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The Armed Founder versus the Catonic Hero: Machiavelli and Rousseau on Popular Leadership

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I. INTRODUCTION

In *The Prince* and *Discourses*, Machiavelli disclosed a political education opposed to the prevailing Christian understanding that was dedicated to the renaissance of Roman republican virtue. The core of Machiavelli's doctrine of education is republican in spirit—albeit harsh, expansive republicanism. Its periphery, however, allows for the alternative of princely rule—whether kingship tied to a notion of the common good or tyranny—under some circumstances.

Most of Machiavelli's unscholarly readers, however, have concluded after reading *The Prince* that his advocacy of tyranny is the center of his consciously revolutionary teaching. A majority of Machiavelli's scholarly readers, on the other hand, have sought to explain away his simultaneous recommendation of republican statesmanship, kingship, and tyranny by viewing the latter two as subordinate means to the attainment of republicanism.¹ Rousseau was one of the first and most influential thinkers to encourage this now dominant scholarly view of Machiavelli's theory. In putting forward his own republican political education in the *Discourse on Political Economy* and the *Social Contract*, Rousseau considered Machiavelli an important ally who only feigned to give advice to kings and tyrants—the better to teach the people how to attain and safeguard their freedom.

In the following analysis, I will attempt to show that there are suggestive parallels or family resemblances between Machiavelli's and Rousseau's doctrines of popular statesmanship, more specifically, of their notions of the armed prophet or founder, the senatorial hero, and the legislator. I will also contend, however, that Rousseau's teaching gives primacy to a tragic, inward-looking virtue which is quite foreign to Machiavelli's own preference for a daring and warlike virtue that essentially aims at overcoming the power of fortune in political affairs to the greatest extent possible.

II. POPULAR STATESMANSHIP VERSUS TYRANNY

Rousseau makes clear in the *Political Economy* that he and Machiavelli are on the same side—upholders of popular freedom and opponents of tyranny. Only

1. Cf. Harvey C. Mansfield's introduction to his translation of *The Prince* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. vii–viii.

statesmanship based on the general will, says Rousseau, is legitimate: the kind of statesmanship characteristic of a regime in which there is “a unity of interest and will” between the people and its leaders. Nonetheless, the very opposite, tyranny, has prevailed in the historical practice of politics, and tyrannical maxims are inscribed in the archives of history and “the satires of Machiavelli” (P, III, 247).²

Machiavelli, Rousseau suggests, is writing on two levels: on the surface level, he teaches princes how to dominate peoples; but on a second, deeper level he censures tyrannical domination from the perspective of popular republicanism. Rousseau tells us in the *Social Contract* that he was convinced of this interpretation of Machiavelli’s teaching from comparing *The Prince* to the *Discourses on Livy* and the *Florentine Histories*. This comparative analysis, he claimed, showed that “in pretending to give lessons to kings, [Machiavelli] gave some very good ones to the people.” Machiavelli, the lover of liberty and profound political thinker, was the enemy of the papal court and of every other king’s court (Book III, Chapter 6: P, III, 409, 1480).³

In his comparative reading, one would surmise, Rousseau was especially moved by Machiavelli’s praise in the *Florentine Histories* for those leading Florentine citizens, who in their city’s conflict with the pope, acted so as to demonstrate that they cared for their earthly fatherland more than for their souls (Book III, Chapter 7). More importantly, Rousseau could be confident of his interpretation of Machiavelli’s teaching as republican in view of the latter’s pathbreaking defense of popular republicanism in the *Discourses*. In this work, attempting to defend popular rule against the charges of “all the writers” (Book I, Chapter 58; p. 262), Machiavelli declares that it is

not without reason one likens the voice of a people to the voice of God: because one sees that a universal opinion [*una opinione universale*] arrives at marvelous results in its prognostications; so much so that it seems as if by some occult virtue it [the people] foresaw its own evil and good. With regard to its judgment, when two speakers of equal skill are heard advocating different alternatives, very rarely does one find it [the people] failing to adopt the better opinion, and incapable of appreciating the truth it hears. And, if in bold things and those which appear useful, as it is said above, it errs,

2. See the *Œuvres complètes de J.-J. Rousseau*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond, 4 vols. thus far (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959–). P, III, 247 means vol. III, p. 247, etc.

For Machiavelli I have used the *Opere*, ed. Sergio Bertelli (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1960). References for the *Prince* and *Discourses* are to vol. I and for *Florentine History*, vol. VII.

For the *Political Economy*, I have consulted the Cole Everyman trans. and the Masters St. Martin’s trans. For the *Prince*, I have usually cited Alvarez’s trans. (University of Dallas Press, 1980); for the *Discourses* I cited Fr. Walker’s trans., most accessible in the Penguin Books ed.

For Plutarch’s *Lives*, I have used the Modern Library ed., trans. John Dryden and rev. Arthur Hugh Clough, pp. 918–60.

3. On Rousseau’s relationship to Machiavelli, see the excellent survey of the works by Paolo M. Cucchi, “Rousseau, lecteur de Machiavel,” in *Rousseau et son temps*, ed. M. Launay (Paris, 1968), pp. 17–35; and as background to satire, Garrett Mattingly, “Machiavelli’s *Prince*: Political Science or Political Satire?” *The American Scholar*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Autumn 1958), 482–91.

many times more errs a prince in his own passions, and these are much stronger than those of a people.

