

## Beyond the Politics of Fear: Machiavelli on Hope

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**Abstract:** Many Machiavelli scholars emphasize his discussion of fear and neglect the important role that hope plays in his thought. I analyze Machiavelli's frequent references to hope throughout his corpus to offer an explanation of what he means by 'hope,' examine the relation between hope and fear, and identify the benefits, dangers, and limits of these two foundational and complementary passions. Greater attention to the role of hope in Machiavelli's thought can help us understand the significance of this passion for Machiavelli's political project, particularly his view of freedom.

Scholars have frequently noted the emphasis on fear in Machiavelli's thought,<sup>1</sup> as well as the importance the passions play in Machiavelli's political

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<sup>1</sup>Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult: The "Discourses on Livy" and the Origins of Political Conflictualism*, trans. Patricia Gaborik and Richard Nybakken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 94–116; Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 58–64; Patrick Boucheron, *Machiavelli: The Art of Teaching People What to Fear*, trans. Willard Wood (New York: Other Press, 2018); Thomas Osborne, "Machiavelli and the Liberalism of Fear," *History of the Human Sciences* 30, no. 5 (2017): 68–85; Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 147–48, 230–35; Alison Brown, "Lucretian Naturalism and the Evolution of Machiavelli's Ethics," in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, ed. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 77–80, 88; J. Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the "Discourses on Livy"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 68–69, 179–88.

project more generally.<sup>2</sup> I concur that recognizing the importance of the passions is crucial for understanding Machiavelli's thought. In all his major works, except his plays *Mandragola* and *Clizia*, fear is the passion most referenced. As table 1 shows, Machiavelli's more than five hundred references to fear across his seven major political and dramatic works double his references to love and nearly triple his references to hate. These numbers suggest that Machiavelli is deeply interested in fear above all other passions. I am therefore not persuaded by Nicole Hochner's contention that the "crucial emotion in Machiavelli's political world is not necessarily fear, but rather love."<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli repeatedly chooses fear over love.<sup>4</sup> Fear reigns supreme as his foremost political passion because, of all the passions, fear depends most on one's actions and least on other's feelings. Machiavelli advises the prince to choose fear but recognizes that an overreliance on fear can make him hated by the people.<sup>5</sup>

However, after fear, the passion to which Machiavelli most often refers is hope. Across his major works, Machiavelli's 283 references to hope slightly exceed his 271 references to love and greatly outnumber his 191 references to hate. The *Florentine Histories* alone refers to hope 167 times while referencing love and hate only 93 times each.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as table 2 shows, without his two dramatic works, which owing to their genre and subject matter mention love more frequently, Machiavelli's references to hope outnumber those to love.<sup>7</sup> Yet these many references to hope have been all but ignored in Machiavelli scholarship. In this article, I demonstrate the significance of hope in Machiavelli's politics and argue that there are grounds for emphasizing the dyad of fear and hope over that of fear and love<sup>8</sup> as Machiavelli's primary pair of passions relevant to politics.

<sup>2</sup>Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 17; Brown, "Lucretian Naturalism," 71, 80.

<sup>3</sup>Nicole Hochner, "Machiavelli: Love and the Economy of Emotions," *Italian Culture* 32, no. 2 (2014): 124.

<sup>4</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince with Related Documents*, trans. and ed. William J. Connell (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 17. *The Prince* (hereafter *P*) is cited by chapter and page number where appropriate. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.21.2, 3.22. The *Discourses* (hereafter *D*) is cited by book, chapter, and section, and page number where appropriate.

<sup>5</sup>*P* 17, 19; *D* 3.19.1.

<sup>6</sup>See table 1. The data in tables 1–9 are my own and were compiled with reference to Machiavelli's original Italian as appears in the Intratext Digital Library (Niccolò Machiavelli, *Raccolta di opere* [IntraText Digital Library: EuloTech, 2007], <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1109/>).

<sup>7</sup>For a breakdown of each major work's references to fear, hope, love, and hate, see tables 3–9.

<sup>8</sup>For scholarship that emphasizes fear and love, see Hochner, "Machiavelli: Love"; Yves, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 58–64; Haig Patapan, *Machiavelli in Love: The Modern Politics of Love and Fear* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006);

**Table 1.** References to fear, hope, love, and hate in Machiavelli's major works

|  | Fear  | Hope  | Love  | Hate  | Total |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <i>The Prince</i>                        | 65    | 15    | 25    | 42    | 147   |
| <i>Discourses on Livy</i>                | 128   | 55    | 51    | 48    | 282   |
| <i>The Life of Castruccio Castracani</i> | 10    | 7     | 7     | 0     | 24    |
| <i>Mandragola</i>                        | 17    | 17    | 19    | 3     | 56    |
| <i>Clizia</i>                            | 6     | 6     | 59    | 3     | 74    |
| <i>Art of War</i>                        | 87    | 16    | 17    | 2     | 122   |
| <i>Florentine Histories</i>              | 229   | 167   | 93    | 93    | 582   |
| Total                                    | 542   | 283   | 271   | 191   | 1287  |
| Percentage of Total References           | 42.11 | 21.99 | 21.06 | 14.84 |       |

**Table 2.** References to fear, hope, love, and hate in Machiavelli's political and historical works

|  | Fear  | Hope  | Love  | Hate  | Total |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <i>The Prince</i>                        | 65    | 15    | 25    | 42    | 147   |
| <i>Discourses on Livy</i>                | 128   | 55    | 51    | 48    | 282   |
| <i>The Life of Castruccio Castracani</i> | 10    | 7     | 7     | 0     | 24    |
| <i>Art of War</i>                        | 87    | 16    | 17    | 2     | 122   |
| <i>Florentine Histories</i>              | 229   | 167   | 93    | 93    | 582   |
| Total                                    | 519   | 260   | 193   | 185   | 1157  |
| Percentage of Total References           | 44.86 | 22.47 | 16.68 | 15.99 |       |

Even when the prince manages to utilize fear without becoming hated, fear must be combined with hope to be politically effective. "It was never a wise course to make men desperate," Machiavelli asserts, "because he who does not hope for good does not fear evil."<sup>9</sup> Robbed of hope, humans no longer have anything to fear and therefore cannot be controlled. Without hope, fear becomes impotent. Thus, to describe Machiavelli as a political thinker of fear alone is inadequate. Fear and hope must be present to realize the benefits of each passion and avoid their excesses; they are necessary and complementary passions for the maintenance of republics as well as principalities.

I begin with an explanation of what Machiavelli means by "hope" as a passion in the absence of any explicit definition. In the second section I consider hope's relation to fear. Whereas fear has a paralyzing effect, hope spurs

Benedetto Fontana, "Love of Country and Love of God: The Political Uses of Religion in Machiavelli," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 657–58; Jack D'Amico, "Love and Fear in Machiavelli's 'Discorsi,'" *Il Politico* 45, no. 3 (1980): 429–41.

<sup>9</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 2.14, 67. *Florentine Histories* (hereafter *FH*) is cited by book and chapter, as well as page number where appropriate.

