good laws will only be obeyed if the subjects have good habits.

Moreover, the institutions and laws that have been established in a republic at the time of its foundation, when the individuals who made

63. In 362 B.C.

it up were good, are no longer appropriate when they become bad. If the laws of a city are relatively easily changed to take account of changing circumstances, the institutions, on the other hand, never change, or do so only at long intervals. The result is that the new laws are insufficient, because the institutions that remain unchanged distort their impact. In order to make clearer what I mean, let me explain what the institutions of the government, or rather of the state, were in Rome, and then I will outline the laws with which the magistrates held the citizens in check. The fundamental institutions of the state were embodied in the respective powers of the people, the senate, the tribunes, and the consuls; in the ways in which magistrates were chosen and appointed; and in the ways in which legislation was passed. This fundamental constitution changed little or not at all as circumstances changed. What did change were the laws that restricted the actions of citizens, such as the laws on adultery, the laws controlling extravagance, those on political corruption, and many others, which were altered as the citizens became progressively more corrupt. But since the institutions of the state remained unchanged, although they were no longer appropriate once the citizens had become corrupt, the revision of particular laws was insufficient to prevent the progress of corruption; the outcome would have been different if not only the laws had been changed, but the constitution as well.

That I am justified in claiming that such institutions were not the right ones for a corrupt city is particularly apparent if we look at two topics: the election of magistrates and the passage of legislation. The people of Rome did not give the consulate and the rest of the highest offices in the city except to those who sought them. This system was good at first, for only those citizens who thought themselves worthy of high office stood for election. Since defeat was shameful, each candidate behaved well in the hope of being judged worthy of election. However, this system was disastrous when the city had become corrupt. For then it was not the most virtuous [*virtù*] but the most powerful who stood for election, and the weak, even if virtuous [*virtuosi*], were too frightened to run for office. Things degenerated to this point not all at once but bit by bit, as happens with all cases of degeneration. Once the Romans had subdued Africa and Asia, and had compelled almost the whole of Greece to acknowledge their authority, they became confident that no one would conquer them, and they no longer thought they had any enemies of whom they ought to be afraid.[64] This sense of security, this absence of enemies who inspired respect, meant that

64. Roughly, after 146 B.C., when Carthage fell.

the people of Rome, in electing consuls, no longer paid attention to competence [*virtù*], but judged only on the basis of charm. They elected those who were best at flattering Rome's citizens, not those who were best at defeating Rome's enemies. Later, even charm was not enough, and the people sank to the point that they voted for those who had the most patronage to distribute; so that good men, because the system was faulty, never stood a chance.

Similarly, a tribune, or indeed any other citizen, could propose a law to the people. Every citizen then had the right to speak for or against the proposal before a vote was taken. This was a good system, so long as the citizens were good, for it is always a good principle that anyone should be free to put forward a proposal of benefit to the public; it is also a good principle that everyone should be able to express his opinion on the subject, so that the people, when they have heard everyone's opinion, can then make the right decision. But once the citizens became corrupt this system became disastrous, for only the powerful proposed laws, and they did so not in order to further the liberty of all, but only in order to build up their own power. Everyone was too frightened to speak against their proposals, so that the people were either taken in, or else compelled to choose policies that would lead to their own destruction.

If one had wanted to preserve liberty in Rome despite the progress of corruption, it would have been necessary to go beyond passing new laws from time to time and to construct new political institutions. For the institutions and ways of life one needs to establish if men are corrupt are different from those that are appropriate if they are good; if one has different materials with which to work, one must build a quite different structure. But these institutions would either have had to be reformed all at once, as soon as it was realized that as a whole they were no longer appropriate, or else they would have had to be revised little by little, as each particular institution was seen to be in need of reform. Both of these procedures are, in my view, almost impossible to carry out. For if you want to revise institutions little by little and one by one, you need to have some wise man proposing change, someone who sees problems almost before they have developed and catches them at the moment of their birth. In the whole history of a city there might easily prove to be not a single person as wise as this. And even if there were such a person, he would never be able to persuade others to recognize the truth of his arguments, for men who have been used to living in a particular way have no desire to change it, especially when they do not find themselves standing toe-to-toe with a problem, but rather are asked to accept its existence on the basis of someone else's conjectures and hypotheses. On the other hand, if one hopes to change the institutions at a stroke, when everyone has come to recognize that they are defective, then I maintain defects that are easy to recognize are hard to correct. For such reforms, ordinary measures are insufficient, for we are dealing with a situation where the ordinary measures have proved defective. So one has to adopt extraordinary measures, such as resorting to violence and civil war. One's primary goal must be to become sole ruler of the city, so that one can do with it as one pleases. In order to reconstruct the constitution of a city so that it fosters political liberty, one needs to be a man with good intentions; but people who resort to arms in order to seize power in a republic are people whose methods are bad. So you can see that there will hardly ever be an occasion when a good man, using wicked means, but using them in the service of good ends, will want to become sole ruler; or when a wicked man, having become sole ruler, wants to do good. It will not occur to him to use for good the power he has acquired by wicked means.