It is found, too, that in the election of magistrates the people makes far better choice than does the prince; nor can the people ever be persuaded that it is good to appoint to such an office a man of infamous life or corrupt habits, whereas a prince may easily and in a vast variety of ways be persuaded to do so (I, 58; p. 264).

A people, says Machiavelli, can effectively be guided in its future actions by that universal or general opinion it has about what is good or evil for it.

Though on balance a people is less subject to blind passions than kings and less likely to choose incompetent or infamous and corrupt statesmen, still Machiavelli grants that a people can make mistakes. It can err most easily when deciding foreign affairs, when bold and useful projects are at issue. But, as well, a people can make mistakes when deliberating about domestic matters. For, Machiavelli asserts, a people will usually adopt the better opinion and be able to distinguish truth from falsehood, provided the speakers who are putting forth various alternatives are of equal skill—which, of course, is not always the case.

Thus Machiavelli stipulates that for popular rule to be defensible, the people must be “well-ordered” (*Dis.* I, 58; p. 264). That is to say, it must not be corrupt, but rather law-abiding and united. And to become united, a people needs heads or leaders (*Dis.* I, 57; pp. 260–61; cf. I, 1–2):

in goodness and glory the people is by far superior [to princes]. And if princes are superior to peoples in ordering laws, forming codes of civic life, establishing statutes and new orders, peoples are so much superior in maintaining things once established, that it indubitably adds to the glory of those who ordered them (*Dis.* I, 58; p. 265).

In this context, by “princes” Machiavelli means the leading actors in any regime: armed prophets or founders, statesmen, and legislators. For a republican regime to be well-ordered, there must be a reciprocal, symbiotic, and dynamic relationship between the few and the many grounded on their respective needs and powers. The princely leaders have the power stemming from their virtue to order the people into an effective whole either through new orders or reformed ones. For its part, the people has the goodness to manifest its gratitude towards its leaders as it preserves their orders—new or renewed—and gives them glorious recognition in the present and future. This reciprocal relationship—in which one side contributes the conditions for order, prosperity, and independence based on imperial power, while the other side provides stable adherence and support—is Machiavelli’s formula for effectual justice (*Dis.* I, 1; pp. 131–32). It is, moreover, Machiavelli’s version of an implicit social contract between the two essential “humors” that constitute society: the great who wish to dominate and the common people who desire not to be dominated (cf. *Pr.*, Ch. 9).

Like Machiavelli, Rousseau sees the broad outlines of a solution to the problem of political unity in the reciprocal relationship of the exceptionally virtuous few and the many who have the potential to acquire a popular or general will. In

the introductory section of the *Political Economy*, Rousseau for the first time mentions the notion of the general will as that “common self” that gives life to the state as a moral being, caring for the preservation and well-being of the whole and of each part (P, III, 245). Conformity to the dictates of the general will provides the standard for just as opposed to tyrannical statesmanship.

The general will is derived from Rousseau’s reflections on modern natural right in relation to the ancient alternative. If we judge by his first use of the term, *la volonté générale*, in the *Political Economy*, then it is clear that he intends it as an ideal standard that is meant to correct the atomistic individualism of Hobbes by the application of the Platonic-Aristotelian emphasis on the unifying character of the idea of justice (cf. P, III, 244–45, 248–49). Nonetheless, the passages that first delineate Rousseau’s understanding of the general will echo and have a family resemblance to Machiavelli’s teaching on the popular will in *Discourses* I, 58.

Now, in clarifying what he means by the general will in the *Political Economy*, Rousseau distinguishes a variety of associations and wills. Political society is not homogeneous, he maintains. Rather, it is composed of a variety of interrelated, smaller societies—permanent or temporary, formal or tacit—which modify in many ways “the appearances of the public will,” that is, of the general will (P, III, 246). United by their common interests, these partial societies are animated by a will that is general from the perspective of its members, but particular and hence pernicious from the perspective of the whole society:

[A person] . . . can be a devout priest, a brave soldier, or a zealous patrician, and a bad citizen. [Their] . . . deliberation can be advantageous to the small community, and very pernicious to the large. It is true that particular societies being always subordinate to those which contain them, one should obey the latter in preference to the others, that the duties of a citizen go before those of a senator, and those of man before those of the citizen; but unfortunately personal interest is found always in inverse proportion to duty, and increases to the extent that the association becomes more narrow and the engagement less sacred: invincible proof that the most general will is also always the most just, and the voice of the people is in fact the voice of God (P, III, 246).

Rousseau as much as Machiavelli claims that the universal opinion of a people is the ultimate and most authoritative source of political morality. Indeed, Rousseau is even more emphatic than Machiavelli, employing an identity instead of a simile (the voice of the people “is in fact the voice of God”). Furthermore, Rousseau is unambiguous in affirming that the declarations of the general will are only the universal opinion of that particular people as to what is just, for he contends that such declarations may well be faulty from the perspective of foreigners (P, III, 245). Though Rousseau raises the un-Machiavellian notion of the possibility of a unified earthly city with its universal general will overcoming the divisions caused by the general wills of different peoples, he quickly sets aside this notion and conducts the rest of his inquiry on the assumption of the existence of distinct popular wills (P, III, 245).

