



Political Philosophy

Week 2.
Do we need to be ruled?

After this staggering defeat for May, our country is left lost and adrift

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Tue 15 Jan 2019
20.39 GMT



 
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The prime minister's catalogue of errors led us to this point.
Now we face paralysis and humiliation





MOBILE DIPHTHERIA
IMMUNISATION UNIT







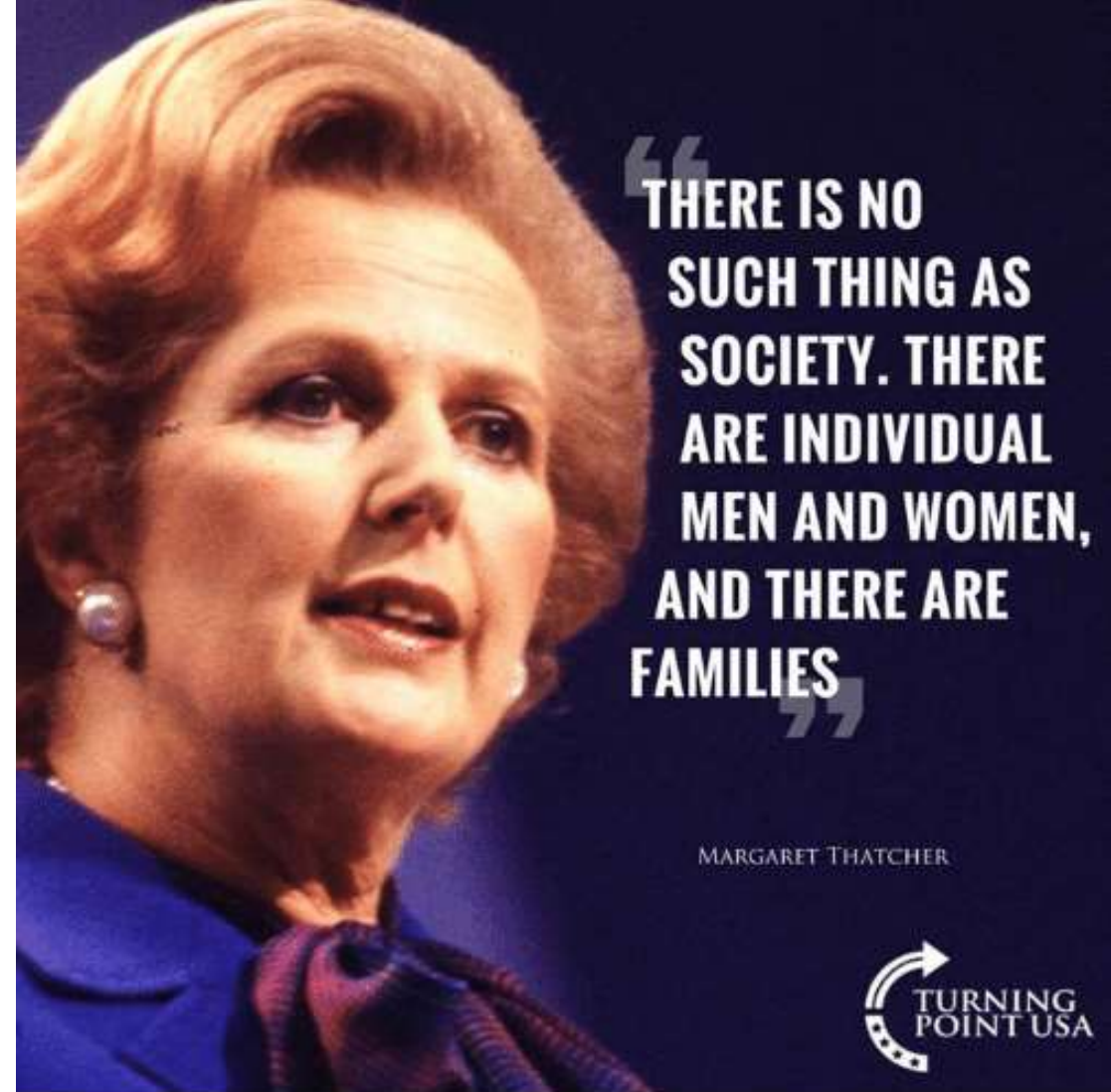


Do we need government?

