

The Ubiquitous and Prudent Prince: Machiavelli's Political Strategy and Pragmatic Principles

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Abstract

This essay intends to shed some light and give a discerned understanding of Machiavelli's utility of violence and deception in politics despite his profound commitment and sincere loyalty to the republic in the context of the *Prince*. The thesis I would like to expound on is about the definitive instruction and teachings of “ethical values” for political rulers who wish to protect their political status and maintain reverence among the citizens, while maintaining his deep love, respect, and commitment to the republic. In the *Prince*, he offered specific instruction to rulers as to what they must do to achieve their purpose in order to preserve and secure their power. Its significance for ethics lies precisely in the fact that Machiavelli's advice ignores the usual conventional rules of ethics. He elaborated on the *Discourses on Livy* (1531) and the *Prince* (1532) the inherent relationship of politics and violence. This instruction may not be useful for political rulers, but because we want to begin on the supreme goal and ideals of the republic, Machiavelli says emphatically that such instruction is pragmatic and would generate and preserve power for the *Prince*.

Keywords: *Machiavelli, Discourses, Prince, Ethical values, the republic, political rulers, pragmatic*

Introduction

Was Machiavelli a despotic idealist, a radical political thinker, or a realist theorist? Is virtuous violence a veritable alternative option to justify the politics of state-craftsmanship? These are only a few of the numerous concerns that may have been trapping him for a long time, and may have even started sooner in his early life, shaping his beliefs and interests.

This essay intends to shed some light and give a discerned understanding of Machiavelli's utility of violence and deception in politics despite his profound commitment and sincere loyalty to the republic in the context of the *Prince*. The thesis I would like to expound on is about the definitive advice and teachings of “ethical values” for political rulers who wish to protect their political status and maintain reverence among the citizens, while maintaining his deep love, respect, and commitment to the republic.¹ In the *Prince*, he offered specific advices to rulers as to

¹ Machiavelli's “ethical value” must be understood as a merely political value, rather than a moral or metaphysical version. Leo Rauch. *The Political Animal: Studies in Political Philosophy from Machiavelli to Marx* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 2. Machiavelli dedicated himself to the ideal form of government to which we are accustomed to referring the names “republic” and/or “republicanism.” Another concern is how much he adopted a lexicon easily interpreted by these phrases, because ‘res publica’ (*commonwealth*) may refer to any political organization, either governed by a ruler or not. For Machiavelli, republicanism arose to challenge monarchism since the former represents an intellectually complicated and historically persistent worldview, and it proceeded to give his reputation in its conception and historical narrative.

what they must do to achieve their purpose in order to preserve and secure their power. Its significance for ethics lies precisely in the fact that Machiavelli's advice ignores the usual conventional rules of ethics. He elaborated on the *Discourses on Livy* (1531) and the *Prince* (1532) the inherent relationship of politics and violence. It is necessary for a ruler, who wishes to maintain himself, to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity of the situation. However, Machiavelli does not support coercion over reason only if the former is deemed extremely necessary or out of contingent measures. In other words, prudential judgment is crucial in state-rulership. Machiavelli writes that,

. . . how men live is so different from how they should live that a ruler who does not do what is generally done, but persists in doing what ought to be done, will undermine his power rather than maintain it. If a ruler who wants always to act honorably is surrounded by many men his downfall is inevitable. Therefore, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to act immorally when this becomes necessary.²

This essay is divided into three sections. First, the author wants to illustrate and describe the historical trace of Machiavelli's special character in the development of the *Prince*, which identifies him as a sui generis in political philosophy. Second, the article aims to emphasize Machiavelli's political view and disposition toward the republic in the use of violence or coercion as necessary for a ruler to sustain and safeguard political power for the sake of regulatory and institutional order. Finally, in light of this discussion, the author would like to provide some conjectures on rendering complete sense of his pragmatic and political ideas.

The ethical intricacies in his political ideas are articulated explicitly rather than tacitly in his works especially in the *Discourses on Livy* (1531) and the *Prince* (1532). These books normative explicitness is more analogous to a model internalized and embedded in the veins of his political theory. In the *Discourses on Livy*, he laid the foundation of his political ideas on the *Prince*. He provided historical analogies and proposed strategic military tactics for conquering any battle. Historical education is essential for any political rulers before they can govern the state. Despite the fact that this work serves as a foundation for Machiavelli's political ideas, the *Prince* has left a more distinct taste in the imagination of most political rulers. In the political arena, the *Prince's* reputation is more vigorous and influential. Because the *Prince* is a how-to-instruction, it is concise yet straightforward, and it is fitted to a certain time and place, his rhetorical approach is more pragmatic and less poetic. His approach to explaining and characterizing people, circumstances, and events is generally sound and logical. His political assertions are supported by historical facts, which demonstrate why his ideas are logically reasonable, relevant, and applicable in practically all political circumstances.³ In essence, Machiavelli's views represent a Renaissance revival of a veritable humanist ruler.

In this essay, let us not view Machiavelli's political philosophy as something only for greedy politicians and cynical individuals, but as a practical philosophy for

² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, edited by Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Australia: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Chapter XV, 54. [Henceforth, all citations from this book will be abbreviated as P].

³ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), 19-21. In the first Chapter, Strauss examines the dual character of Machiavelli's political and ethical ideas in the *Discourses* and the *Prince* where his comprehensive teachings are found.

those seeking political leadership and public service. Although the term “Machiavellian” is commonly used dismissively to describe a populist politician who manipulates others in an opportunistic and illusory manner,⁴ let us try with zeal and enthusiasm to appreciate the erudition of his political ideas and learn some lessons of his thoughts and feelings in the campaigning of a sturdy republican state.