Table 3. References to fear, hope, love, and hate in *The Prince*

| Fear      |    | Hope      |    | Love    |    | Hate        |    |
|-----------|----|-----------|----|---------|----|-------------|----|
| paura     | 18 | sperare   | 9  | amore   | 6  | odio        | 19 |
| temere    | 17 | speranza  | 2  | amare   | 4  | odiato      | 9  |
| temuto    | 6  | spera     | 1  | amato   | 4  | odioso      | 6  |
| timore    | 6  | sperano   | 1  | amavono | 3  | odiare      | 3  |
| paure     | 2  | sperorono | 1  | carità  | 2  | odiati      | 2  |
| paurosi   | 2  | spes      | 1  | amando  | 1  | odiata      | 1  |
| tema      | 2  |           |    | amari   | 1  | odiosa      | 1  |
| temerlo   | 2  |           |    | amarlo  | 1  | odiosissimo | 1  |
| temerne   | 2  |           |    | amati   | 1  |             |    |
| pauroso   | 1  |           |    | amatore | 1  |             |    |
| temendo   | 1  |           |    | amatori | 1  |             |    |
| temendolo | 1  |           |    |         |    |             |    |
| temerità  | 1  |           |    |         |    |             |    |
| temerli   | 1  |           |    |         |    |             |    |
| temono    | 1  |           |    |         |    |             |    |
| timeri    | 1  |           |    |         |    |             |    |
| timidità  | 1  |           |    |         |    |             |    |
| Total     | 65 |           | 15 |         | 25 |             | 42 |

people to action. The third section discusses how political leaders can control the people by manipulating their fears and hopes according to the necessities of the given circumstances. In the fourth section I focus on the risks and limits of fear and hope. The penultimate section examines the presence of hope (at least implicitly) in Machiavelli’s description of a free way of life in *Discourses* 2.2.3 and argues that the struggle between fear and hope helps to create the conditions for free government. I conclude that proper recognition of the power of hope in Machiavelli’s thought will help scholars to see the significance of this passion for his political project.

1. What Machiavelli Means by “Hope”

Machiavelli never defines what he means by “hope” (*speranza*). Because hope is absent from the list of qualities, such as liberal and miserly, humane and proud, for which princes are praised and blamed in *P* 15, it is safe to assume that Machiavelli does not follow Christian doctrine in categorizing hope (*spes*) as a theological virtue.<sup>10</sup> He does not explicitly link hope with Christian faith,

<sup>10</sup> Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40–51, 151–57; Michael Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope: Augustine’s Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Michael Lamb, “Aquinas and the Virtues of Hope: Theological and Democratic,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 4 (2016): 300–332.

**Table 4.** References to fear, hope, love, and hate in *Discourses on Livy*

| Fear        |     | Hope         |    | Love      |    | Hate     |    |
|-------------|-----|--------------|----|-----------|----|----------|----|
| paura       | 51  | speranza     | 24 | amore     | 19 | odio     | 29 |
| temere      | 20  | sperare      | 12 | amatore   | 7  | odioso   | 6  |
| timore      | 15  | speranze     | 5  | amato     | 6  | odiando  | 2  |
| temendo     | 8   | sperando     | 3  | amare     | 5  | odiare   | 2  |
| temevano    | 6   | spera        | 2  | amatori   | 3  | odiato   | 2  |
| temano      | 4   | speravono    | 2  | carità    | 2  | odiava   | 2  |
| temerità    | 4   | insperati    | 1  | ama       | 1  | odii     | 2  |
| temono      | 3   | spei         | 1  | amando    | 1  | odiosi   | 2  |
| tema        | 2   | sperandam    | 1  | amarli    | 1  | odiavano | 1  |
| teme        | 2   | speravano    | 1  | amarsi    | 1  |          |    |
| temuto      | 2   | speremus     | 1  | amassino  | 1  |          |    |
| impauriti   | 1   | spererebbero | 1  | amiamo    | 1  |          |    |
| paure       | 1   | spes         | 1  | amorevoli | 1  |          |    |
| paurosi     | 1   |              |    | inamorato | 1  |          |    |
| pauroso     | 1   |              |    | innamorò  | 1  |          |    |
| spauriti    | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| temessono   | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| temeva      | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| temevono    | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| timendo     | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| timidamente | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| timidi      | 1   |              |    |           |    |          |    |
| Total       | 128 |              | 55 |           | 51 |          | 48 |

**Table 5.** References to fear, hope, and love in *The Life of Castruccio Castracani*

| Fear    |    | Hope           |   | Love     |   | Hate |   |
|---------|----|----------------|---|----------|---|------|---|
| paura   | 4  | speranza       | 2 | amore    | 3 |      |   |
| timore  | 3  | insperatamente | 1 | amare    | 1 |      |   |
| temere  | 2  | sperando       | 1 | amassino | 1 |      |   |
| temendo | 1  | speranze       | 1 | amato    | 1 |      |   |
|         |    | sperare        | 1 | amatore  | 1 |      |   |
|         |    | sperava        | 1 |          |   |      |   |
| Total   | 10 |                | 7 |          | 7 |      | 0 |

though he does mention placing one's hope in God—specifically the goods in this world that God's favor can help one obtain, such as the freedom of Italy from the "barbarians."<sup>11</sup> While it is likely that Machiavelli's appeals to hope

<sup>11</sup>p 26.

Table 6. References to fear, hope, love, and hate in *Mandragola*

| Fear    |    | Hope     |    | Love       |    | Hate |   |
|---------|----|----------|----|------------|----|------|---|
| paura   | 8  | speranza | 8  | amore      | 10 | odi  | 3 |
| timore  | 3  | sperare  | 4  | amante     | 2  |      |   |
| temere  | 2  | spera    | 2  | ama        | 1  |      |   |
| teme    | 1  | speranze | 1  | amanti     | 1  |      |   |
| temendo | 1  | speme    | 1  | amata      | 1  |      |   |
| temo    | 1  | spero    | 1  | amorose    | 1  |      |   |
| timori  | 1  |          |    | carità     | 1  |      |   |
|         |    |          |    | caritative | 1  |      |   |
|         |    |          |    | innamorati | 1  |      |   |
| Total   | 17 |          | 17 |            | 19 |      | 3 |

Table 7. References to fear, hope, love, and hate in *Clizia*

| Fear    |   | Hope     |   | Love             |    | Hate |   |
|---------|---|----------|---|------------------|----|------|---|
| paura   | 4 | speranza | 2 | amore            | 19 | odi  | 2 |
| paurosi | 1 | speri    | 2 | innamorato       | 9  | odio | 1 |
| temono  | 1 | spera    | 1 | amanti           | 5  |      |   |
|         |   | speme    | 1 | ama              | 4  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amor             | 3  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amante           | 2  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amata            | 2  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amori            | 2  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | innamorate       | 2  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | ami <sup>1</sup> | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amo              | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amorevole        | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amorose          | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | amorosi          | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | carità           | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | innamoramento    | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | innamorati       | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | innamorò         | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | innamororno      | 1  |      |   |
|         |   |          |   | innamororono     | 1  |      |   |
| Total   | 6 |          | 6 |                  | 59 |      | 3 |

<sup>1</sup>There is an additional appearance of the word “ami” in *Clizia* 4.3, but it is used to mean “friend” and not as a form of the verb *amare*; it is therefore not included.

