'ALL STATES, all powers that have held and hold rule over men have been and are either republics or principalities.' Machiavelli still belongs to the either/or world where politics is *either* kingly politics *or* citizen politics, in which power resides *either* in a single set of hands *or* in many hands. Machiavelli wrote another guide to politics after *The Prince*, this time for republics, which drew on the historical experience of ancient Rome. *The Discourses* spells out some of the same lessons as *The Prince*, especially about being alive to the role of chance. It also makes clear that, if citizens want to maintain *their* power, they will have to use it against their enemies. But Machiavelli would never have thought that a republic and a principality should be confused with each other: they were practically opposites, not least because the people who ruled them were invariably opposed to each other.

Now, if you live in a modern representative democracy, ask yourself: is it a republic or a principality? The answer is that it is neither because it is both, and it is both because it is neither. This is what Hobbes did: he abolished the distinction. Even the United States, which calls itself a republic, has what appears to be a prince in its president, as well as what seems like a princely court in the schemers around him. Elites, especially moneyed elites, are far too powerful in America for it to count as a Machiavellian republic. But Obama is not really a prince, because his power is heavily circumscribed by popular politics. He still depends on the authorisation of ordinary citizens and their representatives. There are significant constitutional limits to what he can do with his power: he can't treat it as his personal property. His job is not to maintain his estate. It's to represent the United States of America.

Modern politics combines extraordinary personal power on the part of its leading politicians with the impersonal institutional apparatus of a state. This creates a distinctive moral and psychological dynamic that goes beyond Machiavelli. It is best described as 'Weberian', after the early twentieth-century German sociologist Max Weber. It is from Weber that we have what has become the most famous definition of a modern state: 'That entity which successfully claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence.' The words that leap out from this definition are 'monopoly' and 'violence', but they aren't the really important ones. What the state claims is a monopoly of 'legitimate' violence: i.e., violence with no comeback. Moreover, it is only a 'claim', not a fact. What it needs to be is 'successful', meaning that people must accept it. When that happens, an 'entity' or institution is created whose power will be greater than that of any individual, though it will still be individuals who exercise its power. This is a thoroughly Hobbesian definition of the state.

What Weber saw is that the existence of these entities changes the character of political violence. They don't abolish it. What they do is institutionalise, rationalise and bureaucratise it. Successful states, in controlling violence, build up a network of institutions whose job is to manage it. There are rules, guidelines, protocols and chains of command. Politicians find themselves surrounded by civil servants and legal officers warning them of the risks and the caveats that