If the end of ethics is politics for Aristotle; the end of politics, for Machiavelli, is political and regulative order, and violence is a necessary apparatus in the pursuit of certain political goals. This is not a normative approach to traditional politics, but it may be a practicable means to justify the end.

I. Historical Context

Political transitions and misfortunes caused by the conflicting factions between the Church and the State interrupted Machiavelli's way of life. Both sides are always at odds; even the thought of reconciling and restoring these two parties' mutual concession has faded from people's imaginations. As a result, he sought to reimagine and create a political framework that would manage and maintain absolute power over the State. Meanwhile, Machiavelli declared that his purpose in creating the *Prince* was to make his message “useful” to everyone who could grasp its meaning and intent.

... my intention is to write something useful for anyone who understands it, it seemed more suitable to me to search after the effectual truth of the matter rather than its imagined one (*P*, On those things for which men and particularly princes are praised or blamed).

The *Prince* was penned during the Renaissance period in reaction to the conditions that constituted the “state of emergency,” when Italy was a cauldron of military prowess, political turmoil, and economic strife amongst the dominant city-states. Each metropolis attempted to defend itself by fighting other major powers. As a result, there was widespread political scheming, bribery, and resistance. Its conclusion was an impassioned call for Italian unification and an end to foreign involvement. He contended in the *Prince* that Italy needed a new ruler to unify the people, push the enemies out, and re-establish civic concordance.⁵

Machiavelli's *Prince* outlines and more specifically specifies strategies for seizing and retaining power in ways that appeared to elevate sovereignty above morality and formalized Renaissance political diplomacy.⁶ Furthermore, Machiavelli was motivated by popular aspirations for the unity of Italy and the advancement of Italian Renaissance morality through the reinstatement of old Roman virtues.

The *Prince* is the foundation of contemporary political philosophy due to its well-known and highly regarded political treatises and “patriotic” ideals.⁷ It is the work of a creative and skilled mind that produces treatises aimed at providing direct advice and complete instructions to political rulers of an existing political system. The *Prince* is a collection of practical instructions from a ruler on how to become a

⁴ Cirilio F. Bautista, “A Variant of the Poetic Language,” *Philippine Panorama*, 19 January 2003: 25-26.

⁵ G.H.R. Parkinson, “Ethics and Politics in Machiavelli,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 5, Number 18, January 1955, 38-39.

⁶ Joseph S. Rousek (ed.), *Twentieth Century Political Thought* (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1946), 3.

⁷ *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 10-11.

powerful state leader, written specifically to Lorenzo de Medici. He tried to gain the Medici's favor by writing and dedicating a book to them.⁸

The *Prince*, according to Mary G. Dietz, was composed for the Medici family, albeit it is essentially sarcastic, but “. . . he remains a defender of republican liberty and an opponent of the Medici.”⁹ Apparently, the Medici and his Florentines disapproved with the book's assertions. When the book was published, the Italian people were outraged. It seriously harmed Machiavelli's reputation both while he was still alive and after his demise.¹⁰

Leo Strauss explains, “The first part (of Machiavelli's book) sets forth the science or the art of princely government while the second takes up the time-honored question of the limits of art or prudence, or the question of relation of art or prudence and chance.”¹¹ Machiavelli's aim was to restore modern Italy, a republic comparable to that of Roman times. He could just achieve it by chaos, which had the willpower to wipe out its competitors. As a political theorist, he endeavored to relate philosophy to terrible ways of eliminating anybody who disagreed with the *Prince*'s vision for preserving and maintaining the republic.¹² In the art of war, this resembles the adage where the end justifies the means.

In the *Prince*, Machiavelli states that a shrewd ruler must combine the strength of the lion with the cunningness of the fox (*P*, XVIII, 61).¹³ He must always be attentive, ruthless, and nimble, tearing down or repressing his adversaries without prompting, and he must hit them in one swift blow. Since, “It should be remarked. . . that good deeds as well as bad might incur hatred” (*P*, XIX, 68). Machiavelli encourages rulers to be positive at the proper moment, and territorial seizure should be either a quick corrective action by the monarch himself or be shattered. Furthermore, unlike private citizens, rulers are not compelled to preserve allegiance since politics resembles the rules of the jungle. In this senses, standard moral precepts do not apply since the state is a law unto itself.¹⁴

More so, Machiavelli criticizes the assumptions of classical Western political thinking. He argues with “confident authority” since he saw human history as politically biased, based on a polemical framework and system that gauges a one-track model of leadership that finally leads to derision and incompetence. Machiavelli indeed never followed any authorities, including the Church and the State. However, he cited them historically to illustrate how to improve and strengthen one's leadership based on the Greek and Roman models. Machiavelli's examples base his political

⁸ Leo Strauss, “Machiavelli's Intention: The Prince,” *American Political Science Review*, Volume 51, Issue 1, March 1957: 14.

⁹ Mary G. Dietz, “Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception,” *American Political Science Review*, Volume 80, No. 3, September 1986: 779. She contends that if Machiavelli's adaptation of his theories to the Prince is truly decisive, we may read and perceive him as anti-citizen and anti-theorist, which is not supported by the strong republican view. According to her, the Prince is a 'praxis' aimed at reestablishing the republic, and Machiavelli is a practitioner of this theoretical delusion. See 779-781.

