

INTRODUCTION

by MAX LERNER

We live today in the shadow of a Florentine, the man who above all others taught the world to think in terms of cold political power. His name was Niccolò Machiavelli, and he was one of those rare intellectuals who write about politics because they have had a hand in politics and learned what it is about. His portraits show a thin-faced, pale little man, with a sharp nose, sunken cheeks, subtle lips, a discreet and enigmatic smile, and piercing black eyes that look as if they knew much more than they were willing to tell.

There is little we can say for certain about his early years. He was born in 1469, of a family that was part of the small and impoverished gentry of Florence. His father, a lawyer, tried desperately to keep his family from slipping down into the ranks of the middle class. Niccolò must have had the sort of boyhood that most children had in the homes and on the streets of Florence in the *quattrocento*. He steps onto the threshold of history in 1498, already a young man of twenty-nine, only a month after the execution of the friar-politician Savonarola, who had dominated the last decades of the dying fifteenth century in Florence. At that time Machiavelli got a minor job as secretary to the Second Chancery—an office he was to hold for fourteen years.

He was what we should call today a Braintruster and bureaucrat. He loved his job as idea-man for some of the stuffed-shirt Florentine politicians. And because he was so

good at it, the stuffed shirts came to regard him as someone on whose shoulders they could place the burden of administrative work—the man who got papers drawn up and orders sent out and correspondence carried on and records kept. In due time—since Florence like the other Italian city-states in an age of intrigue depended on skilful diplomacy for its survival—they broadened the scope of his work and sent him on diplomatic missions. In the course of a decade he visited as an unofficial emissary every important city-state in Italy and several of the courts outside Italy. He sent back reports which may still be read for their tough understanding of diplomatic realities. Invariably he acquitted himself well; he met the movers and shakers of the world, and the narrow horizon of the Florentine expanded into the vistas of the European state-system.

It was thus that Machiavelli was in a position to become the first modern analyst of power. Where others looked at the figureheads, he kept his eyes glued behind the scenes. He sought the ultimate propulsion of events. He wanted to know what made things tick; he wanted to take the clock of the world to pieces to find out how it worked. He went on foreign missions, organized the armies of Florence, carried through successfully the long protracted siege of Pisa. Yet always he was concerned with what these experiences could teach him about the nature of power. In an age of portraiture it was natural that he too should be a painter, but his subjects never knew they were sitting for him. He studied Pope Julius II, the secular princes, the *condottieri*; above all he studied Caesar Borgia, the Duke Valentino, who came closer to embodying the naked ideal of power than any other person Machiavelli had met. There was in Machiavelli, as in Savonarola, an intense and searing flame, but it was a secular flame, and the things it fed

on were not such things as religious dreams are made of. A man like this might have lived out his days, tasted somewhat of power, known what it was to run a state from behind the scenes as an underling, and died leaving behind him some excellent diplomatic reports, a few plays, and some polished verses in the style of the time. But Machiavelli's destiny was different.

The petty dynasties and the bourgeois merchant princes who ruled the Italian city-states played their fateful game of chessboard diplomacy all through the fifteenth century until finally in the sixteenth it led to disaster for all of them. This is not the place to review the succession of maneuvers by which France, Spain, Germany and the Papacy vied for the supremacy over Italy. When, after the League of Cambrai, a split developed between France and the Papacy, Florence stuck to its basic alliance with France. When Julius II drove the French from Italy, Florence was lost; and not even the new citizen army that Machiavelli had trained could withstand the combined force of the Pope's prestige and his Swiss mercenaries. One of the conditions of the papal peace was the restoration of the Medici in Florence. And so Machiavelli, who had always been staunchly republican and anti-Medici, found himself in 1512 at the age of forty-three a dejected liberal without a job in a world that had come tumbling down about his ears.

