TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

In the early fourteenth century, a young man named Castruccio Castracani rose from the rank of common soldier to become lord of the great city of Lucca, Italy. One of the most powerful families in the city, the Poggios, had been instrumental in his climb (which succeeded through treachery and bloodshed), but after he came to power, they came to feel he had forgotten them. His ambition outweighed any gratitude he felt. In 1325, while Castruccio was away fighting Lucca's main rival, Florence, the Poggios conspired with other noble families in the city to rid themselves of this troublesome and ambitious prince.

THE PEASANT AND THE APPLE-TREE

A peasant had in his garden an apple-tree, which bore no fruit, but only served as a perch for the sparrows and grasshoppers. He resolved to cut it down, and, taking his ax in hand, made a bold stroke at its roots. The grasshoppers and sparrows entreated him not to cut down the tree that sheltered them, but to spare it, and they would sing to him and lighten his labors. He paid no attention to their request, but gave the tree a second and a third blow with his ax. When he reached the hollow of the tree, he found a hive full of honey. Having tasted the honeycomb, he threw down his ax, and, looking on the tree as isacred, took great care of it. Self-interest alone moves some men.

FABLES, AESOP, SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

Mounting an insurrection, the plotters attacked and murdered the governor whom Castruccio had left behind to rule the city. Riots broke out, and the Castruccio supporters and the Poggio supporters were poised to do battle. At the height of the tension, however, Stefano di Poggio, the oldest member of the family, intervened, and made both sides lay down their arms.

A peaceful man, Stefano had not taken part in the conspiracy. He had told his family it would end in a useless bloodbath. Now he insisted he should

intercede on the family's behalf and persuade Castruccio to listen to their complaints and satisfy their demands. Stefano was the oldest and wisest member of the clan, and his family agreed to put their trust in his diplomacy rather than in their weapons.

When news of the rebellion reached Castruccio, he hurried back to Lucca. By the time he arrived, however, the fighting had ceased, through Stefano's agency, and he was surprised by the city's calm and peace. Stefano di Poggio had imagined that Castruccio would be grateful to him for his part in quelling the rebellion, so he paid the prince a visit. He explained how he had brought peace, then begged for Castruccio's mercy. He said that the rebels in his family were young and impetuous, hungry for power yet inexperienced; he recalled his family's past generosity to Castruccio. For all these reasons, he said, the great prince should pardon the Poggios and listen to their complaints. This, he said, was the only just thing to do, since the family had willingly laid down their arms and had always supported him.

Castruccio listened patiently. He seemed not the slightest bit angry or resentful. Instead, he told Stefano to rest assured that justice would prevail, and he asked him to bring his entire family to the palace to talk over their grievances and come to an agreement. As they took leave of one another, Castruccio said he thanked God for the chance he had been given to show his clemency and kindness. That evening the entire Poggio family came to the palace. Castruccio immediately had them imprisoned and a few days later all were executed, including Stefano.

Interpretation

Stefano di Poggio is the embodiment of all those who believe that the justice and nobility of their cause will prevail. Certainly appeals to justice and gratitude have occasionally succeeded in the past, but more often than not they have had dire consequences, especially in dealings with the Castruccios of the world. Stefano knew that the prince had risen to power through treachery and ruthlessness. This was a man, after all, who had put a close and devoted friend to death. When Castruccio was told that it had been a terrible wrong to kill such an old friend, he replied that he had executed not an old friend but a new enemy.

A man like Castruccio knows only force and self-interest. When the rebellion began, to end it and place oneself at his mercy was the most dangerous possible move. Even once Stefano di Poggio had made that fatal mistake, however, he still had options: He could have offered money to Castruccio, could have made promises for the future, could have pointed out what the Poggios could still contribute to Castruccio's power—their influence with the most influential families of Rome, for example, and the great marriage they could have brokered.

Instead Stefano brought up the past, and debts that carried no obligation. Not only is a man not obliged to be grateful, gratitude is often a terrible burden that he gladly discards. And in this case Castruccio rid himself of his obligations to the Poggios by eliminating the Poggios.