¹⁰ Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 114.

¹¹ *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 55.

¹² Machiavelli was the first well-known political thinker to link ideology to violence, but he was too much of a political scientist to accept the function of the ideologue. Of course, prudent judgment is a ruler's defense suit if he wishes to remain in power and earn respect.

¹³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (London, England: University of California Press, 1984), 33-37.

¹⁴ The Church is the seat of power and the basis of moral principles. Theology was the bedrock of political ideology during the Middle Ages. They have a completely theocratic consciousness. The Church's and State's power is founded on and always justified by God's will and design for mankind. Such an ideology and power, according to Machiavelli, are an anathema to the republic.

ideas on firsthand observations and extensive studies of ancient history. *The Prince* does not tell us what an ideal ruler or government is; instead, Machiavelli explains which rulers and political strategies are the most efficient and effective in achieving and maintaining power through historical examples.¹⁵

John Plamenatz emphasizes that with the dominant political conditions and views in Florentine, for him “Mediaeval political theory was rooted in theology, and sought to explain the authority of Church and State and limits of that authority by reference to the will of God and the nature of man as created by God.”¹⁶ Hanna Pitkin goes on to say that, “In the medieval understanding, then, interconnectedness and dependence were taken for granted almost as the definition of the human condition . . . This acceptance of dependence . . . is what made medieval people seem . . . as if they had never grown up . . . In such a world people felt neither an aspiration nor an obligation to be autonomous; mutual dependence was the very nature of the universe.”¹⁷ She maintains her position that, “For the medieval sense that dependence is natural and that [S]omeone is in charge . . .”¹⁸ In contrast, Machiavelli transcended his people's religious and metaphysical awareness and focused on the actual conditions of human beings, namely man's political life and civic conduct, which aims at political liberty and autonomy grounded on just and reasonable laws.

For Machiavelli, like Aristotle, man is a ‘political animal.’¹⁹ While Machiavelli acknowledged the religious tendencies of human beings, he never accepted religion as the foundation of man's political life. For him, “. . . political life has no such higher *telos* as the equating of politics and ethics. Political life [is and] must be regarded as self-contained, with values that are altogether political.”²⁰ In other words, Machiavelli constructed a political value based solely on three key aspects: “. . . the ‘amoralization of politics, the emphasis on the nation-state, [and] the ‘secularization’ of politics.”²¹ Machiavelli says,

... a prince must be prudent enough to know how to escape the bad reputation of those vices that would lose the state for him, and must protect himself from those that will not lose it for him. . . but if cannot, he need not concern himself unduly if he ignores these less serious vices. . . moreover. . . carefully taking everything into account, one will discover that something which appears to be virtue, if pursued, will end in his destruction; while some other thing which seems to be a vice, if pursued, will result in his safety and his well-being (*P*, On those things for which men and particularly princes are praised or blamed).

According to Machiavelli, people are often indecisive and capricious, which is why it is essential to take such steps that, when they no longer support the *Prince*, he must be able to make them believe by compulsion (*P*, VI, 21). Because the enforcement of laws is sometimes ineffective, coercion may be the final resort to

¹⁵ Unlike other humanists, Machiavelli saw history as a source of power, but he did not understand history or power in a moral framework. Instead, he sought to explore history and power in an amoral and hence purely scientific manner. Despite not being a psychologist, he envisioned a new science that studies human and physical events as distinct entities that must be studied and archived. In this sense, his work was distinct in its design yet deeply anchored in the humanistic tradition. However, Machiavelli's triumph devalues humanism in various ways. He laid the basis for modern social science and political science in a realm bereft of humanistic morals.

¹⁶ John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: Political and Social Theory: Machiavelli through Rousseau* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), 1.

¹⁷ *Fortune Is a Woman*, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ *The Political Animal*, 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

compel individuals to follow and nurture the required virtues for the survival of an organized and cohesive society.

If we ignore the reality that man is a “political animal,” we will most likely be wrecked by our carelessness and apathy. As a result, the laws of the jungle and survival methods will be the main procedure of all political struggles. To clarify these two concepts, on one hand, it is ‘political’ because they live in a society that values civic order, harmony, prosperity, and mutual friendship, and such idealism must be regulated and governed by a “good” ruler. A ruler utilizes his/her ‘mind’ and is not swayed by the dictates of the ‘heart’ until the circumstance calls for it. In other words, if he is to use the latter, it must be for political purposes only, that is, for the sake of emphatic understanding for his/her people and securing their power and maintaining their trust or loyalty in the republic. On the other hand, he is also an ‘animal’ because he could behave like a “beast” if the situation’s demand calls for him to defend himself or the state, or protect his dignity in case of danger.

Furthermore, Machiavelli attempts to demythologize politics in the strictest sense. Historical data and observations support his approach and pedagogy in politics and political governance. He proves his position with historical examples and methodologies. The myth of the state is an extreme manifestation of man’s desire to distance himself from himself and let the superego take over his life and manner of existence, making him denser and smaller to himself and others. Since “It makes its demands, forces men to obey, and even persuades them that obedience is right and good. The persuasion usually consists of specious metaphysics, perverted religion, or demagoguery disguised as (a) philosophy of history.”²²

As a result, he needs “... to give the supernatural a human face, so that it can be approached and appealed to, [therefore] the aim of the myth is to deprive human institution of its face, so that it is beyond approach [or reproach].”²³ In other words, if we over-emphasized this myth and made it the center of our lives, it could and would embody a false image of us, allowing our actions and intentions to be irresponsibly justified. Thus, for Machiavelli, the state is a human artifice, a human fabrication of *the Prince’s* ingenuity and creative imagination.