He tried to make his peace with the Medici, but to no avail. There was a witch-hunting atmosphere in Florence, and everyone was suspect who had ever been identified with the liberal cause. Two ardent young republican conspirators had evidently made a list of those on whom they thought they might rely for aid, and Machiavelli's name was on the list. He was arrested, drawn by the rope, tortured. But he was plainly innocent, and finally was released. He slunk

off to a small suburban farm near Florence, and for the next fourteen years until his death his letters are full of pleas to be reinstated in the favor of the Medici and the Pope, plans to recommend himself to them, strategies by which his abilities could be brought to their attention. It is, as so many commentators have pointed out, neither a pretty nor a graceful picture. Yet we must reflect that Machiavelli out of office felt himself a vessel without use. The letters he has left us during this period, for all their bitter pride and the unbreakable gaiety of their style, show that reinstatement in office spelled for him nothing less than a return to life.

Ironically, it was this period of his disgrace that represents the high point of his creative power. The enforced leisure compelled him to fall back on himself. Finding himself after fourteen years deprived of his job, he felt shut in like a bird in an iron cage. The result was his books—his solitary song. More and more he retreated to his study and his mind. From them came *The Prince*, the *Art of War*, *The Discourses*, the *History of Florence*; various plays, among them a first-rate comedy, *Mandragola*; poetry, stories, biographical sketches. The civil servant, the politician, the diplomat, the military organizer had become a man of letters *malgré lui*.

There remains only the final ironic act. In 1527 the papal armies were defeated and Rome was sacked by the soldiers of Charles V. At this the popular party in Florence overthrew the Medici and for a short time restored democratic government. Machiavelli had hurried back to Florence, eager to regain his post as secretary. But he never stood a real chance. *The Prince*, circulated in manuscript, had made him enemies; the small dull men who had it in their power to dispense office feared his brilliance and his wit. Mercifully Machiavelli fell sick and never learned that the final vote of the Council was overwhelmingly against him. Be-

fore the news came he was dead. And so a man who had hoped for the ultimate glory of being restored to the Florentine civil service died, leaving behind him nothing but the memory of a few books he had written in his exile.

2

There is a famous letter from Machiavelli to his friend Vettori, the Florentine ambassador at the Papal Court in Rome, in which he describes the tenor of his life on the farm, and the relief that he finds among books in his study.

On the threshold I slip off my day's clothes with their mud and dirt, put on my royal and curial robes, and enter, decently accoutred, the ancient courts of men of old, where I am welcomed kindly and fed on that fare which is mine alone, and for which I was born: where I am not ashamed to address them and ask them the reasons for their action, and they reply considerately; and for two hours I forget all my cares, I know no more trouble, death loses its terrors: I am utterly translated in their company. And since Dante says that we can never attain knowledge unless we retain what we hear, I have noted down the capital I have accumulated from their conversation and composed a little book, *De Principatibus*, in which I probe as deeply as I can the consideration of this subject, discussing what a principality is, the variety of such states, how they are won, how they are held, how they are lost . . .¹

It was the period of the great humanist revival of ancient learning. The books Machiavelli read were the traditional Latin authors and (since he probably did not know Greek) the Greek authors in Latin translation. And as he read there came crowding back into his mind the varied experiences

¹ I use here the translation made by Ralph Roeder in his *Man of the Renaissance* (1933).

of his life; and out of the fusion of reading and experience came new insights into politics, at first jotted down in the form of notes which eventually formed themselves into a vast book.