Third, like Machiavelli, Rousseau appropriates religious language to describe the popular will. Pointing with a sense of awe to the sacred character of the people's declarations, Rousseau stresses the same occult, popular excellence underlined by Machiavelli (cf. P, III, 248).

Fourth, in the *Political Economy* Rousseau echoes Machiavelli's concern that the people can be "seduced" by the eloquence of clever speakers to make bad judgments about common affairs (P, III, 246). And, later in the *Social Contract*, Rousseau repeats Machiavelli's key contention in *Discourses* I, 58 that unlike kings who choose incompetent or corrupt magistrates, "the people errs much less than the prince." For, says Rousseau the people elevates only those of true merit to head a republican government (Bk. III, Ch. 6; P, III, 410).

These family resemblances, echoes, or parallels in Rousseau's teaching of Machiavelli's premise of popular statesmanship are accompanied, moreover, by Rousseau's acceptance of Machiavelli's notion of a unity of interest and will between leaders and the people—albeit a unity grounded on a division of political labor. As Machiavelli had done, Rousseau asserts the need for a political unity that transcends the divisions of particular associations and classes. And it is only the "virtue"—that exceptional, "sublime," rare, heroic virtue—of armed founders, legislators, and senatorial statesmen which can accomplish this unifying task (cf. *PE*, P, III, 248; *SC*, II, 7; P, III, 381).

III. THE ARMED FOUNDER

Rousseau adumbrates his notion of the armed founder while explicating a maxim of popular statesmanship, "Follow in everything the general will," which he restates in the form that the government's "administration be in conformity with the laws" of the general will (*PE*, P, III, 251). The laws are the central concern; Rousseau initially seems to view the role of the *chef* or head as passive, an instrument of the laws established by the legislator. The leader must simply, it seems, learn not to employ a disproportionate amount of force to uphold the law and to retain his impartiality under all circumstances.

However, in the final, lengthy paragraph of this first section of the *Political Economy*, a Machiavellian leitmotiv emerges:

If it is good to know how to use men as they are, it is worth much more still to make them what there is a need that they be; the most absolute authority is that which penetrates to the very interior of man, and is exercised no less on the will than on actions. It is certain that the people are in the long run what the government makes them be. Warriors, citizens, men when it wants; populace and *canaille* when it pleases it; and every prince who despises his subjects dishonors himself in showing that he did not know how to render them worthy of esteem (P, III, 251).

According to Rousseau "the great art of ancient governments" (P, III, 252) can be imitated by modern leaders; they can mold the wills of essentially malleable men

into the will to generalize—the unified popular will—of citizens who will desire the common good and fight to defend their homeland. This formation of the citizen's psyche and body is necessary because naturally men are not political. Above all, for the citizen to become political, he must learn to respect the laws; “the first of the laws is to respect the laws,” but this disposition cannot be engendered by written laws (P, III, 249). What is required to make men political is a comprehensive fashioning by morals and manners appropriate to republican warriors and citizens. Addressing himself to every potentially heroic prince, Rousseau advocates a break with the mercenary politics of the age that gave rise to disunited *canaille* and masses: “form men, then, if you wish to command men; if you want the laws obeyed, make them loved” (P, III, 251–52).

Undoubtedly, in this call to the virtuous few to overcome the corruption of the age, Rousseau—albeit with some indirection—is calling for the exercise of that active heroic virtue he analyzed in his earlier *Discourse on the Virtue Most Necessary to the Hero*. In this work he stresses that the heroic founder is an expert wielder of force, although his defining virtue of strength of soul cannot properly be reduced to physical courage (cf. P, II, 1263, 1268, 1272). Rousseau contends that

Men do not govern themselves thus by abstract views. They are only made happy by being constrained to be so, and they must be made to experience happiness for them to love it. Here lies the business and talents of the hero; it is often with force in his hand that he puts himself in a condition to receive the blessings of men whom he first constrains to carry the yoke of the laws, in order finally to submit them to the authority of reason (P, II, 1263–64).

According to this passage, the heroic leader must employ force initially in order to establish the rule of law.⁴ Once the people experience the happiness or common good that results from obeying the laws, then they will learn to love them and justify them with their reason.

It is true that in the *Political Economy* Rousseau does not emphasize the use of force as he had done in the *Discourse on the Hero*, and instead stresses the use of austere and peaceful morals and manners in making the laws obeyed and loved. Nonetheless, in the *Political Economy* he is wholly explicit about the need for citizens to be warriors first and last, coming to the aid of their fatherland when it needs their arms (cf. section II, P, III, 261). To fashion warriors, however, the leader must be a warrior as well, and know how to wield force expertly (such as Romulus, who is referred to as a founder in section III).

