Moses, Machiavelli, and Augustine's Republicanism

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No two political thinkers seem as opposed to each other as Augustine of Hippo and Niccolò Machiavelli, yet their relationship has attracted a notable measure of scholarly attention. It is not difficult to see why. Augustine and Machiavelli share a profound interest in Rome.[1] Each offers a critical reinterpretation of ancient Roman history, Augustine in *The City of God* and Machiavelli in the *Discourses on Livy*.[2] Each makes frequent use of exemplars.[3] Each attaches considerable significance to Christianity in his political writings. Augustine's concern with Christianity is obvious as an adult convert, bishop, and theologian. For Machiavelli, the matter is more complex. Scholars debate the character of the Florentine's relationship to Christianity, but his preoccupation with it remains indisputable.[4]

Drawing on these shared interests, scholars have put Augustine and Machiavelli in conversation on a wide array of topics. Despite their variety, many of these studies betray a curious neglect of

Augustine's positive contribution to the exchange. For some the focus remains primarily on Machiavelli, while Augustine mainly serves as an occasional foil.[5] Others give fuller development to Augustine's thought, but their emphasis remains on how Machiavelli radically alters the ideas he inherits from Augustine.[6] Still others give greater attention to Augustine in his own right yet neglect to explore what we consider one of the keys to unlocking Augustine's positive political vision: *The City of God*'s treatment of Moses, the biblical founder[7] of the Hebrew republic.[8] In this study, we borrow Eric Nelson's term "Hebrew republic" as a scholarly construct to describe the Hebrew polity's proto-republican features under Moses's leadership.[9] Inattention to Moses as portrayed in *The City of God* is not limited to studies comparing Augustine with Machiavelli. Even many studies that focus on Augustine share the tendency to overlook his treatment of Moses.[10]

This article aims to correct this deficiency and rebalance the conversation between Augustine and Machiavelli, giving due attention to the former without neglecting the latter. To this end, we explore Augustine's treatment of Moses in *The City of God* and draw out its weighty implications for his political thought. Most significantly, we conclude that Augustine is in important respects a republican thinker for whom Moses is a model of republican leadership. In characterizing Augustine as republican, we rely on the commonsense meaning of the term as connoting shared, public-spirited governmental responsibility, law, and leadership among a people, rather than the more specialized meanings emphasized in modern or contemporary political theory.[11] We focus on what we term a republican outlook and ethics in the context of statesmanship and political founder-legislators. While Augustine does not use the term *res publica* in treating the Hebrew *populus* and its foundation, he emphasizes elsewhere the Roman connection between *populus* and *res publica*—a natural, helpful interpretive key also for his reflections on the Hebrew people and Moses's founding leadership. The specific comparisons Augustine draws between the Hebrews and the Romans, and between the Hebrews and other ancient polities, as we shall see, reflect more positively on the

Mosaic founding and governance than on its grander ancient peers.[12]

A brief review of four important studies will clarify our scholarly contribution further. John Warner and John Scott examine Augustine's critique of Rome and the Roman founders Romulus and Brutus. They then show how Machiavelli inverts Augustine's critique and provides a novel foundation for political order. By developing a powerful interpretation of Augustine's negative appraisal of Rome, Warner and Scott are then able to contrast it with Machiavelli's positive vision of politics. Their approach, however, leaves Augustine's positive vision of politics unexplored. Augustine sees Romulus and Brutus as deficient political founders; these figures must be supplemented with another exemplar, Moses, to illumine Augustine's understanding of an exemplary political founder and foundation.

In contrast to Warner and Scott, Robert Dodaro offers a brief but illuminating exploration of Moses and his significance for Augustine's positive ethical-political vision. Dodaro's examination of Augustine's Moses focuses on the theophany at Mount Sinai. Drawing on Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Dodaro emphasizes the "tension between God's self-revelation and hiddenness."[13] Our interpretation, anchored instead in *The City of God*, points not to divine "hiddenness" but to a republican outlook and ethics of publicity. Dodaro also omits comparative contexts that we explore to elucidate the political significance of Augustine's Moses: Moses contrasted with Lycurgus and Augustine contrasted with Machiavelli.

In some respects, John von Heyking's work comes the closest to our own. Like Dodaro, von Heyking turns to Moses to develop an interpretation of Augustine's positive political vision. Unlike Dodaro, von Heyking draws on *The City of God* rather than *De Trinitate*.[14] Most significantly, he uses Moses to draw out what he identifies as a republican dimension of Augustine's political thought. Despite these similarities, von Heyking's focus differs from ours in important respects. He interprets Augustine's Moses through the Voegelinian idea of representation and focuses on the

active role of the Hebrew people in such representation. At the same time, von Heyking develops the case for Augustine as a republican thinker by elaborating the institutional mode of the mixed regime he reads Augustine as preferring. We adopt a complementary focus: the civic outlook and ethics of the founder-statesman marked by the virtues of honesty, publicity, and humility, exemplified by Moses and presented by Augustine as essential for a politics of *res publica*.

Like von Heyking, Paul Cornish interprets Augustine as a republican thinker, focusing on his engagement with Cicero.[15] Following Walter Nicgorski,[16] Cornish argues that "Cicero's political prudence recognized that there are less than reasonable tendencies in political life, and led him to shift his focus from the issue of the best regime to that of the model statesman." He further argues that Augustine "radicalizes Cicero's concern about the problematic nature of politics" but "shows little concern about the nature of a model statesman."[17] While we see considerable merit in Cornish's arguments, Cornish fails to note the significance of Augustine's treatment of Moses, among other statesmen Augustine assesses, including Solon, who also receives a favorable review in *The City of God*. Moses, we maintain, is for Augustine an exemplar of the model statesman and an indicator of Augustine's agreement with Cicero on the importance of a republican outlook and ethics among officials and citizens.[18]

To make this case, this article draws out the significance of Augustine's treatment of Moses through two sets of contrasts. First, we follow Augustine's lead in making use of his comparison of Moses with Lycurgus, the mythical refounder of Sparta. Solon of Athens also enters into this discourse and appears preferable to Lycurgus in human and statesmanly virtues. Second, we compare Augustine's analysis of these figures with Machiavelli's to clarify and develop what we term Augustine's republican outlook and ethics and its signature virtues. Augustine's Moses, the paradigmatic biblical founder-legislator, emerges from these contrasts as an exemplar of republicanism defined by honesty, publicity, and humility.

Augustine's Lycurgus

We begin with Augustine's critique of Lycurgus, the legendary lawgiver of Sparta. To understand the significance of Augustine's criticism, it may help to recall the important place Lycurgus held in classical political thought. In his *History*, Herodotus recounts the deficient laws Sparta lived under before Lycurgus's encounter with the oracle at Delphi and his reform of Sparta's constitution.[19] Compared with Herodotus's appreciative account of Lycurgus, Aristotle's examination of Sparta's laws is relatively critical, and by implication his judgment extends to the founder who instituted them.[20] Xenophon similarly investigates Sparta's laws in the *Regime of the Lacedaemonians*,[21] while Lycurgus is the subject of one of Plutarch's memorable *Lives*.[22]

Considering Lycurgus's prominence in classical political thought, it is surprising that Augustine mentions him just twice in *The City of God*. In each of these passages, Augustine pairs Lycurgus with another notable founder, first Solon and then Moses. These comparisons suggest that Lycurgus factors more heavily in Augustine's thought than the paucity of references reveals. In the first passage, Augustine notes, "[H]ad the Romans been able to receive laws of right living from their gods, they would not have had to borrow the laws of Solon from the Athenians some years after Rome's foundation. . . . Also, although Lycurgus pretended that he had instituted laws for the Spartans by the authority of Apollo, the Romans wisely refused to believe this, and so received nothing from that source."[23]

Augustine's preference for Solon's over Lycurgus's legislation might seem surprising. According to Plutarch, Solon reformed the laws of Athens at a moment of intense conflict among different factions of the city.[24] The regime established by Solon gave way during his own lifetime to the tyranny of Pisistratus. The Spartan regime, by contrast, was lauded for its longevity. Plutarch writes admiringly, "[T]he city of Lacedaemon continued the chief city of all Greece for the space of five hundred years, in strict observance of Lycurgus's laws; in all which time there was no manner of alteration made, during the reign of fourteen kings down to the time of Agis, the son of Archidamus."[25]

Given the greater longevity of Sparta, why would Augustine affirm Rome's wisdom in rejecting the authority of Spartan law? Augustine seems to prefer Solon's laws to Lycurgus's for religious reasons with political implications: "Lycurgus pretended that he had instituted laws for the Spartans by the authority of Apollo," but "the Romans wisely refused to believe this, and so received nothing from that source."[26] Augustine rejects Lycurgus chiefly because he considers the Lacedaemonian a religious fraud.[27]

The foregoing interpretation receives confirmation when we consider the second passage in *The City of God* in which Augustine discusses Lycurgus, now contrasting the Spartan founder with Moses.

> Since it was fitting, therefore, that the Law of God should be given not to one man or to a few wise men, but a whole nation and a great people [*non uni homini paucisue sapientibus, sed universae genti et populo ingenti*], by the awesome proclamation of angels, the great things which were done on Mount Sinai were done before the whole people. The Law was given by one man there, to the multitude who beheld what was done with fear and trembling. But the people of Israel did not believe in Moses in the way that the Spartans believed in Lycurgus [*non enim populus Israel sic Moysi credidit, quem ad modum suo Lycurgo Lacedaemonii*]: that is, because [Lycurgus] was thought to have received from Jupiter or Apollo the laws which he established [*condidit*]. For when the Law by which the Israelites were commanded to worship one God was delivered to the people, marvellous signs and portents appeared before the sight of the people [*lex dabatur populo, qua coli unus iubebatur deus, in conspectus ipsius populi*] in such number as the divine providence judged sufficient, as the creation served its Creator in giving that same Law.[28]

Commenting on this passage, Ernest Fortin notes that while another scholar has taken "the text to mean that the Spartans were

receptive and faithful to the laws of Lycurgus, whereas the Israelites were unfaithful to the Mosaic law," the real issue is "whether the Israelites had a valid motive for accepting that law in the first place. . . . The contrast that [Augustine] draws is . . . between the private and hence, highly dubious character of [Lycurgus's] Delphic oracle and the public and eminently credible character of the Mosaic legislation."[29] Augustine's insistence that the Hebrew people's trust in Moses differs normatively from the Spartans' faith in Lycurgus suggests two contrasts between these great founder-legislators. First, Moses's relationship with God is sincere, whereas Lycurgus's relationship with Jupiter or Apollo is false. Second, Moses's relationship is not only true but also evident, for God provided "marvellous signs and portents" to confirm the authenticity of Mosaic law, whereas Lycurgus's purported relationship with the gods received no such evident, public endorsement. Thus, the pair of passages in *The City of God* examining Lycurgus point to the same basic conclusion: Lycurgus is a deeply problematic founder because of his use of religious fraud. It would be an error, however, to treat Augustine's critique as simply having to do with religion and therefore irrelevant to politics and political philosophy. The religious deception perpetrated by Lycurgus fundamentally distorts his relationship with the people he governs, leading him to violate basic principles of political morality: honesty, publicity, and humility. We will elaborate these principles in our discussion of Augustine's Moses.

Human and Divine Agency in Augustine's Exemplary Statesman

Before turning to the substance of Augustine's Moses, we must consider a baseline query: whether Moses can be considered a genuine political founder. In the biblical account Moses's agency is bound up in important ways with God's agency. This connection might appear to render the authenticity of Moses's agency questionable. In this vein Machiavelli suggests that Moses "was a mere executor of things that had been ordered for him by God."[30] If Moses is a "mere executor" of God's commands, he is not a real

political founder-legislator, because genuine political agency presupposes authentic human agency.

In his book *In God's Shadow*, Michael Walzer adopts a view similar to the one voiced by Machiavelli. He acknowledges that "there are many different voices in the Hebrew Bible" but emphasizes "a strong anti-political tendency in the biblical texts, which follows from the idea that God is a 'man of war' (Exodus 15:3) and a supreme king—so what is there for human beings to do? Antipolitics makes its first appearance in the exodus story, which describes a liberation with no acknowledged and autonomous human agents, and it is reiterated, centuries later, in the prophetic writings."[31] Although Walzer does not discuss Moses directly, the implications of his argument are clear. In the Hebrew exodus from Egypt, God acts. Because God acts, the human beings involved, including even Moses, lack genuine agency.

Augustine, by contrast, sees Moses as a genuine agent, a true political founder and lawgiver. He does not consider this ascription to be incompatible with God's activity on behalf of the Hebrews. His account in *The City of God* of Moses's political agency, however, does initially appear ambiguous. In Book XVI, chapter 43, Augustine states that "God's people dwelt in the wilderness for forty years, with Moses as their leader" (*duce Moyse*) and refers to Moses and Joshua as remarkable "leaders" (*ducibus*).[32] These formulations seem to weigh in favor of Moses's genuine political agency. Earlier in this chapter, however, Augustine writes of Moses that he "grew into so great a man that he delivered that nation, so wondrously multiplied, from the most harsh and grievous yoke of servitude which they bore there. Or, rather, they were delivered through him by the God [*iugo seruitutis extraheret, immo per eum deus*] Who had promised Abraham that he would do this."[33] This last passage could be read as supporting Walzer's interpretation of the Hebrew exodus. A similar perplexity occurs in Book XVIII. Augustine initially writes, "It was through [Moses] that the people of God were redeemed from slavery in Egypt" and "God led his people out of Egypt through the agency of Moses."[34] Later in Book XVIII, however, Augustine again speaks

of Moses as an active agent, delivering and guiding Israel: "Moses, then, led the people of God out of Egypt" (*eduxit ergo Moyses ex Aegypto populum dei*) and "Moses ruled the people" (*rexit autem populum Moyses*).[35] Several of these passages, then, speak of Moses as a genuine agent, but others could be read as pointing to the opposite conclusion.

To resolve the question of how Augustine views Moses's agency, we must ascend from the case of Moses to a more theoretical level. In Book V of *The City of God*, Augustine examines the relationship between human agency and divine foreknowledge. The context of this discussion is an assertion by the philosophic statesman Cicero that Augustine finds problematic. As Augustine reads him, Cicero was troubled by what he saw as an important implication of the Stoic belief in divination: that it presupposes belief in divine foreknowledge, and divine foreknowledge precludes human freedom. Faced with this opposition, Cicero opted for free human agency: "Cicero wishes to say that there is no foreknowledge of things to come. He restricts the mind of the religious man to a choice between two alternatives: either there is something which lies within the power of our own will, or there is [divine] foreknowledge of the future. He considers that these statements cannot both be true, and that to affirm one of them is to deny the other."[36] Augustine concurs with Cicero in rejecting the Stoic belief in fate, but not on the implications of this rejection. Augustine insists both on divine foreknowledge and on human freedom: "[W]e say both that God knows all things before they happen, and that we do by our own free will, and only by our own free will, whatever we know and feel to be done by us."[37] Humans bear responsibility for their actions, for better or for worse.

Augustine does not see a conflict between human responsibility and divine foreknowledge nor between human action and divine action. Augustine provides a model of this compatibility in the last of the many passages in *The City of God* mentioning Moses: Just as Moses defeated the court magicians of Pharaoh (*a Moyse . . . victi sunt*), so the martyrs have "vanquished" the false gods. These false divinities "perform their wonders with an impure pride . . . ; but the

martyrs perform theirs—or rather, God performs them while they work with Him and pray—in order to strengthen the faith by which we believe not that they [the martyrs] are our gods, but that both they and we have one God."[38] This reluctance of the martyrs, and Moses before them, to accept false divinization, along with their eagerness to share their faith in one true God with others on an equal basis, serves as a useful introduction to Augustine's interpretation of Moses. Augustine does not accept that divine knowledge (or divine action) excludes genuine human agency. The fact that God founds and leads the Hebrew people does not exclude Moses from founding and leading them as well.[39]

Augustine's Moses

Augustine's Moses is a genuine agent, a political leader and founder. His leadership embodies a distinctively Augustinian republican outlook and ethics marked by honesty, publicity, and humility. Let us recall the key passage quoted earlier from *The City of God*, Book X, contrasting Moses with Lycurgus.[40] Augustine, we saw, affirms Moses and rejects Lycurgus as a founding lawgiver for parallel reasons. Having briefly considered the qualities that differentiate the two founders negatively in our discussion of Lycurgus, let us revisit them more positively in the light of Moses.

In contrast to his assessment of Lycurgus's oracle, Augustine regards Moses's claim to communicate with God as genuine. Both founders claim prophetic status, but for Augustine Moses, unlike Lycurgus, is a true prophet. Publicity and miraculous testimony accompanied the Mosaic legislation, whereas Lycurgus's founding had an air of secrecy about it. Lycurgus bases his claim to authority on assertions that he cannot demonstrate or support in public. "He was thought to have received from Jupiter or Apollo the laws which he established," but his proof for this claim amounts to asserting a private revelation. In consequence the Spartans had to believe him by accepting his word as sufficient evidence.[41] Though Plutarch tells the story differently from Augustine, the air of secrecy remains: The Spartan founder establishes his rule through conspiracy.[42] The Mosaic foundation Augustine recounts rests rather on

public revelation, fitting for a people, a civic community. When Moses received the law on Sinai, "marvellous signs and portents appeared before the sight of the people in such number as the divine providence judged sufficient." The gods and Lycurgus offered the Spartans no comparable public evidence.

Augustine's account of the Hebrew polity's founding thus underscores that model lawgiving and political leadership require transparency rather than secrecy, in foundational religious and political matters most of all. In this emphasis, Augustine echoes the point he made earlier in *The City of God*, contrasting the religious understandings of the ancient Roman and Jewish polities in this quote from Seneca: "The Jews . . . understand the origins of their rites, whereas the greater part of the Roman people do not know why they perform theirs" (quoting a lost work by Seneca, *On Superstition*).[43]

In addition to honesty and publicity, perhaps the most fundamental characteristic distinguishing Moses from Lycurgus is, for Augustine, humility. As Mary Keys argues, for Augustine "humility is the virtue or excellence by which human beings willingly acknowledge their dependence on God and their essential equality with their fellow human beings and strive to live accordingly with right worship, justice, moderation, and mercy."[44] Thus defined, virtuous humility comprises two dimensions: a vertical dimension relating the human being to God and a horizontal dimension relating the human being to other human beings.[45] On Augustine's account, Moses as founder-legislator acts in accord with humility in both respects; Lycurgus does not.

Let us begin with humility as rightful subordination to God. It might seem that Lycurgus respected this form of humility insofar as he grounded his authority on an oracle and on laws "received from Jupiter or Apollo," but two facts undermine this appearance. First, Augustine insists that Lycurgus "was thought to have received" laws from the gods, but in fact he only "pretended," which suggests that Lycurgus appropriates divine authority as his own. Second, the oracle that Lycurgus receives attributes a quasi-divine status to Lycurgus, at least on Plutarch's account. From

Augustine's point of view, this oracle contradicts the fundamental ideals of truthfulness and humility. Moses, by contrast, avoided the dangers to which Lycurgus succumbed. Like Lycurgus's claims to govern, Moses's authority is founded on the divine, but Augustine sees Moses's relationship with God as authentic and Lycurgus's as fraudulent. And perhaps for Augustine it is no small sign of Moses's authenticity that he never claimed nor was attributed a quasi-divine status, as Lycurgus was.[46]

Let us consider now the second dimension of humility: its implications for relationships among human beings. Humility does not rule out forms of political subordination that are often necessary for social stability, but humility does entail that no one claim for oneself the rightful subordination owed by human beings only to God. Here again Lycurgus went astray. He founded his authority on an oracle that attributed quasi-divine status to him, claiming a form of authority over his fellow human beings that no human being can justly claim.

Lest one conclude that the theological basis of Moses's humility renders his example irrelevant for contemporary political life, it is important to recall the secular invocation of humility found, for example, in Václav Havel and his caution against the hubris of playing God in personal and political interactions.[47] Augustine himself arguably anticipates the secular humility of someone like Havel in his surprising elevation of Solon over Lycurgus. Augustine makes no attempt to "Christianize" Solon, yet he clearly finds something valuable in Solon that Lycurgus lacks. In his only other mention of Solon in *The City of God*, Augustine identifies him as one of the "Seven Sages" who "achieved distinction . . . because they outshone other men by virtue of a certain praiseworthy quality in their way of life, and because they reduced many moral precepts into sayings noted for their terseness."[48] Perhaps Augustine sees in Solon something of the "understanding of God which . . . is in many respects consistent with the truth of our religion" and which he attributes to Plato.[49] At any rate, Plutarch's account also seems to attribute to Solon a measure of humility that Lycurgus does not possess. Each receives a Delphic oracle calling the reformer to action, but in

Lycurgus's oracle, "he is called beloved of God, *and rather God than man*."[50] Solon's humbler oracle declares, "Take the mid-seat, and be the vessel's guide; Many in Athens are upon your side."[51] Augustine similarly seems to consider Solon to have had a modest share of the republican virtues he finds in Moses.

If Augustine's Lycurgus highlights human political authority improperly blended with claims of quasi-divine authority, then Augustine's Moses exemplifies an exercise of human political authority properly imbued with humility. Such humility encourages truthfulness on the part of officials and in political life fosters a "fellowship of equality" in the most important matters. While Moses certainly is the head of the nascent Hebrew polity, so to speak, and thus while he lives is the highest human authority, religiously and politically, the biblical Moses as interpreted by Augustine does not see himself as the source of his own authority, nor does he grasp at a plenitude of power. He is open to what we might term republican modes, as evinced by the political reforms Moses enacted on the advice of his father-in-law, Jethro.[52]

While Augustine does not discuss Jethro in *The City of God*, he does so in another work, his *Questions on Exodus* nestled within his lengthy *Questions on the Heptateuch*, written at the same time as *The City of God*.[53] Before the tablets of the law were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, Moses explained to Jethro that he had adjudicated all the people's disputes, instructing them as to the precepts of God's law. In question 67, Augustine interprets this passage as pointing to Moses's disposition to seek counsel in and allow his own mind to be ruled by God's eternal law.[54]

Jethro, concerned for his son-in-law and also for the vast people Moses is leading, offers Moses some very human, politically sage counsel: essentially, stop trying to judge all cases yourself. Augustine discusses this dialogue in questions 68 and 69, emphasizing how Jethro counsels Moses: "You shall represent the people before God, and bring their cases to God" (quoting Ex 18:19).[55] In other matters, concrete issues of day-to-day justice, Jethro counsels Moses that "the concerns that individuals have among themselves should not be neglected, namely, by choosing

capable men who worship God and are righteous and who hate pride, whom he [Moses] should set over thousands, others over hundreds, others over fifties, and others over tens." Augustine underscores that this arrangement was good for everybody, those ruling and those ruled. In willingly agreeing to Jethro's advice and putting it speedily into practice, moreover, Moses exemplified "*humility* . . . because Moses, with whom God used to speak, was not haughty and did not disdain the counsel of his foreign father-in-law" in governing Israel (emphasis added). Moses does not cling to judging alone; he does not see himself as a sole civic proprietor, nor does he wish for univocal authority in political matters, much less to supplant divine authority.[56] In these ways, in contrast with Lycurgus and other, more frequently considered founders such as Romulus, Augustine presents Moses as an exemplary model of political leadership and virtue.

Machiavelli's Lycurgus

We turn now to Machiavelli's interpretation of our pair of founders, beginning with Lycurgus. Despite Lycurgus's status as one of the important ancient lawgivers, Machiavelli does not mention him in *The Prince*. He is not listed in chapter 6 as a "most excellent" individual alongside Moses, Theseus, Romulus, and Cyrus. This omission suggests that Machiavelli does not esteem Lycurgus greatly. In the *Discourses* we find confirmation of Machiavelli's mixed opinion of this founder. Lycurgus features prominently in the early chapters, where Machiavelli elaborates an extended comparison of Lycurgus's Sparta and early Rome. At times Machiavelli lauds Lycurgus and Sparta: "That republic can be called happy whose lot is to get one man so prudent that he gives it laws ordered so that it can live securely under them without needing to correct them." A few paragraphs later, in a discussion of the mixed regime, Machiavelli claims, "Among those who have deserved most praise for such constitutions is Lycurgus."[57] Machiavelli then emphasizes the superiority of Lycurgus to Solon, an inversion of Augustine's assessment. Lycurgus instituted a mixed regime while Solon instituted a democracy, which led to Lycurgus's constitution lasting

much longer than Solon's constitution. While Augustine had judged Lycurgus and Solon on whether and how they used religion to ground their political authority, with or without honesty and humility, Machiavelli focuses on the vigor and longevity of their constitutions.

Although Machiavelli initially appears to think highly of Lycurgus, as we proceed further we discover that he views the Spartan's founding as highly problematic. Machiavelli suggests that Rome was built for *expansion*, whereas Sparta was built for *stability*. Expansion, it turns out, is a political necessity. For Machiavelli, "all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady"; if "reason" does not require a republic to expand, "necessity" will. A republic unprepared for expansion will "come to ruin sooner." Thus "it is necessary to follow the Roman order and not that of other republics."[58] Machiavelli reiterates this principle in another form later in the *Discourses*:

> [A] small republic cannot seize cities or kingdoms that are sounder or thicker than it. If, however, it seizes one, what happens is as with a tree that has a branch thicker than the stem: it supports it with labor, and every small wind breaks it. Thus it was seen to happen to Sparta, which had seized all the cities of Greece. No sooner did Thebes rebel than all the other cities rebelled, and the trunk alone remained without branches.[59]

Lycurgus did not recognize that necessity would someday require Sparta to expand, and so he failed to order his laws accordingly.[60]

Despite what he sees as Lycurgus's shortcomings, Machiavelli gives him favorable mention elsewhere in the *Discourses*, notably in his discussion of Roman religion. Machiavelli explains how Rome's second king, Numa Pompilius, "pretended [*simulò*] to be intimate with a nymph who counseled him on what he had to counsel the people."[61] Machiavelli draws a general principle from the example of Numa: "[T]ruly there was never any orderer of extraordinary laws [*mai fu alcuno ordinatore di leggi straordinarie*] for a

people who did not have recourse to God [*ricorresse a Dio*]."[62] As further examples of this principle, Machiavelli cites both Lycurgus and Solon. Machiavelli does not indicate that these orderers truly had "recourse to God"; as the example of Numa shows, it would be more precise to say that they pretended to have recourse to God (or a god). Numa used religious fraud to ground his authority, and Machiavelli affirms this decision as both good and necessary. In short, Machiavelli presents both Lycurgus and Solon as political practitioners of religious fraud.

Machiavelli's discussion of Roman religion thus deepens his disagreement with Augustine. Augustine seems to admire Solon in part because he differs from Lycurgus with respect to using religious fraud as a support for political authority. Machiavelli denies this difference. Both Machiavelli and Augustine cite Solon favorably with respect to his attitude toward religion, but their characterizations of Solon's attitude are opposed. Augustine and Machiavelli concur in depicting Lycurgus as using religious fraud, but their evaluations of this conduct conflict.

Machiavelli's Moses

Unlike Lycurgus, Moses has a prominent place in *The Prince*. In chapter 6 Machiavelli names four "most excellent" individuals "who have become princes by their own virtue and not by fortune": Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus.[63] What makes these founders "most excellent"? Machiavelli suggests it is their virtue, but nowhere in chapter 6 does he define virtue. In chapter 7 he explains that although Cesare Borgia attained his rule through fortune, he "laid for himself great foundations for future power" through his virtue.[64] Machiavelli then shows that Cesare's virtue partly consisted in his clever use of force and fraud.[65] In this respect, Cesare resembles princes like Agathocles who, Machiavelli says in chapter 8, attain rule through crime.[66] Machiavelli admittedly appears to equivocate on whether Agathocles possessed virtue. This ambivalence suggests two important qualifications. First, though the clever use of force and fraud are components of Machiavellian virtue, they are not necessarily its whole.[67] Second,

Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus resemble Agathocles in some respects, but not necessarily all.[68] For our purposes, it is sufficient that the example of Agathocles supports the idea that Machiavellian virtue is, in part, the clever use of force and fraud and suggests that it is this same clever use of force and fraud that to some extent distinguishes the virtuous founders Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus.

Machiavelli further clarifies this element of virtue in chapter 18 of *The Prince*, where he argues that "a prince, especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since he is often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion"; he must "know how to enter into evil when forced by necessity."[69] Earlier in the same chapter Machiavelli observes that a prince "needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten wolves."[70] Here we see again how by Machiavelli's account a political leader must use force and fraud, including religious fraud. If Machiavelli groups Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus together as "most excellent," it seems that each must have used force and fraud judiciously.

Yet in chapter 6 Machiavelli at first seems to consider the possibility that Moses may be different from the other three founders with whom he is classed: "[O]ne should not reason about Moses [*di Moisè non si debba ragionare*], as he was a mere executor of things that had been ordered for him by God [*uno mero esecutore delle cose che gli erano ordinate da Dio*]."[71] Machiavelli, however, quickly amends his initial position. Although "one should not reason about Moses," he now maintains that it is appropriate to speak about him, to "admire" him "if only for that grace which made him deserving of speaking with God."[72] Machiavelli then takes a step further, claiming that if the "particular actions and orders" of Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus "are considered, they will appear no different [*non discrepanti*] from those of Moses." Machiavelli has done what he denied we should do: He has begun to "reason about Moses." Moreover, his reasoning has begun to undermine his initial insistence on Moses's uniqueness, for he has

suggested that Moses is "no different" from the other "most excel-
lent" founders. The conclusion to which this reasoning points is
that if Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus used violence, so did Moses.
If Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus used fraud, so did Moses. If
Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus used religious fraud, so did Moses.[73]

Step by step, the ensuing analysis of *The Prince* eliminates any
meaningful difference between Moses and the others.[74] Machiavelli
claims that the founders he is considering had nothing "else from
fortune than the opportunity," and he lists Moses, Romulus, and
Cyrus as specific examples.[75] Machiavelli then argues that Moses,
like Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus, was an "armed prophet," and in
his view this ascription is vital: "[A]ll the armed prophets conquered
and the unarmed ones were ruined."[76] In other words, Moses used
violence as readily as Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus.

Machiavelli's treatment of Moses in the *Discourses on Livy*
proceeds along similar lines. Machiavelli identifies Moses with
Romulus, Lycurgus, Solon, and "other founders of kingdoms and
republics who were able to form laws for the purpose of the
common good because they had one authority attributed to
them."[77] To understand the force of this comment, one must
remember that Romulus acquired "one authority" by killing his
brother, Remus. Significantly, Machiavelli identifies Moses and his
people as an example of those who "enter with violence [*con
violenza entrano*] into the countries of others, kill the inhabitants
[*ammazzano gli abitatori*], take possession of their goods, make a
new kingdom, and change the province's name."[78] He suggests that
in this respect Moses and his people are akin to "the peoples who
seized the Roman Empire."[79] Machiavelli highlights again in Book
III the violence he sees in Moses's political leadership: "[W]hoever
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
[*ammazzare infiniti uomini*] who, moved by nothing other than
envy, were opposed to his plans."[80]

In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli does not explicitly return to the
question of whether Moses used fraud, particularly religious fraud,
alongside violence. We must remember, however, what he writes in

his chapter "On the Religion of the Romans." After giving the example of Numa Pompilius's religious fraud, Machiavelli concludes, "[T]ruly there was never any orderer of extraordinary laws for a people who did not have recourse to God."[81] Machiavelli's analysis does not indicate that these orderers truly had "recourse to God"; as the example of Numa suggests, it would be more plausible to say that they pretended to have recourse to God (or a god).[82] Although he does not list Moses as an example alongside Lycurgus and Solon, Machiavelli makes no exception for him either. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes Moses as a prince who introduces "new orders and modes"—language that seems to parallel "orderer of extraordinary laws" mentioned in the *Discourses*.[83] Therefore, we may reasonably conclude that Machiavelli's secularized Moses uses religious fraud,[84] doing so to advance his laws and his orders, not God's.[85] In this respect, Machiavelli confirms what he had argued in chapter 18 of *The Prince*—namely, that an effective political leader must practice religious fraud while appearing religious.[86]

Machiavelli's Moses, to sum up, acts as an excellent political founder in the same way as eminent pagan political founders act, including Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, as well as Solon and Lycurgus. Like other founders, Moses knew "how to enter into evil when forced by necessity." Like other founders, he was an armed prophet: He used violence to establish and maintain his authority. Like other founders, he used religious fraud as well.[87]

Conclusion: Augustine's Moses and Republican Exemplarity and Ethics

Augustine sees Lycurgus and Moses as offering antithetical models of political leadership. Augustine's Lycurgus grounds his authority on religious fraud, whereas his Moses humbly exemplifies honesty concerning himself and his relationship to the divine. For Augustine, Lycurgus is another famous yet deeply flawed political founder, much like Romulus or Brutus, while Solon and especially Moses represent a more positive model. Machiavelli calls these crucial differences into question.

Despite these contrasts, one point on which Augustine and Machiavelli might seem to converge regards the necessity of force

in political foundations. Machiavelli places great emphasis on the occasions when Moses used violence. Moses, he insists, was an "armed prophet." For his part, Augustine cannot and does not deny that Moses uses force at times in the biblical account of his leadership. Nonetheless, Augustine and Machiavelli interpret this violence quite differently. For Machiavelli, the violence Moses practices is one key to his character. The distinction between "armed prophets" and "unarmed prophets" is essential to Machiavelli's vision of politics, as is the identification of the prince with the lion. The ability and willingness to use violence are the modes in which a prince must "know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity."[88] Machiavelli thus sees Moses as exemplary precisely (though not exclusively) because of his violence.

When in *The City of God* and *Questions on Exodus* Augustine calls attention, clearly or obliquely, to the instances in the Bible when Moses performs or orders acts of violence, or announces them as punishments from God, Augustine, in contrast to Machiavelli, refers also to an objective standard of right or justice undergirding them, such as defense of the innocent or retribution for enslavement and oppression. In *The City of God*, moreover, he barely alludes to these facets of Moses's conduct: Moses as an *exemplar* for Augustine points to Jesus and the martyrs, who suffer violence for the sake of justice rather than inflict it, and to a just-war ethic limiting the defensible use of lethal force.[89]

Contemporary political theorists have long looked to Machiavelli as a source of guidance. So rich is Machiavelli's thought that different scholars have often drawn quite different political models from his writings. Concerned with the power of contemporary elites, John P. McCormick has defended a vision of Machiavellian democracy, consisting of "offices or assemblies that exclude the wealthiest citizens from eligibility; magistrate appointment procedures that combine lottery and election; and political trials in which the entire citizenry acts as ultimate judge over prosecutions and appeals."[90] Against the view that Machiavelli's republicanism means "a commitment to, or fascination for, virtue, military valour, expansion, and predation," Maurizio Viroli argues that the keystones of Machiavelli's

view are "commitment to the rule of law" and "political liberty."[91] Viroli adds that Machiavelli's republicanism is a Christian republicanism (or a "republican Christianity") in which "[t]he saints were not those ascetics who renounced the world, nor were they those devout men and women who obeyed the commandments of the church. Rather, the saints were the citizens who placed liberty and the homeland *before all other things*."[92]

As an alternative to these and other Machiavellian visions of politics illustrated in his exemplars, we have argued that through Solon's and especially Moses's example, Augustine proposes a political foundation, outlook, and ethics marked by honesty, publicity, and humility. As an exemplar of humanity,[93] as well as of the Jewish people and nation of Israel,[94] Augustine's Moses guides readers to build political community understood as a republic or commonwealth, a *res publica*, a shared endeavor of the people and their representatives. Extolling honesty, publicity, and public service grounded in love, Augustine's vision seeks governing officials and citizens sharing humbly and responsibly in this republican outlook and ethics. Augustine's political theory and its exemplars thus may continue to provide resources for citizens today and appear preferable in key regards to Machiavelli's "orders and modes."[95]

Notes

1. On Augustine and Rome, see Dean Hammer, *Roman Political Thought: From Cicero to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 382–86, 416–30.

2. Quotations from *The City of God* are taken from Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R .W. Dyson (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Augustine's Latin is taken from Augustine, *Opera Omnia CAG*, Corpus Augustinianum Gissense, electronic ed., ed. Cornelius Mayer (InteLex Corporation, 2000). Quotations from the *Discourses* and *The Prince* are taken from Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2nd ed., trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (University of Chicago Press, 1998). For Machiavelli's Italian, we have consulted Niccolò Machiavelli, *Tutte le Opere*, ed. Francesco Flora and Carlo Cordié (Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1949); and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Einaudi-Gallimard, 1997).

3. On the fruitfulness but also the challenges of moral exemplars, see Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1–10.

4. See, among others, Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the "Discourses on Livy"* (University of Chicago Press, 1979); Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton University Press, 1983); and Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

5. For examples of this tendency, see Harvey C. Mansfield, "Machiavelli's Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 75, no. 2 (1981): 294–95, 295–96; Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, 137–38, 215; Hannah Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (University of California Press, 1984), 58–59; Vickie B. Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes: Religion, Human Liberty, and Politics Reformed* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 76; and 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): 658.

6. See John M. Warner and John T. Scott, "Sin City: Augustine and Machiavelli's Reordering of Rome," *Journal of Politics* 73, no. 3 (2001): 857–71; Gaetano Lettieri, "Agostino Aurelio," in *Machiavelli: Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, ed. Gennaro Sasso (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 2014), 15–26; and Ashleen Menchaca-Bagnulo, "Humility and Humanity: Machiavelli's Rejection and Appropriation of a Christian Ideal," *European Journal of Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (2018): 131–51.

7. Throughout this essay we use the term *founder* to include both refounders and lawgivers. In this respect we follow Livy's usage. See Gary Miles, "*Maiores, Conditores*, and Livy's Perspective on the Past," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 118 (1988): 194–95. As Miles argues, "Livy conceives of the *conditor* in unusually broad terms. He identifies not just one, but several successive Romans as *conditores*." According to Miles, Livy identifies the following as *conditores*: Romulus, Numa, Servius Tullius, "all the kings (except Tarquinius Superbus)," Appius Claudius, Augustus, Furius Camillus, and Brutus.

8. See Bjorn Qviller, "The Machiavellian Cosmos," *History of Political Thought* 17, no. 3 (1996): 326–53; James V. Schall, "The 'Realism' of Augustine's 'Political Realism': Augustine and Machiavelli," *Perspectives on Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1996): 117–23; and Paul R. Wright, "Machiavelli's *City of God*: Civic Humanism and Augustinian Terror,"

in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lexington Books, 2005), 297–336. Lettieri does take note of Machiavelli's inversion of Augustinian religion and politics with reference to Moses and Lycurgus, but he does not elaborate Augustine's treatment of these exemplars. See Lettieri, "Agostino Aurelio," 9.

For still other discussions of the relationship between Augustine and Machiavelli, see Guiseppe Prezzolini, *Machiavelli*, trans. Gioconda Savini (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), 99–100; Guiseppe Prezzolini, "The Christian Roots of Machiavelli's Moral Pessimism," *Review of National Literatures* 1, no. 1 (1970): 33–37; Philip Mazzeo, "The Poetry of Power: Machiavelli's Literary Vision," *Review of National Literatures* 1, no.1 (1970): 44–46, 50; Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 187, 188–89; Haig Patapan, *Machiavelli in Love: The Modern Politics of Love and Fear* (Lexington Books, 2006), 4–6, 9–11; Brian Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue* (Continuum, 2008), viii–xi and 160–65. We are indebted to the helpful literature reviews in Marcia L. Colish, "Republicanism, Religion, and Machiavelli's Savonarolan Moment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 597–616; Wright, "Machiavelli's *City of God*"; Warner and Scott, "Sin City"; and Menchaca-Bagnulo, "Humility and Humanity."

9. Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Harvard University Press, 2010). See also Leon R. Kass, *Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus* (Yale University Press, 2021), focusing more broadly on the "Israelite nation" and perennial questions concerning "nation-building and peoplehood" (Kass, 1).

10. See Herbert A. Deane, *The Social and Political Ideas of Saint Augustine* (Columbia University Press, 1967); R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 1970); R .W. Dyson, *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of St Augustine of Hippo* (Boydell Press, 2001); Doody, Hughes, and Paffenroth, eds., *Augustine and Politics*; Richard J. Dougherty, ed., *Augustine's Political Thought* (University of Rochester Press, 2019); Veronica Roberts Ogle, *Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine's "City of God"* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Michael Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope: Augustine's Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2022). See, however, Peter Iver Kaufman, *Augustine's Leaders* (Cascade Books, 2017), 7, 8, 48, 96; and Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, *The "Populus" of Augustine and Jerome: A Study in the Patristic Sense of Community* (Yale University Press, 1971), 27, 37, 47, 48, 51, and

esp. 134–35, 143–44. Kaufman makes occasional reference to Moses, though he is not a primary focus of Kaufman's study. Adams mentions Moses several times, even discussing the key passage in Book X, chapter 13, of *The City of God* on which we focus. His focus, however, is on interpreting Augustine's (and Jerome's) concept(s) of *populus*.

11. See, e.g., J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975); Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); or Philip Petit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

    For an argument that Augustine can contribute to contemporary republican theory through his theory of rhetoric, see Boleslaw Z. Kabala, "Augustine and Contemporary Republicanism: On Speech as Domination," *Political Research Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2020): 15–26. For a related argument highlighting Augustine's insistence on publicity in political debate, see Michael Lamb, "Augustine and Republican Liberty: Contextualizing Coercion," *Augustinian Studies* 48, no.1–2 (2017): 151–55.

12. See Augustine, *The City of God*, 2.21, 6.11, 10.13, 19.21, 19.24.

13. Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 117, cf. 141–45.

14. John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (University of Missouri Press, 2001), 94–95; John von Heyking "A Headless Body Politic?: Augustine's Understanding of a Populus and Its Representation," *History of Political Thought* 20, no. 4 (1999): 549–74.

15. Paul J. Cornish, "Augustine's Contribution to the Republican Tradition," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 2 (2010): 133–48. For a more recent examination of Augustine's critical yet constructive engagement with Cicero, see Veronica Roberts, "Augustine's Ciceronian Response to the Ciceronian Patriot," *Perspectives on Political Science* 45, no. 2 (2016): 113–24.

16. Walter Nicgorski, "Cicero's Focus: From the Best Regime to the Model Statesman," *Political Theory* 19, no. 2 (1991): 230–51.

17. Cornish, "Augustine's Contribution," 135. For another perspective on what Cornish calls "the problematic nature of politics" in Augustine, see Donald X. Burt, "Cain's City: Augustine's Reflections on the Origins of Civil Society," in *Augustinus: De Civitate Dei*, ed. Christopher Horn (De Gruyter Akademie Forschung, 1997), 195–210.

18. Hammer, too, stresses the importance of the ideas of *civitas* and *res publica* to Augustine's thought. He argues, "[A] *civitas* or *res publica* . . . is not

an institutional form, but a relationship of people" (*Roman Political Thought*, 426). He also notes Augustine's invocation of "the *res publica* of Christ" (*Roman Political Thought*, 427, citing *The City of God*, 2.21).

19. Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Grene (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1.65–66.

20. Aristotle, *Politics*, 2nd ed., trans. Carnes Lord (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1269a–1271b.

21. Xenophon, *Regime of the Lacedaemonians*, trans. Catherine S. Kuiper and Susan D. Collins, in *Shorter Writings*, ed. Gregory A. McBrayer (Cornell University Press, 2018), 107–25.

22. Plutarch, *Lives*, ed. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 52–80.

23. Augustine, *The City of God*, 2.16.

24. Plutarch, *Lives*, 113–15. On Augustine and Plutarch, see Carol Harrison, "Playing Ball: Augustine and Plutarch on Capturing Wisdom," in *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*, ed. Carol Harrison, Caroline Humfress, and Isabela Sandwell (Oxford University Press, 2014), 90–105; Luke Van der Stockt, "Compositional Methods in the *Lives*," in *A Companion to Plutarch*, ed. Mark Beck (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 321–32; Marianne Pade, "The Reception of Plutarch from Antiquity to the Italian Renaissance," in *A Companion to Plutarch*, 531–43; and Georgiana Huian, "Plutarch's Reception in the Church Fathers," in *Plutarch and the New Testament in Their Religio-Philosophical Contexts*, ed. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold (Brill, 2022), 212–36.

   We assert no claim about whether Augustine could or would have read Plutarch. Harrison and Van der Stockt draw interesting comparisons between the two thinkers, but neither scholar alleges influence. Pade makes no mention of Augustine, but see Huian, whose approach we echo in some respects. For our purposes it is sufficient that Plutarch is one of the most significant ancient biographers of Solon, Lycurgus, and others; his biographies may be used as approximations of the accounts Augustine would have encountered in his late-classical milieu. Where Augustine's interpretations seem unclear, Plutarch may suggest details needed to complete the picture. In cases of clear disagreement between the two authors, Plutarch's biographies provide a valuable point of contrast.

25. Plutarch, *Lives*, 79. Machiavelli similarly writes, "Among those who have deserved most praise for such [mixed] constitutions is Lycurgus, who . . . made a state that lasted more than eight hundred years, achieving the highest praise for himself and quiet in that city" (*Discourses on Livy*, 1.2.6).

26. Augustine, *The City of God*, 2.16.

27. In this religiously based preference for Solon, Augustine's interpretation of Solon's life differs from Plutarch's account. In Plutarch's account, the pagan gods seem to be mixed into Solon's reforms as thoroughly as into Lycurgus's legislation (*Lives*, 108, 114). Plutarch seems to see a different contrast between Lycurgus and Solon. Plutarch emphasizes Lycurgus's use of force in reforming Sparta; he suggests that the oracle inspired Lycurgus to action but that Lycurgus attained power to implement his reforms through conspiracy and threats of violence rather than religion (*Lives*, 56–57). Meanwhile, he stresses the *consent* Solon received from both the rich and the poor (*Lives*, 116–17).

28. Augustine, *The City of God*, 10.13.

29. Ernest L. Fortin, *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 68–69.

30. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.2. As we will see, Machiavelli ultimately rejects this interpretation of Moses. Nonetheless, in this regard he raises an important problem requiring examination.

31. Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Yale University Press, 2012), xii–xiii.

32. Augustine, *The City of God*, 16.43.

33. Augustine, *The City of God*, 16.43.

34. Augustine, *The City of God*, 18.8.

35. Augustine, *The City of God*, 18.11.

36. Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.9.

37. Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.9.

38. Augustine, *The City of God*, 22.10. See, however, Kaufman on Augustine's interpretation of Moses and the Amalekites (Ex 17:8–13). While we have argued that Augustine does not reject genuine human agency, Kaufman rightly emphasizes Augustine's opposition to Pelagian views that attribute too much to "humanity's strengths and merits" and neglect humility (*Augustine's Leaders*, 96).

39. For a much briefer argument for this conclusion, with reference to Augustine's *On Grace and Free Will*, see Mary M. Keys, *Pride, Politics, and Humility in Augustine's "City of God"* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 181–82.

40. Augustine, *The City of God*, 10.13.

41. Augustine, *The City of God*, 10.13.

42. Plutarch, *Lives*, 56–57; see also Fortin, *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity*, 69.

43. Augustine, *The City of God*, 6.11. See also Cornish, "Augustine's Contribution," 144, commenting on Augustine, *The City of God*, 19.23.