II. The Prince’s Rhetoric

The *Prince* made Machiavelli renowned, albeit adversely, for his radical conviction to transform Florence’s polemical predicament and restore its former milieu and political situation, but not in a medieval Florentine vision of sovereignty.²⁴ Fortune, according to Machiavelli, is a volatile, vile, and vicious stream which may blind our judgment from any situation. Fortune can only be managed by a dissenting violent force, i.e., by using masculine coercive power against her hectic feminine distraction. Thus, a prudent *Prince* knows well the historical patterns and political systems of the flux of experience resulting from the rise and fall of individuals from different states.²⁵

²² *The Political Animal*, 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ *Fortune Is a Woman*, 12-13. Hanna Pitkin explains that Florence “was a self-governing commune” during the late Middle Ages but its prevailing political system and consciousness is that of religious and Church oriented. Eventually, the division between theory and practice was well developed in hearts and minds of the people even their leaders because of the personal interest of the ruling elite.

²⁵ Elizabeth Frazer & Kimberly Hutchings, “Virtuous Violence and the Politics of Statecraft in Machiavelli, Clausewitz, and Weber,” *Political Studies*, Volume 59, 2011: 61.

In *the Prince*, Machiavelli presented instructions to a monarchical ruler to maintain that person in power. He proposed policies that discouraged widespread political activism and directed people's efforts toward private pursuits. Machiavelli hoped to persuade the monarch that he could best protect his sovereignty by using violence judiciously, respecting private property and his subjects' customs, and encouraging economic prosperity. The use of virtuous violence is neither vindictive nor rehabilitative but rather regulative or directive; thus transformative.²⁶ Despite its complex use in politics, it must be handled with utmost discretion and judicious acumen.

Machiavelli's political prospects are not restrictive of the monarchical system but instead of any form of government as long as the ruler and his people respect and appreciate the rule of law and the common good. To achieve this, Mary G. Dietz explains that "... the art of war and the art of politics require a knowledge of crafty assault as well as of armed combat. The political actor must be skilled at setting traps as he is at bold, ferocious attack, for when one is foiled by "terrain" and unable to ambush easily, it may be necessary to deceive...." this summarizes the three decisive actions for a ruler, "... where to live, how to behave, and whom to arm."²⁷

The *first one* means that *the Prince* must live *with* the people in the city and not distance himself from them or vice-versa while maintaining his power and authority over the people. The *second one* means that *the Prince* must primarily gain the favor and trust of the people. The *last one* means that *the Prince* must be cautious in his decisions if he intends to arm his people because it might worsen the situation and create factions among themselves. More so, Machiavelli suggests that he has to arm himself with dreadful and cunning means to guard himself against the snares of corrupt and egoistic ruling elites or the people themselves.²⁸

According to Machiavelli, a prudent ruler should emulate and follow the example of past great leaders who came before him.²⁹ He should strive very high since even if they hit something substantially lower, it was still desirable to aim high (*P*, VI, 19). One of the most delicate pieces of advice for a new prince is to proactively create a robust political foundation (*P*, VII, 23). In this context, he strongly recommends that we emulate our predecessors since it preaches political liberty and respect for the rule of law, such as ancient Rome. He constructed a political model of revolutionary autocracy in *the Prince*. He also predicted a powerful ruler, a prince with the 'will to power,' to reconcile and restore order in Florence, where there is peace and justice.

According to Strauss, readers frequently misread Machiavelli's positionality on religion. In fact, he is not completely indifferent to religion; rather, he is a friend of it. Religion, for him, is primarily a means to an end in the preservation and maintenance of social order.³⁰ On the contrary, Machiavelli found that it is not possible to rule political life by a subset of moral or religious absolutes and that the monarch might occasionally justify acts of violence and trickery, as amoral virtues, that would be reprehensible in private life, but creates political order in the public arena.

²⁶ Fraser & Hutchings, "Virtuous Violence....," 62-64.

²⁷ Dietz, "Trapping the Prince," 782-788.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 782-786.

²⁹ *The Prince* must mimic and recall the actions of prominent names such as Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Scipio. etc., (*P*, A Prince Duty Concerning Military Matters).

³⁰ *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 12; 32.

Religion should not interfere with the affairs of the state unless it promotes the assembly of the people and supports the prince in achieving the maintenance of the state in peace and concord. Machiavelli's perspective on religion is detached yet pragmatic, repugnant, but beneficial in some state-related aspects. Thus, religion is only a tool or a means to an end for the government's political intentions and activities. Machiavelli supports Roman religion because it instills confidence and encourages virtues beneficial to the republic, and it also fosters social cohesion to bring citizens closer together, resulting in further allegiance to the republic.³¹

According to Machiavelli, *the Prince* must increase his authority by secularizing his people so that he must build decent laws and solid troops (*P*, X, 38) to withstand political incursions. The best strategy to win a battle is for the *Prince* to be the commander-in-chief and use the local citizens as his defenders. Furthermore, utilizing our citizens as troops is the best way to protect oneself. Mercenaries are worthless in this case (*P*, XII 44; XIV 52). Thus "politics is not simply secularized [here], but its resources and incentives are channeled from the greatness of Rome into sixteenth-century thought."³²

Machiavelli's ultimate objective in the *Prince* is to educate young rulers on how to stay in power once they acquire it. Thus, the best way to protect it is to govern wisely. If this is not feasible, Machiavelli offers several strategies for a ruler to maintain power, i.e., the judicious use of violence, coercion, or deception is called into place. It is on this context that the adjective 'Machiavellian' makes sense to us.³³ Machiavelli said that,

A shrewd ruler, therefore, must try to ensure that his citizens, whatever the situation may be, will always be dependent on the government and on him; and then they will always be loyal to him (*P*, IX, 37).