That book was not *The Prince*. There are clear indications that Machiavelli started to write what afterward became *The Discourses*, planned on a grand scale. But as he wrote in his study, things were happening in the world outside. There was a new Pope in Rome, a new regime in Italy; the Pope was carving out a new state in Italy and placing his nephew Giuliano at its head. What more natural than to wish to influence this new prince and recommend oneself to his favor? Perhaps one could once more thus have a hand in world affairs, and—who knows?—set in motion a train of forces that might arrest the decadence of the Italian communes and free Italy from the invaders. But *The Discourses* were too vast to finish quickly, and their form was far too sprawling for the purpose. And so, carving out of *The Discourses* certain sections and ideas, Machiavelli proceeded to recast them in the form of a short treatise, *De Principibus*. Eventually he changed the title from the Latin abstract to the Italian personal, *Il Principe*. The book was written in 1513 at an almost white heat, in what was probably only a few months. Dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, it was presented to him and by him neglected and forgotten. It was, however, circulated in manuscript during Machiavelli's lifetime, surreptitiously copied and corrupted, and achieved an underground fame. Since his death it has been one of the half dozen books that have done most to shape Western thought.

What gives *The Prince* its greatness? It is not a great formal treatise on politics. It is bare of any genuine insights into social organization as the basis of politics. It has very

little passion in it—so little that, because the final chapter crackles and glows with Machiavelli's fervor for the unification of Italy, some commentators have suggested that it is not an organic part of the book but was added as an afterthought. It has been pretty well proved, moreover, by recent scholarship that Machiavelli's little pamphlet on princes is not even original in form. It is part of a whole traditional literature on princes that stretches back to the Middle Ages. The structure of the book, its division into chapters and even some of the chapter headings follow the conventional form of what has been called the mirror-of-princes literature: the discussion of how to rule conquered territory, what advisers a prince should rely on, how he should conduct himself among the intrigues of diplomacy, whether he should depend mainly on fortified castles or entrenched camps in warfare.

But the intellectual spirit that pervades the book is quite another matter. Here we are in the presence of something little short of a revolution in political thinking. The humanists who had written books about princes had written in the idealistic and scholastic medieval tradition; they were ridden by theology and metaphysics. Machiavelli rejected metaphysics, theology, idealism. The whole drift of his work is toward a political realism, unknown to the formal writing of his time.

I say unknown to the *formal writing*. That does not mean it was unknown to his time. Machiavelli was expressing the realism that characterized the actual politics and the popular ethos of his time. Take, for example, some sentences from the famous eighteenth chapter, "In What Way Princes Must Keep Faith." The Achilles myth of the centaur, he writes, teaches us that we are "semi-animal, semi-human" and that "a prince must know how to use both

natures." . . . "A prince being thus obliged to know well how to act as a beast must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves." . . . "A prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by so doing it would be against his interest, and when the reasons which made him bind himself no longer exist." "It is not, therefore, necessary for a prince to have all the above-named qualities, but it is very necessary to seem to have them." When Machiavelli wrote thus he was not creating a new ethos, whatever we may think of it; he was expressing the ethos of the late *quattrocento* and the early *cinquecento* not only in Florence but in the whole of Italy. Machiavelli was, in short, the child of his time—neither better nor worse than the other intellectuals, politicians, diplomats and civil servants of his time.

He was able, using the traditional humanist literary forms, to pour into them a realistic political spirit which his age was acting on but which had never before been so well expressed in political thought. He had the daring to turn against the whole idealistic preoccupation of the humanists. He had the clear-eyed capacity to distinguish between man as he ought to be and man as he actually is—between the ideal form of institutions and the pragmatic conditions under which they operate.

But if we have come close to his greatness here, we have not wholly succeeded in ensnaring it. There have been other men who have expressed the consciousness of their period. They have in very few instances achieved the highest rank in the history of ideas. And while those who content themselves with seeing Machiavelli thus in the context of his time may succeed thereby in countering the charges made against him of being a sort of anti-Christ who had

created a new immorality, they do not thereby get at the roots of his greatness.