This heroic virtue Rousseau calls for in the *Political Economy* reminds us of Machiavelli's advocacy of heroic leadership to put an end to the corruption of his

4. See David R. Cameron, “The Hero in Rousseau's Political Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 45, no. 3 (July–September 1984), p. 401; and for an excellent study of the *Discourse on the Hero* that places it in its historical and literary contexts, see Diane Beelen Woody's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, *Problématique du héros dans les écrits de J.-J. Rousseau* (University of Toronto, 1981).

times in *The Prince*. Let us read the final chapter of *The Prince* according to the interpretive mode Rousseau espouses. In it (Chapter 26, whose heading translated from the Latin original is: “Exhortation to take hold of Italy and liberate her from the barbarians”), on the surface level, Machiavelli exhorts Lorenzo de’ Medici, ruling prince of Florence, to unite Italy and regain her ancient glory. What is needed, says Machiavelli, is a virtuous leader of the greatness of Moses, Cyrus, and Theseus (all viewed, along with Romulus, as armed prophets in Chapter 6). Indeed, such virtue is present in the house of the de’ Medici, in Lorenzo himself, and he need only follow the examples of greatness which preceded him (*Pr.*, 102). Then Machiavelli asserts

at present we have witnessed extraordinary happenings without example brought about by God: the sea has opened; a cloud has cleared your path; the rock has poured water; it has rained manna here; everything has run in favor of your greatness. The rest you must do yourself. God does not want to do everything, so as not to take from us our free will and a part of that glory that belongs to us (*Pr.*, 103).

If Lorenzo’s supposed greatness, however, depends upon the occurrence of these extraordinary happenings without example, it is questionable. For these happenings were preceded in sacred history, and are reported in the Bible as experienced by Moses and the Jewish people on the way to their promised land.

To be sure, moreover, Machiavelli is not reporting their occurrence a second time; in fact, in inventing a second occurrence he ridicules the first. Above all, Machiavelli is making fun of Lorenzo, a petty autocrat who hardly possesses the virtue required to overcome the corruption in his native land. Indeed, this ridicule or satirical treatment of Lorenzo is not only based on the fact that the parallel between Moses’ divine destiny and Lorenzo’s is false. Furthermore, in likening Lorenzo to Moses in such a ridiculous fashion, Machiavelli may nonetheless be saying to Lorenzo in an ironic manner that, just as Moses did not reach the promised land, neither would he attain the goal of a unified Italy.

Machiavelli, then, is not seriously advising Lorenzo in *The Prince*. In the following passage, addressing himself to men more capable politically than Lorenzo, he reveals what he really intends beyond his satire:

it is no wonder if during the numerous revolutions in Italy and during the numerous manoeuvres of war, it always seemed that her military strength is extinguished. This arises from the fact that her old orders were not good, and that there was no one who knew how to discover new ones; and nothing brings as much honor to a newly rising man, as do the new laws and the new orders discovered by him (*Pr.*, 103).

What is required, according to Machiavelli, are leaders who will be political artisans and put form in the prime object of politics constituted by a whole people (in this case, the Italian people). In alluding to Roman virtue, moreover, Machiavelli shows his preference for republican modes and orders (*Pr.*, 105).

Rousseau, then, is in fundamental agreement with Machiavelli’s teaching that

the art of the few is necessary to create the foundation for the life of citizens and warriors, a civic life according to the rule of laws accepted by the popular will as just, instead of a corrupt mercenary politics based on the collection and payment of money. Though Machiavelli's concern was more in the direction of foreign policy (the mercenary soldiers in Italy that precluded the attainment of national independence), and Rousseau's in that of domestic policy (monetary corruption associated with the system of taxation—as he elaborates in section III of the *Political Economy*), nevertheless both view the problem of political corruption as requiring an armed prophet to provide the initial solution.

In the *Social Contract* Rousseau leaves a place for the Machiavellian armed founder in his own theory, but emphasizes the notion even less than he had in the *Political Economy*. At the periphery of his discussion of the legislator, Rousseau hints at the necessity of an armed founder who would be a leader of warriors, and whose activity would precede that of the legislator. To found a nation successfully, he says, remember that imitative genius will not suffice. What is required is “true genius,” that “which creates and makes everything out of nothing” (*celui qui crée et fait tout de rien*) (Book II, Chap. 8; P, III, 386). Unfortunately, he concludes, Peter the Great had only imitative genius, and thus failed to understand that the Russians first had to be made into warriors, then civilized with the appropriate laws and institutions (cf. IV, 4, note; P, III, 444).

IV. THE SENATORIAL HERO

The armed founder is not Rousseau's central model of popular leadership; rather, it is the senatorial, republican hero—above all as exemplified by Cato the Younger. Rousseau considers Catonic virtue to be the epitome of political virtue in the *Political Economy*. Political virtue requires that “the particular will conform to the general will” (P, III, 252). At the level of heroism such virtue demands that one act as Cato did, giving up his life to affirm the general good, even when Caesar had won the physical battle on behalf of a tyranny that negated the popular will.

It is clear from the latter formulation that for Rousseau “virtue” is simply the will to generalize one's concerns in times of peace and of war; this is the excellence of the citizen that alone interests him in the *Political Economy*. And political virtue or the will to generalize, he contends, requires love of the fatherland as its passionate fuel or energy (P, III, 254). For this love to develop among the citizens, however, first of all the leaders must act in the manner of the most virtuous and talented Roman senators, like Cato, protecting the rights and liberties of the citizens against would-be tyrants, not like modern, mercenary politicians.

