Imagining the Unimaginable:
The Ideological Function of the Political Imagination in Machiavelli's Politics of Transformation

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Abbreviations for the works of Niccolò Machiavelli cited in this thesis are as follows.

P: *The Prince*

D: *Discourses on Livy*

FH: *Florentine Histories*

Gh: The "Ghiribizzi"

Ass: *L'Asino* or *The [Golden] Ass*

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of the political imagination in Machiavelli's critique of ideology and in his theory of change. More precisely, I examine the ideological function that Machiavelli attributes to two constitutive arteries (or subfaculties) of the political imagination —political emotions (*passione*) and political memory (*memoria*). As I demonstrate, the political imagination and its subfaculties are central to understanding Machiavelli's critique of the Church as a political instrument and to his theory on new beginnings and founding. I contend that he regards memory and emotions as faculties through which ideology secures the consent of subjects, operating in and through their political imaginations. *I argue that political memory and political emotions serve ideological functions in Machiavelli's politics of preservation and change.* To do so, I first establish the centrality of the imagination in Machiavelli's political thought and, accordingly, demonstrate the constitutive functions of its subfaculties. This allows me to examine their central role in Machiavelli's analysis of the repressive ideological power of religion. Second, I examine the liberating or transformative potential of political emotions and memory and highlight how Machiavelli might have used his rhetorical *virtù* to affect and rewire the reader's 'corrupt' political imagination. In doing so, I hope to offer insights that may prove instrumental in better comprehending Machiavelli's broader objective of beginnings and change, a dimension that he himself might not have fully realised or discerned from his own writing.

Résumé

Ce mémoire explore le rôle de l'imagination politique dans la critique de l'idéologie de Machiavel et dans sa théorie du changement. Plus précisément, j'examine la fonction idéologique que Machiavel attribue à deux artères constitutives (ou sous-facultés) de l'imagination politique - les émotions politiques (*passione*) et la mémoire politique (*memoria*). Comme je le démontre, l'imagination politique et ses sous-facultés sont essentielles pour comprendre la critique de Machiavel contre l'Église, qu'il considère comme un instrument politique, ainsi que sa théorie sur les nouveaux commencements et la formation d'États. Je soutiens qu'il considère la mémoire et les émotions comme des facultés par lesquelles une idéologie sécurise le consentement des sujets, en agissant sur leur imagination politique et par son intermédiaire. Je soutiens que la mémoire et les émotions politiques exercent des fonctions idéologiques dans les politiques de préservation et de changement de Machiavel. Pour ce faire, j'établis en premier lieu la dimension centrale de l'imagination dans la pensée politique de Machiavel et, de ce fait, je démontre les fonctions constitutives des émotions et de la mémoire politiques. Cela me permet d'examiner leur rôle crucial dans l'analyse que fait Machiavel du pouvoir idéologique répressif de la religion. Deuxièmement, j'examine le potentiel libérateur ou transformateur des émotions et de la mémoire politiques et je souligne la possibilité que Machiavel ait pu se servir de sa virtù rhétorique afin d'affecter et de reconfigurer l'imagination politique "corrompue" de son lecteur. Ce faisant, j'espère offrir des perspectives qui pourraient s'avérer importantes dans la compréhension de l'objectif ultime de Machiavel relatif aux commencements et aux changements, une dimension que lui-même aurait pu ne pas complètement percevoir ou discerner de ses propres écrits.

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Beginning a Machiavellian thesis by enumerating a list of my co-conspirator may seem ironic, but I trust that Machiavelli would appreciate the humour in this paradoxical gesture.

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I. Introduction

> *But there should be no one with so small a brain that he will believe, if this house is falling, that God will save it without any other prop, because he will die beneath that ruin*
>
> - Niccolò Machiavelli, *L'Asino* X: 124-127

This thesis explores the role of the political imagination in Machiavelli's critique of ideology and in his theory of change. More precisely, I examine the ideological function that Machiavelli attributes to two constitutive arteries (or subfaculties) of the political imagination — political emotions (*passione*) and political memory (*memoria*). The focus of this thesis is based on two fundamental claims about Machiavelli's political writings. First, his critique of religion can be understood as a critique of ideology.[1] Second, Machiavelli's objective of new beginnings requires an ideological rupture in the individual and collective political imaginations.[2] Accordingly, my thesis' first and second chapters will elaborate on these two claims.

Before discussing the role of the political imagination in Machiavelli's critique of ideology, I first wish to provide brief conceptual clarifications. I adopt an approach to ideology based on principles shared by Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser since both have advanced seminal theories of ideology in and through Machiavelli's works. Although they may diverge in their definitions of ideology and domination, both rely on the premise that ideologies are systems of domination that structure and ensure the reproduction of social relations.[3] Whether formulated as

[1] Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, ed. François Matheron, trans. Gregory Elliott, Radical Thinkers (Verso Books, 2020), 90–92; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 2003, 126; Nicole Hochner, "A Ritualist Approach to Machiavelli," *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 4 (2009): 575; Ross Speer, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci" 2 (2016): 11–12.

[2] Sergio Alloggio, "The Reproduction of Control : Notes on Althusser's Notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and the Use of Machiavelli," *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 3, no. 1 (January 2012): 79–88, https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC168378; Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 8; Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 136; Speer, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci."

[3] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press (New York, 2001), 128; Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, 138.

a "conception of the world" or in terms of "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," both approaches agree that an ideology ascribes a system of representations that serves the social function of shaping individuals in such a way as to fulfil their social roles to ensure the reproduction of the dominating social structures (thereby making 'individuals' into 'subjects').[4] In and through discourses, practices, myths, and images, ideologies are naturalized and internalized by subjects; they shape and affect the way one perceives, understands, and experiences the social world.[5] The power of ideologies is not necessarily to ascribe to subjects the *content* of their beliefs, but rather the *terms* by which they operate.[6] As such, by ideologies, I mean systems of domination that prescribe the *terms* by which subjects perceive and interpret social reality.

Gramsci and Althusser both recognize that the most important ideology in Machiavelli's texts is religion.[7] Therefore, I limit my treatment of ideology in Machiavelli's writing to his discourse on religions and sects (*D* I.11-16; II.5).[8] I align with the interpretation that Machiavelli has an instrumentalist view of religion and that he criticizes religion viewed as *religio* —"used to develop and cement social bonds"— rather than *fides* —a faith based on a transcendent 'truth'."[9] This line of interpretation clarifies the relation between ideology and Machiavelli's view of religion; in both cases, religion or ideology is viewed as that which structures and ensures the reproduction of social relations. By condemning the Church's misuse of its ideological power

[4] Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, 328; Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 162.
[5] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 223; Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, 322.
[6] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 223; Gramsci, Selections from the prison notebooks, 322
[7] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 90-92; Gramsci, Selections from the prison notebooks, 136.
[8] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 88-92; Gramsci, Selections from the prison notebooks, 136; Hochner, "A Ritualist Approach to Machiavelli," 579; Speer, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci," 12-13.
[9] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 90; Fontana, *Love of Country and Love of God: The Political Uses of Religion in Machiavelli*, 639; J. Samuel Preus, "Machiavelli's Functional Analysis of Religion: Context and Object," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 2 (1979): 188–89, https://doi.org/10.2307/2709147; Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 85.

(religion well/badly used [*D* I.15]), Machiavelli indicates the political potency of religion *(fides)* as an apparatus of social control (*religio*) "to realize popular politics."[10] His political objective of founding a new and durable state is related to his critique of religion as he blames the Church and its moral framework for "[keeping] this province divided" (*D* I.12.2). The reproduction of social relations through tradition, culture, customs, and religion keeps the province in a moral prison as its political subjects are rendered politically idle and mentally "corrupt," thereby thwarting the emergence of any desire for change as Christianity has "interpreted … religion according to idleness and not according to virtue" (*D* II.2).

This approach, wherein ideologies determine or affect *how we think,* indicates that they affect the mental faculties by which thoughts are produced and assessed.[11] These faculties are numerous and various, but I contend that for Machiavelli, an overarching umbrella faculty called the *fantasia* or *immaginazionne* —what I refer to as the *political imagination*— encompasses them.[12] This forms the basis of my argument that, for Machiavelli, for an ideology to dominate successfully it must exert control over the imagination, shaping the terms by which they operate (*D* I.9, I.11, II.P, II.5). This control enables the ideology to maintain its power by having individuals internalize its logic and instinctively adhere to its terms, without constant external reinforcement (*D* I.17).[13] This is how Machiavelli's theory of transformation relates to the political imagination;

> Machiavelli implies that Christianity has thoroughly mystified *the minds* of modern political actors, inhibiting them from behaving in civically salutary ways: most chillingly perhaps, when he asserts, in his discussion of ecclesiastical principalities in *The Prince*,

[10] Speer, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci," 12.
[11] Avshalom M. Schwartz, "Political Imagination and Its Limits," *Synthese* 199, no. 1 (December 1, 2021): 3333, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02936-1.
[12]Machiavelli seem to use these terms interchangeably. In the Ghiribizzi, Machiavelli employs the word "*fantasia*" to refer to the imagination, whereas he uses the term "*immaginazione*" in the famous passage of *The Prince* on the "effectual truth"; "to go directly to the effectual truth [*verità effettuale*] of the thing than to the imagination [*immaginazione*] of it" (*P* XV).
[13] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 82; Gramsci, Selections from the prison notebooks.

> that all modern subjects of an allegorized Christian principality, including political leaders, can *imagine* no ultimate authority other than that of the Church (*P* 11).[14]

The 'power of ideology over subjects' ability to *imagine* alternative ways of being and living stems from "historically novel structural and psychological constraints, which so seriously inhibit modern political actors."[15] In other words, and as will be developed in this thesis, as ideology determines the terms by which subjects think and act, it also determines and delimits the realm of political possibilities and influences individual and collective political aspirations. This is why I identify the political imagination as a faculty through which one becomes subject to ideology —it is a faculty through which ideology operates as "the individual and collective imagination act as conveyor points between sensory experiences and political affects."[16] This means that the political imagination mediates between received information and external reaction. Machiavelli indicates so in the *Ghiribizzi*, a 1506 letter addressed to Giovan Battista Soderini in which he seeks to explain the variation in people's behaviour and [re]action towards their particular circumstances. While he indicates his shortcomings in providing such answers, Machiavelli writes that "each man must do what his mind prompts him to" (*Gh*, 134), and points to the imagination as governing one's actions. Considering that (1) the imagination mediates between received information and external [re]action and that (2) it operates on the terms of the dominant ideology, this suggests that the ensuing external [re]action is a material result of the ideology. Althusser argues that ideology has a material existence; it "always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material."[17] While ideology is "imaginary," to reaffirm and perpetuate its dominant order it must

[14] John P. Mccormick, "Faulty Foundings and Failed Reformers in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (February 2017): 214, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000678; *emphasis added.*
[15] McCormick, "Faulty Foundings and Failed Reformers in Machiavelli's Florentine Histories," 215.
[16] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 64.
[17] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 166.

acquire a material form by affecting or guiding actions. In this thesis, this is how I identify that an ideology acquires a material form; through the political imagination.