So I have now explained the difficulties that would have to be overcome if one were to try to preserve liberty in a corrupt city or to attempt to establish it from scratch. These difficulties are, in effect, insuperable. Even if one had the opportunity to carry out reform or revolution, one would have to introduce a constitution that was more monarchical than democratic. For men who were so ill-behaved that they could not be kept in order by the laws would need to be kept in check by a more or less arbitrary authority. If one sought to find some other way of making them good, one would either fail completely, or have to resort to extreme cruelty, as I explained above when discussing Cleomenes. He, in order to be sole ruler, had to kill the ephors, just as Romulus, for the same reason, had to kill both his brother and Titus Tatius the Sabine. They went on to use their power well. But you have to take into account the fact that neither of them was dealing with subjects who were as eaten away with corruption as those we have been discussing in this chapter. So it was not unreasonable for them to hope to build a free state; and they were able to turn their aspirations into reality.

Chapter Twenty-One: On how much those rulers and republics that do not have their own armies deserve to be criticized.

Those contemporary rulers and modern republics that do not have their own soldiers for defense and for offense ought to be ashamed of themselves. They should think of Tullus, and they will see that this

shortcoming is not caused by a shortage of men fit for military duty, but by their own failure, for they should have known how to turn their subjects into soldiers. For Tullus became King of Rome when the city had been at peace for forty years.[65] He could not find a single man who had ever been in battle. Nevertheless, when he decided he wanted to go to war, he did not think of hiring the Samnites, or the Tuscans, or of turning to others who were accustomed to military service. Instead, being a man of great wisdom, he decided to use his own troops. He was so skilled in his leadership [*fu tanta la sua virtù*] that it was possible for him to train the most excellent soldiers from scratch. This is truer than anything else: If a state has men but no soldiers, then the fault is the ruler's. There is no point in blaming the nature of the territory or the character of the inhabitants.

Here is a very recent example that confirms my claim. Everyone knows that only very recently the King of England attacked the King of France, and did so relying entirely on his own native troops.[66] Now the English had been more than thirty years without fighting a war, so that their king could not recruit either soldiers or officers with experience of warfare; nevertheless, he did not hesitate to rely on untried troops to attack a kingdom full of experienced officers and disciplined soldiers, for the French army had for years past been continuously at war in Italy. The explanation for this is simply that the King of England was a prudent man, and his country was well administered, for during the years of peace they had continued to prepare for war.

Pelopidas and Epaminondas, the Thebans, when they had liberated Thebes and freed it from domination within the Spartan empire,[67] found themselves ruling a city used to obeying, surrounded by a people who had become effeminate. But they did not hesitate, so well did they understand their business [*tanta era la virtù loro*], to call them to the colors and to march out with them against the Spartan armies whom they defeated. The historian of these events[68] comments that these two very quickly showed not that men born in Lacedaemonia had the makings of good soldiers, but rather that wherever men are born, good soldiers are to be found, provided you can find someone who knows how to train them for military service, as we have seen Tullus knew how to train the Romans. Virgil makes the point better

65. In 672 B.C.
66. In 1513.
67. In 379 B.C.
68. Plutarch.

than anyone else could, and in doing so shows that he agrees with it, when he says:

> Tullus will herd the lazy men into the army.[69]

Chapter Twenty-Six: On how a new ruler, in a city or territory over which he has gained control, should make everything new.