Blinded by their ambition to acquire and maintain power, modern politicians confound their glory with the misery of the people, says Rousseau, and resort to using a “dark art” consisting of force and fraud (P, III, 253). This blind quest for

power and glory may result in the acquisition of power, but not of glory, for such methods produce a fragmented society of self-interested individuals unable to glorify the leader. Thus

A herdsman governs his dogs and his herds, and is only the last of men. If it be a fine thing to command, it is when those who obey us can honor us: show respect then to your fellow citizens, and you will make yourself respectable; show respect to liberty, and your power will increase daily: never exceed your rights and they will soon become unlimited (P, III, 258).

Rousseau, we see, fully accepts the Machiavellian doctrine that political ambition and the exercise of power are good things which can be satisfied either in a competent way (e.g., the leaders of the Roman republic) or an incompetent manner (e.g., Louis XII of France) (*Pr.*, Ch. 3).

All men, says Machiavelli, seek material things and glory (*Pr.*, Ch. 25), but that political actor who decides “to kill his fellow citizens, to betray his friends, to be without faith, without pity, without religion” can acquire “imperium but not glory” (*Pr.*, Ch. 8; 42). If one wants to acquire immortal glory, *The Prince* tells us (if we read it as having a republican intention), one must cultivate that greatness and nobility of mind prevalent in the Roman senate. Even Scipio’s easy nature “would have in time wronged . . . [his] fame and glory, had he continued with it in the imperium, but since he lived under the government of the Senate, these harmful qualities were not only hidden, but brought him glory” (*Pr.*, ch. 17; pp. 102–3 of the Alvarez trans.). For, when one’s ambition is exercised in the context of a republican senate, the distinct strengths of each compensate for the unique weaknesses of each:

For this reason a republic has a fuller life and enjoys good fortune for a longer time than a principality, since it is better able to adapt itself to diverse circumstances owing to the diversity found among its citizens than a prince can do. For a man who is accustomed to act in one particular way, never changes. Hence, when times change and no longer suit his ways, he is inevitably ruined (*Discourses* III, 9; Walker trans.).

Rousseau, as much as Machiavelli, then, is arguing that political efficacy *and* glory can alone be attained if one exercises power according to the model of a Roman senate that respects the rights of citizens in the assemblies (P, III, 257).

Citizens, then, will be virtuous if they love their homeland. They will love their homeland if the leaders protect and enhance their interests in life, property, and, most importantly, individual liberty. But this is not enough. In addition, love as a bond energizing citizen virtue requires the concrete examples of heroically virtuous citizens who provide a model of emulation for the others:

everywhere where the lesson is not upheld by authority, and the precept by example, the instruction remains without fruit, and even virtue loses its influence in the mouth of him who does not practice it. But let illustrious warriors, bent under the weight of their laurels, preach courage; let upright magistrates, grown gray in purple and on the tribu-

nals, teach justice; the ones and the others will thus form virtuous successors, and transmit from age to age to the following generations, the experience and talents of the leaders, the courage and virtue of the citizens, and the common emulation of all to live and die for the fatherland (P, III, 261).

Only when there is such concrete public education in the context of a political society that protects the rights of citizens, encourages humanity or compassion for one's own (P, II, 254–55), and satisfies the desire for rooted fraternity (P, III, 258–59), will love of the fatherland and the consequent citizen virtue develop.

To clarify the conjunction of love of the fatherland and political virtue Rousseau contrasts Cato the Younger with Socrates, Cato who opposed the tyrannical designs of Caesar and Pompey and whose example pierced Rousseau's heart to his dying day (cf. P, I, 1134).

Catonic virtue is put into relief in the *Political Economy* by being contrasted with the pure virtue of Socrates (P, III, 255).⁵ The philosopher Socrates' fatherland was the whole world, says Rousseau, as he went about in search of the truth. His happiness had its source in the exercise of such pure intellectual virtue, in seeking after individual perfection, though he fought the sophists and taught a few individuals. Socrates proved his total dedication by dying for the philosophical way of life and the truth. In contrast, Cato was totally committed to his particular fatherland—Rome. Living completely for his homeland, Cato discovered his personal happiness in the happiness of his fellow citizens. As long as he was able, he defended the republic, its laws, and its liberty. Appearing like “a god among mortals,” he stood his ground in the senate (Rousseau implies from Plutarch's account), uncorrupted, impervious to the blandishments of Pompey and Caesar—who sought to flatter and bribe the senators and people with the results of their foreign conquests. In the end, though, when Caesar and “his satellites” (cf. sect. III, P, III, 269) triumphed and enslaved Rome, Cato would not give Caesar his greatest victory: rather than accept (as claims Plutarch) the salvation of his life through Caesar's customary clemency towards the virtuous, he chose instead to commit suicide—after reading the *Phaedo* several times, a dialogue in which Plato's Socrates discusses death and the possible immortality of individual souls.

After developing this contrast between the individualistic Socrates and the communitarian Cato, Rousseau concludes that while a worthy student of Socrates would be the most virtuous or excellent human being among his contemporaries, a worthy emulator of Cato would be “the greatest.” Though somewhat ambivalent in his judgment about the relative value of these two models of virtue, hence claiming that we should be instructed by the first and led by the second, in the final analysis Rousseau avers that we should prefer and celebrate the worthy emulator of Cato. “For a people [consisting solely] of wise men has never

5. See Claude Pichois and René Pintard, *Jean-Jacques entre Socrate et Caton* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1972), pp. 48–64.

been instituted, but it is not impossible to make a people happy," when such republican leaders as Cato are guiding the political community (P, III, 245).