A political model in disguise must be a trained and highly skillful manipulator, a brilliant "deceiver," and a "lover" of merit to others. A prince must display political skepticism and deception in specific ways, yet he should also be admired and trusted. In other words, a great ruler is someone who is both feared and revered.³⁴ Although, as evident in most of his arguments, the former is more emphasized than the latter.

So, "When the question arises, therefore, as to whether it is better for a prince to be loved or be feared, the obvious conclusion is that it is better for a prince to be feared: When the people love their prince, that love is in control and they can grant it or withdraw it. But when they fear their prince, that fear is not in their control but in his."³⁵ Becoming a prince solely by being an evil genius and using wicked ways is equally perilous and fraught with difficulties. If a ruler has no mercy, no faith, slays

³¹ For a more detailed explanation, see *Man and Society*, 32-36.

³² Erwin A. Gaede, *Politics and Ethics: Machiavelli to Niebuhr* (Lanham: University of America, 1983), 7.

³³ Machiavelli had unjustly been criticized throughout his public life because of his poor reputation in the government. Even until he died, his name was incessantly been dejected for his "defense" of dishonest ruling. In fact, the word 'Machiavellian' right now means a corrupt or a dishonest government. His true character came to light only quite recently. The world must change its vision of the cold, uncaring Machiavelli to the correct view of a patriot and a political genius of the republic. For a brief and straightforward discussion, see *Politics and Ethics*.

³⁴ I prefer to use this word because it signifies avoidance of hatred, even if he does not acquire love. In Chapter XVII of *The Prince*, he elucidated the notion of cruelty and mercy as necessary attributes of a good ruler.

³⁵ *The Political Animal*, 10. See also *P*, VII, 28-29.

people, and misleads one's allies, one may be able to get a nation, but he will not have any honor. Such evil genius might be admired but never remembered (*P*, VIII, 31).

Only if the ruler's safety was at stake would he be despicable and utilize violence with a single blow. He should not stay in iniquity until he can use it to serve his people. A wise ruler who employs harsh and devious tactics only, when necessary, would win over a vicious ruler who employs wickedness at all times.³⁶ Machiavelli antagonizes those individuals who rise to power by wicked means,

For injuries should be done all together so that, because they are tasted less, they will cause less resentment; benefits should be given out one by one, so that they will be savored more (*P*, VIII, 33-34).

A ruler who governs without being ruled is ludicrous because to dominate all by himself is to rule no one. Thus, to rule for everyone means reconciling the heterogeneity of its constituents – the citizenry, but to reign in mediocrity, leniency, and gentleness is to destroy oneself and bring one's demise and dishonor. Machiavelli upheld the concept of the confluence of fraudulence and integrity as an essential element in maintaining and preserving the republic's peace, order, and security, while also displaying the people's admiration for him. In other words, a ruler must be feared but not hated (*P*, XVII, 59) while yet being respected by the citizens.³⁷

Furthermore, Machiavelli's views on human nature are nuanced, with a keen awareness of what human nature is, as he states:

For this may be said of men generally: they are ungrateful, fickle, feigners, and dissemblers, avoiders of danger, eager for gain. While you benefit them, they are all devoted to you: they would shed their blood for you, they offer their possessions, their lives, and their sons, as I said before, when the need to do so is far off. But when you are hard pressed, they turn away Men are less hesitant about offending or harming a ruler who makes himself loved than one who inspires fear (*P*, XVII, 59).

Machiavelli is undoubtedly suggesting deception here, but in a subtle way that instills love and dread in the people. The former is more desirable than the latter, yet a monarch must still be revered and not despised by the people if he wants to instill dread. Political intervention is necessary when the public's life and integrity are at stake.³⁸ If the public goes berserk and becomes unmanageable, a strong political will is needed to control their behavior to maintain peace and order.

Furthermore, Machiavelli's critical investigation of human nature begins with an unorthodox premise that humans are profuse in their desires and demands, prone to oppress each other whenever they are empowered to do so and whenever there is an opportunity to exploit their immodest proclivity. The ruler's statutes should curb people's egoistic impulses, selfishness, and excessive self-indulgence. The fundamental problem of politics was establishing and maintaining the republican state, which is why the ruler should use decisive and shrewd measures while remaining piquant and clever to preserve the republic's well-being.

³⁶ A prudent ruler should eschew veering from the good whenever viable but should be ready to face evil if necessary – “Non partirsi dal bene, potendo, ma sapere intrare nel male, necessitate.” See Parkinson, “Ethics and Politics in Machiavelli,” 40-41.

³⁷ As Machiavelli suggested in Chapter XIX of *The Prince*, a ruler must avoid being despised and hated.

³⁸ *Fortune Is a Woman*, 164.

Machiavelli's sympathies and political dreams were always for the improvement of the republic. However, the numerous political upheavals, religious malfeasance, and complicated shift patterns of power during those times, the vulnerability of the Italian states, and the security risk of foreign invasion made him yearn for that "new prince." The latter could embody his great dream of the liberation of Italy. This new prince, according to Machiavelli, must do whatever is necessary to become a powerful, effective, and efficient ruler, but not out of despondency. If it helps him appear to be a good ruler, he should act like one; however, he may do so if it helps him attain a political goal to use vicious methods.

