Cruelty and the example of Agathocles

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Abstract

In this paper, I reconstruct Machiavelli's defence of cruelty. To do this, I will focus on the example of Agathocles the Sicilian in Chapter 8 of The Prince, where Machiavelli states the conditions under which having recourse to cruelty becomes justified. I shall make the case that the example of Agathocles demonstrates that Machiavelli viewed cruelty as an anti-oligarchical political tactic. In so doing, I will highlight how Machiavelli's defence of cruelty differs from the contemporary understanding of it. Notably, I shall examine Judith Shklar's account of cruelty as an offence of the strong against the weak before critiquing her reading of Machiavelli. I will make the case that Machiavelli takes the side of the people and defends cruelty as a political tactic against those who would seek to deprive the people of their freedom. I shall also critique Michael Walzer's formulation of the dirty hand problem to the extent he traces it to Machiavelli. In particular, I will challenge his contention that Machiavelli regarded cruelty as evil regardless of the context in which it occurs. Instead, I will highlight the class-based account of society advanced by the Florentine and make the case that Machiavelli believed that behaviour which appears to be cruel to the few appears as merciful to the many.

Résumé

Dans cet article, je reconstruis la défense de la cruauté de Machiavel. Pour ce faire, je me concentrerai sur l'exemple d'Agathocle Sicilien dans le chapitre 8 du Prince, où Machiavel énonce les conditions dans lesquelles le recours à la cruauté se justifie. Je ferai valoir que l'exemple d'Agathocle démontre que Machiavel considérait la cruauté comme une tactique politique anti-oligarchique. Ce faisant, je vais mettre en évidence comment la défense de Machiavel contre la cruauté diffère de la compréhension contemporaine de celle-ci. Je vais notamment examiner le récit de Judith Shklar sur la cruauté comme une infraction des forts contre les faibles avant de critiquer sa lecture de Machiavel. Je voudrais dire que Machiavel prend le parti du peuple et défend la cruauté en tant que tactique politique contre ceux qui cherchent à priver le peuple de sa liberté. Je critiquerai aussi la formulation de Michael Walzer du problème de la main sale dans la mesure où il le retrace à Machiavel. Je contesterai en particulier son affirmation selon laquelle Machiavel considérait la cruauté comme mauvaise, quel que soit le contexte dans lequel elle se produit. Au lieu de cela, je vais mettre en évidence le récit de la société fondée sur les classes avancées par les Florentins et faire valoir que Machiavel croyait que le comportement qui semble cruel pour quelques-uns semble être aussi miséricordieux pour le grand nombre.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family for their support as I worked on this thesis. I became interested in Machiavelli as he discussed the role of violence in politics through prudential reasoning rather than normative categories. However, I cannot claim to have always been fully clear in my focus. Hence, I owe special thanks to my supervisor, Prof. Yves Winter, for his incisive and critical comments in helping me narrow my focus and urging me to highlight the stakes of my interpretation. I also like to thank Prof. Arash Abizadeh for acting as my examiner.

Introduction

In this paper, I will reconstruct Machiavelli's defence of cruelty. I shall make the case that Machiavelli defended cruelty as an anti-oligarchical political tactic. In doing so, I will highlight the class-based account of society advanced by the Florentine and the democratic implication of his theory of humours that underlies his defence of cruelty. To make this case, I shall focus on the example of Agathocles the Sicilian in chapter 8 of *The Prince*. The example of Agathocles is both challenging and instructive. It is challenging because there is no consensus in the secondary literature on Machiavelli's judgement on the deeds of the Sicilian. This is because although Machiavelli refers to Agathocles' virtue three times in the same chapter and calls him the most excellent captain, he also famously calls him a criminal whose actions cannot enable one to acquire glory. In this vein, Machiavelli apparently refuses to consider him a virtuous prince and suggests he cannot be ranked among the most excellent men (*P*, 8). In contrast, Machiavelli's admiration for Cesare Borgia is more readily acknowledged by scholars.[1] However, the example of Agathocles is particularly instructive for two reasons. First, it is through this example that Machiavelli justifies cruelty by making an infamous distinction between cruelties that are well used and cruelties that are badly used. Second, an examination of Agathocles' career demonstrates that his cruelties entrenched him in his position to such an extent that he could be

[1] Though some scholars, such as John M. Najemy (2013), have questioned the sincerity of Machiavelli's praise for Cesare Borgia.

considered the most successful practitioner of cruelty in *The Prince*, certainly far more successful than Cesare Borgia, whom Machiavelli praises without hesitation.[2]

In what follows, I shall make the case that Machiavelli considered Agathocles to be a fully virtuous prince worthy of imitation owing to his cruelties being targeted against the richest and most powerful citizens of his city. In so doing, I will advance a populist and democratic interpretation of Machiavelli's intentions. Notably, I will highlight the ways in which the Florentine qualifies his apparent condemnation of Agathocles through the examples of other cruel princes which he praises. Here, I am inclined toward the suggestion that this is Machiavelli's way of challenging interpretations of controversial figures such as Agathocles (McCormick 2015: 123-126). Hence, I believe the contradictions that appear in the work of the Florentine – which will become clearer – are a deliberate strategy that does not imply a lack of consistency.

To demonstrate the virtue of Agathocles, I will begin by pointing, in the first place, to the example of Cesare Borgia as undermining the suggestion that Agathocles' crimes bar him from being considered a virtuous prince. This is because Cesare's cruelties in pacifying Romagna share unmistakable similarities to those of Agathocles (*P*, 7). Furthermore, I will highlight the fact that while Machiavelli praises the virtue of Cesare, he does not rank him among the most excellent men. This, I suggest, highlights that acquiring such a status is not a necessary condition

[2] That is with the possible exception of Ferdinand of Aragon, whose "pious cruelty" in expelling the Marranos from his kingdom acquired him fame and glory among Christians (*P*, 21). However, Machiavelli does not call Ferdinand's cruelties well used.

for being considered a virtuous prince in Machiavelli's estimation. Second, I will highlight the example of Nabis in chapter 9 as further complicating the suggestion that the Sicilian's conduct is blameworthy. There, Machiavelli makes clear his preference for civil principalities, where he suggests the civil prince ostensibly comes to power without recourse to "crime and other intolerable violence" but with the support of his fellow citizens (*P*, 9). Notably, Machiavelli suggests there are two humours in society, namely that of the people and the great. The Florentine proceeds to advise civil princes to align themselves with the people. However, as it has been noted in the secondary literature, Machiavelli's example of a civil prince in Nabis contradicts the suggestion that civil princes can come to power in the absence of violence (McCormick 2014; Winter 2018). This is because Nabis killed two rivals with royal claims to the throne of Sparta and behaved similarly to Agathocles in killing the nobility and the distinguished citizens of his city. This, I will argue, demonstrates that Machiavelli's admiration for Agathocles' cruelties lay in the fact that they were directed against the richest and most powerful citizens of his city. Finally, I will examine the relationship between virtue and glory and whether glory precludes recourse to cruelties. I will challenge this assumption by highlighting Machiavelli's remarks in chapter 18 that the prince needs to appear merciful, faithful, honest, humane, and religious without necessarily possessing these qualities. I will then suggest that Agathocles' cruelties, in fact, made him appear merciful in the eyes of his people. This allowed the Sicilian to achieve glory in the eyes of his subjects. In order to account for the reasons Agathocles failed to achieve glory in the eyes of posterity, I attribute the Sicilian's failure to achieve such a reputation to the fact that such a status is often bestowed by the writers and the senators. Here, I shall draw on John McCormick's (2015) argument that Machiavelli believes Agathocles did not achieve the glory he deserved because he went against the senators of his

city, which is backed up by a comparison between the conduct of the Sicilian and the Roman general, Scipio. I will argue that this necessary dependence on the opinion of the writers and senators in achieving glory means that Machiavelli could not have prioritized the notion of glory over and above that of virtue as claimed in the secondary literature (Kahn 2013).

In establishing the credential of Agathocles as a virtuous prince, I will proceed to make the case that cruelty is a method that Machiavelli indicates through his examples that civil princes must necessarily employ if they wish to secure themselves. Hence, as alluded to, I will challenge the assumption that a civil prince can come to power in the absence of violence. Furthermore, I seek to account for the rhetorical aims of Machiavelli in writing to the Medici. Contra Victoria Kahn's suggestion in a recent article that Machiavelli would have wanted the Medici to refrain from following what she describes as the tyrannical behaviour of Agathocles by reference to the failure of the latter to achieve glory, I will make the case that Machiavelli would have wanted the Medici and other princes to ensure that the targets of their cruelties be the ambitious few that surround them and found themselves on the people (Kahn 2013). Notably, I highlight that Machiavelli urges civil princes to secure themselves against the great and the magistrates, which will remove the cause of the servility of the people. This empowers the people to constrain tyrannical behaviour on the part of princes, given the desire the Florentine attributes to the people, which is neither to be oppressed nor to be commanded. In this way, I defend McCormick's (2015) argument and critique Kahn's (2013) as to how Machiavelli would have wanted to constrain the potentially tyrannical behaviour of the civil princes he advocates.

Furthermore, I will examine the relationship between cruelty and the reputation one acquires as a result of employing it. Here, I draw on Yves Winter's (2018) account insofar as he highlights the importance of context in evaluating whether a prince should disavow responsibility for his cruelties or own up to them. I will use this emphasis on context in evaluating the politics of cruelty to challenge a consensus in the secondary literature – including in the populist and or democratic interpretations of *The Prince*, which includes Winter's own account – that Cesare Borgia's cruelties are deserving of more credit than Agathocles for his shrewd disavowal of his cruelties (Lefort 2012; McCormick 2014; Kahn 1986; Winter 2018). I will argue that the Sicilian had no reason to do likewise, as he faced a completely different political situation. Furthermore, I will contest Winter's argument regarding the pedagogical character of Cesare's cruelties. I will make the case that the cruelties of Agathocles deserve greater credit as he ensured the targets of his cruelties were those who bear prime responsibility for the misfortune of the people. This, I argue, cannot be said of Borgia's cruelties to the same degree.