Anyone who becomes the ruler of a city or of a territorial state—especially if the foundations of his power are weak, and he is not concerned to establish constitutional rule, whether of a monarchical or republican type—the best policy he can follow if he wants to hold on to power is, since he is a new ruler, to remake everything else in the state from scratch. In cities he should establish new governments and put in charge new men with new titles and new powers. He should make the rich poor and the poor rich, as David did when he became king, "who filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he sent empty away."[70] Moreover, he should build new cities and destroy those that already exist. He should move populations from one place to another. In short, he should leave nothing as it was in the whole territory. There should be no office, no rank, no authority, no wealth which is not acknowledged by its possessor as being his gift. He should take as his model Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander, who transformed himself from a princeling into the ruler of all Greece by using such policies. Those who write about him say that he removed whole populations from one province to another, as herdsmen drive their herds.[71]

Such methods are horrific and destructive not merely of a Christian way of life but of a merely human existence. Nobody ought to willingly adopt them. Anyone should prefer to remain a private citizen rather than become a king through the destruction of so many people's lives. Nevertheless, anyone who does not want to choose the option of doing good, if he wants to stay in power, will find himself well-advised to adopt these evil methods. But instead, men pursue policies that are neither good nor bad, and these are extremely dangerous. They do

69. Virgil, *Aeneid*, bk. 6, ll. 813–4.
70. Machiavelli is, in fact, quoting the Magnificat (1 Luke 53), which echoes David's Psalm 33.11.
71. Philip II ruled from 360 to 336 B.C. Machiavelli's source is Justin, bk. 8.

not understand how to be either entirely wicked or completely good, as I will explain in the next chapter.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: On how it is only on very rare occasions that men know how to be either completely bad or completely good.

Pope Julius II went to Bologna in 1505 to overthrow the Bentivogli, who had been rulers of the city for a hundred years. He also wanted to get rid of Giovampagolo Baglioni, who was tyrant of Perugia, because he had plotted against all the tyrants who controlled cities within the papal states. When he reached Perugia, realizing that everyone knew what his intention was, he had no expectation of being allowed to enter the city accompanied by his army, but he did get permission to enter without any troops, despite the fact that Giovampagolo was in the city with plenty of troops whom he had collected together to defend himself. So, swept along by the frenzy with which he undertook everything he did, Julius put himself into the hands of his enemy with only his personal guard to protect him.

Shortly afterwards, he left the city taking Giovampagolo with him, leaving a governor behind who would rule Perugia on behalf of the church. Astute men who were with the pope remarked on his rash boldness and on the cowardice of Giovampagolo.[72] They could not understand how it came about that Giovampagolo had not made himself famous for evermore by getting rid of his enemy with a single blow. He would have been able to make himself wealthy from the plunder, for all the cardinals were travelling with the pope, and they had all their luxuries with them. They could not believe that he had held back out of goodness, nor that his conscience had restrained him. He was a violent man, who kept his sister as his mistress, and had killed cousins and nephews to take power. Compassion could not have made such a man hesitate. So they concluded the explanation was that men do not know how to be either admirably wicked or completely good. A truly wicked deed has its own grandeur or involves a certain nobility of conception: Most men are consequently not up to it.

So Giovampagolo, who thought nothing of committing incest and murdering his relatives in public, did not know how to carry out an enterprise that would have caused everyone to admire his spirit. He had a legitimate opportunity, but to tell the truth he did not dare, though he would have won eternal fame for being the first person to

72. Machiavelli himself was there.

show the clergy just how little one should respect people who live and govern as they do. He could have done something whose grandeur would have more than compensated for any disgrace or any danger that might have resulted from it.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: On whether ingratitude is more characteristic of a people or a ruler.

It seems to me relevant to the subject we have been discussing to ask whether it is peoples or rulers who commit acts of the most striking ingratitude. In order to discuss this question better, I will begin by remarking that this vice of ingratitude is the result either of stinginess or of suspicion. For when either a people or a ruler has sent a general out on an important expedition, and the general has been victorious and acquired a good deal of glory, then that ruler (or that people) is obliged to reward him when he returns. And if, instead of rewarding him, he dishonors him or attacks him, and does so because he is stingy and does not want to give him what he deserves because he is too miserly, then he makes a mistake that cannot be excused. Such a mistake brings with it eternal infamy. Nevertheless, there are many rulers who commit this crime. Cornelius Tacitus explains why in the following sentence: "It is easier to respond to an injury than to a good deed, for gratitude is thought of as an obligation, revenge as pure profit."[73]