Coming back to the faculties that constitute the political imagination, in Machiavelli's writings, I identify political memory (*memoria*) and the political emotions (*passione*) as being the most important faculties of the mind to control in order to command virtuously (*P* IV, XIX; *D* I.11; II P.; II.5; III.1.3; III.5; *FH* VI.29). A significant subsection of my first chapter will involve interpretive work on Machiavelli's writing to justify my claim that political emotions and memory are constitutive *subfaculties* of the political imagination . As I will demonstrate, the political imagination and its subfaculties are central to understanding Machiavelli's critique of the Church as a political instrument and to his theory on beginnings and founding. I contend that he regards memory and emotions as faculties through which ideology secures the consent of subjects, operating in and through their political imaginations (*D* I.16-17). *I argue that political memory and political emotions serve ideological functions in Machiavelli's politics of preservation and change.* In doing so, I hope to offer insights that may prove instrumental in better comprehending Machiavelli's broader objective of beginnings and change, a dimension that he himself might not have fully realized or discerned from his own writing.

What does Machiavelli suggest is the role of political emotions and political memory in preserving the existing order, and inversely, in politics of transformation? How does he suggest political emotions and memories can be harnessed to maintain (*mantenere*) or change/alter (*[ri]mutare/alterare*) an order? An exploration of Machiavelli's use and underlying analysis of political emotions and memory is indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of his politics of beginnings and founding. My research's contribution to Machiavellian scholarship is thus twofold: (1) it first proposes a look at Machiavelli's theory of transition/beginnings strictly from

an ideological lens (rather than looking at the transition from a form of government to another, for instance) and (2) it does so by providing an analysis of the function of political memory and the political emotions in Machiavelli's critique of ideology and in his theory of change. What can we learn about Machiavelli's theory of change/beginnings when we approach his ideological critique through his discussion of political emotions and memory?

This thesis begins by providing a brief review of the literature that addresses Machiavelli's objective of new beginnings and founding and highlights the importance and function of the imagination in discussing this topic. In the first chapter, I establish that Machiavelli attributes significant political functions to political emotions and memory in reproducing existing social relations and subjecting individuals to consent to their own political idleness, facilitated by religious ideological mechanisms. In the second chapter, I examine the liberating or transformative potential of political emotions and memory for Machiavelli.

I. Contextualizing the Political Imagination in Machiavellian Scholarship

Machiavelli's political objective is the unification of Italy, "the foundation and beginning of a durable state," a new state free from corruption, which for him requires a 'return to beginnings' (*D* III.1).[18] This concept has sparked diverse interpretations within Machiavellian scholarship, centering on the nature of political change advocated in his writing. Scholars have grappled with Machiavelli's equivocal assertion regarding the concept of 'returns to beginnings,' reflecting a spectrum of perspectives, each offering valuable insights into his conception of political transformation.

[18]Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 48, 62-68 Miguel E. Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, vol. 2, Topoi Library (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2000), 177, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-9337-3.

John P. McCormick has adopted a pragmatic interpretation of the problem of beginnings and founding in Machiavelli, focusing on institutional reforms and shifts in governance. In his essay "Machiavelli's Greek Tyrant as Republican Reformer," McCormick interprets Machiavelli as proposing a model to *reform* rather than *transform* the corrupted character of the civic orders.[19] Elsewhere, McCormick makes it clear that he understands Machiavelli's politics of change at the institutional level and therefore interprets the problem of founding as one that can be adequately addressed within the existing legal and institutional framework .[20]

In stark contrast to McCormick's interpretation, Miguel Vatter adopts a more metaphysical approach to the problem of founding. In his book *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom*, Vatter challenges conventional readings by proposing that Machiavelli's notion of 'return to beginnings' rather points to a theory of change from a state of being to another; from a state of slavery to one of freedom (or in Machiavelli's terms, from a "tyranny" to a "republic").[21] Like McCormick, Vatter identifies that Machiavelli's discourse for political change ultimately has to do with people's desire "not to be oppressed" by the elite.[22] However, for Vatter, the problem goes beyond McCormick's institutional approach, delving into the metaphysical complexities of Machiavelli's problem of change. Vatter contends that the nature of this change lies in the people's emancipation from their "master-slave relation."[23] One can read in Vatter's interpretation the necessity for subjects to transcend the oppressive social relations that define

[19] John P. McCormick, "Machiavelli's Greek Tyrant as Republican Reformer," in *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy, and Language*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, Fabio Frosini, and Vittorio Morfino, Brill, vol. 1 (Leiden, 2015), 337.
[20] John P. McCormick, "People and Elites in Republican Constitutions, Traditional and Modern," in *The Paradox of Constitutionalism*, ed. Martin Loughlin and Neil Walker, 1st ed. (Oxford University PressOxford, 2008), 107–26, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199552207.003.0007.
[21] Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 266.
[22] McCormick, "Machiavelli's Greek Tyrant as Republican Reformer," 344; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 273-274.
[23] Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 273-274.

them as a group. He recognizes the necessity for the people to gain a desire for freedom and arm themselves accordingly, in order to counter the oppressive forces of the state.[24] He also highlights the necessity to break with tradition; "Machiavelli shows that the practices of political foundation based on tradition, authority and religion, all draw their normative force from their attachment to pure origins, that is, to founding instances that are withdrawn from the active practice of historical repetition, from the active subversion of origins."[25] However, Vatter fails to recognize that this break with tradition —or the ideological break from the authority of religion— does not come automatically with people's desires not to be oppressed. What is lacking from his text is a conception of emancipation for subjects who may not recognize their own oppression, and consequently do not actively seek revolution or partake in political action —i.e., the subjects Machiavelli criticizes as idle and corrupt men (*D* I.16-18; II.2, 21; III.1). Vatter's framework is based on subjects' emancipation from their master-slave relation, which is contingent on their active *desire not to be oppressed*. He addresses subjects' desire to transcend their oppressive social relations but omits the ideological nature of their subjugation. He emphasizes the role of religion in perpetuating their subjectification and idleness, yet overlooks the appropriate means required to transcend this particular form of subjugation.[26] Vatter's analysis provides valuable insights into the metaphysical dimension of oppression in Machiavelli's writing but falls short of addressing the ideological dimension inherent in the quest for freedom. My interpretation embraces this metaphysical approach to the problem of founding, but extends it further by centering ideology and the political imagination in Machiavelli's problem of change.

[24] Ibid, 110.
[25] Ibid, 10.
[26] Ibid.

Hanna Pitkin interprets Machiavelli's returns to beginnings and politics of transformation as "the renewals (which) takes the form of a liberation."[27] She posits that Machiavelli seeks to urge subjects to civic engagement, with the ultimate aim of catalyzing social and political transformation.[28] Adopting a psycho-political angle, Pitkin interprets Machiavelli's call to return to beginnings as characterized by an existential awakening, a call to consciousness, wherein individuals come to acknowledge their inherent ability and responsibility to take control of their fate, rather than idly resigning themselves to their faith.[29] As Machiavelli writes that returns to beginnings need "something [to] arise by which punishment is brought back to [men's] memory and fear is renewed in their spirit" (*D* III.1.3), Pitkin describes this renewal as an experience of *excess*, of "terror and of self-recognition" which is "tied to memory, the recovery of a forgotten past."[30] However, she fails to recognize what Winter highlights in his discussion on beginnings and foundation; that this emotional "excess renders [founding moments] effective at reconfiguring the space of the political imagination."[31] Indeed, the existential shock emphasized by Pitkin as essential for the subject's 'rebirth' implies a shock on the political imagination *through* emotions and memory. Therefore, while she aptly interprets Machiavelli's return to beginnings as implying a newly acquired state of consciousness about one's subjectivity and agency, she fails to recognize that emotions and memory are constitutive of the transformative process she identifies. I wish to demonstrate that the effects on memory and emotions are not merely *consequences* of the founding moment or return to beginnings, but rather, they are *intended results* meant to "reconfigure the space of the political imagination."[32] This reconfiguration is necessary because it undermines and

[27] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune is a woman: gender and politics in the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 275.
[28] Ibid, 278-279.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid, 275.
[31] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 140.
[32] *Ibid*., 140.

destroys the logic of the dominant ideological order which dictates the terms by which people think and act. In this thesis, I highlight that Machiavelli's politics of transformation relies on harnessing the political imagination, which consists of faculties that need to be exploited to generate the transformative existential shock upon which relies Pitkin's interpretation.

The existing literature has overlooked the centrality of affecting political change in and through the subject's mind in Machiavelli's theory of beginnings and founding. I will demonstrate that for Machiavelli, beginnings and founding require disarming the dominant ideology of its control over these faculties of the political imagination. The *virtù* of Machiavelli's new founder is contingent on the ability to exploit these faculties, thereby pointing to their essential ideological function in the politics of preservation and change.

II. Ideological Function of Political Memory and Political Emotions

In this chapter, I argue that political emotions and memory play a central function in Machiavelli's analysis of the repressive ideological power of religion. Doing so first requires establishing the centrality of the imagination in Machiavelli's political thought and, accordingly, demonstrating the constitutive function of political emotions and memory.

i. Political Emotions and Political Memory: Arteries of the Political Imagination

In the *Ghiribizzi* —a letter addressed to Giovan Battista Soderini, the nephew of the gonfaloniere Piero Soderini— Machiavelli provides early reflections on the importance of adapting actions to the circumstances of the times, foreshadowing ideas that would later be expanded in *The Prince*, *Discourses,* and the *Florentine Histories.* Throughout the *Ghiribizzi* (which translates to "Whimsy" or "Speculations"), Machiavelli delivers arguably his most notable remarks on the imagination and the mind, as he attempts to understand and explain how and why

people behave as they do. This endeavour is prompted by the lack of consistent correlative explanations between different figures' behaviours and outcomes. For instance, he compares Hannibal and Scipio's opposite approaches to military endeavours and highlights that they achieved identical results (*Gh*, 134). The existing literature addressing the *Ghiribizzi* has mostly adopted a literal approach to reading and interpreting the letter, and emphasize his attempt to establish a correlation between means and ends.[33] These readings suggest that the letter's primary purpose is to postulate what later became a fundamental premise of his writing, and which underpinned the entire body of his political theories—namely, the necessity to adapt flexibly to changing times and circumstances. While this literal approach is valuable and essential to properly understand his teachings, it seems to come at the expense of a typological read from which the significance of the imagination in Machiavelli's works can be derived. Examining this letter reveals that his emphasis on the imagination in determining outcomes is integral to his political thought, as I argue below. Among the scholars who examine the *Ghiribizzi*, Atkinson, Black, Cox, Vivanti, Ascoli, and Capodivacca certainly provide insightful perspectives and analyses of his words, with some mentions or acknowledgement of the imagination.[34] Ascoli and Capodivacca briefly address the imagination in the *Ghiribizzi*, but only mention it to accurately highlight the polysemy of the term *fantasia* in Machiavelli's writings.[35] Nonetheless, as they explore his poem *L'Asino*, they highlight ways in which Machiavelli centralizes the imagination in his poetic and

[33] James B. Atkinson, "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19–20; Robert Black, "Machiavelli in the Chancery," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41–43; Virginia Cox, "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 182; Corrado Vivanti, "7. Changes of Fortune and the Ghiribizzi al Soderino," in *Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography*, (Princeton University Press, 2021), 39, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400849055-008.