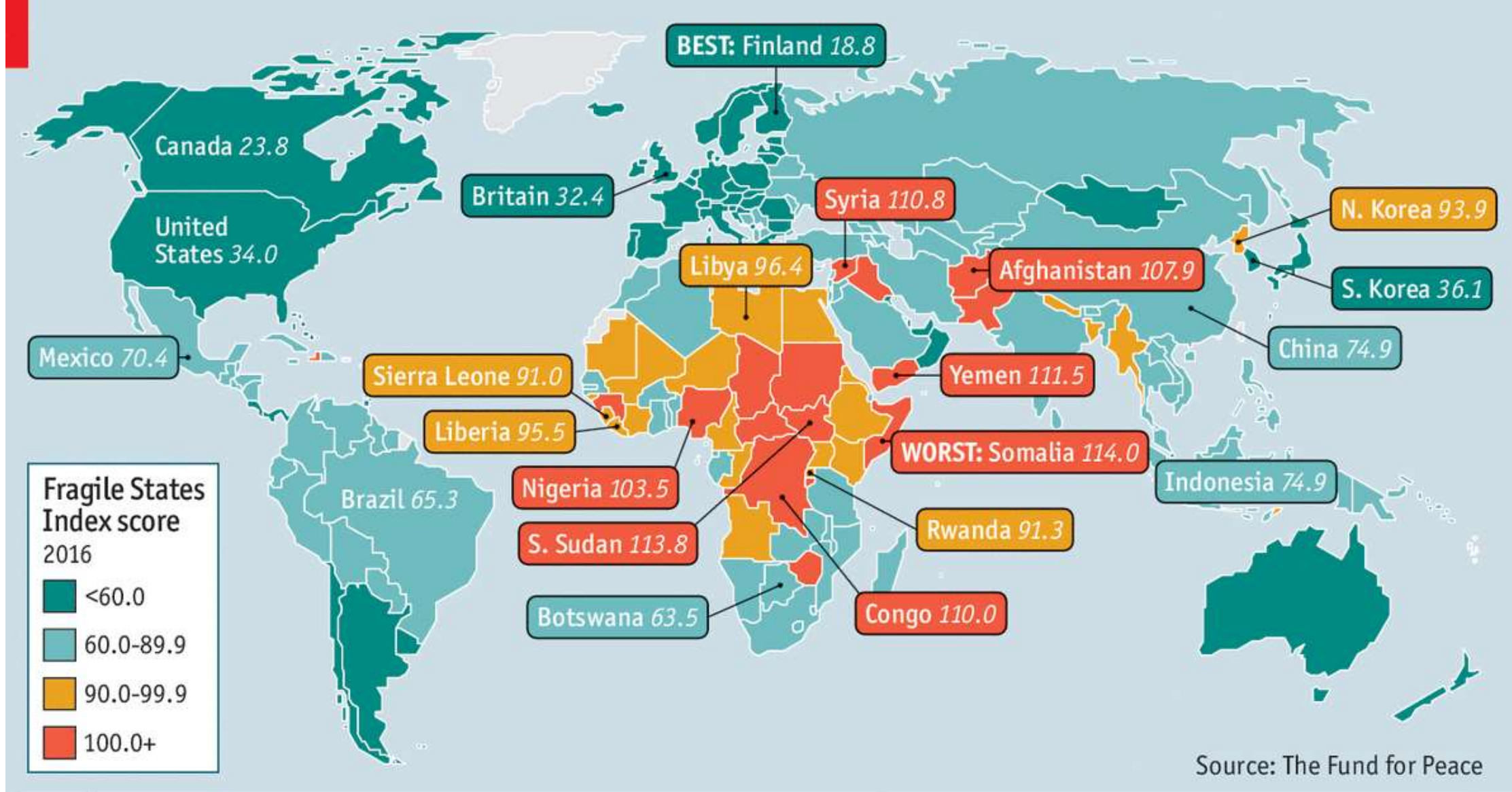
- From 'cradle to grave', we've each grown up with the influence of government throughout our lives
- Think for a moment of how the state has impacted your life...