To take a further step in our analysis, we must see that Machiavelli, while he expressed the ethical consciousness of his time, was also a good deal ahead of his time in other respects. He lived in a period when economic growth had gone so far as to burst the bounds of existing political forms. What gave the city-states of Italy their Renaissance grandeur was not some mysterious flowering of the humanist spirit at the time. It was the fact that with the opening of the East by the crusades, the breakup of the manorial economy and the growth of trade and handicraft manufacture, the cities of Italy found themselves strategically placed with respect to the world trade routes. There followed what amounted to a communal revolution in Italy and a reorganization of the government of the Italian city-states under democratic and guild forms. The expansion of the economic power of these cities went on apace into the end of the fifteenth century. By the time Machiavelli came to the maturity of his powers, a sharp contraction had set in. The expansion had gone as far as the political limits of the communal organization allowed.

If the Italian city-states had been able to adjust themselves to the needs of an expanding economy by resolving their rivalries and joining in a united political structure, Italy might have been spared the two and a half centuries of humiliation and cultural aridness which followed the fall of the communes. Elsewhere, however, in France, in England, in Spain, the expansion of political forms kept pace with the economic expansion. Machiavelli lived in what, with our historical perspective, we now say to have been the beginnings of the Western nation-state system. As we know it, he was himself only dimly aware of it. He was in no sense

an articulate nationalist, and the fervor of his national feeling has probably been overestimated by commentators. But two elements were historically to enter into the composition of the Western nation-state. One was national unity and the idea of a common tongue, common culture and common economic limits. The second was a realistic concentration of power at the center in order to break down divisive barriers. Machiavelli only dimly foresaw nationalism, but he very clearly expressed the second element—the realistic use of power from the center, the methods by which unity could be achieved.

Therein lies the importance of *The Prince* in the subsequent history of the Western world. Machiavelli wrote a grammar of power, not only for the sixteenth century, but for the ages that have followed. Read *The Prince* today and you will be struck by the detonations which its sentences set off in the corridors of our experiences with present-day rulers. Machiavelli seen only in his historical context does become intelligible; but his greatness does not emerge until we see that when he wrote his grammar of power he came close to setting down the imperatives by which men govern and are governed in political communities, whatever the epoch and whatever the governmental structure.

The Prince has become, for better or worse, a symbol of a whole body of literature and a whole approach to politics. Just as in literature and art we must always face, under whatever names, the polar conflict of classic and romantic, so in the history of political thinking we have always to face the polar conflict between the ethical and the ruthlessly realistic. *The Prince* is part of the world's polemical literature because it places itself squarely in the ranks of realism. It brushes aside, with an impatience in which Machiavelli scarcely cares to conceal his disdain, the tender-mindedness of reformers and idealists.

There is in all of us, along with the ethical and normative strain, a strain of hard-headedness and of the acceptance of the framework of human passions and social reality within which we have to work. One can trace it back to Aristophanes and the way in which he always deflated contemporary dreams and illusions by getting back to the essential limits of the human animal. In every generation since him the young men have been divided between the pursuit of some passionate ideal and the hard-bitten inquiry into how things actually get accomplished in a real political world. It is to that pole of our political thinking that *The Prince* gravitates. As long as this strain will remain in political thinking, so long will *The Prince* be found to have expressed in undying prose its intensity and its temper.

3

Very few who talk of *The Prince* have ever read more than a few sentences in it. But fewer still have read the work of Machiavelli which, without having the same *éclat* in history as *The Prince*, is nevertheless the saner, the more rounded, the more comprehensive work. I refer to *The Discourses*.

It was the longer work on which Machiavelli was engaged when, because of political opportunism, he made a sudden sortie to finish *The Prince*. He came back to it later. He seems to have worked on it intermittently for the better part of a decade. It bears to *The Prince* much the same relation that Marx's *Capital* bears to the *Communist Manifesto*. It is the considered, comprehensive treatise. Outwardly a commentary (unfinished) on the first ten books of Livy's *History of Rome*, it is actually a set of *pensees*, loosely gathered together into a book—reflections on politics which use Roman history as a point of departure. It is clearly not a book which ever had a chance for real fame. The very peo-

ple who have written most about *The Prince* seem to have neglected *The Discourses*, and very few seem to have read it. When we talk of Machiavellianism, it is *The Prince* we have in mind. And that is perhaps as it should be. But when we talk of Machiavelli, we must have *The Discourses* in mind as well. For if we are to judge a man it is fairer to judge him by the book into which he sought to put his whole system of politics rather than by the pamphlet which he dashed off to win a friend and influence a personage.