[34] Albert Russell Ascoli and Angela Matilde Capodivacca, "Machiavelli and Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 200–204.; Atkinson, "Niccolò Machiavelli: A Portrait," 19-20; Black, "Machiavelli in the chancery," 41-43; Cox, "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli," 182; Vivanti "Changes of Fortune and the Ghiribizzi al Soderino," 39

[35] Ascoli and Capodivacca, "Machiavelli and Poetry", 203.

political reflections, noting "the power of the imagination to understand and shape realities around us and the historical conditions that contribute to it."[36] While their analysis does highlight the *importance* of the imagination and its "inventive powers," it fails to address the *function* of the imagination.[37] They overlook its concrete political potency, and instead mainly note its presence in Machiavelli's writing. This reflects a failure in the literature to recognize the mind and the imagination as *the* driving forces behind actions, as that which explains or clarifies Machiavelli's puzzle concerning the lack of correlative explanation and consistency between means and ends. Alternatively, Winter provides one of the most direct, explicit, and concrete commentaries on the imagination's role in Machiavelli's political theory as he identifies the imagination as a mediator between received information and external reaction.[38] His brief yet striking observation forms the foundation of my analysis and arguments. Winter's remark leads me to emphasize what the overwhelming majority of the literature has largely overlooked —namely, that the *Ghiribizzi* provides early but fundamental reflections on the crucial functions of the imagination and the mind in shaping political actions. In his efforts to understand the variability of people's behaviour to explain why different actions produce similar outcomes and, conversely, why similar means can yield different results, Machiavelli ultimately points to 1) the commanding powers of the mind (*animo*) and 2) the idiosyncratic nature of the imagination (*fantasia*) to explain such phenomena.

First, Machiavelli's remarks on the *mind* indicate both its function and its power, as he writes that "each man must do what his mind prompts him to (*ognun facci quello che li detta l'animo*)" (*Gh*, 134). By using the formulations "must do" (*facci*) and "prompts" (*detta*),

[36] Ibid, 201.
[37] Ibid, 201-203.
[38] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 64.

Machiavelli suggests that a person's [re]actions in the face of a given situation are dictated by the dominant cognitive powers of their mind or *animo* (to be distinguished from *anima,* which refers to the soul).[39] Essentially separating the mind from the individual, he seems to indicate that the former commands the latter, not the other way around. Similarly, in his unfinished 1517 poem *L'Asino*, Machiavelli writes that "the mind [*mente*] of man, ever intent on what is natural to it, grants no protection against either habit or nature" (*Ass*, vv. 88-89)[40]. In both passages, and more than a decade apart, Machiavelli depicts the mind as something that individuals are not in control of, but rather that commands or dictates their actions. As Machiavelli suggests that the mind is governed by nature, he further indicates that the mind makes individuals follow their 'natural' impulses —i.e., uninhibited instincts comparable to those of animals.[41] Mansfield explains that for Machiavelli, "*animo* is brutish and uncultivated; it is subhuman and below manliness … [it is] what most belongs to oneself."[42] As such, when Machiavelli writes that "each man *must* do what his mind [*animo*] prompts him to," he explains that one's actions are dictated by their mind, in accordance with their 'natural' or 'raw' impulse.

This is why, in his political theory, Machiavelli describes virtuous men as having control over these impulses and instincts; his concept of *virtù* "consists mainly in a *habit of mind.*"[43] It requires a certain mental disposition that guides reactions to given circumstances or problems, enabling one to skillfully turn 'in whatever direction the winds of Fortune and variations of affairs

[39]See Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago, IL, UNITED STATES: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 200. Brown notes that "the soul [did not] play any part in Machiavelli's physiology, where imagination (*fantasia*) replaces the soul or "spirit" (*anima*) in its relationship with the mind or intelligence (*animo*)." See Alison Brown, "Philosophy and Religion in Machiavelli," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 165..

[40] Consistently throughout his writing, Machiavelli interchangeably uses the terms *animo* and *mente* to designate the mind (*P* VII; *D* I.9, 26, II.Pr,*; Gh* 134; *Ass* v.88).

[41] For an in-depth discussion on how Machiavelli's approach to human nature, consisting of "spirit, mind, desires, and humors" is embedded in a medieval medical theory, see Fischer, "Machiavelli's Political Psychology," 789-829.

[42] Harvey C. Mansfield, "Machiavelli's Virtue," in *Machiavelli's Virtue* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 40.

[43] Ibid., 24.

require'(*P* XVIII). The letter's overarching argument —the ability to adapt one's actions to particular circumstances as essential to maintaining control and success— is therefore consistent with the function of the mind (dictating one's actions) when considered in light of his notion of *virtù*. Is it therefore significant that, while Machiavelli uses the term *animo* to designate the mind in the *Ghiribizzi*, he uses elsewhere the term *animo* as "spirit" or "spiritedness," to designate an essential characteristic of virtuous leaders, required to overpower fortuna (a prince "needs to have spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him" [*P* XVIII]).[44] For him, *animo* "denotes the natural spiritedness that can become *virtù*."[45] His statement on the commanding powers of the mind (*animo*) in the *Ghiribizzi* is therefore consistent with his assertion on the importance that a virtuous leader be in control of their own mind or nature (to have *animo*), since he sees both having control of one's own mind and *animo* as a condition of *virtù*.[46] Hence, *animo* refers to the mind, or the natural and almost impulsive (dare I say impetuous) mental processes that *dictate* one's actions and command individuals as "[men] are unable to master their own natures; thus it follow that Fortune is fickle, controlling men and keeping them under her yoke" (*Gh*, 135). Vivanti rightly points out that "the ability to protect oneself from changes in fortune was the most precious attribute of the wise man; Machiavelli formulated this conviction at that time, and all of his political thought would remain rooted in this premise."[47] However, like the overwhelming majority of the scholarship on the *Ghiribizzi*, Vivanti overlooks the importance Machiavelli ascribes to the mind and imagination throughout this letter. This is especially surprising considering that Machiavelli explicitly announces that the purpose of the

[44] Fischer, "Machiavelli's Political Psychology," 800-801.
[45] Michelle Tolman Clarke, "On the Woman Question in Machiavelli," *The Review of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 232, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500033507.
[46] See Clarke, "On the Woman Question in Machiavelli" for a useful discussion of *animo* in Machiavelli's writing.
[47] Vivanti, "Changes of Fortune and the Ghiribizzi al Soderino," 39.

letter is to reason about methods of political success, an objective he achieves by examining and discussing human behaviour, centering his reflections on the mind and the imagination to explain the variation between means and ends. The imagination is what must be controlled in order to succeed politically. As such, the fundamental premise Vivanti highlights is grounded in an even more basic principle concerning the mind and imagination; a (virtuous) person's ability to adapt to changing fortunes reflects *some* degree of control over their mind or the mental processes by which their external [re]actions are determined, as indicated by the statement "each man *must do* what his mind prompts him to." What the literature has largely failed to note is that the mind and imagination are essential to understanding even the most foundational premises of Machiavelli's thought.

This leads us to our second point; Machiavelli explains the inconsistency between means and ends by referring to the idiosyncratic nature of the imagination (*fantasia*). He writes that

> just as Nature has created men with different faces, so she has created them with different intellect and imaginations. As a result, each man behaves according to his own intellect and imagination [*Io credo che come la natura ha fatto a l'uomo diverso volto cosí li abbi fatto diverso ingegno e diversa fantasia. Da questo nasce che ciascuono secondo lo ingegno e fantasia sua si governa*] (*Gh*, 135).

He suggests that the mind is constituted of two main faculties that influence [re]actions and behaviours; the imagination (*fantasia*) and the intellect (*ingegno*). Considering the mind as the sum of its faculties, he hints at the distinction in their respective functions when he writes a few lines later, in a similar formulation, that "men change neither their imaginations nor their ways of doing things [*li uomini non mutono le loro fantasie né e loro modi di procedere*]" (*Gh*, 135). Here, he explicitly names the imagination but does not directly refer to the intellect by name, thereby revealing the function of the latter through a periphrasis —i.e., determining the "*ways* [*modi*] of doing things." For Machiavelli, *ingegno* refers to one's ability to opt for the appropriate modes

according to particular circumstances.[48] In this passage, Machiavelli explicitly distinguishes the imagination from "the way of doing things," which indicates that the imagination is not what dictates the ways of doing things, but rather, what shapes the reasons for "doing things." It is in this sense that the imagination works as a "filter" of the mind that mediates between received information and external [re]action;[49] the terms by which the intellect determines the appropriate means of action are first established *in* the imagination (Figure 1). This is significant because it identifies the imagination as the source of people's actions and reactions for Machiavelli, thereby underscoring its importance in his political thoughts.

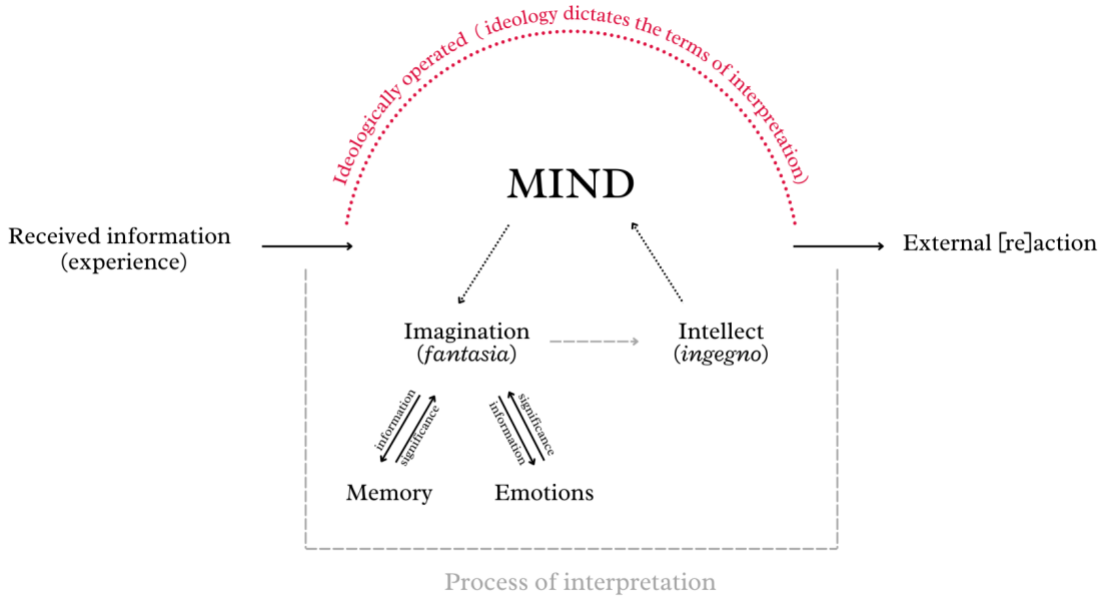

Figure 1: Diagram depicting my interpretation of Machiavelli's conception of the mind and the political imagination.

The imagination and the intellect, as the two faculties of the mind, echo Machiavelli's persistent duality of the forces that constitute the dynamics of this world; *virtù* and *fortuna*. The imagination is like the wild and untamed *fortuna* as its idiosyncrasy explains the "variations in

[48] Fischer, "Machiavelli's Political Psychology," 802.
[49] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 64.

earthly things" (*Ass*, 5.35). Indeed, the imagination is like "the intrinsic *fortuna* of humanity, which cannot help but follow its own natural impulses."[50] Wise men, Machiavelli argues, are able "to master their own nature" (*Gh,* 135), meaning that they are able to tame their natural reflexes or mental processes that dictate action; the mind. Whereas the mind is what dictates actions and controls individuals, its faculty —the imagination — represents the circumstances (or the *terms*) one ought to control as a condition to their *virtù*. If Machiavelli's description of the imagination appears to correspond to his description of *fortuna,* and if *fortuna* "controls [*comanda*] and [keeps] them under [its] yoke" (*Gh*, 135)," then one's *virtù* is contingent on their ability to dominate the imagination (*fortuna*).