Most men are so thoroughly subjective that nothing really interests them but themselves. They always think of their own case as soon as *ever any remark is made, and their whole attention is engrossed and absorbed by the merest chance reference to anything which affects them personally, be it never so remote.*

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, 1788-1860

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

In 433 B.C., just before the Peloponnesian War, the island of Corcyra (later called Corfu) and the Greek city-state of Corinth stood on the brink of conflict. Both parties sent ambassadors to Athens to try to win over the Athenians to their side. The stakes were high, since whoever had Athens on his side was sure to win. And whoever won the war would certainly give the defeated side no mercy.

Corcyra spoke first. Its ambassador began by admitting that the island had never helped Athens before, and in fact had allied itself with Athens's enemies. There were no ties of friendship or gratitude between Corcyra and Athens. Yes, the ambassador admitted, he had come to Athens now out of fear and concern for Corcyra's safety. The only thing he could offer was an alliance of mutual interests. Corcyra had a navy only surpassed in size and strength by Athens's own; an alliance between the two states would create a formidable force, one that could intimidate the rival state of Sparta. That, unfortunately, was all Corcyra had to offer.

The representative from Corinth then gave a brilliant, passionate speech, in sharp contrast to the dry, colorless approach of the Corcyran. He talked of everything Corinth had done for Athens in the past. He asked how it would look to Athens's other allies if the city put an agreement with a former enemy over one with a present friend, one that had served Athens's interest loyally: Perhaps those allies would break their agreements with Athens if they saw that their loyalty was not valued. He referred to Hellenic law, and the need to repay Corinth for all its good deeds. He finally went on to list the many services Corinth had performed for Athens, and the importance of showing gratitude to one's friends.

After the speech, the Athenians debated the issue in an assembly. On the second round, they voted overwhelmingly to ally with Corcyra and drop Corinth.

Interpretation

History has remembered the Athenians nobly, but they were the preeminent realists of classical Greece. With them, all the rhetoric, all the emotional appeals in the world, could not match a good pragmatic argument, especially one that added to their power.

What the Corinthian ambassador did not realize was that his references to Corinth's past generosity to Athens only irritated the Athenians, subtly asking them to feel guilty and putting them under obligation. The Athenians couldn't care less about past favors and friendly feelings. At the same time, they knew that if their other allies thought them ungrateful for abandoning Corinth, these city-states would still be unlikely to break their ties to Athens, the preeminent power in Greece. Athens ruled its empire by force, and would simply compel any rebellious ally to return to the fold.

When people choose between talk about the past and talk about the future, a pragmatic person will always opt for the future and forget the past. As the Corcyrans realized, it is always best to speak pragmatically to a pragmatic person. And in the end, most people are in fact pragmatic—they will rarely act against their own self-interest.

It has always been a rule that the weak should be subject to the strong; and besides, we consider that we are worthy of our power. Up till the present moment you, too, used to think that we were; but now, after calculating your own interest, you are beginning to talk in terms of right and wrong. Considerations of this kind have never yet turned people aside from the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength.
Athenian representative to Sparta,
quoted in The Peloponnesian War, *Thucydides,* c. *465-395* B.C.

KEYS TO POWER

In your quest for power, you will constantly find yourself in the position of asking for help from those more powerful than you. There is an art to asking for help, an art that depends on your ability to understand the person you are dealing with, and to not confuse your needs with theirs.

Most people never succeed at this, because they are completely trapped in their own wants and desires. They start from the assumption that the people they are appealing to have a selfless interest in helping them. They talk as if their needs mattered to these people—who probably couldn't care less. Sometimes they refer to larger issues: a great cause, or grand emotions such as love and gratitude. They go for the big picture when simple, everyday realities would have much more appeal. What they do not realize is that even the most powerful person is locked inside needs of his own, and that if you make no appeal to his self-interest, he merely sees you as desperate or, at best, a waste of time.