Table 8. References to fear, hope, love, and hate in *Art of War*

| Fear     |    | Hope      |    | Love               |    | Hate   |   |
|----------|----|-----------|----|--------------------|----|--------|---|
| paura    | 18 | speranza  | 6  | amore <sup>1</sup> | 5  | odiare | 1 |
| temere   | 18 | sperare   | 5  | amare              | 4  | odioso | 1 |
| timore   | 16 | sperano   | 2  | amatory            | 3  |        |   |
| teme     | 9  | insperato | 1  | amasse             | 1  |        |   |
| temono   | 6  | sperasse  | 1  | amati              | 1  |        |   |
| temendo  | 3  | sperino   | 1  | amatore            | 1  |        |   |
| tema     | 2  |           |    | amorosi            | 1  |        |   |
| temano   | 2  |           |    | innamarato         | 1  |        |   |
| temevano | 2  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temergli | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temerlo  | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temesse  | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temessi  | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temeva   | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temi     | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temiamo  | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temuti   | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| temuto   | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| timidi   | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| timido   | 1  |           |    |                    |    |        |   |
| Total    | 87 |           | 16 |                    | 17 |        | 2 |

<sup>1</sup>The word “amo” appears in AW 5.114, but it refers to a “hook” and is therefore not included here.

in God are intended to play on his audience’s Christian faith,<sup>12</sup> there is little evidence that his view of hope is the same as that promoted by Christian doctrine. Nonetheless, Machiavelli tends to follow Christian thinkers in characterizing hope in positive terms, as opposed to the ancients, for whom hope (*elpis*) had a neutral or ambivalent meaning of being “expectant.”<sup>13</sup> Machiavelli

<sup>12</sup>For more on Machiavelli’s use of religious appeals and rhetoric in *P* 26, see see Mario Martelli, “La logica provvidenzialistica e il capitolo 26 del *Principe*,” *Interpres* 4 (1982): 262–384; Gennaro Sasso, “Del ventiseiesimo capitolo, della ‘provvidenza’ e di altre cose,” in *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, vol. 2 (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1988), 277–49; Maurizio Viroli, *Redeeming “The Prince”: The Meaning of Machiavelli’s Masterpiece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3–9, 36–39; Colleen E. Mitchell, “Machiavelli and the Political Use of the Christian Doctrine of Free Will,” *History of Political Thought* 43, no. 3 (2022): 436–59. For Machiavelli’s other references to hope in God, see Niccolò Machiavelli, *Clizia*, trans. Daniel T. Gallagher (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1996), 3.6; *FH* 1.5, 5.11.

<sup>13</sup>For more on the ancients’ “ambivalence towards and at times, outright denigration” of hope, see Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age*, 16, 67–90; G. Scott Gravlee, “Aristotle on Hope,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38, no. 4 (2000): 461–77.

**Table 9.** References to fear, hope, love, and hate in *Florentine Histories*

| Fear       |     | Hope       |     | Love          |    | Hate        |    |
|------------|-----|------------|-----|---------------|----|-------------|----|
| paura      | 51  | speranza   | 75  | amore         | 26 | odio        | 52 |
| timore     | 44  | sperando   | 22  | amava         | 9  | odii        | 8  |
| temeva     | 30  | sperare    | 22  | amavano       | 8  | odi         | 4  |
| temere     | 24  | sperava    | 12  | amare         | 7  | odiare      | 4  |
| temevano   | 19  | speravano  | 10  | amato         | 7  | odiati      | 4  |
| temendo    | 15  | insperato  | 7   | amorevole     | 5  | odiato      | 4  |
| temevono   | 10  | speranze   | 6   | amasse        | 4  | odiava      | 3  |
| temuto     | 5   | spera      | 3   | amatore       | 4  | odiosi      | 3  |
| temesse    | 4   | sperandone | 1   | amatori       | 4  | odiavano    | 2  |
| impauriti  | 3   | sperano    | 1   | amata         | 3  | odiammo     | 1  |
| teme       | 3   | sperarne   | 1   | amorevoli     | 3  | odiamo      | 1  |
| paure      | 2   | sperarono  | 1   | amorevolmente | 3  | odiarlo     | 1  |
| temé       | 2   | sperasse   | 1   | carità        | 3  | odiasse     | 1  |
| temessi    | 2   | sperato    | 1   | ama           | 1  | odiata      | 1  |
| temute     | 2   | speravano  | 1   | amammo        | 1  | odiate      | 1  |
| timido     | 2   | speri      | 1   | amarli        | 1  | odiosa      | 1  |
| impaurita  | 1   | sperino    | 1   | amassero      | 1  | odiosissimo | 1  |
| pauroso    | 1   | sperò      | 1   | ami           | 1  | odioso      | 1  |
| spaurì     | 1   |            |     | amiamo        | 1  |             |    |
| spaurirono | 1   |            |     | amò           | 1  |             |    |
| temano     | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| temendone  | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| temerlo    | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| temessero  | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| temevasi   | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| temono     | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| temuti     | 1   |            |     |               |    |             |    |
| Total      | 229 |            | 167 |               | 93 |             | 93 |



generally approaches hope as something to be encouraged; one hopes for something good<sup>14</sup> or something better than what one has now.<sup>15</sup>

Machiavelli frequently equates hope with trust.<sup>16</sup> Similar to how one places one's trust in something, one can place one's hope in a given object, outcome, or person. He refers to placing hope in victory, conquering, campaigns, opportunities, acquisition, arms, another person, the help of others, promises, rescue, flight, peace, marriage prospects, and even in the stupidity of the man whose wife one wants to seduce.<sup>17</sup> However, these terms are not identical. Hope goes beyond the relational, even at times transactional, nature of trust in Machiavelli's thought.<sup>18</sup> Hope should not be reduced to trust, nor elevated to a virtue. In the absence of a clear definition, it is best to understand hope in Machiavelli's thought as a passion, alongside fear, love, and hate.

Like the ancients, Machiavelli accepts that the passions are not fully rational. However, he does not suggest that they need to be subdued so that reason and intellect can rule. Because the passions prompt action, he would not propose eliminating them purely on the grounds that they are not fully rational. Moreover, it is doubtful that Machiavelli thought human beings were capable of fully suppressing their passions and desires. As Catherine H. Zuckert argues, Machiavelli did "not think it possible to change human nature, especially the passions."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Alison Brown claims that for Machiavelli the passions are "part of human nature and nee[d] to be controlled, not destroyed."<sup>20</sup> If the passions as part of human nature must be endured, political actors must find a way to support the passions' "creative" abilities while subduing their "destructive" tendencies.<sup>21</sup> Zuckert contends that "it is possible to channel or direct those passions so that they have better, more desirable, and less destructive results than they had in the

<sup>14</sup>D 2.15.2; FH 6.18.

<sup>15</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, trans. Mera J. Flaumenhaft (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 1981), 3.2.