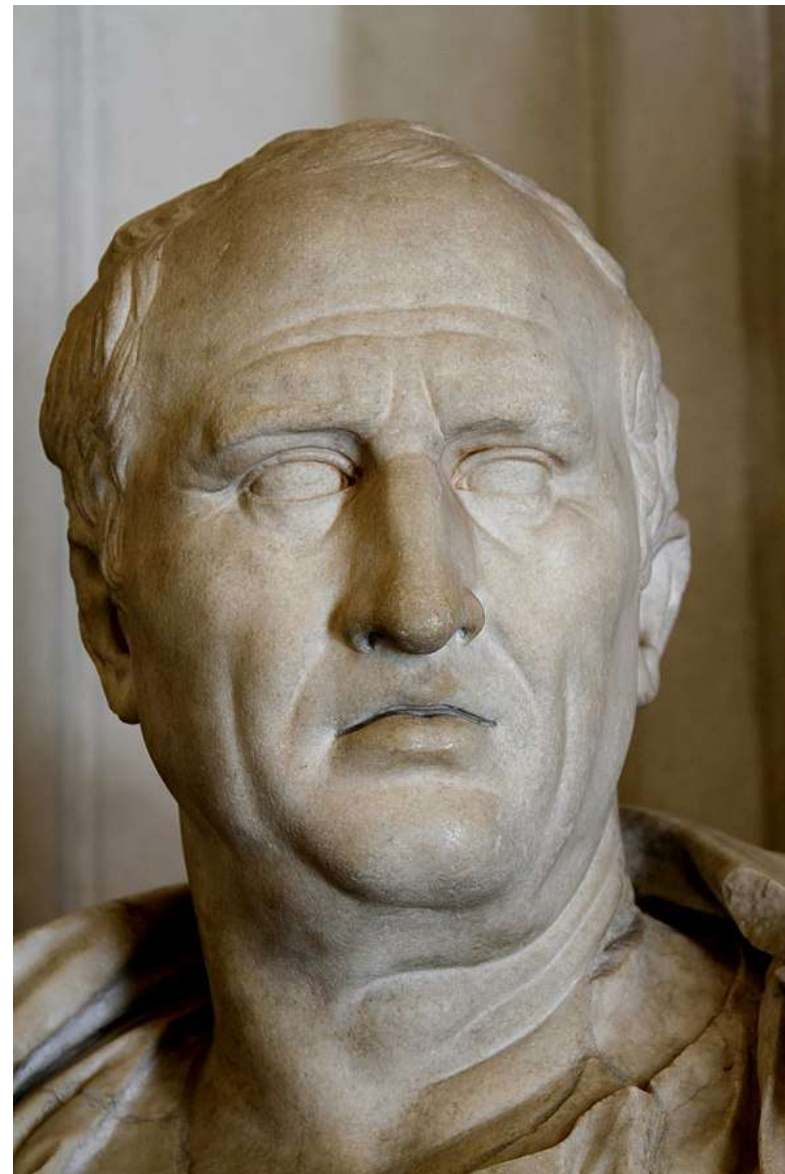
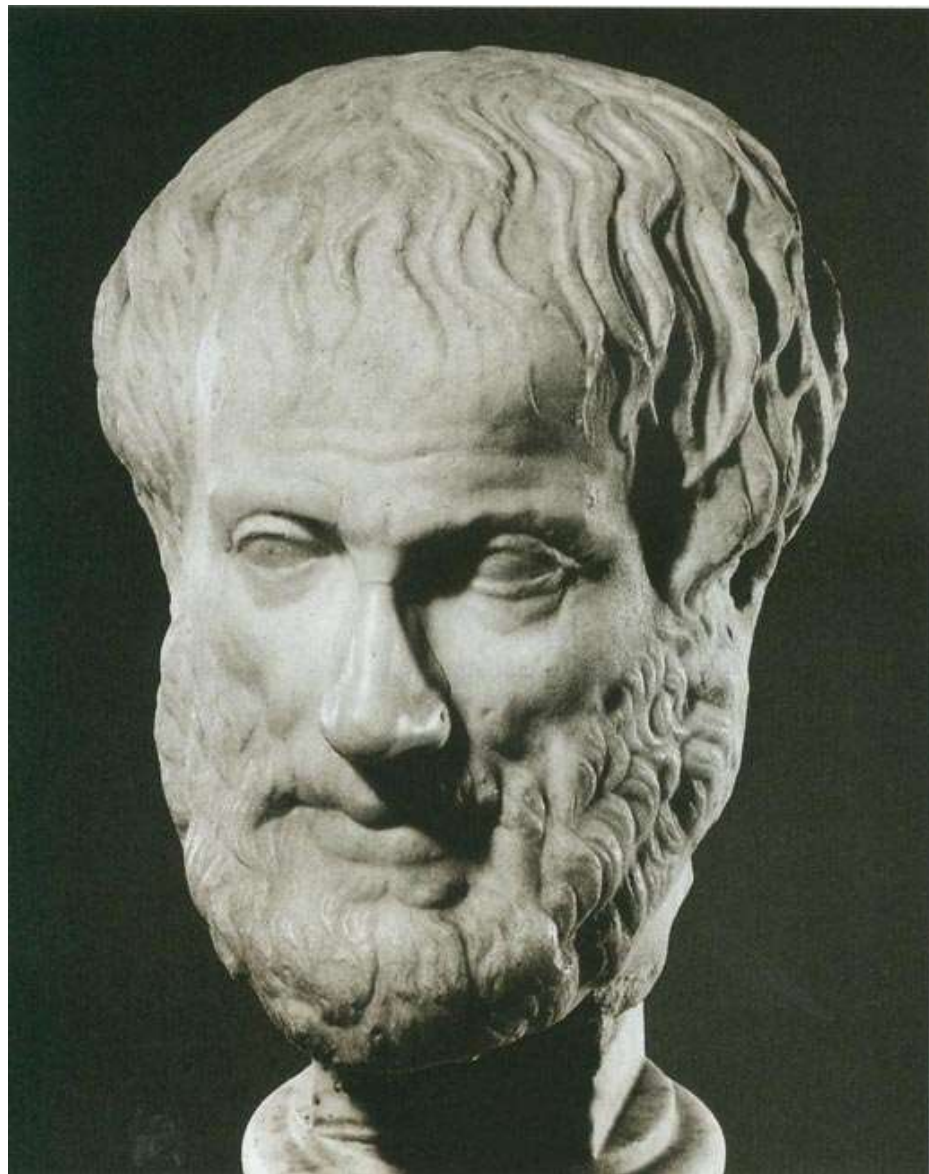
Do we need government?

- From national health systems in which we were safely born, to birth registries, vaccinations, schooling, national insurance, work, to old age pensions...
- Then there is the role of the state in providing a basic infrastructure through which we can live and work together
- In return for taxes, obeying the laws, perhaps jury service, we have police, a justice system, social care, roads, national cultural events and institutions, freedom from foreign invasion, to rubbish collection...
- *But do we really need it, or is it a great con?*



Conservatives Want To
Empower The Individual!
#BigGovSucks





‘And we recently discovered, if it was not known before, that no amount of power can withstand the hatred of the many. The death of this tyrant (Julius Caesar), whose yoke the state endured under the constraint of armed force and whom it still obeys more humbly than ever, though he is dead, illustrates the deadly effects of popular hatred; and the same lesson is taught by the similar fate of all other despots, of whom practically no one has ever escaped such a death. **For fear is but a poor safeguard of lasting power; while affection, on the other hand, may be trusted to keep it safe for ever.**’

- Cicero



From this arises the question whether it is better to be loved more than feared, or feared more than loved. The reply is, that **one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting.**

For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours; they offer you their blood, their goods, their life, and their children, as I have before said, when the necessity is remote; but when it approaches, they revolt.