Scholarship has not done well by *The Discourses*. The scholars pay lip service to it as the larger frame of reference within which *The Prince* can be understood. Yet having done so, they go on to talk of *The Prince*. Its structure is difficult and fragmentary. Precepts drawn from Livy form the chapter heads. There are whole sections that might easily be cut out to improve the book. A good editor today, receiving such a manuscript, would probably ask the author to cut it down to one-third and pull it together a bit. Yet once read, *The Discourses* stay in your mind as an impressive intellectual experience. And once read, whatever impression you have formed of Machiavelli through reading *The Prince* is rather drastically changed.

What was the intellectual tradition that lay back of *The Discourses*? In the case of *The Prince*, it was the mirror-of-princes medieval and humanist literature. Felix Gilbert has suggested in a recent article, and I think the suggestion is a sound one, that research into the literature of "the good state," both in Italian and in Greater European thought, might yield exciting results for an understanding of *The Discourses*.

However that may be, what are the basic ideas of *The Discourses*? I should say the following: first, the superiority of the democratic republic to every other political form;

second, the ultimate reliance even of despotic and authoritarian regimes on mass consent; third, the primary political imperative of cohesiveness, organic unity in a state, stability and survival; fourth, the great role of leadership (what Machiavelli calls the role of the law-giver, but what we should today call leadership) in achieving this cohesiveness and survival; fifth, the imperative of military power in insuring survival and the need for putting it on a mass base (he felt that war was the health of the state); sixth, the use of a national religion for state purposes, and the choice of one not for its supernatural validity, but for its power as a myth in unifying the masses and cementing their morale (Machiavelli's count against Christianity, like that of Nietzsche after him, was that by glorifying humility and pacifism and the weaker virtues, it dulled the fighting edge of a state); seventh, the need in the conduct even of a democratic state for the will to survive, and therefore for ruthless instead of half-hearted measures when ruthless measures were necessary; eighth, the idea—later to be found in Vico and in our day in Spengler—of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations due to the decadence and corruption of the old and the reinvigoration of the new.

This is, of course, only a sampling of the vast riches to be found in *The Discourses*. It is not a single-themed, monolithic book, such as Marx or Mill wrote. It has a catholicity and vastness of resource which will make it yield different discoveries for every reader and on every reading.

This is not the place to discuss the themes I have mentioned. I want only to say that if *The Prince* is great because of its intensity, *The Discourses* are great because of their variety; if *The Prince* is great because it is polemical, *The Discourses* are great because they have balance; and if *The Prince* is great because it gives us the grammar of power for

a government, *The Discourses* are great because they give us the philosophy of organic unity not in a government but in a state, and the conditions under which alone a culture can survive.

4

"The authentic interpreter of Machiavelli," Lord Acton has written in his erudite preface to Burd's great edition of *The Prince*, "is the whole of later history." In the same essay he strings out a remarkable series of quotations from the great writers and statesmen of the last three or four centuries which show the impact that Machiavelli had on the European mind. The history of that impact may be called the history of Machiavellianism.

It is clear that one element in the denunciation of Machiavellianism was the use of that symbol as a weapon of the Counter-Reformation. Machiavelli was utterly secular in his thinking. And when the Church, in assuming the aggressive against the religious reformers, sought something that could be set up as a secular devil-symbol in contrast to the ethical teachings of religion, it easily found what it sought in Machiavelli's writings. At the same time also the same symbol could serve to brand with infamy the methods that were being used to set up and consolidate the new nation-states of Europe, the power of whose sovereigns was one of the great threats to church power. And so the Church statesmen who had at first accepted *The Prince*, then ignored it, finally decided to attack it. Under Leo, Clement, Paul III, it was tolerated. But under Paul IV, in 1557, a generation after the Florentine's death, Machiavelli was put on the Index. What is somewhat ironic about this is that the Church princes, like the secular princes, were among the principal followers of Machiavelli's precepts. As Lord Acton (himself a Catholic) points out, the arguments used

to excuse the massacres of the religious wars were drawn from Machiavelli.

