FEAR OF ENEMIES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

What makes individuals with divergent and often conflicting interests join together and act in unison? *Fear of Enemies and Collective Action* explores how the fear of external threats shapes political groups at their founding and helps preserve them by consolidating them in times of crisis. It develops a theory of "negative association" that examines the dynamics captured by the maxim "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" and then traces its role from Greek and Roman political thought, through Machiavelli and the reason of state thinkers, and Hobbes and his emulators and critics, to the realists of the twentieth century. By focusing on the role of fear and enmity in the formation of individual and group identity, this book reveals an important tradition in the history of political thought and offers new insights into texts that are considered familiar. This book demonstrates that the fear of external threats is an essential element of the formation and preservation of political groups and that its absence renders political association unsustainable.

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To Tra

But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil be destroyed – for it is necessary that something always be opposed to the good.

– Socrates

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PROLOGUE

During the rivalry between Rome and Carthage, Marcus Porcius Cato was famous for concluding every speech in the Senate – regardless of the subject matter – with the call that Carthage be destroyed. On the other side, Publius Scipio Nasica would counter that Carthage ought to be saved, because fear of the threat that it posed to Rome was the only thing that prevented the nobles and the plebs from descending into civil war. Nasica's advice, immortalized by Sallust and cited by Saint Augustine in *City of God*, became paradigmatic of the realization that human beings form and sharpen their identities as much by positive means as by reference to how they differ from others.

The history of political thought is filled with accounts of the mechanism captured by the old dictum "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," and yet studies of group formation and collective action pay little explicit attention to this negative mechanism. In the only work of its kind, Wood identifies as "Sallust's Theorem" the realization that *metus hostilis*, the fear of enemies, "promotes internal social unity," and proclaims it "a founding axiom of modern political thought."[1] Wood anticipates that modern readers may find Sallust's Theorem platitudinous. What is more, students of social movements may be tempted to ascribe the observation to Simmel, or to Sumner, who bequeathed to us the concepts of "in-group" and "out-group." Yet their accounts, influential though they have been, are merely parts of a very long tradition that recognizes the social utility of contradistinction from and conflict with others, outsiders, and enemies. In this tradition, thinkers who are otherwise quite different see outsiders as essential signposts that enable human beings to form a better understanding of who they are both as individuals and as members of political groups.

[1] Wood, "Sallust's Theorem," 181, 175. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's.

PROLOGUE

The world around us is complex and puzzling, and it is often hard to understand and even harder to manage. Psychological and philosophical theories of perception and cognition often note that the human mind develops mechanisms in order to make this complexity manageable. Thus, for example, we set arbitrary starting points, ignore information that we lack, lump invisible factors into broad and often meaningless categories, and use analogies and metaphors that are limited in their application. These heuristic devices are necessary if we are to be able to function in the midst of such complexity. One such device is the use of outside entities for comparison and contrast. We often supplement our understanding of something in useful ways by contrasting it with something else. This method is constantly at work on a more or less conscious level and is an integral part of the most lengthy and demanding process of understanding our attempt to understand ourselves.

From a biological perspective, these mental devices may be seen as defense mechanisms that enable us to continue to exist. Fear is a very different device, but with a similar function. Too much fear is paralyzing, but too little fear may prove deadly. The right amount of fear, however, enables us to sense danger and take measures to thwart it. The fear of enemies is in some sense, then, the point at which these two mechanisms meet. Outside entities tell us something about who we are not, and the emergence of one can transform our view of another. Thus, a new threat on the horizon may lead to the formation of alliances between previously unrelated and uncooperative individuals or groups. The process through which these new groups come into being and the resulting identification with and membership in them transform the identities of their members. Through contradistinction, individuals often discover new boundaries. Questions that might never have arisen find their answer in the way one feels about the practices of others. Exposure to their ways and customs helps us hone our understanding of ourselves. For example, someone who is otherwise indifferent to animals might become fond of them as a result of witnessing a dog being mistreated.

Metus hostilis of Carthage was a central theme of Roman historiography and political discourse, and an important lesson learned by those who were educated by Sallust, Plutarch, and Polybius. Beyond history books and political treatises, however, unlikely alliances, marriages of convenience, and strange bedfellows of all kinds confirm its prescience and render the truth captured by Nasica's advice familiar. This book develops a theory of "negative association," which begins with the observation that differentiation from outsiders shapes the identities of political groups and their members in fundamental ways and thus forms their bottom line. In times of crisis, when the identities of these groups are challenged and the individual interests of their

members interfere with their ability to act in unison, appeals to this bottom line may be the only means of forestalling their dissolution. Among motives for negative association, fear provides the strongest link because it speaks to another bottom line, the fundamental concern with self-preservation. When this concern is heightened, and threats to survival and security loom large, individuals and small social groups find a bond in their common fear that enables them to set their differences aside and unite in the pursuit of goals that are otherwise unattainable.