Rousseau views Cato as the model of excellence, then, from the perspective of the happiness of the people, but in so doing Rousseau has introduced an aspect of his general "myth of antiquity,"⁶ especially of the Roman republic as truly democratic and the senatorial leadership as concerned with the common people's interests. For even from Plutarch's account, it is clear that Cato cared too much about his character and dignity to court the people's votes, was the first to arrive and last to leave the Senate, and would never consent to economic measures that benefited the common people, if it was likely such measures would upset the constitutional order centered in the collective leadership of the senate under the law (*Lives*, pp. 946–47, 936, 928).

Cato's perspective, according to Plutarch, was that of the conservative senators who, to be sure, showed humanity towards the common people, but were fundamentally dedicated to senatorial ascendancy (*Lives*, p. 933). Rousseau's Cato takes his bearings by the happiness of the common people. The mediating term accounting for this mythical reinterpretation is Machiavelli's popular republicanism based on the Roman model (although I do not want to discount other influences, above all that of Bodin and Montesquieu). Rousseau, as we have seen, reflected on Machiavelli's *Prince* and *Discourses* as background material for developing his own maxims of popular leadership. And he reiterates here in his reformed model of Cato, of senatorial leadership, Machiavelli's general claim that a civil order can be firmly based on the satisfaction of the people's desires for life, property, and liberty from being oppressed by the great (*Pr.*, Chs. 9–10, 16–17). Such a popular foundation and perspective conforms to Machiavelli's general call for a politics based on "the effectual truth of the thing, than to the imagination thereof" (*Pr.*, Ch. 15). Machiavelli opposed with this realism all versions of political idealism, which he viewed as constructing "imagined republics and principates that have never been seen or known to be in truth" (*Pr.*, Ch. 15): Plato's ideal of rule by wise philosopher-kings, Aristotle's ideal of rule by wise aristocrats, and Augustine's ideal of rule by Christian princes who already partook in the spiritual community of the City of God. Machiavelli insists, however, that politicians assume simply that all men are self-centered and desire material things and personal glory.

A closer analysis of Rousseau's ideal of patriotic republicanism that is to be shared by leaders and citizens will reveal its realistic or Machiavellian basis. As we have seen, according to Rousseau love of the fatherland motivates leaders and citizens to manifest political virtue:

It is certain that the greatest prodigies of virtue have been produced by love of the fatherland [*l'amour de la patrie*]: this mild and live sentiment which joins the force of

6. Cf. Jean Cousin. "J.-J. Rousseau, interprète des institutions romaines dans le *Contrat social*," in *Études sur le Contrat social* (Paris, 1964), pp. 13–34; and Denise Leduc-Fayette, *J.-J. Rousseau et le mythe de l'antiquité* (Paris: Vrin, 1974), pp. 103–16.

self-love [*amour-propre*] to all the beauty of virtue, gives to it an energy which without disfiguring it, makes of it the most heroic of all the passions (P, III, 255).

But, as we now see, the essence of love of the homeland is self-love or self-regard—*amour-propre*—even though it is experienced by the political actors themselves as a “burning and sublime ardor,” as the emotion a religious person feels in loving God (P, III, 255). Rousseau does not, it seems, want to emphasize the realistic psychological foundation—the self-regarding basis—of all idealistic republican patriotism, including the type he is advocating for the corrupt modern world. Nonetheless, though *amour-propre* is a self-regarding desire, it is a desire for recognition on the part of the leaders that can well result in social conditions that make the people happy, as long as the leaders are persuaded that their desire for glorious recognition can only be fulfilled when there are united citizens with a sense of liberty and the common good to give recognition.

That is to say, great leaders who love their fatherland always experience a tension between this love and their love of personal glory; citizens experience this tension to a lesser degree, since their attempt at emulating the exceptionally virtuous is not as thoroughgoing as that of actual or potential leaders. This tension exists for exceptional leaders as well as common citizens, but Rousseau’s Machiavellian path prevents him from arguing for an essentially Aristotelian or Christian solution to the problem. From the perspective of the latter what is required is a struggle between our prudence and unrestrained passions or between our love of God and of ourselves. If we win the struggle, we attain moral or spiritual perfection and hence care about the common good more than for our individual interests; if we lose this internal battle, then, at worst, we become tyrants. Rousseau, however, rejects such a “perfectionist” approach that asks, he claims, most men to do what they are incapable of doing—effectively overcome their self-regarding passions (P, III, 259). Rather, what he advocates is a public education that leads to an expansion of the self to identify with the state or popular will:

If . . . [children] are accustomed early enough never to regard their individuality except by its relations with the body of the State, and to perceive, so to speak, their own existence as a part of it, they will be able to arrive finally at identifying in some way with the greater whole (P, III, 259).

Later on in this same passage Rousseau asserts, albeit rather vaguely in comparison to the *Second Discourse* (cf. P, III, 189, 219), that an expanded or patriotic love results from a form of habituation of man’s *amour-propre* (P, III, 260).