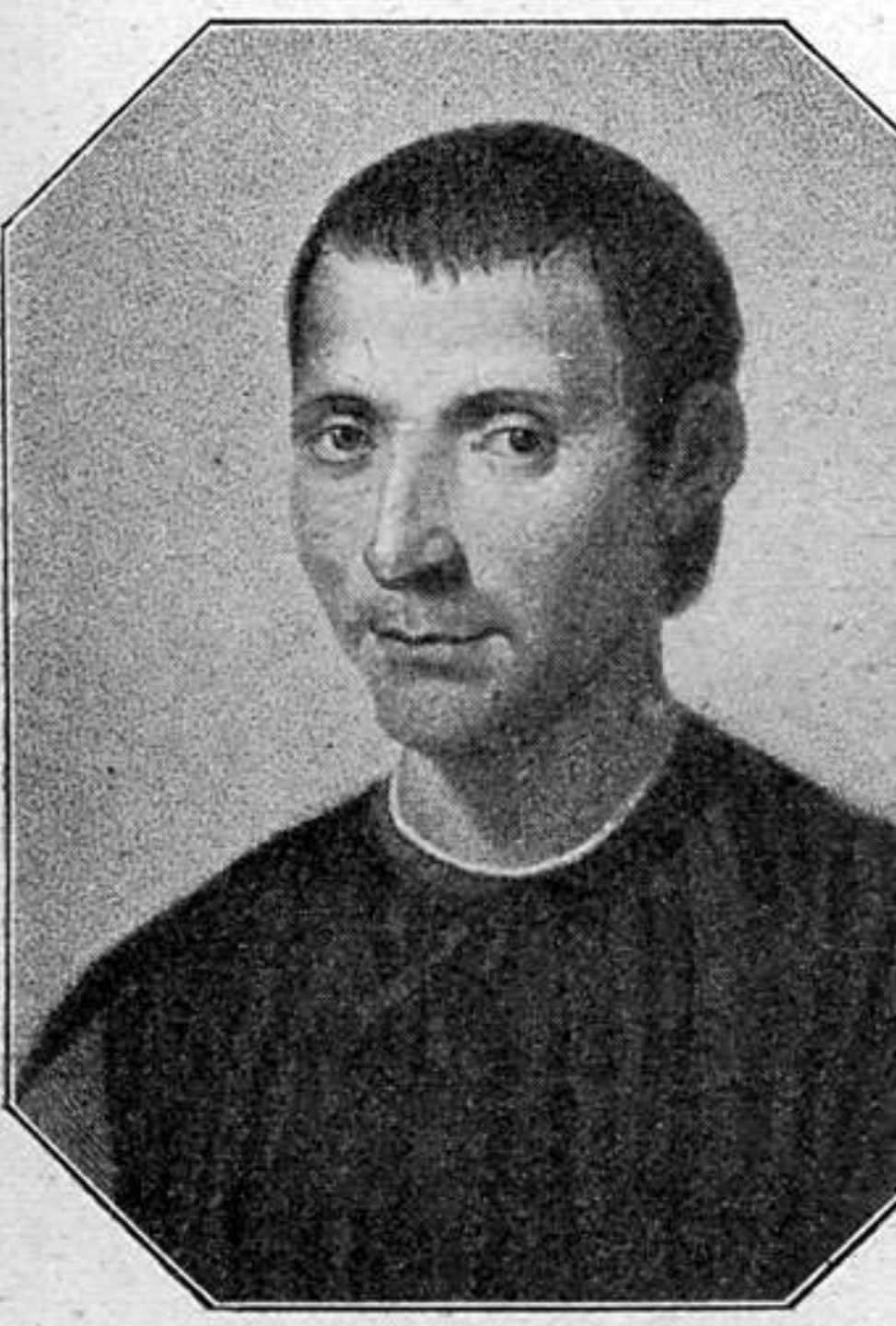
Key questions

- Is human nature such that we need strong rulers to protect us from our worst instincts?
- Does the language of morality and virtue in politics simply veil, in a hypocritical way, the truly amoral nature of power?
- Are Machiavelli and Hobbes apologists for tyrants, men of their times, or misunderstood?



‘I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.’
Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part III*