This study of negative association in political thought begins with Thucydides, who considers fear to be the cause of the Peloponnesian War, and whose account is filled with descriptions of pleas for the formation of alliances appealing to the need to deal with common enemies. The centrality of fear and security may not be surprising in Thucydides, but it is not what one associates with Aristotle, whose declaration of man as a ζῶον πολιτικόν in the opening lines of the *Politics* is usually taken to mean that man is by nature sociable. Nevertheless, Aristotle proceeds to explain that what distinguishes the *political* association (the polis) from other, subordinate forms is that it is self-sufficient. Before goods and services, however, self-sufficiency involves defense and security. Those who can provide these for themselves are either Gods or beasts. Man, on the other hand, needs allies if he and they are to be secure. That Aristotle is keenly aware of the primacy of security is apparent later on in the *Politics*, when he counsels those who govern to keep some dangers near, so as to keep the citizens on their guard.

The lesson of Thucydides and Aristotle regarding the fear of external threats acquired a particular urgency in Rome during the Punic Wars. At the outskirts, Rome ruled over an ever-expanding territory and a multiplicity of peoples. At the center, it was characterized by constant tension between the nobles and the plebs. Roman historians from Posidonius to Sallust, and beyond, saw the fear of the threat posed by Carthage as the force that kept Rome from descending into civil war. This specter became so entrenched in Roman life that nurses would threaten "fractious children that Hannibal was coming to fetch them."[2] Sallust's paradigmatic account broke new ground because it placed descriptions of negative association in the broader context of his assessment of Rome's decay. Whereas Thucydides and Aristotle describe the formation of political groups and alliances, and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions, Sallust does not hesitate to register his regret at the degeneration of Rome brought about by the elimination of the threat posed by Carthage. In Sallust's powerful account of *metus hostilis*, Saint Augustine

[2] Cary & Scullard, *A History of Rome*, 148.

found the evidence to show that the city of man is fallen, and that the fall of the city of Rome had begun long before its conversion to Christianity.

Machiavelli opens his own work on Rome by claiming that he is about to lead the way to a path as yet untrodden by anyone. His declaration turns out to be true, albeit in unexpected ways, since it involves a return to the ancients, whose theories seemed all too familiar. Machiavelli's most important lesson is that cities need to be returned to their beginnings, where they can be reinvigorated and reacquainted with their most basic identity. He himself shows that he has learned it by returning to the ancients and, more specifically, to Livy's account of the beginnings of Rome. He also follows his own counsel in choosing the individual, fallen or not, as the starting point of political inquiry. This twofold return to first principles leads Machiavelli to the realization that regaining the state is the best means of maintaining it. The passage of time erodes the initial vigor of the state, and individuals lose the clear sense of identity and purpose that guided them in the beginning. Eventually, priorities are reclassified, fissures develop, and internal tumult replaces external threat as the order of the day. Machiavelli notes that states everywhere have different ways of recreating something of the state of mind that characterized their beginnings, but those usually involve the reshuffling of offices and institutions and are ultimately inadequate for the task. At the same time, he recognizes that the most effective means of achieving such a return to the beginnings, exposing the state to external threats, is also the most dangerous. If such a measure backfires, it can prove disastrous, for, instead of postponing the demise of the state, it can hasten it.

Machiavelli parted company with the Sallustian tradition insofar as he had no interest in evaluating negative association from a moral point of view. At best indifferent and at worst downright hostile to moral considerations in political matters, Machiavelli was first and foremost concerned with the efficacy of proposed measures. His examination of the benefits of drawing republics back to their beginnings is a detached and rather sober one, but in the eyes of his critics these attributes were shortcomings; they constituted further evidence of his immorality. Three such critics, Gentillet, Bodin, and Botero, stand out. These thinkers' ventures to restore morality to politics and reinstate it in a world created by a benevolent Maker display many traits that one would expect to encounter but also several that one would not. Loud denunciations of the Florentine abound, but so do suggestions for policies that are Machiavellian in all but name. Most striking among the latter are those that pertain to the use of external threats to consolidate the commonwealth and purge it of undesirable elements and bad habits. The vehemence with which these critics met Machiavelli's teachings, however,

did not cloud their theories completely. This wave of reaction put Machiavelli and the issues surrounding the preservation of the state at the center of political discourse, and thereby enabled the advent of the systematic theories of the modern state that followed.