In the sixteenth century, Portuguese missionaries tried for years to convert the people of Japan to Catholicism, while at the same time Portugal had a monopoly on trade between Japan and Europe. Although the missionaries did have some success, they never got far among the ruling elite; by the beginning of the seventeenth century, in fact, their proselytizing had completely antagonized the Japanese emperor Ieyasu. When the Dutch began to arrive in Japan in great numbers, Ieyasu was much relieved. He needed Europeans for their know-how in guns and navigation, and here at last were Europeans who cared nothing for spreading religion—the Dutch wanted only to trade. Ieyasu swiftly moved to evict the Portuguese. From then on, he would only deal with the practical-minded Dutch.

Japan and Holland were vastly different cultures, but each shared a timeless and universal concern: self-interest. Every person you deal with is like another culture, an alien land with a past that has nothing to do with yours. Yet you can bypass the differences between you and him by appealing to his self-interest. Do not be subtle: You have valuable knowledge to share, you will fill his coffers with gold, you will make him

live longer and happier. This is a language that all of us speak and understand.

A key step in the process is to understand the other person's psychology. Is he vain? Is he concerned about his reputation or his social standing? Does he have enemies you could help him vanquish? Is he simply motivated by money and power?

When the Mongols invaded China in the twelfth century, they threatened to obliterate a culture that had thrived for over two thousand years. Their leader, Genghis Khan, saw nothing in China but a country that lacked pasturing for his horses, and he decided to destroy the place, leveling all its cities, for "it would be better to exterminate the Chinese and let the grass grow." It was not a soldier, a general, or a king who saved the Chinese from devastation, but a man named Yelu Ch'u-Ts'ai. A foreigner himself, Ch'u-Ts'ai had come to appreciate the superiority of Chinese culture. He managed to make himself a trusted adviser to Genghis Khan, and persuaded him that he would reap riches out of the place if, instead of destroying it, he simply taxed everyone who lived there. Khan saw the wisdom in this and did as Ch'u-Ts'ai advised.

When Khan took the city of Kaifeng, after a long siege, and decided to massacre its inhabitants (as he had in other cities that had resisted him), Ch'u-Ts'ai told him that the finest craftsmen and engineers in China had fled to Kaifeng, and it would be better to put them to use. Kaifeng was spared. Never before had Genghis Khan shown such mercy, but then it really wasn't mercy that saved Kaifeng. Ch'u-Ts'ai knew Khan well. He was a barbaric peasant who cared nothing for culture, or indeed for anything other than warfare and practical results. Ch'u-Ts'ai chose to appeal to the only emotion that would work on such a man: greed.

Self-interest is the lever that will move people. Once you make them see how you can in some way meet their needs or advance their cause, their resistance to your requests for help will magically fall away. At each step on the way to acquiring power, you must train yourself to think your way inside the other person's mind, to see their needs and interests, to get rid of the screen of your own feelings that obscure the truth. Master this art and there will be no limits to what you can accomplish.

Image: A Cord that
Binds. The cord of
mercy and grati-

tude is threadbare,
and will break at
the first shock.
Do not throw
such a lifeline.
The cord of
mutual self-inter-
est is woven of
many fibers and
cannot easily be
severed. It will serve
you well for years.

Authority: The shortest and best way to make your fortune is to let people see clearly that it is in their interests to promote yours. (Jean de La Bruyère, 1645-1696)

REVERSAL

Some people will see an appeal to their self-interest as ugly and ignoble. They actually prefer to be able to exercise charity, mercy, and justice, which are their ways of feeling superior to you: When you beg them for help, you emphasize their power and position. They are strong enough to need nothing from you except the chance to feel superior. This is the wine that intoxicates them. They are dying to fund your project, to introduce you to powerful people—provided, of course, that all this is done in public, and for a good cause (usually the more public, the better). Not everyone, then, can be approached through cynical self-interest. Some people will be put off by it, because they don't want to seem to be motivated by such things. They need opportunities to display their good heart.