<sup>16</sup>The link between the two means that translators use these terms interchangeably. See, for example, Andrew Brown's translation: "Therefore you must not trust [*sperare*] in anything, except your skill and the memory of my examples of virtue and the repute that this new victory brings you" (Niccolò Machiavelli, *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, trans. Andrew Brown [London: Hesperus, 2003], 32).

<sup>17</sup>D 3.33.2; D 3.36.2; FH 5.13; Niccolò Machiavelli, *Art of War*, trans. and ed. Christopher Lynch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.112; FH 5.10; D 3.12.2; FH 7.32; FH 5.35; FH 7.25; FH 6.24; D 2.19.1; FH 8.17; FH 5.13; Machiavelli, *Mandragola* 1.1. Citations to the *Art of War* (hereafter AW) are by book and section, as well as page number where appropriate.

<sup>18</sup>See, for instance, Machiavelli's inversion of the golden rule in P 18: "because [men] are wicked, and they would not observe faith for you, you too do not have to observe it for them" (94).

<sup>19</sup>Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 17.

<sup>20</sup>Brown, "Lucretian Naturalism," 80.

<sup>21</sup>Hochner, "Machiavelli: Love," 124.

past.”<sup>22</sup> But how to do this in such a way that produces the best possible political effects requires greater knowledge of how the passions, especially fear and hope, operate in human hearts.

## 2. Hope and Fear as Fundamental Human Drives

In the *Art of War* Machiavelli asserts that human beings are motivated by two primary drives: “the hope of reward and fear of penalty.”<sup>23</sup> These in turn are linked to acquisition, the fundamental drive of human beings. Humans fear losing their life, liberty, property, family, and honor. However, once these goods seem secure, they desire or hope to acquire more.<sup>24</sup> In the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli writes that “men are moved so much more by the hope of acquiring than by the fear of losing, for loss is not to be believed in unless it is close, while acquisition, even though distant, is hoped for.”<sup>25</sup> This suggests that the people’s hope is more powerful than their fear but seems to contradict what Machiavelli says in *Discourses* 1.5.4 where he suggests that fear of losing what one possesses will drive someone to acquire more than those who are seeking merely to acquire. Although Machiavelli speaks in both instances of fears and hopes, in *FH* 4.18, he seems to be referring to men in a *moltitudine* who are more inclined to hope, whereas in *D* 1.54 he appears to be thinking more of men in the *grandi* class who are more inclined to fear losing because they “possess much” and “it does not appear to men that they possess securely what a man has unless he acquires something else new.”<sup>26</sup> But if the people are more inclined toward hope and the great more toward fear, Machiavelli never makes this distinction explicit, nor does he clearly answer whether the hope of acquiring something new or the fear of losing what one has already acquired is more powerful.

In his dramatic works, Machiavelli offers two metaphors that offer insight into the effects he thinks fear and hope have on human hearts and thereby actions. In *Mandragola* and *Clizia*, Machiavelli ends act 1 with the same song that includes the observation: “how often / fear and hope freeze and melt hearts [*timore e speme i cori adiaccia e strugge*].”<sup>27</sup> Fear freezes people in their tracks, whereas hope liquefies hearts and spurs movement. He reiterates that fear and hope produce opposite effects in *Mandragola* when Callimaco

<sup>22</sup>Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 17.

<sup>23</sup>AW 5.120, 111.

<sup>24</sup>See P 3; D 1.5.

<sup>25</sup>FH 4.18, 164.

<sup>26</sup>D 1.5.4, 19.

<sup>27</sup>Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, act 1 song, 19; see Machiavelli, *Clizia*, act 1 song. *Adiaccia* is a medieval form of the Italian verb *agghiacciare*, meaning “to freeze,” “to ice over,” or “to paralyze.” *Struggere* can be rendered as “to melt,” “to consume,” or “to destroy.” It may be useful to conceive of hope’s melting ability as liquefying, i.e., causing to move or change owing to heat, rather than mollifying.

addresses the way in which fear and hope amplify each other and leave him feeling divided: "The more my hope has grown, the more my fear has grown. Miserable me!" he laments. "Will it ever be possible for me to live with so many worries, disturbed by these fears and these hopes? I'm a ship tossed by two different winds, which fears so much more the nearer she is to port. The simplicity of Messer Nicia makes me hope; the foresight and firmness of Lucrezia make me fear. Woe is me, for I can't find rest anywhere!"<sup>28</sup> Callimaco's soliloquy demonstrates the curious way in which Machiavelli thinks fear and hope feed off one another even as they battle within the human heart. Fear pulls back, while hope propels. Both forces might grow equally strong, but one must eventually vanquish the other for the stalemate to conclude. But while Callimaco feels tormented by these conflicting passions, he recognizes hope's importance for motivating human beings even in desperate circumstances. "There's never anything so desperate that there isn't some way of being able to hope for it," he asserts, "and though it might be weak and in vain, the longing and desire that a man has of carrying the thing through make it seem not so."<sup>29</sup> Without hope, Callimaco insists, he would "die no matter what."<sup>30</sup>

Callimaco's predilection for hope over fear could be dismissed as the naiveté shown by most young men in love for the first time. But Machiavelli does not censure young people for their hopefulness. Quite the opposite, as Zuckert notes, he addresses most of his major political works to young people—both in terms of his specific dedicatees and his wider intended audience<sup>31</sup>—and advises political actors of all ages to embrace the hopefulness of youth. The young are more inclined toward hope for similar reasons to why fortune favors them: "they are less cautious, more ferocious, and they command [*fortuna*] with more audacity."<sup>32</sup> The boldness of the

<sup>28</sup>Machiavelli, *Mandragola* 4.1, 39. Callimaco's speech here resembles the first stanza of Machiavelli's "Strambotti," which begins with hope and ends in fear:

I hope, and the hoping increases the torment:  
I cry, and the crying feeds the weary heart:  
I laugh, and my laughing does not go inside:  
I burn, and the fire does not appear outside:  
I fear that which I see and that which I feel;  
Everything gives me new pain;  
So hoping, I cry, I laugh, and I burn,  
And I fear that which I hear and observe.

The translation is my own. For the Italian text, see Niccolò Machiavelli, "Strambotti," in *Tutte Le Opere: Storiche e Letterarie di Niccolò Machiavelli*, ed. Guido Mazzoni and Mario Casella (Florence: G. Barbèra Editore, 1929), 868–69.

<sup>29</sup>Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, 1.1, 14.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.3, 17.

<sup>31</sup>Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 6, 265, 299, 305–7, 363.

<sup>32</sup>p 25, 119.

young when it comes to commanding *fortuna* is likely connected to their more limited experience with failure and greater hope for positive outcomes. Young people have much to learn about channeling their hopes to produce the best possible outcomes, but their hopefulness is to be refined and promoted, not extinguished. Hope provides the motivation not only to undertake bold enterprises but also to persevere and succeed. Machiavelli writes in the *Discourses* that even in bad fortune men should “never give up. . . . They have always to hope and, since they hope, not to give up in whatever fortune and in whatever travail they may find themselves.”<sup>33</sup>

In addition to shielding people from succumbing to despair, hope safeguards against dangers that might arise owing to lack of fear. Callimaco muses that in the absence of hope, he will “not [be] afraid of anything, but will take any course—bestial, cruel, nefarious.”<sup>34</sup> The death of hope is accompanied by the death of fear, and those who have neither are willing to do anything, whether it be cruel, nefarious, or even bestial. To keep human beings from turning into desperate beasts, willing to take any course, fear and hope must both be kept alive.