44. Keys, *Pride, Politics, and Humility*, 10. While our analysis here is in tandem with Keys's arguments on Augustine's humility in this work, with regard to the detailed comparison of Moses with Lycurgus, the relevance of the comparison of Lycurgus with Solon, and the import of Jethro's counsel in assessing Moses's virtues, it is mainly or wholly new. We accord more attention to humility than transparency and publicity, since in Augustine's view the latter two are grounded on and facilitated by the first virtue.

45. Compare the similar line of thought developed by Harry V. Jaffa (though not in the context of Augustine): "[T]he differences between man and beast, on the one hand, and man and God, on the other, remain self-evident and definitive. For that reason, we know that any attempt of human beings to rule other human beings, as if the former were gods and the latter beasts, is wrong." See Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lexington Books, 2000), 1200. See also Donald X. Burt, "Friendship and Subordination in Earthly Societies," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 90–92; and Burt, "Cain's City," 204.

46. In his examination of Book X, chapter 13, of *The City of God*, von Heyking similarly emphasizes the ideas of republicanism and publicity, but his primary emphasis seems to be on the idea of representation and on the active participation of the Hebrew people (*Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 94–95). He does not discuss the virtue of humility in this context, nor does he contrast Augustine's interpretation of Moses to Machiavelli's account.

47. Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 171–72.

48. Augustine, *The City of God*, 18.25.

49. Augustine, *The City of God*, 8.11. Von Heyking comments that for Augustine "the best kind of *populus* is a kind of political friendship attainable not exclusively by Christian revelation but also by non-Christian political philosophy" (*Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 77). On "friendship in . . . the state," see also Burt, "Friendship and Subordination in Earthly Societies," 103–10.

50. Plutarch, *Lives*, 56. Emphasis added.

51. Plutarch, *Lives*, 114.

52. Exodus 18.

53. Quotations from Augustine's *Questions on Exodus* are taken from Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard and

Sean Doyle, in *Writings on the Old Testament*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (New City Press, 2006), 1–476.

On Augustine's *Questions on the Heptateuch*, written around 418–419, see Sarah Byers, "Early Christian Ethics," in *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Sacha Golob and Jens Timmerman (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 121–22; and Joseph T. Lienhard, "The Christian Reception of the Pentateuch: Patristic Commentaries on the Books of Moses," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2002): 378. Lienhard notes that Augustine was the first Latin writer to comment on the Pentateuch.

Augustine's commentary here reinforces the confluence of divine and human agency in Moses's memorable leadership. On this point consider an earlier passage of Augustine on Exodus 13:17, question 49, where he argues, "Here it is shown that everything should be done that can be done rightly and prudently to avoid what is harmful, even when God is most clearly our helper."

54. Byers notes the philosophic (Platonic and Stoic) roots of Augustine's understanding of eternal law qua "God's simple ideas of justice, prudence, moderation, and fortitude . . . , called 'law' because they are immutable and because living in accord with them yields a consistent and well-ordered pattern of life" ("Early Christian Ethics," 123).

55. Here we substitute the RSV translation of Exodus 18:19 for that by Leinhard and Doyle.

56. On the conversation between Jethro and Moses and its political lessons, see also Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 273–81.

57. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.2.6.

58. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.6.4.

59. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 2.3.

60. On this sequence of thought in Machiavelli, see Catherine Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 123–30.

61. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.11.2.

62. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.11.3.

63. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.2. For a careful, detailed analysis of chapters 6–8 of *The Prince*, which we follow in part, see Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 57–65.

64. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 7.2.

65. For a critical survey of and response to different interpretations of Machiavelli's Cesare Borgia, see Clifford Orwin, "The Riddle of Cesare Borgia and the Legacy of Machiavelli's *Prince*," in *Machiavelli's Legacy: "The Prince" After Five Hundred Years*, ed. Timothy Fuller (University

of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 156–70. While we agree with Orwin that Cesare is not Machiavelli's "ideal prince" (158), we take Machiavelli's praise of Cesare's virtue as generally sincere. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 71.

66. See Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 59; Victoria Kahn, "Revisiting Agathocles," *Review of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 569; Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 187; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 46–47, 180, 243, 273.

67. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 8.2. On the complexities of Machiavelli's usage of the term *virtue*, see Leo Paul S. de Alvarez's introduction to Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Waveland Press, 1989), xix–xxii; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 6–52; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 47, 126, 234–69.

68. See Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 59, 64–65, 101, 347, 470; and Kahn, "Revisiting Agathocles."

69. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.5.

70. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.3.

71. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.2. On the ambiguity of this passage, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 298.

72. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.2. On this passage Strauss asks, "Does God give his grace without any regard to the previous worthiness of the individual concerned? Did Moses lack virtue of his own? Machiavelli settles these questions by counting Moses among those who became princes by their own virtue and their own arms." See Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 204 and also 189. See also Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 188–89.

73. Catherine Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 57; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 204–5. Following Zuckert, we argue that the significance of this passage is not to address the question of Machiavelli's own belief or atheism, which lies beyond the scope of our inquiry, but simply to draw out the purely "secular" way in which he explains Moses's founding.

74. For similar readings see Fontana, "Love of Country and Love of God"; and David C. Rapoport, "Moses, Charisma, and Covenant," *Western Political Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1979): 123–43.

75. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.2–3.

76. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.4.

77. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.9.3.

78. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 2.8.2.

79. By "the peoples who seized the Roman empire" Machiavelli means the Lombards and the Franks, among others.

80. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 3.30.1. See Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 245; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 161, 163.

81. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.11.3.

82. See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 205, 208.

83. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.4.

84. Cf. Fontana, "Love of Country and Love of God," 646–47.

85. See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 298, on *Discourses*, 3.30.

86. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.5. See also Zuckert's discussion of *Discourses* 1.11 and the following chapters in *Machiavelli's Politics*, 138–42; and Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 225–31.

87. Cf., however, Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 94–95, 183–84.

88. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.5.

89. See Kaufman on Augustine's response to the Manichean accusation that Moses "had sinned by pilfering the Egyptians' properties before leading his enslaved people to freedom" (*Augustine's Leaders*, 7–8). For a detailed interpretation of Augustine's view on violence, see Donald X. Burt, "Augustine on the Morality of Violence: Theoretical Issues and Applications," *Atti: Congresso Internazionale Su S. Agostino Nel XVI Centenario Della Conversione, Roma, Settembre 1986* (Institutum Patristica "Augustinianum," 1987), 25–54. On grace, Christ, and biblical exemplars of justice and other virtues, see Dodaro, Christ and the Just Society, 115–146.

90. John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), vii.

91. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

92. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton University Press, 2010), 2. Emphasis added.

93. Jared C. Calaway, *The Christian Moses: Vision, Authority, and the Limits of Humanity in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (McGill University Press, 2019), 3–5, 219–33.

94. Paula Fredriksen, "Against the Manichean Moses: Augustine on Moses and Scripture," in *The Christian Moses: From Philo to the Qur'an*, ed. Philip Rousseau and Janet A. Timble (Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 226.

95. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6.4. On Moses in the history of political thought, see also Ronald Beiner and Harrison Flush, *Moses and Political Philosophy* (University of Toronto Press, 2025).