If the quality of work is the goal, Machiavelli was highly concerned with appearances. Because the end is what matters most, this so-called "redeemer" of Italy, to whom he unsuccessfully promised to give a voice and a personality, would not have had to endure herculean barriers and struggles, nor would there have been much choice of tactics in achieving such a goal. Machiavelli endeavored to direct the ruler toward specific measures compatible with human nature and the exigency of the present moment.

His political philosophy also has ethical implications although not so much a "rejection of Christianity for paganism, nor of paganism for Christianity, but the setting of them side by side, with the implicit invitation to men to choose either a good, virtuous, private life, or a good, successful, social existence, but not both."³⁹ Machiavelli is simply saying that religious belief and traditional morality are not irreconcilable with political affairs; instead, they assist to moderate personal interests, promote solidarity and mutual cohesion among people, and thus establish political rapport and civil concordance with the political space.

Religion and morals are crucial in any country or community because they are necessary tools in politics to mobilize the people and create social harmony. According to Gaede, "One of the values of a civil religion lies in its ability to cement people into a social and political unity so that the community is manageable and obedient."⁴⁰

"Some... religions are good for societies, since they make them strong-spirited;" however, some religions "cause decay or disintegration."⁴¹ As Machiavelli frequently pointed out, Christian values, such as meekness, unworldliness, and fraternal dependency, are excellent examples. Nietzsche provided a concrete illustration of Machiavelli's assessment of Christianity's weak ideals. Machiavelli, like Nietzsche, argued that Christian morality is a terrible dark templar of humanity. These moralities poison and corrode people's thoughts and lives. They stifle innovation as well as human emotions.

³⁹ Isaiah Berlin (ed.), *The Originality of Machiavelli, in Against the Current* (New York: Viking Press, 1990), 71.

⁴⁰ *Politics and Ethics*, 9.

⁴¹ See *The Originality of Machiavelli*, 37. The author splendidly describes Machiavelli's political character and magnanimous personality in his political cunningness and human artifice to attain the ideal state he longs for in Italy. In the second chapter of Hanna Pitkins' *Fortune is a Woman*, Machiavelli strongly advocated the autonomy of each citizen. Autonomy here does not mean complete self-ruling and absolute independence among others, but rather, doing one's individual assigned task and maintaining each role in the society in such a way that would generate a kin relationship with the government. It is inevitable to say that such unique and individual desires and needs of the people purport a plurality of interest and concern. Such plurality sometimes produces tension or conflicts, which is essential for the growth and strength of the citizens.

While Machiavelli appears to have an intuition of Nietzsche's moral riddle, if such belief or principle would hinder the political exercise of vile proclivities or clever tactics as an agency towards peace and order, it must be despised and abandoned since it undermines political freedom.⁴² "The weakening of religious ties is a part of general decadence and corruption: there is no need for a religion to rest on truth, provided that it is socially effective."⁴³

In other words, religion and morality are only socially indispensable tools if they play an influential role in the proper maintenance and preservation of peace and order as a favorable political condition. Values and ethical principles are politically relevant only if they fit and fulfill the republic's political goals, rather than implying an a priori principle.

Machiavelli does not condemn tradition as a prerequisite for comprehending and utilizing the traditional conception of values in the political realm. Indeed, he regards it highly as "a source of social stability."⁴⁴ As Quentin Skinner explicitly stated in his conclusion, to sum up, Machiavelli's republicanism in two interrelated propositions: *first*, he promotes a free way of life; *second*, to realize and uphold the former, one must maintain and preserve the republican constitution's goals. Thus, such a proposition resonates with his vigorous defense of traditional republican values, which he expresses in a thoroughly conventional manner.⁴⁵

Machiavelli does not rule out the prospect of reinstating traditional nuances of values, provided we have adequate knowledge, will, energy, efficacy, and virtuosity (or *virtù*) on the part of the ruler and suitably educated, bravely, and skillfully on the part of the citizenry.⁴⁶ As Machiavelli claims, we cannot overcome a value system until it degenerates and debases the political goal of the general good in a republican state rather than individual and private interests. It may appear unrealistic to achieve and overly idealistic to gain or propose a utopian society, but he seems to be arguing on the level of what is pragmatic and realistic in political life.

According to Hannah Pitkin, Machiavelli emphasizes the value of *furbo* as a political "camouflage" in rejuvenating and preserving his political power and authority.⁴⁷ However, to complete the political life (*vivere politico*), the citizenry should participate in and respect each other for the common good. "The *vivere politico* demands that citizens be willing to give priority to the interests of the city over their own particular interests. In other words, the *vivere politico* requires habits of civic virtue both in magistrates and ordinary citizens. In a corrupt city, where citizens give priority to their particular interests, no *vivere politico* can exist."⁴⁸ Though Machiavelli instructs that the ruler should behave like the cunningness of the fox, Mary G. Dietz

⁴² The only freedom that Machiavelli acknowledges is 'political freedom.' See *The Originality of Machiavelli*, 38.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁵ Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Mauricio Viroli, *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 141.

⁴⁶ The word *virtù* should be used in an amoral sense. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 210.