### 3. Political Benefits of Hope and Fear

Machiavelli illustrates the struggle between the fear of losing and the hope of acquiring in his discussion of conspiracies. He focuses on fear throughout the planning, execution, and aftermath of conspiracies, for both princes and conspirators. A prince has two fears: internal and external threats. To protect against the latter, he must have good arms and good allies. To protect against the former, he needs to avoid being hated by the people.<sup>35</sup> If hated, he is at risk of conspiracies and therefore “must fear everything and everyone.”<sup>36</sup> Conspiracies are the greatest enemy for the prince because he is either killed or brought infamy by them.<sup>37</sup> For conspirators, conspiracies are extremely risky endeavors. For them “there is only fear, apprehension and worry about a punishment that frightens [them].”<sup>38</sup> Conspirators have fears at all stages of conspiracies, and if they succeed in killing the prince, they must fear that the people will turn on them; if this happens, they can “hope for no refuge whatsoever.”<sup>39</sup> This fear works in the favor of the prince; without becoming hated, he seeks to amplify the people’s fear so that they are deterred from attempting conspiracies. So long as he keeps the people’s fear alive, it would seem that he need not fear a conspiracy against him.

<sup>33</sup>D 2.29.3, 199.

<sup>34</sup>Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, 1.3, 17.

<sup>35</sup>P 19.

<sup>36</sup>P 19, 98; see also D 3.6.2.

<sup>37</sup>D 3.6.20.

<sup>38</sup>P 19, 97.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. See also FH 7.34

But fear is not the only relevant passion here; hope must be present for conspiracies to be attempted, and conspirators' hopes must overcome their fears if they are to be successful. Conspirators plot out of the hope of gaining different but related rewards: to rid themselves of a bad ruler or rival, to free their fatherland, and/or to acquire rule for themselves. The more the people collectively hate the current ruler, the more hope conspirators have that their plotting will be successful. Without hope, conspirators would not attempt such an enterprise; their hope must overpower their fears in order to attempt something so risky.<sup>40</sup> When hope is lacking, conspiracies fail or are found out.

The *Florentine Histories* explains how the conspiracy against Messer Jacopo Gabrielli da Gubbio was revealed because one of the conspirators "in thinking the thing over" felt that "fear of punishment became more powerful in him than hope of revenge."<sup>41</sup> Without hope, conspiracies would never be attempted, and for them to be successful, hope must be sustained throughout all stages of the task. The success or failure of the princes who seek to quell conspiracies and conspirators who seek to execute them depends in no small part on the battle between hopes and fears. As Machiavelli's discussion of conspiracies indicates, fear and hope are significant passions that motivate political action and inaction.

Given the fundamental importance of these two passions for human motivation, political leaders must take account of fear and hope if they wish to reap their potential benefits, particularly for exerting control over others. In the *Art of War* Machiavelli maintains that captains should cultivate fear and hope in their soldiers but that each passion serves a different function. "When [soldiers] remain in garrison, [they] are maintained with fear and punishment; when they are then led to war, with hope and reward."<sup>42</sup> Such dynamics follow the principle that fear freezes while hope melts: fear keeps soldiers obedient and patient while garrisoned; hope makes them bold and ferocious in battle. But what is less straightforward in Machiavelli's teaching is how captains are able to move their soldiers away from fear and toward hope when the time is right.

A prudent captain has the power to instill fear in his troops by giving harsh punishments to correct lack of discipline.<sup>43</sup> Machiavelli commends the Romans' use of capital punishment against any soldier who fails to comply with the commander's orders.<sup>44</sup> In cases in which the entire legion erred, rather than kill all the soldiers, one tenth of the legion was chosen by lot to die.<sup>45</sup> "This punishment was used so that if each did not feel it, each nonetheless feared it."<sup>46</sup> As Machiavelli writes in *The Prince*, "fear is held in place by a

<sup>40</sup>D 3.6.3; see also FH 7.13, 7.15, 7.33.

<sup>41</sup>FH 2.32, 87.

<sup>42</sup>AW 7.173, 159.

<sup>43</sup>AW 6.111–25.

<sup>44</sup>AW 6.113.

<sup>45</sup>AW 6.114.

<sup>46</sup>AW 6.115, 127.

fear of punishment that never abandons" the prince.<sup>47</sup> Brown notes that fear is a prince's primary "weapon of political control."<sup>48</sup> But even though fear can promote discipline and keep soldiers from abandoning their duty, it can also have a paralyzing effect. While fear of punishment might ensure that soldiers perform the bare minimum, the propelling force of hope is necessary to induce them to fight well. Just as harsh punishments are to be given to those who disobey commands, rewards should be "offered for every outstanding deed."<sup>49</sup> Soldiers who risk their lives to save others, jump first over enemy walls, and kill or wound enemy soldiers ought to be "recognized and rewarded" publicly, presented with gifts, and welcomed home by their families with great demonstrations.<sup>50</sup> With the hope of rewards, soldiers will feel more inspired to fight well and distinguish themselves. These rewards cannot replace punishment, for it is not possible to give rewards indefinitely, but they might inspire outstanding deeds, which paralyzing fear alone cannot produce.

In addition to knowing how to inspire soldiers with the hope of rewards, a prudent captain must build up his soldiers' confidence prior to battle so that when they engage an enemy they do so with stronger hope of victory. A captain can do this by training his troops to fight in mock battles over several months<sup>51</sup> and engaging in light skirmishes against a new enemy prior to a larger battle.<sup>52</sup> Mock battles teach "obedience and order" that eventually will provide them "greatest confidence in true fighting."<sup>53</sup> Light skirmishes with a new enemy afford soldiers the opportunity to understand their enemy better and thereby lose their fear of them.<sup>54</sup> But such fights are only useful when there is a "very great advantage" on one's own side and "hope of certain victory."<sup>55</sup> If the enemy wins one of these small fights, confidence is destroyed.<sup>56</sup> A captain, therefore, needs to assess the virtue of the enemy against his own and avoid any unnecessary fighting that would produce more fear than hope.

A captain must also be able to control, even disguise, his passions so that he can appeal to his soldiers' fears and hopes through speech. Even if he fears an enemy, with his "words and with other extrinsic demonstrations," the captain must "show that [he] despise[s]" the enemy. "For this . . . mode makes [his] soldiers hope more to have victory."<sup>57</sup> Through speeches, he "takes away fear, inflames spirits, increases obstinacy, uncovers deceptions, promises

<sup>47</sup>P 17, 91.

<sup>48</sup>Brown, "Lucretian Naturalism," 88.

<sup>49</sup>AW 6.116, 127.