When, on the other hand, a ruler (or a people) does not reward him or, to put it better, attacks him, not because he is stingy, but because he is suspicious, then there is some excuse for his behavior. Of this sort of ingratitude, motivated by suspicion, one reads often enough; for a general who has brilliantly [*virtuosamente*] conquered an empire for his employer, overcoming his enemies, covering himself with glory, and loading his soldiers down with riches, inevitably acquires such a reputation—with his soldiers, with his enemies, and with his ruler's own subjects—that his victory cannot taste good to the ruler who sent him out. Because it is in human nature to be ambitious and suspicious, and not to know how to place either good fortune or bad in perspective, it is inevitable that this suspicion, which begins to stir in a ruler as soon as a general has won a victory, appears to be justified by something that the general himself does or says that seems disrespectful. So the ruler can think of nothing but of how to protect himself against him. In order to do this, he considers either killing him or blackening his

73. Tacitus, *Histories*, bk. 4, ch. 3.

reputation with his army and with his fellow subjects. He must use every effort to show that this victory is the result, not of his general's skill [*virtù*] but of good luck, or the cowardice of the enemy, or the wisdom of the other officers that participated in the campaign.

Vespasian, while in Judea, was declared emperor by his army.[74] So Antonius Primus, who was in command of another army in Illyria, declared his support for him and marched into Italy against Vitellius, who controlled Rome. He brilliantly [*virtuosissimamente*] destroyed two of Vitellius's armies and occupied Rome. Mucianus, sent there by Vespasian, found that through Antonius's skill [*virtù*] everything had been taken care of, and every difficulty overcome. Antonius's reward was to see Mucianus quickly deprive him of authority over his army, and he found that little by little he was being confined to Rome and deprived of all power. So Antonius set out to meet Vespasian, who was still in Asia. Vespasian gave him such a welcome that within a short time, deprived of all rank, he died, perhaps of despair. History is full of cases like this. In our own day, everyone still remembers with what effort and skill [*virtù*] Gonsalvo Ferrante, campaigning in the Kingdom of Naples against the French on behalf of Ferdinand, King of Aragon, conquered and defeated that kingdom,[75] and knows his reward for victory was that Ferdinand left Aragon and, having arrived in Naples, began by taking away his authority over his troops,[76] then deprived him of his fortresses, and soon took him back with him to Spain, where he quickly died, unhonored.[77]

This suspicion on the part of rulers is so natural that they cannot help but give in to it. It is impossible for them to express gratitude to someone whose victories, while he is in command of their armies, have brought extensive new territories under their control. If a ruler cannot help but give in, it is scarcely remarkable if a popular government cannot either, and one should lay no more stress on its failings than on a prince's. For a city that rules itself has two objectives: One is to acquire new territory, the other to defend its freedom. It is to be expected that it will make mistakes because of its excessive preoccupation with these objectives. As for mistakes made in acquiring territory, I will discuss them in their proper place. These are some of the mistakes made in defending liberty: to attack those citizens whom one ought to reward, and to be suspicious of those in whom one ought to have

74. In 69. The source is Tacitus, bk. 3.
75. In 1495–6.
76. In 1507.
77. In 1515.

confidence. Although these types of behavior, in a republic that has become corrupt, result in great evils, and although often a general seizes by force the rewards that ingratitude has denied him, with the result that the republic ends up under the rule of a tyrant, as Rome ended up under the rule of Caesar, nevertheless, in a republic that has not been corrupted they result in great benefits and ensure that freedom is preserved. For a little longer the citizens continue to be good and free of ambition, if only out of fear of punishment.