⁴⁷ As discussed in the text of Hannah Pitkin, the analogous exemplification of the fox as the ruler shows the vehemence and cleverness of the prince in how he could maintain, preserve his position and radically develop the character of a *furbo* as the "hammer" tool in governing the state. As opposed to *fesso*, *furbo* is essentially the character of a man with "scrupulously moral in his relation with (his) family and friends, yet take pride in his ability to cheat someone outside his intimate circle or, better still, to defraud an organization or public agency." Pitkin describes this word with laconic brevity in her text. See *Fortune is a Woman*, 33. However, a *fesso* is the contrary of *furbo* where the former is essentially an attribute of the minions.

⁴⁸ *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, 156.

claims that he has learned the art of war in political deceit in a constructive light, i.e., for the preservation of the republic, its laws, and its purposes in general.⁴⁹

Machiavelli utterly hates most and radically admonishes those people or rulers who have horde and weak values and an idle, obscured, and indecisive mind. As pointed out by Hannah Pitkin, one of the things Machiavelli was indifferent about was the efficacy of the “femininical” ruling tendency, in that irresolute princes that follow a neutral, vague path are generally ruined the character of women.⁵⁰ Such effeminate attribute inhibits the development of a good citizenry. Machiavelli emphasizes that true manhood is someone who has *virtù*, which is quintessentially the quality of a “real man.” As the author points out, it mainly connotes energy, effectiveness, and virtuosity.⁵¹

A jurist from Perugia named Alberico Gentili brought back Machiavelli's reputation as a republican thinker wherein Gentili writes that Machiavelli was...

... a strong supporter and enthusiast for democracy. [He] was born, educated and received public honors in a Republic. He was extremely hostile to tyranny. Therefore, he did not help the tyrant; his intention was not to instruct the tyrant, but by making all his secrets clear and openly displaying the degree of wretchedness to the people . . . he excelled all other men in wisdom and while appearing to instruct the prince he was actually educating the people.⁵²

In Machiavelli's political philosophy, what is noteworthy was his core motive in restoring the republic. According to Machiavelli, the goal is to re-establish a well-ordered republic, i.e., the rule of law and advocacy for the common good. This legislation should be just, equitably established, and applied to all individuals, including rulers.⁵³

In other words, the laws are impartial and preeminent above all, i.e., a fair and well-enforced law devoid of personal and arbitrary justifications of the few ruling elite. Machiavelli maintains that active public discourse and equal participation before the law are essential components of political liberty in a republic.⁵⁴ Political liberty or “autonomy means something like as self-governing polity, one free of foreign domination, but also perhaps one that is internally self-governing...”⁵⁵ which is an essential feature of the republic. Political liberty or autonomy is, in this sense, the purpose of every state. Though he did not explicitly address the issue of autonomy

⁴⁹ Dietz, “Trapping the Prince,” 778.

⁵⁰ *Fortune Is a Woman*, 25.

⁵¹ For most of this political theory, Machiavelli neglected to create a particular moral principle that would elevate the citizens' standard of living, i.e., if he were caring and concerned about the welfare of the citizenry.

⁵² Alberico Gentili, *De legationibus* (London: Thomas Vautrollarius, 1585), Book III, Chapter 9 citing Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115.

⁵³ *Machiavelli*, 116-118.

⁵⁴ *Machiavelli*, 120-121. Viroli explains that Machiavelli's notion of a political life can be applied to any form of government as long as the law bound the prince also. But Machiavelli favors the rule. For a more eloquent yet brief discussion, see 123-124. Hanna Pitkin explains political liberty as autonomy in the public and private realms. “Autonomy . . . is Machiavelli's central preoccupation . . .” in his political theory. It means “having or making one's own laws or principles: independence, self-control, self-government, freedom.” See *Fortune Is a Woman*, 7. For a more eloquent explanation, read Part I, “Autonomy—Personal and Political,” 3-22.

⁵⁵ *Fortune Is a Woman*, 7.

in any of his writings, it was a recurring theme in all of his works in various ways and guises.⁵⁶

According to Machiavelli, the correct formulation and execution of the law is the foundation of political and civil life. This law makes people suitable, and they are obligated to serve the common good while avoiding injury or damage to their fellowmen. In this regard, the law sternly supports lawful authorities' appropriate implementation of rewards and sanctions to maintain peace and order.⁵⁷ In this context, this was Machiavelli's profound political goal in Florence.

For Machiavelli, social conflict, dissent, and dispute are inevitable to elicit change and bring about some progress, but only within the confines of civil life norms, i.e., non-destructive and open to diplomacy. Beyond that, it is an atrocity and is punishable by law.⁵⁸ Hannah Pitkin explains expressively that "Politics presupposes human plurality: our conflicting perspectives must constantly be reconciled sufficiently to sustain the common life."⁵⁹

If we look at *the Prince* through an orthodox prism, that is, via religious and moral assumptions, we are likely to see him as a malevolent creator and a totalitarian supporter of political manipulation and brutality. Though it may look hideous on the surface, Machiavelli is attempting to discover the art of political leadership grounded on a republican government. Even though he has been and will continue to be loathed and misunderstood by many people, he believes that time and historical necessity will determine whether such art and craft can thrive. The *Prince's* unveiling and binding act in the art of political leadership and craftsmanship is ingrained in the hearts and minds of people who aspire to human greatness in the sphere of politics.