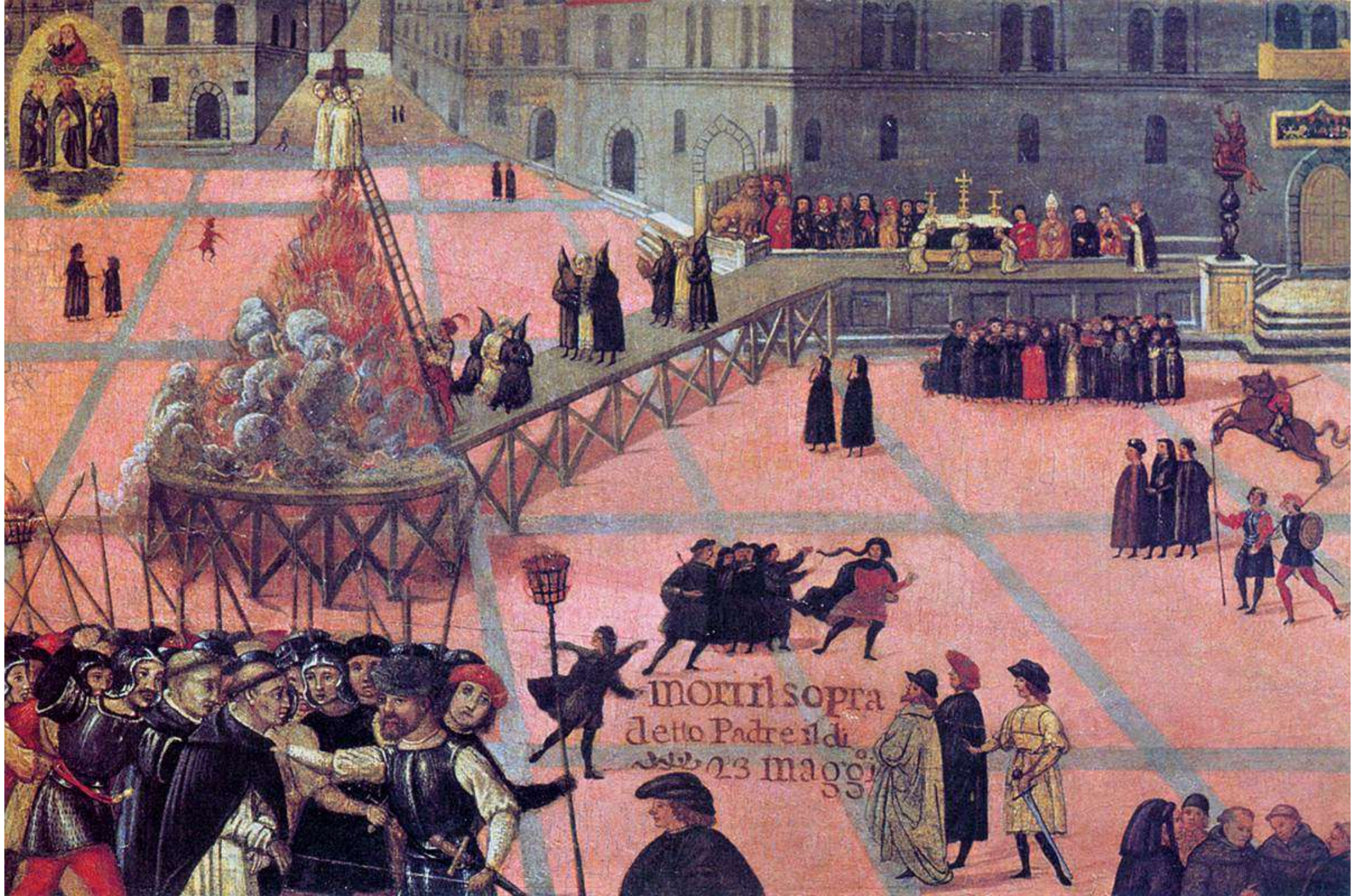
‘Am I politic? am I subtle? am I a Machiavel?’
- Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,
Act III. Scene I.



Machiavelli (1469-1527)

- Amid the Renaissance, Italy divided into warring city states
- Machiavelli was a diplomat in the republic of Florence (1498-1512), when the powerful Medici family were overthrown
- Amid the political weakness of Savonarola's rule, Machiavelli's writings used Roman history to identify and argue for political principles that could not only stabilise Florence, but unite a new Italy
- But under what principles?





MORI' IL SOPRA
DETTO PADRE DI
DEL 23 MAGGIO



'When evening comes, I return to my home, and I go into my study; and on the threshold, I take off my everyday clothes, which are covered with mud and mire, and I put on regal and curial robes; and dressed in a more appropriate manner I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men and am welcomed by them kindly, and there I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born; and there I am not ashamed to speak to them, to ask them the reason for their actions; and they, in their humanity, answer me; and for four hours I feel no boredom, I dismiss every affliction, I no longer fear poverty nor do I tremble at the thought of death: I become completely part of them.'

I DISCORSI DI NICO-
LO MACHIAVELLI, SO-
PRA LA PRIMA DECA DI
TITO LIVIO.

Con due T auole, l'una de capitoli, & l'altra delle cose prin-
cipali: & con le stesse parole di Tito Livio a luo-
ghi loro, ridotte nella volgar
Lingua.

Nouellamente emmendati, & con somma
cura ristampati.



I N PALERMO
Appresso gli heredi d' Antoniello degli Antonielli a xxviii. di
Genajo, 1 5 8 4.

Discourses on Livy (1631)

- Machiavelli wrote plays and histories, but notably *The Prince* (a job application) 1513
- The *Discourses* is published posthumously, but is believed to have been finished around 1517
- A commentary on Roman history, like *The Prince* it was a guide for good politics whose time never comes about...

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Gennaio, 1584.