It is true that, among all the peoples who have ever controlled an empire, Rome was, for the reasons I have explained above, the least ungrateful, for one may claim that there is only one example of Roman ingratitude, that of Scipio.[78] For Coriolanus and Camillus were driven into exile, not out of ingratitude, but for offenses that both had committed against the populace.[79] Coriolanus was not pardoned because he had always had a hostile attitude towards the populace; but Camillus was not only recalled, but throughout the remainder of his life he was honored as if he were sole ruler. But the ingratitude shown towards Scipio was the result of a suspicion the citizens began to have about him, one they had not had about the others. This was because Scipio had defeated such a mighty enemy, and victory in so long and dangerous a war had given him such a remarkable reputation, which was enhanced by the speed of his success and by the esteem that his youth, his prudence, and his other remarkable virtues [*virtudi*] had acquired for him. These factors were so important that the constituted authorities in Rome, not to mention anyone else, were frightened of his personal authority. This state of affairs displeased all wise men, as something completely unheard of in Rome. His position seemed so exceptional that Cato the Elder, who was regarded as a saint, was the first to attack him, the first to say that a city could not call itself free if one of its citizens could intimidate the authorities.[80] If the people of Rome followed Cato's advice in this matter, then they should not be blamed for it, since, as I said above, peoples and rulers who are ungrateful because they are suspicious have no choice. Let me conclude this chapter by repeating that this vice of ingratitude is derived either from stinginess or from suspicion; but one can see that popular governments will never be guilty of it from stinginess, and they will be less often guilty of it because they are suspicious than rulers will be, for they have less reason to be suspicious, as I will explain below.

78. See Livy, bk. 38, chs. 50–60.
79. Coriolanus in 491 B.C., Camillus in 391 B.C.
80. In 189 B.C.

Chapter Thirty-Two: On how a republic or a ruler should not postpone treating its subjects well until the government's time of need.

A policy of being generous to the populace in times of danger worked out well for the Romans. When Porsenna came to attack Rome in order to restore the Tarquins, the senate was concerned the populace might prefer to have monarchy restored rather than bear the burden of the war. In order to ensure its support, they removed the tax on salt and other duties, saying that the poor did enough to benefit the public if they fed their own children.[81] In gratitude for this assistance, the populace proved ready to bear siege, hunger, and war.

But it would be wrong for anyone, relying on this precedent, to postpone until danger is at hand the measures necessary to win the support of the populace, for he will never succeed with this policy, even though it worked for the Romans. For each person will conclude that he does not have you to thank for the good you do him, but your enemies. They will all be afraid that, when the crisis has passed, you will take back whatever you have been forced to give them. They will feel no obligation to you at all. The reason why this policy worked out well for the Romans was that their government was new and not yet well established. The populace had seen that other laws to benefit them had already been passed, such as the law giving a right of appeal to the people. So they could persuade themselves that the good that had been done them was not so much caused by the arrival of the enemy as by the senate's desire to treat them well. Moreover, people had a fresh memory of what it was like to be ruled by kings. They remembered having been scorned and ill-treated in numerous ways. Because similar circumstances rarely obtain, it will not often be the case that similar policies will be successful.

So anyone who holds power, whether in a republic or as a ruler, ought to ask himself ahead of time what hostile circumstances he may find himself in and what sorts of men he may have to turn to for support in tough times, and then treat these people in the fashion in which he judges he will be obliged to treat them then, when facing unfavorable conditions. Anyone who acts differently, whether ruler or republic, but especially a ruler, and then believes, on the strength of this example, that when danger comes he will be able to win back support by treating people well, is making a mistake, for not only will he not be able to win over support, but his attempts to do so will accelerate his own destruction.

81. In 508 B.C.

Chapter Thirty-Four: On how dictatorships were beneficial, not harmful, for the Roman republic; and on how powers that are seized from the hands of the citizens against their will are destructive of political freedom, but those they freely vote to give up are not.

Those Romans who found a way to introduce the institution of the dictator to their city have been criticized by some writers, for it has been held responsible for the eventual development of tyranny in Rome. They point out that the first tyrant to establish himself there ruled under the cover of this office of dictator, and they say that without this pretext Caesar would never have been able to find any public appointment that would have provided legitimacy for his tyranny. But those who hold this view have not examined the question carefully, and those who believe them have been misled. For it was neither the name nor the office of dictator that enslaved Rome, but the right that dictators claimed, without authorization from the citizens, to stay in office for a lengthy period. If there had been no title of dictator in Rome, Rome's overmighty citizens would have made up an alternative one, for power easily acquires a title, while titles do not convey power. If you look you will see that the dictators, as long as they were appointed according to the constitutional procedures, and did not appoint themselves, were always good for the city. Those appointments made and those powers claimed by non-constitutional means harm republics; but those that are constitutional do no harm. So in Rome centuries passed without a single dictator doing anything but good to the republic.