I shall also examine the dangers of overstepping the mark in employing cruelties, namely, in becoming hated by the people. Though Machiavelli famously advises princes to make themselves feared rather than loved, he maintains that "being feared and not being hated can go together very well" (*P*, 17). I will argue that, according to Machiavelli, princes should not refrain from cruelties as hatred can be caused by failing to have recourse to cruelties also. I will then suggest that the example of Agathocles demonstrates that it is possible to make oneself loved by having recourse to cruelties. However, I will also note that Machiavelli attributes the success of Hannibal's cruelties to lie in his ability to make himself feared.

Of particular concern in reconstructing Machiavelli's defence of cruelty is challenging contemporary understanding of cruelty. In this vein, I will critically engage with the works of Judith Shklar and Michael Walzer. I will challenge Shklar's (1984) critique of cruelty as an offence of the strong against the weak. In contrast, I shall argue that Machiavelli – who comes for criticism in her work – endorsed cruelty as a political tactic that satisfies the desire of ordinary people for revenge. Second, I examine Walzer's (1973) formulation of the problem of dirty hands to the extent to which he traces the problem to Machiavelli. I will critique Walzer's contention that Machiavelli excuses but does not justify political tactics such as cruelty and deceit and that he regards such tactics as evil regardless of the context in which they occur. In contrast, I will argue that Machiavelli believed that behaviour which appears to be cruel to the few appears as merciful to the many.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section I, I shall examine the secondary literature on Agathocles with a view to making the case that Machiavelli regarded the Sicilian as a virtuous prince, given the targets of his cruelties were the richest and most powerful citizens of his city. In Section II, I follow up on my discussion to demonstrate that cruelty is defended by Machiavelli as the necessary weapon of civil princes. I will also argue that civil princes, advocated by Machiavelli, invariably target the nobility and empower the people. This, in turn, highlights the democratic implications of Machiavelli's arguments. In Section III, I examine the relationship between cruelty and the reputation one acquires as a result of recourse to it. Here, I critique Michael Walzer's account of cruelty as evil regardless of context. Instead, I argue that behaviour which appears to be cruel to the few appears as merciful to the many. Furthermore, I draw on Winter's account as regards the importance of context to challenge a consensus in the secondary

literature as regards the superior political skills of Borgia as compared with Agathocles. In Section IV, I will examine the relationship between cruelties and political emotions. I highlight the dangers of cruelty resulting in hatred. I will argue that the cruelties of Agathocles demonstrate how it is also possible for cruelties to result in acquiring the love or the fidelity of one's subjects. In Section V, I shall critically examine Judith Shklar's account of cruelty as an objection to Machiavelli's defence of cruelty. I will demonstrate she conceives of cruelty differently from Machiavelli and will object to her reading of Machiavelli. I will then reflect on the fact that the majority of cruelties committed are of the type that Machiavelli describes as badly used. I conclude by restating my arguments.

Section I: Cruelty and the example of Agathocles

To examine the question of cruelty and the conditions under which Machiavelli justifies its use, I focus on the example of Agathocles. In chapter 8, Machiavelli puts the Sicilian forward as an example of a prince that acquired his power through criminal and nefarious means that "cannot be altogether attributed either to fortune or virtue" (*P*, 8), which he elsewhere suggests map out the ways in which private individuals become princes (*P*, 1, 6, 25). This notwithstanding, Machiavelli talks about the virtue of Agathocles on three occasions in the same chapter as he details how the Sicilian lifted himself from his lowly position as a son of a potter to become the king of Syracuse. Machiavelli begins his rendition by noting that although the Sicilian "kept to a life of crime at every rank of his career," his rise through the ranks of the military that allowed him to become the praetor of Syracuse resulted from his "virtue of spirit and body" that accompanied his crimes (*P*, 8). However, after being established in that rank, Agathocles

"decided to become prince and to hold with violence and without obligation that which had been conceded to him by agreement" (*P*, 8). To do this, he assembled the people and Senate of Syracuse under the pretence of deciding on matters pertaining to the republic before ordering his soldiers to kill all the senators and the richest citizens. This, in turn, allowed him to seize and hold "the principate of that city without any civil controversy" (*P*, 8). He did this by giving Hamilcar the Carthaginian the intelligence of his plans, after which he betrayed him, and despite two defeats at the hand of Carthaginians, he ended up holding Syracuse. The Florentine notes how Agathocles managed to accomplish this by leaving the defence of Syracuse to some of his soldiers and taking the war to Carthaginians in Africa, where he brought them "to dire necessity" so they were content with keeping Africa and leaving Sicily to him (*P,* 8). These successes lead Machiavelli to argue that when one considers "actions and the virtue of this man," one cannot attribute his rise to power to fortune as it was "not through anyone's support but through the ranks of the military, which he had gained for himself with a thousand hardship and dangers" that Agathocles managed to secure the principate of Syracuse (*P*, 8). Nevertheless, after detailing the successful exploits of Agathocles, the Florentine writes in a famous passage:

"Yet one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion: these modes can enable one to acquire empire, but not glory. For, if one considers the virtue of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities, one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to the most excellent captain. Nonetheless, his savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes, do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men. Thus, one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he achieved without either" (*P*, 8).

It has not escaped the attention of the readers of *The Prince* that Machiavelli writes of the virtue of Agathocles immediately after suggesting that he cannot be considered virtuous. Furthermore, the distinction Machiavelli draws between "the most excellent men" and "the most excellent captain" has been subject to debate. In particular, this distinction has led many to wonder whether Machiavelli is drawing a distinction between military virtue and political virtue; and whether political virtue requires glory. This, in turn, has important implications as to whether Machiavelli justifies the cruelties committed by Agathocles, as the Sicilian is condemned for failing to acquire glory on account of "his savage cruelty and inhumanity" (*P*, 8). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that Machiavelli concludes the chapter by making an infamous distinction between cruelties that are well used and those that are badly used with a view to accounting for the longevity of Agathocles' rule. As he writes,

"Those [cruelties] can be called well used (if it is permissible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can. Those cruelties are badly used which, though few in the beginning, rather grow with time than are eliminated. Those who observe the first mode can have some remedy for their state with God and with men, as had Agathocles; as for others it is impossible to maintain themselves" (*P*, 8).

In this passage, Machiavelli suggests those cruelties are well used that meet three criteria. First, their use is dictated by the necessity of securing oneself. Second, this necessity allows one to employ cruelty to such an extent that it removes the necessity of having to resort to it again.

Third, they should benefit one's subjects. In this vein, Machiavelli points to Agathocles as a prince who knew how to turn his cruelties to the benefit of his subjects as something that allowed him to maintain his state. In the secondary literature, there are three main positions on the puzzling question of whether Machiavelli is drawing a distinction between military virtue and political virtue and whether political virtue requires glory that precludes recourse to cruelty.

First, there are those who take seriously Machiavelli's claim that Agathocles could not be considered a virtuous prince given his cruelties and crimes. For instance, the Cambridge School scholar, Quentin Skinner, has highlighted the role of glory in Machiavelli's apparently negative estimation of Agathocles. According to Skinner (2019: 55), there is a distinction that Machiavelli seeks to register between a prince who is "prepared 'to be not good'" in maintaining his state and one who acts "badly in unnecessary or indiscriminate ways." Skinner (2019: 55) suggests that the Florentine's condemnation of Agathocles owes to the latter's readiness to use cruelty in an "excessive" manner, which was "not dictated by necessity" and which reflected "his wicked nature." This, in turn, allows Skinner (2019: 55) to understand Machiavelli's notion of glory as excluding such excessive uses of cruelties. Skinner's reading, however, is problematic. This is because it is clearly at odds with what Machiavelli says about Agathocles' conduct, exemplifying the well use of cruelties later in the same chapter. Furthermore, when one looks at the example of Cesare Borgia in the preceding chapter, it is difficult to argue his cruelties were not "excessive." Machiavelli lauds the actions of Cesare – whom he calls by his "vulgar" name "Duke Valentino" – for laying for himself "great foundations for future power." This foundation, the Florentine makes clear, consisted of the duke acquiring "the friendship of Romagna" by gaining the fidelity of the people who lived there (*P*, 7). Machiavelli famously praises the conduct of the duke in

gaining the people to himself through the execution of his deputy, Messer Remirro de Orco, whom he had appointed to restore order to Romagna after he found the province poorly managed (*P*, 7). The Florentine notes how Remirro accomplished this by committing cruelties that acquired the hatred of the people, after which the duke determined that he could not afford such a reputation for himself. Thus, the duke resolved to "purge the spirits of that people and gain them entirely to himself" by demonstrating that "if any cruelty had been committed, this had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister" (*P*, 7). He did this by setting up "a civil court in the middle of the province, with a most excellent president, where each city had its advocate" (*P*, 7). Then, one morning, he had Remirro placed "in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him" (*P*, 7). Machiavelli approvingly writes that "the ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied" (*P*, 7). Given Machiavelli's defence of Cesare's cruelties, it is clear that "excessive cruelties" cannot explain why he refuses to call Agathocles a virtuous prince. Furthermore, Machiavelli's refusal to rank Cesare among the most excellent men suggests acquiring such a status is not a necessary condition to be considered a virtuous prince.

Second, there are those who acknowledge political virtue does not preclude the use of cruelties but who nonetheless argue that Agathocles' cruelties cannot be defended for his role in overthrowing a republic. This point is made by another Cambridge School scholar Peter Stacey, who reads Machiavelli to be advocating for a moderate form of republicanism by highlighting the Florentine's preference for republics over principalities in reference to his other equally important work, *Discourses on Livy*. Peter Stacey (2007: 297, 281) acknowledges Cesare's conduct demonstrates cruelties being well used. However, he argues that Machiavelli's "moral

evaluation completely changes" when it comes to Agathocles insofar as the Sicilian rejected "the republican ethic" when he proceeded to massacre his fellow citizens (Stacey 2007: 297). As Stacey (2007: 297) writes, "one thing Machiavelli insists that you can never hope to do virtuously is to reduce a republic to principality…[which] leads citizens of a republic from a state of liberty into a state of servitude".