By the end of the sixteenth century, all the pieces for such a systematic theory were in place. Foremost among these were a concern with the preservation of the state, the realization that any attempt to preserve the state has to begin by taking account of human psychology, the concept of sovereignty, and the need to approach – or at least appear to approach – complex issues in a scientific way. Whatever their disagreement with Machiavelli on the moral front, political thinkers did not question his fundamental premise that the state needed to be preserved, and agreement on this principle was no small matter. Once the debate shifted from ends to means, Machiavelli's task was much simpler. His interest in human psychology as the proper foundation for the preservation of the state was equally important. Here, Machiavelli drew less fire, for, after all, Machiavellian man is not too far removed from fallen man. Although concerned exclusively with the domestic realm, Bodin's formulation of the concept of sovereignty paved the way for a comprehensive examination of the difference between the state and the natural condition of mankind. These developments converged with the rise of interest in systematic approaches to the solution of political problems, and the search for ways in which scientific method could be applied to all aspects of life.

It was this climate that Thomas Hobbes found himself in when the King of England declared his right to determine whether or not the state was in danger and was challenged by his subjects. In the political theory that he formulated in response to those events, Hobbes announced the foundation of political science. This scientific approach to politics consisted of all the raw materials bequeathed to him by the reason of state thinkers that preceded him, and Hobbes put them to good use. Following Machiavelli's lead, he began by formulating a detailed theory of human nature before moving on to consider how it affects politics. In his search for a foundation that would appeal to as broad an audience as possible, Hobbes turned to fear, a human trait as familiar as it is universal, and one that partakes as much of reason as it does of emotion. The quest for a *summum bonum* had failed again and again. Fear, he suggested, could serve as a *summum malum*, and he challenged his readers to look inside themselves for proof that he was right.

Combining this starting point with the need for a better way to achieve the psychological effects of a return to the beginnings of cities, Hobbes constructed the image of the state of nature and urged his readers to think about the consequences of life without the protection of a sovereign, life, that

is, when it was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[3] The ingeniousness of Hobbes's construct lay not only in its capacity to move the imagination but also in the way he related it to reality. The state of nature was no mere fiction, no tale of a time that never was. He who doubted its truth had but to step beyond the protection of his sovereign and taste the dangers of a life when there is no overarching power to keep all in awe. This aspect of the state of nature rendered it familiar enough to make it credible. As such, it was the perfect solution to Machiavelli's problem. It produced the effects of a return to the beginning but with fewer of the dangers inherent in the real thing. Moreover, by adding a view of the commonwealth from without, Hobbes expanded Bodin's strictly inward-looking vision of absolute sovereignty, and made explicit what was only implicit in Bodin's conclusion that the sovereign is the absolute bearer of authority. Nothing illustrates the validity of that conclusion as vividly as the contrast between the inside of the commonwealth and the anarchic world that lies beyond its borders.

Hobbes's fundamentally conflictual vision and his union of reason with the passions gave rise to a wave of political thought centered on negative social emotions. Taking as their points of departure a wide range of previously despised human motives, such as greed, envy, and hatred, these theories brought into the mainstream the notion of negative self-definition – definition, that is, in contrast with others – and established it as an unavoidable and explicit consideration of political thought. Initially, reaction to Hobbes's teachings bore a general resemblance to the one that followed the publication of Machiavelli's political works. Just as Machiavelli left his imprint on subsequent debates, those writing from the second half of the seventeenth century forward found it impossible to ignore Hobbes. The concept of the state of nature became a staple of political thought in the eighteenth century and continued to be discussed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with reference to international relations. There was, however, an important difference as well. Whereas Machiavelli's view of human beings had been the least of his problems, Hobbes was criticized severely for depicting them in the way that he did. While he accepted Hobbes's basic construct of the state of nature, Rousseau nevertheless argued that it ought to begin further back, at a time when man was a much lonelier and tamer creature.

Much as the Anti-Machiavellists discovered that there were aspects of the Florentine's teaching that could not be dismissed, the Anti-Hobbists found out that regrettable though Hobbes's view of human nature might sound, it

[3] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII § 9. All references to this work are to the Curley edition.