<sup>50</sup>AW 6.117, 128.

<sup>51</sup>D 3.38.2.

<sup>52</sup>D 3.37.

<sup>53</sup>D 3.38.2, 297.

<sup>54</sup>D 3.37.2.

<sup>55</sup>D 3.37.3, 295.

<sup>56</sup>D 3.37.3–4.

<sup>57</sup>AW 5.117, 111; see also D 1.11–15, 3.38; AW 4.139–42.

rewards, shows dangers and the way to flee them, fills with hope, praises, vituperates, and does all of those things by which the human passions are extinguished or inflamed.”<sup>58</sup> This oratory requires a certain degree of deception, but it is a means by which a captain can rouse his troops before battle.

To extinguish or inflame the passions, prudent captains, as well as political leaders, should also utilize religion. According to Machiavelli, religion civilizes a people by instilling in them the useful fear of the divine. He uses the Romans as his primary example of the political advantages of religious fear. When Numa succeeded Romulus, he “found a very ferocious people” that he “wished to reduce . . . to civil obedience with the arts of peace.”<sup>59</sup> Machiavelli does not state what these “arts of peace” are but moves immediately to talking about fear; by establishing the Roman religion, Numa ensured that “for many centuries there was never so much fear of God as in that republic.”<sup>60</sup> When a people has a robust fear of the divine it is easier for political elites to carry out their enterprises as the people will be more obedient.

Not only is it useful for political leaders to cultivate a fear of the divine in the people, but they should also promote reverence for the sacred and hope in what has been divinely ordained. To this end, Machiavelli advises that political leaders encourage belief in miracles,<sup>61</sup> as well as in religious rites. The Romans took advantage of their soldiers’ hopes in the divine before battle. Prior to waging war, they would have their augurs check the auspices to see if the gods were favorable to their enterprise; if the augury was considered favorable, battle was waged; if unfavorable, battle was avoided.<sup>62</sup> The Romans never took up expeditions or entered battles “unless they had persuaded the soldiers that the gods promised them victory.”<sup>63</sup> Although Machiavelli describes the Roman religion’s origin in terms of fear instilled to make people more obedient, his analysis shows that hope is needed to make religion something that gives people motivation to take action. As in the case of war, fear works to ensure submission to a given order but does not suffice to give people the desire to do more than comply.

These examples demonstrate that Machiavelli thinks that there is a time and a place for fear and hope in politics and that a prudent leader knows how to arouse these passions when the circumstances call for the freezing or warming of people’s hearts. Successful management of the passions allows for greater control over others and thereby makes positive political outcomes, such as victory in war, more likely. But Machiavelli often makes it seem as though moving the passions of the people back and forth

<sup>58</sup>AW 4.139, 98.

<sup>59</sup>D 1.11.1, 34.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>D 1.12.1.

<sup>62</sup>D 1.14.1.

<sup>63</sup>D 1.14.1, 41.



between fear and hope is straightforward. In practice, manipulating others' fears and hopes is not so simple, and there are limits to their effectiveness.

#### 4. The Limits and Risks of Hope

As noted above, fear is for Machiavelli the most useful political passion for a prince because it depends the most on one's own agency and the least on the feelings of others. But while fear of punishment can make people comply, it fails to inspire them to do more than obey. Fear is also insufficient on its own "because he who does not hope for good does not fear evil."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, an excessive use of fear can make one hated by the people and thereby more vulnerable to conspiracies. For this reason, Machiavelli always qualifies his advice about using fear and warns princes to avoid being hated.<sup>65</sup>

Just as there are limits and risks to the use of fear, appeals to hope, too, have limitations and dangers. Like love, hope cannot be controlled entirely by the prince's actions.<sup>66</sup> The people can be encouraged to hope through the promise of rewards, speeches, and religious appeals, but ultimately they must hope of their own accord. Hope for some potential good is also not as immediate as fear of certain punishment in the present. If a conspirator must choose between the hope of removing a cruel prince after a difficult and dangerous enterprise and the fear of being killed on the spot, fear might understandably win. Hope requires people to overcome their fears and put future goods ahead of present anxieties. When people manage to do this, they might accomplish victory in battle or the overthrow of a cruel prince. But while hope has this potential to spur political action and produce positive political outcomes, Machiavelli identifies three significant risks: hope (1) in false objects, (2) without reason, and (3) without limits.

Hope in false objects is an error in judgment. One can err by hoping in someone who is untrustworthy, such as flatterers, mercenaries, and exiles, as well as hoping in a "false image of good."<sup>67</sup> Cesare Borgia deceived himself by thinking that "new benefits make old injuries forgotten" and allowing Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere to be elected pope.<sup>68</sup> Cesare hoped that Giuliano, once pope, would overlook the injuries the Borgia family had done to him. But Cesare was deceived by this mistaken hope in the power of new benefits to sway someone his family had wronged, and this error "was the cause of his final ruin."<sup>69</sup> John P. McCormick considers

<sup>64</sup>*FH* 2.14, 67.

<sup>65</sup>See *P* 17, 19.

<sup>66</sup>*P* 17.

<sup>67</sup>*D* 1.53.1, 106; *P* 23, 12; *D* 2.31; *FH* 5.9.

<sup>68</sup>*P* 7, 64; see also *D* 3.4.1.

<sup>69</sup>*P* 7, 64.



Cesare's "ultimate mistake" to be "that he believes in forgiveness,"<sup>70</sup> but this can be reframed as a misguided hope in the ability of others to forgive past injuries.

While princes can err in placing their hope in something false, the people are more vulnerable to being deceived by "great hopes and mighty promises."<sup>71</sup> After the city of Veii was captured, the plebs became inflamed by the hope of inhabiting Veii and becoming enriched, even though this policy appeared "useless and harmful" to the "wisest Romans."<sup>72</sup> The Senate had to create a "shield of some old and esteemed citizens" to check the plebs' misguided hopes.<sup>73</sup> While Machiavelli says that it is possible, such as in this Roman example, for "reverence for some grave man of authority" to "check an excited multitude,"<sup>74</sup> such checks do not always work. During the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians' hope of conquering Sicily was so great that the "very grave and prudent" Nicias failed to persuade them that the undertaking was unwise and "the entire ruin of Athens followed from it."<sup>75</sup> Nicias's failure in the case of the Sicilian expedition illustrates the ruin that can occur when the people's hopes in objects that only appear good cannot be reined in.

Hope can also prove dangerous when promoted without reason. Machiavelli's references to hoping in vain suggest that he thinks people are capable of hoping for things that are impossible or highly improbable.<sup>76</sup> "When you lose the pass that you had presupposed you would hold, and in which your people and your army trusted [*confidava*]," Machiavelli explains that "most often such terror enters into the people and the remainder of your troops that you are left a loser without being able to try out their virtue."<sup>77</sup> Confidence in unreasonable hopes can blind people to the unlikelihood of positive outcomes and leave them terrified when the more probable outcome rears its head. Prudent leaders recognize that political action is constrained by the circumstances and that hope can be a valuable tool for accomplishing great enterprises, but hope without reason brings more harm than

<sup>70</sup>John P. McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli: Scandalous Books, Suspect Engagements, and the Virtue of Populist Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 37.