There is another important element in the history of Machiavellianism—so far, at least, as the English-speaking secular world is concerned. Machiavelli entered our consciousness largely through the Elizabethan drama. Wyndham Lewis has written a provocative, although erratic, book with the title *The Lion and the Fox*: It takes its point of departure from a fact spelled out by scholars like Edward Meyer and more recently Mario Praz—that the figure of Machiavelli dominated the imagination of the Tudor dramatists. The meeting between Italian Renaissance culture and the Tudor mind contained an element of shock arising from novelty. The English were, as is true of all cultural borrowers, at once attracted and repelled by the Italians. Moreover, Tudor drama was enormously sensitive to world currents. The result was that not only were there, as Meyer has pointed out, some 400 direct references to Machiavelli in the Elizabethan literature; but the Machiavelli figure, whether directly or indirectly, dominates it as does no other. Iago was drawn from Machiavelli, as was Barabas. Webster, Massinger, Ford, Marston, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare—they were all fascinated by the image they constructed of subtle cunning, of treachery, of the gap between outward seeming and inward being, all of which they thought of as Machiavellianism. To the Tudor imagination, which has in turn so influenced our own, Machiavelli was the symbol that stood for the decadence, the corruption, the unfathomable depths of Renaissance Italy. It was probably due to the fusion of the influence of church and stage that Machiavelli became associated in the popular mind with the Devil himself. "Old Nick" became an epithet equally applicable to both.

It may therefore seem surprising that Tudor England had

scarcely read Machiavelli at all. *The Discourses* were not translated into English until 1636, *The Prince* until 1640. The Elizabethans got their knowledge of Machiavelli from a French book attacking him, Gentillet's *Anti-Machiavel*. And Gentillet gave just enough of Machiavelli to distort him, and not enough to make him either comprehensible or human. This should not surprise us. It is the essence of a symbol that its outlines should be shadowy. What has first been sifted through the intellect is unlikely to ensnare the imagination. Had the Elizabethans really read *The Discourses* and *The Prince*, they would no doubt have been more just to the author, but their drama would have suffered and one of its type figures would have had to be scrapped. By the time the translations were made, it was unfortunately—or shall we say fortunately?—too late to affect either their intelligence or their art. The symbol had become fixed.

I have spoken of various historical reasons why the Elizabethans should have responded to the Machiavelli symbol, and Wyncham Lewis adds the fascination which the diabolical holds for the Puritan genius in every age. Yet we come closer to the core of the truth when we remember that the Elizabethans had the same perverse and feverish preoccupation with the theme of death. And, I am inclined to guess, for much the same reason. It *unmarks* the human animal. But for this very reason Machiavelli became the subject of attack from still another source—the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century absolute monarchy. To be sure, we have a long roster of despots—benevolent and otherwise—who are reputed to have drunk in Machiavelli with their mothers' milk and were known as "Machiavellistiae." But we must remember, so black had Machiavelli's reputation become that if you wanted to hit at a monarch, you had

only to start a whispering campaign to the effect that he ruled according to Machiavelli's grammar. The supreme irony was that Frederick the Great of Prussia, while still a young man, wrote a refutation of Machiavelli. As Frederick's later career showed, Machiavelli had adumbrated the methods of the benevolent despots only too well. His offense had been only to unmask them, to lay bare to the world the mechanisms of power which were behind the authority of the ruler. Voltaire encouraged the young prince to write his treatise; but his comment on Frederick in his *Memoirs* is delicious:

If Machiavelli had had a prince for disciple, the first thing he would have recommended him to do would have been to write a book against Machiavellism.