posed a serious challenge. This was especially true when it came to thinking about the state in the context of the international realm. After all, if human beings were not as dangerous as Hobbes had thought, why would states and wars be necessary? That some type of answer to a question of this sort would have to be given if Hobbes were to be proven wrong became apparent very quickly. The eighteenth century saw the publication of numerous treatises on the problem of war and the prospects for perpetual peace, and debates about federations of states and transnational unions abounded. Perhaps the two most notable efforts of this kind to emerge from this period were Saint-Pierre's and Kant's projects for perpetual peace. Widely circulated and discussed, these drew a number of responses, among which those of Rousseau, to the former, and Hegel, to the latter, reveal the extent to which Hobbes's views influenced subsequent political thought. These exchanges are striking because they show that proponents and opponents of projects for perpetual peace speak in Hobbist terms, feel the need to address Hobbist concerns, and shape their respective arguments around a fundamentally Hobbist vision of the world. Hobbes is not a thinker who is traditionally associated with this period, and yet these debates reveal the extent of his influence and thus explain why a conflictual model draped in terms of negativity, juxtaposition, and contrast became so prevalent in the budding disciplines of psychology and sociology. It also provides an explanation to one of the most baffling mysteries: Hobbes's stature among theorists of international relations. Textbooks of international relations routinely list Hobbes as one of the founders of the discipline, and yet why a thinker who devotes only a handful of lines to the relations among states should be considered a theorist of international relations is not at all clear. The reason given most often is that Hobbes's account of anarchy in the state of nature is the best metaphor for the relations between states. Another reason is that Hobbes is the best known of the theorists who depict the state as a unitary actor, not least because of the famous frontispiece of *Leviathan*. Although these reasons are significant, they are still insufficient when it comes to explaining Hobbes's standing as a theorist of international relations. The story of German Hobbism provides the missing link.

Interest in Hobbes's political thought remained strong outside his country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and by the end of the nineteenth century the most important students of Hobbes's political thought had emerged from the German world. To understand Hobbes's influence on the academic study of international relations, it is necessary to examine two particularly important examples of German Hobbism: the political theories of Carl Schmitt, who considered the friend–enemy distinction to be

the fundamental political criterion, and Hans Morgenthau, who incorporated the most central aspects of Schmitt's theory into his version of political realism. Schmitt defined the sphere of the political as that in which the possibility of the negation of one's existence is what determines the enemy; this kind of existential threat is what makes a relationship political, rather than moral, economic, or aesthetic. This distinctly Hobbist outlook was the single greatest source of influence on Morgenthau during his time in Europe. With Morgenthau's emigration, it was transmitted to the United States and became the basis for the study of international relations in the second half of the twentieth century.

In times of relative peace and prosperity, security tends to lose its primacy and recede on people's lists of priorities. Calls for attention to security thus come to be associated with excessive worry or fearmongering, or to be considered window dressing for the advancement of dubious political agendas. A good deal of this skepticism and criticism is justified, and yet there are aspects of security that remain pressing and taken for granted. This is a necessary outcome of peace and prosperity that comes with some positive and some negative consequences of its own. Constant worry would be paralyzing, and yet obliviousness to actual danger and harm would be deadly. As Shklar points out, it is from recognition of fear and harm that our struggle to establish rights and political institutions begins.[4] As such, fear of harm, the emotion that triggers our concern with our preservation and security, becomes the enemy, the rallying point for political awareness, vigilance, and meaningful collective action. Even this enemy is not universal, since it pits those who oppose harm against those who threaten or inflict it, and yet it may well be the best that we can hope for.

Many of the thinkers examined in this book are known as bearers of bad news. Their views of human nature are at best "cautious" – they see human beings as "dangerous and dynamic."[5] The search for the role of negative association in the history of political thought, however, reveals that a fundamental concern with security is implicit even in the arguments of thinkers who are not usually thought of in these terms. Thus, seemingly familiar texts in the history of political thought reveal overlooked, important new sides, with surprising results. In examining what these thinkers have to say about the ways in which political associations form and respond to

[4] Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 5, 237–38.
[5] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 61.

the presence of common threats, this book revisits some well-trodden paths but also exposes certain unfamiliar aspects of their arguments, and often challenges established interpretations of the texts in question.

The centrality of negative association for each of these theories means that there is widespread agreement about much, and yet there are also significant differences that need to be borne in mind. An exclusive focus on similarity or one on difference each presents its own enticements, but each must be resisted as far as possible. On the one hand, the universality of negative association yields an enduring set of basic characteristics that renders it recognizable from the Peloponnesian War through the Cold War, to the "War on Terror," and beyond. On the other hand, particular circumstances raise new problems in addition to old ones, and every one of the thinkers examined herein has a set of each to contend with. That the authors in question are taken up in chronological order, therefore, is no accident. As every new hurdle emerges, old observations and methods are tested and amended to fit the demands of the times, and revisions and innovations are provided along with ample commentary on those who have come before. As a result, one way to describe the trajectory of this concept in political thought is as a series of actions followed by reactions. But to leave it at that would be to put too much stress on the differences and risk losing sight of the common ground. Behind the bold claims for innovation, and the announcements of new discoveries, there is a profound agreement that people everywhere define themselves as much by figuring out who they are as by finding out who they are not.