<sup>71</sup>D 1.53 T, 105.

<sup>72</sup>D 1.53.1, 105.

<sup>73</sup>D 1.53.1, 106; see also D 1.54.1; cf. Livy, *History of Rome*, vol. 3, *Books 5–7*, trans. B. O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 172 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 5.24–25.

<sup>74</sup>D 1.54.1, 108.

<sup>75</sup>D 1.53.4, 107. See also D 3.16.1 for another reference to the Sicilian expedition. Cf. Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Mynott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.8–24.

<sup>76</sup>D 2.31.1; *FH* 5.9, 8.15.

<sup>77</sup>D 1.23.2, 57–58. While Mansfield and Tarcov translate "*confidava*" as "trusted" in *Discourses* 1.23.2, confidence might be better linked to hope than trust. See Gravlee, "Aristotle on Hope," 463–68.

good. By calling for prudence to set limits on what can be reasonably hoped for and pursued, Machiavelli indicates that the passion of hope must be moderated by prudential reason.

Moderation is also needed to avoid the third and most dangerous risk: hope without limit. "For when this hope enters into the breasts of men, it makes them pass beyond the mark and most often lose the opportunity of having a certain good through hoping to have an uncertain better."<sup>78</sup> Hope without limit is capable of animating people to such a degree that they reject certain goods in the present in favor of the hope of uncertain, better goods. Those "who do not know how to put limits to their hopes" or act on such hopes "without otherwise measuring themselves . . . are ruined."<sup>79</sup> Machiavelli cites the Carthaginians' decision to continue fighting the Romans after their victory at Cannae. Even though it would have been safer to use their victory to make peace, the Carthaginians were so buoyed by their unlimited hopes that they decided to push for greater victory, despite the advice of Hanno that they should seek peace.<sup>80</sup> "One should not seek to lose [present goods] through the hope of a greater," and the Carthaginians later realized their mistake when they were faring poorly in the war and the opportunity for making peace with the Romans was lost.<sup>81</sup>

Machiavelli's example of the Carthaginians' actions during the Second Punic War shows that hope can become increasingly risky the more it is realized. When hope is repeatedly rewarded, present successes can lead people to develop a false sense about the success of future enterprises. Unlimited hopes can convince them that they should hazard the goods they have for something greater. Hope's triumph can bring about future ruin unless hope is prudently circumscribed. It is up to political leaders to set limits on what they and their people can reasonably hope for and ensure that their aspirations do not become unrealistic. But circumscribing hopes will prove difficult. Machiavelli writes in "*Dell'Ambizione*" that everyone desires not only "whatever good his enemy has" but also "what he seems to have"; one "hopes to climb higher by crushing now one, now another, rather than through his own wisdom and goodness."<sup>82</sup> Thus tied to ambition and the desire to acquire, hope as a passion can never be fully satisfied, for there is always something else that one can hope for. Moreover, as shown above, one can hope in false objects,

<sup>78</sup>D 2.27.1, 193.

<sup>79</sup>D 2.27.4, 195.

<sup>80</sup>D 2.27.1.

<sup>81</sup>D 2.27.1, 193. Cf. Livy, *History of Rome*, vol. 6, *Books 23–25*, ed. and trans. J. C. Yardley, Loeb Classical Library 355 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 23.11–13.

<sup>82</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, "Tercets on Ambition," in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, vol. 2, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), lines 70–75, 736–37.

without reason, and without limits. Political leaders must work to moderate this passion, so as to take advantage of its benefits and avoid its errors. And when hope proves too unruly, leaders can rely on fear to provide greater control and promote obedience.

To be effective, a political leader must learn when to amplify or downplay hope and use this passion as an auxiliary to one's own powers, virtue, and arms. As Machiavelli writes in the *Art of War*, "whoever knows how to order [one's troops in war] better, whoever has the better disciplined army, has more advantage in [battle] and can hope more to win it."<sup>83</sup> Hope, like fortune, can reinforce good order, discipline, and arms, but it cannot make up for the lack of them.<sup>84</sup>

## 5. Hope and Freedom

Despite their risks and limits, fear and hope are both politically necessary passions. Fear especially is necessary for maintaining principalities and republics, but it cannot create the conditions for a free way of life. Without hope, Machiavelli believes, there can be no free way of life in its fullest sense. Of his seven major works, the texts that refer to hope more than both hate and love and contain the most references to hope overall are the *Discourses* and *Florentine Histories*,<sup>85</sup> and both focus on republican states and policies. This is an indication of the connection between hope and freedom.

As Marcia Colish has observed, Machiavelli offers no clear definition of freedom; his use of terms like "*libertà*" and "*vivere libero*" has broad patterns but lacks precision.<sup>86</sup> His free way of life consists in prosperity and security—achieved primarily through an absence of fear. "All towns and provinces that live freely in every part" make "very great profits" because of their larger populations, which, in turn, are due to people's sense of security in their familial and economic matters: "marriages are freer and more desirable to men since each willingly procreates those children he believes he can nourish. He does not fear that his patrimony will be taken away."<sup>87</sup> In the absence of such fear, "riches are seen to multiply. . . . Each willingly multiplies that thing and seeks to acquire those goods he believes he can enjoy once acquired."<sup>88</sup> Men thus come to "think of private and public advantages, and both the one and the other come to grow marvelously."<sup>89</sup> This lack of

<sup>83</sup>AW 6.240, 140.

<sup>84</sup>D 2.29.3.

<sup>85</sup>See table 1.

<sup>86</sup>Marcia L. Colish, "The Idea of Liberty in Machiavelli," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 3 (1971): 324–25.

<sup>87</sup>D 2.2.3, 132.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

fear allows for a sense of security in one's family and property that enables one to carry out individual pursuits while benefiting the state.<sup>90</sup> But Machiavelli's description of a free way of life involves more than just the absence of fear; there is also a positive dimension: one "knows not only that [his children] are born free and not slaves, but that they can, through their virtue, become princes."<sup>91</sup> Here Machiavelli suggests that a free way of life entails not only freedom from domination but also a freedom to participate in politics. Although he does not use the word "hope" explicitly, the knowledge that one's children, if virtuous enough, might become princes implies a connection between freedom and hope for participation in political rule.

Indeed, just a few chapters prior in *Discourses* 1.60, Machiavelli does connect ascending to the consulate with hope. In the Roman Republic consuls were chosen from male citizens "without respect to age or to blood."<sup>92</sup> So long as he was virtuous enough and his virtue was recognized and valued by others, any man, young or old, plebeian or patrician, could hope to ascend to the highest office. Men "cannot be given trouble without a reward, nor can the hope of attaining the reward be taken away from them without danger."<sup>93</sup> His claims suggest that a republic needs to cultivate in the people the hope that they can ascend to the highest office so that they see some reward for enduring the difficulties and sacrifices necessary to maintain a free government. Other more material rewards could suffice in this regard and would soften the difficulties faced under princely rule. But the hope that anyone who is virtuous enough can ascend to the highest office is something that republics alone can offer. Because of this, the people will feel more incentive to try to achieve that end; they will see their personal virtue and free way of life tied to the freedom and health of the republic. As a result, they will feel more connected to the republic and invested in its success and future. This hope reinforces the power of the people in the

<sup>90</sup>Machiavelli connects the loss of freedom with the overwhelming presence of fear in "L'Asino" when he describes the narrator in a place "where [he] wholly lost [his] liberty" while experiencing "great fear" and feeling "terror-stricken" (Niccolò Machiavelli, "The [Golden] Ass," in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, 2.24, 753; 2.26, 753; 2.47, 754).