The reasons for this are obvious. First, for a citizen to want to break the law and claim for himself extralegal authority, he must have many qualities he simply never would have in a republic that was not corrupt. For to form this intention he must needs be extraordinarily rich, and he must have the support of numerous supporters and adherents, which he could not have if the laws were obeyed. Even if he could have, men of this sort are so intimidating that in a free election men will not willingly vote for them. Moreover, the dictator was appointed for a fixed period and not for life, and he was appointed to deal solely with the particular problem that had made necessary his appointment. He was given authority to take decisions on his own in order to deal with an urgent crisis, to act as he saw fit without consulting others, and if he decided to punish you, you had no right of appeal. But he could not do anything that would undermine the state, such as reduce the powers of the senate or the populace, or abolish the ancient institutions

of the city and make new ones. So, taking together the short time of his dictatorship, his limited powers, and the fact that the people of Rome were not corrupt, it was impossible for him to exceed his powers and do harm to the city, and the record shows that he always left things better than he found them.

The truth is that this is one of the institutions that deserves to be added to the list of factors that helped cause the greatness of the Roman state, for without such an institution it is difficult for cities to cope with exceptional events. The established institutions in republics move slowly, for no single committee or official can on its own take charge of everything. Most of the time they have to cooperate to get things done, and time slips by while they try to agree on what to do. The result is that it is terribly dangerous to leave matters in their hands when there is a crisis to be dealt with that leaves no time for delay. So all republics should establish a similar institution. The Venetian republic, which is the best of the modern ones, has ensured that in times of emergency a small group of citizens can take the necessary decisions, provided they are unanimous, without further consultation.[82] If a republic does not have some provision of this sort one is faced with a choice between being destroyed while obeying the constitution or avoiding destruction by violating the constitution. No republican should ever reconcile himself to the notion that it might be necessary to govern by extralegal means. Even if acting outside the constitution may have good consequences in the short term, in the long run it represents a dangerous precedent. People begin to make a habit of ignoring the constitution when it gets in the way of doing good; later they use this to legitimate ignoring the constitution when it gets in the way of their doing harm. No republic can claim to be perfect if its laws do not make provision for any possible eventuality, if they do not lay down correct procedures for dealing with unforeseen events.

So I conclude by saying those republics that do not allow for the establishment of a dictatorship or some other form of emergency rule in time of danger will always go under when the crisis comes. It is worth noting the procedures the Romans established for electing a dictator when they invented this new office,[83] for they dealt with the matter wisely. The problem was that the creation of a dictatorship was a blow to the status of the consuls in office at the time, for they were downgraded from being the supreme magistrates to having to take orders like everyone else. Because there was concern that this would

82. The Council of Ten, created in 1310.

83. Livy thinks in 501 B.C.

be a cause of hostility between citizens, it was decided that the consuls should be the ones with the authority to elect a dictator, for it was felt that in a crisis where Rome had need of an absolute ruler the consuls would be eager to appoint one, and that, if it were they who had taken the decision, then they would have less reason to resent it. For those wounds you inflict on yourself by choice and of your own free will cause a great deal less pain than those others inflict on you, and the same goes for every other setback. However, in the last years of the republic, the Romans, instead of appointing a dictator, used to give arbitrary authority to one of the consuls by passing the motion: "Let the consul ensure that the republic comes to no harm."[84] To return to my subject, I conclude that Rome's neighbors, in trying to defeat her, pushed her into changing her constitution with the result that she was not only better able to defend herself but was able to attack them with more strength, better judgment, and greater unity.

Chapter Forty-Two: On how easy it is for men to be corrupted.

One should also note, while we are discussing the Decemviri, how easy it is for men to be corrupted.[85] Their characters are quickly transformed, no matter how good and well-trained they were. Think of how the young men that Appius had gathered around him began to be well-disposed towards tyranny because they stood to gain some small benefit by it, and of how Quintus Fabius, one of the second group of Decemviri, who was one of the best of men, was blinded by a little bit of ambition, and was persuaded by Appius's malice to change his good habits into evil ones, and become like his new mentor. If they consider such matters carefully, those who pass laws for republics or for kingdoms will be all the more eager to put a brake on human appetites, and deprive men of any hope that they can go wrong without being punished.

Chapter Forty-Three: On how those who fight for their own glory make good and faithful soldiers.