III. Conjectures and Overtures

Truth-speaking is only meaningful when conversing to wise persons and only a sensible mind can grasp the realism of Machiavelli's ideas. In the political arena, how can this realism be grasped? For Machiavelli, political life is a complex reality to fathom. His understanding of politics is mostly based on historical knowledge and an examination of emotional responses.⁶⁰

As an overseer, the *Prince's* decisiveness and cunningness are crucial in the political maneuverings of the state. It may appear repulsive to certain mediocre minds and religious frauds, but his approach appears plausible to those who seek strategic control. Some officials may engage in political corruption, bribery, and exploitation, but the *Prince* condemns these forms of vice and treachery. These scenarios and behaviors may be antediluvian, particularly when humans first began to form societies and establish laws, but the nauseating reality of this viciousness is extremely distasteful when practically everything becomes commonplace and verifiable. And so it is better to act like a vigorous antagonist than an impotent protagonist.

According to Mary G. Dietz, Machiavelli invented an art in politics by wielding power while devising a plan to keep and cultivate it with a lofty aspiration to re-install the image of a flourishing republic despite his harsh and crafty tactics of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁷ *Machiavelli*, 122.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 126. According to Viroli, Machiavelli does not adhere to a quiet socius if it restricts the people's political rights unconstitutionally. Even in a muddled republic with a large population and civic army, Machiavelli believes that political life is still possible if the people respect the principles of the rule of law and the common good. Also see 127.

⁵⁹ *Fortune Is a Woman*, 35.

⁶⁰ Maurizio Viroli, "Machiavelli's Realism," *Constellations*, Volume 14, Number 4, December 2007: 470-472.

attaining it. In essence, the political actor, *the Prince*, is rewarded by the people's faith and confidence in his leadership in implementing his guile strategy and viewpoint on managing the state while retaining the people's profound respect and love for the law.⁶¹

It appears that Machiavelli behaves like a 'political scientist' since he offered a scientific analysis of the state and proper governance rules. However, like Strauss,⁶² according to John Plamenatz, "There is nothing specifically scientific about his attitude.... [Since] it is scientific only if it uses suitable methods to establish what the facts are, what men actually do want, and what experience has shown to be the most effective way of getting it... [Therefore,] they are empirical generalizations; they are based on observation...." However, it is never scientific in the strict sense.⁶³

As a "political scientist," his main concern is establishing what humans are like, i.e., egoist, self-centered creatures, and how power is maintained and preserved, with no expressed intent of trying to pass moral judgment on the political state of affairs. The morality that serves the population for mutual cohesiveness does not apply to the rulers' political exercise. In the *Prince*, he prioritizes the republic's stability, ignoring all moral concerns and focusing instead on the ruler's strength, vigor, courage, independence, or virtù. In other words, he emphasized the necessity of military prowess in effective governance and political institutions.⁶⁴

A good ruler should understand how to do violence and when to use it to his advantage. In reality, we must comprehend this since being merely admirable permits heinous deeds to harm us. A wise ruler should appear to have all of the excellent characteristics that one would anticipate of him and nothing hideous. However, human nature prevents us from being faultless. As a consequence, it is prudent to choose whether to affirm and deny, when to fight back, and when to remain diplomatic (*P*, XV, 54-55).

Despite the fact that Machiavelli appears to have an anti-clerical standpoint, he maintains that "politics is still concerned with real life,"⁶⁵ a life worthy of being termed political rather than moral. The problem discussed in politics is invariably an ethical one. Though we cannot escape conflict and tension in society, their existence cannot and should not be blamed or condemned; rather, it must be managed in such a way that the republic's health and preservation are promoted.

Furthermore, the preservation of the republic is not entirely dependent on its ruler's prudential judgment and eloquent speeches, but on how he could maintain a relatively ordered and peaceful (or perfect) society through virtuous violence and persuasive mechanisms. In order to fulfill this vision, the ruler would require the proper kind of virtues necessary for the citizens and the republic to cultivate and enhance. Even after his death, his "ways" are no longer necessary because of his (seeming) perfect design for the republic. As Leveriza would suggest, "Political ethics is a matter of leadership. It's not a vision, but political will, the strength to draw conclusions and set priorities that determine the institutional context of political ethics."⁶⁶

⁶¹ Dietz, "Trapping the Prince," 793-794.

⁶² *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 20.

⁶³ *Man and Society*, 2-3.

⁶⁴ Gilbert, "On Machiavelli's Idea of Virtù," 54. Also, see Viroli, "Machiavelli's Realism," 472-473.

⁶⁵ *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, 157.

⁶⁶ Jose P. Leveriza, *Ethics in Government* (Makati City: Grandwater Publications and Research Corporation, 1996), 43.

Machiavelli's political skepticism and ethical insight demonstrate how a political ruler should maintain and protect his integrity and authority in the face of partisan political rhetoric and societal conflict. We are impressed by his thorough historical explanation based on his personal experiences that if "... mankind's historical experience will be a valued source of insight and guidance to be drawn upon in the development of specific norms of upbringing and education, of intellectual, artistic, and political activity."⁶⁷

Finally, can the republic endure in the absence of the *Prince*? According to Machiavelli, a competent political leadership is impossible and implausible if the ruler is arrogant in committing to the republic and governs his people without historical knowledge and respect for conventional practices. However, political knowledge based on convention alone is never the ultimate word in effective governance, rather we must overcome all specific forms of historical impairments or revisionisms to provide a positive impact on its contemporary relevance and application.

Beyond the rule of violence, the ideal state in which all people revere and practice civic values is the future of politics. However, as long as Hobbesian notions of human greed and voracity for power saturate most people's veins, the necessity for virtuous violence appears ubiquitous and imperative for the *Prince*.

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⁶⁷ *Democracy and the Ethical Life*, 87.

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