Returning to Rousseau’s central example of a model republican leader—Cato—we will now see what, according to Rousseau’s realistic psychology, allowed Cato to put the glory of Rome before his personal glory. In the *Discourse on the Hero* Rousseau remarks on the strength of soul Cato required to give a public celebration after losing the consulship instead of withdrawing into private grief (P, II, 1274), a generous act Caesar, who also possessed the heroic virtue of strength of soul, would not have performed (cf. P, II, 1264). All heroic leaders

must possess strength of soul, but those like Cato put that strength to the service of the constitutional order because of their pride in their country being first among other countries in establishing the conditions for civil freedom. Patriotism, then, has this thoroughly self-regarding side—but it is an expanded self-regard consistent with the common good of a particular nation. No sooner did Rousseau raise the possibility of a unified earthly city in the introductory section of the *Political Economy* than he quickly laid it to rest, as we saw. For republican politics based on being spiritually superior to other states could not function in the absence of particular regimes. During the civil war, fleeing among strangers, Cato refused to shave, have his hair cut, or any longer recline in the Roman manner when at table. Cato acted like one in mourning for a most beautiful beloved, for whom all other objects of possible affection are essentially inferior and hence unworthy of one's love.

V THE CATONIC LEGISLATOR

In Rousseau's account in the *Political Economy*, we have seen that Cato sought political recognition. In the end, though, he was satisfied with attaining recognition in future centuries for his total dedication to his fatherland. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau tells us that the legislator also hopes to attain "distant glory," and like Cato has the stature of a god among mortals (P, III, 381; cf. 245).

Furthermore, the legislator relies not on force, but on his "great soul" to lead the people to the condition where they adopt laws embodying their common good, and enlists the support of myths about the will of the divine. Rousseau clearly follows Machiavelli's account of the way the legislator, with such "prudence and goodness," civilizes a people (quoting from *Discourses* I, II in a note to SC II, 7; P, III, 384). However, unlike Machiavelli, Rousseau uses Lycurgus, not Numa as his central example.

In Rousseau's portrait of him, Lycurgus made the Spartans happy, even while they were unknown to the rest of Greece. Resigning his kingship to serve as a lawgiver—a wise advisor—he took advantage of a time following revolutions and civil war to give his people a new code of laws (cf. SC, II, 7–8 with the *Discourse on Inequality*; P, III, 381, 385, 180).

But the portrait of Lycurgus given in the *Social Contract* leaves out the Catonic dimension Rousseau underlines in a "Fragment":

Quand Licurgue établit ses lois, il eut à souffrir mille murmures et même de mauvais traitemens de la part des Lacedemoniens et il fut même contraint d'user de ruse et d'aller finir ses jours hors de sa patrie pour obliger ses concitoyens à conserver une institution qui les a rendu le peuple le plus illustre et le plus respecté qui ait existé sur la terre (P, III, 512).

In the *Social Contract's* account, Rousseau simply assumed, one gathers, his readers knew Plutarch's portrait of Lycurgus and thus the requisite details of the deception to which he alludes in the preceding quotation. Plutarch recounts that Lycurgus persuaded his countrymen to swear an oath that they would not change any of the customs or laws he had given them, until he returned from visiting the oracle at Delphi. After visiting the oracle and being told that his institutions were good, he sent this oracular utterance back to the Spartans. However, to assure that his laws would never be changed, Lycurgus never returned to Sparta. Instead, he starved himself to death (*Lives*, pp. 72–73).

VI. VIOLENT CREATIVITY OR TRAGIC EQUANIMITY IN THE FACE OF FORTUNE

We have seen that in Rousseau's doctrine of political leadership, Catoic senatorial virtue is combined with the popular foundation Machiavelli advocated in his political education of new leaders; and the armed founder has a necessary preliminary function to perform to clear the way for the senatorial statesman, under primitive or corrupt historical circumstances.

Moreover, in Rousseau's teaching there is a resemblance to Machiavelli's concern with overcoming the power of fortune in political affairs, though Rousseau parts company with Machiavelli after an initial agreement.

Now, Machiavelli's philosophy leadership is a protest against the power of fortune in human affairs—a call to political men to be self-reliant and active, not tragic and passive instruments of a fate beyond their control. In describing the power of fortune, Machiavelli at first employs the image of fortune as a torrential river. If one builds embankments and dikes in quiet times—uses prudential foresight to plan for the future—then one will not be subject to fortune's power in chaotic times (*Pr.*, Ch. 25).

However, Machiavelli uses a second image to depict the power of fortune: fortune is like a fickle mistress who is effectively seduced by forceful overtures, physical strength and daring; or, politically speaking, arms and imaginative, resolute calculation and will. The armed prophets who establish republican senates such as the Roman one, and the legislators and senatorial heroes who emerge from such bodies of advisors are fortune's worthy foes (cf. *Dis.* I, 11; II, 1).

Machiavelli, one must grant, is not entirely certain fortune can be wholly conquered by human daring and adaptive calculation, though the unifying theme of his political education in *The Prince* and *Discourses* is how political virtue can overcome fortune more and more to the point of totality. Machiavelli's problem is how to inspire his readers to imitate armed founders or prophets and senatorial heroes completely—without the admixture of Christian compassion and love. For these admixtures would debase political virtue with vulnerability, weakness, and acceptance of defeat for the sake of affirming the value of idealism and the

innocent in the face of the struggles against fortune (*Pr.*, Chs. 15–17, and 25).