Do not be shy. Give them that opportunity. It's not as if you are conning them by asking for help—it is really their pleasure to give, and to be seen giving. You must distinguish the differences among powerful people and figure out what makes them tick. When they ooze greed, do not appeal to their charity. When they want to look charitable and noble, do not appeal to their greed.

LAW 14

POSE AS A FRIEND, WORK AS A SPY

JUDGMENT

Knowing about your rival is critical. Use spies to gather valuable information that will keep you a step ahead. Better still: Play the spy yourself. In polite social encounters, learn to probe. Ask indirect questions to get people to reveal their weaknesses and intentions. There is no occasion that is not an opportunity for artful spying.

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

Joseph Duveen was undoubtedly the greatest art dealer of his time—from 1904 to 1940 he almost single-handedly monopolized America's millionaire art-collecting market. But one prize plum eluded him: the industrialist Andrew Mellon. Before he died, Duveen was determined to make Mellon a client.

Duveen's friends said this was an impossible dream. Mellon was a stiff, taciturn man. The stories he had heard about the congenial, talkative Duveen rubbed him the wrong way—he had made it clear he had no desire to meet the man. Yet Duveen told his doubting friends, "Not only will Mellon buy from me but he will buy only from me." For several years he tracked his prey, learning the man's habits, tastes, phobias. To do this, he secretly put several of Mellon's staff on his own payroll, worming valuable information out of them. By the time he moved into action, he knew Mellon about as well as Mellon's wife did.

In 1921 Mellon was visiting London, and staying in a palatial suite on the third floor of Claridge's Hotel. Duveen booked himself into the suite just below Mellon's, on the second floor. He had arranged for his valet to befriend Mellon's valet, and on the fateful day he had chosen to make his move, Mellon's valet told Duveen's valet, who told Duveen, that he had just helped Mellon on with his overcoat, and that the industrialist was making his way down the corridor to ring for the lift.

Duveen's valet hurriedly helped Duveen with his own overcoat. Seconds later, Duveen entered the lift, and lo and behold, there was Mellon. "How do you do, Mr. Mellon?" said Duveen, introducing himself. "I am on my way to the National Gallery to look at some pictures." How uncanny—that was precisely where Mellon was headed. And so Duveen was able to accompany his prey to the one location that would ensure his success. He knew Mellon's taste inside and out, and while the two men wandered through the museum, he dazzled the magnate with his knowledge. Once again quite uncannily, they seemed to have remarkably similar tastes.

Mellon was pleasantly surprised: This was not the Duveen he had expected. The man was charming and agreeable, and clearly had exquisite

taste. When they returned to New York, Mellon visited Duveen’s exclusive gallery and fell in love with the collection. Everything, surprisingly enough, seemed to be precisely the kind of work he wanted to collect. For the rest of his life he was Duveen’s best and most generous client.

Interpretation

A man as ambitious and competitive as Joseph Duveen left nothing to chance. What's the point of winging it, of just hoping you may be able to charm this or that client? It's like shooting ducks blindfolded. Arm yourself with a little knowledge and your aim improves.

Mellon was the most spectacular of Duveen's catches, but he spied on many a millionaire. By secretly putting members of his clients' household staffs on his own payroll, he would gain constant access to valuable information about their masters' comings and goings, changes in taste, and other such tidbits of information that would put him a step ahead. A rival of Duveen's who wanted to make Henry Frick a client noticed that whenever he visited this wealthy New Yorker, Duveen was there before him, as if he had a sixth sense. To other dealers Duveen seemed to be everywhere, and to know everything before they did. His powers discouraged and disheartened them, until many simply gave up going after the wealthy clients who could make a dealer rich.

Such is the power of artful spying: It makes you seem all-powerful, clairvoyant. Your knowledge of your mark can also make you seem charming, so well can you anticipate his desires. No one sees the source of your power, and what they cannot see they cannot fight.

Rulers see through spies, as cows through smell, Brahmins through scriptures and the rest of the people through their normal eyes.
Kautilya, Indian philosopher third century B. C.