As Machiavelli's exemplification of *virtù*, Cesare Borgia's spectacular execution of Remirro de Orco can help us further examine the analogy and clarify how and why Machiavelli indicates the function of the political imagination as a faculty of the mind constituted by two essential sub-faculties: political memory and political emotions. He uses Borgia as an exemplar of how to found a state (*P* VII, VIII, XIII).[51] His praise for Cesare stems from the strategic use of violence in his spectacle through which he conquered the Romagna —by displaying De Orco's severed corpse in the middle of Cesena and liberating the people from the tyrant's "excessive authority";

> And because this point is deserving of notice and of being imitated by others, I do not want to leave it out. Once the duke had taken over Romagna, he found it had been commanded by impotent lords who … had given their subjects matter for disunion, not for union… So he put there Remirro de Orco, a cruel and ready man, to whom he gave the fullest power. In a short time Remirro reduced it to peace and unity…And because he knew that the past rigours had generated some hatred for Remirro, *to purge the spirits [animi] of that people and to gain them entirely to himself* … he had him placed one morning in the piazza at

[50] Ascoli and Capodivicca, "Machiavelli and poetry," 203.

[51] For an in-depth discussion on Borgia as Machiavelli's representation of *virtú,* see Fox: Equivocation and Authorial Duplicity in The Prince." PMLA, vol. 107, no. 5, 1992, pp. 1181–1195; Mizumoto- Gitter, Alex. "Narrativizing the Self: Niccolò Machiavelli's use of Cesare Borgia in The Prince." UCLA Historical Journal 29.1 (2018); Najemy, John M. "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia: A Reconsideration of Chapter 7 of 'The Fallon, Stephen M. "Hunting the Prince.'" The Review of Politics, vol. 75, no. 4, 2013, pp. 539–556.

> Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle *left the people at once satisfied and stupefied* (*P* VII; *emphases added*).

Borgia's spectacle not only establishes his dominance but also strategically engages the people's *animi*— their collective spirit or mind. In fact, Machiavelli's praise of Borgia ultimately seems to hinge on his ability to establish solid foundations *in and through the political imagination of the people*. It was necessary for Borgia to affect the people's minds, "to purge the *spirits [animi]* of that people," in and through their emotions and memory. On the one hand, the significance of Borgia's spectacle relies on the *emotional* reaction of the people of Cesena, on the fact that his act is *reacted to*. Machiavelli's praise is not necessarily about his use of violence, but about how he was able to make people *react* (emotionally) to that cruel spectacle. Without the audience, the spectacle of violence loses political significance since "the spectator's gaze on the actual punishment plays a major part in the psycho-political effect Remirro's execution has on the Romagnol."[52] If we refer back to the *Ghiribizzi*, it then becomes clearer as to why political emotions are a sub-faculty of the political imagination rather than an equal one; the political imagination *mediates* between received information and external reactions, whereas emotions *drive* or *prompt* reactions.[53] External reactions are thus the product of emotions filtered in and through the imagination, revealing the subordinate role of emotions as a subfaculty of the imagination. In this sense, Borgia's case illustrates that Machiavelli perceives the imagination of the people as what mediates between the received information (the spectacle of violence) and their external emotional reaction. Their response, however, is not strictly an emotional reaction of stupefaction and satisfaction; it is the result of the mental processing of the events, which then informs their political [re]action. It is their stupefaction and satisfaction that ultimately drives them

[52] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 47.
[53] Ibid, 59-64.

to grant Borgia their support since the cathartic release is what allows him to "purge" their *animi* or minds. Rather than merely a consequence of his *spettaculo*, the "expiatory language of purging and mending indicates that the execution is *intended* to evoke intense *affective* responses that produce political bonds."[54] Borgia's impact on the people's imagination is not merely a consequence of the moment of state-making, but an intended and necessary result meant to unify the people through the shared traumatic *memory* of their previous of oppression, the immediate and ongoing *emotional* shock at the moment of collectively experienced cathartic release, and the renewed hopes of a liberated future since the people's *animi* has now been cleansed into a state disposed for change.

On the other hand, Machiavelli's theory of state-making requires theatrical performances that embed the state's origins into collective memory. Winter underscores the importance of the theatricality in Borgia's violent spectacle (*spettaculo*) for effective state-making and highlights that the political impact of such spectacles relies heavily on the creation of enduring memories.[55] This is achieved through "recurring narrations and dramatic reenactments of the stories about their origins and history," which become deeply ingrained in the collective political imagination.[56] Hence, affecting the individual and collective political memory is necessary for the political significance of the act since conceptions of the political future carry the trace of the past and are shaped by the present (*D* III.43). This is why the events are narrated with such dramatization, rendering them almost mythical or legendary by painting a scene in which Remirro's corpse is severed in half. The scene's graphic appearance affects the audience's imagination (present and future) by painting a memorable, gruesome, and shocking picture. It is Borgia's *animo* "that makes

[54] Ibid, 53; *emphasis added.*
[55] Ibid, 134.
[56] Ibid, 135.

action memorable and honorific."[57] Through this descriptive scene, Machiavelli tells us that Borgia's *virtù* is contingent on his state-making memorable violence to last in the people's political memory. Through the political imagination, the scene must enmesh itself into the tradition or narratives that will come to define and shape the origin story of that people.

While Winter specifies that memorable executions, like the one orchestrated by Borgia, lead to regime changes by creating foundational memories, my focus here is not on regime changes per se but on new foundations, return to beginnings, and ideological transformations. It is about changing the *terms* by which the people operate rather than merely the *forms*. On that topic, Machiavelli discusses the concept of erasing old memories and replacing them with new ones (*D* II.5), as will be examined in detail in the following section. The key point is that Borgia does not erase the memory of the old. On the contrary, his acts of violence, along with the fear and respect they garner, rely on the memory of a traumatizing and despotic past to legitimize his spectacle of violence. It relies on the recollection of an oppressive past from which Borgia liberated the Romagna. Therefore, while Borgia's actions underscore the significance of the political memory and emotions in Machiavelli's politics of state-making, they do not constitute a return to beginnings or a new foundation since "an improvised action of such a kind, by its very nature, cannot have a long-term and organic character."[58] Instead, his actions are "deserving of notice and of being imitated"(*P* VII) precisely *because* Machiavelli considers harnessing political emotions and memory necessary in politics of transformation, which is why he makes an active decision to emphasize these effects (the people's reaction on these two particular levels). Borgia gains *virtù* in and through the effect he produces on the people's political imagination. Although this thesis addresses Machiavelli's theory of change and ideological transformations, Borgia's scene is

[57] Clarke, "On the Woman Question,' 239.
[58] Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks,* 129.

nonetheless significant since, as Machiavelli's personification of *virtù,* Cesare represents a state-making exemplar. In this case, his *virtù* relies on his mastery or effect on the people's political emotions and memory. Machiavelli's virtuous new founder, in short, ought to affect people's political emotions and memory to successfully found a new and long-lasting order.

ii. Ideological Functions: Repressive Use of Political Emotions and Memory

In this section, I argue that the main subfaculties of the political imagination play a central function in Machiavelli's analysis of the repressive ideological power of religion. As will be developed, by 'repressive' I mean that religion maintains the subject passive and idle, inhibiting pursuits of political interests that would benefit the people and the *patria* as a whole, instead of only those "who want to oppress" (*P* IX). His critique of religion emphasises that ideological domination of emotions and memory is constitutive of the self-reproducing and self-reinforcing powers of the ideology. The purpose of this section is to establish that Machiavelli attributes significant political functions to political emotions and political memory in the process of reproducing and subjecting individuals to consent to their own political neutralisation, facilitated by religious ideological mechanisms.

We have established that the political imagination is a faculty of the mind through which ideologies operate; ideologies establish the *terms* by which subjects behave or [re]act. We have also established that Machiavelli considers the imagination as a filter of the mind that mediates between received information and external [re]action.[59] The question that remains is therefore, on what terms does this filter operate? What are the codes by which the political imagination is wired? For Machiavelli, I suggest, ideology (or religion) seems to have this power; the ideologically

[59] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 64.

modulated normative codes established by Christianity, by which the imagination is wired, determine the resulting external [re]actions. Considering that Machiavelli frames the clergy as "the traditional ideology-makers of the society," his ideological critique of Christianity stems from the fact that it has rendered people civically idle, setting the conditions to be able to rule for its own ambitions to the detriment of the collectivity.[60] He criticizes the fact that "those peoples who are closest to the Roman church, the head of our religion, have less religion" (*D* I.12) and that they have not only corrupted the faith (*fides*), but the minds of subjects in and through this use of religion. Pointing to Christianity's promotion of the *sacerdotium* over the *regnum*, he condemns the cultivation of contemplative subjects instead of civically engaged citizens as he denounces "the weakness into which the present religion has led the world," "the evil that an ambitious idleness has done to many Christian provinces and cities," (*D* Pr.) as well as "the cowardice of the men who have interpreted our religion according to idleness and not according to virtue" (*D* II.2). Machiavelli's issue with the Church is not its political and strategic use of religious beliefs, as indicated by his praise of the Gentiles and the Samnites for harnessing the power of religion "according to necessity" (*D* XIV). The problem rather lies in the repressive use of faith; it is about a Christianity that uses religion for its own purposes and that induces subjects to consent to their subjugation, which renders them passive and subservient instead of harnessing its powers for the love, service, and security of the *patria*.