Indeed, even Machiavelli's passionate personal commitment to republicanism and symbiotic, popular leadership takes second place to his awe in the face of those tyrannical manifestations of creative competence that conquer fortune. Someone of "outstanding brain-power and authority," he asseverates, could convert a province suited to monarchical rule into a republic, or vice versa, or willfully found a tyrannical order (*Dis.* 1, 55; 257–58; cf. 1, 16, 25–26). Rare indeed, he says, are the leaders who possess such mental and physical power to carry out enterprises of this magnitude.

In his advocacy of such activism, Machiavelli defends a new political aristocracy, not the "pernicious" old ones of the rich, lazy, and cowardly "who live idly on the income of their abundant possessions without being concerned either with cultivation or necessary toil in living" (*Dis.* 1, 55; 266). This new senate Machiavelli envisages is made up of leaders who are resolute in the face of fortune, who have that greatness of soul manifested by Camillus who averred: "The dictatorship did not elate me, nor did exile depress me" (*Dis.* III, 31; 469). Such resoluteness in mind and conduct results in fortune having "no sway over them." Still, Machiavelli advocates resoluteness of mind combined with resoluteness of military conduct, and all that will allow one to triumph after one has competently prepared one's forces.

In the *Political Economy*, Rousseau claims that "in public administration where fortune has less of a part than in the fate of individuals, wisdom is so close to happiness that these two objects are intertwined" (P, III, 262). Going in a Machiavellian direction, Rousseau maintains that the Catoic statesman who employs enlightened, calculating policies of parsimony, future planning, and egalitarian tax measures can assure that public needs are satisfied—hence the power of fortune minimized. In the spirit of Machiavelli's first image of fortune as a torrential river, Rousseau, first of all, encourages the construction of public warehouses to prevent famine, just as Machiavelli had done in *The Prince* (P, III, 267; *Pr.*, Ch. 10). Second, like Machiavelli, Rousseau opposes the use of mercenaries and argues instead for the establishment of a citizen army (P, III, 268–69; *Pr.*, Chs. 12–13). Third, both advocate parsimony—preventing the emergence of new governmental needs rather than increasing revenues—so as to prevent "the people [from] being crushed" with excessive taxes (P, III, 266; *Pr.*, Ch. 16). Fourth, in the *Political Economy* Rousseau attacks the tyranny of the rich and demands egalitarian tax reforms entirely in the spirit—albeit less violently—of Machiavelli's censure of the idle rich in the *Discourses* (P, III, 270–78; *Dis.* 1, 55; 266).

In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau even goes some distance toward advocating Machiavellian daring in the face of fortune. In proportion as more people are involved in making governmental decisions, he says, prudence is stressed "too much, insufficient emphasis is given to fortune, so that by dint of deliberating, the fruits of deliberation are often lost" (*SC*, III, 2; P, III, 402). A head or leader

who exercises the political art well must employ prudence, but also those imaginative, swift strokes of political judgment and action that will harmonize affairs with fortune, and not make the polity subject to its vagaries. Thus, Rousseau criticizes Cicero for not employing emergency measures and hence subjecting himself to “a combination of chance factors” in dealing with the Catilinarian conspiracy. Rather, he should have appointed a dictator who could easily have dissipated the conspiracy with vigor, leaving nothing to chance (*SC*, IV, 6; P, III, 457).

Rousseau, then, thought of himself as following in the footsteps of Machiavelli’s *Prince* and *Discourses* as he elaborated upon his own political education for republican statesmen in the *Political Economy* and the *Social Contract*. Rousseau did not conclude that there is a fundamental difference between his teaching and Machiavelli’s—as we must—because in his republican interpretation of Machiavelli’s thought he failed to see the priority Machiavelli gives to creative violence.

It is true that at times Machiavelli seems to prefer the arts of peace to those of violence: he seems to rank Numa’s peaceful methods above Romulus’s creative violence (*Dis.* I, 11). However, he quickly reverses his judgment (*Dis.* I, 19) and goes on to manifest little interest in that exemplary virtue of both Catos, which he admired but found wanting. Rome was so corrupt at the time of Cato the Younger, that the example of virtue—a republican politics of emulation—was insufficient to turn the tide. What was needed, he implies, was instilling men with that “terror and fear” they had known at the beginning of their regime—by a new armed founder or prophet like Romulus, but more sophisticated—so as to be able to deal with the lavish corruption of the imperial republic (*Dis.* III, 1; 382).

Machiavelli’s advocacy of the priority of the action of the armed founder and of those creative commanders who imitate him puts him at odds with Rousseau’s ultimate reliance on a politics grounded in the emulation of strength of soul. For Rousseau was convinced that only the Catoic model of republican leadership assures that a republic will be oriented to showing moral superiority over other regimes and not seek imperialistic mastery. The moral struggle for republicanism is more important than winning specific armed battles; compelling by exemplary dedication is more potent in the long run than the force of arms. Rousseau subordinated mere success through the competent wielding of the political art to his pure faith in the nobility and moral superiority of republicanism; Machiavelli subordinated this faith to what he understood to be “the effectual truth” of politics.