However, although Stacey is right to bring attention to the different contexts in which the cruelties of Cesare and Agathocles occur, his argument is flawed insofar as it assumes that Machiavelli privileges the lives of all the citizens of a republic to the lives of all the citizens in a principality. This, in turn, ignores the class-based and conflictual view of society advanced by Machiavelli. In chapter 9 – where Machiavelli makes clear his preference for a civil principality – the Florentine argues there are two humours found in a city, namely that of "the people who desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, and the great desire to command and oppress the people" (*P*, 9). He then suggests the new prince strive to ensure the support of the people. Machiavelli's advice is backed by both moral and prudential reasoning. Thus, Machiavelli writes that "one cannot satisfy the great with decency and without injury to others, but one can satisfy the people; for the end of the people is more decent than that of the great" (*P*, 9). Furthermore, Machiavelli writes of the dangers of having the people as the enemy as there are many of them, whereas the great being fewer in number could be more easily dealt with (*P*, 9). Machiavelli's example of a civil prince is Nabis the Spartan, who employed cruelties to become the king of Sparta by eliminating two of his rivals to the throne. Machiavelli revealingly contrasts the behaviour of Nabis with those of the Gracchi brothers in Rome and Messer Giorgio Scali in Florence, as he seeks to rebut "that trite proverb, that whoever founds on the people

found on mud" (*P*, 9). Machiavelli argues that whereas Nabis had the foresight of securing himself against the few, the Gracchi brothers came to ruin by failing to understand the necessity of having recourse to similar methods in securing themselves against the Roman senators (*P*, 9).

This has important implications for how we view the cruelties of Agathocles, as there exists ample historical evidence to suggest his rule avoided the mistakes made by the Gracchi brothers and mirrored that of Nabis. In his book *A History of Sicily*, Finley (1968: 101-102) attests to the existing poverty and class conflict that existed in ancient Sicily; and how Agathocles had managed to acquire "a reputation as a defender of the masses against the oligarchs." Finley (1968: 103) writes that Agathocles' "atrocities were always selective, directed against the wealthy and the oligarchically-inclined." These facts are attested by reference to ancient historian Diodorus, who claimed that the populace took a greater role in the assembly after the rise of Agathocles and how the Sicilian never needed a bodyguard to accompany him when he was among his people (Finley 1968: 103). Therefore, it cannot be argued that Agathocles led his subjects from liberty to servitude, as Stacey claims, as the people participated in the assembly to a greater degree than before.

An influential reading of Agathocles is put forth by Claude Lefort. Lefort (2012: 138) argues that when Machiavelli suggests the criminal methods used by Agathocles enabled him to acquire "empire but not glory," the Florentine is registering the idea that the virtue of political action cannot be measured without considering the role of representation – understood as the way in which one's actions are perceived and interpreted by one's subjects. Lefort (2012: 131)

acknowledges Borgia's criminal behaviour, but he draws a distinction between his example and that of Agathocles. Lefort makes the case that Cesare's conduct cannot be reduced to one of "violent ambition". Thus, he argues that Cesare's crimes went "beyond the framework of personal interests" (Lefort 2012: 131). For instance, Lefort (2012: 131) highlights how Cesare's execution of his minister – whose cruelty had been of benefit to him – is accompanied by the establishment of a civil court that replaced the existing plea system. This, he suggests, contributed to creating "confidence in the justice of law" (Lefort 2012: 131). In a similar vein, Cesare's brutal elimination of the heads of the Orsini family in Sinigaglia is read as helping to bring peace to the states in which they had planted "the seeds of dissension" (Lefort 131-132). Turning to the example of Agathocles, Lefort (2012: 138) attributes Machiavelli's apparent condemnation of the Sicilian to the fact that his conduct was motivated by no reason other than his ambition. Lefort (2012: 138) acknowledges that in Machiavelli's rendition of the career of Agathocles, the Sicilian managed to acquire "a certain glory" by winning the support of his subjects by repelling the Carthaginian invasion. Nevertheless, he argues this does not wipe away Agathocles' "first crimes" that were "committed without justification or without disguise, by a man whom nothing but his own ambition destined to reign" (Lefort 2012: 138). This allows Lefort (2012: 138) to understand the distinction between the "most excellent captain" and "most excellent men" to encapsulate how it is not possible to cover up crimes with military virtue and expect one to receive the glory bestowed on the most excellent men. Thus, for Lefort (2012: 138), virtue is not necessarily incompatible with crime, but it requires glory; and the failure of Agathocles to acquire the glory of the "most excellent men" or even that of Borgia resulted from the manner of his rise to power which "was in the eyes of his subjects, and remains, in posterity's memory." Importantly, Lefort (2012: 138) reads the lowly birth of the Agathocles as a son of

potter as something that is cited by Machiavelli with a view to qualifying the virtue of the Sicilian.

Lefort is right to emphasize the role of representation in the Machiavellian account of virtue, which raises the question of the relationship between cruelty and reputation. However, as I will argue in greater detail in Section III, it is not clear that Agathocles' rise to power was not politically astute, given the existing class hostility that pervaded life in ancient Sicily. Furthermore, it is not clear whether Agathocles' ambition qualifies the virtue of his action. Lefort (2012: 131) is keen to draw a distinction between Agathocles and Borgia by suggesting the ambition of the latter coincided in each instance with those of his subjects. However, it is possible to suggest the cruelties of Agathocles were even more popularly "representative" than Cesare's. This is because Agathocles' cruelties did not harm his people in any way, whereas the cruelties of Cesare's deputy did harm the ordinary people. Indeed, it seems that it is not just Agathocles' foreign policy that was received well but also his domestic politics. As to whether Machiavelli would judge Agathocles' humble background as qualifying his virtue, Victoria Kahn (1986: 70) has convincingly rebutted this suggestion by noting this would render the Florentine's account of fortune and representation a static concept as it assumes Agathocles' back luck of a lowly birth would forever restrict his ability to represent himself in a positive light.

The third position in the secondary literature – advanced by scholars who defend the populist and or democratic character of Machiavelli's intentions in writing *The Prince* – maintains that Machiavelli considered Agathocles virtuous given the popular nature of his rule. Thus, the

Sicilian's employment of cruelties is singled out as deserving of credit. In her influential article "Virtù and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's Prince," Kahn (1986) challenges Lefort's reading by making the case that Machiavelli considered Agathocles to be a fully virtuous prince. Unlike Lefort, Kahn suggests the very manner of Agathocles' rise to power is one that Machiavelli approved of insofar as the cruelties were all committed at once which allowed him to master necessity. Notably, she points to the fact that Machiavelli cites Agathocles as a prince who used cruelties well as evidence of the ability of the Sicilian to present himself in a favourable light. To explain why Machiavelli refuses to call Agathocles virtuous, Kahn draws the attention of the reader to the example of Borgia in the previous chapter. Kahn (1986: 73) argues that in chapter 7, Machiavelli puts Cesare Borgia forward as an example of a prince worthy of imitation before proceeding to imitate him in his apparent condemnation of Agathocles in chapter 8. In this way, Machiavelli is taken to be testing the virtue of the readers. In chapter 7, Kahn (1986: 73) finds two examples of cruelties well used. The first cruelty well used is that performed by Remirro in bringing order and unity to the province, and the second is that performed by Borgia in distancing himself from his deputy by way of his execution. Whereas the first cruelty is destructive and repressive, the second one is theatrical and cathartic. Kahn (1986: 73) notes that these two cruelties are examples of "representation well used." In the first case, Borgia delegates his power to conceal his responsibility for his deputy's conduct. In the second case, Cesare accomplishes his aim through the theatrical execution of his deputy in the public square (Kahn 1986: 73-74). Turning to chapter 8, Kahn argues that Machiavelli's condemnation of Agathocles is a theatrical imitation of Borgia's conduct toward Remirro. In condemning Agathocles, Machiavelli distances himself from the kind of criminal politics which he praised the duke for. The reader is left morally satisfied and reassured to learn there is a

distinction between virtue and crime (Kahn 1986: 74). However, the reader who is taken in by this excuse is in the position of the subject rather than the prince. For, according to Kahn, Machiavelli has drawn this distinction to test the virtue of the reader. The distinction is made not because Machiavellian virtue and crime are mutually exclusive but because they are not identical (Kahn 1986: 74). Thus, Kahn (1986: 69) argues that when Machiavelli writes that "one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends…" it is *called* that should be emphasized as it shows Machiavellian virtue cannot be called any single thing. This has the effect of emptying virtue of any specific meaning or content, which as a faculty of deliberation about particulars, cannot yield a general rule of behaviour (Kahn 1986: 71).