<sup>91</sup>*D* 2.2.3, 132. I take "princes" here to refer not only to the head of principalities but to the highest political office more generally. In the Roman Republic, for instance, a consul would be a "prince." Machiavelli does not clearly distinguish whether this free way of life is to be found only in republics, but the hope of becoming a "prince" seems far more likely in a republic than a principality.

<sup>92</sup>*D* 1.60.1, 121. Machiavelli is not entirely accurate in his description of the consulate here. There were class barriers to the consulship, as well as an eventual age barrier. See Andrew Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 104–9.

<sup>93</sup>*D* 1.60.1, 121–22.

overall structure of the republic. It is a powerful hope to promote, and as Machiavelli suggests, a dangerous one to take away.

To ensure that this hope is not eliminated, it cannot remain an aspiration. Eventually it needs to be realized. In Rome, "it was fitting at an early hour that the plebs have hope of gaining the consulate, and it was fed a bit with this hope without having it; then the hope was not enough, and it was fitting that it come to the effect."<sup>94</sup> The Romans did eventually allow plebs to become consuls, as the nobles felt compelled to yield to the plebs' ambitious demands by sharing offices and honors with them.<sup>95</sup> Calling attention to this policy shift in Rome suggests that the people's hopes pushed the nobles to make their republic more democratic.

McCormick's democratic reading of Machiavelli claims that the people's competition for and participation in political rule help to resist their domination by the nobles and thus "advance and preserve liberty."<sup>96</sup> While I concur that Machiavelli leans toward a more democratic republic in which the nobles are forced to compete with and share power with the people,<sup>97</sup> Machiavelli thinks hope and fear must battle against one another to avoid the defects and excesses of either passion and produce the best political results. The people's hopes for office are limited by their fear of the nobles' power and retribution; the nobles' hope in their power is checked by their fear of popular revolt and of public accusations.<sup>98</sup> To create the conditions for liberty rather than principality or license,<sup>99</sup> fears and hopes must both be alive and battling against one another to ensure that the conflict between the two humors remains an ongoing conflict.

As scholars of Machiavelli's republicanism have demonstrated,<sup>100</sup> Machiavelli has a more positive view of conflict than most other thinkers in the classical and humanist traditions. He believes that the freedom of a republic arises from, rather than despite, the conflict between the great's desire to

<sup>94</sup>D 1.60.1, 122.

<sup>95</sup>D 1.37. Cf. Livy, *History of Rome*, vol. 1, *Books 1–2*, trans. B. O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 114 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 2.41–43.

<sup>96</sup>McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, 193.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 198–99.

<sup>98</sup>D 1.4, 1.7, 3.6.

<sup>99</sup>P 9.

<sup>100</sup>Filippo Del Lucchese, "Crisis and Power: Economics, Politics and Conflict in Machiavelli's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 1 (2009): 75–96; Filippo Del Lucchese, *The Political Philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 40–54; Benedetto Fontana, "Machiavelli and the Gracchi: Republican Liberty and Class Conflict," in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, ed. David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 235–56; Marie Gaille, "The *Discourses on Livy*: A 'Commentary' on the Effectual Truth of Civil Conflict," in *Machiavelli's "Discourses on Livy": New Readings*, ed. Diogo Pires Aurélio and Andre Santos Campos (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 81–97.

dominate and the people's desire not to be dominated:<sup>101</sup> as David N. Levy says, "only through conflict, i.e., through popular resistance to the *grandi's* projects of domination, can liberty . . . be secured."<sup>102</sup> In analyzing this conflict, Gabriele Pedullà correctly observes that fear serves as "an indispensable check" on the people and the great,<sup>103</sup> but his study overlooks hope's role in checking fear and securing freedom.

For republics to maintain their liberty, there must be a free way of life that includes a possibility of hope for the people's participation in political rule, lest the nobles' domination become too oppressive. But to keep the people from becoming too powerful or even licentious, this hope cannot be without limits and must be checked when necessary by fear of the nobles and of law. In *Discourses* 1.37 Machiavelli explains that the people's unchecked desire for not only greater honors but also greater wealth during the Agrarian conflict eventually led to the destruction of the Roman Republic. Had their hopes been checked by fear, the republic might have been able to maintain itself free for a longer period. Thus, while I generally agree with McCormick that we ought to have greater appreciation of the democratic bent of Machiavelli's republicanism and with Pedullà that fear is an important passion for understanding how freedom emerges from conflict, we must also be sensitive to the role that hope plays in checking fear and securing freedom. Adding to Yves Winter's observation that "for Machiavelli, love and fear are both regime-preserving,"<sup>104</sup> I contend that hope and fear are both necessary passions for maintaining a republic's liberty.

## 6. Conclusion

By fixating on the priority of fear in Machiavelli's thought, scholars have missed the ways in which hope operates in his political project. My examination of this neglected theme shows that Machiavelli's repeated references to hope demonstrate its power over the human heart. Hope can produce positive and negative political effects when used well or badly as an auxiliary tool for politics. However, unlike fear, hope offers something more than obedience to avoid punishment; it provides a powerful shield against political leaders' weapon of fear and a foundation for a free way of life. By taking greater account of the role of hope in Machiavelli's thought, scholars can better understand his political project and view of freedom.

Scholars can also better understand Machiavelli himself. Isaiah Berlin observed that Machiavelli is "not, in the usual sense of the word,

<sup>101</sup>P 9; D 1.4.

<sup>102</sup>David N. Levy, *Wily Elites and Spirited Peoples in Machiavelli's Republicanism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 15.

<sup>103</sup>Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, 251.

<sup>104</sup>Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence*, 59.

hopeful.”<sup>105</sup> Machiavelli cannot be labeled an optimist, but he did see a political and perhaps also a personal need for hope. As a young man he had a thirst to revive Florence’s republican government and prove himself in the process, but his political ambitions were quashed by the return of the Medici in 1512 and his subsequent dismissal, imprisonment, and torture. He knew what it meant to have hopes dashed. But even though Machiavelli’s own political fortunes had been ruined, he kept writing about politics so that he could “at least show the path to someone who with more virtue” could bring his efforts to “the destined place.”<sup>106</sup> Machiavelli persevered in writing histories, dialogues, and discourses with the hope that those younger and more favored by fortune could carry on his political project. His example serves as a lesson to all who desire to promote free government: fear alone is not enough; hope must also be present to secure freedom.

<sup>105</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 61.

<sup>106</sup> D 1.Preface.1–2, 5–6.