Throughout his critique, Machiavelli seems to indicate that an integral factor in the Church's ability to subjugate its people is religion's hold over their minds, their political imaginations, and its subfaculties. His criticism of the Church, idleness, and dissipation of *virtù* are encapsulated in his remarks on *corruption*. When I refer to 'corruption' in Machiavelli's

[60] A. B. Davidson, "Gramsci and Reading Machiavelli," *Science & Society* 37, no. 1 (1973): 65.

writing, I diverge from the literature that interprets it as "a failure to devote one's energies to the common good, and a corresponding tendency to place one's own interests above those of the community."[61] This interpretation of 'corruption' is closer to a contemporary use of the term to designate fraudulent or dishonest conduct for personal gains at the expense of others. However, when Machiavelli makes direct attacks denouncing corruption in the Church, he is not strictly addressing corruption in legal terms, but also in a non-deontological moral framework concerning the corruption of the faith itself and religion as a political tool (*D* I.12).[62] Machiavelli's use of the term 'corrupt' seems to designate something that has been tampered with, as evidenced by his interchangeable use of "tainted" and "corrupted" when discussing the state of religion and the necessity of returns to beginnings (*D* III.1). He therefore seems to differentiate between two types of corruption; one describing legal actions committed by individuals or groups ("the excessive ambition and corruption of the powerful" [*D* I.55]), and another as an insidious corruption that penetrates and contaminates individuals or groups ("the corruption that was *in* them" [*D* I.17; *emphasis added*]). The latter, which concerns the *state* of subjects' minds, reflects how Christian contemplative values taint people's imagination and corrupt the processes through which they filter information, and which guides their [re]actions. This suggests that people themselves are corrupt (their minds) rather than merely committing acts of corruption. Machiavelli points to corruption as an issue that cannot be overcome without a return to beginnings. It is something that cannot simply be solved by removing corrupt individuals from power nor through regime change; corrupt states and their members are "impossible … to reform" (*D* I.17) since "neither laws nor orders can be found that are enough to check a universal corruption" (*D* I.18). He emphasizes that

[61] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 164.
[62] Thierry Ménissier, "Corruption, Virtue and Republic in Machiavelli's Work," *South-East European Journal of Political Science*, 2013, 51–60.

corruption is something that is "put *in* the people" (*D* I.17; *emphasis added*), it is something that "enter[s] *in* everything" (*D* I.16; *emphasis added*). This type of corruption is what leads people to consent to their own subjectification and oppression as "the corruption that [is] put in the people … blind[s] the multitude" to a point where "it [does] not recognize the yoke that it [is] putting on its own neck" (*D* I.17). He explains that corruption is passed down through generation ("corruption passed into the bowels of [a] city") (*D* 1.17). In other words, through time, corrupted ways (of thinking, being, and acting) are internalized and naturalized. In this way, ideological corruption evolves and maintains itself through the minds of the people, transforming from corrupt actions to corrupted minds ("corruption that [is] in them") (*D* I.17). Corruption is not an issue merely because it is the ideological wiring of people's minds and imagination; it is problematic because it is used for harmful purposes, benefiting an elite few rather than the *patria*. This is important to clarify because Machiavelli does not indicate that an ideologically-free society can exist. He makes it clear that there has always been and will always be a dominant ideology, most often a religious one (*D* II.5).[63] However, what he criticizes is ideology or religion 'badly-used'. Through *religio* —"a political technique to rule and to control the masses"[64]— subjects' consent to their own oppression via the imagination. For instance, Machiavelli discusses the role of religions in establishing and maintaining long-lasting states, emphasizing the strategic importance of affecting *emotions* to attain desired political ends (*D* I.11-15). The function of political emotions in reproducing and subjecting individuals to consent to their own political neutralization is primarily noted in the obedience that faith secures to the institutions and ideology. He insists on religions' ideological power and political function of influencing the people through their emotions, for

[63]Machiavelli indicates so as he writes that "It is … to be believed that what the Christian sect wished to do against the Gentile sect, the Gentile would have done against that which was prior to it' (*D* II.5).
[64] Fontana, *Love of Country and Love of God: The Political Uses of Religion in Machiavelli*, 640.

instance through *fear*; "for many centuries there was never so much fear of God as in that republic, which made easier whatever enterprise the Senate or the great men of Rome might plan to make" (*D* I.11). Here, as "citizens feared to break an oath much more than the laws" (*D* I.11), emotions shape and determine subjects' [re]actions and behaviours; the fear of God drives them to follow an oath rather than break the law. It is what makes them consent to their political idleness. As the Church's corrupt ethical frameworks are passed down through generations ("corruption passed into the bowels of [a] city" [*D* I.17]), the emotional reactions are internalized and instinctualized. Moral codes and religious narratives provide the terms by which to assess a situation. However, when these frameworks are corrupt and serve as corrupt means to a corrupt end, it indicates that the emotional processes are 'tainted,' hence pointing to their essential repressive role. The repressive function of emotions lies in how Christianity makes its subjects voluntarily sacrifice their civic agency and restrain their actions for the sake of their afterlife, as dictated by moral and normative codes, at the expense of the *patria* and to the benefit of the Church's institutional hegemony.

Considering our prior discussion about the filtering function of the imagination allows us to deduce that the corruption of the mind also involves a corruption of the senses. If an ideology dictates the *terms* by which the imagination processes an experience or information, then the very process by which people feel becomes corrupted or ideologically *dirigé*. In other words, if we understand the imagination as that which guides one's [re]actions to events or experiences, and if we accept the proposition that it is a mental faculty governed by the dominant ideology, then the *terms* by which it filters information and which guide [re]actions are dictated by ideological norms, cultural codes, and tradition, among other things. Hence, as Machiavelli writes that the corruption is "*in"* subjects' minds and that it affects their [re]actions through the engineering of emotions and

the imagination, he seems to indicate that Christianity has ingrained in its subjects 'instinctual' ways of perceiving and experiencing the external world. In view of our previous analysis of the *Ghiribizzi* where Machiavelli indicates that men are slaves to their own nature and act according to their impulses, and considering his discussion on corruption, the mind, and idleness, he seems to suggest that religion has wired the subject's minds and instinctual cognitive structures to conform, uphold, and perpetuate the logic of the dominant order. This wiring moulds individuals' patterns of behaviour and 'instinctual' emotional responses in such a way that it shapes the internal mechanisms or processes through which one interprets external information.

Machiavelli explains that, when corrupted, subjects are not governed by their 'real' or 'unrepressed' nature but by their ideologically-informed or tainted 'natures.' He indicates this through remarks such as, "men are corrupted and make themselves assume a contrary nature" (*D* I.42). While I suggested in the previous section that nature governs the mind, my remarks on repression call for a brief clarification; nature governs the mind *in its unrepressed state* (the mind in its almost animal state). Machiavelli indicates so as he writes that "the mind [*mente*] of man, ever intent on what is natural to it, grants no protection against either habit or nature" (*Ass*, vv. 88-89). Considering that the mind is what dictates [re]actions, here Machiavelli distinguishes between the mind governed by nature —where humans' 'untamed' impulses guide behaviour— and the mind governed by habit, where customs and learned conventions shape behaviour.[65] Whereas the former represents the unrepressed mind, the latter is repressed or corrupted and therefore, ideologically *dirigé*. When ideology intervenes, it moulds this 'nature' to fit its precepts and foundational premises. What I argue is that ideology shapes 'nature' in and through the political

[65] For an in-depth discussion and analysis of nature in Machiavelli, see Yves Winter, "Necessity and Fortune: Machiavelli's Politics of Nature," in *Second Nature: Rethinking the Natural through Politics* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 26–45.

imagination. Machiavelli indicates that when corrupted, something is put "*in*" subjects' minds, thus altering and corrupting their nature. I am not suggesting that Machiavelli believes in or argues for a return to an original or 'first' nature. Rather, what this highlights is that he criticizes the kind of corruption that represses individuals' nature *because* it prevents them from becoming civically engaged.

Another way of corrupting the political imagination, for Machiavelli, is through the political memory. As Vatter states, Machiavelli understands the power that religion has in ascribing religious significance to the foundation of the political state; "the key to the system of authority consists in positing the beginning of political form as an absolute, which at one and the same time absolves this beginning from all historical becoming and sets it up as a foundation."[66] This can also be understood as a process of legitimation through the corruption of individual and collective political memories. This means that the ruling ideology, namely the Christian religion, grants itself a position of authority in and through the legitimizing function and power of founding myths. In concert with founding myths, the reproduction of social relations through tradition, culture, customs, and religion keeps subjects enslaved, their memory corrupted, and their minds unquestioning (*D* II.Pr; III.43). In this way, memory is used as a tool of repression, playing a central role in establishing and maintaining the logic of the ideology, which is internalized and instinctualized by subjects, thus maintaining itself without constant external forces. Machiavelli emphasizes this function of memory as he explains that what made the Christian religion so effective in establishing its supremacy can be attributed, among other reasons, to its ability to successfully eradicate the memory of the prior dominant religion, that of the Gentile;

> For when a new sect —that is, a new religion—emerges, its first concern is to extinguish the old to give itself reputation; and when it occurs that the orderers of the new sect are of a different language, they easily eliminate it. This thing is known from considering the

[66] Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 208-210.

> modes that the Christian sect took against the Gentile. It suppressed all its orders and all its ceremonies and eliminated every memory of that ancient theology (*D* II.5)

As previously articulated, the terms by which the imagination filters information are dictated by the dominant ideology, primarily through culture and tradition. For Machiavelli, "the *cult* of tradition, which has a tendentious value … implies a choice and a determinate goal —that is to say, it is the basis for an ideology."[67] He attributes the success of Christianity in erasing the memory of the Gentile sect to its ability to supplant the culture and traditions of the former order. He writes that "whoever reads of the modes taken by Saint Gregory and by the other heads of the Christian religion will see with how much obstinacy they persecuted all the ancient memories, burning the works of the poets and historians, ruining images, and spoiling every other thing that might convey some sign of antiquity" (*D* II.5). Although the Gentile sect persisted in the collective memory of Machiavelli's time, it seems as though it was perceived as a historical artefact rather than a viable and legitimate alternative to the existing ideological order; "and if, however, some sign of them remains. it is considered as something fabulous and is not lent faith [*fede*] to" (*D* II.5). What is left of the memory of the Gentile seems to serve a function in the collective political memory; that of framing the prevailing order as modern and legitimate, in contrast to the perceived archaism of the ancient civilization in the popular political imagination of the 16th century. It is in this way that "political memory can be regime-preserving or regime-subverting."[68] The role of political memory in the process of reproducing the dominant order and subjecting individuals to consent to their own political neutralization involves both the erasure and delegitimization of the past through processes of archaization ("regime-subverting"), and the simultaneous

[67] Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, 147.
[68] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 134.

romanticization of the foundation and traditions that legitimize and justify the current order ("regime-preserving") (*D* II.Pr).

In this way, Machiavelli highlights the role of memory in subjecting individuals; it can serve as a repressive tool through which to delegitimize divergent ideological foundations while legitimizing the current order by exalting its history and traditions. As Morfino notes, for Machiavelli, "memory is not the conceptual double of history, but a fragment saved from powerful causes of destruction."[69] In other words, Machiavelli does not view memory as faithfully reflecting history, but as a tool through which history is carefully curated to serve the logic of the dominant ideology. History, in this sense, becomes an artefact whose political memory carries the trace of destruction. This is reflected in the replacement of the Gentile hegemony with the Christian one. In such a way, "memory… is not simply a recording divide that faithfully chronicles political events,"[70] but a necessary foundation, reflection, and maintainer of the dominating ideology. It is a tool of repression, with dominant ideologies determining what is to be forgotten or remembered, what is left out and what is included in the collective recollection of the past which forms the present and shapes the future, and on which an entire People's culture and traditions rely. Machiavelli effectively identifies that our understanding of the past shapes our perceptions of the future as he writes that "whoever wishes to see what has to be considers what has been" (*D* III.43). Such a manipulation of the narratives that form the common past and repression of memory therefore creates boundaries on individual and collective political imaginations; ideologies determine and limit subjects' ability to conceive of political possibilities and alternative futures. The dominant ideology, which determines the terms by which its subjects' political imaginations operate, defines the realm of political possibilities through its two sub-faculties. It does so (1)

[69] Morfino, *The Five Theses of Machiavelli's 'Philosophy*,' 165.
[70] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 136.

through political emotions, by guiding and limiting the scope of their [re]action, thus regulating the extent of their political pursuits and feats; and (2) through the political memory, by limiting the scope of what is conceivable as people's conception of the future is predicated on the past. It thwarts subjects from imagining a life other than the one imposed by ruling ideological system, thus inhibiting the pursuit of political endeavours that diverge from the existing order

When Machiavelli criticizes the use of tradition and the romanticization of the past, he highlights how political emotions and memory are employed repressively to constrain the political imagination. Through these faculties, the dominant ideology prescribes the terms by which subjects perceive and interpret social reality and delimits the parameters by which subjects conceive of possible futures, thereby ensuring that the future is perceived merely as a continuation of the present. For Machiavelli, these boundaries thwart the cultivation of citizens capable of contributing to the glorious *patria* he envisions —one that requires active civic engagement. This is evident in his comparisons between Christianity and the Gentile, wherein he consistently argues that the latter managed their affairs more effectively, while the former has become corrupted (*D* I.12; II.2). He criticizes Christianity for having "rendered the world weak and given it in prey to criminal men, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men, so as to go to paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them" (*D* II.2). In contrast, he praises the Gentile for their use of religion to foster a "very obstinate … defense of their freedom" (*D* II.2). The narratives that Machiavelli criticizes reinforce the set of normative and ethical codes imposed on subjects, who remain unaware of the ideological mechanisms that determine the *terms* by which they arrive at a conclusion or political decisions. This ideological conditioning ensures that the oppressive order self-perpetuates within the minds of the very people it subjugates.