In a recent article, Kahn revised her position. In particular, she has expressed uneasiness with the implication of her argument, namely that it treats glory to be subject to ironic critique by Machiavelli (Kahn 2013: 561-562). Accordingly, whereas Kahn still maintains that Agathocles is a virtuous prince, she takes Machiavelli's suggestion that the Sicilian failed to achieve glory at face value. Kahn (2013: 565) argues that, for Machiavelli, glory is "an intrinsic quality of great deeds, although one that can be misrepresented or falsely attributed." Importantly, Kahn (2013: 564-565, note 13) acknowledges that glory does not preclude violence and fraud, which Machiavelli endorses; thus, she points to the examples of Scipio and Hannibal in *Discourses* (III. 21) as both achieving glory through different means, with the former behaving humanely and the latter cruelly. However, Kahn does not engage with Machiavelli's critique of Scipio's behaviour in *The Prince* and privileges Machiavelli's account in the *Discourses*.[3] Instead, she highlights

[3] Kahn highlights Machiavelli's praise for Scipio's imitation of Cyrus in chapter 14 of *The Prince*. However, she fails to account for the possibility that Machiavelli's critique in chapter 17 implies that Scipio might have over imitated Cyrus.

the distinction between Scipio and Julius Caesar in *Discourses* (I. 10) and suggests that the conduct of Agathocles mirrored that of Caesar insofar as he was instrumental in overthrowing a republic (Kahn 2013: 563). This notwithstanding, she reiterates her critique of Lefort by maintaining that Machiavellian virtue does not require glory. This is because the skills required for military and political success do not go hand in hand with the greatness that is the subject of *Discourses* and the last chapter of *The Prince* (Kahn 2013: 570). This leads her to elevate the notion of glory over and above that of virtue by suggesting that Machiavelli distinguishes between military virtue, which Agathocles possessed as the most excellent captain and the glory of the most excellent men, which he lacked (Kahn 2013: 570). Thus, she is no longer impressed with the examples of Borgia and Agathocles, whose conducts remain a "distinction without a difference" since neither figure achieved glory (Kahn 2013: 572). Instead, she lauds the glory achieved by the legendary figures of chapter 6, who Machiavelli holds out before the Medici in chapter 26 (Kahn 2013: 572). Hence, the example of Agathocles is taken to bear two messages for the Medici. First, it demonstrates the necessity of curbing cruelties to maintain power. Second, it is taken to dissuade the Medici from imitating the tyrannical behaviour of Agathocles in gaining power so that they can gain the glory that escaped the Sicilian.

Kahn's analysis of Agathocles shows a great degree of erudition. Her argument as regards Machiavelli's theatrical imitation of Borgia in his condemnation of Agathocles is particularly convincing. However, the recent revision of her argument is open to two objections. First, although Kahn acknowledges that glory can be falsely attributed, she is strangely uncritical of Scipio's ability to achieve glory through humane methods. Notably, in chapter 17 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli critiques Scipio for his "excessive mercy" in leading his armies to rebel against him

in Spain. This, Machiavelli suggests, arose from the "agreeable nature" of Scipio which would have sullied "his fame and glory if he had continued with it in the empire but while he *lived under the government of the Senate*, this damaging quality of his not only was hidden, but made for his glory" (my emphasis) (*P*, 17). I suggest Kahn's failure to take into account Machiavelli's critique of Scipio in chapter 17 of *The Prince* owes to the fact that this account would complicate the distinction between the glory of Scipio and Caesar, on which her critique of Agathocles depends. For his part, John McCormick has drawn a convincing comparison between the example of Agathocles and Scipio, which highlights the role of senators and writers in bestowing glory. In particular, McCormick (2015: 31) has highlighted that although Scipio was awarded the tile Africanus – the conqueror of Africa – after defeating Hannibal, Agathocles is not celebrated for achieving the same feat in defending his fatherland from the Carthaginian Republic. This, McCormick (2015: 45) argues, demonstrates that glory presupposes a dependence on "senators and writers" that is "problematically at odds with the will-to-autonomy at the heart of Machiavellian *virtù*". In this vein, he makes the case that Machiavelli not only considered Agathocles to be virtuous but that he reckons that the Sicilian failed to achieve the glory that he deserved (McCormick 2015: 30).[4]

This highlights the second problem with Kahn's argument, namely her elevation of the notion of glory above virtue. However, it is important to highlight Kahn's theoretical reason for this move. In particular, Kahn's elevation of the notion of glory above virtue results from her uneasiness

[4] This notwithstanding, McCormick (2011; 2014) argues that the conduct of the Sicilian is subject to some censure when compared with Borgia, namely that the latter created a court that bestowed his action a degree of legitimacy whereas the latter failed to do so. This, he argues, demonstrates the greater political acumen of Borgia. I will challenge this aspect of his argument in Section III.

with the implication of her original argument, namely that Machiavelli would not have regarded republics as qualitatively superior. Instead, it would explain Machiavelli's attribution of greater glory to republics to the numerically greater virtue of their people (Kahn 2013: 561, note 8). Hence, Kahn elevates the notion of glory as something that could constrain the behaviour of tyrannical princes.

Here, it is instructive to highlight the way McCormick deals with the problem of tyrannical behaviour on the part of princes. McCormick (2015: 339) reads the example of Agathocles alongside other Greek tyrants in Machiavelli's books and juxtaposes them against the failed Roman reformers. In particular, he highlights the examples of Hiero of Syracuse and Nabis in *The Prince* alongside the example of Cleomenes and Clearchus in the *Discourses* to make the case that "Machiavelli harbours some sympathy for a very specific kind of tyrant; that is, one who suppresses nobles, the *grandi*, and who economically and militarily empowers plebians, the *popolo*" (McCormick 2015: 339). McCormick (2015: 129-133) argues that the cruel methods used by Greek tyrants such as Agathocles are ones that Machiavelli intimates would have been of use to the failed Roman reformers such as the Gracchi and Julius Caesar. McCormick (2015: 133-134) maintains that it is the failure of the Greek tyrants to establish lasting regimes that can explain their failure to achieve glory. Notably, McCormick (2015: 134) points to the inclusion of Hiero of Syracuse alongside the most excellent men in chapter 6 as lending credence to the reading that Machiavelli believed Agathocles and other Greek tyrants would have risen to the rank of the most excellent men if they had succeeded in establishing lasting regimes like the legendary figures of chapter 6. He attributes their failure to do so to the

strength of the Macedonians and the Romans and the corresponding weakness of the Greek states (McCormick 2015: 134).

McCormick's complication of the distinction between the most excellent men and the most excellent captain echoes Leo Strauss' argument in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1953: 309-310, note 53). Yet, whereas this acute observation had led Strauss to make a case for the wicked character of Machiavelli's teachings given his own absolutist moral commitment, McCormick highlights the democratic implications of the Florentine's argument. In particular, in response to objections that Greek tyrants cum reformers could become oppressive tyrants after removing checks from their power, McCormick (2015: 346) counters that Machiavelli would have regarded their arming of plebians and establishment of socio-economic equality as providing the people rather than the nobility with the necessary and sufficient power to exercise those checks on the powers of princes and provide the foundation for establishing republics in due course. This, he argues, is the most important implication of Machiavelli's famous statement in chapter 12 of *The Prince* that "where there are good arms there must be good laws" (McCormick 2015: 346).

Therefore, whereas Kahn privileges the notion of glory as constraining the tyrannical behaviour of princes such as Agathocles, McCormick maintains that Machiavelli reckons cruelties of the likes of the Sicilian towards the nobility would have empowered the ordinary people to constrain tyrannical behaviour on the part of princes. In this way, McCormick highlights the democratic implications of Machiavelli's argument by highlighting that the Florentine believed the people rather than the nobility should be entrusted with exercising the necessary checks on the powers

of princes who might otherwise seek to rule tyrannically. In the next section, I shall demonstrate McCormick's argument is more in line with the spirit of what Machiavelli writes than Kahn's.[5]

Section II: Cruelty as the Weapon of Civil Princes

In the last section, I demonstrated that the example of Agathocles and the nature of his cruelties are subject to a variety of interpretations. In so doing, I challenged the argument that Agathocles' cruelties were excessive and made the case that they were necessary for the Sicilian to secure himself and gain the support of the people. In this section, I begin by demonstrating that Machiavelli indicates that it is necessary for civil princes to have recourse to cruelties. I will then demonstrate that the aim of Machiavelli's rhetoric is not to dissuade the Medici from following the example of cruel princes he puts forth but rather to invite an imitation as they all invariably target the nobility. I do this by considering the examples of cruel princes in chapters 7-9 together. I shall then conclude by considering Machiavelli's remarks at the end of chapter 9 as regards the need for civil princes to "seize absolute authority" by removing the magistrates (*P*, 9). I will argue that a careful examination of these remarks supports McCormick's reading, namely that Machiavelli advises civil princes to remove the cause of the servility of the people in the

[5] This notwithstanding, I am not convinced with McCormick's inclusion of Julius Caesar alongside the Gracchi brothers as an example of a Roman reformer since Machiavelli explicitly charges Caesar with bringing an end to Roman freedom. In contrast, while Machiavelli critiques the lack of prudence on the part of the Gracchi brothers in setting a chain of events that led to the rise of Caesar, he nonetheless praises his intention (D I. 37). This is important as he rarely discusses the intention of princes given his preoccupation with the outcome of things. However, I will not engage this aspect of McCormick's argument as it does not pertain to the topic of cruelty.

nobility, which in turn highlights the democratic implication of the Florentine's defence of cruelty.