But if Machiavelli was a butt and a tool in the Age of Reason, he came into his own in the nineteenth century in the age of new nationalism. Men rediscovered Machiavelli the liberal, Machiavelli the democrat, Machiavelli the nationalist patriot. In Germany, during and after the Napoleonic wars, the intellectuals rediscovered Machiavelli, and turned their fine gifts of scholarship toward him, with the characteristic result of a spate of Machiavelli studies. The leader was Fichte, who made an analysis of Machiavelli part of his famous *Address to the German Nation*; and Hegel, who following Machiavelli made a cult of the state, taught that "the course of world history stands outside of virtue, blame and justice." And in Italy Cavour and the leaders of the Risorgimento found in Machiavelli their ideal symbol. What both the Italians and the Germans sought in him was what they needed for their movements of national liberation: the stress on cohesiveness, the pursuit of the main chance, the prime virtue of political survival. The Germans

took from him the concept of *Stattlösung*—opportunism justified by reasons of state policy; and in the field of foreign affairs, *Realpolitik*.

In country after country the rediscovery of Machiavelli seems to have had an almost magical efficacy in stirring latent national and even reformist energies. To complete the history of Machiavellianism, I need only point out that for the recent collectivist movements as well he became an evocative figure. H. G. Wells, in what is one of his really first-rate political novels, *The New Machiavelli*, dreamed of a "strengthened and perfected state" that blends Machiavelli with English Fabian humanitarianism. Both Lenin and Mussolini did their work in the shadow of the Florentine. The "old Bolshevik" Kamenev published a volume of Machiavelli selections with a sympathetic Introduction under the Soviet regime. Some years later, when he was tried and convicted in the purge trials, the Public Prosecutor used his Machiavelli editing job against him. Mussolini also wrote an introductory essay to an edition of *The Prince*, and it was included in Volume IV of his *Collected Works*, although for a time he banned his own works from the national library. Rausching in his *Voice of Destruction*, which recounts his conversations with Hitler, asserts that Hitler ranked Machiavelli with Wagner as among the influences shaping his thought; and that he used to keep a copy of *The Prince* by his bedside.

5

It has become a truism to point out that Machiavelli is the father of power politics. Whether a truism or not, it is still true. Machiavelli, as ambassador and administrator, could not afford to do any wishful thinking. If he did, the penalty was swift and merciless—failure. Which may not

be a bad idea as a school for political theorists. But to say that he was the father of power politics may have curiously erroneous implications—as if we were to say that Harvey was the father of the circulation of the blood. Power politics existed before Machiavelli was ever heard of; it will exist long after his name is only a faint memory. What he did, like Harvey, was to recognize its existence and subject it to scientific study. And so his name has come to be associated with it.

To be sure, Machiavelli's role is not wholly innocent. His grammar of power brought a whole new world to consciousness. With one of Moliere's characters, the princes of Europe became aware that all their lives they had been talking prose. And the awareness led them to perfect their prose. Frederick, Richelieu, Napoleon, Bismarck, Clemenceau, Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, have gone to school to Machiavelli. But by bringing the world to this awareness Machiavelli did what every creative figure does. We might as well blame Shakespeare because, by creating Hamlet, he has intensified the agony of the indecisive and divided liberal.

Machiavelli has also been accused, and it is true, of being the father of the martial spirit, of propaganda techniques and of the totalitarian spirit. But here again he anticipated things latent in the very texture of society and the state. A reading of *The Discourses* should show that his thinking fathered many movements, democratic as well as dictatorial. The common meaning he has for democrats and dictators alike is that, whatever your ends, you must be clear-eyed and unsentimental in pursuit of them and you must rest your power ultimately on a cohesive principle.