Because the logic of the ideology is internalized and instinctualized, it sustains itself without the need for constant external enforcement. What Machiavelli highlights is that the ideological domination of emotions and memory is constitutive of the self-reproducing and self-reinforcing powers of the ideology.

III. Liberating potential

In this chapter, I examine the liberating or transformative potential of political emotions and memory. I argue that Machiavelli's treatment of the political imagination, emotions, and memory in this context underscores their pivotal role in his theory of beginnings and founding.

i. Distortions

In our examination of Cesare Borgia, we saw that for Machiavelli, the *virtù* of new founders is contingent on their ability to exert control and affect the people's political emotions and memory. However, Machiavelli argues that real political transformation and emancipatory social change requires more than reforms or regime changes. This is because, for him, the issue extends beyond faulty institutions or incompetent princes. As we saw, Machiavelli identifies the corruption *in* and *of* the minds of the people as a central reason why change rarely lasts, and as the root cause of Italy's disunity and corruption. This point is particularly emphasized in the prefaces of the *Discourses*' first two books, where he insists that the lack of *true* knowledge of history has kept Italians divided and subjugated in and through idleness, ignorance, and ideological subjugation;

> This arises, I believe, not so much from the weakness into which the present religion has led the world, or from the evil that an ambitious idleness has done to many Christian provinces and cities, *as from not having a true knowledge of histories, through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting that flavor that they have in themselves* (*D* I.Pr; *emphasis added*).

> *The truth of ancient things [which] is not altogether understood* and that most often the things that would bring infamy to those times are concealed and other that could bring forth their glory are rendered magnificent and very expansive" (*D* II.Pr; *emphasis added*).

Machiavelli blames Christianity for corrupting citizens into civic idleness through pacifying "educations and false interpretations" of the religion, thereby identifying education as the source and tool of their corruption (*D* II.2). This corruption —or the ideological 'tainting' of the mind and the imagination— constitutes a central aspect of their subjectification. It is in this spirit that he emphasizes the need for radical transformation rather than mere reforms or regime changes, since "neither laws nor orders can be found that are enough to check a universal corruption… new laws [are] insufficient because the orders, which remained fixed, corrupt them" (*D* I.18). Machiavelli insists on the necessity of fundamentally transforming modes and orders to achieve lasting prosperity.[71] He makes it clear that reforming the state, its laws, or its institutions is pointless if the people who constitute it are corrupt. One cannot have a totally new order composed of corrupt people since their corruption will inevitably transpire onto the new order (*D* I.17-18). This suggests that change must occur in the minds and imaginations of corrupt people, as he insists that "a new and free way of life" necessarily implies "alter[ing] the minds of men," (*D* I.25). This suggests that change must occur in the minds and imaginations of the corrupt people, indicating these faculties' subversive potential in liberating subjects from their corruption.

As Skinner highlights the centrality and importance of education for Machiavelli, he notes that

> [Machiavelli] declares with great emphasis in Book I, chapter 4, that 'all instances of *virtù* have their origin in good education' (203), a judgment which he endorses at the start of Book II, declaring

[71] By modes and orders, I understand what "makes up the political structure and fabric of a state. They mediate between political form and matter. The political form is composed of countless *ordini,* which in turn are practiced, instantiated, and actualized by *modi*. Good orders, in other words, are a necessary but insufficient condition for political freedom. They must be supplemented by modes – practices – which are more or less regulated activities oriented by norms and customs." Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence,* 144-145.

> that 'if we ask why it is that people in ancient times were greater lovers of *libertà* than nowadays', we are bound to conclude that the answer lies in 'the difference between our education and that of ancient times'. Finally, he reiterates the same conclusion at the end of Book III, blaming 'men's feebleness in our day' upon 'their feeble education', and reminding us that the impressions of our tender years '*serve to govern our conduct in all the subsequent periods of our life'*.[72]

Worth noting here is not only the centrality of education for Machiavelli, but also its role and significance in "govern[ing] our conduct." Machiavelli emphasizes its function as an ideological apparatus in shaping how people *behave* or govern themselves, and in guiding their external reactions to experiences, which brings to mind his statement that "*ciascuono secondo lo ingegno e fantasia sua si governa*" in the *Ghiribizzi*. What Machiavelli highlights by writing that education "serve[s] to govern our conduct" is the role of Christian-based knowledge, education, and truth claims in setting the *terms* by which the imagination and its faculties function. The knowledge deemed "true" is what has corrupted people's minds, shaped subjects' perception of their experiences, and wired their minds in a way that has created barriers on their political imagination, thus shaping their actions in a limited and measured way. Having been denied the knowledge of history devoid of that tainted moralistic filter and having instead internalized the narrative ascribed onto them (*D* II.Pr), subjects have been prevented from tapping into their unrepressed imagination. By identifying modern Christian education and erroneous "truths" as sources of the dissipation of *virtù* and widespread civic idleness, Machiavelli indicates the root of subjects' oppression while simultaneously suggesting its solution: the *terms* of that education. This education prescribes the moral framework (which sets the ideological *terms*) that perpetuates and actualizes the dominant ideology and the foundational myths that legitimize it. He suggests that subjects must be purged of these ingrained falsehoods that corrupt their minds in order to reclaim their civic spirit.

[72] Quentin Skinner, "Machiavelli on the Maintenance of Liberty," *Politics* 18, no. 2 (November 1, 1983): 7.

This echoes his statements in the prefaces of the first two books of the *Discourses* quoted above, indicating the liberatory potential of amending accepted narratives built on an effectual rather than imaginative "truth[s] of ancient things" (*D* II.Pr). When Machiavelli compares the current and ancient religions, noting that "our religion, having shown the *truth and the true way*, makes us esteem less the honour of the world, whereas the Gentiles esteeming it very much … were more ferocious in their actions," he is not contradicting his position stated in the prefaces about Christianity's impeding people's access to "*true* knowledge of histories" or "the *truth* of ancient things" (*D* I.Pr; II.Pr, 2.2; *emphasis added*). Rather, he is pointing to the "effectual truth" (*P* VII) —rather than a "filtered" or imaginative one— by referring directly to the original and uncorrupted source of knowledge; the Bible. A typological read reveals that by writing "having shown the truth and the true way," Machiavelli references the verse "and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).[73] His choice of quote is significant and purposeful. Not only does the quote itself represent liberation through *true* knowledge, but the author of the quote himself symbolizes a way to *true* freedom. Indeed, John the Apostle, usually depicted as the author of the Gospel, symbolizes the way to salvation through Scripture. Machiavelli invokes Christian typology to indicate the possibility of saving his *patria* from the illnesses of modernity through written words. By returning to the original religious texts to make his point, he bypasses modern-day religion's interpretive filters, going straight to the source. Machiavelli's writing

[73] By typological read, I refer to Dante Alighieri's fourfold model of literary composition and interpretation, —the literal, typological, tropological, and anagogical reads— by which a text should be read and analysed. The typological read highlights that the subject or topic of the text is to be "allegorically intended," meaning that significance is to be inferred from the historical or cultural references made, for instance. See Dante's letter to Con Grande, Robert Hollander, *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande*, Recentiores (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). For more on the relevance and influence of Dante's fourfold model on Machiavelli's writing, see Martin Eisner, "Machiavelli in Paradise: How Reading Dante and Ovid Shaped The Prince," *PMLA* 134, no. 1 (January 2019): 35–50; Ed King, "Machiavelli's 'L'Asino': Troubled Centaur into Conscious Ass," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 41, no. 2 (2008): 279–301; Massimo Verdicchio, "Machiavelli on Dante on Language," *Forum Italicum* 47, no. 3 (November 1, 2013): 522–39.

returns to the beginnings (Biblical founders and foundation of Rome) so as to retell history devoid of Christianity's corrupted and corrupting filter (or imaginative truth). In other words, his rendition of history seeks to rectify or alter these corrupted narratives and filters so as to set the people (and their minds) free from the source of their corruption. This is coherent with the premise that freedom —and a return to *virtù*— can only be achieved by ridding the subjects of their corruption; by altering the individual and collective paradigms that currently bind them to their subjecthood. What Machiavelli attempts to do is to provide the reader with the necessary historical (and thus non ideologically-tainted) version of the history that informs their political memory, so as to set subjects free from a version of the past that anchors them in their current subjecthood and from a future that condemns them to it. In doing so, he distorts historical events and narratives about mythical stories, evident not only in the inaccuracies of his reported facts but also in his unconventional narrative approach.[74] What I argue is that he provides an alternative narrative of historical facts to free the subjects from the ideological shackles and boundaries set on their political imaginations since "false interpretations" of the past restrict alternative political futures. Indeed, Machiavelli notes the influence of the past on conceptions and attitudes towards the future, noting that "it is an easy thing for whoever examines past things diligently to foresee future things" and "it is "easy to know future things by past" (*D* I.39; III.43). Considering his assertion that subjects' knowledge of the past is based on "false interpretations" and narratively corrupted histories (*D* II.2), this indicates that subjects' ideologically-regulated knowledge shapes their understanding of the future, and therefore restrict their political imaginations when conceiving political futures. His distortions suggest the necessity of affecting the terms by which subjects'

[74] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 23; Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 114-117.

political memory and emotions are wired, and which have been used to repress the political imagination. Commenting on Machiavelli's noted distortions, Hale writes;

> Breaking from the old-fashioned annal and diverging from fashionable humanistic historiography, he produced a work which was at once realistic, because it dealt with men as political animals and showed them at their intrigues, and also didactic, because he manipulated those events in the past which he thought had the most relevance to the present with such gusto that their lessons could not be missed. If this involved distortion, he was not concerned; the present is more important than the past…Machiavelli touched nothing which he did not transform.[75]

While Hale rightfully notes Machiavelli's purposeful manipulation of history, I disagree with his claim stating Machiavelli's prioritization of the present over the past, or the implication that his distortions reveal a disregard for accurately reporting history. Machiavelli consistently insists on the importance of the "true knowledge of histories" (*D* II.Pr). He criticizes the false reporting of history which has mislead his current society into weakness and idleness, and which has allowed Christianity to reign for its own benefits. While he *does* distort the past, it is not out of disregard for the importance of factually reporting it, but rather the opposite. His aim is to rectify Christianity's impact through the effectual truth. He does so for a very specific purpose, which he explicitly states in the first preface of the *Discourses*, expressing that "wishing … to turn men from this error" (*D* I.Pr), his book aims to rectify the fallacy into which subjects have been led by religion and education, "so that those who read these statement of [his] can more easily draw from them that utility for which one should seek knowledge of histories" (*D* I.Pr). This "utility" includes using the examples of the ancients for "ordering republics, maintaining states, governing kingdoms, ordering the military and administrating war, judging subjects, and increasing empire" (*D* I.Pr). Therefore, one cannot mistake Machiavelli's dramatization of historical events for a disregard of the past. It is instead a rhetorical strategy aimed at affecting the reader's political

[75] John Rigby Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* (London, English Universities Press, 1961), 17–18.

imagination, so as to counteract the detrimental effects of Christian education.[76] He does not change the stories themselves, but their tropological significance; it is a rhetorical strategy which emphasizes specific aspects of the stories, revealing alternative moral interpretations and significances of the same events, so as to transcend the ideological boundaries that have restricted subjects' political imaginations.