In chapter 9 on civil principalities, Machiavelli begins by writing of "the other policy, when a private citizen becomes prince of his fatherland, not through crime or other intolerable violence but with the support of his fellow citizens." This appears to cast doubt on whether princes such as Agathocles could be considered civil princes as he had recourse to cruelties that marked him as a criminal. Furthermore, although the Florentine makes clear the necessity of winning the support of the people, he pointedly refuses to give details as to how princes can do that on the basis that the modes vary according to circumstances. As he writes,

"Therefore, one who becomes prince through the support of the people should keep them friendly to him, which should be easy for him because they ask of him only that they not be oppressed. But one who becomes prince against the people with the support of the great must before everything else seek to gain the people to himself, which should be easy for him when he takes up its protection. And since men who receive good from someone from whom they believed they would receive evil are more obligated to their benefactor, the people immediately wish him well more than if they had been brought to principality with their support. The prince can gain the people to himself in many modes, for which one cannot give certain rules because the modes vary according to circumstances, and so they will be left out. I will conclude only that for a prince it is necessary to have the people friendly; otherwise he has no remedy in adversity." (*P*, 9)

To make sense of whether a civil prince can come to power in the absence of violence and to account for the reasons why Machiavelli refrains from providing details on how princes can acquire the support of the people in this passage, it is necessary to consult the examples Machiavelli brings which often qualify his general statements. First, as it has been noted in the secondary literature, the example of Nabis the Spartan in the same chapter flatly contradicts the suggestion that a civil prince can come to power in the absence of violence (McCormick 2014: Winter 2018). This is because Nabis' rule shares many similarities with the example of Agathocles. In particular, Nabis became the king of Sparta by killing two of his rivals for the throne. Furthermore, once in power, Nabis killed Sparta's nobility, albeit intermittently rather than at a stroke, and freed slaves to fight in his armies (McCormick 2014: 147). Through all this, he was able to "withstand a siege by all Greece and by one of Rome's victorious armies" (*P*, 9), a feat that is similar to that achieved by Agathocles in seeing off the Carthaginians. Second, Machiavelli's juxtaposition of Nabis against failed civil princes, such as the Gracchi brothers in Rome and Messer Giorgio Scali in Florence, provides additional proof for the view that having recourse to violence is necessary for the civil princes who wish to succeed. In a revealing passage, Machiavelli writes that the prince who "knows how to command and is a man full of heart, *does not get frightened in adversity*, does not fail to make other preparation, and with his spirits and orders keeps the generality of the people inspired …will never find himself deceived by them" (my emphasis) (*P*, 9). It is important to note that Machiavelli praises Agathocles in the preceding chapter precisely for "the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities" (*P*, 8). In addition, the fact that the Gracchi brothers were killed by none other than the Roman senators vindicates Agathocles' conduct in securing himself against the senators of

his city. Third, the example of Borgia, who is praised for gaining the "friendship of Romagna," further contradicts the suggestion that a civil prince can gain the people to himself without recourse to cruelty. Therefore, through the examination of the conduct of popular princes such as Cesare Borgia, Agathocles the Sicilian, and Nabis the Spartan, it becomes clear that Machiavelli indicates that cruelty targeted against the few is the method that civil princes need to employ if they seek to inspire the people and gain their support.

Here, it is important to consider an example omitted from consideration so far in Liverotto de Fermo. Liverotto is the modern example of a prince who comes to power through criminal and nefarious means. Liverotto's example is instructive as his rise to power occurs with the support of the great, which suggests he is also a civil prince, albeit a defective one. This notwithstanding, Liverotto's career, as described by Machiavelli, shares some similarities with that of Agathocles. Machiavelli begins his rendition of Liverotto's career by mentioning his disadvantages, namely in being brought up by his maternal uncle, Giovanni Fogliani, after having been left a fatherless child (*P*, 8). Machiavelli notes Liverotto's energy and ability to distinguish himself and become "the first man in his military" after serving under Paolo Vitelli and, subsequently, his brother Vitellozzo (*P*, 8). In addition, Machiavelli highlights Liverotto's ambitions of becoming the prince and not being content with his position. However, the Florentine also makes a note of the fact that Liverotto seized Fermo by conspiring with "certain citizens of Fermo to whom servitude was dearer than the liberty of their fatherland" and "with support from the Vitelli" (*P*, 8). This dependence on the great differentiates the example of Liverotto from Agathocles. This notwithstanding, the target of Liverotto's cruelties happens to be his uncle and "the first men of Fermo" (*P*, 8). Notably, Machiavelli notes how Liverotto exploited his relationship with his

uncle by asking him to receive him "in honourable fashion" so that he could "acknowledge his patrimony" (*P*, 8). Hence, after Giovanni took the necessary care that his nephew be received honourably, Liverotto held "a most solemn banquet" where "with cunning" he "opened a certain grave discussion" in which he praised "the greatness of Pope Alexander and Cesare Borgia…and of their undertaking" (*P*, 8). In the middle of the conversation, Liverotto suggested such sensitive matters "be spoken of in a more secret place" (*P*, 8). After withdrawing into a room where he was followed by "Giovanni and all the other citizens," Liverotto's soldiers came out and killed Giovanni and all the others (*P*, 8). After this, Liverotto mounted on a horse and "besieged the highest magistracy," established a government and made himself the prince (*P*, 8). In one year, Machiavelli reports, Liverotto had managed to strengthen himself "with new civil and military orders" so that he was not only "secure" but also "fearsome to all his neighbours" (*P*, 8). Machiavelli reports that overthrowing Liverotto would have been as difficult as overthrowing Agathocles. Yet, Liverotto's reign ended abruptly when, "one year after the parricide," he was deceived by Cesare Borgia and strangled at Sinigaglia alongside Vitellozzo who, Machiavelli notes, "had been his master in his virtues and crimes" (*P*, 8).

Peter Stacey (2007: 297) has argued that the main difference between the example of Liverotto and Agathocles is that the former came to power with the support of his citizens and the latter with the help of an outsider in Hamilcar the Carthaginian. However, although Machiavelli mentions the role of Liverotto's fellow citizens in the coup, he also makes clear Liverotto's dependence on Vitellozzo. This is evident in how Machiavelli rounds up his rendition of Liverotto's career by mentioning that he allowed himself to be deceived by Cesare Borgia and be strangled alongside Vitellozzo, whom the Florentine notes "had been his master in his virtues

and crimes" (*P*, 8). On the other hand, although Agathocles is reported to have given Hamilcar the Carthaginians the intelligence of his plans, Machiavelli refrains from mentioning what those plans were. Instead, he praises the Sicilian for acquiring the principality "*not through anyone's support* but through the ranks of the military, which he had gained for himself with a thousand hardships and dangers" (my emphasis). It is, therefore, incorrect to suggest that Agathocles was more beholden to a foreigner than Liverotto.

The main difference between the two turns out to be their manner of rise to power and the nature of their cruelties. In particular, Liverotto's dependence on the great contrasts with the example of Agathocles. Furthermore, whereas Agathocles' cruelties were committed in the open sight, Liverotto's cruelties occur in secret, far from people's views. The fact that Liverotto managed to become "secure" in his position and "fearsome to all his neighbours" is attributable to the fact that his cruelties which were the first citizens of his city, and his ability to secure himself against the magistrates. However, Machiavelli's mention of Liverotto's "parricide" and his dependence on Vitellozzo compares unfavourably with Agathocles' cruelties that are followed by a remark as regards the lack of civil controversy. These observations demonstrate three shortcomings on the part of Liverotto. First, it demonstrates Liverotto's dependence on the great. Second, although Liverotto's cruelties are targeted at the first men of Fermo, there is no mention of his cruelties being committed for public consumption or gaining the support of the people. Third, he failed to practice fraud in his foreign policies, evident in the fact that he "permitted himself to be deceived" by none other than Cesare Borgia (*P*, 8). These shortcomings notwithstanding, Machiavelli's observation that Liverotto managed to establish "new civil and military orders"

and make himself feared by besieging the magistracy highlights the abilities of the son of Fermo.

Strauss (1958: 306, note 9) has argued Machiavelli's refusal to bring a modern example of a civil prince in chapter 9 could be attributed to the fact that the Medici themselves were civil princes who returned to power with the support of their fellow citizens. Furthermore, he has highlighted that Machiavelli does not describe civil princes such as Nabis and Agathocles as tyrants in *The Prince*, while he has no problem doing so in the *Discourses*. Strauss (1953: 26) attributes this to Machiavelli's rhetorical tact as "'tyrant' is too harsh a word to use within the hearing of the prince." Strauss' suggestion as regards Machiavelli's rhetorical reasons for not calling Nabis and Agathocles tyrants in *The Prince* is convincing. It is, therefore, important to account for Machiavelli's rhetorical purpose in putting forth the examples of cruel princes and the lessons he would have wanted the Medici to draw.

First, as McCormick (2015: 344) has astutely noted, Strauss overlooks the fact that the Medici were defective civil princes insofar as they relied on an aristocratic coup to return to power. This being the case, it is possible to read the passage cited at the beginning of this section as a rhetorical plea – backed by prudential reasoning – that the Medici would benefit from changing tracks and founding themselves on the people as they would be supported with greater enthusiasm. The passage demonstrates that for Machiavelli's ultimate purpose, that which matters is not the way in which a prince comes to power – whether through the support of the people or the great – so long as he turns to govern with the support of the people. The aim of Machiavelli's rhetoric, therefore, is not to dissuade the Medici from following the example of

Borgia and Agathocles, as Kahn claims in the revision to her original position. Instead, the Florentine wishes the Medici to recognize that it is through having recourse to cruelties against the ambitious few that surround them that they could establish a secure rule, something that is attested through the examples of cruel princes, including Liverotto, even if his virtue does not reach that of Borgia, Agathocles, and Nabis. Furthermore, the fact that the Medici were already restored in Florence makes one doubt whether Machiavelli's purpose was to disabuse the Medici of acquiring power in the manner that they did.

Second, it is necessary to consider the relationship between civil princes and tyrants. Indeed, Machiavelli's example of the civil prince in chapter 9, namely Nabis, is described as a tyrant in the *Discourses* (I. 40; III.6). Here, it is important to examine what Machiavelli writes at the end of the chapter on civil principalities. There, he mentions that civil principalities run into trouble "when they are about to ascend from a civil order to an absolute one" (*P,* 9). This is because these principalities are either commanded by the prince or by means of the magistrates. He then proceeds to advise the civil prince to secure himself against the magistrates and "seize absolute authority" (*P*, 9). This is because the magistrates can easily remove him in adverse times since citizens and subjects who are accustomed to receiving orders from the magistrates will be unwilling to take his orders. In this way, the prince makes himself appear needed to the populace (*P*, 9).

It is necessary to read this advice in tandem with the desire Machiavelli ascribes to the people earlier in the chapter, namely, to avoid being oppressed and commanded. If Machiavelli advises the prince to rid himself of the dependence on magistrates and the great, he is not thereby

encouraging tyrannical rule as has been alleged by his critics (Strauss 1953: 307-308, note 29). This is because he trusts that the people would not tolerate such behaviour on the part of the prince, particularly after he has removed the main obstacle to their freedom in the magistrates.