May I venture a guess as to the reason why we still shudder slightly at Machiavelli's name? It is not only the tradition I have described. It is our recognition that the realities

he described *are* realities; that men, whether in politics, in business or in private life, do *not* act according to their professions of virtue; that leaders in every field seek power ruthlessly and hold on to it tenaciously; that the masses who are coerced in a dictatorship have to be wooed and duped in a democracy; that deceit and ruthlessness invariably crop up in every state; and that while the art of being ruled has always been a relatively easy one, the art of ruling ourselves is monstrously difficult. Machiavelli today confronts us with the major dilemma of how to adapt our democratic techniques and concepts to the demands of a world in which as never before naked power politics dominates the foreign field and determined oligarchies struggle for power internally. It is not an easy dilemma to resolve. And in a sense, just as the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century monarchs hated and feared Machiavelli because he had exposed their authority to the world, so today we hate and fear him because he has exposed our dilemma and made it visible to ourselves and the world.

Let us be clear about one thing: ideals and ethics are important in politics as norms, but they are scarcely effective as techniques. The successful statesman is an artist, concerned with nuances of public mood, approximations of operative motives, guesswork as to the tactics of his opponents, back-breaking work in unifying his own side by compromise and concession. Religious reformers have often succeeded in bringing public morale closer to some ethical norm; they have never succeeded as statesmen. Even in the theories of Savonarola in Florence, Cromwell and the Puritans in England, our own New England colonies, the men of God, when they came to power, learned to play the game of power. The only difference between them and others is that, since they had a certitude of having a pipeline to God, they

did not have to reckon at all with the uneasy factor of their conscience. The most destructive imperialisms of the world have been those of men who have elevated their preferences to the pinnacle of moral imperatives and who have then confidently proceeded to impose those imperatives on others.

Today, as in Machiavelli's day, our world has become a collection of principalities struggling for survival, maneuvering for position, fighting over spoils. The scale is bigger but the proportions are the same. The strong men have come forward in every state, using the rhetoric of mass interest and national glory to extend their power and entrench their class. The first law of internal policy is to hold on to power, of external policy it is to extend your imperialism. Like Machiavelli, we live in a time of the breaking of nations.

Let it be said that Machiavelli in his day blundered as we are doing in ours. He could not make up his mind whether what he wanted was a democratic Florence or a unified Italy. I think he must have felt, when he wrote *The Prince*, that democracy would somehow follow if unity was achieved. There are some today who feel the same way about the attempts to achieve world integration through establishing a Russian Century or an American Century. There are others who feel that no integration is worth the candle if democratic rights and human decencies are scrapped in the process. In Machiavelli's writing you will find both attitudes, but more often the first.

This raises sharply, of course, the interminable question of ends and means. Machiavelli would, I think, shrug his shoulders at the whole problem. He himself, he would say, was an observer of politics. And as such he would find it irrelevant to impose his own ethical patterns on the orientational flow of world history. It is for that very reason that Machiavellianism, after everything has been said about it,

fails to be an adequate philosophy for a way of life. Men are not only observers, not only participants; they are also valuing individuals. Without judgments life loses its hierarchical quality of being a choice between preferences. And losing that, it loses its savor.

Machiavelli sought to distinguish the realm of what ought to be and the realm of what is. He rejected the first for the second. But there is a third realm: the realm of what can be. It is in that realm that what one might call a humanist realism can lie. The measure of man is his ability to extend this sphere of the socially possible. We can start with our democratic values, and we can start also with Machiavelli's realism about tough-minded methods. To be realistic about methods in the politics of a democracy at home does not mean that you throw away all scruples, or accept the superior force of "reason of state," or embrace the police-state crushing of constitutional liberties. To be realistic about the massing of power abroad in the economic and ideological struggle for the support of men and women throughout the world does not mean that you abandon the struggle for peace and for a constitutional imperium that can grow into a world republic. We may yet find that an effective pursuit of democratic values is possible within the scope of a strong social-welfare state and an unsentimental realism about human motives.

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