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WARRIOR POLITICS

WHY LEADERSHIP
DEMANDS
A PAGAN ETHOS

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As future crises arrive in steep waves, our leaders will realize that the world is not “modern” or “postmodern” but only a continuation of the ancient—a world that, despite its technologies, the best Chinese, Greek, and Roman philosophers would have understood, and known how to navigate.

CHAPTER II: CHURCHILL'S *RIVER WAR* / 17

How Churchill's first large historical work, published in 1899, when he was in his twenties, reveals the roots of his thinking and the source of the greatness that enabled him to lead England against Hitler in World War II. The Battle of Omdurman was one of the last of its kind before the age of industrial warfare—a panoramic succession of cavalry charges in which the young Churchill took part. *The River War* shows the ancient world within the modern one: it is here that we start our journey to wrest from the past what we need to arm ourselves for the present.

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Livy's *The War with Hannibal* offers canonical images of patriotic virtue and invaluable lessons about our own time. Livy, the quintessential outsider, proposes timeless insights into human passions and motivation and shows that the vigor to face our adversaries must ultimately come from pride in our own past and its achievements. "Never mind," Livy writes, "if they call your caution timidity, your wisdom sloth, your generalship weakness; it is better that a wise enemy should fear you than that foolish friends should praise."

CHAPTER IV: SUN-TZU AND THUCYDIDES / 38

There is arguably no work of philosophy in which knowledge and experience are so pungently condensed as Sun-Tzu's *The Art of Warfare*. If Churchill's morality is summarized by his hardheadedness and Livy's by his patriotic virtue, then Sun-Tzu's morality is the warrior's honor. A virtuous leader is one "who advances without any thought of winning personal fame and withdraws in spite of certain punishment." Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* introduced pragmatism into political discourse. His notion that self-interest gives birth to effort and effort to options makes his 2,400-year-old history a weapon against fatalism.

CHAPTER V: MACHIAVELLIAN VIRTUE / 52

For Machiavelli, a policy is defined not by its excellence but by its outcome: if it isn't effective, it can't be virtuous. Modern leaders can learn how to achieve results by applying the concept of Machiavellian virtue. "Since one must start with the present state of things," Machiavelli writes, "one can only work with the material at hand." Seasoned by his own experience in govern-

ment, Machiavelli believes in pagan virtue—ruthless and pragmatic but not amoral. “All armed prophets succeed,” he writes, “whereas unarmed ones fail.”

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When does a war, upheaval, or other danger become foreseeable? With Machiavelli as its guide, this chapter looks at determinism—the belief that historical, cultural, economic, and other antecedent forces determine events. It examines the lessons of Machiavelli’s anxious foresight: the danger of reading too narrowly from the past into the future.

CHAPTER VII: THE GREAT DISTURBERS: HOBBS AND MALTHUS / 78

How Hobbes, influenced by the political turmoil of his time, came to believe that just as vanity and overconfidence can make men blind, fear can make them see clearly and act morally. “The sum of virtue,” Hobbes writes, “is to be sociable with them that will be sociable, and formidable to them that will not.” According to Hobbes, altruism is unnatural, human beings are rapacious, and the struggle of every man against every other is the natural condition of humanity. Freedom becomes an issue only after order has been established. Thomas Malthus, the first philosopher to focus on the political effects of poor soil, famine, disease, and the quality of life among the poor, defined the most important debate of the first half of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER VIII: THE HOLOCAUST, REALISM, AND KANT / 96

The new era of human rights that policymakers and the media have declared is neither completely new nor completely real. Because the world is full of cruelty, the moral lessons of the Holo-

caust—that emblematic atrocity—will be hard to apply to our satisfaction. The philosopher Immanuel Kant made it his life’s project to define a system of universal laws. Kant’s subject is pure integrity, a morality of abstract justice and of intention rather than of consequences. The challenge of realism is to combine tough tactics with long-range Kantian goals in complex and original circumstances.

**CHAPTER IX: THE WORLD OF ACHILLES: ANCIENT SOLDIERS,
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War will increasingly be unconventional and undeclared and fought within states rather than between them. There have always been warriors who, in Homer’s words, “call up the wild joy of war,” but the collapse of the Cold War empires and the disorder it engendered—along with the advance of technology and low-end urbanization—has provoked the breakdown of families and the renewal of cults and blood ties. The result is the birth of a new warrior class, as cruel as ever—and better-armed. Defeating warriors will depend on our speed of reaction, not international law.

**CHAPTER X: WARRING STATES CHINA AND GLOBAL
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The Sumerian city-states of the third millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia, the early Mauryan empire of the fourth century B.C. in India, and the early Han empire of the second century B.C. in China are all examples of political systems in which diverse and far-flung territories were tied together through trade and political alliances. Likewise today, in a climate of increasing

global trade, the emergence of some kind of loose world governance is probably inevitable—barring a major war between two or more great powers, such as the U.S. and China. But even such a tenuous unity will require the organizing principle of a great power.

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True bravery and independence of thought are best anchored by examples from the past. Great leadership will always reside with the mystery of character—one has only to look at the much-maligned Roman emperor Tiberius. In the first half of his rule, Tiberius preserved the institutions and imperial boundaries of his predecessor, Augustus, while leaving them sufficiently stable to survive the excesses of successors like Caligula. He built few cities, annexed few territories, and did not cater to popular whims; rather, he strengthened the territories Rome already possessed by adding military bases, and combined diplomacy with the threat of force to preserve a peace that was favorable to Rome. Unlike Churchill or Pericles, Tiberius is not an inspiring role model. But where his strengths are concerned, he may be a surprisingly good one.

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