This interpretation can also be defended by pointing to the example of Clearchus, the tyrant of Heraclea, whom Machiavelli has a good thing to say about in the *Discourses* (I. 16). There, Machiavelli makes clear that although a tyrant can satisfy the people by removing the cause of its servility, he cannot fully recover its freedom. Thus, he praises Clearchus for changing tracks and having the aristocrats "cut to pieces…to the extreme satisfaction of the people" after being brought in by them to deal with the rage of the people as they are considered the main reason for the servility of the people (D I. 16). Importantly, Machiavelli also suggests that such a prince cannot fully recover the freedom of the people. Thus, he encourages the tyrant to set up laws and orders that satisfy the desire of the people to live in security and ensures that he, too, follows them. This can hardly be described as a tyrannical way of ruling, even if the manner of rise to power is often described as tyrannical. This demonstrates the self-sufficiency presupposed by Machiavellian virtue is tempered by a consideration of the desire of the people. Here, the democratic implications of Machiavelli's defence of cruelty are clear. This lends greater weight to McCormick's argument when compared with Kahn's.

In this section, I demonstrated the necessity of having recourse to cruelty to gain the support of the people. To do this, I focused on the example of Nabis the Spartan and Cesare Borgia to highlight this necessity. I also considered the example of Liverotto by highlighting the role of his cruelties against the great as securing him in his principality, even as I critiqued his secret

political machinations. I argued that the aim of Machiavelli's rhetoric is to encourage the Medici to build their foundation on the people by ensuring that the targets of their cruelties are great, as evident in the example of Agathocles. I rebutted the suggestion that Machiavelli encourages tyrannical behaviour by distinguishing between the character of ruling and the manner of rise to power. I argued Machiavelli is not particularly bothered by the latter if the prince does not behave in a tyrannical manner once he assumes power. This is because the tyrant will have empowered people significantly by removing the obstacles to their freedom in the great and the magistrates. I highlighted the democratic implication of this argument, which I suggested supports McCormick's argument. In the next section, I examine the important question of the relationship between cruelty and reputation, which is at the centre of the politics of cruelty.

Section III: Cruelty and Reputation

The question of the relationship between cruelty and the reputation one acquires because of recourse to it is central to the politics of cruelty. In this section, I will examine the relationship between cruelty and reputation through a consideration of the example of Agathocles. There is a consensus in the secondary literature that the conduct of Borgia deserves more credit than that of Agathocles. Thus, Lefort (2012: 131) and McCormick (2011; 2014) praise as shrewd Cesare's decision to create a court in Romagna that cloaked his action with a degree of legitimacy. Victoria Kahn (2013: 569) has similarly suggested that Borgia could be argued to have better managed his reputation. In what follows, I shall critique this consensus in the secondary literature by making the case that Agathocles' actions were as politically astute as that of Cesare.

To do this, I draw on Winter's (2018) account as regards the importance of context in evaluating cruelty. However, I will critique his argument as regards the pedagogical value of Cesare's cruelties. I shall also critique Walzer's argument that Machiavelli believed cruelty to be evil regardless of the context in which it occurs.

In chapter 15, Machiavelli famously describes his intent in "writing something useful to whoever understands it" and the need to "go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it." There, he writes of the distance between how men live and how they ought to live "that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than preservation" (*P*, 15). In accordance with this observation, Machiavelli highlights the necessity of men learning how "not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity" (*P*, 15). In this vein, Machiavelli describes ironies inherent in political action when he advises princes not to "care about incurring the fame of those vices without which it is difficult to save one's state; for if one considers everything well, one will find something appears to be virtue, which if pursued would be one's ruin, and something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being" (*P*, 15).

In the secondary literature, there are disagreements as to how to read Machiavelli's critique of morality, which informs his defence of cruelty in chapter 17. There, Machiavelli affirms the need that a prince "be held merciful and not cruel" but proceeds to warn of using mercy badly (*P*, 17). Though, as alluded to in Section I, the example of Scipio is used to demonstrate the dangers of

excessive mercy, Machiavelli also critiques the policy of the Florentine republic toward Pistoia, which he compares with Cesare Borgia's cruelties. Machiavelli writes,

"Cesare Borgia was held to be cruel; nonetheless his cruelty resorted the Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and to faith. If one considers this well, one will see that he was much more merciful than the Florentine people, who as to escape a name for cruelty, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed" (*P*, 17).

Here, Machiavelli explicitly endorses Cesare's cruelties as more merciful than that mercy shown by the Florentine republic toward Pistoia. In doing so, he brings the attention of the reader to the *effects* of the policies pursued by Cesare on his subjects. In *The Problem of Dirty Hands*, Michael Walzer has read Machiavelli's defence of cruelty to underlie the fact that oftentimes political leaders must go against deep-seated moral beliefs if they seek to pursue the correct political actions. In Machiavelli's advice regarding new princes needing to learn how "not to be good," Walzer (1973: 168) reads an implicit acknowledgement that there exists a distinct set of actions and political tactics, such as cruelty and deceit that are bad in themselves, regardless of the circumstances in which they are performed. Walzer maintains it is Machiavelli's intention to teach "good men" how to go against their moral judgements by resorting to this set of actions when required to do so by necessity. This allows Walzer (1973: 175) to make the case that although Machiavelli excuses terrible and cruel actions if they result in political success, he does not justify them. Walzer (1973: 175) argues that justifying deceit and cruelty would make it unnecessary to teach good men how not to be good, as that would be akin to inaugurating a new

standard of goodness foreign to already good men. Walzer emphasizes Machiavelli's commitment to the existence of moral standards as they are while arguing that he privileges the demands of politics over and above that of morality. Thus, Walzer (1973: 175) suggests that although Machiavelli is not a moral consequentialist, he is a political consequentialist. That cruelty is used well or badly is determined "by its effects over time." However, that cruelty is bad is apparently clear both to Machiavelli as well as the good men he is keen to teach political know-how to (Walzer 1973: 175).

However, as is clear from the foregoing discussion, Machiavelli justifies cruelties under certain conditions, namely when cruelties are targeted against the few, and they allow their practitioner to master necessity rather than be subject to it. Furthermore, it does not follow from this that Machiavelli is engaged in inaugurating a new standard of goodness. Instead, Machiavelli's defence of cruelty highlights how that behaviour which appears to be cruel to the few appears as merciful to the many. This is evident in the passage where Machiavelli's defence of Cesare's cruelties as merciful turns our attention toward their positive reception by his subjects rather than engage in a discourse about their normative status.

In *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, Yves Winter (2018: 106) criticized Walzer's suggestion that Machiavelli regarded political tactics such as cruelty as bad in themselves, regardless of the context in which they occur. Instead, Winter (2018: 104) has emphasized the importance of appearances by arguing that the lesson of chapter 15 is "that there is no such thing as an intrinsically virtuous or vicious action, but that these qualities are attached to what people

see." Accordingly, Winter (2018: 103-104) points to Machiavelli's advice that princes ought not to care about incurring the infamy of vices as highlighting the need to manage appearances. Yet, whereas this might suggest that the appearances might be false, Winter (2018: 106) points to the passage where Machiavelli describes Cesare's cruelties as merciful to make the case that the Florentine effectively collapses the distinction "between the perception of cruelty and its objective reality" by showing "the 'effectual truth' of cruelty is its appearance." That Machiavelli does not question the appearance of Cesare's cruelties as false or distorted is taken to lend credence to this reading. Furthermore, Winter (2018: 106) convincingly argues that the passage complicates the suggestion that Cesare Borgia's actions were shrewd in that he delegated the responsibility for the violence to his deputy in Remirro. This, Winter suggests, means a reputation for cruelty is not always deleterious for a new prince. As he writes, "sometimes, princes must be cruel and deny their responsibility for that cruelty…[whereas] sometimes princes must be cruel and *acknowledge* that cruelty, perhaps even highlight it, to benefit from the 'effect' such affirmation creates" (his emphasis) (Winter 2018: 106). This leads Winter to highlight the importance of context in the evaluation of cruelty while also emphasizing that the appearance of cruelty is independent of its practice. Underlying the observations as regards the importance of the appearance of cruelty is Winter's thesis (2018: 196) that Machiavelli's defence of spectacles of cruelty has a "triadic" structure. This refers to the emphasis put on how violent and cruel spectacles are interpreted by the third party in the political audience rather than the agents of cruelty (2018: 98, 196).

Winter's argument as regards the importance of context in evaluating whether cruelties are a political asset or liability is particularly convincing. The upshot of this analysis for a positive

examination of Agathocles' political acumen is clear. This is because it is possible to make the case that the Sicilian had no reason to cover up or disown his role for his cruelties as he faced a completely different political situation to Cesare. This is evident in historical accounts that testify to the class resentment that pervaded life in ancient Sicily. Notably, it is attested that the coup engineered by Agathocles "was achieved by a two-day popular uprising in which…more than four thousand were slain…and another six thousand were exiled" before the looting and the slaughter was brought to a halt by the Sicilian who entered the general assembly "in civilian clothing and laid down the generalship" (Finley 1968: 102-103). Finley (1968: 103) notes that the offer was refused by the assembly owing to it being composed of people of lower social classes. In exchange, the Sicilian promised to cancel debts and redistribute lands among the people (Finley 1968: 103). It is noteworthy that the Sicilian used fortifications so as to withstand foreign attacks rather than to prevent revolt (Finley 1968: 103). Furthermore, it is noted that Agathocles openly boasted about his skills as a potter as something that endeared him to the people rather than act as a political liability (Finley 1968: 103). Therefore, Lefort and McCormick's arguments as regards Cesare's ability to evade responsibility as something that shines in comparison with Agathocles' actions lose their force as the Sicilian had no reason to do likewise. Through these actions, the Sicilian succeeded in entrenching himself in his position to such an extent that he could "drop terror as an instrument altogether" (Finley 1968: 103).