One should also consider, while thinking over what I have said above, what a fundamental difference there is between an army that is content and fights for its own glory and one that is ill-disposed and fights to

84. The first occasion appears to be in 121 B.C.

85. The Ten were first elected to reform the laws in 452 B.C.; when a commission was again elected in 451 they proceeded to establish a virtual dictatorship.

satisfy someone else's ambition. For while the Roman armies were in the habit of always winning so long as Rome was ruled by the consuls, under the Decemviri they always lost. From this example one can get some indication of why mercenary soldiers are useless, for they have no reason to stand firm apart from the little bit of pay that you give them. This is not and cannot be a strong enough motive to make them faithful, and it cannot make them so devoted to you that they are prepared to die for you. In an army where the soldiers do not feel enough affection for the ruler for whom they fight to become his eager supporters, you will never find sufficient firmness of purpose [*virtù*] for them to withstand an enemy who is at all determined [*virtuoso*]. And because this love and this eagerness can only develop among your own subjects it is essential, if you want to hold on to power—the argument applies equally to republics and to kingdoms—to enlist your own subjects. It is a simple fact that all those who have made major gains with their armies have done this. The Roman armies when the Decemviri were in charge were no less skillful [*virtù*] than before; but they no longer had the same attitude, and so they did not achieve what they were accustomed to achieving. But as soon as the rule of the Decemviri came to an end, and they began to fight again as free men, they recovered their old spirit, and, as a result, their undertakings once more had happy outcomes, as they always had done in the past.

Chapter Forty-Six: On how men advance from one aspiration to another. At first they want only to defend themselves; later, they want to attack others.

When the Roman people had recovered their liberty, and returned to their original condition, except improved in so far as they had made many new laws that reinforced the authority of the populace, it seemed reasonable that Roman politics would quiet down for a while. In practice, however, the opposite proved to be the case, for every day new conflicts and discords broke out. Because Titus Livy very sensibly explains why this happened, it seems to me relevant at this point to report to you his precise words.[86] He says that it was always the case that if the populace were humiliated, the nobles grew haughty, and vice versa. Because the populace remained peaceably within their assigned limits, the young nobles began to insult them, and the tribunes were able to do little to defend them, for they, too, were under attack. The nobility, for its part, even though it thought that its younger members

86. Livy, bk. 3, ch. 65.

were overdoing it a bit, nevertheless was not distressed at the idea that if one group was going to make gains at the expense of the other, then it was they who stood to make gains at the expense of the populace. So the desire to defend their rights meant that each group advanced to the point where it oppressed the other.

The way these things work is this: When men are simply trying to avoid having reason to fear their opponents, they begin to give their opponents grounds to fear them. In defending themselves against attack, they attack others and put them on the defensive, as if there were no choice but to be either the attacker or the victim. So you can see one way in which republics fall apart; and also how men advance from one aspiration to another. There is nothing truer than the opinion Sallust attributes to Caesar: "All bad outcomes derive from good beginnings."[87] As I have said, those citizens who live in a republic and are ambitious for themselves start out by trying to ensure that they cannot be attacked. They want not only to be safe from other private citizens, but even to be immune from prosecution. In order to accomplish this, they seek allies. These they acquire in ways that seem outwardly honest, either by lending private citizens money or by defending them against the powerful. Because this seems like a good way to behave [*pare virtuoso*], everyone is easily taken in by it, and so nothing is done to put a stop to it. So, an individual who carries on in this fashion, without being stopped, soon accumulates so much influence that other private citizens are afraid of him, and even government officials have to give him special treatment. Once he has got into this position, without anyone having taken the measures needed to put a stop to his accumulation of influence, it becomes very dangerous to do anything about it, for the reasons I explained above. It is dangerous to try to tackle a problem in a political system once it has become well-established.

In the end, it becomes straightforward: You must either eliminate him and run the risk of destroying yourself before you know it, or allow him to continue to accumulate power, in which case it will become obvious that he has mastered you, unless his death or some other lucky accident comes to your rescue. For once you have reached this point where both citizens and government officials are frightened of going against his wishes or even those of his allies, then it is relatively straightforward for him to ensure that everyone makes the decisions he wants made, and everyone turns against those he wants attacked. So a republic ought to have among its institutions one whose task it is to ensure citizens cannot do harm under the pretence of doing good, and that

87. Sallust, *Bellum Catalinarium*, ch. 51.