Discourses on Livy (1631)

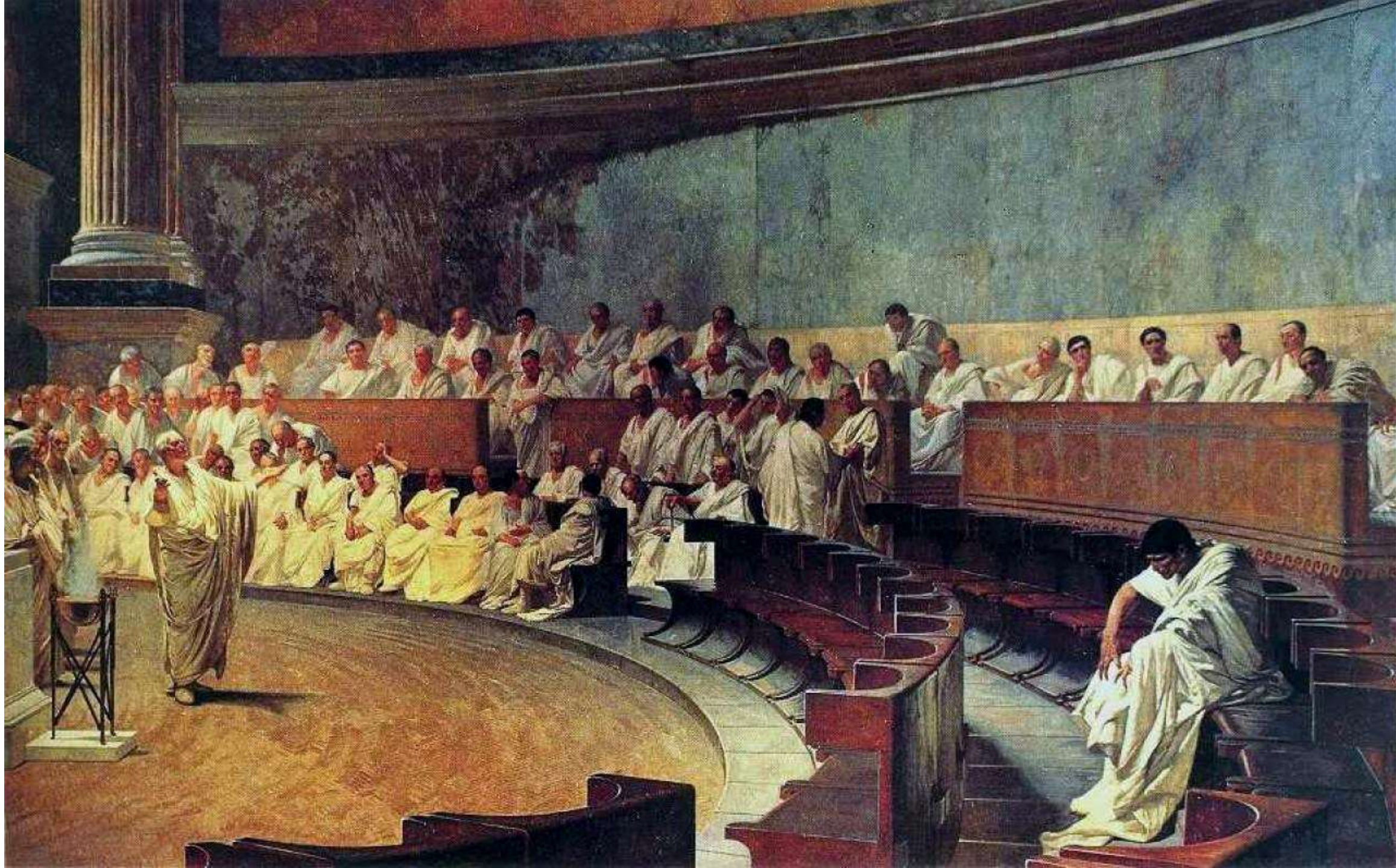
- 'All men are evil' – political peace and stability protect us from catastrophe
- Conflict is essential and vital to politics
- Societies require a capable leader with sufficient skill *and* popular support
- Checks and balances, good laws, a robust constitution and strong civic institutions
- Ultimately, the people rule...

Over to you

In small groups, approach one of these questions:

1. How does Machiavelli view the different groups of a society? How can a state balance the different social forces within it?
2. Is the multitude is wiser than the prince? What makes Machiavelli's observations about the people interesting (or unexpected)?

- 'I must say, therefore, that the defect for which writers blame the crowd can be attributed to all men individually and most of all to princes, for each person who is not regulated by the laws will commit the very same errors as an uncontrolled crowd of people.'
- 'If anyone were to blame peoples and princes alike, he might be telling the truth ... for a people that exercises power and is well organized will be stable, prudent and grateful no differently from a prince, or better than a prince, and will even be considered wise; and, on the other hand, a prince freed from the restraint of the laws will be even more ungrateful, variable, and imprudent than a people. ... if there is a surplus of good, it resides in the people'