For instance, he manipulates the narrative around the four armed prophets and their founding moments. He changes the lessons customarily derived from their stories, presenting them outside the confines of religious moralistic frameworks and ideological purposes. Attributing the success of their founding moments to their use of violence rather than to the power that God had imbued in them, he writes that they "would not have been able to make their peoples observe their constitutions for long if they had been unarmed" (*P* VI). Taking Moses as an example to contrast Machiavelli's narrative attitude with traditional Christian renderings, we observe a contrast with classical texts and Christian tradition. In Christianity, Moses is typically celebrated for freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and for doing so by being law-abiding since "Moses conveyed to [the people] the Law which he had received from God on Mount Sinai."[77] While Machiavelli also praises Moses for freeing the enslaved Israelites, he attributes the latter's *virtù* to his strategic use of violence. Once again referencing Scripture directly and by-passing Christian moralistic narrative frameworks, Machiavelli writes that "Moses was forced to kill infinite men who, moved by nothing other than envy, were opposed to his plans." (*D* III.30). Referring to a violent Biblical episode wherein Moses instructs the people to each murder their "brother and friend and neighbour," resulting in over 3000 deaths (Exodus 32:25-28), his account focuses on the

[76] For Machiavelli's use of rhetoric to affect politics, see Cox, "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli," 173-189.
[77] Augustine, *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XVIII.11.

"concealed" violent means "that would bring infamy" to the founding ends that are "celebrated" (*D* II.Pr).[78] This is an example of the political potency and potential of the imagination and its faculties. Indeed, on the one hand, these distortions affect political emotions, which we remember are shaped or governed by the moralistic framework associated with these religious beliefs and historical narratives, and which ultimately dictate the terms by which people assess and react to their reality. Machiavelli turns the moralistic religious doctrine on its head and plays on the people's political emotions by focusing the story on its violent aspect, thereby confronting the fact that violence is usually frowned upon in Christian theology while passivity is morally, socially, and ideologically enforced. In so doing, it seems that Machiavelli wishes to disrupt —or at least to highlight the importance of disrupting— the terms of the imagination that determine how subjects feel and [re]act in the face of a situation, and that entrenches them in their subjecthood, as discussed in the first chapter. He deviates from the Christian moralistic principles which rely on such stories to legitimize an ideological narrative. In this case, the ideological function of Moses' story is to teach full obedience to God, which, for Machiavelli, contributes to cultivating idle religious obedience and civic "effeminacy." His distortions prompt the reader or subject to reconsider what has become axiomatic and instinctualized passivity. Affecting political emotions is necessary for his politics of change since, as Speer highlights, Machiavelli insists that "political practice at a moment of transition cannot be subject to preexisting morality as it seeks to go beyond it."[79] For real change to happen, people (and their minds) cannot be corrupted by the enfeebling moral frameworks that they have internalized and instinctualized. This points to the liberating

[78] Machiavelli references Exodus 32:25-28, where Moses' story is narrated *dans toute sa violence*; "Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.' And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died."
[79] Speer, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci," 5.

potential of political emotions for Machiavelli and the importance of subjects' emancipation from the moralistic codes that imprison them in their subjecthood. If we consider that emotional faculties are wired in such a way as to reinforce the logic of the dominant order, and that this logic is dialectically fuelled by the internalization of moral codes —or the way subjects are taught, trained, and expected to feel about a given thing— then changing the *terms* (here, the moral codes) by which these stories acquire or are ascribed meaning and significance highlights the liberatory potential and potency of political emotions.

On the other hand, these distortions also affect the political memory. Indeed, this is an example of how Machiavelli preserves the existing political memory —the 'fact' that Moses freed the people of Israel— but frames the events in a way that diverges from its Christian ideological function. Here too, what Machiavelli alters is not the content of the histories, but the terms by which they are retold, perceived, and assimilated. He is changing the lens by which to read histories and their significance. He even establishes a 'correct' reading of the story; "*and whoever reads the bible judiciously* will see that since he wished his laws and his orders to go forward, Moses was forced to kill infinite men who, moved by nothing other than envy, were opposed to his plans" (*D* III.30). Machiavelli is explicit in asserting the biblical accuracy of his narration, as if he is assuring the reader that he presents the story in its true light. In specifying "whoever reads the bible judiciously," he echoes his criticism of Christian education for its manipulation of the tropological significances of historical events and foundational stories, which he blames for cultivating subjects lacking "*a true knowledge of histories through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting that flavor that they have in themselves*" (*D* I.Pr). His distortions of history offer alternative versions to the foundational myths on which individual and collective memories rely and upon which the culture and society of his time are built. That is the effectual truth; it narrates history

devoid of the Christian ideological moralistic frameworks, thereby opening up *possibilities* for radical transformation. These distortions are not imaginative truths, but effectual ones (*verità effettuale*), as Machiavelli wrests the possibility of liberation from the established reality. Rather than proposing a utopian alternative world, he salvages from the past, present, and future the potential for alternative modes of living and being.

He does so for a specific reason. He addresses himself to "all those who wish to suppress an ancient way of life in a city and *to turn it to a new and free way of life*," highlighting the necessity to maintain the illusion of continuity with the metanarrative that unifies people around common foundational stories. These stories have given a sense of identity to people in and through their shared history. He therefore conforms to his own teaching that "since the new things alter the minds [*menti*] of men, you should contrive that those alterations retain as much of the ancient as possible" (*D* I.25). Once again, Machiavelli plays with the terms rather than merely the content of the political imagination. We observe that by exploiting existing religious beliefs, Machiavelli acts in accordance with "the necessity of retaining at least the shadow of its [a state's] ancient modes so that it may not appear to the peoples to have changed its order even if in fact the new orders are altogether alien to the past ones" (*D* I.25). While this might seem contradictory to his earlier teaching about the necessity to wipe out the memory of the ancient modes in order to establish new states, with the Gentile, Machiavelli specifies that the memory of the sect was not altogether erased (*D* II.5). Nonetheless, the effects of Machiavelli's distortions on the political memory cannot be conflated with his comments about the Gentiles. Machiavelli writes that transformation either happens "at a stoke" and through "extraordinary means" by a virtuous founder, or "little by little" by a prudent man (*D* I.18). Through his distortions, Machiavelli enacts the latter rather than the former. He is not trying to erase the memory of the Christian religion because he is aware of

the existential grip it has on people. Bringing back to the beginnings then takes on a whole new meaning; it means bringing the mind, rather than the body or the physical order, *back* to an original, effectual, or uncorrupted truth.

In this way, his distortions extend beyond tropological divergences and transpire as his rhetorical device through which he almost interpellates the reader into accepting his effectual truth. He employs markers of unifying beliefs and shared collective memory, such as "our religion" (*D* II.2), "in our time" (e.g., *D* I. 5.1, 7.3, 12.2) or "we have seen in our times" (*D* I.7.2), "everyone who lives at present knows" (*D* I.29.2), "every history shows in a thousand places that what we are say is true" (*D* II.10.3). By doing so, Machiavelli constructs an incontestable narrative, presenting his effectual truths as if it were widely known reality and common knowledge rather than an alternative narrative or contestable assertions. As Cox notes, Machiavelli demonstrates his "own imaginative allegiance to the notion of rhetoric as persuasion" through his written works.[80] He frames his distorted narration of history as something that has always or already been agreed upon, appealing to the political imagination of his audience and subtly guiding them to align with his perspective. This is evident in his retelling of foundational stories like Borgia's, where he sets the stage for the dramatized scene of violent founding by announcing "I want to bring up two examples *that have occurred in days within our memory*"(*P* VII; *emphasis added*). The political imagination becomes an element and vessel of liberation for Machiavelli as his distortions seek to imprint onto subjects and their minds this version of shared memory and experience. Through rhetorical strategies such as dramatization, uncustomary narrative focus, and religious inferences, Machiavelli indicates the necessity of liberating the political imagination from the existing ideological boundaries imposed on it, and thus reveals the potential of successfully doing so by

[80] Cox, "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli," 176.

directly affecting the political emotions and memory that govern subjects. This liberation from false knowledge and false truths is necessary for a reimagined political future.

ii. Rupturing, Rewiring, and Refusal

When Machiavelli argues that a new state free from corruption requires a 'return to beginnings,' he seems to advocate for a return to a state where minds have yet not been corrupted —when the political imagination has not yet been constrained by these false educations (*D* III.1). It is therefore significant that, while the first two prefaces of the *Discourses* reveal that the problem of idleness and corruption stem from false educations and lacks in historical knowledge, the third book, which opens without a preface, begins with a call to draw orders back to their pre-corrupted states. Here, "not only is the return to beginnings a recovery or renewed recognition of self, or a mutual recognition among citizens, but it is a return to initial 'goodness' and '*virtù*'."[81] A return to beginnings thus refers to a return to the "goodness" that has been corrupted (*D* III.1).

Skinner notes that Machiavelli devotes considerable "attention to … the possibility that a body of citizen may perhaps be capable of transcending their natural selfishness if they are inspired by the example of truly *virtuoso* leadership."[82] This is precisely what Machiavelli seems to attempt through his distortions of foundational narratives and near-mythical founders. For instance, in the dramatization of Borgia's theatrical execution of De Orco, Machiavelli attributes to the former an overwhelming power, rendering him almost godlike.[83] By demonstrating that a human being can perform such *sacerdotal* exploits in the *regnum*, Machiavelli provides an inspiring exemplar of

[81] Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman,* 278.
[82] Skinner, "Machiavelli on the Maintenance of Liberty," 8.
[83] For more on Machiavelli's attribution of near godlike authority to Borgia, see Ed King, "Quinquennial Terror: Machiavelli's Understanding of the Political Sublime," *Open Journal of Political Science* 03, no. 02 (2013): 72; Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 123–26.

virtù to mobilize the men of his time. Through Borgia, he personifies or 'humanizes' the constitutive qualities of *virtù*. The intended effect of attributing virtuous exploits to a figure with whom his readers are familiar (an example that "*occurred in days within our memory*" [*P* VII]), is to break a certain barrier that had heretofore rendered civic *virtù* inaccessible to the everyday subject of Christianity. Indeed, he writes in the first preface of the *Discourses* that the purpose of the book is to "turn men from [the] error" of not pursuing *virtù* simply because histories have been taught in a way that frames the imitation of the ancients and their virtuous feats as impossible (*D* I.Pr). Machiavelli mentions Borgia's failures to humanize him, thereby framing *virtù* as accessible and achievable, without necessarily "promoting the excessive ambition entailed in imagining humans as having godlike power."[84] Nonetheless, his conception of *virtù*, personified through Borgia, advocates the pursuit for autonomy, freedom, and civic engagement. Machiavelli's distortions are a "power-oriented civic practice" which he uses politically to "mold his listeners' *responses* and work on their wills."[85] The "response" or [re]action he aims to evoke is one that breaks the logic of civic idleness and prompts active engagement in public life.[86] The way to change the [re]actions is to change the process by which they are determined or shaped —i.e., through the political imagination. This involves altering the cognitive processes that have fostered civic idleness, and therefore presupposes a rupture from the ideological terms that govern the political imagination. What I am arguing here is that through his distortions, Machiavelli seeks to prompt a rupture at the level of the political memory and emotions so as to rewire the instinctual structures that make subjects conform to the logic of the dominant order. To be clear, I am not asserting that Machiavelli explicitly conceptualized his distortions and political writings in these

[84] For an insightful argument concerning Machiavelli's endeavour "to rouse men to action, but to action that recognized some limits to human capacities, " see Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 293.
[85] Ibid, *emphasis added.*
[86] Cox, "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli," 173; *emphasis added.*

terms —i.e., in terms of their effects and intended rupture on political emotions and memory. Rather, my argument highlights that when we consider his critique of idleness, false truths, and corruption alongside his description of the mind, the imagination, and intellect's role in guiding action, as well as his discussion on subjects' ideologically-informed or tainted 'natures,' a careful reader is able to discern a coherent framework. This framework, when interpreted in line with his comments on the mind and the imagination, points to the political memory and political emotions as fundamental keys in Machiavelli's discussion of transformation and return to beginnings; they become essential aspects to consider and faculties to rewire in order to free people from their subjecthood.

The literature examining Machiavelli's critique of religion widely agrees that his objective of "return to beginnings," solid foundation, and transformation require an ideological rupture.[87] He advocates for a rupture in the dominant ideological framework which, as I have maintained, imprisons subjects through their political imagination by restricting their ability to imagine alternative modes of living and by condemning them to civic idleness. As Hammill highlights, for Machiavelli, "freedom is actualized by breaking with pregiven political forms."[88] In Machiavelli's goal of transformation, these distortions are intended to affect corrupted political imaginations; he breaks with the pregiven "*forms*" (or terms) instead of attempting to contradict the axiomatic *content* of internalized ideological 'truths.' His historical distortions have the potential to instigate a rupture with the ideological terms that dominate subjects' political imaginations. This involves a break at the level of the political memory by reframing narratives about foundational myths and

[87]Alloggio, "The Reproduction of Control," 79-88; Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 8; Gramsci, *Selection from the prison notebooks*, 136; Graham Hammill, "Machiavelli and Hebrew Scripture," in *The Mosaic Constitution* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 31; Speer, *The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci*, 11; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 239.
[88] Hammill, "Machiavelli and Hebrew Scripture," 31.

at the level of political emotions by redefining the moral imperatives that restrict civic involvement and virtuous pursuits. This rupture cannot happen without rewiring the cognitive processes by which [re]actions are instinctualized. Political emotions and memory and thus central to liberating the mind and the imagination from the chokehold of the current order. Rewiring the mechanisms of the mind by which subjects [re]act means changing the *terms* by which their political imagination operates. *This* is the emancipatory potential of political emotions and memory, both in subjects' oppression and liberation. Expanding the boundaries of the imagination therefore means creating the necessary conditions to be able to conceive of alternative possibilities and for new and stable foundations. Tackling the ideological barriers of the political imagination can help break the cycle of corruption, oppression, and failed governments by removing the ideological barriers that confine subjects through this 'imagined' truth.

Machiavelli's politics of rebirth and transformation fundamentally concerns men's ability and responsibility to "examine themselves" (*D* III.1). This examination implies a "rediscovery of the preexisting but somehow obscured, distorted, or forgotten reality of self: its inescapable history together with its capacity for change."[89] This is significant because it reveals that subjects possess *some* power to change their condition if they can be mobilized to do so; they are not condemned to idleness. Tapping into this capacity for change and the presupposed latent or repressed agency is therefore imperative for Machiavelli. If his objective is the foundation and beginning of a free and durable state, and if the durability of that freedom can only be maintained by the people (*D* I.58), then the question of consent, agency, and refusal are necessarily involved in his politics of liberatory change. Indeed, building on the premise that the ideological control of subjects' minds leads them to consent to and participate in their subjugation, the idea of consent also implies a

[89] Ibid, 279.

form of agency —an ability or power of refusal. This suggests that subjects possess some capacity to opt out of their subjectification by negating or refusing to participate in their own servitude, and therefore possess the capacity to act virtuously. Crucially, it also implies that this state of subjecthood and civic idleness is not the only available option and that alternative modes of being and living exist. The 'wiggle room' for the individual to refuse to consent to their servitude can be created by rupturing and expanding the ideological barriers through which subjects are oppressed —i.e., the boundaries on the political imagination.

To be sure, I am not suggesting that Machiavelli makes an argument for the self-emancipation of the people. Subjects cannot simply self-emancipate by acquiring 'true' knowledge; for Machiavelli, it is impossible to 'uncorrupt' subjects simply by means of education or persuasion. This is because the dominant ideology provides subjects their *raison d'être*, attaching all that holds meaning (culture, customs, tradition, collectivity, the self, etc.) to itself. Its control over the imagination ensures that subjects will defend its logic. His assertion instead concerns the role of the many in *maintaining* freedom and preventing it from falling prey to a cyclical model of corruption, rather than in *acquiring* it or in *founding* free states (*D* I.9,17, 58). He expresses clearly that *one* virtuous individual must create this rupture through an extraordinary founding moment (*P* VI, VII; *D* I.17-18; II.1, 30). A new order requires an individual to employ "the greatest extraordinary means" (*D* I.17), which I argue must produce a shock to the political imagination. This shock must simultaneously shatter the politics of common sense naturalized by the ideological hegemon, and erect new ones. As Winter notes, the "extraordinary" character of the armed prophets' or Borgia's founding moments is not only attributed to the violence of the scenes, but to their success in "pushing beyond the limits of what is thinkable and possible within

a political field."[90] It is the "*transgressive* nature of these acts" and the "excessive" character of their (and Machiavelli's) audiences' cognitive experiences that "renders them effective at reconfiguring the space of the political imagination."[91] These experiences are excessive in that their audiences lack the adequate cognitive tools to process them, thereby confronting the limits of their political imaginations while also expanding them Rewiring repressive instinctual mechanisms first requires rupturing the processes that generate the [re]actions that materialize the dominant ideology. This rupture disturbs the cognitive process that perpetuates the dominant order through voluntary servitude. If that cognitive process is the process wherein the political imagination filters received information (or experiences) by which one makes sense of the external world and which guides their external [re]actions (Figure 1), then rupturing this process means shattering the logic of the dominant order and expanding the boundaries of the imagination.

Exactly *how* Machiavelli suggests we return to beginnings or create that extraordinary moment of founding and rupture is not entirely clear and is beyond the scope of this thesis. What I wish to highlight with this observation is that the very notion of consent (or *voluntary* servitude) implies the possibility of refusal, and thus necessarily involves a rupture at the level of the political imagination in Machiavelli's politics of transformation or return to beginnings.[92] For this reason, discussions about subjects' emancipation from servitude in or through Machiavelli's writing cannot overlook the political imagination, since the dominant ideology secures the consent of its subjects through its effects on political emotions and the political memory, as Machiavelli exemplifies through Borgia.

[90] Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 140.
[91] Ibid, *emphasis added.*
[92] The term "voluntary servitude" is developed much later by Étienne de La Boétie, but has been used in the literature to refer to Machiavelli's theory of the workings of domination. See Christopher Holman, "Machiavelli's Two Utopias," *Utopian Studies* 29, no. 1 (2018): 88–108..

Knowledge and history are not just facts that exist in books for Machiavelli. Rather, they establish a normative, cultural, and existential logic internalized by a people, and informs their future by looking at the past (*D* III.43). When ideologically corrupted, that knowledge works as an apparatus to wire cognitive faculties in such a way that builds boundaries on the political imagination, thereby thwarting subjects' ability to envision different political and social futures than those they have always experienced or been taught have always existed. With his distortions, Machiavelli looks to rupture these boundaries so as to open the possibilities for transformative change in and through the political imagination. This change would break the cycle of failed governments and open up possibilities for a virtuous *patria*. Founding moments must therefore be moments of rupture at the level of the political imagination; moments of excess where the floodgates of the imagination are forced open, and Machiavelli needs subjects to be virtuous enough to tame these Fortunian waves. This experience of excess offers opportunities for alternative political possibilities as it directly affects subjects' instinctual frameworks by rupturing the logic of the dominant order, thereby expanding the imagination. By opening up possibilities of "alternative" realities or effectual truths through his distortions, Machiavelli indicates the necessity of a rupture in order for subjects to transcend the boundaries that cognitively and physically anchor them in their domination.

Conclusion

An imagination-centred reading of Machiavelli' works —spanning his political theory, his poetry, to his personal correspondences— reveals the centrality of the political imagination in his politics of transformation and change. His observations concerning the political imagination seem

foundational and even axiomatic to his core principles, such as the necessity of adapting one's actions to changing circumstances. As I have demonstrated, Machiavelli identifies the imagination and intellect as the two primary faculties of the mind that shape [re]actions and behaviours. He sees memory and emotions as subfaculties through which ideology secures the consent of subjects, operating in and through their political imaginations. Machiavelli sees the *terms* by which these cognitive faculties operate as ideologically formatted and formattable, which makes them powerful tools for both perpetuating and disrupting existing political orders. It is in this perspective that I have argued that political memory and political emotions serve crucial ideological functions in Machiavelli's politics of preservation and change.

As he denounces the imaginative truth propagated by Christianity, Machiavelli identifies the root of his *patria*'s illnesses in the people's false educations and their (mis)interpretation of history. He therefore offers an alternative narrative *as* the effectual truth, aiming to liberate corrupted political imaginations from the constraints imposed by the dominant ideology. Since political emotions and memory play a crucial function in subjects' corruption, their liberatory potential resides in the external changes that ensue from rewiring the mental and 'instinctual' processes that shape subjects [re]actions and behaviours. The ideologically-determined character of the terms that govern the imagination, being 'unnatural' and learned, suggests the possibility of alternative modes of living and being. Therefore, A rupture within the dominant ideological framework, at the level of the political imagination, is necessary to be able to imagine alternative futures. Machiavelli's distortions can thus be interpreted as his way of breaking from the dominant narratives that have corrupted the people, fostered civically idleness, and contributed to the ills that have disunited Italy. Ultimately, Machiavelli's vision for political renewal is rooted in the

belief that a liberated imagination is the key to a liberated people and *patria*, capable of resisting corruption and sustaining virtuous governance.

For him, ideology *can* be well-used, which is why he consistently praises the ancients; not because he wants to affect political memories by romanticizing the past, but to demonstrate that a future as virtuous as the ancients' *is* possible. Expending the bounds of individual and collective political imaginations requires showing the effectual truth rather than the imagination of it, affecting the terms by which people assess and [re]act to experiences, and opening up possibilities for transformative change. Aware of the irreversibility of time, Machiavelli's *ritorno alle origini* is not a call to undo the past or the present, but to forge new paths forward by reconfiguring the political imagination.

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