These facts attest that the Sicilian achieved glory in the eyes of his subjects. This becomes evident when one examines what Machiavelli writes in chapter 18 of *The Prince*, where he famously advises princes to *appear* merciful, faithful, honest, humane and religious without necessarily possessing these qualities. If we examine what Machiavelli says about Cesare's

cruelties exemplifying merciful behaviour, it is possible to make the case that the Sicilian appears as even more merciful than the duke to his people. This is because his actions did not harm anybody, and he even eliminated fortifications that were used to prevent revolt and lived with his subjects. Here, it is important to point out what Machiavelli writes at the end of chapter 8 in his discussion of cruelties:

"For injuries must be done altogether, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; and benefits should be done little by little so that they may be tasted better. *And above all, a prince should live with his subjects so that no single accident whether bad or good has to make him change*; for when necessities come in adverse times you will not be in time for evil, and the good that you do does not help you, because it is judged to be forced on you, and cannot bring you any gratitude" (my emphasis) (*P*, 8).

Though this might appear like cynical advice, it is important to highlight the emphasis that is put on the prince who lives among his people. Furthermore, the suggestion that benefits should be conferred throughout one's reign – even if economically – rather than when one is out of options is a sign of a prince who is attentive to the needs of his subjects. Thus, if Agathocles did not achieve a glorious reputation in the eyes of the posterity, one has to highlight the role of the writers and senators in bestowing glory, as McCormick (2015: 31) has done by way of a comparison with Scipio. Here, it is important to highlight that among the people Agathocles exiled was the Greek historian Timaeus, who is generally regarded as being responsible for painting a deeply negative picture of Agathocles (Finley 1968: 101-102). This picture did not go unchallenged by later historians as the personal enmity of Timaeus toward Agathocles was

discerned by Polybius and Diodorus. Polybius, for instance, is said to have written the following "Do the historians not record that Agathocles of Syracuse, after having the reputation for extreme cruelty in his first coup and in the establishment of his rule, is considered to have become the gentlest and mildest of all once he thought that his power was secure over the Sicilians?" (Finley 1968: 103). This demonstrates not only the popularity but also the political acumen of the Sicilian who knew how to put a stop to cruelties that he had to commit to secure himself.

Yet, Winter (2018: 43-51) has followed others in favouring Cesare's cruelties to that of Agathocles, albeit for a different reason. Notably, whereas McCormick and Lefort praise Cesare for creating a court, Winter has critiqued this focus on the basis that it does not sufficiently capture the popular nature of Cesare's cruelties. This is because such readings highlight the role of the court as an impartial and disinterested institution in bringing an end to the violence unleashed by the duke's deputy (Winter 2018: 45). Winter (2018: 45) argues that the court is there to establish an alliance between Cesare and the people of Romagna. That there is no reference to any proclamation or public indictment and the text moves from Cesare's intention in bringing people to his side to the scene of the bisected body of his deputy in the plaza is taken to lend credence to this reading (Winter 2018: 45). Instead, Winter highlights the pedagogical effects of Cesare's cruelties on his subjects. The pedagogical moment is located in reference to the stupefying effects of the execution on the duke's subjects and the way in which they are faced with a "crime scene" and forced to work out Cesare's motive for the execution (Winter 2018: 48).

Winter is right to highlight the effects of cruelties on the political audience, but his argument as regards the popular character and pedagogical effects of Cesare's cruelties is open to objections. As regards Cesare's cruelties, I already established that Agathocles' cruelties were more popular as he did not harm ordinary people. As regards the pedagogical effects of Cesare's cruelties, it is important to point out that the heads of the Orsini family and Vitelli, whom Machiavelli describes as being eliminated by Cesare in Sinigaglia, meet their fate far from people's view as a result of a secret political machination (*P*, 7). In this instance, Cesare's actions bear a resemblance to that of Liverotto. The target of Agathocles' open display of cruelty, on the other hand, were the senators and the richest citizens, that is, men of political and economic status, who were the main beneficiaries of the oppression of the ordinary people in Sicily. This complicates Winter's account regarding the pedagogical effects of the execution. This is because the responsibility of the Orsini family for the misfortune of Romagna did not become known to the people, nor was their downfall witnessed by them.

In this section, I examined the relationship between cruelty and the reputation one acquires as a result of recourse to it. In doing so, I critiqued Walzer's account that Machiavelli regards cruelty as evil regardless of the context in which they occur. I highlighted that Machiavelli justifies cruelty as an anti-oligarchical political tactic without inaugurating a new standard of goodness. Instead, I suggested that Machiavelli highlights how that behaviour which appears to be cruel to the few appears as merciful to the many. Furthermore, I drew on Winter's account and highlighted the importance of context in evaluating whether one must own up to or disavow the use of cruelties. This allowed me to critique a consensus in the secondary literature, which maintains that Cesare's cruelties demonstrated his superior skills when compared with

Agathocles. Thus, I highlighted that Agathocles had no need to disavow his role in the cruelties that were committed by pointing to the class resentment pervading life in ancient Sicily. Finally, I critiqued the suggestion that Cesare's cruelties were more popular or had some notable pedagogical value. In the next section, I follow up on this discussion by examining the relationship between cruelty and the political emotions that are evoked by recourse to it.

Section IV: Pitfalls of Cruelty

In his discussion of the emotions that a prince should wish to evoke in his subjects, Machiavelli famously advises princes to make themselves feared rather than loved. However, he also warns princes that fear could be transformed into hatred (*P*, 17). In this section, I examine the dangers that come with having recourse to cruelty. First, I will make the case that although Machiavelli warns that cruelty can inspire hatred, he does not, on this basis, refrain from recommending it. Second, I will demonstrate that fear is not the only emotion that one can evoke through recourse to cruelty. Instead, I will argue it is possible for princes to make themselves loved by their subjects. This, I shall argue, is the outcome achieved by Agathocles.

In his discussion of fear and love, Machiavelli acknowledges that it would be best for a prince to be both loved and feared (*P*, 17). However, he argues that such an outcome is difficult to achieve in new principalities as such states are "full of dangers" and "it is impossible for the new prince to escape a name for cruelty" (*P*, 17). He, therefore, argues that it is better for a new prince to

find himself on what is his by making himself feared rather than on what belongs to someone else by trying too hard to make himself loved (*P*, 17). As he writes, "love is held by a chain of obligations, which, because men are wicked, is broken at every opportunity for their own utility, but fear is held by a dread of punishment that never forsakes you" (*P*, 17). Nevertheless, Machiavelli warns new princes of the danger of fear transforming into hatred. Accordingly, he advises princes to abstain "from the property of his citizens and his subjects," "from their [sic] women," and not move against someone's life unless "there is suitable justification and manifest cause for it" (*P*, 17). Notably, abstaining from the property of subjects and citizens is singled out as particularly important, as "men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony" (*P*, 17). Another important reason for this emphasis is that a prince can easily find a cause for taking away the property of others – especially princes who live rapaciously - whereas it is rarer to find a cause for taking life (*P*, 17). However, it is important to note that Machiavelli does not argue that cruelty will necessarily result in hatred. Hence, he writes that "being feared and not being hated can go together very well" (*P*, 17).

Machiavelli's insistence that hatred does not necessarily follow from having recourse to cruelties is defended in chapter 19 of *The Prince*. There, the Florentine shows that hatred can be acquired through both good deeds and bad deeds. Hence, he demonstrates that all good Roman emperors who refrained from cruelties came to an unhappy end, except for Marcus Aurelius. This is because all except Marcus were new princes whose failure to have recourse to cruelties had pernicious consequences, especially by making them hated in the eyes of their soldiers, who the Florentine makes clear were a third humour that Roman emperors had to deal with. As to the bad emperors, Machiavelli mentions that all emperors except Septimius Severus came to an unhappy

end. This is because they did not have the virtue of Severus, who Machiavelli notes had managed to make himself "feared and revered by everyone" by keeping his soldiers satisfied and the people stupefied. Hence, the cruelties of the other emperors made them hated by everyone; notably, in the case of Maximinus, Machiavelli mentions the "indignation at the baseness of his blood" which accompanied his cruelties as a factor in the revolt against his rule (*P*, 19).[6] The Florentine rounds up by advising the new prince not to imitate Marcus as he was a hereditary ruler. He also advises the new prince against imitating Severus by pointing out that all princes except the Turk and the Sultan need to focus on satisfying the people rather than the soldiers in the modern world (*P*, 19).

From the foregoing discussion, it might appear that cruelties that are well used will only result in fear rather than love. Indeed, the example of Hannibal brought in the same chapter appears to confirm such a reading, given his success in keeping his army united is attributed to his "inhuman cruelty, which together with his infinite virtues, always made him venerable and terrible in the sight of his soldiers" (*P*, 17). However, the example of Agathocles demonstrates one can acquire the love of one's people by recourse to cruelties against the great. In previous sections, I drew on the historical account of Agathocles' rule to demonstrate the popular nature of his rule and how he never needed a bodyguard when among his people. This demonstrates that fear could not have been the main passion that Agathocles inspired in his subjects. Rather, he

[6] It is important to highlight that whereas the low origin of Agathocles turns out to be a political asset, Maximinus' base origin is presented as a political liability. In this way, we can recognize the different political cultures existing in ancient Sicily and the Roman Empire.

appears to have secured their fidelity through cruelties that were subjected against the richest citizens.

In this vein, we might also point to Agathocles' redistribution of land and cancellation of debts as an important factor in achieving this outcome. It might be objected that this practice contradicts Machiavelli's advice as regards princes needing to abstain from the property of others on the basis that it could generate hatred. However, that is not the case. Here, it is important to highlight Machiavelli's reasons for the advice, namely that princes will never cease finding a reason to acquire the property of their subjects. This demonstrates that he must be referring to the property of the ordinary people, who are many in number, rather than the great, who are few. The latter, the new prince, "can make and unmake…everyday" (*P*, 9). Hence, the advice as regards living by rapine ways does not preclude recourse to redistributive policies.

Again, this interpretation finds textual support in *Discourses* (I. 55), where Machiavelli writes of the necessity of eliminating gentlemen and creating equality where one wishes to establish a republic and of creating inequality where one wishes to establish a principality. If we consider Agathocles' conduct against this maxim, his redistributive policies attest to the proto-republican nature of his rule. Though such measures result in hatred among those who have been deprived of their properties, the risk is averted if one eliminates them, which is what Machiavelli advises new princes to do. In this vein, it is important to mention that the Sicilian either killed or exiled the richest citizens whose lands he took into his possession.

It might seem counter-intuitive that people would cherish witnessing cruelties against their fellow-citizens. Yet Machiavelli's defence of cruelties precisely presupposes this premise, namely that people will find satisfaction in witnessing the undoing of those who seek to oppress and command them. Thus, Machiavelli writes of the satisfaction of the people in seeing the bisected body of Remirro in chapter 7 of *The Prince*. Furthermore, in *Discourses* (I. 16), Machiavelli writes how Clearchus, the tyrant of Heraclea, "cut to pieces all the aristocrats, to the extreme satisfaction of the people" after the said aristocrats brought him to secure them against the rage of the people. Though Machiavelli does not describe the reaction of the people to the cruelties of Agathocles, his cryptic mention of a lack of civil controversy lends weight to the reading that the people were pleased by what they saw.

To recapitulate, Machiavelli argues that the way to avoid hatred is not through abstaining from acts of cruelty. Rather, it is important to employ cruelties against the few who seek to command and oppress the people. This will always result in acquiring the love or the fidelity of the people, which Agathocles managed to achieve. However, Machiavelli also demonstrates through the example of Hannibal the possibility of using cruelty to instill fear in the hearts of soldiers.

Section V: An Objection to Machiavelli's Defence of Cruelty Considered

In the previous sections, I reconstructed Machiavelli's defence of cruelties. In the first step, I made the case that Machiavelli advances cruelty as an anti-oligarchical political tactic. In so doing, I highlighted the democratic implications of it. In the second step, I examined the politics of cruelty and how that behaviour which appears to be cruel to the few appears as merciful to the many. Finally, I examined the emotions evoked in a political audience by acts of cruelty while highlighting that hatred is not the necessary outcome of cruelty. I did this by considering the example of Agathocles, whose cruelties allow Machiavelli to state the conditions under which having recourse to cruelties becomes justified. In this section, I will critically examine Judith Shklar's critique of cruelty. I will argue that her account of cruelty differs from Machiavelli's and that her reading of the Florentine is open to objections.

In *Ordinary Vices*, Shklar (1984: 8) defines cruelty as "the willful inflicting of physical pain on a weaker being in order to cause anguish and fear" (1984: 8). Shklar (1984: 8) puts cruelty first among vices because it "is a wrong done entirely to *another creature*" (her emphasis). In this way, Shklar differentiates her decision to put cruelty first among vices from Christian accounts that prioritize the wrongness of pride as it signals the transgression of the authority of God. This notwithstanding, she aims the thrust of her critique at Machiavelli, whom she calls a misanthrope based on his endorsement of cruelty while acknowledging that cruelty is distinctly human behaviour (Shklar 1984: 13-14). Shklar (1984: 10) appears to read the example of Agathocles as that of an "indiscriminate butcher" whose failure to achieve glory is a fact that Machiavelli notes without concern for whether a desire for glory will prevent further acts of cruelties. Notably,

Shklar (1984: 10) faults Machiavelli for failing to consider cruelty from the perspective of its victims and adopting the perspective of its practitioner. In addition, she makes the baffling case that Machiavelli believed that cruelty is only effective against "one's inferior subjects" and "that one cannot rule one's equals with cruelty" (Shklar 1984: 28). She also calls the crimes of the Spaniards in the New World as a triumph of Machiavellianism without seeming to differentiate between Machiavelli and the caricature of him (Shklar 1984: 12).

Shklar's understanding of Machiavelli's defence of cruelty is flawed. First, Machiavelli never calls Ferdinand's pious cruelties well used. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest the crimes of the Spaniards were ones he would have approved of. Second, although she is right in her assertion that Machiavelli does not consider cruelty from the perspective of the victim, her suggestion that Machiavelli adopts the perspective of the practitioner of cruelty is incorrect. As I highlighted, Machiavelli's admiration for princes such as Borgia, Agathocles, and Nabis lies in the fact that they satisfied the desire of the people for revenge by ensuring the target of their cruelties were the great citizens who sought to otherwise oppress and command the people. Even the cruelties of Liverotto that do not receive the same praise are targeted against the first men of his city. This demonstrates the fallaciousness of the suggestion that Machiavelli reckoned well used cruelties ought to be targeted at one's inferior subjects. Furthermore, as argued in Section II, Machiavelli's civil princes invariably face the hostility of both the magistrates as well as the people if they do not follow the same laws they institute. In this sense, the self-sufficiency presupposed by Machiavellian virtue finds itself tempered by the need to keep one's subjects satisfied. Finally, Machiavelli's identification with the people rather than princes is evident in the

Dedicatory Letter to *The Prince*, where he writes of his "low and mean state" as providing him with a privileged standpoint "to discuss and give rules for the governments of princes."

It is evident that most of the cruelties in the modern world are not of the type endorsed by Machiavelli. This is because the targets of cruelties often happen to be ordinary people. It is important to highlight that these types of cruelties are described by Machiavelli as badly used insofar as they force their practitioner to be "always under necessity to hold a knife in his hand" (*P*, 8). The upshot of Machiavelli's analysis is that such cruelties cannot persist as it transforms fear in subjects into hatred that make the persistence of such regimes tenuous. In theorizing the role of violence in politics more broadly, Machiavelli is, therefore, best understood as a thinker who takes the side of the people by making it clear how it is possible to overcome those princes and the ambitious few that would seek to oppress and command the people and deprive them of their freedom.

Conclusion

In this paper, I reconstructed Machiavelli's account of cruelty with a view to highlighting the democratic implications of his arguments and demonstrating the ways in which his account of cruelty differs from the contemporary understanding of it. Notably, I made the case that Machiavelli views cruelty as an anti-oligarchical political tactic that is best deployed to avenge the people's desire for revenge against those who seek to otherwise oppress and command them. To do this, I focused on Agathocles the Sicilian, whose example allows Machiavelli to state the conditions under which having recourse to cruelties becomes justified. I argued that Machiavelli

did not believe that Agathocles' cruelties were excessive insofar as the Sicilian managed to master necessity by removing the senators who would have otherwise posed a threat to his rule (Skinner 2019: 55). To back up this claim, I highlighted the example of Cesare Borgia in chapter 7 and how Machiavelli praised his cruelties. Furthermore, I highlighted the example of Nabis the Spartan in chapter 9 as well as the comparison Machiavelli draws between his example and that of the Gracchi brothers, who were killed by the Roman senators. I argued that the examples of Nabis and Cesare Borgia, who both had recourse to cruelties, undermine the suggestion that Machiavelli would have regarded the cruelties of Agathocles as barring him from being considered a virtuous prince. I also made the case that this demonstrates that cruelty is considered by Machiavelli as the weapon of civil princes.

Furthermore, I drew on the historical accounts of the rule of Agathocles and highlighted how there was a higher political participation after the coup he engineered came to a happy consummation. I also highlighted how the Sicilian lived with his subjects in harmony by way of removing fortifications that were used to prevent revolts and making use of them against foreign attacks. These facts, I argued, challenge the claim that Agathocles deprived his citizens of their liberty (Stacey 2007: 297). Furthermore, I argued that this demonstrates that the Sicilian achieved glory in the eyes of his subjects. To account for the reasons that Agathocles failed to achieve glory in the eyes of posterity, I drew on McCormick's account, which highlights the role of the writers and senators in bestowing glory. In so doing, I challenged Kahn's account as regards the glory of the Sicilian and the lessons his example bears for the Medici. I argued if there are any lessons to draw from the example of Agathocles, it is that cruelties must be targeted against the aristocrats and the nobility rather than advise princes to abstain from acquiring states

through such methods, especially since the Medici had already been restored. In so doing, I highlighted the importance of how one rules rather than how one acquires power in Machiavelli's estimation.

I then proceeded to challenge a consensus in the secondary literature as regards the greater political acumen of Cesare Borgia when compared with Agathocles. I argued that the Sicilian had no reason to cover up his actions like Cesare as he faced a completely different political situation. To do this, I drew on Winter's account regarding the importance of context in evaluating the politics of cruelty while critiquing Walzer's account that Machiavelli regarded cruelty as evil regardless of the context in which it occurs. I argued that Agathocles' popularity resulted from him being held responsible for the cruelties he had committed, as it made him appear merciful toward his subjects. I then proceeded to criticize Winter's account as regards the pedagogical character of Cesare's cruelties. I made the case that the people saw the beneficiaries of their oppression in the case of Agathocles. In contrast, the secret political machinations of Cesare meant that this did not become evident to them. I then followed up this discussion by considering the pitfalls of cruelty by examining the political emotions evoked by having recourse to it. I highlighted Machiavelli's argument that excessive cruelties could make one hated. However, I demonstrated that hatred is not the necessary outcome of well used cruelties, as fear and love could also result from having recourse to such political tactics. Notably, I argued that Agathocles' cruelties made him appear merciful in the eyes of his subjects, something that ensured he acquired the fidelity or the love of his subjects. I argued this demonstrates that cruelty does not necessarily have to lead to fear as might be assumed, though I acknowledged that the example of Hannibal demonstrates that it is one outcome.

I followed up the discussion of Machiavelli's defence of cruelty by differentiating it from contemporary accounts. To do this, I focused on Judith Shklar's critique of cruelty as the offence of the strong against the weak and, consequently, as the worst thing humans can do to one another. I demonstrated that her account of cruelty differs from Machiavelli's and that her reading of the Florentine is open to objections. Notably, I criticized her view that Machiavelli's defence of cruelty is from the perspective of the practitioner of cruelties. Instead, I argued that Machiavelli's admiration for princes such as Agathocles is that they were attentive to the needs of the ordinary people, even if the Sicilian was motivated by his own ambition.

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