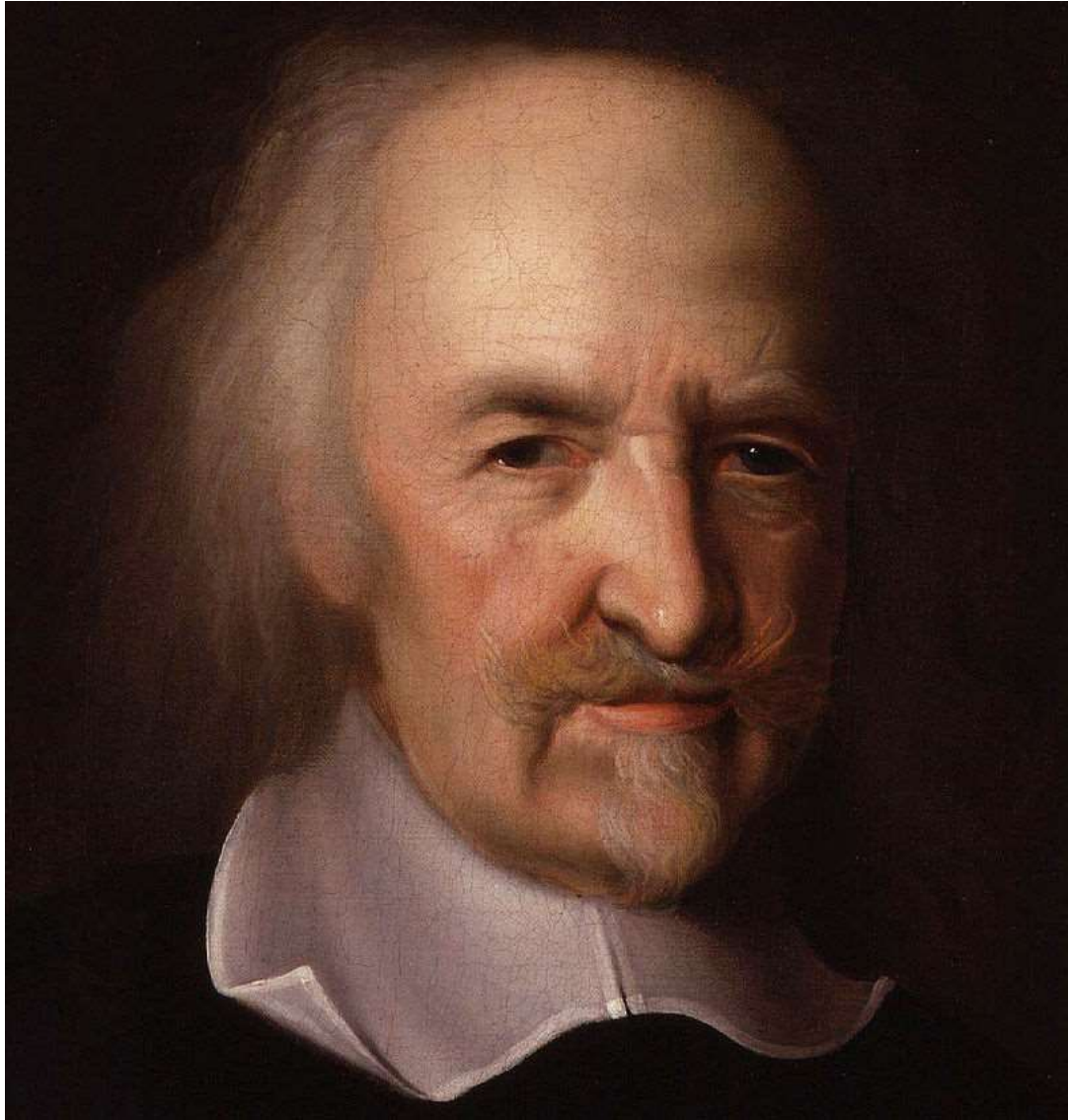


‘But with respect to prudence and stability, I would say that a people is more prudent, more stable, and of better judgement than a prince. It is not without reason that the voice of a people is compared with that of a God, for it is obvious that popular opinion is wondrously effective in its predictions, to the extent that it seems to be able to foresee its own good and evil fortune through some occult power. As for making judgements, when the people hear two opposing speakers of equal skill taking different sides, it is only on the rarest occasions that it does not select the best opinion and that it is not capable of understanding the truth it hears. If in matters of courage or of seeming utility, as was mentioned above, the people errs, a prince will also often err because of his own passions, which are more numerous than those of a people. It is also evident that in the selection of magistrates the people make far better choices than a prince, for one can never persuade the people that it is good to elect to public office an infamous man with corrupted habits, something that a prince can be persuaded to do easily and in a thousand ways.’



Machiavelli was a proper man and a good citizen; but, being attached to the court of the Medici, he could not help veiling his love of liberty in the midst of his country's oppression. The choice of his detestable hero, Cesare Borgia, clearly enough shows his hidden aim; and the contradiction between the teaching of *The Prince* and that of the *Discourses on Livy* and the *History of Florence* shows that this profound political thinker has so far been studied only by superficial or corrupt readers. The Court of Rome sternly prohibited his book. I can well believe it; for it is that Court it most clearly portrays.

— Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book III.





The Spanish Armada of 1588



A True Narrative of the Horrid Hellish Popish-Plot.

The Popish Plot (1678 – 1681)

‘fear and I were born twins together’



Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

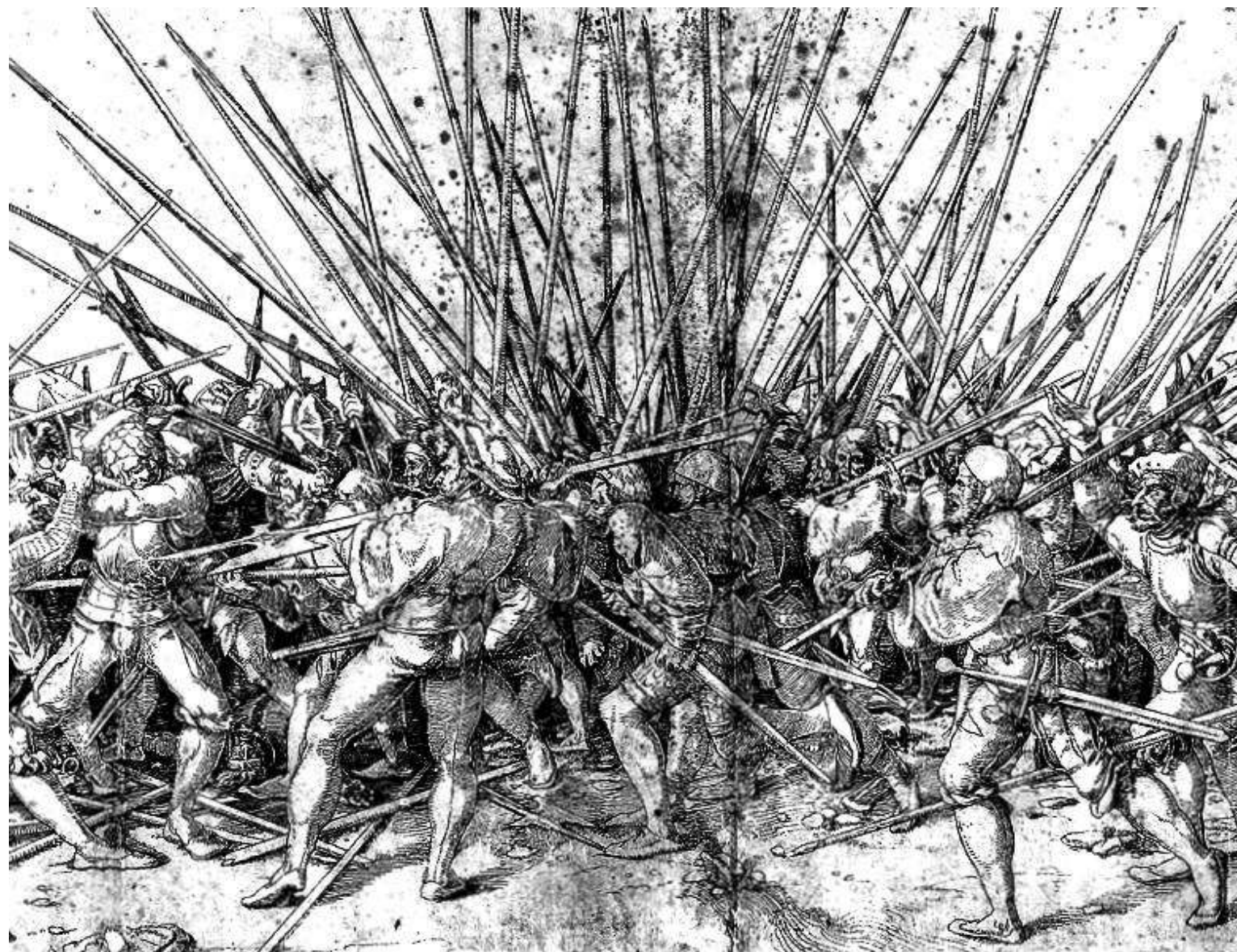
- English philosopher, historian, translator and political theorist
- *Leviathan* (1651) written during English Civil War – dispute between monarchists and parliamentarians
- Dispute over the purpose of the State and obedience to its authority - the Divine Right of Kings
- Hobbes, on the side of Charles I, argued for the necessity of obedience to the monarch as conditional for popular sovereignty



Laws of nature

Let's turn to Hobbes now. In small groups, select one of the questions and discuss:

1. What is Hobbes' view of human nature, and its various laws? How does he differ from say Aristotle and Cicero?
2. How does society emerge in Hobbes' view? What kind of government does Hobbes prefer?



Nasty, brutish and short

- In nature all are equals, pursuing their natural right
- In this free-for-all, the problem is the inevitability of conflict with other people's freedoms
- The state of nature would be a 'war of all against all', an ongoing civil war; there would be no civilisation, arts, or security because everyone would be living in a constant fear of violence and death
- There is no morality or system of law
- Hobbes rejects the 'natural law' associated with God's benevolence, being universally binding
- Instead there is just one law of nature, self-preservation



What is the solution?

- For Hobbes, it is clear that only some kind of strong government will protect us from each other
- A social contract, in which we agree to respect each other's rights and obey the law
- The only way to enforce this law, and provide trust, is by transferring our right to a sovereign authority to rule over us
- The disagreement is in how much power we should hand over to this authority...



Next week... *Democracy is joy!*

- We're going to read Spinoza and Rousseau, who in separate centuries develop arguments for democracy in early modern Europe
- Spinoza, whose politics combine a Hobbesian scepticism about human nature with powerful vision of human freedom...
- Rousseau, whose concept of the general will and natural equality presented a revolutionary challenge to European hierarchies...
- Do these democratic visionaries have something to tell us today?
- Or is democracy the 'worst form of government except all the others that have been tried' (Churchill), hampered by our human nature?
- Email any questions to dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk