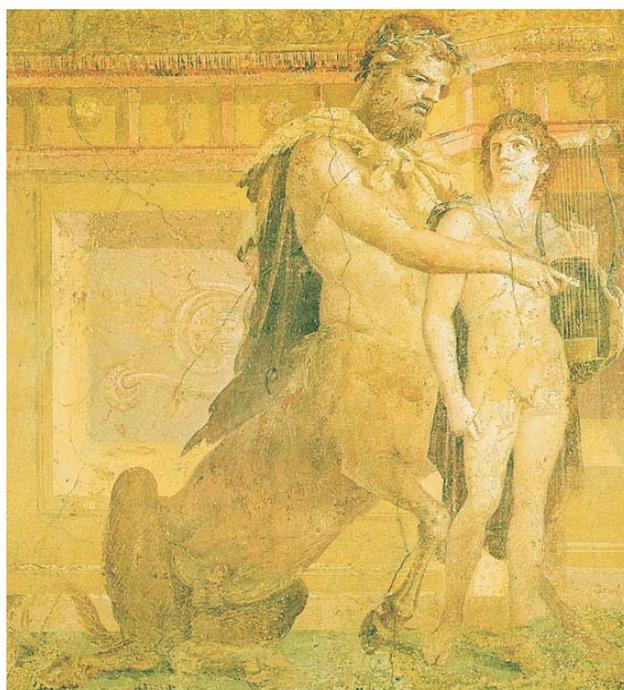


Paul-Erik Korvela

The Machiavellian Reformation

An Essay in Political Theory







ABSTRACT

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The Machiavellian Reformation. An Essay in Political Theory

Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä 2006, 171 p.

(Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research

ISSN 0075-4625; 290)

ISBN 951-39-2666-4

Diss.

The study explores Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469-1527) views on Christianity. The question of Machiavelli's relation to religion in general and to Christianity in particular has aroused much discussion. Most commonly he is seen as some sort of neo-Pagan aiming to paganise rather than secularise or reform Christianity. In previous research, his opposition to Christianity often has been assumed but seldom clarified. The view that Machiavelli was simply an advocate of paganism against Christianity is inaccurate.

Machiavelli criticised Christianity, but this does not mean that he was an anti-Christian or an anti-religious thinker. He thought that religion should be *used* like the ancients used it, but he does not demand that the religion in question should be the *same* as the ancients had. Thus, he was not attempting any kind of resurrection of paganism.

As is commonly known, Machiavelli harked back to ancient Rome and its practices. The same methods were not used in his time, he thought, because Christianity had already carved men into its liking and made them effeminate and contemplative rather than virtuous and active. But Machiavelli did not claim that it would be better for a society to get rid of religion altogether. Christianity contains some effective elements that were unavailable to paganism, and, when interpreted according to *virtù*, it, too, could allow virtuous action in Machiavelli's sense. Nevertheless, the idea that he aimed at some sort of reinterpretation or reform of Christianity is complicated, since it is hardly possible to interpret Christianity in such a way that it would exalt this life over the other. If he is considered as a reformer, then he was a very radical one, moving the aim of Christian life to temporal world and adjusting its virtues to serve the needs of the earthly community. But, nevertheless, this seems to be the case. Machiavelli was utterly critical towards the optimistic Christianity of his day, but like Luther and other reformers, he did not need a pagan alternative. A more pessimistic view of humans and society was already enshrined in the traditions of Christianity itself, especially in the Augustinian strand. But from these too Machiavelli departed by moving the aim of Christianity to proximate concerns. Machiavelli had very little enthusiasm to engage in theological debates – instead, he focused on the political consequences of Christianity. Machiavelli's alleged paganism is more like a rhetorical construction which shows how Christianity too could be politically more salutary.

Keywords: Niccolò Machiavelli, Christianity, Renaissance, political theory, reformation

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For financial support I wish to thank the Kone Foundation, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and the University of Jyväskylä. For intellectual support and general encouragement I would like to thank especially Professors Sakari Hänninen, Kari Palonen and Pekka Korhonen. From many others who have offered me advice and discussed Machiavelli's political theory with me I wish to name especially Docent Jussi Vähämäki. I also wish to thank the reviewers, Prof. Emer. Ilkka Heiskanen and Docent Kari Saastamoinen for their comments on the work, and Susanne Kalejaiye, who helped me with my English.

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1 INTRODUCTION: MACHIAVELLI AND RENAISSANCE PAGANISM

The question of Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469-1527) relation to religion in general and to Christianity in particular has aroused much discussion. There are scholars who claim that he was a sincere Christian in private life and constantly distressed by the fact that politics appears to operate on rules very different from the ones taught by Christ. Then there are those who claim that he was an atheist who aimed at devastating the whole of Christianity. Most commonly he is seen as some sort of neo-Pagan aiming to paganise rather than secularise or reform Christianity. In previous research, his opposition to Christianity often has been assumed but seldom clarified. What was he actually opposing, and what did he offer as an alternative? The view that Machiavelli was simply an advocate of paganism against Christianity is both inaccurate and erroneous. So is the view that Machiavelli was opposed to Christianity only because of the temporal power of the Church. What, then, was his new path, and what did he think of Christianity?

This study aims to explore Machiavelli's views on Christianity. Firstly, it is assumed that Machiavelli criticised Christianity, not any special sect of Christianity, nor any specific individuals. He was not criticising only the clergy or the Roman Catholic Church, but the whole philosophy of Christianity. His attack is directed towards "nostra religione", "educazione debole" or "questo modo di vivere" (*Discorsi*, II/2)¹ – that is to say, towards Christian education or Christian way of living in general. He does not specify his attack better than that. Despite the fact that Machiavelli probably disagreed with some sects on various contemporary political questions - the *Frateschi*, for example, seemed to undermine the *governo largo* type of republicanism Machiavelli was advocating

¹ The references to Machiavelli's works include the book and the chapter (as in *Discorsi* I/12) or just the book (as in *Arte della guerra*, IV) or just the chapter (as in *Il Principe*, chap. XVIII), so that it is relatively easy to locate the passages, regardless of the edition or the translation. The translations usually follow "The Chief Works and Others", III vols., Duke University Press 1989, translated by Allan Gilbert.

with their apocalyptic visions - his critique of Christianity can not be reduced to a criticism of the *Frateschi*, or any other sect.

Secondly, it is assumed that there is at least some level of coherence in the thought of Machiavelli in respect to his views on Christianity. Those familiar with the writings of Machiavelli know well that his thinking is not systematic. His statements are often paradoxical and, more than once, he distorts facts in order to dramatise his point. The un-systematic character may stem from the fact that Machiavelli's style of writing is rhetorical and aims to provoke action. But I would like to suggest that there nevertheless might be a sense in which he is coherent, namely in his critique of Christianity. If he occasionally speaks of the "true religion" that has showed the truth and the true way, we can quite legitimately interpret it as irony². Furthermore, one little text with a seemingly Christian tone (namely the *Esortazione alla penitenza*), interpreted by some scholars as forming the "climax" of Machiavelli's Christian thought, does not resolve his attitude towards Christianity. The context of this text can explain the Christian tone, while in closer examination the whole text seems to be rather unorthodox from the Christian point of view (cf. Korvela 2004). This, however, does not make him an atheist or a pagan.

This study focuses on Machiavelli's views on Christianity. Hence, it is of secondary importance whether Machiavelli's views are historically correct or not. Was Christianity in Renaissance Florence really the kind Machiavelli claims it was, is a question that need not detain us here. Machiavelli often exaggerated his views and distorted facts in order to dramatise his arguments, and he most likely did so in regard to religion as well. He argued perhaps unduly that Christianity is primarily a religion of *ozio*, but to prove that he is right or wrong in this and similar statements is not our task in this study. In other words, this study is about Machiavelli's views of Christianity, not about historical Christianity. He had, of course, influences from actual Christianity: when he singled out humility as the chief Christian virtue, he was probably greatly influenced by contemporary trends in ascetical theology. Parel (1992, 54) notes that Savonarola's writings on humility, in which he restated St. Bernard's famous Twelve Steps in humility, could easily have come to Machiavelli's attention. Nevertheless, Machiavelli seldom specifies his criticism of Christianity, seldom speaks openly against certain individuals or sects.

During the Renaissance, pre-Reformation Christianity was not one clearly defined set of beliefs. Instead, there were numerous sects and heresies that emphasised different things from the general doctrine of Christianity. The concept of the Church in the singular carries overtones of a unified and rigid body, in organization and belief. Although the church proclaimed itself 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic', it embraced a wide and constantly changing variety of religious and spiritual standpoints. United by the broadly shared definitions of the faith under the supremacy of the Popes, the actuality of religion differed considerably from region to region, and even within regions,

² Forte (2000) holds a similar view and warns us not to isolate Machiavelli's statements from the context.

between different bodies, perhaps right down to the atomized spirituality of the individual Christian (cf. Swanson 2000, 9). I do not intend to go deeper with this theme because it seems to me that Machiavelli was not criticising any special sect of Christianity but what he thought of as the very essence of that religion. It is, of course, true that he saw for example the rise and blossoming of Savonarola's theocracy³, which ended at the stake near Palazzo Vecchio in 1498. Young Niccolò was probably watching the pyre and the whole process might have shaped his view of Christianity or religion in general, but still, his critique of Christianity cannot be reduced to a criticism of the supporters of that curious Dominican. His rejection of Christianity is more fundamental.

Machiavelli thought that politics (or *arte dello stato*) – when viewed from within the confines of a Christian *Weltanschauung* – is by nature always immoral. Hence, he does not separate politics and morality, but politics and Christian morality. As is commonly known, Machiavelli harked back to ancient Rome and its practices. The same methods were not used in his time, he thought, because Christianity had already carved men into its liking and made them effeminate and contemplative rather than virtuous and active. Machiavelli did not claim that it would be better for a society to get rid of religion altogether. Instead, he claimed that Christianity happens to be rather unsuited for a well-ordered state. Christianity contains some effective elements that were unavailable to paganism, and, when interpreted according to *virtù*, it, too, could allow virtuous action in Machiavelli's sense. Nevertheless, the idea that he aimed at some sort of reinterpretation or reform of Christianity is complicated, since it is hardly possible to interpret Christianity in such a way that it would exalt this life over the other. If he is considered as a reformer, then he was a very radical one, moving the aim of Christian life to temporal world and adjusting its virtues to serve the needs of the earthly community. But, as we shall see, this seems to be the case. Machiavelli was utterly critical towards the Christianity of his day, but like Luther and other reformers, he did not need a pagan alternative. A more pessimistic view of humans and society was already enshrined in the traditions of Christianity itself. But from these too Machiavelli departed by moving the aim of Christianity to proximate concerns. Machiavelli's alleged paganism is more like a rhetorical construction which shows how Christianity too could be effectively used.

When I say that Machiavelli criticised Christianity I do not mean that he was an anti-Christian or an anti-religious thinker. The pressing *ceterum censeo* against Christianity that is evident in the writings of Nietzsche is absent in Machiavelli. Machiavelli thought that the present religion was badly

³ Savonarola started preaching from the pulpit of San Marco in 1489. He preached on the apocalypse, on the corruption of the clergy, on the greed of the wealthy, on vices like homosexuality, on tyranny etc. He also made prophecies according to which the Church would soon be scourged and reformed and Italy and Florence would receive punishment for their sins. Machiavelli always spoke of Savonarola with certain reverence, but he probably never was one of his supporters. He agreed with the friar on most of the subjects he spoke of, but he surely did not agree with the remedies he was offering – fasting, praying and abstaining from carnal pleasures, gaming, dancing etc.

interpreted and that there were better ways available for arranging religious appeals in a society. He thought that religion should be *used* like the ancients used it, but he does not demand that the religion in question should be the *same* as the ancients had. Thus, he was not attempting any kind of resurrection of paganism. His analysis of the Roman religion is focused on the way the Romans used religion, rather than the contents of that religion.

It can not be claimed that Machiavelli would have wanted to eradicate religion altogether. His own words in *Il Principe* tell the opposite:

“Debbe adunque uno principe avere gran cura che non gli esca mai di bocca cosa che non sia piena delle soprascritte cinque qualità; e paia, a udirlo e vederlo, tutto pietà, tutto fede, tutto integrità, tutto umanità, tutto religione: e non è cosa più necessaria a parere di avere, che questa ultima qualità” (*Il Principe*, XVIII).

Religion is very necessary in making citizens obedient and virtuous, and for the ruler too it is necessary to seem religious. From every viewpoint religion is necessary and Machavelli never argued that religion should be eradicated altogether.

Machiavelli considered the arts of politics, understood as the ruling of states, and warfare as analogous, and both of them, he thought, was corrupted by Christian mildness. Consider the following passages. Firstly, the profession of war necessarily demands the employment of dishonest means: “for he who practices it [i.e. war] will never be judged to be good, as to gain some usefulness from it at any time he must be rapacious, deceitful, violent, and have many qualities, which of necessity, do not make him good” (*Arte della Guerra*, I). Secondly, the prince “ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline” (*Il Principe*, XIV). In general, as Lukes (2004) has argued, Machiavelli so thoroughly integrates military and civil concerns that they become indistinguishable. Hence, we have a syllogism:

A: The profession of war requires the employment of dishonest means

B: Military and civil concerns (i.e. politics) are indistinguishable

C: The profession of politics requires the employment of dishonest means

As Lukes (2004, 1092) notes, we may too easily dismiss or devalue the statements regarding the importance of war as exaggerations of a dilettante suffering romantic delusions. And so by marginalizing Machiavelli’s military recommendations we can continue to receive *The Prince*, for instance, as a less daunting work of “political” theory. However, the fact remains that for Machiavelli civil and martial abilities are practically the same and good laws cannot exist without the military:

“Ma se si considerassono gli antichi ordini, non si troverebbono cose più unite più conformi e che, di necessità, tanto l’una amasse l’altra, quanto queste, perché tutte

l'arti che si ordinano in una civiltà per cagione del bene comune degli uomini, tutti gli ordini fatti in quella per vivere con timore delle leggi e d'Iddio, sarebbero vani, se non fussono preparate le difese loro; le quali, bene ordinate mantengono quegli, ancora che non bene ordinati. E così, per il contrario, i buoni ordini, senza il militare aiuto, non altrimenti si disordinano che l'abitazioni d'uno superbo e regale palazzo, ancora che ornate di gemme e d'oro, quando, senza essere coperte, non avessono cosa che dalla pioggia le difendesse" (*Arte della Guerra*, proemio)

Hence, even if we devaluate Machiavelli's comments on warfare and consider him a dilettante in this respect, we must remember the importance he himself laid on military matters. The two spheres of communal life are inseparable, and it is not possible to remain honest in either one. Honest includes both the Ciceronian ideal and the Christian version.

1.1 The Alleged Paganism of Machiavelli Reconsidered

Machiavelli, certainly, is a classic. But it is occasionally good to forget that he is so, in order to say something interesting about his texts. We should literally forget the canonical picture of the textbooks, in which the "Italian statesman and philosopher" is somehow elevated to a status of a classic in political science. First of all, as Palonen (1999a, 6) has noted of Max Weber, the process of canonization often counts a person as a classic of a discipline which did not exist in that time. This somehow turns that classical author into a forerunner as opposed to a real participant in the history of that discipline. By this "evolutionary" narrative of the discipline, the thoughts of a classic are considered elementary and simple in relation to later thinkers⁴. Furthermore, a preliminary view on the classic's life and works, whether a raw textbook variant or a richer biographical variant, rather prevents than promotes a close and attentive reading of the texts written by the classic (Palonen 1999b, 40). The earlier readings of Machiavelli's texts contribute not only to the figure of Machiavelli but also to the construction of the texts themselves. The texts have been canonized too in a rather questionable manner, and the alleged motives of the author somehow lurk behind the whole interpretation of a text. Another way to remain inside the canonized picture of Machiavelli is to say that he was a typical Renaissance man. A strict contextualization can lead to a reading of Machiavelli in which his allusions to contemporary events and persons appear as the main point. Machiavelli, like many other nonpareil authors, was not only one of his contemporaries, but also something more.

The view of Machiavelli as a neo-Pagan aiming to paganise rather than to secularise political theory still holds sway. In a recent article, Machiavelli's relation to paganism and Christianity is put as follows: "As everyone knows, he

⁴ For example Montesquieu is often seen as the "corrector" or "moderator" of Machiavelli's ideas, which argument also claims that Machiavelli's ideas would be in need of correcting, that they would be older and thus inferior, waiting to be superseded by later thinkers.

admired the ancient Romans and consciously adopted, and adapted, their heroic ideals, their single-minded devotion to the *patria*, and their pragmatic contempt for abstract theorizing. Given that all of these ideas and attitudes had fallen out of favour with the rise of Christianity and its alternative value-system, his nostalgia for the past does not diminish his credentials as an intellectual revolutionary. Even his humanist predecessors, who despised medieval 'darkness' and embraced the secular heritage of Rome, never succeeded in freeing themselves from Christian dogma. Although he was not without pedigree, Machiavelli is generally (and rightly) reckoned to have created something new. Paradoxically, his unabashed pagan revivalism gave birth to a distinctively modern approach to political reality – one that is indelibly associated with his name. The influence of this approach can be discussed under three headings: hostility to metaphysics; political realism; and a quest for spiritual renewal – a desire, that is, to end present corruption and recreate the (real or imagined) glories of the past." (Femia 2004, 5-6). Hence, even Machiavelli's alleged 'modernity' is often seen as a result of his "unabashed pagan revivalism". Connected to this is also the more general view of the Renaissance as a revival of paganism.

In general, the Renaissance was a thoroughly Christian era. The view, held by earlier scholars, according to which the Renaissance was thoroughly pagan, is for the most part a myth⁵. The whole project began as a rebirth of man, not of antiquity. Indeed, the artistic and literary productions of the period reveal no animosity towards Christianity. On the contrary, most of the artists were inspired by religious motives, and when pagan themes did enter the paintings, the result was a strange mixture of Christian and pagan themes. "While Florentines were secularizing and de-Christianizing the discursive realm of their civic politics in the early Quattrocento, they were simultaneously sacralizing and re-Christianizing their built civic environment. This is not to resurrect long discredited caricatures of the humanists as pagans, or to reposit a fundamental conflict (not even updated as "culture wars") between secularizing humanists and Christian reactionaries. Humanists from Petrarch onward were deeply Augustinian in their anthropology and attacked ecclesiastics not for their religion but for their lack of it" (Peterson 2002, 175). The humanistic reform of education surely facilitated the separation of a classical vision of humanity from its scholastic colouring, but in general it remained compatible with the Christian views of the time. The interest in pagan literary productions was justified with the rather obscure notion of *theologia poetarum* or *prisca theologiae*, which allowed the recognition of Christian themes from pre-Christian authors. The practice dates back to the earliest Church Fathers who wanted to show the close conformity between ancient authors and the Christian doctrine. Certain texts of the pre-Socratic philosophers, Sibylline prophecies etc. appear in company with Plato, whose religious opinions are thought to derive from them. The practice greatly increased during the

⁵ There were "probably few real atheists and barely a few pantheists during the Renaissance", as Kristeller (1979, 67) has noted

Renaissance, when the need to integrate newly discovered Platonism into Christianity became evident. Moreover, the movement known as Renaissance humanism did not come to an end with Catholic Reformation, the Protestant Reformation or the Counter-Reformation. It could not be condemned as heresy or marginalised precisely because it was not a theology. The majority of Italian humanists were not theologians and most of them did not concern themselves with strictly theological issues, even though some of them applied the tools of classical scholarship to Christian texts and thus preceded the Reformers.

The myth that there was a revival of paganism, supposedly the inevitable result of the study of antiquity, is often deduced from the attacks on scholasticism. Attacking scholasticism is, however, not the same as attacking Christianity. That there was anticlericalism during the Renaissance is undeniable, but this was true also of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The difference is not one of degree or kind, but merely one of form and expression (cf. Ullmann 1977, 3). The humanists were able to present their views more subtly than the anti-Gregorians or the Ghibellines or any heretics, and their works are much better preserved. What would have been more effective would have been either silence, a polemical ignorance of Christianity, or full frontal assault (ibid.). It is only with Machiavelli that we find the ultimate concerns of Christianity almost totally ignored. The real core of Renaissance paganism, if it must be called paganism, is "the steady and irresistible growth of nonreligious intellectual interests which were not so much opposed to the content of religious doctrine as competing with it for individual and public attention" (Kristeller 1979, 67). This was, of course, nothing new, but during the Renaissance nonreligious thought attained a kind of equilibrium with religious thought. Christian convictions were either retained or transformed, but never really challenged (ibid.). The interest in secular topics did not mean a turn away from religion, as if the energy which was devoted to secular matters was necessarily denied to religion. The achievement of humanism was the desire and the demand for a style of religion or a spirituality that took more account of individuality and of life in the world around us (cf. Bireley 1999, 12-13)⁶.

The charge of paganism was made against the humanists by some theologians of their own time, and it has been repeated ever since. The use of pagan mythology in poetry and prose was, however, intended not to replace Christian imagery but to supplement it. It served as a literary ornament, and where more serious intentions were involved, its use was justified by allegory. The humanist attitude towards pagan learning was curiously similar to that of the Church Fathers, but with one important difference: the Church Fathers

⁶ The proper relation between reason and faith was also discussed. The humanists were, for the most part, sincere Christians and endorsed the wedding of reason and faith. When Aquinas "baptized" Aristotelian philosophy, reason was made the handmaiden of faith. Not surprisingly, men like Dante were deeply interested in the question of the proper relation between the two. As the humanistic movement of the Renaissance developed, it becomes increasingly evident that it was reason that played the dominant role (Haydn 1950, xii). Ultimately the trend moved toward the rational or natural theology of the seventeenth century.

tended to fit Christianity into the ancient modes of thought known to their contemporaries, whereas the humanists wanted to adapt classical ideas to a previously accepted Christian conceptions (Kristeller 1990, 40). When the humanists defended the reading of pagan literature against the theological critics of their time, they frequently alluded to the example of the Church Fathers.

It is important to note that criticising Christianity does not necessarily mean that one would favour paganism. Machiavelli, certainly, was not a pagan. His anthropology and cosmology are very different from the classical conceptions. Machiavelli's view of men as naturally inclined towards evil, for example, is a conception unknown to classical antiquity. This conception was also lacking from the medieval theory of bodily humours and its Renaissance versions. The nearest parallel to Machiavelli's anthropology is to be found in Manichaeism and in its Christian counterpart, the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, as Qviller (1996) has argued⁷. These were, of course, products of Late Antiquity, but they gained currency during the Renaissance because they challenged the optimistic Thomist version of Catholicism, which had led to a relatively optimistic view of human nature and the cosmos. When Machiavelli challenged the prevailing understanding, based on the rather dubious synthesis of Aristotelianism and Christianity, of man as an *animal sociale*, he was not resurrecting pagan conceptions, but remained within the bounds of the more pessimistic strand of Christianity.

Machiavelli's project to take a path as yet un-trodden by anybody, a path comparable to the efforts of those who sail unknown waters (*Discorsi*, preface)⁸, is a curious one. What was his new path? It could not have been what he said it was (i.e. return to the ancients in political matters), since this path was already trodden by many humanists of previous generations⁹. Colluccio Salutati,

⁷ "In the political theories of Antiquity there was general agreement that friendship and justice were the twin foundations of social and political life. If we ask what Machiavelli has adopted from the anthropology and sociology of the ancient world, the reply is 'nothing'" (Qviller 1996, 329). It is, indeed, Machiavelli instead of Hobbes who re-introduces this anti-Aristotelian tenet into political theory.

⁸ "Ancora che, per la invida natura degli uomini, sia sempre suto non altrimenti pericoloso trovare modi ed ordini nuovi, che si fusse cercare acque e terre incognite, per essere quelli più pronti a biasimare che a laudare le azioni d'altri; nondimanco, spinto da quel naturale desiderio che fu sempre in me di operare, senza alcuno rispetto, quelle cose che io credea rechino comune beneficio a ciascuno, ho deliberato entrare per una via, la quale, non essendo suta ancora da alcuno trita, se la mi arrecherà fastidio e difficoltà, mi potrebbe ancora arrecare premio, mediante quelli che umanamente di queste mie fatiche il fine considerassino".

⁹ Three themes appear most prominently in the humanistic treatises on politics (cf. Gilbert 1965, 89-91). Firstly, they were concerned with the ethical norms for social behaviour and aimed to establish that the practice and cultivation of cardinal virtues will accrue advantages to everyone. Secondly, they wrote imitations of classical political utopias and tried to find the best monarchy or the best republic. Thirdly the type, also adopted from classical pattern, was the panegyric for city-states, which often served the purpose of propaganda. Machiavelli departed from all of these concerns. The Renaissance witnessed the (re)birth of secular historiography. During the Middle Ages all history was sacred history, *historia sacra*. In other words, there was no separation between the profane and the sacred. When the profane came to be

Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini, for instance, all exhorted the emulation of the political life of the ancients in their works. These are also works that Machiavelli was surely familiar with, since he used them as sources when writing his *Istorie fiorentine*. The crucial question is *which antiquity* he held in esteem.

According to Fischer (2000, 184-185) the humanists took the moralizing aspects of the ancient works to be their true message, whereas Machiavelli was the first to claim that, between the lines, the ancients had taught that political good rests on evil means. Whereas “the ancients maintained the classical belief that princes could and should uphold such virtues as justice, liberality, charity, and faith, Machiavelli advised the fashion to enter into the corresponding vices; whereas the humanists conceived republics as communities that rest on concord and make the citizens virtuous, Machiavelli described them as war machines propelled by domestic conflicts of interest. To understand that this was the real message of the ancients is thus to have ‘true knowledge of histories’, according to Machiavelli”.

recognised as a separate realm of human experience, and when the humanists turned for models of historical writing to works composed in an age when the realm of the sacred was subordinate to the profane, all history became instead profane history (cf. Cochrane 1981, 445). What little remained of *historia sacra* thereafter was confined to those matters that even the humanists recognised as solely religious. New secular historiography was concentrated on the city-state and took the form of panegyric. Leonardo Bruni’s *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis* (1404), one of the most famous examples, is patterned on the panegyric of Athens by Aristides. Although an Aretine by birth, Bruni looked upon Florence as a model commonwealth. So strong was his admiration that the book turned patriotism into an ideology. Bruni, as well as his friend and follower Poggio Bracciolini, endowed a collective person, “the Florentines”, with a constancy of purpose and ideology that the brief tenure of the magistrates could never have permitted. Actions that were often the result of personal ambitions of single men or groups were frequently attributed to the whole populace of Florence. Bracciolini avoided references to anything polemical and continued Bruni’s style of attributing all political decisions to the “Florentines”, even after the rise of Cosimo de’ Medici, whom he mentioned only once in his *Historiae Florentini Populi*, and then only as an ambassador to Venice (*ibid.*, 29). Bruni overlooked the internal discords of Florence even to the extent that he attributed those signs of dissension he could not avoid to external interference in domestic affairs. Machiavelli was openly opposed to this kind of practice of history. For Machiavelli, like for Dante, Florence was the worst example on earth to be imitated because of her violent factionalism, the cause of the instability of her politics. Dante’s *Inferno* is full of Florentines from the elite of great families, and Machiavelli’s Belfagor sets out from Hell to Florence to see if life there is really worse than it is in Hell. The disastrous effects of factions were well-known in Florentine political thought, even though historians tried to ignore them. Florentine Dominican Remigio dei Girolami is highly interesting in this respect. Remigio was the first properly educated student of classical philosophy (Brunetto Latini was a dilettante who hardly deserves the title) who attempted to apply the thoughts of Aristotle and Cicero to the political problems of Florence (cf. Holmes 1986, 84). His two treatises, *De Bono Communi* and *De Bono Pacis*, were probably composed in the aftermath of Florentine revolution of 1301. In both of these works, Remigio turns to ancient authors for arguments that would show his fellow-Florentines they were conducting politics in the wrong fashion. The remedy that would heal the wounds of Florence was to be found from Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*: the good of the whole community is more important than any private interest.

But Machiavelli's reading of the ancients was largely wrong, as Fischer (ibid., 185) correctly notes. The ancients had ultimately been more eager to exhort virtuous life in ethical community than to counsel men to "enter evil" in Machiavelli's sense. True, there was a strand of Greek thought that exalted glorious violence and the sacrifice of human beings to the city, namely the heroic ethos of Homer and the agonistic view of sophists like Thrasymachus and Callicles: but they did so in order to refute them and exhort men to act morally instead. Aristotle offered his advice to tyrants but supposedly his aim was not to help them subjugate neighbouring states and to oppress citizens. According to Fischer, "Machiavelli undoubtedly sensed this ruthless side current of the classical tradition, and - being ignorant of its separateness and inclining to it from his own experience - mistook it for covertly expressed truth".

Hence, Machiavelli's peculiar reading of the classics made him the harbinger of modernity: "He intended to return his contemporaries to the political ideas and practices of the ancients, whom he thought to have understood correctly for the first time; but since his understanding was actually very different from what classical thinkers had always maintained, Machiavelli thereby created a fresh vision of political life, which propelled the West toward modernity" (ibid.). Now it seems that Machiavelli paradoxically paved the way for modernity by returning to the ancients. Curiously enough, he returned to the "wrong" antiquity and thus ended up with a fresh vision of political life. But do we have to posit ignorance or a mistake to explain Machiavelli's views? Perhaps, if he had wanted to emphasise this side-current in the political thought of the ancients, he would have said this. He often explains his projects in prefaces and compares himself to contemporaries. But he never says that this is his "new path". He never justifies his counsels to tyrants by referring to the example of Aristotle. Neither is there any mention of Homer in his works. Another question is whether it would have been possible to say in a preface what he wanted to say.

When we discuss Machiavelli's critique of Christianity we should also bear in mind that it is during the Renaissance that religion becomes the object of thought in the strong sense. Many have stressed the religious *context* of Renaissance thought, but that context itself began for some to be the *object* of thought (cf. Preus 1979). The study of religion, distinct from theology, produced an outlook that treats religion as an object of historical, rational, or empirical inquiry. Most significantly, with Machiavelli at the latest, religion becomes the object of political inquiry. Machiavelli detached himself from Christianity in order to observe it as an object of political inquiry. This was, in a sense, a revolution in the history of ideas. "The reality upon which Machiavelli focused", writes Preus, "was not necessarily the same reality upon which the believer focused, because his frame of reference was not the same. And Machiavelli chose to evaluate religion using norms in no sense intrinsic to religious systems generally, and even antagonistic to the values of Christian

believers as he saw them" (ibid., 175). In Christianity, Machiavelli saw *a* religion, not *the* religion.

In a revolutionary manner, Machiavelli repudiates the prevailing Christian understanding that political life is subordinate to eternity. "Where the Christian tradition saw everything that occurs in time as tainted with original sin, and where the Platonist tradition saw everything that is not understood as participating in Being or unchanging form as merely occurring in the world of flux, *doxa* and illusion, Machiavelli insists on the possibilities of greatness in time, a greatness that is not in need of completion by either philosophy or grace" (Walker 1993, 39-40). Instead, to achieve greatness, politics must respond to the temporal contingency of life in this world and to the particular context of the action. In Machiavelli's view, this greatness is achieved not by being virtuous in the Aristotelian or in the Christian sense, but by changing the character according to times. Since times are changing, it is not possible to be successful with a fixed character so to say. If one always attempts to be virtuous, this will bring ruin, but what Machiavelli wants to say is that one cannot always remain the same, cling desperately to one mode of action. This inability to act according to times and necessities brings ruin, not the virtues themselves. His *virtù* denotes precisely the moral flexibility of the action, the ability to abandon principles when necessary.

The question of immortality played an important, even a decisive, role in the Renaissance thought. The quest for immortal fame, fame that would outlast the limited duration of human life, was a common goal for the pagans of the classical antiquity. However, Christianity had something better to offer. Christianity began by infecting the idea of permanence through memory with the germ of futility and then offered, in its stead, the promise of redemption from death. Remembrance could only appear tawdry when compared to a life everlasting. According to Smith, it was this replacement of immortality in time with an immortality beyond time which underlay the "providential" coup of Christianity over the ancient world (Smith 1985, 44). Moreover, Christianity's assault on the culture of fame and glory was even more devastating. If Christian eschatology taught the futility of an immortality founded on human things, the Christian God seemed by his very omnipotence and omniscience - qualities which pagan deities lacked - to sap and degrade all human power and effort. According to Smith, the power of Christianity lay in its promise of mastery over death (ibid., 46). It took advantage of one of the fundamental fears of human beings, namely that of oblivion, of having left without a trace, but unlike ancient practice, which sought to transform the fear of death and direct it to politically salutary ends, Christianity sought felicity through its conquest and replacement with the law of love.

Against this view, Machiavelli argues for political immortality. In his view, statecraft "is not for those whose virtues do not exceed those of their fellows, in whom is not uncommonly prominent the gifts of *long* foresight, readiness for the unexpected turn of events as well as to recognize history in them. To display these qualities in the conduct of public affairs is to secure a

fame which will outlast your own life - the only immortality available to creatures of time" (Orr 1972, 208). Machiavelli's version of Christianity would focus on this world in stead of imposing conflictual demands on the individual.

Machiavelli's universe was no longer that of the scholastics. With Machiavelli, it has lost the symmetrical and rational order that the scholastics had conferred upon it. His universe is no longer ordained by the will of Providence. If there is an organising power, it is the capricious *Fortuna*. In contrasting the Christian imagery Machiavelli made a shift from plural to singular and from singular to plural. For Machiavelli, the human ability to control the events of history was subsumed in the image of *virtù*, not the plural *virtutes* of Christianity. The cardinal virtues of Christianity had to give way for the pagan crystallisation of manliness and civic and martial ability. But whereas for the Christian tradition the supernatural power opposing and guiding action in the world was singular, Machiavelli's *Fortuna* encompasses a variety of related concepts. For Dante, fortune is purely an arm of divine intentionality known as Providence. In his world, chance is merely an appearance and ability of any kind may finally be merely a charismatic event, generated or negated by grace (Mazzeo 1970, 44). For Machiavelli, on the other hand, around the image of fortune there clustered a host of impersonal agencies effective in the human experience: fate, blind chance, logic of history, the malignity or benignity of planets, and so on. Medieval Christianity was based on the notion that sin lay in attaching oneself to this life, whereas virtue lay in the negation of the worldly life. The Christian attitude, where everything must be squared with the will of the Providence, leads to resignation, whereas Machiavelli's perspective leaves the door open for action.

"Machiavelli is no Christian heretic; he is the first of the post-Christian philosophers" (Kristol 1961, 145). Machiavelli is post-Christian, not pre-Christian. Since he lived during the Renaissance, we are tempted to conclude that he attempted to resurrect paganism. Machiavelli's writings are, however, of different type compared to those of the ancient authors. The ancients had implied that man could be superior to his fate in so far as he faced it with nobility of character, courage and grace. Their writings breathe a *pietas* before the cosmic condition of human race, whereas Machiavelli writes with the sardonic iciness of inhuman fate itself (*ibid.*). Machiavelli is the first of the nihilists, not the last of the pagans. If Machiavelli speaks of *Fortuna* instead of God, this surely does not make him a pagan as *Fortuna's* role in human affairs was a constant theme in mediaeval literature and especially in the Boethian tradition.

Truly, Machiavelli's writings differ essentially from those of classical morality. As many have noted, his writings often are in direct opposition to the views of the Stoics, especially those of Cicero. Constancy, the ancient and classical virtue of steadfastness in the face of changing fortune no longer seems to be held in esteem, as Fleisher (1966, 365) has noted. Machiavelli's truly prudent prince would understand the times and events and accommodate his ways to them, and would consequently always enjoy good fortune. Thus

Machiavelli's ideal political actor is very different from the Stoic sage and from the Christian believer, who humbly waits for what fortune brings and accepts it without much scrutiny. But as adaptation to times is often difficult, even the prudent man sometimes loses. No matter how prudent men may be, they cannot control times and circumstances. Machiavelli, however, refused to build any philosophy of consolation, for there are no compensations for the losses of this world in the hereafter, or in the internal peace of mind. Thus, the only way available for the loser is to endeavour to recoup his good fortune through virtuous action.

Pocock (1975, 156-158) reads Machiavelli's *Il Principe* as a typology of innovators and their relations with *Fortuna* (the confrontation of citizenship itself with *Fortuna* is a topic reserved for the *Discorsi*). If politics is thought of as the art of dealing with the contingent event, it is the art of dealing with *Fortuna* as the force directing such events and thus symbolising pure, uncontrolled contingency. In proportion, as the political system ceases to be universal and is seen as particular, it becomes difficult for it to do this. The republic can prevail over *Fortuna* only by integrating its citizens in a self-sufficient *universitas*, but this in turn depends on the freely participating and morally assenting citizen. The decay of citizenship leads to the decline of the republic and the ascendancy of *Fortuna*, especially when this is brought about by innovation, through an uncontrolled act having uncontrolled consequences in time. In Pocock's view, Machiavelli's treatment of the "new prince", the ruler as an innovator, therefore isolates him from the desires of the *ottimati* and others to continue acting as citizens, and considers the new prince and those he rules as acting solely in their relations with *Fortuna*.

As Pocock (1975, 156-158) correctly notes, the problem *Fortuna* poses is primarily a problem in virtue. In the very influential Boethian tradition *virtus* was that by which the good man imposed form on his *Fortuna*. Renaissance civic humanists, who identified the good man with the citizen, politicised virtue and rendered it dependent on the virtue of others. If *virtus* could only exist where more or less equal citizens associated in pursuit of a *res publica*, then the *politeia* or constitution - Aristotle's functionally differentiated structure of participation - became practically identical with virtue itself. If the good man could practice his virtue only within a frame of citizenship, then the collapse of such a frame, whether through violent innovation or through the creeping dependence of some upon others, Pocock argues, corrupted the virtue of the powerful as well as the powerless. The tyrant could not be a good man simply because he had no fellow citizens. But at this point, the ability of the republic to sustain itself against internal and external shocks became identical with *virtus* as the Roman antithesis to *Fortuna*. The virtue of the citizens was grounded in the stability of the *politeia*, and vice versa. Politically and morally, then, the *vivere civile* was the only defence against the ascendancy of *Fortuna* and the necessary prerequisite of virtue in the individual. What Machiavelli is doing, according to Pocock, in the most notorious passages of *Il Principe*, is reverting to the formal implementation of the Roman definition and asking whether there is

any *virtù* by which the innovator, self-isolated from moral society, can impose form upon his *Fortuna* and whether there will be any moral quality in such a *virtù* or in the political consequences which can be imagined as flowing from its exercise.

When he isolated his founders of republics, successful generals and new princes from the morality of the common man, Machiavelli broke the age-old connection between statecraft and soul-craft. Henceforth, as Wolin (1961, 237) has noted, it would be increasingly taken for granted that while the cultivation of souls and personalities might be a proper end of man, it did not provide the focus of political action. In a sense, for Machiavelli politics has become external to its participants. He focused on the external effects of political action and said very little about the promotion of man's interior life. Unlike Plato and his successors, he saw no connection between the correct order in the soul and correct order in the society. While many claimed that the good rhetorician or good statesman must of necessity be also a good man, Machiavelli seemed to argue the opposite. This view challenges not only the opinions of the ancient authors but also, or even primarily, the Christian opinion.

Plato and his successors had been able to suppress the archaic conception that justice is doing good to friends and harm to enemies, but Machiavelli does not assume any natural law or any Platonic idea of justice. Neither does he believe that justice has natural basis in natural reason or that it produces order in the soul. It deals, in other words, only with externals. In his view, good laws channel men's passions to politically salutary ends, but they do not tame or change those passions. Whereas the Stoics had argued that the truly virtuous man is free from the effects of fortune because it only deals with externals, and whereas the Christians had asserted that only the body is subject to operations of chance, Machiavelli applied the dichotomy of *fortuna-virtù* or chance and ability to public rather than private life (Mazzeo 1964, 93). Unlike many of his contemporaries who toyed with similar ideas, Machiavelli gave political actors a fifty-fifty chance against the malice and irrationality of fortune. By claiming that political actors should literally forget their souls, Machiavelli paved way for a modern concept of the self as different from the soul. Once he had refuted the old virtues, the piety of the Christian and the honour of the nobles, his followers like "Hobbes and Locke assumed that most men would immediately agree that their self-preservative desires are real, that they come from within and take primacy over any other desire. The true self is not only good for individuals but provides a basis for consensus not provided by religions or philosophies. Locke's substitute for the virtuous man, the rational and industrious one, is the perfect expression of this solution" (Bloom 1987, 175).

What little Machiavelli said of the internals was also rather unorthodox from the Christian viewpoint. As Fleisher (1972, 11) has noted, Machiavelli's political psychology is collective in character. In brief, for Machiavelli, the human soul is not capable of finding or realizing its own peace or harmony. It has no innate principle of integrity. Its restrictions and goals lie outside itself - in the public arena and its relation to others. Like life itself, the characteristic

movement of the soul is growth understood as self-aggrandizement. This aggrandizement is political in nature, since it is both public and relative to others. It follows that Machiavelli's *vera cognizione* - true knowledge - can not be found through introspection, by turning inward in an examination of the self. True reflection of the world of men is not to be found in the soul but in the political experience of the peoples. This is, for Machiavelli, the highest form of human consciousness.

Machiavelli has often been criticized for teaching immorality or evil. Voegelin's perspective on this problem is tempting: because human existence is social, one is responsible for the consequences of one's actions on the lives of others. The spiritual insights expressed by Plato, in his *Gorgias*, and by many Christian thinkers in their works, that it is better to suffer than to commit evil, do not exhaust the political questions that statesmen or princes must consider. "A statesman," Voegelin remarked, "who does not answer an attack on his country with the order to shoot back will not be praised for the spiritual refinement of his morality in turning the other cheek, but he will justly be cursed for his criminal irresponsibility. Spiritual morality is a problem in human existence, precisely because there is a good deal more to human existence than spirit" (quoted from Cooper 1999, 260).

Some commentators, most notably Berlin and Prezzolini, have seen that Machiavelli's patriotic or republican exhortations have another side. In choosing the life of a statesman, or even the life of a citizen with enough civic sense to want his state to be as successful and splendid as possible, a man commits himself to rejection of Christian behaviour. The truly responsible citizen has made his choice: the only sins he can commit are weakness, cowardice, and stupidity. The real innovation of Machiavelli is in the separation of the good man and the good citizen. But he does not say that the state is governed with different morality. His cynical view of men was not limited to the public sphere.

Machiavelli was among the first who had to struggle to speak about an emerging form of political community, the city state, in categories dominated by Christian universalism (cf. Walker 1993, 35). This is highly significant. Machiavelli lived in an epoch, when the language of political theory underwent a radical change. What emerged was a contradiction between Christian otherworldliness and "realist" political theory. As Walker has noted elsewhere (2003, 269), "Machiavelli took a stand for earth, or at least Florence, against heaven". When he took a stand for earth, this did not necessarily mean total renunciation of Christianity.

1.2 The Structure

The second chapter deals with Machiavelli's critique of Christianity in previous research. Attention is drawn also to certain "displacements" of Machiavelli in

scholarly literature. By this, I hope to point out how one of his most central themes was strangely lost when his writings became valuable in other respects. The third chapter presents Machiavelli's views on Christianity and religion in general. Leaving aside the apparently insoluble question of Machiavelli's personal convictions, it will be argued that he nevertheless criticised Christianity for various reasons and thought that politics (or public ethics) is fundamentally incompatible with Christian ethics. Whether Machiavelli was an atheist, a devout Catholic, or whatever, is irrelevant in terms of the arguments his writings contain. That he criticised Christianity is a fact – why he did so, is another question. If something must be said of his personal religious life, I agree with Anthony Parel when he says that Machiavelli was, without doubt, a cultural Christian (Parel 1992, 62). He used Christian expressions in his private letters and he certainly considered Christianity as “*nostra religione*”, but his cultural commitment to Christianity does not involve any other commitments, namely doctrinal ones. His use of Christian concepts does not mean that he would necessarily use them in the Christian sense. For example, when he uses the word ‘sin’, he often means a ‘political mistake’ or a political shortcoming rather than breaking a commandment of God (cf. Femia 2004, 6). For example in *Il Principe* (XII) Machiavelli says that the French invasion to Italy was a punishment for her sins, but these sins were, for him, connected to the lack of good arms.

In previous research, much has been made of the apparent inconsistencies between the republican sentiment of the *Discorsi* and the rather absolutist advice in *Il Principe*. The two seemingly opposing views can be seen as describing different stages of a well-ordered society, *Il Principe* the founding, and *Discorsi* the preserving of one. But both works contain similar views of Christian ethics. While many scholars have analysed these two books, not too many have taken the trouble of analysing Machiavelli's other works also, a total of about thousand pages or so. We must note the brave opinions Machiavelli holds e.g. in *Istorie fiorentine*, even though the work was commissioned by the Pope. In his plays, private letters and other writings, he seldom loses any opportunity of striking against Christianity. And, of course, private letters at that time were not private in the modern sense. When Machiavelli wrote, from his journeys, to Vettori, the addressee probably read the letter in a tavern to all Machiavelli's other friends, etc. So, they were probably also written for that purpose. The third chapter focuses firstly on Machiavelli's views of the Popes and the Church, and of the lower clergy. Then, his idea of subordination of religion to politics is analysed. Attention is also drawn to his “reformatory” ideas, when he argued that Christianity too could be interpreted according to *virtù*, and that its present state of corruption could be solved by returning to its founding principles. The chapter also contains a discussion of Machiavelli's secular approach as compared to the Christian attitude and an analysis how Christian mildness in Machiavelli's view had corrupted not only politics but also warfare.

The fourth chapter focuses briefly on the reception of Machiavelli's ideas concerning religion. The chapter also aims to explore the "revolutionary" character of Machiavelli's writings on the topic, as well as the various consequences that this Machiavellian revolution had. There are numerous problems in writing of the early reception of Machiavelli's thoughts. First of all, many of those who really pressed his ideas into use never mentioned his name in their writings. Some of their works were actually only plagiarisms or bad translations of Machiavelli's works. Secondly, even if we find his name mentioned in a given text, we can hardly infer that the author was familiar with Machiavelli's works. Many of those who used his ideas or attributed some thoughts to the Florentine had never seen any of his books. And those who had, often distorted his message and used him only as a device by which to slander adversaries. Thirdly, if we want to know what people really thought of his ideas, we cannot limit our study to printed sources. The true reactions are likely to be found in letters, diaries, pamphlets, and later in newspapers. Surely, what the printed sources reveal is a distorted Machiavelli, but for the purposes of this study Machiavelli the straw-man, the constructed opponent, is actually much more interesting. Studying his reception is useful in the sense that we can get a picture of what the anti-Machiavellians wanted to oppose. For many, that doctrine was religion as an *instrumentum regni*, and this they (correctly) attributed to Machiavelli. If we study the early reception of Machiavelli¹⁰, we find that the shocking element in his writings consisted of two partly overlapping features: namely his blatant secularism in harnessing religion to serve politics, and his openly hostile attitude towards Christianity. For some reason, modern scholarship seems to have forgotten this essential thing about Machiavelli. What later would develop into the doctrine of the separation of church and state was truly revolutionary in the sixteenth century. The principle of the Peace of Augsburg (1555), *Cuius regio, eius religio*, meant that the local princes gained the freedom to prescribe local worship and to introduce Lutheranism in their territories. More time was needed before Machiavelli's concept that the state does not believe but wants its subjects to believe could be taken as a principle.

The problem Machiavelli's writings posed turned into the problem known as reason of state. The entire body of literature on *ragione di stato* was created by the apparent inconsistency between the morality of the individual and that of the state. What was not acceptable in private life was sometimes a necessity in political life. The idea of political necessity and public utility overriding conventional morality was already enshrined in the writings of the ancient authors and in the canon law. However, such departures from the Christian path were meant to be exceptional, which means that they were not a *normal* feature of political life. They were permissible only when necessitated by some religiously laudable goal. Machiavelli, however, changed this by claiming that

¹⁰ Among many articles and books on the subject, see especially Bleznick 1958; Raab 1965; Kelley 1970; Beame 1982; Fernández-Santamaría 1983; Mayer 1979; Donaldson 1992; Haitsma Mulier 1990.

such injustice is a permanent and inescapable feature in public morality *in its normal condition*. With Machiavelli the Christian synthesis of the good man and the good citizen was questioned. The problem Machiavelli was describing (i.e. that in politics it is not possible to follow Christian precepts), was transformed and “solved” by claiming that the state has different morality than its individual citizens. What this actually means, is that the state can not operate on *Christian* morality. The disturbing notion that the state and the individual must have different moralities stems from the fact that Christian morality is simply harmful on the communal level¹¹.

¹¹ The divide between what is thought to be “Machiavelli’s morality” and Christian morality is wide. Mussolini declared *Il Principe* as a “*vade mecum* for statesmen”, but this meant for Bertrand Russel and many others that it was nothing but “a handbook for gangsters”. The evaluative moral description is different, but the message is same in both interpretations: it is a book for those, who do not act according to the morality of the common man.

2 MACHIAVELLI'S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY IN PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1 The Displacements of Machiavelli

"...was habe ich mit Widerlegungen zu schaffen! – sondern, wie es einem positiven Geiste zukommt, an Stelle des Unwahrscheinlichen das Wahrscheinlichere setzend, unter Umständen an Stelle eines Irrthums einen andern".

- Friedrich Nietzsche, Zur Genealogie der Moral -

Just why did Machiavelli write *Il Principe*? During the subsequent centuries following its publication in the early 1530's, this question has been asked repeatedly and without ever reaching the definitive answer. Of course, we do not ask such questions of other authors. We do not trouble our icon of metaphysics with the question why did he write *The Republic*, or *The Statesman*. Or why did Descartes write his books? Was he only a sycophant trying to acquire fame in the intellectual circles of Europe? We do not usually ask such questions. As Lukes has noted, it is only Machiavelli who suffers incessantly the indignity of similar suspicions (Lukes 2001, 561). There is definitely something in the writings of Machiavelli that provokes this and similar questions. What was that shocking element in Machiavelli that needs to be explained with some excuse? Why is it that we do not usually even consider the option that he was really sincere, that he truly was of that opinion? After all, if we follow the dictates of Ockham's razor, we should take into account the possibility that if he seems to be of some opinion, then he possibly, or even probably, was of that opinion - no matter how strange or shocking that opinion might seem to be. It is my contention that even though the scholarship on Machiavelli is prolific in numbers, it is quite often strangely centred on something rather inessential. This is not to say that it is useless or of less value. My intention is only to add one dimension to it, to emphasise something that, in my opinion, has passed with too little attention.

The problem with many studies on Machiavelli is that they either make him a harbinger of later developments or see him as a Renaissance humanist who was too distracted by a futile dream of reviving the Antiquity. Those who are more historically orientated and place Machiavelli in his context (whatever that may be), tend to lose his originality when they claim that we should read Machiavelli in the context of the mirror-for-princes literature or in the tradition of republicanism. Hörnqvist (2004) has recently argued that the primary context of Machiavelli's work is not the mirror-for-princes genre or medieval and Renaissance republicanism in general, but the tradition of Florentine imperialist republicanism dating back to the late thirteenth-century. Yet this tradition of Florentine imperialism, based on the twin notions of liberty at home and empire abroad, is another tradition that somehow makes Machiavelli less original, less controversial.

From one century to another, we find *Il Principe* approached from almost every angle. Confused, however, by party love and party hatred the portrait of Machiavelli in history has varied. Cassirer, writing in the late 1940's, has rightly noted that whereas the former generations were interested in the book itself and studied its contents, we begin with psychoanalysing its author (Cassirer 1950, 127). Instead of analysing and criticising Machiavelli's *thoughts* most modern commentators only ask for his *motives*. Yet if we read all his personal qualities into his books we are mistaken.

Nevertheless, this kind of psychoanalysing research on Machiavelli is published all the time. Depending on the commentator, Machiavelli is the republican deceiver trying to ruin the Medicis by giving them bad advice (Dietz 1986), the proto-Fascist feeling anxiety about being sufficiently masculine and thus delivering his revenge in the form of macho prose (Pitkin 1987), the anti-Dante who provided the Italians with their inferiority complex and moulded the Italian mind susceptible to Fascism (Borgese 1938) etc. Neither can Machiavelli's authorship be understood to be only instrumental for some material purpose. He did not "found new modes and orders in order to put a roof over his head, or secure a pension, or even, presumably, to win favor with the ladies. It is more plausible, certainly, to refer Machiavelli's authorship to the motive of glory" (Hancock 2000, 46-47), but still one has to explain the rather tawdry glory of the odd project that would only be fully understood by the few. If he was seeking glory, it would have been perhaps unwise for him to write *Il Principe*. This is important also in respect to his critique of Christianity. That he was a critic of Christianity is a fact and that his innovative treatment of religion caused much stir is another. Neither one of these facts has anything to do with his personal convictions. Whether Machiavelli was an atheist, a devout Catholic, or whatever, is irrelevant in terms of the effect his writings had.

The scholarship on Machiavelli is prolific, but often misleading. Most of the early commentators were not interested in the deeper nuances of his thought, but used him as a device by which to slander adversaries. Even the 20th-century commentators have been much too interested in what Machiavelli represents, or what he can be said to represent. Modern scholarship on

Machiavelli originated in Italy and Germany, and in both of these countries it coincided with the efforts to form a united nation. This is one reason why it is misleading. In the writings of Herder, Fichte, Hegel, and Italian patriotic writers such as Alfieri, Parini, and Algarotti, an image of a republican Machiavelli, a prophet of Italian unity, has been transmitted to the twentieth century. Not to mention Mussolini's interpretation of him. This strand of interpretation has hailed Machiavelli as one of the ideological founders of the modern national state. Naturally, this has been done on the basis of the XXVI chapter of *Il Principe*, Machiavelli's famous exhortation to liberate Italy from foreign domination.

Machiavelli's *Il Principe* re-emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Italy and especially Germany, where it was translated, prefaced and commented upon by writers such as Rehberg, Leo, Ranke and Kellerman. According to Foucault, this re-appearance would be worth analysing, since the context is "partly Napoleonic, but also partly created by the Revolution and the problems of revolution in the United States, of how and under what conditions a ruler's sovereignty over the state can be maintained" (Foucault 1991, 88). Foucault continues by claiming that this is also the context in which there emerges, with Clausewitz, the problem of "the relationship between politics and strategy, and the problem of relations of force and the calculation of these relations as a principle of intelligibility and rationalisation in international relations; and lastly, in addition, it connects with the problem of Italian and German territorial unity, since Machiavelli had been one of those who tried to define the conditions under which Italian territorial unity could be restored" (ibid.). Much has been made out of the last chapter of *Il Principe*. But it is noteworthy that the early commentators on Machiavelli paid not the slightest attention to this chapter. Proto-nationalism is not what made Machiavelli famous in the first place.

That Machiavelli's *Il Principe* contains rather immoral precepts for ruthless princes is incontestable. But, as Cassirer (1950, 142) has noted, there are a number of modern writers who deliberately shut their eyes to this obvious fact. Instead of trying to understand it, they make the greatest effort to deny it. "They tell us that the measures recommended by Machiavelli, however objectionable in themselves, are only meant for the 'common good'". "But where do we find this mental reservation?", asks Cassirer. In a morally detached manner, *Il Principe* describes how political power is effectively used and maintained. About the *right use* of power it says nothing. His statecraft was equally fit for both illegal and legal states. "The sun of his political wisdom shines upon both legitimate princes and usurpers or tyrants, on just and unjust rulers" (ibid., 155). This, of course, is a consequence of his dividing all regimes in two, republics and principalities (*Il Principe*, I). Whereas Aristotle distinguishes six regimes, three of which are good and the other three their bad counterparts, Machiavelli leaves no room for such moral distinctions. The crucial mixture in *Il Principe* is between different modes of acquisition, not between different forms of government with different ends (Tarcov 2000, 30).

Consequently, many of Machiavelli's maxims are indifferently true of any political system, principality or republic. Thus, he no longer distinguishes between princes and tyrants¹². *Il Principe* does not restrict the use of power to the well-being of the commonwealth¹³. It was only centuries later that the Italian patriotic writers started to read their own aims into Machiavelli's book. We also have to turn our glance to the 17th century before we find the interpretation according to which *Il Principe* is a satire. It is the republican sentiment of a Spinoza or a Rousseau that makes them wish their hero had not sincerely praised the Borgian bunglers, even though they, too, would like to see the world eradicated from Christian mildness that works as an impetus for potential tyrants. In Machiavelli's view, to found an Italian state capable of resisting the barbarian invaders, a single ruthless prince was necessary – whether he is a tyrant or not is irrelevant. Republican constitutions were capable of preserving political units but not of inaugurating new ones¹⁴. Therefore, his recommendations are essentially addressed to the hoped-for architect of the necessarily *parvenu* peninsular lordship (cf. Anderson 1979, 164).

In the hands of his “well-meaning” commentators Machiavelli has suffered the fate of Rousseau and Nietzsche (cf. Hulliung 1983, 3). To defend Rousseau from the charges of primitivism and irrationalism, his defenders passed over in silence the fact that he attacked European culture, root and branch. To ward off accusations concerning proto-Fascism, the defenders fabricated a Nietzsche who criticised Christianity, but left intact what, to him, were its nauseating successors; the Enlightenment, liberalism, socialism, and the humanitarianism all three were imbued with. In this very process of redemption Machiavelli, Rousseau and Nietzsche were lost - their edge was cut off and they were shorn of all that made them great and dangerous. Nietzsche was quite consciously conducting a similar enterprise as Machiavelli. He said

¹² Perhaps it would have been unwise for Machiavelli to speak of tyrants in *Il Principe* since he was addressing one himself. The crucial question in this respect is whether Machiavelli shares Aristotle's end in addressing a tyrant (cf. de Alvarez 1999, 10). Socrates never speaks to a tyrant. Aristotle, in contrast, addresses tyrants, showing them how they may preserve themselves. Aristotle's justification for this is the usual one: by speaking with a tyrant one may be able to somehow moderate his rule. It is hard to believe that this was Machiavelli's intention. Whereas Socrates tries to persuade young men from politics to philosophy, Machiavelli would seem to wish to do the opposite. Far from dissuading the spirited from tyranny, he seems to encourage them to believe that it is virtue itself to indulge their desire to rule. It is, however, also clear that Machiavelli deploys different terminology in *Il Principe* and *Discorsi*. The same characters can be termed as 'principe' in *Il Principe* and 'tiranno' in *Discorsi*.

¹³ When Machiavelli actually speaks of the common good, his conception seems to be non-classical. He has a rather modern view which is necessitated by the unleashing of the selfish desires. In this sense, he anticipates Mandeville's conceptions, as well as Adam Smith's “invisible hand” and Hegel's “List der Vernunft”.

¹⁴ If a body politic is considered the precondition of virtue, it must be created with superhuman capacities, with virtue exceeding that of humans. Machiavelli's solution, his founding myth, might be the dominant role that he grants to great lawgivers such as Romulus, Moses, Lycurgus etc. Necessity may force them to act outside the law (*extraordini* - outside the *ordini*), but such action produces *ordini*, order. Machiavelli's “new prince” must bring order to the chaos.

he wanted to write “ein böses Buch”, as bad as Machiavelli’s. When he restored *areté* and *virtus* to their original meanings, like Machiavelli had done in salvaging certain concepts from Stoic and Christian revisionism, the result was nearly the same as with Machiavelli’s reception: a shock wave that first numbed and then angered the humanitarian intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is, of course, a great difference between Machiavelli and Nietzsche, but they are united by the shock they gave to the core of Western thought, that is, to Christianity. Deliberately or not, most of the scholarship on Machiavelli tends to tame him, to keep him harmless in a secured locus (ibid., 254). Those who are historically specific in their orientation (F. Gilbert, Q. Skinner) moderate Machiavelli’s innovations vis-à-vis his intellectual predecessors and keep him locked up in his context, where he can not do any harm to us. Those who make more generalised arguments tend to misconstrue, or lose altogether, his innovative responses to classical and Christian traditions. Their way of making him harmless is to annex him to a certain tradition, like the liberal ideology. Stressing Machiavelli’s scientific orientation is but another way of making him harmless.

It is also quite common to claim that the sinister age in which Machiavelli lived somehow seduced him into an excessive pessimism. Why many a contemporary writer remained more idealistic, these interpretations can not answer. In fact, it might not be a less realistic account of the epoch to claim that values like patience, truthfulness and loyalty instead of bluff, intrigue and deception where those that might be considered appropriate for the age¹⁵. “Even Machiavelli himself was not in practice Machiavellian”, as Mattingly (1962, 40) has noted. Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* has been accepted as an objective picture of a society which had lost any sense of moral foundation for politics. How much this conforms to the reality of the epoch is not within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it could be claimed that, in the final analysis, any given epoch is quite sinister and immoral, and should therefore lead to cynical observations equalling Machiavelli’s.

Furthermore, the conventional interpretation has forced Machiavelli into a realm where he does not belong. He has been given a special place in which to act, the realm of *realpolitik*, but this is not the sphere where we should put him into use. Walker’s analysis of Machiavelli emphasises one crucial point: to the extent that Machiavelli “was concerned with international relations and military affairs – and they certainly preoccupied him extensively – it is as a consequence of his account of the possibilities of political life within states” (Walker 1993, 36). Even though Machiavelli’s theories make little sense unless read in the context of the classical account of life *within* a political community, he has been associated primarily with the theories of the relations between states. Machiavelli has been forced to the realm of *realpolitik*, not the community

¹⁵ There were also huge regional differences. It has been said that the violent Italian culture that produced the Borgias also produced Michelangelo, while all the Swiss, known for 500 years of order and good manners, could come up with was the cuckoo clock.

in which peace and progress are possible, but the supposed home of naked power politics, the so-called international anarchy. He has been pushed into “the realm of ‘relations’ rather than of ‘politics’, of barbarians, of others who are understood to be beyond the limits of our political community, our political identity, our peace, justice and good government” (ibid., 42). This happens along with the expansion of political reason, when politics is applied to anti-polis phenomena such as war, invasion and insurrection. Originally *polis*, as a locus of reason and culture, signified the exact opposite to bestial and violent nature (cf. Wolin 1987, 483-484). With the Baconian-Cartesian dream of the domination of nature by scientific reasoning, the realm of politics expanded. It was this expansion that created the need for the Machiavelli of the international relations theories.¹⁶

Even reading him contextually may result in another displacement of Machiavelli. In the beginning of the XV chapter of *Il Principe*, where Machiavelli spells out his ‘realism’, he discusses the wise prince’s methods and conduct in dealing with subjects and allies. He says: “And because I know that many have written about this, I fear that, when I too write about it, I shall be thought conceited, since in discussing this material I depart very far from the methods of the others”. The passage is often understood to reveal the fact that Machiavelli consciously departed from the genre of advice-books for princes. But, as Tarcov (1988, 198) has argued, “nothing in this famous statement assures us that Machiavelli was specifically criticising the contemporary advice-books to princes”. The aim of Tarcov’s critique is Quentin Skinner’s way of reading Machiavelli, his decision to read *Il Principe* in the context of its near-contemporary advice-books. Indeed, the only writer of advice-books for princes we have Machiavelli’s own assurance that he was conscious of is Xenophon. It is in the end of the previous chapter (XIV) where Machiavelli writes: “And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon recognizes afterward in Scipio’s life how much that imitation was to his glory and how completely in chastity, affability, courtesy, and liberality Scipio shaped himself by what Xenophon wrote about Cyrus”. Nevertheless, Xenophon is not mentioned in Skinner’s *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* when he discusses Machiavelli’s context, and the “context” of Machiavelli’s argument according to Skinner, i.e. Pontano, Patrizi, Castiglione and the like, are not mentioned in *Il Principe*. Nor “does Skinner offer any external evidence for Machiavelli’s concern with them” (Tarcov 1988, 198). In fact, according to Tarcov, the mention of republics in the passage (“Yet many have fancied for themselves republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality.”) indeed indicates a broader concern. When Machiavelli wanted to single out his contemporaries, he was often perfectly capable of doing so.

¹⁶ The balance-of-power theories which later enhanced into the equilibrist theories of multi-state relations did, nevertheless, conceptualise during the Renaissance. It was not Machiavelli, however, but Bernardo Rucellai, Niccolò Valori and Francesco Guicciardini, who epitomised the idea in their writings when describing the policy of Lorenzo Magnifico (Gilbert 1965, 113-122; McKenzie 1980; Haslam 2002, 92).

Tarcov argues that “Skinner’s interpretation of Machiavelli is superficial, confused and poorly documented” (ibid., 202). Skinner “interprets Machiavelli’s statements as either contributions to or critiques of traditions which Skinner does not otherwise show were Machiavelli’s major concerns”, and he is “less interested in Machiavelli’s contradicting the Bible, Plato, or us, than in his contradicting Pontano or Patrizi”. Indeed, as Skinner himself writes: “... the fact that *The Prince* was in part intended as a deliberate attack on the moral conventions of advice books to princes cannot be discovered simply by attending to the text, since this is not a fact contained in the text. It is also clear, however, that no one can be said fully to understand Machiavelli’s text who does not understand this fact about it. To fail to grasp this fact is to fail to grasp the *point* of Machiavelli’s argument in the latter chapters of his book” (Skinner 1988a, 95). But how do we know what tradition Machiavelli was actually contributing to? On what grounds can it be claimed that it is the *contemporary* genre of advice-books that forms the context of his argument? The contextual method too has its deficiencies. The greatest danger might be imposing the context on the text, and thus favouring the context to the disadvantage of the text. In the following chapter, I suggest that the critique of Christianity - and I do not mean just the Church but Christianity in its essence - is indeed something that might be termed as Machiavelli’s “major concern”.

Machiavelli has also been mistakenly read as a theorist of *ragion di stato*. This is a case where the contextual way of reading might show its good sides. As Skinner has noted, more than once Machiavelli’s political theory has been read in terms of its alleged account of the relationship between the rights and interests of individual citizens and the powers of the state (Skinner 1988b, 255). But Machiavelli himself never employs such terminology. Even though some have suggested that Machiavelli can be credited with a theory of individual rights (Colish 1971), he never uses the concept of individual rights (*diritti*). And even though in an early stage it was claimed that: “Interest is the key word of this political system. It is the vortex of Descartes, the gravitation of Newton.” (*Anti-Machiavel*, XV), Machiavelli never employs the terminology of interests (*intressi*). Evidence indicates that it is Guicciardini instead of Machiavelli who was among the first to use the idea of interest, collective as well as individual, and to explore its possibilities in politics¹⁷. The effect of revising Machiavelli’s vocabulary in this way has been to supply him with a range of beliefs about a number of topics on which he never wrote (Skinner 1988b, 255). Apart from interests and rights, Machiavelli never employs the term *ragion di stato*. The doctrine of reason of state was developed when the emerging absolutist states needed a theory of the state. Prior political theory, like that of Machiavelli’s, was a theory of the society. Furthermore, reason of state was a thoroughly

¹⁷ The expressions he uses include *intresse*, *intresse publico*, *intresse proprio* and *intresse dello stato*. One of Guicciardini’s main aims was to find a way in which self-interest could be reconciled with public interest (cf. McKenzie 1980). We must also note that it was Guicciardini, not Machiavelli, who spoke of *la ragione e uso degli stati*, the reason and practice of states, thus nearly formulating the idea of *ragion di stato* (Guicciardini 1994, 159).

Christian construction, and would have proved useful to somebody espousing a more Christian worldview than Machiavelli. In addition, all of those who attacked Machiavelli's doctrines did not repudiate the doctrine of reason of state. Sometimes the principles of reason of state were distinguished from the far more reprehensible doctrines of the Florentine *segretario*. In Machiavelli, they saw primarily an atheist and a proponent of a secular state. Machiavelli simply chose to clothe his view of politics in garb thoroughly offensive to an age when the reality of Christianity nevertheless remained compelling. That is why his suggestion that Christianity should be banished from the ruler's political travail was unacceptable to many. However, there was a certain amount of pomp in his thoughts, and it would not do to ignore him altogether. In this situation, the principle of reason of state appeared as an opportune way out of this impasse (cf. Fernández-Santamaría 1983). In England, in France, in Spain, and in the rest of the Christian Europe, Machiavelli was attacked primarily because of what he had dared to say of Christianity, the "true religion", not because of his 'new' reason of state.

Focusing on Machiavelli's vocabulary is another approach that is somehow inherently problematic. During the Renaissance, a Machiavelli, despite his mingling with the chaps of *Orti Oricellari*, could still be *solitario*. A Rousseau or a Thoreau, despite their solitary walks, could not. Machiavelli's tentative vocabulary is not nearly as easy a case for conceptual history as e.g. Rousseau's language of politics. During the Renaissance, if there was such a thing as the prevailing meaning of a given term, it was constituted by the usage of ordinary persons, not by that of the intellectuals or the socially powerful. "Thus", argues Lorenzo Valla, "housewives sometimes have a better sense of the meaning of words than the greatest philosophers. For the former employ words for a purpose, the latter for a game"¹⁸. There is also an inherent problem in the Pocockian style of concentrating on the conceptual frameworks of e.g. English republicanism. If we treat republicanism as a language instead of programme, this easily leads to a situation, where we eagerly label certain thinkers as republicans only on the grounds of their vocabulary. But, as Kustaa Multamäki (1999, 19) has noted, it is apparent that republicanism cannot be defined by the usage of language only: "There is nothing necessarily republican in quoting 'the wise Florentine', because the ideas of Machiavelli were used by royalists and republicans alike". The employment of Machiavellian language of republicanism can indeed be a sign of republican inclinations, but this is not necessarily the case. Especially when the transformation of civic virtues from classical to mercantile took place, Machiavelli was felt to be rather obsolete, since he did not have much understanding of e.g. the economic needs of a republic or the apparent need of naval strategy.

¹⁸ "Itaque melius de intellectu verborum mulierculae nonnumquam sentient, quam summi philosophi. Illae enim verba ad usum trahunt: isti ad lusum". Quoted from Najemy 1995, 94.

2.2 Machiavelli and Christianity in Previous Research

The case with Machiavelli's critique of Christianity is odd because most of the earlier research on Machiavelli pays some attention to his criticism of the Christian religion, but does not delve deeper into the theme. In the following, I discuss some of the approaches to Machiavelli's critique as presented in recent and not-so-recent research literature. In secondary literature, Machiavelli's relation to Christianity has sparked various interpretations. For the purposes of the present study, we can make a rough division between the views according to which A.) Machiavelli was primarily a pagan, B.) he was an atheist, or C.) he remained within the confines of Christianity.

2.2.1 Machiavelli the Pagan

Parel (1992) is among the most notable defenders of Machiavelli's paganism. "Taking all available data into consideration, then, one is obliged to conclude that Machiavelli is a neopagan whose aim is to paganize rather than to secularise Christianity", writes Parel (*ibid.*, 62). Given Machiavelli's astrological assumptions, he cannot eliminate the heavens and Fortune from his analysis of religion. Parel criticises most of all Leo Strauss' and Sebastian de Grazia's ways of reading Machiavelli. According to him, Strauss attributes to Machiavelli what appear to be the principles of biblical criticism of a much later date, i.e. that the Bible is a collection of historical writings without any divine inspiration, and that any accuracy it may contain can be verified only in reference to other non-biblical sources (*ibid.*, 60). Parel argues that "what Machiavelli really wants to do is to attack Christianity on the basis of the principles of sixteenth-century astrological historiography, not on the basis of those assumed by nineteenth-century higher criticism" (*ibid.*, 61). But if we look at the way Machiavelli says he wants to read the Bible, we notice that Strauss might not be so mistaken after all.

In Parel's view, de Grazia conflates Machiavelli's paganism and Christian theology when he tries to accommodate the whole Machiavelli within the Christian fold. Christianity is not sufficient in explaining Machiavelli's views, because a Christian conception of God cannot support the view that Machiavellian new princes are God's favourites, but a pagan view of God definitely can. Similarly, a pagan view of religion can hold that *virtù* in Machiavelli's sense is the highest fulfilment of religion, whereas the Christian view of religion cannot (*ibid.*, 61). The God of Christianity does not depend on the heavens, Fortune and other astral forces, but since Machiavelli clearly believes in such forces, there is no real place for God in his cosmology. When Parel argues that Machiavelli is pagan and pre-modern instead of a modern thinker because he believed in astrology – that the malignity or benignity of planets and their position have a role in politics – he is defining not only Machiavelli's place in the history of political thought but also the concept of

modernity. We can not make this the fundamental division between pre-moderns and moderns or pagans and Christians since, for instance, Ronald Reagan shared the same view of astrology.

Perhaps the most emphatic argument on behalf of Machiavelli's paganism is Hulliung's (1983) *Citizen Machiavelli*. For him, Machiavelli, by stressing the need to conquer, divorced himself not only from the humanistic discourse of the mirror-for-princes literature, but also from the republican tradition. Hulliung's Machiavelli pictured a rigorous (pagan) morality of public life joined to a slack morality of private life. According to Hulliung, Machiavelli saw private life as a continuation of politics, not as an alternative to it (Hulliung 1983, 104). He believed in the ubiquity of politics and that the same rules more or less apply in both private and public spheres. His comedies contain a didactic function for politicians, since e.g. seduction and conspiracy, womanizing and politicking, can be seen as related phenomena that operate on same maxims.

It is relatively unquestionable that Machiavelli did not try to replace Christianity with pagan morality. Like Rousseau, he was totally confident that once Christianity and the present way of living had already transformed men, it is not possible to go back to the state *ante* Christianity. From the fact that his sentiment on a given subject agrees with the sentiment of a classical author, it does not follow that Machiavelli was guided in that point by the classics. Machiavelli may sometimes hold Lucretian or Epicurean views¹⁹, but is he therefore a Lucretian thinker? Surely, this can not be claimed. The agreement may be a coincidence (cf. Strauss 1970, 7), or it can follow necessarily from certain axiomatic assumptions. But by the same token, it is also relatively unquestionable that he did admire pagan morality in contrast to Christianity. Admiring and yearning to resurrect are, however, two different things²⁰. Machiavelli clearly discussed the possibilities of using Christianity for political advantage. Lukes (1984) is among those who have understood the importance of this. "Clearly", writes Lukes, "for Machiavelli, the value of religion as a political tool is in its ability to arouse extra-political sanctions for wholly political operations" (ibid., 268). In this sense, Christianity is even better than its pagan counterparts, since it lays somewhat more emphasis on the post-mortem punishments. The sanctioning power of a religion makes people more obedient, and the fear of God or gods makes oaths and laws effective.

It has been claimed that Machiavelli appeals to certain elements of both paganism and Christianity to enhance his political system (e.g. Sullivan 1996). It is clear that the religion he is longing for is not purely pagan. Resurrecting

¹⁹ See for example Cutinelli-Rendina 1999, 5-6, 80.

²⁰ As Baron (1968) has argued, many a Renaissance man was so convinced of his own inferiority compared to the ancients that their self-confidence and productivity were weakened as a result of their militant classicism. Some, like Niccolò Niccoli, were so deeply convinced of the futility of any attempt to equal the perfection of the classical models which they admired, that during their entire life they never published a single line. In other words, they were perfectly aware of the impossibility of strict imitation - instead of *imitatio* the battle-cry of the humanists was *aemulatio*.

pagan practices is doomed to fail since Christianity has already carved men into its liking. After all, Machiavelli himself writes that anyone who “wishes to build a state will find it easier among mountaineers, where there is no culture, than among those who are used to living in cities, where culture is corrupt” (*Discorsi*, I/11). Numa succeeded with the Roman populace, because men were untaught and he could easily “stamp on them any new form whatever”. In a similar fashion “a sculptor will more easily get a beautiful statue out of a rough piece of marble than from one badly blocked out by someone else”. Nevertheless, Machiavelli says in the same chapter that “though rude men are more easily won over to a new order or opinion”, it is still not impossible “to win over to it also cultured men and those who assume they are not rude”, since Savonarola persuaded the populace of Florence to follow him even though many had not seen anything extraordinary to make them believe him. Commenting this passage, Lukes (1984, 270) argues that Machiavelli discovers in Christianity a facility to reshape deformed marble, a facility that is unavailable to paganism. The Florentines were neither untaught nor rude, but still it was possible to persuade them to believe that Savonarola spoke with God. But it is also clear that the religion Machiavelli is longing for is not totally Christian either. Christianity may contain some effective elements, but its basic tenets are unsuited for a well-ordered republic.

Many scholars have argued that Machiavelli’s political thought is based on morality. They have stressed that this morality differs essentially from the Christian one. In the words of Skinner, “the difference between Machiavelli and his contemporaries cannot adequately be characterised as a difference between a moral view of politics and a view of politics as divorced from morality. The essential contrast is rather between two different moralities – two rival and incompatible accounts of what ought ultimately to be done” (Skinner 1978, 135). Detachment from Christian morality is not the same as having no morality at all.

As Berlin (1980) has argued, the fact that the wicked are seen to flourish or that wicked courses appear to pay has never been very remote from the consciousness of mankind, and it cannot be Machiavelli’s shocking new path. The characters of Jacob or Joshua in the Bible, Thucydides’ Melian dialogue, the philosophies of Thrasymachus and Callicles in Plato’s dialogues, Aristotle’s more cynical advice in *The Politics*, and, after these, Carneades’ speeches to the Roman Senate as described by Cicero, Augustine’s view of the secular state from one vantage point, and Marsilio’s from another. All of these examples from the core of Western literature, Berlin argues, had cast enough light on political realities to shock the credulous and naïve out of uncritical idealism. The explanation can scarcely lie in Machiavelli’s tough-mindedness alone, even though he did perhaps dot the i’s and cross the t’s more sharply than anyone before him.

Berlin (1980) argues that the claim according to which Machiavelli separated politics and morality might be tenable only “if ethics is confined to, let us say, Stoic or Christian or Kantian, or even some types of utilitarian ethics,

where the source and criterion of value are the word of God, or eternal reason, or some inner sense or knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong, voices which speak directly to the individual consciousness with absolute authority". But as Berlin notes, there exists an equally time-honoured ethics: that of the Greek *polis*, of which Aristotle provided the clearest exposition. "Since men are beings made by nature to live in communities, their communal purposes are the ultimate values from which the rest are derived, or with which their ends as individuals are identified. Politics – the art of living in a *polis* – is not an activity that can be dispensed with by those who prefer private life: it is not like seafaring or sculpture which those who do not wish to do so need not undertake. Political conduct is intrinsic to being a human being at a certain stage of civilization, and what it demands is intrinsic to living a successful human life". As I already noted, Machiavelli did not separate politics and morality but politics and Christian morality. I wouldn't be so sure that he needed an Aristotelian alternative.

Machiavelli, as Berlin argues, is indeed rejecting Christian morality but not in favour of something that is not a morality at all but a game of skill, an activity called political, which is not concerned with ultimate human ends and is therefore not ethical at all. "He is indeed rejecting Christian ethics, but in favor of another system, another moral universe – the world of Pericles or of Scipio, or even of the Duke Valentino, a society geared to ends just as ultimate as the Christian faith, a society in which men fight and are ready to die for (public) ends which they pursue for their own sakes. They are choosing not a realm of means (called politics) as opposed to a realm of ends (called morals), but opt for a rival (Roman or classical) morality, an alternative realm of ends. In other words the conflict is between two moralities, Christian and pagan (or as some wish to call it, aesthetic), not between autonomous realms of morals and politics". It is precisely this that is curious in Machiavelli scholarship: even those who (in my view correctly) understand that Machiavelli separated himself from Christian ethics are too easily labelling him as a proponent of pagan morality.

In the history of Western thought, there are three men who have contested Christian morality in a fundamental sense: Machiavelli, de Sade and Nietzsche. Following Kristol (1961, 146-147), we may compare Machiavelli and de Sade. What was so shocking about Marquis de Sade? We know that the kinds of sexual activities he describes really do exist. Lust, adultery and various forms of sexual deviation, they are inherent in the actual world of human beings. As Kristol maintains, our societies still seem to believe that unrestricted knowledge of these subjects constitutes pornography. If these matters are to be discussed at all, it should be done in an esoteric manner in medical textbooks or within a moral framework that makes it clear one is treating of an evil, not merely a human phenomenon. For de Sade, there is no prescriptive moral framework in sexual behaviour. Correspondingly, for Machiavelli, there isn't one in politics. He is, thus, the pornographer of politics. He said nothing that most men did not already know. But the manner through which he delivered his message is

another question. In a letter to Machiavelli, Francesco Vettori wrote of his idle days in Rome, saying that “I know of nothing that gives more delight to think about and to do than fucking. Every man may philosophize all he wants, but this is the utter truth, which many people understand but few will say”²¹. Many understand, but few will say – this holds true for Machiavellian politics as well.

There is an in-built paradox in *Il Principe* if it is simply meant to be an advice book for ruthless princes. Namely, it reveals secrets that would evidently be more effective if they were kept secret. Most likely he did not reveal any real secrets of statecraft, even if many a commentator thought so of him²². On a theoretical level Machiavelli’s doctrines may be innovative, but as practice they are as old as political society. He did not invent anything essentially new, but was doing what pornographers do: he was describing what people actually do and not what naïve Christian idealism would want them to do. And the acts he is describing are by no means sins in his view. Instead, they are embedded in the nature of things. For Machiavelli, there is no sin but ignorance. This also makes him a nihilist. If knowledge *per se*, in and of itself, is valuable and enlightening, one must conclude that the knowledge of evil is as valuable as the knowledge of good²³. It follows that a man teaching evil things is as virtuous as a man engaged in adding to our knowledge of good things. In short, the difference between good and evil is a matter of habitual terminology. This is, precisely, nihilism (Kristol 1961, 146).²⁴

It may be claimed that Machiavelli had a different moral system, or that he advocated a sort of neo-pagan morality, but I think it is also possible to claim

²¹ Quoted from Viroli 2000, 169.

²² On Machiavelli and the *arcana imperii* –tradition, see Donaldson 1992.

²³ It was, however, somewhat commonplace in the later *ragione di stato* discussions that the ruler needs to know also the wrong means, in a similar fashion that a doctor needs to know poisons. When the state is considered as a body politic that can get sick, the ruler must occasionally act as a doctor, and therefore he must know the cures (cf. Burke 1991, 481-482).

²⁴ In this sense, Machiavelli can also be seen as an early exponent of the *crise pyrrhoniennne*. The Pyrrhonian strand of scepticism that became dominant during the Late Renaissance advocated a suspension of judgment concerning all knowledge claims and thus withdrew certainty and confidence from ethics too (see Popkin 1968). Even Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum* was only a subjective truth. With his inability to rise to the objective level, the quest for certainty turned from triumph to tragedy. The outcome was the acknowledgement of the fact that in a fundamental sense our basic beliefs have no foundation and must be accepted on faith, be it animal, religious, or blind. In contrast, in regard to Renaissance rhetoric and later English discussions, Skinner (2002b) highlights the inability to agree about the proper application of evaluative terms and argues that the anxiety expressed by the seventeenth-century philosophers about moral ambiguity stems less from the rise of Scepticism than from the Renaissance revival of classical eloquence. The writers in question were seeking to overcome the humanist insistence that in moral reasoning it will always be possible to construct a plausible argument *in utramque partem*. Against this view, writers like Hobbes sought ways to limit the play of ambiguity and to arrive at authorised versions of potentially subversive texts. Faced with the problem of moral ambiguity and paradiastolic speech, some proposed the creation of a new language, some suggested the abolition of language altogether, and some proposed the regulation of meanings and definitions by fiat.

that his contestation of Christianity of his day does not necessarily turn him into a pagan.

2.2.2 Machiavelli the Atheist

Most of Machiavelli's early adversaries saw him as an atheist, but the most forceful scholarly interpretation supporting this view is that of Leo Strauss. Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* adopts the old view that Machiavelli and Machiavellism should not be separated. For him, Machiavelli is simply a "teacher of evil", and by calling Machiavelli a blasphemer Strauss thinks he is only calling a "spade a spade". In another instance, Strauss says: "It is repugnant to me to spell out fully the blasphemy which Machiavelli forces his reader to think" (Strauss 1970, 17). Strauss, however, thinks that Machiavelli's blasphemy is elusive, and that his silences are as important as his statements. Machiavelli's writings are not easy, Strauss argues, and the reader must be properly prepared to come across suggestions which refuse to be stated. The Straussian line of interpretation may sometimes produce good results, but usually, I would claim, it is of rather dubious nature. Strauss presumes too much, follows hidden meanings that are revealed through numerical or even cryptographical analysis, and is generally too devoted to an obscurantist interpretation. As McShea (1963, 782) has noted, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* is not so much a study of Machiavelli as it is the exemplification of an ideology. It is no exaggeration to say that the book is more useful to students of Strauss's ideas than to scholars of Machiavelli.

Strauss's interpretation of Machiavelli is, nevertheless, compelling. He makes no attempt to read Machiavelli in the context of Florentine political thought, but instead interprets him against the background of classical thought. For Strauss, Machiavelli breaks with the great tradition of moral and political philosophy, founded by Socrates and culminating in the works of Aristotle. In contrast to this tradition, Machiavelli opts for the classical alternative that right is conventional, that there is no natural right. One of the classical philosophers, Xenophon, is of unique importance to Machiavelli, Strauss argues, since Machiavelli mentions Xenophon in *Il Principe* and *Discorsi* more frequently than he does Plato, Aristotle and Cicero taken together (Strauss 1970, 12). Xenophon paved way for Machiavelli by claiming that force and fraud are indispensable not only for defeating foreign enemies but also for overcoming resistance to establishing oneself within one's own community. Unlike the sophists, Machiavelli does not believe in the omnipotence of rhetoric - he knows that men are ruled only by a mixture of persuasion and coercion, speech and brachial power.

It is almost a truism in Machiavelli studies to argue that Machiavelli and Machiavellism should be separated. In addition to Strauss, some other scholars

²⁶ Avarice, ambition and sexual desire are the characteristic features of the fallen man in Augustine's writings. Machiavelli's anthropology seems to be truly Augustinian even in his comedies.

have argued that this might not be so fruitful. Hulliung's *Citizen Machiavelli* (1983) is a critique of modern scholarship that has tried to eradicate the sinister Machiavelli. Hulliung tries to save Machiavelli from his saviours, who have blurred the image of the Florentine by justifying and rationalising his thoughts. In this respect, I think, Hulliung is absolutely correct. The popular sinister image might not be so erroneous, since Machiavelli himself knew his thoughts were unconventional and unacceptable to many. Furthermore, there must be some reason why we speak of Machiavellism instead of, say, Guicciardinianism. Machiavellism, as we now know it, might not be found in Machiavelli's writings, but he most certainly did give some sort of philosophical justification for 'vulgar Machiavellism'. In this sense, his writings cannot be seen as forming just a typical example of the mirror-for-princes literature or of the republican tradition.

Writing in 1949, Merleau-Ponty asked how Machiavelli could have been understood. According to Merleau-Ponty, Machiavelli "writes against good feelings in politics". Since Machiavelli "has the nerve to speak of *virtue* at the very moment he is sorely wounding ordinary morality, he disconcerts the believers in Law as he does those who believe that the State is the Law. For he describes that knot of collective life in which pure morality can be cruel and pure politics requires something like a morality". That is why we "do not like this difficult thinker without idols". (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 211)

Althusser adopts Merleau-Ponty's question concerning the possibility of comprehending Machiavelli. Althusser finds what he calls "Machiavelli's solitude" in the fact that Machiavelli was poised between the Middle Ages and modernity. Althusser writes: "Through his silences, even more than his words, we may infer which discourses Machiavelli condemns definitely: not only the edifying religious, moral or aesthetic discourses of the court humanists, and even radical humanists; not only the revolutionary sermons of a Savonarola; but also the entire tradition of Christian theology and all the political theories of antiquity" (Althusser 1999, 7-8). Althusser's Machiavelli is stranded between classical and Christian traditions, on the one hand, and the modern tradition of natural law on the other.

For all their pervasive insights into the dilemmas of liberalism, socialism etc., writers like Croce, Merleau-Ponty, and Horkheimer show little insight into Machiavelli. Althusser is an exception, stressing the solitary position of Machiavelli. They may suffer from various forms of *Weltangst* when discovering the terrible truths of power - that the moral ends of humanism sometimes require immoral means. Machiavelli, however, did not. For him the truths of power were exciting. The problem of dirty hands these writers detect in Machiavelli is something that stems from false modernisation (cf. Hulliung 1983, 7). Their Machiavelli is torn and divided by the necessity of doing evil for the sake of the good. But Machiavelli was not particularly interested in the formula "The end justifies the means" (or meanness), and in that explicit form it is not to be found in his writings. It was the battle-cry of Jesuit casuistry, not Machiavelli's. Unlike for the Christian believers, for Machiavelli there simply

was no ultimate end that would justify all means. According to him, true prudence and success consist of adapting to times and particular situations, instead of clinging desperately to certain extra-political ideals. In the cases when he does have an end, such as keeping the *patria* free from domination, he does not trouble his mind with the logic of the dirty hands.

Strauss argued originally that modern political philosophy begins with Hobbes. Later he changed his view, now arguing that it begins when Machiavelli declares war on both Athens and Jerusalem – on reason and revelation alike. Strauss's Machiavelli rejects the classical doctrine of politics (found in the writings of Plato, Aristotle etc.) and the teaching of the whole Judeo-Christian tradition, thereby starting something new, something completely different (Strauss 1980, 40).

Strauss's Machiavelli is the first political scientist, and *Il Principe* is a "scientific book" (Strauss 1957). By the same token, this is a question of Machiavelli's modernity. Does being new have to mean the same as being modern? Parel addresses this question and argues that Strauss is mistaken (Parel 1995). Most critics think that Machiavelli is not one of the ancients, but they are not sure whether he is one of the moderns either. Some, like Fischer, have pointed to certain medieval elements in the thought of Machiavelli (Fischer 1997). As Parel notes in his criticism of Strauss, Machiavelli's theory undoubtedly introduces many new things. For example, it rejects the teachings of Plato, Aristotle and the scholastics, and it has changed the meaning of virtue in general and of *phronesis* in particular. In regard to virtue, Machiavelli cuts the Gordian knot (cf. Orwin 1978, 1219). For if we think that there is a tension between what virtue and success require of us, our devotion to virtue will not be wholehearted, but neither will our devotion to success or survival. By redefining virtue as that which serves political success, Machiavelli strives to abolish, for all time, the bad conscience of the politically successful. Similarly Machiavelli's prudence is not the prudence of Aristotle, since he deprives it of its intrinsic directedness towards virtuous ends (presuming that 'virtuous' is understood in its classical meaning). However, Parel's point is that the arguments by means of which certain new things are accomplished in the writings of Machiavelli are based on pre-modern cosmology and anthropology (Parel 1992; Parel 1995, 271). The astrological background turns Machiavelli's political metaphysics into a kind of naturalism exempt from theological explanations.

Accepting the astrological assumptions of Renaissance, Machiavelli thus rules out God from his cosmos. He occasionally uses God as a rhetorical device, as in XXVI chapter of *Il Principe*, but there is no real place for him in Machiavelli's universe. This may seem like an easy way to escape the theological references in Machiavelli's works, but we should bear in mind that he was, after all, writing to people who were most likely more Christian than he was. He needed Christian concepts in order to be understood. Parel tries to escape from the theological references in Machiavelli by making his God a tribal or national God who always takes sides in politics (Parel 1992, 56).

Nevertheless, whether his God was this or that, the universe of Machiavelli was no longer that of the scholastics. His universe is no longer ordained by the will of Providence. If there is an organising power, it is the capricious *Fortuna*. Adaptation to the tricks of *Fortuna* requires the abolition of virtues, especially the Christian ones.

Machiavelli's ideal ruler aims not so much to maximise his power as to minimise his dependence. There should be no principle or character trait that constrains his ability to respond to his circumstances (cf. Grant 1997, 55). Religion, and especially Christianity, is certainly a hindrance in prince's quest for autonomy. But if atheism means that a person denies the existence of God, then Machiavelli surely is not an atheist. Not a single passage in his texts hints that there is no God.

2.2.3 Machiavelli the Christian

There are also a number of scholars who think that Machiavelli remained within the confines of Christianity. Among the most notable of them are his two biographers, Ridolfi and de Grazia. Recently Viroli has joined this camp, insisting that for Machiavelli Christianity was essentially an *instrumentum libertatis*, a religion that would exemplify the sense of civic duties of the republican citizen. According to Ridolfi (1963, 253), a great mountain was made out of Machiavelli's sarcastic comments on the corruption of the Roman Church and his "all too frequent jokes" about his indifference towards the practices of religion *et similia*, which went to swell the already vast heap of misunderstanding and scandals aroused by the bold ethics of Machiavelli. "Thus through the centuries there was built up layer by layer a mass of prejudices under which the religious and Christian conscience of the Florentine Secretary was deeply buried". Machiavelli's frequent jokes and irreverent humour gave him a reputation that his later reverent words were never able to dispel, "because there was no one who understood them, who appreciated his 'essential Christianity', the intimate religious foundation of his conscience which breathes from all his works" (ibid.). Almost needless to mention, I disagree with Ridolfi's position.

Colish (1999) sees Machiavelli's critique of Christianity essentially as a critique of Savonarola. For her, Machiavelli's opposition to Christianity stands as "evidence for Machiavelli the ironist, seeking to discredit a detested figure and movement that competed with his own advocacy of Christianity well used and well integrated with the civic and military institutions that promote free and broadly participatory republics" (ibid., 616). Because Machiavelli's own republicanism was different from the Savonarolan republicanism, and since he accepts Christianity "as true or as politically constructive elsewhere", it becomes possible to read Machiavelli's works as texts with an anti-Savonarolan subtext (ibid., 601).

For de Grazia (1994), Machiavelli remained within the confines of Christianity, but sought to emphasise the fact that God wants men to actively defend their country. Hence, instead of lauding the saints, by lauding those

without whom one's country goes into servitude and anarchy, Machiavelli "wants not only to modify the Christian rites but also to change the objects of veneration of those rites, wants to pass from saints to heroes" (ibid., 378). For Machiavelli, the deeds of great men are most gratifying to God, and God is a friend to those who defend their country. "It is country that religion should help, and it is God who wishes this. If God wishes it, one can understand that the church should reform itself to teach us to love, exalt, and defend our country and that the church that does not do so is in danger" (ibid., 121). Machiavelli is certainly familiar with Christian teaching, but occasionally "waters at other oases" (ibid., 79), and does not make use of the Sermon on the Mount or of the Ten Commandments. In de Grazia's view, what Machiavelli ultimately believes in or would like to be true is a new or reformed redemptive system, "a true religion in which the master deity is God, the saints on earth are few, poor, and honest, the beloved of God are makers of states in deed and in writing, great legislators, founders of religion, warriors, and saviours of country who, their entering and exiting evil divinely comprehended, go post-mortem by God's immediate and final judgment directly to the dwelling place of heroes" (ibid., 385). The political problem of Christianity is thus solved by claiming that God has different standards for great legislators and founders of religions. In my view, this does not solve the problem. Machiavelli exhorts entering evil to private citizens as well as to great rulers. The question remains to whom should the normal standards or redemption be applied?

Germino (1966) has argued against the view held by Strauss that Machiavelli was deliberately seeking, after covering the subversive nature of his message by stratagems of unprecedented deviousness, to destroy Christianity. Germino thinks that as members of the *cognoscenti*, Machiavelli and Guicciardini could occasionally comment sarcastically and irreverently to each other upon current religious practices, which nevertheless does not turn them into atheists. For Germino, Machiavelli remained a Christian thinker despite his views that the ultimate demands of the Gospel, if literally applied in a world of men more prone to evil than to good, would only result in havoc and misery. Instead, Germino argues, the problem as Machiavelli sees it is not that Christianity is either untrue or hopelessly defective for the demands of the world, but that worthless men have interpreted it wrongly: "Thus, it could be concluded that *at the political level* Machiavelli regarded a perfectionist, other-worldly interpretation of Christianity as wrong and that he saw the Christian as having both world-immanent and world-transcendent obligations" (ibid., 802). In my view, Germino rightly emphasises the question of interpreting Christianity, but I do not agree with him on the point that this regards only the political level. Germino finds many passages "which suggest that Christian morality remained for Machiavelli the ultimate standard, to cast its shadow of judgment over the activities of sinful men with their proximate concerns and relative goals" and which support the interpretation that Machiavelli, "instead of being the conscienceless subverter of Christianity, experienced in some agony and tension the conflict between the demands of transcendent morality

and the requirements of what we have come to call 'power politics'" (ibid., 801). I think Machiavelli's problem was not that the world does not conform to the teachings of the Gospel, but rather that the Gospel does not conform to the world.

2.2.4 Machiavelli as a Critic of Christianity

While Machiavelli's critique of Christianity is often acknowledged, modern scholarly literature is relatively silent about it. The most lucid argument on behalf of Machiavelli's distinctively un-Christian thought is to be found from *Machiavelli anticristo* by Prezzolini. The book, translated into English as *Machiavelli* (Prezzolini 1967), however, has its deficiencies. It contains very short fragments on various topics and, in general, it assumes rather than proves Machiavelli's opposition to Christianity. Even though it contains a section dedicated to Machiavelli's works, it fails to even mention *Esortazione alla penitenza*. Maybe Prezzolini left it out intentionally, since the text is rather discomfoting for those who think that Machiavelli was always very clearly opposed to Christianity. His blindness for certain texts leads Prezzolini to conclude that in Machiavelli's writings "there is no trace of a sense of sin, or of charity, or of love of neighbor. His motivations are always practical, realistic, earthy" (ibid., 26). It is incontestable that Machiavelli does say something of those themes, especially in *Esortazione*. Furthermore, Machiavelli's treatment of these themes is not opposed to his "realistic" or "earthy" motivations – charity and love of neighbour are very important also from a more mundane perspective.

Leaving aside its minor deficiencies, Prezzolini's book includes a section called "The Doctrine", which, I think, is among the best introductions to the core of Machiavelli's thought. For Prezzolini, Machiavelli is a profoundly pessimistic thinker who repudiates the relevance of Christian morality. Machiavelli's complete honesty in this matter is one of the reasons why he is not popular: "People are generally afraid of the truth, whether revealed by Christ or Machiavelli" (ibid., 5). Prezzolini's Machiavelli is the founder of political science who upset the attempts to define an ideal state in order to discover the real nature of states and how they functioned, and in this respect he can be compared to Galileo: they both taught that the universe, solar system for Galileo and history for Machiavelli, is indifferent to the desires and destinies of the individual (ibid., 6-7). In Machiavelli's political theory, the force opposing the malignity of supernatural powers is *virtù*, which exalts the Renaissance idea of man who is capable of carving his own destiny, as opposed to Greek concept of destiny that crushes mankind, and the medieval idea of the will of God. Machiavelli's *virtù* does not correspond to the virtues of Plato and of the Stoics which became the cardinal virtues of Christianity. In stead, he uses the word more in the sense of *dynamis* (virtue of power) than in the sense of *areté* (ethical virtue). Machiavelli's virtue, according to Prezzolini, is opposed to *dolce vita* – that is, lasciviousness, sloth etc. – and neither an effeminate and contemplative attitude towards life nor simple barbaric *furor* are ever called virtuous by

Machiavelli (ibid., 23). Machiavelli's "studies are based on the inapplicability of Christian morality to political life" (ibid., 26) because he believes that recourse to evil in politics is necessary.

In her *Machiavelli's Three Romes; Religion, Human Liberty and Politics Reformed* Sullivan argues that the tyrant from whose grip Machiavelli, being an exponent of *vivere politico*, would see humanity extricated is the Christian god. Since Machiavelli indicates that this manner of life can be established by way of either a republic or a kingship, she argues that Machiavelli finds that Christianity alone has made the practice of a true political life impossible (Sullivan 1996, 4). Without entering the scholastic debates, Machiavelli "objects categorically to the manner in which Christianity exerts a type of rule over human beings that reduces all politics to fundamental weakness" (ibid., 5). Sullivan's Machiavelli regards the clergy as a type of nobility which derives its vitality from draining political actors of theirs. "Machiavelli repeatedly presents his readers with the spectacle of seemingly mighty rulers humbled before the shepherds of the Christian flock" (ibid., 4-5).

Skinner (2000) has rightly emphasised Machiavelli's divorce from classical and contemporary humanism. Skinner's Machiavelli argues that, if a ruler wishes to reach his highest goals, he will not always find it rational to be moral. He will find that any consistent attempt to cultivate the princely virtues, especially *honestum*, will prove to be a ruinously irrational policy. For Skinner, the crucial difference between Machiavelli and his more conventional contemporaries lies not in the goals which princes ought to pursue but in the nature of the methods they took to be appropriate for the attainment of these ends (Skinner 1978 I, 134). Machiavelli agreed with earlier writers that the proper goals of a prince are to achieve great things, to seek glory, fame and honour, and to maintain his state. But whereas others assumed that the prince must ensure that he follows the dictates of Christian morality and cultivates all the Christian cardinal virtues, Machiavelli claimed that this would inevitably lead to the prince's devastation among so many who are not virtuous. The only way out of this dilemma, if the prince is interested in maintaining his state, is to accept unflinchingly that "he will have to shake off the demands of Christian virtue, wholeheartedly embracing the very different morality which his situation dictates" (ibid., 134-135). The prince must be able to counterfeit the Christian virtues, to pretend to possess them, without actually resorting to them. Thus, for Machiavelli, *virtú* denotes precisely the requisite quality of moral flexibility in a prince.

But what about the obvious Christian objection that this is a foolish as well as a wicked position to adopt, since it forgets the day of judgement on which all injustices will finally be punished? "About this", writes Skinner, "Machiavelli says nothing at all. His silence is eloquent, indeed epoch making; it echoed around Christian Europe, at first eliciting a stunned silence in return, and then a howl of execration that has never finally died away" (ibid., 42). As long as this claim regards *Il Principe*, it is accurate. But in his other writings, Machiavelli

does say something about post-mortem retribution. Indeed, it almost constitutes a recurring theme in his more literary writings and personal letters (Korvela 2001). Even in his comedies and letters Machiavelli seldom loses any opportunity of striking against the Christian religion.

It is clear that if we wish to examine Machiavelli's attitude towards Christianity, we should consider all of his works, not just *Il Principe* and *Discorsi*. Consequently, Machiavelli never abandons Christian morality totally, since he recalls traditional moral and social norms by stressing the need to violate them if his prince is to succeed. de Grazia (1994, 299), has labelled Machiavelli's perspective as The Un-Golden Rule. It is Machiavelli's small gift to moral philosophy, the near antecedents of which are to be found in the legal and military language of self-defence and pre-emptive strike. Whereas the Gospels of Matthew (7:12) and Luke (6:31) exhort people to "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", Machiavelli's norm is "Do unto others as they would do unto you". Unlike the Christian norm which is based on wished-for conduct, Machiavelli's norm is based on the actual truth of the matter, grasped by observing the behaviour of men and tasting the flavour of history. Since others will not keep their word to you, it is not very wise to keep yours to them. It is, of course, clear that Machiavelli assumes rather than proves that keeping one's faith is disadvantageous for rulers. Nevertheless, in the real world trust seldom pays, as Machiavelli observed five hundred years ago. In Machiavelli's view, Christian virtues may sometimes be useful, but more often in dealing with other people they are a hindrance. But the reason for this is not that the virtues in themselves are a hindrance. In stead, it is because of the crookedness of others that the cultivation of Christian virtues seldom brings renown. Whoever wishes to prevail against the bad intentions of others must be ready to outmanoeuvre them beforehand.

For Machiavelli, religion is a *sine qua non* of a well-ordered community. Not just any religion, but a religion that is likewise well-ordered and has no disclaimer of earthly pursuits like Christianity. Commenting on Machiavelli's analysis of Roman religion, Coby (1999, 66) tells us that for Machiavelli 1.) religion is the glue of society and is important to national success, 2.) religion is untrue but politically useful to the extent that the rulers feign belief and manipulate the rites, 3.) the primary use of religion is the control of the plebeian population, and that 4.) religion used militarily is helpful but of less certain value. Rome benefited from religion not because it civilised men through the arts of peace, but because religion made Romans obedient to authority (ibid., 68). Although Machiavelli claims that religion has often acted as a cloak for bad men who can in security control others with it, it is hard to believe Sullivan's (1996, 7) assertion that "Machiavelli opens up the possibility that the better alternative for a city would be to dispense with religious appeals altogether, thereby eliminating a powerful weapon of potential tyrants". According to Sullivan, in "Machiavelli's universe the political triumphs over the religious" and the "religious is not only pernicious, it is wholly superfluous" (ibid.). From the fact that in his universe politics triumphs over religion it does not follow

that religion would be useless. It is precisely the very fact that politics triumphs over religion that makes religion useful.

3 MAIN THEMES IN MACHIAVELLI'S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY

3.1 Polemics against Christianity in the Machiavellian Oeuvre

Those familiar with the writings of Machiavelli know well that his thinking is not systematic. Nevertheless, there might be a sense in which he is coherent, namely in his critique of Christianity. If he occasionally speaks of the "true religion" that has showed the truth and the true way, we can quite legitimately interpret it as irony. He never says that the *ozio* of Christianity is laudable.

"All of Machiavelli's principal works were written at about the same time, one single manner of thinking animates them all, and none of his important works has been lost. Modern criticism has not discovered any essential change in any of his texts. *The Prince*, the *Discourses*, *The Art of War* and the *Florentine Histories* form a single unit with differences stemming only from non-essentials or method of exposition. Machiavelli differs from many authors in that it is not possible to speak of a development or transformation of his thought caused by events or by a maturing of his ideas. Even before 1516, and at the time of his significant works, his mind was already formed; it was an adult mind from the beginning. The young or adolescent Machiavelli does not exist for us." (Prezzolini 1967, 109-110) By claiming that Machiavelli's "thought is always consistent", Prezzolini differs from many other scholars, especially those who have tried to establish an essential difference between Machiavelli's two principal works. Prezzolini thinks that the most systematic exposition of Machiavelli's thought is to be found from the *Discorsi*, while *Il Principe* is a sort of intermezzo, written between the first and second book of the *Discorsi* (ibid., 110). The dating of Machiavelli's works has aroused much discussion between scholars - most of which is irrelevant for the purposes of this study. Whether *Il Principe* is written before, after, or simultaneously with the *Discorsi*, does not explain anything in respect to his views on Christianity. There is no essential difference in his treatment of Christianity in the two works, or in any other works (excepting his sermon). "In all the writings which he gave to the public",

wrote Lord Macaulay in his essay on Machiavelli in 1827, “the same obliquity of moral principle for which *The Prince* is so severely censured is more or less discernible. We doubt whether it would be possible to find, in all the many volumes of his compositions, a single expression indicating that dissimulation and treachery had ever struck him as discreditable” (Macaulay 1879, 29).

The irreverent attitude towards Christian morality is present also in Machiavelli’s literary works. It is clear that if we wish to examine Machiavelli’s attitude towards Christianity, we should consider all of his works, not just *Il Principe* and *Discorsi*. While many scholars have turned Machiavelli’s literary masterpieces, such as *La Mandragola*, into political allegories, Rebhorn (1988) reads those works from the opposite direction. He approaches such characters as the new prince in *Il Principe*, Castruccio Castracani of Machiavelli’s *Vita*, the clever generals, consuls, condottieri etc. in *Istorie fiorentine* and *Discorsi*, as though they were all so many political counterparts of Callimaco (ibid., 6). Rebhorn’s point of departure is that Machiavelli “essentially responds to the world through literary genres” (ibid., 4). Rebhorn’s Machiavelli embraces a vision where the whole of human life is a confidence game. According to him, Machiavelli’s major literary works all centre on trickery and the abuse of confidence. Patapan (1999, 532) regards Machiavellian comedy as a continuation of his more general political teaching and takes up the suggestion made in *Clizia* that comedy is the safest vehicle for a Machiavellian education since it is subversive and appeals to the young. He teaches indecencies through subtle rhetoric: unlike Socrates, his indictment will only take place in a comedy, and hence he will never be accused in a real court of law of impiety or corrupting the young. Whatever his intentions for educating the young were, he wrote three comedies and in all of them cleverness and dissimulation prevail over good faith. In this respect, they do not differ from his political works. In fact, Machiavelli himself says in the prologue to *Clizia* that comedies exist to benefit the audience, for it will be useful, especially for young men, to observe “an old man’s avarice, a lover’s madness, a servant’s tricks, a parasite’s gluttony, a poor man’s distress, a rich man’s ambition, a harlot’s flatteries, all men’s unreliability”²⁶. “Comedies”, he continues, “are full of instances of these, and all these things can with the utmost propriety be put on the stage”. Apparently, the same propriety was not so self-evident in writing about the tricks of the princes or all men’s unreliability in that context.

Then there are some minor works, both literary and political, some poems, reports, and letters. In these too, Machiavelli can be said to be rather consistent in his view of the Christian religion, its practitioners, and its social philosophy. The *Vita di Castruccio Castracani* is a good example as it is a historical and literary work, which Machiavelli has flavoured with his own ideals and appreciations²⁷. Standard interpretation has seen little value in the text, which is a historically inaccurate biography of Lucca’s ruler Castruccio Castracani. I think, however, that the work, written in the summer of 1520, constitutes a kind

²⁷ For an analysis of the text see Bondanella 1972, as well as my introduction to my Finnish translation of the text (Korvela 2005).

of late supplement to *Il Principe*. In the *Vita*, Castruccio seems to be Machiavelli's archetypal prince, rising from zero to hero through his own *virtù*. Significantly, there is not a single mention of Castruccio in *Il Principe*, written some seven years earlier. The text shows very clearly that Machiavelli's ideal prince needs an education different from the Christian one.

There are also passages where Machiavelli passionately attacks Christianity in an implicit manner. Strauss has noted that in the first thirty-nine chapters of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli actually quotes Livy in only four (cf. Strauss 1970, 16). This is somewhat surprising since the whole book is a commentary of Livy's work. The group of chapters (*Discorsi* I/12-15) where Machiavelli quotes Livy contain an ardent indictment of Christianity and the Roman church as responsible for the irreligion of the Italians and for the political weakness of Italy. Strauss argues: "Just as the writers subject to the Roman caesars could not blame Caesar as the tyrant he was but instead praised Brutus, Machiavelli, being subject to the church, could not attack Christianity but extolled the religion of the pagan Romans. He uses the authority of Livy for counteracting the authority of the Bible. Livy's history is his Bible" (ibid., 17).

If we consider what Machiavelli says of the real Bible, we may get a clue what Christianity meant for him. He alludes to the instance of Moses and the Israelites when discussing how a reformer gets rid of the envious, in chapter XXX of the third book of the *Discorsi*:

"E chi legge la Bibbia sensatamente, vedrà Moisè essere stato forzato, a volere che le sue leggi e che i suoi ordini andassero innanzi, ad ammazzare infiniti uomini, i quali, non mossi da altro che dalla invidia, si opponevano a' disegni suoi." (*Discorsi*, III/30)

In the passage above we must note the way Machiavelli wants to read the Bible. His strategy is to read it *sensatamente*. John Geerken has suggested that this presumably means not reading it in a devotional, liturgical, or exegetical manner, but in effect politically (Geerken 1999, 580). According to Geerken, the references to biblical figures in the works of Machiavelli indicate that for him the Bible was not exempt from a political reading – it, too, could yield the reasons for human actions and causes of hatred and factionalism etc, which was, for Machiavelli, the whole idea of writing histories. Thus, in Machiavelli's view the Bible seems to hold no special place compared to other histories. The reference to Biblical figures and stories often serve a rhetorical purpose in Machiavelli's writings, as is clear e.g. from the last chapter of *Il Principe*.

But what is Machiavelli's strategy in his polemics against the Church? As already mentioned, when he wrote that Christianity is incompatible with military valour and that Christianity is not the best civil religion, these were speculative points. He never tries to prove the weakness of Christianity. His critique is also very subtle. Whereas many Renaissance writers described the Church as a whore and its priests as sodomites etc., Machiavelli is more polite. His strategy is to focus on the political level, and not to engage in theological debates.

And what was the object of Machiavelli's polemics? Was he writing against the Papacy? To confine attention to the church's highest ranks gives a skewed picture of the church as a whole. For all the drama, intrigue and even debauchery of the Renaissance papacy, most Catholics would be unaware of what was happening at the curia - and perhaps had little real interest. This raises the question of the papacy's real place in the late mediaeval church as a whole. The emerging local role of non-resident cardinals points to a key feature of the pre-Reformation church, a decentralizing process usually labelled as the emergence of national churches. As the papacy's monarchical control was eroded, its role within the church became more uncertain. The reformers' rejection of papal supremacy in the sixteenth century encourages a search for earlier antipathy and an assumption that support for the papacy declined over the late mediaeval period to a state at best of indifference. While individual popes had detractors and the curia itself faced criticism for corruption and exploitation, few openly challenged the papacy's existence. A Catholic church without the Vicar of Christ was inconceivable. The determination to resolve the Great Schism, to re-establish a single united headship of the church, attests the positive acceptance of the papacy at least by the political and ecclesiastical hierarchs of the early fifteenth century. At lower levels there is similarly no real evidence of rejection among the orthodox. Admittedly, most people's awareness of the papacy was limited and distance encouraged neither affection nor attachment - although Rome retained its spiritual significance as a pilgrimage centre, encouraged by the proclamation of jubilees offering extraordinary indulgences. The papacy was possibly appreciated more as a utilitarian administrative mechanism than for its religious significance, treated with ignorance and indifference until its powers had to be invoked for particular reasons and it suddenly became useful. (Swanson 2000, 13-14)

The Curia's wickedness was a constant theme of reform literature of the fifteenth century. The sale of ecclesiastical appointments was a lucrative and even necessary source of papal income. By the time of Leo X, it is estimated that there were some two thousand marketable Church jobs, which were literally sold over the counter at the Vatican; even a cardinal's hat might go to the highest bidder. Besides these, there were an immense variety of taxes levied by the Curia on the newly conferred benefices. Another practice odious to many of reforming temper was pluralism - the practice of conferring more than one ecclesiastical benefice or office on one man. As a result, many bishops never saw their dioceses and could not control them, since they lived elsewhere (cf. Bokenkotter 2005, 198-199).

Alongside its role as an international institution, the church also had to function in the localities, at the levels of province, diocese and parish. The shift of focus to examine this more localized (and, perhaps, more 'religious') church points attention towards a very different type of church, although one equally liable to provoke contention in matters of status and privilege, and one often criticized for the personal failings of the clergy, its exploitation of economic power and the misuse of endowments to fund personal and family advance.

The late mediaeval parish often epitomizes Catholicism at its most active and vital. Churchwardens' accounts show extensive lay participation in parochial administration and funding, which also gave the laity effective control over a considerable number of clerical careers. The accounts provide evidence for participation in fund-raising, for investment in liturgical necessities, for the provision and maintenance of lights and images, and a host of other activities which establish the parish church and its religious regime as a central element in parochial life. This evidence is augmented by that supplied by wills and by the records of devotional guilds and fraternities which were founded in such numbers that they have might be termed as the most characteristic expressions of late medieval Christianity. (Swanson 2000, 15-16)

While there were core statements of the faith in the creeds, and a common spiritual and ethical culture based on the seven sacraments, the Ten Commandments and shared views on sin and virtue, beyond those essential elements the religion was extremely flexible and variable: 'Catholicism' was no single, unified, coherent body of dogma or devotion; to treat it as such is a gross misrepresentation. Even theologies were regionalized. The proliferation of theological faculties in late mediaeval universities and the maintenance of their separate *studia* by the mendicant orders permitted the development of distinct theological strands and allegiances. These were competitive - as with the tension between the *via antiqua*, based on Thomas Aquinas, and the *via moderna*, which owed more to William of Ockham - but the adversity could be contained. As important as the fragmentation is the cumulative nature of the Catholic religion: the past was rarely explicitly rejected, might always be revived. The fifteenth century saw a major revival in interest in twelfth-century theology; the early sixteenth century witnessed a revival of the Patristic writers. Even in a manuscript culture, these old ideas were simultaneously as valid as those of contemporary thinkers; printing also made them all simultaneously available. Attempts to comprehend the nature of pre-Reformation religion must face the problems inherent in this cumulative character, especially in spirituality. That covers a wide spectrum of activities, from what might now be considered gross superstition to the most intense mysticism. Among historians, this range has provoked attempts to identify specific types of religious culture, setting 'elite' against 'popular' or 'learned' against 'lewd', with occasional blanket denials that pre-Reformation Europe was really 'Christian' at all. Whatever the modern judgement, on their own terms the people of pre-Reformation Europe were Christian, even if some of them displayed the most abysmal ignorance when actually questioned about their supposed beliefs. Distinctions between 'elite' and 'popular' or 'learned' and 'lewd' may have some practical validity, but still rest on insecure foundations. There were gradations in spirituality; but divisions cannot be forcefully applied or rigidly maintained. The learned could dismiss some popular activities as superstitions but they also exploited such behaviour in other cases. Meanwhile, those for whom the Latinate theology was inaccessible might condemn its verbosity and

remoteness, as an alienation from God. While the learned theologized, the unlearned believed and prayed. (Swanson 2000, 17-18)

Machiavelli does not criticise particular practices of the Curia or practices on the level of the parish. He writes of the political irresponsibility of the Papacy and of the lack of religion among the clergy, but at the same time he is criticising Christianity in its very essence.

3.2 The Church and the Popes

For some reason, it has been assumed that Machiavelli criticised Christianity primarily because the Church was keeping Italy disunited. That was one very important reason, but absolutely not the only one. Anyway, this is not one of Machiavelli's most original points. The bad example of the popes and the Church was a central issue for writers like Dante, Marsilius of Padua and Lorenzo Valla. Machiavelli discusses the matter in his *Discorsi*:

“Abbiamo, adunque, con la Chiesa e con i preti noi Italiani questo primo obbligo, di essere diventati senza religione e cattivi: ma ne abbiamo ancora uno maggiore, il quale è la seconda cagione della rovina nostra. Questo è che la Chiesa ha tenuto e tiene questa provincia divisa. E veramente, alcuna provincia non fu mai unita o felice, se la non viene tutta alla ubbidienza d'una repubblica o d'uno principe, come è avvenuto alla Francia ed alla Spagna. E la cagione che la Italia non sia in quel medesimo termine, nè abbia anch'ella o una repubblica o uno principe che la governi, e solamente la Chiesa: perchè, avendovi quella abitato e tenuto imperio temporale, non è stata sì potente né di tanta virtù l'abbia potuto occupare la tirannide d'Italia e farsene principe; e non è stata, dall'altra parte, sì debole, che, per paura di non perdere il dominio delle sue cose temporali, la non abbia potuto convocare uno potente che la difenda contro a quello che in Italia fusse diventato troppo potente” (*Discorsi*, I/12).

Clearly, then, according to Machiavelli, Italy does not enjoy the same happiness of being united like France and Spain because of the Church. She has been too weak to grasp the sole authority in Italy, but also powerful enough to keep anyone else from gaining that position. Machiavelli is actually ironically proposing that anyone who wishes to test the ruinous effects the Church has, would have to be so powerful that he could send the Roman court to Switzerland²⁸. After a “short time the evil habits of that court would do more to

²⁸ Machiavelli chose Switzerland because according to him the Swiss “oggi sono, solo, popoli che vivono, e quanto alla religione e quanto agli ordini militari, secondo gli antichi” (ibid.). This is also important regarding his alleged paganism. If he says that the Swiss are following ancient habits in their religion, this does not mean that they would embrace paganism, but that they are using religion like the ancients did. In Germany too, the religion is not corrupted: “Vedesi bene, nella provincia della Magna, questa bontà e questa religione ancora in quelli popoli essere grande; la quale fa che molte repubbliche vi vivono libere, ed in modo osservano le loro leggi che nessuno di fuori né di dentro ardisce occuparle” (*Discorsi*, I/55). In this sense, Christianity is not totally hostile to republics. Only its corrupted interpretations make republican political life impossible. Furthermore, when he praises the anti-clerical heroes of the War of the Eight Saints in *Istorie fiorentine* (III/7), it should be

break down law and order in that region than any other event which at any time could occur there" (ibid.). In his *Istorie fiorentine* (I/5), Machiavelli continues his attack on same grounds. After the division of the Roman Empire, Italy was in the hands of the barbarians. The provinces suffered because they had to change everything, from their names to their religion:

"Ma, intra tante variazioni, non fu di minore momento il variare della religione, perchè, combattendo la consuetudine della antica fede con i miracoli della nuova, si generavano tumulti e discordie gravissime intra gli uomini; e se pure la cristiana religione fusse stata unita, ne sarebbe sequiti minori disordini; ma, combattendo la chiesa greca, la romana e la ravennate insieme, e di più le sette eretiche con le cattoliche, in molti modi contristavano il mondo" (*Istorie fiorentine*, I/5).

Most damaging has been the change in religion, because Christianity has created tumults in the world by combating old religion with new miracles. These tumults might have been rarer if Christianity itself would not have been disunited and divided into the Greek, Catholic and Ravenna Churches and numerous heretical sects. It is strange that Machiavelli explains the disunity of Christianity with the combating Greek, Roman and Ravenna versions of Christianity, since he is in fact commenting on events that occurred between the years 395-493. The Greek and Roman Catholic churches separated 600 years later in 1054. Nevertheless, unlike Dante who opposed the Roman pontiffs on moral and evangelical grounds, Machiavelli opposed them because they had made Italians unbelievers and therefore incapable of forming a state. He reproved them because their temporal power interfered with the establishment of national state (Prezzolini 1967, 33). Dante's (and Marsilius of Padua's) main point, the fact that this temporal power is contrary to the spirit of Christ, is secondary or even irrelevant for Machiavelli. In 1440, Lorenzo Valla proved that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery, thus making the temporal power and possessions of the Church even more dubious and susceptible to criticism²⁹. Yet, Machiavelli does not mention the whole issue.

Nevertheless, in the same passage (*Istorie fiorentine*, I/5) Machiavelli gives an example of his *paradiastole*, or his practice of inverting *loci comuni* in regard to Christianity:

"Vivendo adunque gli uomini intra tante persecuzioni, portavano descritto negli occhi lo spavento dello animo loro, perché, oltre alli infiniti mali che sopportavano, mancava buona parte di loro di potere rifuggire allo aiuto di Dio, nel quale tutti i miseri sogliono sperare; perché, sendo la maggiore parte di loro incerti a quale Iddio dovessero ricorrere, mancando di ogni aiuto e d'ogni speranza, miseramente morivano."

remembered that these men were nevertheless Christians, although "stimavano allora più la patria che l'anima".

²⁹ The Donation of Constantine is a forged document supposedly from Emperor Constantine the Great, addressed to Pope Sylvester I (314-335), by which large privileges and rich possessions were conferred on the pope and the Roman Church.

In the midst of such persecutions and doctrinal strife people were deprived of hope, which means that Christianity appears as a source of desperation rather than hope. Hence, there is no providential aspect in the transition from the ancient religion to Christianity.

The authority of the popes derives from the same source. In these times, Machiavelli explains, the popes began to acquire greater temporal authority than they had previously possessed (*Istorie fiorentine*, I/9). The immediate successors of St. Peter were revered for the holiness of their lives and the miracles which they performed. Thus, their example so greatly extended the Christian religion that princes of other states embraced it, in order to obviate the confusion which prevailed at that period. Since the emperor chose Christianity and returned to Constantinople, it followed that the Roman empire was more easily ruined, and the church more rapidly increased her authority. Nevertheless, the popes never acquired any greater authority than what reverence for their habits and doctrine gave them. The source of their temporal power is Theoderic:

“Ma quello che gli fece diventare di maggiore momento nelle cose di Italia fu Teoderigo re de' Goti, quando pose la sua sedia in Ravenna; perché, rimasa Roma senza principe, i Romani avevano cagione, per loro refugio, di prestare più ubbidienza al papa”.

Hence, no providential reason is offered, but the simple fact that the Romans were left without a prince. In contrast to many other authors, Machiavelli describes the fact on purely historical-political basis, without entering into the juridical or theological dimensions of the issue. For Machiavelli, it is not a *dispensa apostolica*, but the vacuum left by the emperors and the diplomatic activity of the popes that is the source of their temporal power (cf. Forte 2000, 40). In another passage Machiavelli describes how Charlemagne went to visit the pontiff at Rome, where he declared that the pope could not be judged by men. The pope and the people of Rome made him emperor, and whereas the popes used to be established by the emperors, the latter now began to have need of the popes at their elections. The empire continued to lose its powers, while the church acquired them; and, by these means, she constantly extended her authority over temporal princes. But in the passage Machiavelli actually says: “e ne andò a vicitare il Papa a Roma, dove giudicò che il papa, vicario di Dio, non potesse essere dagli uomini giudicato” (*Istorie fiorentine*, I/11). Hence, Charlemagne's statement that the popes could not be judged by men was only his personal judgment. The providential reasons are again lacking from Machiavelli's version.

The Papal States were certainly acting like a temporal state and were actually very close to turning into one. In fact, as Burckhardt (2000, 108) has noted, there can be no doubt whatever that Cesare Borgia, whether chosen Pope or not after the death of his father Alexander VI, meant to keep possession of the pontifical State at any cost, and that this, after all the enormities he had committed, he could not as Pope have succeeded in doing permanently. Hence he, if anybody, could have secularised the Papal States, and he would have

been forced to do so in order to keep them. “Unless we are much deceived, this is the real reason of the secret sympathy with which Machiavelli treats the great criminal; from Cesare, or from nobody, could it be hoped that he ‘would draw the steel from the wound,’ in other words, annihilate the Papacy – the source of all foreign intervention and of all the divisions of Italy” (ibid.) Yet, Machiavelli does not base his argument against Christianity primarily on the temporal power of the Church, and there are no explicit references where he would reveal his alleged wish to annihilate the Papal States. On the contrary, he leaves the door open for the option that if it would have been united and virtuous, the Church might have been able to unite Italy. Throughout the first book of *Istorie fiorentine* Machiavelli complains about the growing temporal power of the popes, but he never expresses his wish that they should be destroyed. And, as already noted, he evades the question whether this temporal power is contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Ironically he remarks that before Nicholas III, the nephews and other relatives of the popes were not significant, but after him they fill history (*Istorie fiorentine*, I/23). Then, with an obvious reference to Alexander VI, he says that the only logical consequence of this nepotism is that since the popes up to that time have planned to leave their sons as princes, “in the future they may strive to leave them the popedom as hereditary” (ibid.), hence making it a secular state.

Machiavelli is also altogether silent about the papal monarchy and its capability to endure time. When compared to Venice or Sparta or any other republic, the Holy See has managed to cling onto its status much longer. Machiavelli never pondered the reason for this. In *Istorie fiorentine* he mentions papal nepotism, but does not go further with this theme. Nepotism was, of course, the only available means of securing possessions and status for the Popes who could not build a dynasty. Discussion of this type might have fit well e.g. in the fourth or eleventh chapter of *Il Principe*, but there isn't one. He says that the pontifical states are protected by superior causes and that he omits speaking of them since they are maintained by God (*Il Principe*, XI). This sensitivity is probably due to the fact that the book was written in 1513 when Leo X, a Medici pope and thus a relative of the addressee, was the head of those states. In *Il Principe* XIX Machiavelli says that the government of the Pope is neither hereditary nor new, since the descendants of the prince are not his heirs, but neither is it subject to the troubles of new princedoms since the institutions are old and are designed to receive the new ruler as if he were its hereditary lord. The only parallel he finds in secular princedoms is that of the “Soldano”, i.e. the Sultan of Egypt.

That Machiavelli never analysed the actual political practices of the Curia is curious. In Rome, where power was manifested at the highest level, private citizens and delegations from institutional bodies and nations constantly strove to gain concrete advantages, prestige and authority. It was precisely for these reasons that Rome, and especially the Papal court, can be considered as a kind of political laboratory, a place where experiments were made with original ways of doing politics and where such ways were the subject of reflection and

theorising (Signorotto & Visceglia 2002, 1). Again, his silence is curious, if we remember that Machiavelli's political education coincided with certain experiments in the secularization of politics at the very heart of European Christendom, in the *penetralia* of the Apostolic Palace: "Owing to their relative youthfulness, and especially because they owed nothing to the traditional mechanisms of ecclesiastical promotion and cooption into the Sacred College, the 'young' militants of the Borgia party, and especially the Catalans, embraced a radically different ethos from the traditional curial code of behaviour. More than the *salus Ecclesiae*, their priority was the survival of their own group, which was linked to the fortunes of the house of Borgia by a double thread, pending the decisive event of Alexander's death. This was the reason for their readiness to employ any means to help the house of Borgia retain power, an attitude that we might well term 'Machiavellian'" (ibid., 20).

People often expect both salvation and doom from the same source. This holds true for Papacy as well. Since the medieval times, the Pope could be seen either as *pastor angelicus* or as the Antichrist (cf. McGinn 1978, 155-156). The apocalyptic view of the Papacy tended to split apart in the religious quarrels of the post-Reformation era. The Protestants found a useful tool in the image of the Pope as the Antichrist, whereas the Catholics dreamed of the coming holy Pope³⁰. Whereas Luther's writings are filled with contempt for the Papacy, Machiavelli's are not, at least not so openly. Luther used very rude language when describing the Papacy, and even Aristotle was for him merely "a buffoon who has misled the Church". Both Wycliff and Hus had identified the Papacy with the Antichrist foretold in Scriptures, and Luther saw it as the kingdom of Babylon. Now, compared to these, Machiavelli appears to be drawn straight out of the Sunday school. He never employs similar rude terminology, and even Guicciardini seems to be more blasphemous in calling the Popes a "band of ruffians". This is surprising keeping in mind that it was Guicciardini who noted Machiavelli's frequent shocking statements. The reason for this is that Machiavelli focused on the political aspects of the Papal States, not to the theological ones. He thought that the bad example of the popes was diminishing the authority of Christianity in general, but he also considered the popes as lousy political actors.

For Machiavelli, the Papacy was politically dangerous. It had fostered foreign alliances that were causing Italy's ruin, and in domestic politics it was not very wise to rely on the pontiffs:

"perché la brevità della vita de' papi, la variazione della successione, il poco timore che la Chiesa ha de' principi, i pochi rispetti che la ha nel prendere i partiti, fa che uno principi secolare non può in uno pontefice interamente confidare, né può sicuramente accomunare la fortuna sua con quello; perché chi è, nelle guerre e pericoli, del papa amico, sarà nelle vittorie accompagnato e nelle rovine solo, sendo il

³⁰ Machiavelli was not ignorant of this popular image, since in his letter to Guicciardini (18.5.1521) he says that Rovasio "ha paura di non andare in galea come papa Angelico". This refers also to a certain preacher who came to Florence in 1515 and declared himself the Angelic Pope, which led to his imprisonment.

pontefice dalla spirituale potenza e reputazione sostenuto e difeso" (*Istorie fiorentine*, VIII/17).

The popes are friends in victories, but if the war is lost, the secular prince is left alone, since the popes do not fear secular princes and are protected by their spiritual authority even when defeated. This spiritual authority is the reason why he does not consider the causes of the greatness of the Papacy:

"Restaci solamente, al presente, a ragionare de' principati ecclesiastici, circa quali tutte le difficoltà sono avanti che si posseggino; perché si acquistano o per virtù o per fortuna, e senza l'una e l'altra si mantengono: perché sono sustentati da li ordini antiquati nella religione, quali sono stati tanto potenti e di qualità ch'e' tengono e' loro principi in stato in qualunque modo si procedino e vivino. Costoro soli hanno stati e non gli difendono; hanno sudditi e non li governano. E gli stati, per essere indifesi, non sono loro tolti; ed e' sudditi, per non essere governati, non se ne curano, né pensano né possono alienarsi da loro. Solo adunque questi principati sono sicuri e felici; ma essendo quelli retti da cagione superiori, alle quali mente umana non aggiugne, lascerò il parlarne: perché, essendo esaltati e mantenuti da Dio, sarebbe officio di uomo presuntuoso e temerario discorrerne" (*Il Principe*, XI).

Once Machiavelli seems to suggest that the Papacy could (or maybe he means should?) have been annihilated:

"Papa Iulio secondo, andando nel 1505 a Bologna, per cacciare di quello stato la casa de' Bentivogli, la quale aveva tenuto il principato di quella città cento anni, voleva ancora trarre Giovampagolo Baglioni di Perugia, della quale era tiranno, come quello che aveva congiurato contro a tutti i tiranni che occupavano le terre della Chiesa. E pervenuto presso a Perugia con questo animo e deliberazione, nota a ciascuno, non aspettò di entrare in quella città con lo esercito suo, che lo guardasse, ma vi entrò disarmato, non ostante vi fusse dentro Giovampagolo con gente assai, quale per difesa di sé aveva ragunata. Si che, portato da quel furore con il quale governava tutte le cose, con la semplice sua guardia si rimise nelle mani del nimico; il quale dipoi ne menò seco, lasciando un governatore in quella città, che rendesse ragione per la Chiesa. Fu notata, dagli uomini prudenti che col papa erano, la temerità del papa e la viltà di Giovampagolo; né potevano estimare donde si venisse che quello non avesse, con sua perpetua fama, oppresso ad un tratto il nimico suo, e sé arricchito di preda, sendo col papa tutti li cardinali, con tutte le loro delizie. Né si poteva credere si fusse astenuto o per bontà o per coscienza che lo ritenesse; perché in uno petto d'un uomo facinoroso, che si teneva la sorella, che aveva morti i cugini e i nipoti per regnare, non poteva scendere alcun pietoso rispetto: ma si conchiuse, nascesse che gli uomini non sanno essere onorevolmente cattivi, o perfettamente buoni, e, come una malizia ha in sé grandezza, o è in alcuna parte generosa, e' non vi sanno entrare" (*Discorsi*, I/27).

This passage is titled "Very rarely do men understand how to be altogether bad or altogether good". Of course, he does not say anything about the latter, but focuses on why men cannot be totally bad. Giovampagolo, the tyrant who had taken his sister for himself and murdered his cousins, could not attack Julius II even though he put himself in Giovampagolo's hands unarmed. Machiavelli suggests that this was not due to some *pietoso rispetto*, but because men do not understand the greatness in evil deeds. Giovampagolo's hesitation originated, not in religious respect for the Vicar of Christ, but in cowardice. Thus, Machiavelli's view is that the world is full of petty criminals, but great criminals are a rarity (Coby 1999, 231). Nevertheless, the most interesting part follows

when Machiavelli explains what would have been the consequences should Giovampagolo acted otherwise:

“Così Giovampagolo, il quale non stimava essere incesto e publico parricida, non seppe, o, a dir meglio, non ardì, avendone giusta occasione, fare una impresa, dove ciascuno avesse ammirato l'animo suo, e avesse di sé lasciato memoria eterna, sendo il primo che avesse dimostro a' prelati, quanto sia da stimare poco chi vive e regna come loro ed avessi fatto una cosa, la cui grandezza avesse superato ogni infamia, ogni pericolo, che da quella potesse dependere” (*Discorsi*, I/27).

If he had slain the Pope, this act, its greatness, would have transcended every infamy or danger that could have resulted from its implementation. This act would have shown the prelates “what a low estimate was to be put on men who live and reign as they do”³¹. The story, however, resembles the one told in Augustine’s *Civitas Dei* (IV.4.) in which a captured pirate, when accused by Alexander the Great for infesting the seas, accused the emperor for infesting the world. Whereas Augustine uses the story to reveal the brigandage of politics and the fact that rulers are nothing but robbers too powerful to be punished, Machiavelli supposes that acquisition on the scale of empire-building changes criminality into history and self-gratification into public responsibility (Coby 1999, 231). There is greatness in evil deeds if they are implemented on a large scale, but men rarely understand this.

In Machiavelli’s view, it is necessary for a prince to be a great pretender and dissembler; and men are so simple that he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived. This is Machiavelli’s view of men in general, but his example of the ruler who is excellent in this respect is Pope Alexander VI:

“Alessandro sesto non fece mai altro, non pensò mai ad altro che a ingannare uomini, e sempre trovò subietto da poterlo fare: e non fu mai uomo che avessi maggiore efficacia in asseverare, e con maggiori iuramenti affermassi una cosa, che la osservassi meno; nondimeno sempre gli succederno gl'inganni ad votum, perché conosceva bene questa parte del mondo” (*Il Principe*, XVIII)

The Pope, it is implied, is no different from other rulers: in fact, he is even better than other rulers and his plots succeeded because he knew well “questa parte del mondo”. In *Decennale primo* (lines 445-447) Machiavelli says of Alexander that his three dear and intimate handmaids were luxury, simony and cruelty (“sue familiari e care ancelle, lussuria, simonia e crudeltate”). His general view of the Popes is that many times “il Papa si era dimostro lupo e non pastore” (*Istorie fiorentine*, VIII/11). The popes are not pastors but wolves.

³¹ His scorn for the friars is evident also in the whole *Mandragola*, where again attention is drawn to the apparent inconsistency between their way of life and how they are supposed to live: “Egli è pur male però che quegli che ci arebbono a dare buoni esempli sien fatti così” (*Mandragola*, III.2). It is noteworthy that Machiavelli also added the words “and reign as they do”.

Machiavelli never makes any remarks about whether the supreme power in the Church belongs to the Council or to the Pope. The Conciliarist tradition, stressing the power of the Councils, was having its heyday when Machiavelli wrote his works, but there is no discussion on the topic in his works. The prestige of such councils rose when a council, meeting in Constance between 1414 and 1418, achieved the cessation of the Great Schism with its deposition of rival claimants for papacy and their replacement by Martin V, whose return to Rome brought back much of the authority the Church had lost during the Schism. "At Constance, hopes of the council as the reforming parliament of the Church were set out in the constitutional blueprint, *Sacrosancta* (1415), which stated that councils, alongside the pope, derived their authority from Christ. The decree of Constance, *Frequens* (1417), made provision for regular meetings of councils. The aftermath was a period of frequent council sessions, at Basel between 1431 and 1437 and at Florence and Rome between 1438 and 1445. Claims that the authority of the council was equal or even superior to that of the pope—'conciliarism'—posed an obvious threat to the still insecurely reestablished papacy in the line of Martin V, himself put in place by a council. Conciliarism, then, was a recipe for a running conflict between popes and councils, thwarting the proceedings of the Council at Basel, leading eventually to a denunciation by Pope Pius II (1458–64) in the bull *Execrabilis* (1460) of the constitutional claims of councils and sowing seeds of the discord between the papal and conciliar principles that delayed the convening of the vital reforming council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century" (Mullett 1999, 2-3).

Machiavelli claimed that the Church has kept Italy divided. Because of the ruinous policy of the Popes, Italy is not united like Spain and France. In the III chapter of *Il Principe*, however, Machiavelli recalls a discussion he had in 1500 with the Cardinal of Rouen:

"perché, dicendomi el cardinale di Roano che gli Italiani non si intendevano della guerra, io gli risposi che ' Franzesi non si intendevano dello stato: perché, s'è se ne intendessino, non lascerebbono venire in tanta grandezza la Chiesa".

If the French would understand anything of stately matters, they would not have let the Church attain such greatness. The greatness of the Church in Italy and the influence of the Spanish king in those provinces were in Machiavelli's view caused by the king of France and he seems to be smiling ironically at the fact that the Church and the Spanish king were now also causing his devastation.

We must note how little enthusiasm Machiavelli has to engage in theological debates. When he speaks of the Council of Florence (1439), he says: "In those times, there were differences between the Roman and the Greek churches, so that in divine worship they did not agree in every respect" (*Istorie fiorentine*, V/16). It is probably impossible to put it more laconically. When he continues his account of the Council, where temporary agreement between the East and the West was reached, he says that the "Greeks were hard pressed by the Turks and judged that they could not by themselves make a defence, in

order that with more assurance they could ask aid from the others, they decided to yield” and attended the Council. As the result of “many long debates”, the Greeks yielded and made an agreement with the Roman Church (ibid.). Thus, Machiavelli detects the political interests behind the theological union which was more apparent than real³², and evades the doctrinal disputes involved. Similarly, Machiavelli never made a single reference in any of his writings to Luther and the Reformation. It was only his younger contemporary, Francesco Guicciardini, who in his maxims said: “the position I have enjoyed with several popes has forced me to love their greatness for my own self-interest. If weren’t for this consideration, I would have loved Martin Luther as much as I love myself – not to be released from the laws taught by the Christian religion as it is normally interpreted and understood, but to see this band of ruffians reduced within their correct bounds, that is, living without vices or without authority” (Guicciardini 1994, 171).

3.3 The Friars

It has also been argued that Machiavelli’s primary target was the clergy. Criticism of the clergy is one of the distinctive features of the whole literature of the Renaissance and Machiavelli definitely made his contribution to the genre. Boccaccio’s *Decamerone*, to take one example, contains an ardent criticism of the clergymen who are depicted as hypocrites and seekers of personal gain³³. The conflict between their worldly orientations and their spiritual vows obviously provided ideal narrative material, the backbone for good stories. Yet the ferocities and ill-concealed anger in such tales also disclose a profound resentment against the pretensions of the clergy (Martines 2002, 265). The opulence and simony of the Avignonese papacy (1306-1376), the Great Schism (1378) obviously generated anticlerical bitterness, which became less strident after the Council of Constance (1414-1418) ended the schism, but it was now firmly rooted in urban public opinion and in the literature of the age. Machiavelli knew his Boccaccio and he actually refers to him when he discusses the selection of the new Lenten preacher for Florence:

³² The main debate concerned the double Procession of the Holy Ghost. When, at the request of the Greek emperor John Palaeologus, Eugene IV promised the Greeks the military and financial help as a consequence of the projected reconciliation, the Greeks declared that they recognized the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father *and* the Son. The Latin teaching respecting the azymes and purgatory was also accepted by the Greeks. As to the primacy of the Pope, they declared that they would grant the pope all the privileges he had before the schism. Many eastern princes, however, refused to abide by the decrees of the Council of Florence and deserted the position.

³³ Renaissance literature often treated friars as confidence men or *beffatori* who pursue various ends, mainly food, sex, political and religious power, wealth and authority (cf. Rebhorn 1988, 9).

“Vero è che io so che io sono contrario, come in molte altre cose, all’opinione di quelli cittadini: eglino vorrieno un predicatore che insegnasse loro la via del Paradiso, et io vorrei trovarne uno che insegnassi loro la via di andare a casa il diavolo; vorrebbero appresso che fosse huomo prudente, intero, reale, et ion e vorrei trovare uno più pazzo che il Ponzo, più versuto che fra Girolamo, più ippocrito che frate Alberto, perché mi parrebbe una bella cosa, et degna della bontà di questi tempi, che tutto quello che noi habbiamo sperimentato in molti frati, si esperimentasse in uno” (Letter to Guicciardini 17.5.1521)

Machiavelli was probably smiling in the spring of 1521 when he was sent by the Eight of the Pratica (the council in charge of Florence’s foreign affairs) to a monastery in Carpi to attend a general meeting of the Franciscans to negotiate about matters concerning their monasteries on Florentine territory. In Carpi, there was a letter waiting for him. The Florentine Wool Guild trusted an even more bizarre task to him: he was asked to persuade one friar called Rovaio to preach in the Duomo during the next Lent. This is strange, since Machiavelli was probably not very religious and in his plays he mocked friars in true Renaissance fashion. In his letter to Vettori, he tells us that he does not listen to sermons³⁴. Yet the Guild asked him to persuade a preacher. It is no wonder that he first admits being contrary to the opinion of others in this matter: the people would like a preacher that would show them the road to Paradise, and he would like a preacher that would show the people the road to Hell in order to avoid it. The people would like the preacher to be a prudent and true man, but Machiavelli says he would like to find a man crazier than Ponzo, more crafty than Girolamo and more of a hypocrite than Frate Alberto. Domenico da Ponzo was a Florentine preacher, Girolamo means Savonarola, and Frate Alberto is a character in Boccaccio’s *Decamerone* (4/2).

According to Lukes (1984, 268), Machiavelli’s most ardent criticism of the ecclesiastics of his time regards their blatant politicisation and the unavoidable loss of popular support, which such hypocrisy necessarily engenders. The Christian leaders, in order to maintain their religious legitimacy, are forced by the tenets of Christianity itself to remain aloof from political matters. Machiavelli’s ancient heroes, on the other hand, had little cause to worry about such hypocrisy since their religion did not comprise any fundamental opposition between the earthly and heavenly cities. For religion to remain a useful political tool, its integrity should not be doubted. In the case of Christianity, with its disclaimer of earthly pursuits, an outward association with secular politics is intolerable. Yet it is inevitable that those responsible for the security of states that insist upon being regarded as Christians must be hypocrites (cf. Prezzolini 1970, 28). It is embedded in the nature of the stately matters that they cannot be run by true Christians.

It was nearly commonplace to label clergymen as sodomites, schismatic and hypocrite³⁵. Men of remarkable piety were also bitterly critical of the official church and clergy, and the “anticlerical cleric” like Savonarola was a

³⁴ “La predica io non la udi’, perché io non uso simile pratiche” (Letter to Vettori, 19.12.1513).

³⁵ On the anticlericalism of the Renaissance, see Niccoli 2005.

common sight in Italy. "When fused with political crisis, however, the Savonarolan campaign of reform was a natural response to the swelling might of the papal monarchy, which had entered one of its most energetic periods in the middle of the fifteenth century. Later, although Luther, Calvin, and the Northern Reformation were the obvious outcome of so great an accretion of priestly authority, no such schism was possible south of the Alps, because the ruling part of the Italian upper classes, ensconced in their domineering cities, were too closely linked to the wealthy sector of the clergy, to the papal court and to the whole structure of church lands, benefices, religious houses, clerical appointment, the pursuit of careers for sons, and convents for girls removed from the expensive marriage market" (Martines 2002, 273).

The most famous of contemporary preachers in Florence, Girolamo Savonarola, is Machiavelli's example of the unarmed prophet (*Il Principe*, VI). In the *Decennale primo* (157-165) Savonarola's rule is said to have ruined Florence little by little. Yet, in a draft of a letter (9.3.1497) Machiavelli writes that Savonarola, who suddenly changed his views, "keeps on working with the times and making his lies plausible". Apparently Machiavelli respected Savonarola's ability to change his cloak whenever necessary, but in *Discorsi* (I/45) he shows his deeper admiration for the Frate, "whose writings show his learning, his prudence, and his mental power"³⁶. In the same chapter Machiavelli concludes that the law allowing the appeal to the people from the sentences of the Eight and the Signoria, which was Savonarola's achievement, finally revealed his ambitious and partisan spirit, as he was unwilling to condemn those who had broken it. The clearest condemnation of Savonarola's foolish policy of primarily abstaining from carnal sins is in Machiavelli's *L'Asino* (chapter V, lines 106-127):

"Vero è ch'un crede sia cosa mortale
pe' regni, e sia la lor distruzione
l'usura, o qualche peccato carnale;

e della lor grandezza la cagione,
e che alti e potenti gli mantiene,
sian digiuni, limosine, orazione.

Un altro, più discreto e savio, tiene
ch'a ruinargli questo mal non basti,
né basti a conservargli questo bene.

Creder che senza te per te contrasti
Dio, standoti ozioso e ginocchioni,
ha molti regni e molti stati guasti."

³⁶ Was Machiavelli, then, familiar with Savonarola's writings? At least he does not discuss them elsewhere, even though in his tract on remodelling the government of Florence he suggests the revival of Savonarola's *governo largo* type of regime. The reason for this, however, may be something else.

One man believes that states are ruined through sins of the flesh and saved by prayers and alms and orations, whereas a more prudent man knows that to ruin kingdoms, such sins are not enough, and that such good works will not save them. On the contrary, Machiavelli writes, many states are ruined through believing that God fights on one's behalf, while one is idle and on one's knees. The target is naturally Savonarola's strictly religious policy.

It has been noted by Weinstein (1970) that it was precisely Savonarola's adaptation with the times that made him popular in Florence. Before the expulsion of the Medicis in 1494 Savonarola preached on quite traditional themes including sins and the wrath of God but also on the corruption of the church. Savonarola's early prophetic preaching did not address itself to a specific political problem. After the expulsion his preaching took a more positive tone, representing Florence as the New Jerusalem and a locus for the regeneration of Christianity. His eschatology transformed and the regeneration of the individual sinner was pushed aside in favour of the regeneration of the whole society. This is what Machiavelli admired in Savonarola. He adapted to times and made his lies plausible.

Machiavelli's general view of the friars is that they are crafty, cunning and seeking mostly their own benefit. His *Mandragola* is important in this respect, especially because some have suggested that Timoteo, the friar of the story, represents Savonarola. I think Timoteo represents all friars and not just Savonarola, since there is nothing especially Savonarolan in his conduct. Sereno (1949, 56) has made few philological observations on the names of the characters in Machiavelli's play. Timoteo, the corrupt friar, derives from *timor* and *Deus*, and is thus heavy with irony as the friar does everything except honouring God. I guess this was Machiavelli's general view of the friars, as he has Callimaco say: "Oh, frati! Conoscine uno, e conosci gli tutti!" (*Mandragola*, IV/4).

3.4 Religion as an *instrumentum regni*

In Machiavelli's view the function of religion is primarily social unification of a people or a military unit (see e.g. *L' Asino d' Oro*, chap. 5, lines 118-122; *Discorsi*, III/33; *Arte della guerra*, IV). Religion is useful to lawgivers, founders, and army generals, but also acts as a cloak for bad men (Letter to Guicciardini, 17.5.1521) who can with the assistance of religion "deceive more easily" (*Istorie Fiorentine*, III/5). Using ancient Rome as an example he propounds the use of religion in government: "Thus he who examines Roman history well sees how helpful religion was in controlling the armies, in inspiring the people, in keeping men good, in making the wicked ashamed" (*Discorsi*, I/11). According to Machiavelli, it is irrelevant whether religion is true or not - as long as the leaders keep it up: "It is the duty, then, of the rulers of a republic or of a kingdom to preserve the foundations of the religion they hold. If they do this, it

will be an easy thing for them to keep their state religious, and consequently good and united. Also whatever comes up in favour of religion, even they think it false, they are to accept and magnify" (*Discorsi*, I/12). His recommendation for the political use of religion goes even further. He instructs the leaders to interpret religion according to circumstances, i.e. to their own benefit (cf. e.g. *Discorsi*, I/14&15; Najemy 1999). He writes of the Roman method of interpreting religion:

"Non solamente gli augurii, come di sopra si è discorso, erano fondamento, in buona parte, dell'antica religione de' Gentili, ma ancora erano quelli che erano caccione del bene essere della Republica romana. Donde i Romani ne avevano più cura che di alcuno altro ordine di quella; ed usavongli ne' comizi consolari, nel principiare le imprese, nel trar fuori gli eserciti, nel fare le giornate, ed in ogni azione loro importante, o civile o militare; né mai sarebbero iti ad una spedizione, che non avessero per suaso ai soldati che gli Dei promettevano loro la vittoria. Ed in fra gli altri auspicii, avevano negli eserciti certi ordini di aruspici, ch'è chiamavano pullarii: e qualunque volta eglino ordinavano di fare la giornata con il nimico, ei volevano che i pullarii facessero i loro auspicii; e, beccando i polli, combattevono con buono augurio; non beccando, si astenevano dalla zuffa. Nondimeno, quando la ragione mostrava loro una cosa doversi fare, non ostante che gli auspicii fossero avversi, la facevano in ogni modo; ma rivoltavanla con termini e modi tanto attamente, che non paresse che la facessero con dispregio della religione." (*Discorsi*, I/14)

In traditional Roman religion, a significant role was played by divination, sacrifice, and associated rites in the affairs of state. A Roman general with command (*imperium*) enjoyed freedom of action, and fought under his own "auspices". In other words, the general had the right to consult divine will in regard to a contemplated action. The gods, if asked, were willing to provide not strategy (the gods respected, but did not administer, ad hoc doses of wisdom, which was thus the responsibility of the general), but approval or disapproval. Birds were a tried and tested as means of divine communication. The general typically kept chickens in the charge of a chicken-keeper (*pullarius*), and asked whether the chickens had eaten greedily, which signified divine approval of a contemplated action, or whether they had not, which signified disapproval of the same. Significantly, however, the general could reinterpret a false report as true because the report itself could be treated as the omen. A general who observed ritual forms could succeed, and he could cunningly manipulate ritual logic to achieve rational military goals. (Mueller 2002, 109-110)

According to Machiavelli, religion was indispensable in making the Roman army confident:

"Usavano i Romani di fare pigliare agli eserciti loro questa confidenza per via di religione: donde nasceva, che con gli augurii ed auspicii creavano i Consoli, facevano il delecto, partivano con gli eserciti, e venivano alla giornata. E senza avere fatto alcuna di queste cose, non mai avrebbe uno buono capitano e savio tentata alcuna fazione, giudicando di averla potuta perdere facilmente, s'è suoi soldati non avessero prima intesi gli Dii essere da parte loro. E quando alcuno Consolo, o altro loro capitano, avesse combattuto, contro agli auspicii, lo avrebbero punito; come ei punirono Claudio Pulcro. E benché questa parte in tutte le istorie romane si conosca, nondimeno si pruova più certo per le parole che Livio usa nella bocca di Appio Claudio; il quale, dolendosi col popolo della insolenzia de' Tribuni della plebe, e mostrando che, mediante quelli, gli auspicii e le altre cose pertinenti alla religione si

corrompevano, dice così: 'Eludant nunc licet religiones. Quid enim interest, si pulli non pascentur, si ex cavea tardius exiverint, si occinuerit avis? Parva sunt haec; sed parva ista non contemnendo, maiores nostri maximam hanc rempublicam fecerunt'. Perché in queste cose piccole è quella forza di tenere uniti e confidenti i soldati: la quale cosa è prima cagione d'ogni vittoria. Nonpertanto, conviene con queste cose sia accompagnata la virtù: altrimenti, le non vagliano". (*Discorsi*, III/33)

The Romans, Machiavelli says, chose their consuls with auguries and auspices, and with similar method they also marched with their army and engaged into combat. This respect for religion appears in all the Roman histories, but it is best proven by the words Livius puts in the mouth Appius Claudius. Responding to the claims that it did not matter whether the birds ate or not, or came out of their coop slowly, Appius admitted that these were small things ("Parva sunt haec"), but argued that the respect their forefathers had for these small portents was the cause of Rome's greatness. Machiavelli agrees with Livius that these *cose piccole* kept the soldiers united and thus were the first cause of every victory, but adds that to these things *virtù* must be joined. Otherwise, he says, they are useless.

In similar fashion, Machiavelli recalls how the ancient generals interpreted the bad signs of the augurs as well as accidents to their own advantage: "Caesar, falling in Africa as he left his ship, said: 'Africa, I seize you'" (*Arte della Guerra*, VI). Because soldiers were superstitious, the falling of their leader might have been interpreted as a bad omen, which, in turn, might have decreased the morale. Thus, it was necessary for Caesar to act as if he fell on his knees deliberately. According to Machiavelli, religion should not be disparaged even if false, since the "truth" of a religion has no viable connection with its power, with its effect on men. He never speaks of true and false prophets, only of the armed and the unarmed, the successful and the unsuccessful.

For Machiavelli, religion could also instil love of liberty in a people. Where the fear of God is missing, he argued, it is sometimes possible to replace it with the fear of a prince (*Discorsi*, I/11; Strauss 1986, 226). But in republics, fear of God is indispensable. Nevertheless, it does not follow that religion alone could suffice: "there should be no one with so small a brain that he will believe, if his house is falling, that God will save it without any other prop, because he will die beneath that ruin" (*L' Asino d'Oro*, ch. 5, lines 124-127). For Machiavelli religion demanded scrupulous attention, but its importance was due to the effect it has on men, not to its metaphysical or extra-political "truths".

Furthermore, Machiavelli advises the prince to *appear* religious. According to him, it is not necessary to actually have all the qualities that are considered good, but it is very necessary to appear to have them (*Il Principe*, XVIII). In order to keep his position, the prince is sometimes forced to act contrary to truth and religion. He should hold to what is right when he can, but it is essential that he know "how to do wrong when he must" (*ibid.*). The value of appearances derives from the fact that the multitude judges with the eye, not with the hand. "Everybody sees what you appear to be; few perceive what you are" (*ibid.*). Those who can look from closer distance or touch, see even the "devil with smaller horns and less black" (*Canti carnascialeschi*, De' romiti, lines

32-33). The epistemological point here is that those who can only see but cannot touch are easily looking only at the results. Therefore, if a prince succeeds in holding his state, "his means are always judged honourable" (*Il Principe*, XVIII). The mob (meaning the fools, not the lower classes) judges by appearances, whereas wise men want to touch with their hands³⁷. This is also a move that robs being of its independence. If we follow the Machiavellian line of epistemology, the existence of a thing is reduced to nothing other than its effect on people, just as its image is nothing other than its appearance to people. Similarly, men are more taken by the present than by the past or future because they *see* the present. But Machiavelli's adage on the importance of appearances has one important addition:

"Debbe adunque uno principe avere gran cura che non gli esca mai di bocca cosa che non sia piena delle soprascritte cinque qualità; e paia, a udirlo e vederlo, tutto pietà, tutto fede, tutto integrità, tutto umanità, tutto religione: e non è cosa più necessaria a parere di avere, che questa ultima qualità." (*Il Principe*, XVIII)

Those who can see and hear should be given an image of the prince as a ruler full of piety, faith, integrity, humanity, and full of religion. Of these, nothing is more important than the last one.

In Machiavelli's examples, one contemporary ruler rises above others in his use of religion as a political tool. That ruler is Ferdinand of Aragon, the king of Spain. However, Machiavelli's treatment of Ferdinand is ambiguous. From the many references to Ferdinand in Machiavelli's writings, we can infer that occasionally Machiavelli found his actions "all very great and some of them extraordinary" (*Il Principe*, XXI) and, on another occasion, he is "more crafty and fortunate than wise and prudent" (Letter to Vettori 29.4.1513). In Machiavelli's view, Ferdinand initiated many campaigns but "saw the end of none of these; indeed, his end is not a particular gain or a particular victory but to give himself reputation among his people and to keep them uncertain among the great number of his affairs". He is, therefore, "animoso datore di principii", spirited maker of beginnings, "to which he later gives the particular end that is placed before him by chance and that necessity teaches him, and up to now he has not been able to complain of his luck or of his courage" (*ibid.*). But what makes Ferdinand especially interesting for the present study is his use of religion as a cloak of his acquisitions. In *Il Principe* (XVIII) Machiavelli refers to him without actually mentioning his name:

"Alcuno principe de' presenti tempi, il quale non è bene nominare, non predica mai altro che pace e fede, e dell'una e dell'altra è inimicissimo: e l'una e l'altra, quando e' l'avessi osservata, gli arebbe più volte tolto e la riputazione e lo stato".

Ferdinand preaches nothing but peace and faith, but is utterly opposed to both. If he hadn't been opposed to these, he would have lost his reputation and his

³⁷ Note that Messer Nicia says in *Mandragola* (V.2) how he wanted "to touch with my hands how the thing was going, for I am not used to being made to take fireflies for lanterns".

state many times, says Machiavelli. Ferdinand truly was very crafty in using religion to assist his endeavours. To examine the sincerity of converts from Judaism (called *Marranos*) and Mohammedanism (called *Moriscos*), Ferdinand and his wife, empowered by Sixtus IV, established the Spanish Inquisition in 1478. In 1492 he expelled the Moors from Spain and annexed Granada to his kingdom. Three months after the conquest, Ferdinand expelled the Jews from Spain and Sicily. These acts were, however, motivated less by religious concerns than economic and political ones. Ferdinand himself was probably not as intolerant as his clerical advisors, but what inspired him was the wealth of the Jews: the Marranos were often wealthy and occupied the highest levels of the Castilian and Aragonese nobility, and of the clergy as well (Andrew 1990). The Inquisition was self-financing as the property of the victims went into its coffers, and Pope Sixtus IV had to acknowledge soon afterwards that it was not moved by zeal for faith but by lust for wealth, and that many people were imprisoned, tortured and condemned as heretics without any proof (*ibid.*). For some reason, Machiavelli does not accept these methods:

“Oltre a questo, per potere intraprendere maggiore imprese, servendosi sempre della religione, si volse a una pietosa crudelta cacciando, e spogliando, del suo regno e' marrani: né può essere questo esempio più miserabile né più raro.” (*Il Principe*, XXI)

Ferdinand's hunt of the Marranos is depicted as “pious cruelty”, of which there cannot be a more miserable or more rare example. But why would Machiavelli consider this as “miserable” example? In fact, early translators of Machiavelli translated the passage so that the example was “admirable” or “woonderfull” and rare, not miserable (cf. Andrew 1990, 413), and all the modern translations I have consulted say that the example was “admirable”³⁸. The passage would certainly make much more sense if the word in question would be “mirabile” instead of “miserabile”. On the other hand, the chapter ends with a description of wise prince's methods, and Machiavelli's wise prince encourages citizens to carry on their businesses and governs so that a citizen “is not afraid to increase his possessions because of dread that they will be taken away”. This is precisely what Ferdinand did for the Moors and the Marranos³⁹, and in this respect his pious cruelty could be miserable in Machiavelli's view. Perhaps Machiavelli does not appreciate Ferdinand because the king was motivated not by common good but by his personal gain. It would seem plausible that Machiavelli opposes to the crafty use of religion when it is done in order to gain wealth or other personal advantages (which is what most of the priests did according to him and many other Renaissance writers), but not when it is done for the glory of the patria. After all, he says in the *Discorsi* (III/41) that “la patria è bene difesa in qualunque modo la si difende, o con ignominia o con gloria”, i.e. that the fatherland is well defended in whatever way she is defended, whether with disgrace or with glory.

³⁸ Only exception is Gilbert's Chief Works and Others, which uses the word “miserable”.

³⁹ The Spanish word means also ‘pig’ or ‘dirty’.

Fraud, in Machiavelli's view, is by no means always deliberate deception but includes a good many of the conventions, fictions and illusions that society requires for its self-regulation and effective functioning (Mazzeo 1964, 91). Religion, and its effective use in government, is one of the societal fictions that need to be upheld. It is important to note, however, that Machiavelli gives primacy to the wise use of religion as opposed to the contents of the religion. He also indicates that making religion too obviously subservient to rulers can make people incredulous and is likely to disturb all good institutions. Hence e.g. Ferdinand's or Alexander VI's use of religion was not wise.

3.5 Christianity interpreted according to *ozio* and according to *virtù*

The rulers, or the Rome of his day, did not use religion very wisely in Machiavelli's view. In contrast to ancient religion, Christianity favours contemplation, withdrawal, humility, and other such apolitical virtues. Christian doctrine, especially as it is interpreted in Machiavelli's view, exhorts people to live this life as if it were only a preparation for the next one, meaning eternal life after death (John 12:25). In his *Discorsi* Machiavelli writes:

“Pensando dunque donde possa nascere, che, in quegli tempi antichi, i popoli fossero più amatori della libertà che in questi; credo nasca da quella medesima cagione che fa ora gli uomini manco forti: la quale credo sia la diversità della educazione nostra dall'antica, fondata nella diversità della religione nostra dall'antica. Perché, avendoci la nostra religione mostro la verità e la vera via, ci fa stimare meno l'onore del mondo: onde i Gentili, stimandolo assai, ed avendo posto in quello il sommo bene, erano nelle azioni loro più feroci. Il che si può considerare da molte loro costituzioni, cominciandosi dalla magnificenza de' sacrifici loro, alla umiltà de' nostri; dove è qualche pompa più delicata che magnifica, ma nessuna azione feroce o gagliarda. Qui non mancava la pompa né la magnificenza delle cerimonie, ma vi si aggiungeva l'azione del sacrificio pieno di sangue e di ferocità, ammazzandovisi moltitudine d'animali; il quale aspetto, sendo terribile, rendeva gli uomini simili a lui. La religione antica, oltre a di questo, non beatificava se non uomini pieni di mondana gloria; come erano capitani di eserciti e principi repubbliche. La nostra religione ha glorificato più gli uomini umili e contemplativi, che gli attivi. Ha dipoi posto il sommo bene nella umiltà, abiezione, e nel dispregio delle cose umane; quell'altra lo poneva nella grandezza dello animo, nella fermezza del corpo, ed in tutte le altre cose atte a fare gli uomini fortissimi. E se la religione nostra richiede che tu abbi in te fermezza, vuole che tu sia atto a patire più che a fare una cosa forte.”
(*Discorsi*, II/2)

Machiavelli blames Christianity, or its false interpretations, for glorification of the contemplative life instead of active one. The ancients had attributed blessedness only to men abounding in worldly glory and the bloody ceremonies of their religion made men fiercer in their actions. One reason why Machiavelli criticises Christianity is the fact that there is no ferocity, extravagance or shocking elements in its ceremonies. However, in order to

understand his point, we must briefly consider the ceremonies he might have been referring to.

Ancient Rome killed on an enormous scale, with efficiency, ingenuity, and delectation⁴⁰. In the arenas of Rome, in amphitheatres, circuses, and other sites, blood shows (*munera*) included gladiatorial combats (*spectacula gladiatorum, munera glactiatoria*) and animal hunts (*venationes*), and increasingly under the Empire there were also ritualised and even mythologized executions. From the third century BC through the late Republic and into the early Empire, political opportunism, imperial resources, and social needs greatly expanded these spectacles of death and changed their emphasis from private rites or necessary punishments into public entertainments (cf. Kyle 1998).

Warfare and games are often seen as analogous and, in fact, both gladiatorial combats and the earliest amphitheatres arose in context of Roman militarism under the Republic (cf. Kyle 1998, 8). Various festivals (*ludi*) of the Romans began as military thanksgivings, and military triumphs included the presentation of foreign beasts and captives and the staging of spectacular deaths. Moreover, there were the famous 'mock' mass combats on land and water. In a sense, gladiators provided emotional conditioning (as well as actual instruction at times) for the soldier-citizen. Certainly warfare familiarized Romans with violence, and violent spectacles escalated with, and symbolized, the territorial expansion of the empire. Finally, blood sports perhaps acted as a surrogate for war during the Pax Romana (*ibid.*).

Machiavelli does not specify what sort of ceremonies he actually means. He speaks only about the killing of the animals, but the reasoning behind this leads to the obvious but absurd conclusion that if the killing of animals and the sight of blood would make men virtuous, the most virtuous men in the world would be the butchers. But the glorification of cloistered metaphysicians instead of virtuous political leaders has some severe implications concerning the republican ideal:

"Questo modo di vivere, adunque, pare che abbi renduto il mondo debole, e datolo in preda agli uomini scelerati; i quali sicuramente lo possono maneggiare, veggendo come l'università degli uomini, per andarne in Paradiso, pensa più a sopportare le sue battiture che a vendicarle. E benché paia che si sia effeminato il mondo, e disarmato il Cielo, nasce più senza dubbio dalla viltà degli uomini, che hanno interpretato la nostra religione secondo l'ozio, e non secondo la virtù." (*Discorsi*, II/2)

⁴⁰ Indictments of the Romans, especially of the lower classes, for their enthusiasm for games clearly represent a minority ineffectually condemning what was popular and persistent. The intelligentsia criticised the popular culture of the masses, using commonplace themes of social and moral debasement. Christian writers predictably saw spectacles as idolatrous and corruptive, and their criticism was always prejudiced and tended to exaggerate. Yet even they testify to the widespread popularity of the games. Aside from Stoic and Christian authors' concerns about crowd passions and idolatry, criticisms of the games were often of specific examples of a leader's injustice or excess - not of the custom in general. Criticisms of aberrations or elements of the spectacles do not amount to opposition to the phenomenon in general. There simply was no widespread opposition to the inhumanity of the games. (Kyle 1998, 4)

Because men are more interested in going to Paradise than avenging their injuries, the world has grown effeminate and “Heaven has laid aside her arms”. This, in turn, is the fault of those who have interpreted Christianity according to sloth and not according to *virtù*.

What, then, would be Christianity interpreted correctly, *secondo la virtù*? As Counter-Reformation and anti-Machiavellism gathered impetus, various adversaries of Machiavelli took some effort in proving that Christianity can indeed be interpreted also vigorously and that it is not incompatible with military valour. Some of them pointed to Charlemagne and his empire, or to Emperor Constantine. In fact, at least since Augustine, the mainstream of Christianity has approved just wars. Early Christians were, of course, opposed to all warfare because they respected the holiness in every human life. Murder of any kind was a crime against God since man was created into the likeness of God. Consequently, the soldier’s profession was thought to be unfit for Christians. This doctrine, although supported by many passages of the Bible, had to be abandoned. Otherwise, Christianity could have never become the state religion of Roman Empire (cf. Westermarck 1984, 290). With Augustine at the latest, the doctrine was reinterpreted, once and for all. Thenceforth, it was only a matter of finding just causes for warfare. The difference in religion was such a cause⁴¹ and, thus, wars against infidels had the blessing of the Church. The Church used this weapon not only against heretics and Mohammedans, but also against every disobedient Christian prince and sect.

If we, however, think about the political history of Christendom, we surely find at least one example when the whole *Respublica cristiana* has been united in doing something vigorous – namely the Crusades. Is Machiavelli’s ideal Christianity to be found in the religious fervour of the Crusaders? If we look at his comments on Crusades, this seems to be the case. One of his carnival songs (*Degli spiriti beati*) discusses the issue directly and exhorts Christians to forget their internal contests and to gather forces against “Il signor di Turchia”. In *Istorie fiorentine* (I/17), he gives a general account of the Crusades, concluding that “many kings and many states joined in contributing money for it, and many individuals without pay served as soldiers – so powerful then in the minds of men was religion, when they were moved by the examples of her leaders”⁴². Boniface VIII’s proclamation of Crusade against the Colonna family, according to Machiavelli, injured the Church because that weapon, after it was turned through Pope’s personal ambition against Christians, began to stop cutting (*Istorie fiorentine*, I/25)⁴³. Religion used effectively is one that moves

⁴¹ This was not seriously contested before, say, Vitoria, de Soto, and Suarez.

⁴² Machiavelli says that the first crusade was, at the beginning, glorious, and that one of its leaders, Peter the Hermit, was widely renowned for holiness and prudence. Peter’s crusade was, however, less glorious. His armies were engaged in pillaging, stealing food and supplies, and massacring Jews even before they left Europe. In Anatolia they started the real crusade, now pillaging, torturing and massacring indiscriminately, mostly Byzantine Christians. The Turks finally killed all of the crusaders.

⁴³ He does not say anything of the fourth crusade, which was directed to Constantinople in 1204 by Enrico Dandolo, the doge of Venice. The pillage of

men, one that makes them act and wage war on infidels. Religion well-used and the fear of divine punishments made “every sort of undertaking easy for the ancient generals, and always will make them so, where religion is feared and observed” (*Arte della Guerra*, IV). It is easy to make men believe in victory if leaders pretend that God has promised them one. “In the time of our fathers”, writes Machiavelli, “Charles VII, King of France, in the war that he made against the English, said that he took counsel with a girl sent by God, who was called everywhere the Maid of France; and this was the cause of his victory” (ibid.). This is Christianity *secondo la virtù*. In Joan of Arc, Machiavelli finds an armed prophet and Christianity used effectively. Whatever the truth-value of her visions, she nevertheless inspired others to act according to virtù.

Geerken (1999) has suggested that Machiavelli’s exemplary heroic religious leader is Moses, who is heroic without being pagan and religious without being monastic. Thus, according to Geerken, Moses “provides a middle ground between pagan and Christian alternatives” (ibid., 594-595). Moses personifies Machiavelli’s claim that the military and the prophetic can and must be conjoined, but this also highlights the point that the revival of Roman religion is not necessary: ancient biblical religion would suffice. In other words, Christianity interpreted according to *virtù* could achieve political greatness.

The change from *viltà* or *ozio* to *virtù* is discussed also in Machiavelli’s *terza rima* poem *Dell’Ambizione*. Machiavelli’s *Dell’Ambizione*, one of the four poems known as *I Capitoli*, is rather Augustinian in its debunking of ambition. Ambition seems to be as old as history, since hardly had God created the stars and other elements, when he had to quell the pride of the rebellious angels and exile Adam because of the Fall (*Dell’Ambizione*, lines 16-21). With man, Ambition and Avarice were born, and

“Qual regione o qual città n’è priva?
Qual borgo, qual tugurio? In ogni lato
l’Ambizione e l’Avarizia arriva” (lines 10-12)

Because of the insatiable human spirit, Cain slew Abel and the first bloody grass was seen on earth (lines 55-59). Because of this malignant state of affairs, there is no reason to avoid doing evil, or repent doing evil:

“Cresciuta poi questa mala sementa,
moltiplicata la cagion del male,
non c’è ragion che di mal far si penta.

Di qui nasce ch’un scende e l’altro sale;
di qui dipende, senza legge o patto,
Il variar d’ogni stato mortale” (lines 61-66)

Since evil’s cause has multiplied and nobody has reason to avoid doing evil, the result is that one goes down and one goes up without laws or pacts. Everyone hopes to climb higher by crushing others and

Christian Constantinople is one of the major causes why it later (1453) fell to the Turks.

“A questo, istinto natural ci mena
per proprio moto e propria passione,
se legge o maggior forza non ci affrena” (lines 79-81)

Hence, our natural instinct drives us to oppress others unless laws or greater powers inhibit us from doing so. Machiavelli continues his poem and explains that this is the reason why France is victorious and Italy is in ruins. This difference, however, is not natural, but can be changed with education:

“E quando alcun colpassi la natura
se in Italia, tanto afflitta e stanca,
non nasce gente sì feroce e dura,

dico che questo non escusa e franca
la viltà nostra, perché può supplire
l'educazion dove natura manca” (lines 109-113)

It is nature that has made men ambitious, but nature cannot be blamed for the *viltà* of the Italians, since education can supplement where nature is lacking. The crucial passage is

“se con Ambizion congiunto e insieme
un cor feroce, una virtute armata,
quivi del proprio mal raro si teme” (lines 91-93)

Ambition must be joined with a valiant heart and armed virtue. If cowardice and bad government are joined with ambition, every other sort of ruin will quickly follow. Hence, ambition is like *Fortuna* – it should be conjoined with ferocious heart and armed *virtù*. It ruins those who are not prepared for its powers. Machiavelli implies that it would be good for a society to channel its ambition against other peoples to keep its internal conflicts from growing⁴⁴. Thus, the poem's message does not differ essentially from Machiavelli's general view expressed elsewhere. The demise of Italy is caused by none other than the Italians, by their ambitious and partisan spirit. However, this is not caused by nature, and the present *viltà* could be changed through acting according to *virtù*. This would require a change in education, which for Machiavelli means a turn away from the *ozio* of Christianity and from the political *trist'ordin* (lines 118-123). Interestingly, Machiavelli's world is quite Augustinian, since for both writers the havoc and misery of the temporal world result from fallen man's ambition and avarice. For Machiavelli, however, this is man's nature – a word lacking from the Biblical version of the original sin.

⁴⁴ l'Ambizion contr'a l'esterna gente
usa il furor ch'usarlo infra sé stessa
né la legge né il re gliene consente;

onde il mal proprio quasi sempre cessa;
ma suol ben disturbar l'altrui ovile,
dove quel suo furor l'insegna ha messa (lines 97-102).

There are some theologically interesting views in Machiavelli's four poems on Ingratitude, Ambition, Fortune and Occasion, known as *I Capitoli*. Patapan (2003, 204) goes so far as to claim that these poems, taken together and read as a whole, reveal Machiavelli's playful yet subversive cosmology that ousts the old gods by instituting a new theogony: "The poems, as meditations on various aspects of love--as desire, as benefaction, as ambition, as ingratitude--superficially draw upon or support the Bible. Our sinful fallen nature seems to account for all our perfidy. But, as we have seen, at each step the poems challenge Christian eschatology. They question the possibility of beneficence and therefore Grace, the usefulness of piety and penitence, the role of 'occult forces' that seem to rule the Heavens. Indirectly they retell a history that seems to forget the Creation, Fall, and Resurrection, painting a panorama of Fortune's rule that does not distinguish between Egypt, Jerusalem, and Athens. The model is no longer Moses or the Son of God, it is Scipio, a man of 'infinite virtues' and a good citizen".

Machiavelli's Christianity *secondo la virtù*, his Christianity reformed, would not be a religion of withdrawal, but one that would allow people to participate in the affairs of the earthly community. The Christian withdrawal from earthly matters is naturally derivative of the relationship between Christianity and Roman Empire. The ideology of the persecuted sect changed through Constantine's conversion, and the earlier apprehensions about the interference in political matters were replaced by a more optimistic view of the secular realm. The empire was no longer an enemy but an ally in the fight against pagan surroundings, which interconnectedness produced the imperial Christianity of Eusebius of Caesarea (cf. Bergvall 2001, 171-172). His point was to show how the realm of Constantine resembled the ideal monarchy of the celestial realm. This imperial optimism was shattered by the sack of Rome in 410, which also led Augustine to construct his celebrated middle course between the early Christian withdrawal and the Christian imperialism of Eusebius.

Augustine's solution involved the separation of two distinct but cooperative realms, the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas terrena*. The papal-hierocratic political system, propagated by Pope Leo I (440-461), which was based on the pope's alleged *plenitudo potestas*, again united the two realms. This meant that the pope supposedly held both the temporal and spiritual powers through the reduction of the political realm to the theological (Bergvall 2001, 177). It could be noted that it is precisely this unification of the two realms that caused the quarrel between the Popes and the Emperors, since they now only had one "city" to preside over, and consequently they kept fighting over their respective jurisdiction. Nevertheless, there was a constant anti-hierocratic sidecurrent even in orthodox, non-reformatory circles. Dante, Marsilius of Padua and Lorenzo Valla were all in this camp and Forte (2000) has rather convincingly argued that Machiavelli too should be included in this tradition. Their argument was that the immorality of the Vicars of Christ and their involvement in temporal politics was the cause of Italy's lacerations and the general corruption in those

provinces. In a way, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Renaissance Papacy had forgotten the *Civitas Dei* and was focused on their Italian *civitas terrena*.

When the participation in earthly matters was done on the level of religious leaders and included a paradox, namely the conflict between their worldly orientations and their spiritual vows, the full potential of Christianity was not used in Machiavelli's view. Christianity, however, can be effectively used, as is shown by the example of the provinces in Germany. According to Machiavelli, their religiosity makes them better taxpayers:

“Usono quelle repubbliche, quando gli occorre loro bisogno di avere a spendere alcuna quantità di danari per conto publico, che quegli magistrati o consigli che ne hanno autorità, ponghino a tutti gli abitanti della città uno per cento, o due, di quello che ciascuno ha di valente. E fatta tale diliberazione, secondo l'ordine della terra si rappresenta ciascuno dinanzi agli riscotitori di tale imposta; e, preso prima il giuramento di pagare la conveniente somma, getta in una cassa a ciò diputata quello che secondo la coscienza sua gli pare dovere pagare: del quale pagamento non è testimone alcuno, se non quello che paga. Donde si può conietturare quanta bontà e quanta religione sia ancora in quegli uomini” (*Discorsi*, I/55)

Same goodness and religion is seen to exist in Switzerland, and to these countries Machiavelli contrasts the corruptness of France, Italy and Spain⁴⁵. One reason why the German provinces are not corrupted is the fact that they do not have great commerce with their neighbors but have been content in living with what their country provides, and “hence they have not been able to take up the customs of the French, of the Spanish, or of the Italians, which nations all together are the corrupters of the world” (*ibid.*). The other cause is, according to Machiavelli, that a republic, whose political existence is maintained uncorrupted, does not permit that any of its citizens to be or live in the manner of a *gentiluomo*, and by this he means those “who live idly on the provisions of their abundant possessions, without having any care either to cultivate or to do any other work in order to live”. Anyway, the point is that Christianity can be effectively used, as it is used in Germany and Switzerland. In this sense, given the corrupted interpretations of Christianity in Italy, France and Spain, that religion would be in need of reforming. We should note that when Machiavelli speaks of the present corrupted interpretations of Christianity in the beginning of the first book of the *Discorsi*, he says: “quel male che ha fatto a molte provincie e città cristiane uno ambizioso ozio”. The word that is of crucial importance is “molte”, which is not the same as “tutte”. The ambitious *ozio* of Christianity has ruined many Christian provinces, but not all of them.

⁴⁵ See also footnote 28.

3.6 The Change of Religions and Reform in Religion and Politics

Dante and Machiavelli, two great Florentines, both express strange approval towards Averroist doctrines. In the *Commedia*, Dante places Averroes in the Limbo (*Inf.*, canto IV) and Sieger of Brabant in Paradise (*Par.*, canto X) even though both were clearly condemned by the Church. Most likely he also knew that when he placed them there. Besides, since Dante puts his eulogy to Sieger in the mouth of his main enemy (i.e. Aquinas) one can infer that Dante was intentionally being polemic with the Church and ironic in regard to the Dominican intellectual tradition (Forte 2000, 17)⁴⁶. Machiavelli, on the other hand, made a curious leap into philosophy in the middle of *Discorsi*, when he suddenly seems to defend the eternity of the world and the periodical alteration of religions:

“A quegli filosofi che hanno voluto che il mondo sia stato eterno, credo che si potesse replicare che, se tanta antichità fusse vera, e’ sarebbe ragionevole che ci fussi memoria di più che cinquemila anni; quando e’ non si vedesse come queste memorie de’ tempi per diverse cagioni si spengano: delle quali, parte vengono dagli uomini, parte al cielo”. (*Discorsi*, II/5)

The passage begins with an attack on those philosophers who have held that the world is eternal. This means the Averroists, and behind them, Aristotle. To them Machiavelli poses an objection, but as Mansfield (1979, 203) notes, “as soon as it has left his mouth he calls it back with a counterobjection, which actually constitutes a reply to those who *deny* the world is eternal”. He says that if the world would be eternal, there would be records from more than five thousand years, but immediately afterwards he repudiates this by saying that these records disappear at regular intervals partly because of men and partly because of heaven. The matter discussed here is of no little importance. Machiavelli’s position undermines the creationist doctrine, as well as the pretended speciality of Christianity in contrast to other sects. Should the world be eternal, there would be no efficient cause of the world. In fact, the Averroists claimed that God is not the efficient but the final cause of the world. Does Machiavelli carelessly repudiate the whole teaching of Christianity in one sentence, or is there something more to this passage? Forte thinks that Machiavelli was also (or even primarily) exposing his assumptions that the arguments against the doctrine of the eternity of the world were not convincing.

⁴⁶ Some, like Foster (1965, 51), believe that Dante never renounced Christianity or was a heretic. His sympathy for Averroist doctrines can perhaps be explained by the tension he felt between faith and reason. In Western thought philosophy was made ancillary to theology but Averroes, who started from the authority of the Koran instead of the Bible, subordinated religion to philosophy. The compromise between the two extremes was associated with the so-called Latin Averroists (most famous of whom was Sieger), who taught that reason can lead the philosopher even to the point of speculative unorthodoxy, providing only that he be prepared to admit in practice that his rational conclusions might be false from the theologian’s point of view (*ibid.*, 50).

He might have been thinking of the objections to the eternity of the world put forth in Lucretius' *De rerum naturam*, St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, or even Savonarola's *Triumphus crucis* (Forte 2000, 17). Yet, he might have just felt sympathy for the Averroists. The fundamental tenets of Averroism were as well known to intelligent men of Machiavelli's age as the fundamental tenets of Marxism are in the present age, as Strauss (1958, 202-203) has noted. For Machiavelli, all religions are of human, not heavenly, origin. He often uses the term 'sect' for religion, in which usage he treads the paths of the Averroists, who as philosophers refused to make any concessions to revealed religion (Strauss 1986, 226. Machiavelli's passage continues with another very unorthodox theory regarding the alteration regarding the alteration of religious sects:

"Quelle che vengono dagli uomini sono le variazioni delle sette e delle lingue. Perché, quando e' surge una setta nuova, cioè una religione nuova, il primo studio suo è, per darsi riputazione, estinguere la vecchia ... È da credere, pertanto, che quello che ha voluto fare la setta Cristiana contro alla setta Gentile, la Gentile abbia fatto contro a quella che era innanzi a lei. E perché queste sette in cinque o in seimila anni variano due o tre volte, si perde la memoria delle cose fatte innanzi a quel tempo". (*Discorsi*, II/5)

According to him, new religions try to extinguish the memory of the old, as Christianity has done to Paganism and Paganism probably did to the ones preceding it. We have lost record of those older alterations because these sects change two or three times in 5000 or 6000 years. Every sect, then, has the life-span of between 1666 and 3000 years. Thus, Machiavelli believed that Christianity could come to an end about 150 years after he wrote these sentences, as Strauss (1986, 226) has noted⁴⁷. Machiavelli's argument is based on astrological assumptions shared by many contemporaries. The air of Florence of his time was heavy with apocalyptic visions, and the coming of the counter-Christian religion was anticipated, as well as the coming scourge and reform of Christianity itself. The fall of Christianity was predicted to happen at least in 1444 (Haabraz) and 1460 (Abu Ma'shar), and even Gemistos Plethon⁴⁸ was reported to have said that Christianity would soon be replaced by a new astral religion not very different from paganism (Parel 1992, 50). The growing influence of the Turks who conquered Constantinople in 1453 was also undoubtedly acting as a catalysing factor in this respect. Fear of the Turks'

⁴⁷ The calculation is, however, inaccurate. Machiavelli does not say that the changes would occur in regular intervals. Thus, it would be possible for a religion to change e.g. three times in ten years, if the next change would occur after 4990 years.

⁴⁸ Plethon (1355-1452) was a Neoplatonist of Greek origin. In 1438-1439 he attended the Council of Ferrara-Florence, in which took place the momentary union, more apparent than real, between the Latin and the Greek churches. Since he was a secular scholar, he was not needed very often in the Council. In his spare time, he introduced the teachings of Plato to the Florentines and the Western world. Excepting a bad translation of his *Timaeus*, Plato was not known in the West during the Middle Ages. The little that was known of him was distilled through the writings of the Church Fathers and other neoplatonists. When Plethon introduced him to the Florentines, the occasion was suitable in many respects (cf. Springborg 1992, 189-196).

invasion into Italy is a recurrent theme in Machiavelli's writings, and we can be sure that he was not ignorant of the sayings of the astrologers, for he speaks of the anticipated devastation in his carnival songs (*Canti carnascialeschi, De' romiti*). In *Discorsi* (I/12) he is even more explicit on the matter, concluding that: "he who considers its [i.e. Christianity's] foundations and sees how different its present habit is from them, will conclude that near at hand, beyond doubt, is its fall or its punishment".

In this matter Machiavelli comes closest to being a reformer of some sort. It was precisely this *deformatio* of the Church, its perversion from its original pristine state, which was the main concern of the reformers, both Catholic and Protestant alike. During the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance the Church faced many challenges: there were the exaggerations of papal power which incited opposition in both theory and practice, the Great Schism, the conciliarist movement, the very secularity of the Popes and higher ecclesiastics, ignorance and immorality among lower clergy, abuses of the benefice system, concubinage of priests, theological and doctrinal confusions, simony, laxity of monastic discipline, numerous heresies and superstitions to be oppressed in the countryside etc. It is no surprise that this decay evoked a discussion on the fitful course for the Bark of Peter. The reformation, understood as constructive and restorative response, thus arose from the disparity between the ideal Church and the historical reality. Originally the word referred to the spiritual renewal of the individual, but later it came to include the renewal of the Church as well (Olin 1992, xvi). In this sense, reformation was underway by the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century at the latest. And in this respect Machiavelli too is a reformer, for he would definitely have liked to see the Church returning to its founding principles. He believed that "all the beginnings of religions and of republics and of kingdoms must possess some goodness by means of which they gain their first reputation and their first growth" (*Discorsi*, III/1), and that this goodness is corrupted in the process of time. Hence, the truly durable forms were those that were able to renew themselves regularly.

There were attempts to reform the Church by the Papacy and by the General Councils, but these institutional reforms gained little success compared to those led by individual saints or preachers. It is precisely the latter reforms that Machiavelli speaks of in *Discorsi* (III/1) when he concludes that it is necessary to bring religions and republics occasionally back towards their beginnings. Machiavelli admires Saints Francis and Dominic because they lived in poverty according to the example of Christ. The immanent critique is directed towards those prelates that have forgotten the teachings of Christ and wallow in the wealth they have earned through hypocritical behaviour. Without the example of these saints, Machiavelli says, the improbity of the prelates and the heads of Christian religion would have ruined it (*ibid.*). The type of spirituality Machiavelli is admiring is a kind of lay spirituality (like the *devotio moderna*) as

opposed to the corruption and decadence of the ecclesiastics.⁴⁹ Machiavelli's sympathy for the mendicant orders may perhaps be understood as a part of his crusade against the ruinous effects of wealth and luxury. The Franciscan ideal of poverty was, of course, condemned when men like Fra Dolcino tried to suggest that the Popes as the vicars of Christ should also live in poverty. Many contemporaries saw a disparity between the wealth of the Popes and the poverty of Christ. Machiavelli may also have been thinking of the eulogy to Saint Francis and Saint Dominic and their poverty in Dante's *Commedia* (*Pur.*, cantos XI-XII). The example of these men was revived by some Catholic reformers of the early sixteenth century. Matteo da Bascio, who founded the Capuchins, sought to revive the primitive simplicity of St. Francis.

From the antiquity to the Middle Ages, people believed that the present age was one of decline from the Golden age. Society and individuals could hope for a return to the sinless state of the golden age before the Fall only by some reformation, a moral and political reshaping that would return individuals and societies to their beginnings, to their original state of purity. Thus, medieval writers spoke in terms of *reformatio* and *renovatio*. Machiavelli noted that it is necessary to bring religions, as well as republics and kingdoms, back towards their beginnings, and his 'rinnovazione' means precisely *restauratio* or *restitutio* understood as a return to the origins, not as subversion. In similar fashion, medieval political theorists spoke of *renovatio imperii*, understood as a renewal of the Roman Empire. For Machiavelli, this was also a necessity: "è cosa più chiara che la luce, che, non si rinnovando, questi corpi non durano". Of the religious reforms he says the following:

"Ma quanto alle sette, si vede ancora queste rinnovazioni essere necessarie, per lo esempio della nostra religione; la quale, se non fossi stata ritirata verso il suo principio da Santo Francesco e da Santo Domenico, sarebbe al tutto spenta. Perché questi, con la povertà e con lo esempio della vita di Christo, la ridussero nella mente degli uomini, che già vi era spenta: e furono sì potenti gli ordini loro nuovi, che ei sono cagione che la disonestà de' prelati e de' capi della religione non la rovinino; vivendo ancora poveramente, ed avendo tanto credito nelle confessioni con i popoli e nelle predicazioni, che ei danno loro a intendere come egli è male dir male del male, e che sia bene vivere sotto la obediienza loro, e, se fanno errore, lasciargli gastigare a Dio: e così quegli fanno il peggio che possono, perché non temono quella punizione che non veggono e non credono. Ha, adunque, questa rinnovazione mantenuto, e mantiene, questa religione" (*Discorsi*, III/1).

Thus, the reforms made by Saints Francis and Domenic have rescued Christianity from the prelates. But was this kind of renovation possible in politics? The same chapter deals with the necessity of reforming republics and kingdoms, but offers no contemporary example of how one man could carry out these renovations. A passage in *Istorie fiorentine* (I/31) is more revealing:

"In questo tempo seguì a Roma una cosa memorabile, che uno Niccolò di Lorenzo, cancelliere in Campidoglio, cacciò i senatori di Roma, e si fece, sotto titolo di tribuno,

⁴⁹ On the other hand, *devotio moderna* undoubtedly signals a quest for more personal religious experience against the merely formal practices of piety on the part of clergy as well as laity (see Olin 1992, xxi).

capo della republica romana; e quella nella antica forma ridusse, con tanta reputazione di giustizia e di virtù, che non solamente le terre propinque, ma tutta Italia gli mandò ambasciatori; di modo che antiche provincie, vedendo come Roma era rinata, sollevarono il capo, e alcune mosse da la paura, alcune dalla speranza, l'onoravano. Ma Niccolò, non ostante tanta reputazione, se medesimo ne' suoi primi principii abbandonò".

Machiavelli speaks of the renovations made in Rome in 1347 by certain Niccolò di Lorenzo, better known as Cola di Rienzo (1313-1354)⁵⁰. He overthrew the power of the barons and the pope, thus restoring the republic in Rome. Cola attempted to revive the ancient greatness and liberty of the republic and was very successful from the start. The bright hope for Rome and Italy soon changed to disillusionment as the pope and barons conspired to restore their power.

Cola succeeded in escaping and sought refuge with the Spiritual Franciscans living in the Abruzzi Mountains. One of them told him that it was now the proper moment to co-operate in the restoration of the empire and in the purification of the Church. All of this had been predicted by Joachim da Fiore, the celebrated Calabrian abbot. In a bizarre turn of events Cola fled to the Emperor Charles IV at Prague, was imprisoned by pope Clement VI in Avignon, was freed and returned to Rome to restore the republic. Shortly thereafter the barons revolted again and Rienzo was slain by a mob.

Machiavelli presents the events in a different light, saying that Cola grew timid under so great a power and fled to the Emperor without being pursued by anybody. What is interesting in Machiavelli's treatment of Cola is, again, his silence. He knew Cola's achievements at least to some extent, since he used a copy of Cola's *Vita* in writing the *Istorie fiorentine* (Musto 2003, 4). Cola was, after all, doing in practice what Machiavelli himself was doing only on paper. Cola was an early prophet of Italian unity and he sought to revive the ancient practices. He formed a citizen militia imitating the Roman example, a thing Machiavelli himself set out to do in Florence. Cola's republic, which he, echoing Joachimite doctrines, called the *buono stato*⁵¹, was also very innovative and came

⁵⁰ For most people Cola is probably more famous from Wagner's opera *Rienzi*.

⁵¹ "[N]either papal political writing, dependent on a long tradition of imperial and church theory and ancient Roman law, nor the relatively new discourse of the Italian communes had ever used the phrase 'buono stato' in Cola's sense. Instead, the communes had used the language that we have seen in Lorenzetti's painting of the *buon governo* in Siena or in the political theory of Remigio de' Girolami: the good commune (*buon comune*) as the manifestation of the common good, peace and concord, justice and tranquillity. Political theory in the early Middle Ages had spoken of government in the Augustinian terms of *civitas* or the Carolingian *respublica christiana*, *societas* or, during the Investiture Conflict as a *regnum* as opposed to *sacerdotium*. With the twelfth century and the revival of ancient political theory through the rediscovery of Aristotle and his Christianizing by Thomas Aquinas, a whole new vocabulary became available to describe an autonomous secular government. Though translated as 'state' by modern students, Aquinas's terms *civitas*, *civilitas*, *communitas*, and *bonum communem* derived more from his Italian communal culture than from his sources in Aristotle's *Politics*. Only when comparing forms of this *civitas* would Aquinas employ a phrase such as *status popularis*, not to mean a 'people's state' but a government in a popular mode of governance, with the emphasis of *status* placed upon the condition of the government, and not the

close to something Machiavelli surely has praised in other examples. Is he less friendly to Cola merely because he did not succeed in holding his power?

It could be noted that Machiavelli is, by and large, trying to find institutions that can stand firm and resist the attacks of *Fortuna*. This is achieved, as he says in the *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, when everybody has a hand in those institutions and no class of citizens will need to desire “*innovazione*” (he lacked the term ‘revolution’). Republics are very good in preserving political stability, but not in creating a political order. This is a task of an innovator whose methods and virtue must go beyond ordinary morality. Machiavelli’s new prince must create *ordini* while he himself definitely remains *extraordini*. This partially explains his praise of the ruthless leaders in *Il Principe* – that kind of leadership was simply needed in Italy of his time. He never says what would happen after that unification. In IV chapter of *Il Principe* Machiavelli explains through the examples of the kingdom of the Turk and France why Alexander’s kingdom did not revolt after his death. The reason is that Turk’s kingdom is hard to conquer but easy to hold, and France vice versa. The difference, Machiavelli says, does not result from the difference in the abilities of the conquerors but from the difference in their subject matter. Despotic forms of government are overthrown with difficulty but kept easily, whereas free subjects easily desire revolution. This is the problem not only in France but also in Italy. Castruccio’s plans to subjugate only a small part of Tuscany are ruined by Fortune and the little *stato* he has acquired is lost after two generations. Thus, far from seeing Castruccio and Cesare Borgia as saviours of Italy, Machiavelli sees their principedoms too tied to their characters to be truly successful against the blows of Fortune.

Thus, Machiavelli admires religious reformers who sought to take religion towards its beginnings, but seems to be more critical of men who did the same

government itself. This is also the sense in which it appears in contemporary Venetian senate records describing the condition of Venice’s maritime empire. That commune preferred such terms as *regimen* or *dominium* when describing its actual government and its operation. Even when distinguishing monarchic from democratic governments, Aquinas contrasted the *regimen regale* to the *regimen politicum*, a term he invented to match the new reality of the communes. ... Why, then, did Cola, or the Anonimo romano after him, choose to describe his government in terms of *stato* and not *governo* or *regimen*? One can find several precedents for Cola’s slogan in his classical reading: of Cicero’s *De republica* and Valerius Maximus (4 .1.4), for example, and more immediate sources in Dante (*Paradiso* 16.46 – 51). In this classical tradition the term *status* is most often used not as a substantive thing in itself but as a descriptive of something else, as in *status rei publicae*, ‘the condition of the republic.’ *Status* was also the widely accepted term used by Joachim of Fiore and subsequent Joachite writers to describe not a political state but a moral condition tied to the passage of historical time, the gradual progression of sacred history. Thus in the religious sense *status* is not exactly our sense of a time period. That idea remained best transmitted by the Latin term *aetas* so widely used in the medieval Augustine tradition. *Status*, on the other hand, was understood more appropriately as ‘age’ in the sense of a progressive step, a stage in a ongoing process of salvation, a position in time that also connotes the moral and religious ‘status’ of the people who would come to the fore within it. The Franciscan Spirituals, poets such as Dante, even the king of Naples, Robert of Anjou, were familiar with this usage.” (Musto 2003, 147-149)

in republics. Maybe Machiavelli saw a difference between St. Francis and Cola. The former was a morally upright and virtuous individual, whereas the same cannot be said of the latter. In reforms, as in founding of republics, the *virtù* of one man is needed (*Discorsi*, I/9). The reformer ought, however, to be so prudent and wise that the authority which he has assumed will not be left to his heirs or anyone else, since men being more prone to evil than to good, his successor could employ for reasons of personal ambition that which should be employed for virtuous reasons by him. In addition to this, even if one is good at organising or reforming, the thing organised or reformed will not endure long if its administration remains only on the shoulders of one individual, but it is good when it remains in the care of many, and thus there will be many to sustain it (*ibid.*). Therefore Machiavelli paradoxically argued that the stability of a republic or a religious institution is increased by its capability to reform itself.

3.7 Gospel According to Machiavelli

In his *Esortazione alla Penitenza*, Machiavelli again refers to the simplicity of Saint Francis and Saint Jerome. Machiavelli's *Esortazione alla Penitenza* is a difficult text for those who think that he was a pagan or an atheist. The text has convinced many scholars to think that he was a devout catholic in private life. For Roberto Ridolfi (1963, 253), "the sad and pious phrases" of the text form the "climax" of Machiavelli's Christian thought. According to Rehorn, along with Machiavelli's pious phrases in private letters, it indicates a "general orthodoxy, if not a fervent faith" (Rehorn 1988, 128). Others have interpreted Machiavelli's sermon as satirical. Pasquale Villari saw "veiled irony" in the text, while Benedetto Croce concluded that the whole sermon was "una scherzosa cicalata" (see Cutinelli-Rèndina 1998, 280). If we, however, think that Machiavelli's sermon is written without irony, we have to explain why he wrote all the other works that are less Christian. If he, in his older days, started to take Christian teaching seriously, why did he not attempt to destroy or modify his previous writings? There is no evidence that he ever attempted any such action.

The text, which is written in a form of a sermon, was probably written upon request and delivered in a meeting of a confraternity (probably the Company of Charity) composed of lay members. These kinds of confraternities were common in Florence and they were divided broadly into five categories (cf. Henderson 1994, 33-37). The *laudesi* and the *disciplinati* formed the two main types of devotional company in central Italy in the later Middle Ages. The main activity of the former was singing of lauds for Virgin Mary and the saints. Its significance was that the lauds were written and performed in Italian, thus providing the laity the opportunity to understand religious hymns. The latter companies were composed of voluntary flagellants imitating the suffering of Christ and stressing the need to repent one's sins and to resort to penitence. The third main category was constituted by the large charitable societies, which

provided poor relief in the city. The names varied across Europe, as well as the aim of the institutions. In Florence, for instance, there emerged more specialised confraternities helping e.g. condemned criminals (company of the Tempio, founded in 1354) or the *poveri vergognosi*, the respectable poor too proud to beg (Buonomini di S. Martino, founded in 1442). The fifteenth century saw the growth in importance of two other types of lay fraternities: the *fanciulli*, or the “boys”, imitating the adult flagellant societies to which the boys could graduate at certain age, and the artisan companies, providing devotional and social services for their members. The latter were opposed by Florentine regimes because they were suspicious that the disenfranchised workers (*sottoposti*) might use these as front for trade union activities to improve their salaries and working conditions. Machiavelli, as his father before him, had been a member of one or more devotional companies (*ibid.*, 437). Similarly, his sermon is meant for delivery at a meeting of the *disciplinati*. This context alone could explain the Christian tone of the text.

The sermon opens with a quotation from the Vulgate: *De profundis clamavi ad te Domine; Domine, exaudi vocem meam* (Psalm 130). These are the words of David, a great sinner, whose example, according to Machiavelli, shows that God has responded to human frailty by opening a way to salvation via penitence. Machiavelli’s exhortation singles out two grave sins: ingratitude to God and being unfriendly to one’s neighbours. “Because into these two vices we often fall”, writes Machiavelli, “God, the gracious creator has showed us the way for raising ourselves up, which is penitence”. Since God forgave David his adultery and murder and Peter his offence of having denied Christ three times, “what sin will God not forgive you, my brothers, if you sincerely resort to penitence”, Machiavelli asks his audience. This is the central message of the text: there are no sins that God will not forgive if you resort to repentance, since it is not sin but persistence in sin that makes God unforgiving. Machiavelli’s way to Paradise, however, is not the same one taught by Christ. It is surely relevant to wonder with Mansfield (1975, 375) whether this sermon is less an exhortation to penitence than an invitation to do the things for which one must be penitent. The sermon ends with a citation from Petrarch, asserting that we must understand that whatever pleases the world is only a brief dream. Placed in the context of Petrarch’s sonnets, the point of this line is not piety but romance. Upon closer inspection, Machiavelli’s penance seems to be little more than an excuse for hedonism.

There are some interesting features in Machiavelli’s sermon. Firstly, Machiavelli seems to forget, as Sumberg (1994) has noted, the indispensably sacramental character of the priestly absolutions of sins: whom the Church forgives, God forgives. In fact Machiavelli included in the sermon only the first of the three-step sacramental process of penance: contrition, confession, and satisfaction imposed by the priest in the form of punishments according to the severity of the sins atoned for, which omission of the role of the priest may, according to Sumberg, be a sign of Machiavelli playing a sly joke on them. Secondly, the sins Machiavelli mentions can be derived from the words of Jesus

(Mark 12:30-31): "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these". Machiavelli, however, does not exhort to love God but to be grateful to him. Thirdly, Machiavelli clearly exaggerates the importance of penitence and charity as means to salvation. There is the other way to Paradise, namely the belief in Christ as the Son of God (John 14: 16). No charity, nor penitence, was required from the malefactor on the cross, whom Jesus saved only through belief in him ("And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"). Along with David, Machiavelli's other example of penitence is Peter's denial of Christ. The problem is that none of the four evangelists asserts, as Machiavelli does, that Peter in fact repented or that Christ forgave Peter for denying him. It is not consistent with the Christian doctrine that every sin is forgivable or that penitence is sufficient for forgiveness (Norton 1983, 39).

Machiavelli's exhortation does not in fact contradict his general counsels. In a letter dated 25.2.1514, Machiavelli exhorts Vettori to continue his love affairs with loose reins since, "as Boccaccio said, it is better to act and repent than not to act and repent". Time for repentance will never be lacking, so it is better to act and repent than to repent that one did not act.

If we believe Henderson, the sermon is meant to deliver at a meeting of the *disciplinati*. Yet, it is hard to believe that Machiavelli saw some value in voluntary flagellation. He was, nevertheless, well aware of the practices of the Florentine confraternities. *Capitoli per una compagnia di piacere*, another less famous text of Machiavelli, is a satire of lay confraternities and their practices. *Compagnie di piacere* emerged in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and their members parodied normal confraternities by means of inverted values (cf. Henderson 1994, 436). The carnivalistic logic of world turned upside-down is obvious in Machiavelli's text. Some of the absurd rules of his *compagnia* will make this clear:

"Che niuno huomo minore di 30 anni possa essere di detta compagnia, et le donne ne possino essere d'ogni ethà. Che detta compagnia habbi uno capo, o huomo o donna che sia, da stare octo di; et degli huomini sia il primo capo quello che ha di mano in mano maggiore naso, et delle donne, quella che di mano in mano harà minore piè. ... Debbasi sempre dire male l'uno dell'altro; et de' forestieri che vi capitassino, dire tutti i peccati loro et fargli intendere pubblicamente sanza rispetto alcuno".

The men in the company must be over thirty years old, but women can be of any age. The first leader of the company is the man with the longest nose, and of the women, the one with the smallest feet. Of course, these were thought to correspond to the size of sexual organs. The members of the company are obliged to speak badly of each other, especially to strangers. They should discuss those matters on which the lesser part of those assembled shall agree. He or she who speaks the most words but least sense will be most honoured. The carnivalistic logic is evident, but the mocking is aimed especially against religious practices:

“Non si possa alcuno di detta compagnia, o huomo o donna, confessare in altri tempi che per la settimana sacra; ... et il confessore si debba tòrre cieco; et, quando egli havessi l’udire grosso, sarè’ tanto meglio. ... Debbino così huomini et donne di detta compagnia andare a tucti i perdoni, feste et altre cose che si fanno per le chiese; et ad tutti i desinari, merende, cene, commedie, veghie et altre chiachiere simili che si fanno per le case, sotto pena, sendo donna, di essere confinata in una regola di frati, et, sendo huomo, in uno munistero. ... Sieno obligate le donne ad andare quattro volte il mese a Servi almeno”.

No one in Machiavelli’s company is allowed to confess, except on Holy Week. Even then they should choose a blind confessor, and if his hearing is impaired, so much the better. The members are obliged to go to every other sort of gatherings in the churches and houses, and, as regards the women, they should go at least four times a month to the Servi. The church of the Servites (Santissima Annunziata) is, at least according to Machiavelli, full of nasty friars (*Mandragola*, III/2). In *Mandragola* he laments that it is a bad thing that those who ought to set good examples are instead like the friars of the Servi.

Some have suggested that Machiavelli rejects the whole Christian notion of love in his comedies. Patapan (1998, 546) reads Machiavelli’s critical rejection of the Courtly Love tradition in *Clizia* as an attack on its foundation, the notion that love is universal, unlimited, curative, unsolicited and unselfish – in short, the idea of love as *Agape* or *Caritas*. Thus Machiavelli’s critique is in essence a fundamental attack on the Christian God of Love, undertaken from the Platonic view of love as *Eros*, as *mania* and neediness. “Machiavelli’s critique of love is at its core a critique of the providence and omnipotence of the God of the New Testament, the God of Love. The God of Love imposes impossible demands on His children. The requirement that the believer love God with all his heart, all his mind and all his soul institutes within Christianity the volatile erotic love that is inherently contradictory. It raises all the torments that a lover endures in attempting to possess the beloved while satisfying her desires, moving the believer in two opposed directions – his own welfare and the complete abandonment of himself to God. Practically this manifests itself in the impossible demand to love one’s enemies. Such inherently contradictory demands make life on earth like Hell, a vale of tears. It makes the believer long for release; it makes him essentially unpolitical, indifferent to the demands of family and the city. Such an orientation resigns the believer to his fate; true believers act like Cleandro or Nicomaco, indifferent to the demands of family and the city”. This, according to Patapan, is Machiavelli’s useful but indecent teaching.

Occasionally Machiavelli introduces pagan elements into his religious imagery. The story of Belfagor is the best example of this diffusion. The story begins in Hell, which is ruled by Pluto and judges like Radamanthus and Minos. Yet the wretched souls who enter have died “nella disgrazia di Dio”. The main character Belfagor is an archdevil who was an archangel before he fell from Heaven. Nevertheless, they all inhabit the same Hell in Machiavelli’s fable. Similarly, one of his carnival songs (*De’ diavoli iscacciati di cielo*) speaks of the fallen angels but also of Pluto and Proserpina. Somehow, then, Machiavelli’s Hell is a mixture of two religious traditions, pagan and Christian, since the souls are condemned by God but Hell is ruled by Pluto. Curiously

enough, Machiavelli sometimes seems to avoid pagan influences and tries to make his stories more fit for the Christian reader. To the end of *Vita di Castruccio Castracani* Machiavelli has collected many sayings he attributed to Castruccio. Most of them are taken from the *Lives of the Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius, especially from the part narrating the life of Aristippus. One of the original sayings mentions the feasts of gods, but Machiavelli has changed it into “feste de’ nostri santi”⁵². Machiavelli was not a bigot, but neither was he a blasphemer. Machiavelli never engages into straightforward blasphemy. If Machiavelli is a blasphemer, his blasphemy is of a very subtle kind.

3.8 Machiavelli and *sapientia saeculi*

Machiavelli’s ‘realism’⁵³, his famous *verità effettuale della cosa*, as opposed to fantasies and imaginations is put forth in the XV chapter of *Il Principe*:

“Ma sendo l’intenzione mia stata scrivere cosa che sia utile a chi la intende, mi è parso più conveniente andare dritto alla verità effettuale della cosa che alla immaginazione di essa. E molti si sono immaginati repubbliche e principati che non si sono mai visti né conosciuti in vero essere. Perché gli è tanto discosto da come si vive a come si dovrebbe vivere, che colui che lascia quello che si fa, per quello che si dovrebbe fare, impara più presto la ruina che la preservazione sua: perché uno uomo che voglia fare in tutte le parte professione di buono, conviene che ruini in fra tanti che non sono buoni.” (*Il Principe*, XV)

This passage has often been interpreted as a critique of idealistic political philosophies, such as Plato’s *Republic*. But, clearly, this is also a critique of the kingdom of God (since it, too, is imagined and does not exist in reality, and thus belongs to the category of “mai visti”) and Christian morality in general. Loving one’s neighbour brings ruin if the neighbours do not express similar love – and according to Machiavelli, this seems to be the case in the real world. The wise prince, in order to hold his position, must be capable of not being good when it is necessary (*ibid.*). In his *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, a text on the remodelling of the Florentine government written upon request of the Medici pope Leo X, Machiavelli refers explicitly to Plato and others who have founded republics only in writings:

“Io credo che il maggiore onore che possono avere gli uomini sia quello che volontariamente è loro dato dalla loro patria: credo che il maggiore bene che si faccia,

⁵² This example can, however, be due to the Latin edition he was using.

⁵³ ‘Realism’, even though it is anachronistic, describes Machiavelli’s position rather well. It is, of course, disputable whether he was a realist or not, but as opposed to Christianity he certainly was. Marx and many Marxists, for example, were never realists, mainly because their materialistic and historical analysis of societies always served a utopian goal (cf. Portinaro 1999, 49). Also Machiavelli had a utopian goal, namely the unification of Italy. And, of course, Machiavelli’s heroes are often mythical or semi-mythical, and his political theory is not totally free from the ancient founding myths.

e il più grato a Dio, sia quello che si fa alla sua patria. Oltra di questo, non è esaltato alcuno uomo tanto in alcuna sua azione, quanto sono quelli che hanno con leggi e con istituti reformato le repubbliche e i regni: questi sono, dopo quelli che sono stati Iddii, i primi laudati. E perché e' sono stati pochi che abbino avuto occasione di farlo, e pochissimi quelli che lo abbino saputo fare, sono piccolo numero quelli che lo abbino fatto: e è stata stimata tanto questa gloria dagli uomini che non hanno mai atteso ad altro che a gloria, che non avendo possuto fare una repubblica in atto, l'hanno fatta in iscritto; come Aristotile, Platone e molti altri: e' quali hanno voluto mostrare al mondo, che se, come Solone e Licurgo, non hanno potuto fondare un vivere civile, non è mancato dalla ignoranza loro, ma dalla impotenza di metterlo in atto."

The passage begins with a clear allusion to Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, in which the actions of lawgivers and founders of republics are praised in a similar fashion. Machiavelli says that these are to be praised after those who have been gods (a brave opinion, keeping in mind that he was addressing the pope) and that this honour has been so much appreciated that those who have not been able to found a republic in actuality have founded one in writings.

Machiavelli's realism as opposed to utopian idealism was not his primary contribution to modern Western political thought. Although he was among the first to focus on real societies to discover the laws according to which they functioned, this move was not unanimously accepted by his immediate contemporaries. We may note that the genre of utopian literature did not come to an end with Machiavelli. On the contrary, utopian literature was starting to have its heyday only after Machiavelli with writers like More and Campanella. And, of course, Machiavelli's realism was not his invention, and those utopian works like More's and Campanella's are not necessarily far from the pragmatism of Machiavelli (cf. Canfora 2005, IX-X). He may have been thinking the Florentine neo-Platonists of his day, led by Marsilio Ficino, when he wrote against the imagined republics, but his true contribution is in contrasting the *bontà* of Platonism and Christianity. Machiavelli wants to reveal the conflicting demands of earthly life and Christianity, and in this sense he is a realist: successful political action, necessarily demanding employment of dishonest or vicious methods, would not secure salvation for the actor. According to a legend, Machiavelli had a dream, in which

"...he had seen a sparse crowd of poor people, ragged and emaciated; and when he asked who they were, he received the answer that they were the blessed souls of Paradise, of whom we read in Scripture: *Beati pauperes quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*. When they had disappeared, he saw a large crowd of people of noble appearance in royal and courtly robes, who were gravely discussing affairs of state, and among them he recognized Plato, Plutarch, Tacitus and other famous men of antiquity. Having asked who these newcomers were, he was told they were condemned to Hell, because it is written: *Sapientia huius saeculi inimica est Dei*. When they too had vanished, he was asked which lot he would like to be with. He replied that he would rather go to Hell with noble minds to discuss politics than to be in Paradise with that first beggarly contingent." (Ridolfi 1963, 249-250)

As many have noted, the dream is an inversion, a burlesque version, of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, found in the last chapter of his *De re publica*. In Machiavelli's dream, however, statesmen, scholars, and other great men, receive no reward of

eternal happiness but are banished to Hell, “because to have done the great achievements that made them immortal they had contravened the standards of Christian morality” (Viroli 2000, 4). According to Viroli, Machiavelli wanted to reiterate the message of the ancient dream and at the same time to ridicule the Christian dualism of Heaven and Hell.⁵⁴

Machiavelli’s princes have to risk the salvation of their souls simply because the requirements of temporal politics are not compatible with the requirements of the Christian doctrine. A wise man holds that to ruin kingdoms, sins are not evil enough, and to preserve them, alms and prayers are not good enough (*L’Asino d’Oro*, ch. 5, 106-112). According to Machiavelli, there should be no one “with so small a brain that he will believe, if his house is falling, that God will save it without any other prop, because he will die beneath that ruin” (*ibid.*, 124-127).

Machiavelli challenged not only the humanistic, but the whole Aristotelian-Thomist paradigm and raised the question whether the conduct prescribed in the mirror-for-princes tradition was indeed practical and expedient behaviour. Like Machiavelli, the political writers of the Middle Ages had undoubtedly been concerned to discover the rules that could be put into practice and might prove ‘useful’ (Chabod 1958, 181). Aquinas, for example, in his *De Regimine Principum* is interested in the actual site on which a city should be built, the salubrity of the air etc. But Machiavelli’s ‘realism’ was far more reprehensible. He argued that any prince acting in the real world would be foolish to pursue the ‘useful’ goals proposed by the *Fürstenspiegel* literature. Machiavelli shattered both humanist and Christian outlooks with the argument that success is mandatory and virtue, in the Stoic or Christian sense, its nemesis. He spoke in the vocabulary of Stoicism and Christianity - in order to speak to his contemporaries and not past them - but the vocabulary is turned upside down. As Mark Hulliung notes, Stoicism, by separating virtues from their results, made Machiavelli possible, and the Christian belief in pure good, a good indifferent to results, greatly increased his necessity (see Hulliung 1983,

⁵⁴ He may have also been thinking about the story of Aucassin and Nicolette: “What do I have to do with paradise? I do not want to enter there unless I have with me Nicolette, my so sweet friend whom I love so much, for in paradise go only those people I shall number for you. There go the priests so old and those old cripples and the maimed who all day and all night cough before those altars and in old crypts, and those who wear old tattered capes and old clothes, who are naked, without shoes or breeches, who are dead of hunger and thirst, and of cold and misery. Such are the people who go to paradise: with them I have nothing to do. But it is to hell that I want to go, because it is to hell where the fine scholars go, and the fine cavaliers killed in the tournament and the brilliant wars, the valiant men of arms and the knights. It is with these that I want to go. And there go too the fair ladies so courteous for having two or three friends besides their wedded lords; and there go also the gold and silver, the furs of miniver and vair; and there go the harpers, the minstrels, the kings of this world”. (de Grazia 1990, 342) About the story of Aucassin and Nicolette we know very little. What we do know is that it was written in northern France in early thirteenth century (cf. Vance 1970, 38). The name of the author is not known. The tale is written in altering prose and lyrics, telling a story of true love opposed by the father of Aucassin. Whoever composed the story of Machiavelli’s dream might have alluded to this older story, which is the best known love-story among medieval French fables.

204). For Greeks, there was no concept for pure good. Everything that was good, was good for something, not good in itself. Renaissance humanists tried to reintegrate the good and the useful with the claim that virtue succeeds. This is the assumption that they added to the Christian *Fürstenspiegel* genre, which had before their time spoken of virtue but not of utility⁵⁵. By contrast, Machiavelli's monstrous claim is that virtue does not pay, i.e. virtuous action in the Christian sense leads to devastation.

Machiavelli's princes need an education different from the Christian one. A passage from *La Vita di Castruccio* shows the importance of princely education, education that is somehow important even for the naturally able men like Castruccio. Messer Antonio, who is a priest, wanted Castruccio to be a priest too. But he had found a character totally unsuitable for a priestly mould ("Ma aveva trovato subietto allo animo sacerdotale al tutto disforme"), since Castruccio found pleasure not in ecclesiastical books but in arms. When a new tutor emerged, Castruccio was more than happy:

"E un giorno chiamatolo, il dimandò dove più volentieri starebbe: o in casa d'uno gentile uomo che gli insegnasse cavalcare e trattare armi, o in casa di uno prete dove non si udisse mai altro che uffizii e messe. Cognobbe messer Francesco quanto Castruccio si rallegrò sentendo ricordare cavagli e armi; pure, stando un poco vergognoso, e dandogli animo messer Francesco a parlare, rispose che, quando piacesse al suo messere, che non potrebbe avere maggiore grazia che lasciare gli studii del prete e pigliare quelli del soldato. Piacque assai a messer Francesco la risposta, e in brevissimi giorni operò tanto che messer Antonio glielie concedette. A che lo spinse, più che alcuna altra cosa, la natura del fanciullo, giudicando non lo potere tenere molto tempo così."

The point is in two rival educations: Castruccio is being trusted to Francesco Guinigi, a Lucchese condottiere, for education in horses and arms, since in the house of Messr Antonio he would never hear anything except "uffizii e messe". But the reason for this change in education is, according to Machiavelli, "la natura del fanciullo", the nature of the boy. He was totally unsuited for a priestly mould, as Machiavelli explained earlier, but it is important to note that it is precisely this that made him the perfect prince. He disliked theology, and "se pure ei leggeva alcuna volta, altre lezioni non gli piacevano che quelle che di guerre o di cose fatte da grandissimi uomini ragionassino". The perfect prince does not need books on theology but books on war and on the deeds of great men.

⁵⁵ On the pre-humanist and humanist concept of the prince, see Born 1928a; Born 1928b; Gilbert 1939. Many humanists were somehow able, as was the mainstream of Christianity itself, to marry otherworldliness and worldliness. Jacobitti doubts, however, that no philosophy whatsoever would have satisfied Machiavelli, for he was too aware of the impossibility of making *res* and *verba* congruent (Jacobitti 2000, 191). Machiavelli's suspicion about the possibility of correspondence of *cose* and *discorsi* is further elaborated by Najemy 1995. Machiavelli argues that things have often happened apart from (literally 'outside of' - *fuora*) the discourses and concepts one forms about them. This, again, challenges the entire tradition central to Renaissance humanism, that had accepted the beneficent power and utility of language and eloquence in politics.

In the XVIII chapter of *Il Principe* Machiavelli ponders the way in which princes should keep faith. Experience has shown that those princes who have done great things have held good faith of little account, and have known how to be crafty, and in the end have overcome those who have relied on their word. This kind of behaviour, with reliance on force, Machiavelli admits, is more suitable for beasts than for humans. But for this reason, the prince must be educated by the centaur:

“Dovete adunque sapere come e' sono dua generazioni di combattere: l'uno, con le leggi; l'altro, con la forza. Quel primo è proprio dello uomo; quel secondo, delle bestie. Ma perché el primo molte volte non basta, conviene ricorrere al secondo: pertanto a uno principe è necessario sapere bene usare la bestia e lo uomo. Questa parte è stata insegnata alli principi copertamente da li antichi scrittori, e' quali scrivono come Achille e molti altri di quelli principi antichi furono dati a nutrire a Chirone centauro, che sotto la sua disciplina li custodissi. Il che non vuole dire altro, avere per precettore uno mezzo bestia e mezzo uomo, se non che bisogna a uno principe sapere usare l'una e l'altra natura: e l'una senza l'altra non è durabile.”

This is a direct opposition to the Ciceronian ideal. Machiavelli recalls the ancient practice when the heroes were given to the half-beast for education⁵⁶. The prince needs to know the bestial methods (*la forza*) too, since the method appropriate for humans (*le leggi*) is never sufficient without the other. Machiavelli's emphasis on the bestial side of Chiron constitutes, once again, almost a complete break with the traditional interpretation. Before Machiavelli Chiron had embodied the humanist ideal of education, instructing his pupils in music and medicine. Born of a god and immortal until he renounced this gift, Chiron is often portrayed as more divine than human in Renaissance treatises, and the bestial side is not emphasized (Ingman 1982). The Centaurs were, according to Greek mythology, wild and lawless creatures, slaves to their animal passions and more prone to drinking and violence than educating. The defeat of the Centaurs by the Lapiths was seen as the victory of civilization over barbarity. Chiron, however, was the exception, since he was of different pedigree - unlike the other centaurs who are descended from Ixion, Chiron was Cronos' son. Unlike the other centaurs he was kind and peace-loving. What Machiavelli is doing in this passage is denigrating the humanist ideal of educator. When he associates Chiron with bestial force, he was most likely aware that this was not the popular image of Chiron. The ancient heroes were not to be tutored in bestial force: in fact, sometimes Chiron's pupils are depicted as bloodthirsty and ferocious, but Chiron teaches them the calming influences of music. Hence, Machiavelli once again distorts mythology and by doing so tries to show that the humanist ideal of education of the ruler is not sufficient enough in a world where bestial abilities are needed.

Raimondi (1993) argues that it is Xenophon from whom Machiavelli derives the image of Chiron. The connection between Xenophon's and Machiavelli's Chiron is reinforced by the taste for the primitive and the

⁵⁶ Machiavelli mentions only Achilles. The others Chiron tutored included Asclepius, Herakles (Hercules), Jason, Aeneas, and Peleus.

'savage', of a broadly Lucretian inspiration. Machiavelli's centaur "becomes a symbol of power, reflecting the logic of an ancient anthropology, a vision of the world predating and opposed to the Christian view" (ibid., 156).

The methods of the fox and the lion, far from being most alien to a human being, prove most congenial to the nature of princes: whereas for Cicero, guile and force are unjust, if occasionally necessary for a good end, Machiavelli makes them accepted techniques of political action (Barlow 1999, 637). He denies that there is a difference between human sociability and that of the beasts, thus drawing out the implications of Cicero's partial and grudging concessions. Machiavelli's transformation of Cicero's metaphor indicates his dissatisfaction with the entire scheme in *De Officiis*: "Cicero remains within a classical framework in which the objectives of success in politics are limited by nature, that is, by the uniquely human combination of rationality and sociability. Rationality precludes force, and sociability fraud. Machiavelli sees politics as unlimited by considerations outside politics itself. Neither sociability nor rationality impose limits on political action" (ibid.). Of course, it is not only Cicero that Machiavelli is opposing here. The whole structure of Dante's *Inferno* is constructed on force and fraud, to take a more contemporary example. The older Florentine has the Centaurs guard the violent and fraudulent rulers in the XII canto of *Inferno*, but Machiavelli would send his ideal ruler to the cave of Chiron for education.

It is precisely different education that explains the greater or lesser amount of efficacious deeds among a given people:

"Vero è, che le sono le opere loro ora in questa provincia più virtuose che in quella, ed in quella più che in questa, secondo la forma della educazione nella quale queglii popoli hanno preso il modo del vivere loro." (*Discorsi*, III/43)

There was a greater amount of *virtù* in ancient times, because their education was better than the Christian one. The princes too, if they are to achieve great deeds, do not benefit from the Christian education⁵⁷, but need a more secular or politically more salutary education.

3.9 Christianity and the Decline of Italian Military Virtue

Machiavelli's Italy in general and Florence in particular was politically weak and also had witnessed a similar decline in military virtue. Generally, we can find at least three different causes for the decline of Italian and Florentine military valour from the writings of Machiavelli. One is connected with the establishment of the Roman Empire, and, somewhat paradoxically, also with its

⁵⁷ The benefit is, of course, that they know how to pretend Christian virtues.

dissolution. Another is the use of auxiliaries, or mercenary troops. Third, and the most important one, is Christianity.⁵⁸

The first of these matters, the Roman Empire and the subsequent transition to the Christian Europe, is specifically addressed by Machiavelli in the beginning of his *Istorie fiorentine*, as well as at the end of the second book of *Arte della Guerra*. According to Machiavelli, there is such a scarcity of virtuous military leaders in his times because Europe, after the establishment of the Roman Empire, has started to resemble Asia and Africa. He argues that in ancient times Europe was more virtuous in military matters because it did not have a single centre of power, but was constituted by many republics. As is commonly known, according to Machiavelli republics promote more virtue than despotic forms of government. Thus, the decline in military virtue in Europe in general and in Italy in particular was caused by the pacifying effect of the Roman Empire, which eliminated most of the competing autonomous powers in Europe. After the division and slow disintegration of the Empire, ancient military valour did not re-emerge because of Christianity.

Machiavelli's dislike of mercenary troops is rather peculiar⁵⁹. Historians have often pointed to the fact that, during the Renaissance, the mercenary system usually worked flawlessly. The local armies were seldom properly trained and their arms and equipment, besides of being old-fashioned, were inadequate or simply missing. The townsmen were reluctant to leave their occupations or peasants their harvests for the uncertainties of a military campaign. It was also very expensive and dangerous to maintain a military establishment in peacetime, since a standing army might easily turn into a revolutionary one. Thus, those who planned wars had to take into account the engagement and pay of mercenaries (Hale 1971, 96-100). This was the case especially in Italy, where the burghers had long relied on hired professionals, but it also became a trend elsewhere. Machiavelli's *ceterum censeo* against

⁵⁸ Perhaps we should also briefly consider one cause not mentioned by Machiavelli, but nevertheless the one many others expressed as the primary reason for the lack of military virtue in Florence, namely sodomy. From the Medieval times, Florence had been known for this art (see e.g. Sieni 2002). In fact, homosexuality was so common in Florence that e.g. in Late Medieval German language the slang-word for a sodomite was *Florenzer*. So eager were the Florentines to eradicate this bad habit, which was destroying their once famous military ability, that the Florentine government took actions against this fashion by establishing two institutions aimed against it, the *Ufficio della Notte* and the Orwellian-sounding *Ufficio dell'Onesta*, the first establishing brothels and the second investigating accusations of sodomy. The accusations could be made anonymously and aimed against anybody. Nevertheless, none of this is mentioned by Machiavelli. One possible reason for this is the fact that Machiavelli himself was accused of sodomy (with a woman, though). But, perhaps, he just wanted to emphasise the other causes.

⁵⁹ The nexus between good arms, strong government and riches has been a permanent topic in political theory. Since Cicero and Tacitus, at the latest, it has been assumed that the tranquillity of nations was impossible without armies, armies without soldier's wages, and wages without tribute. *Pecunia nervus rerum* was the aphorism with which this wisdom was conveyed for centuries. As Anthony Molho (1995, S97) has noted, Machiavelli was nearly alone in the premodern era to challenge this conventional wisdom by claiming that "i danari non sono il nervo della guerra" (*Discorsi*, II/10) and that money can not supplant *virtù*.

mercenary troops did, however, have some basis in reality. Mercenaries had to be paid promptly, discipline was more difficult to keep because the troops were multi-national, and orders were difficult to pass. The *condottieri* used every effort to rid themselves and their soldiers from hardship and fear, not firing on cities at night, not firing on tents, and not campaigning in the winter, as Machiavelli complained in the XII chapter of *Il Principe*. Mercenary troops were also eager to desert *en masse* or even turn against their employers if the payment was not on time or if they received a better offer from the other side. Despite that, Machiavelli's characterisation of the Italian methods of warfare should not be considered as historical truth (Gilbert 1973, 13). There were intense rivalries between the *condottieri*. Consequently, if only for reasons of their personal gain and glory, they were normally quite eager to defeat the enemy.

But as Machiavelli noted, the *condottieri* often shunned battles and preferred a war of manoeuvre. If the battle could not be avoided, the mercenary leader tried to keep the losses down, since the soldiers were his working capital and he did not want to waste them. This resulted to many bloodless battles, where those who were killed were not slain, but fell from their horses and suffocated in the mud, like Lodovico degli Obizzi and his two followers, the only casualties of the battle of Zagonara in 1424 (*Istorie fiorentine*, IV/6), or were trampled to death, like the only casualty of the famous battle of Anghiari⁶⁰ in 1440 (*Istorie fiorentine*, V/33). The men fought with such safety because "all on horseback and covered with armour and safe against death whenever they surrendered, they had no reason for dying, since they were protected during the fight by armour and when they no longer could fight by surrendering" (*ibid.*). The situation where princedoms are continually attacking one another with armies cannot be called peace, but it cannot be called war either, "in which men are not killed, cities are not sacked, princedoms are not destroyed, because those wars became so feeble that they were begun without fear, carried on without danger, and ended without damage" (*Istorie fiorentine*, V/1). Why would somebody object to this? No casualties in battles, at least none through killing. It sounds very strange that somebody should demand harsher methods. This is especially strange in the case of Machiavelli, since he often lauds the opposite methods of warfare. We know his recommendations to economise the quantity of violence⁶¹, and more than once he admires men like Castruccio Castracani who never attempted to win by force if they could win by fraud. In

⁶⁰ As noted, Machiavelli's account is not realistic. The battle of Anghiari resulted in approximately 900 casualties.

⁶¹ Stressing the heroic values Machiavelli espouses, Mark Hulliung has argued that the economising frame of mind in Machiavelli's comments on violence should not be understood as substantially curtailing the quantity of violence (Hulliung 1983, 223). The economy of violence is actually not very economical, he argues, if the economical use of violence at a given moment is cancelled out by the endlessness of violent moments. "For anyone who inhabits a universe of heroic values, violence comes to an end only when there is no one left to conquer, at which moment an Alexander the Great is reduced to tears" (*ibid.*). But perhaps Hulliung does not see clearly enough the aim of Machiavelli's spectacularly violent moments. It could be argued that the aim is precisely to get rid of violence, i.e. not needing to use it again.

Machiavelli's view, warfare has little to do with gaining a physical hegemony over the enemy, i.e. actually destroying them. Far more important than brute force is brute semiosis (cf. Spackmann 1993). Thus the aim of clever warfare is to construct a seemingly invincible discourse of power. Whether it is based on actual military power is not important if the enemy can be convinced to think so. Use of fraud is, of course, encouraged, "Never when he could win by fraud did he attempt to win by force, because he was accustomed to say that the victory, not the manner of the victory, would bring you renown." (*Vita di Castruccio Castracani*). There is no sense in engaging in an actual combat, if it can be won without it. This can also lead to a situation, where warfare renders itself unnecessary, or at least practically impossible. A modern parallel to this kind of symbolic warfare could be seen in the Cold War and nuclear deterrence.

But Machiavelli's comments on mercenaries do not fit in this general scheme. Machiavelli's point in the dislike of mercenaries is that the *condottiere* and his men fight so badly because their interest in warfare is purely economic (cf. Gilbert 1973, 12-13). The mercenary troops "have no love for you nor any cause that can keep them in the field other than a little pay, which is not enough to make them risk death for you" (*Il Principe*, XII). The citizen army, on the other hand, has every reason to fight for the glory of the *patria*. According to Machiavelli, "the best armies are those of armed peoples", and he could find "only Hannibal and Pyrrhus to represent those who with armies irregularly picked up have done big things" (Letter to Vettori, 26.8.1513). Some leaders have forced their men to fight through necessity⁶², "taking from them every hope of saving themselves except by winning. This is the most spirited device and the best that can be used, if the soldier is to be made determined. His determination is increased by confidence in his general and his native land, and love for them. Confidence is caused by arms, discipline, recent victories, and the general's reputation. Love for a man's native land is caused by nature; that for his general, more by ability than by any kindness. Necessities may be many, but strongest is that which forces you to conquer or die" (*Arte della Guerra*, IV). It is necessity and love of native land that are lacking from mercenary troops.

Skinner has suggested that, although Machiavelli mounts a general attack on hired soldiers, he may have been thinking in particular about the misfortunes of his native city at the hands of its mercenary commanders (Skinner 2000, 36). Nevertheless, Machiavelli objects to mercenaries also on a more general level, because they do not have real attachments to the country they are defending. Like the medieval knights, mercenaries are fighting *pro domino*, not *pro patria*. Their devotion is attached to a specific prince or a king, not to anything resembling the idea of a *patria*. Consequently, they do not have any real interest in defending their cause.

Significantly, Machiavelli never blamed the multitude, the people, or the 'nation' but laid the blame almost exclusively on leaders. The princes are to

⁶² The tactic was applied by e.g. Cortés who, after arriving to the New World, immediately burned his ships, so that the voyage back home was not an easy option if the morale of his troops should have decreased.

blame for the lack of *virtù* of the Italians (*Il Principe*, XXVI, *Arte della Guerra*, VII). In the XIV chapter of *Il Principe* he says:

“Debbe dunque uno principe non avere altro obietto né altro pensiero né prendere cosa alcuna per sua arte, fuora della guerra e ordini e disciplina di essa”.

The Italian princes, however, have acted very differently. They have relied on foreign soldiers and have learned the arts of war from the Transalpines:

“Credevano i nostri principi italiani, prima ch’egli assaggiassero i colpi delle ultramontane guerre, che a uno principe bastasse sapere negli scrittoi pensare una acuta risposta, scrivere una bella lettera, mostrare ne’ detti e nelle parole arguzia e prontezza, sapere tessere una fraude, ornarsi di gemme e d’oro, dormire e mangiare con maggiore splendore che gli altri, tenere assai lascivie intorno, governarsi co’ sudditi avaramente e superbamente, marcirsi nello ozio, dare i gradi della milizia per grazia, disprezzare se alcuno avesse loro dimostro alcuna lodevole via, volere che le parole loro fussero responsi di oraculi” (*Arte della guerra*, VII).

These were the activities Italian princes were engaged in and it did not enter the minds of these “wretches that they were preparing themselves to be the prey of whoever attacked them” (*ibid.*). This happened in 1494 when Charles VIII took Italy with chalk. The Italian princes have not learned their lesson but continue in the same error and refuse to imitate the great men of antiquity who prepared their bodies for hardships and the mind not to fear perils:

“Onde nasceva che Cesare, Alessandro e tutti quegli uomini e principi eccellenti, erano i primi tra’ combattitori, andavano armati a piè, e se pure perdevano lo stato, e’ volevano perdere la vita; talmente che vivevano e morivano virtuosamente. E se in loro, o in parte di loro, si poteva dannare troppa ambizione di regnare, mai non si troverà che in loro si danni alcuna mollizie o alcuna cosa che faccia gli uomini delicati e imbelli. Le quali cose, se da questi principi fussero lette e credute, sarebbe impossibile che loro non mutassero forma di vivere e le provincie loro non mutassero fortuna” (*Arte della guerra*, VII).

Machiavelli believes that the key to changing Italy’s fortune lies in the imitation of antiquity. In this context he does not even speak of the republics, but offers his advice for the princes of Italy. If they would imitate Caesar and Alexander, they would change their way of living and the fortune of their provinces. But what would this change mean? These men led their armies personally and lacked softness (*mollizie*) and other things that make men delicate and unwarlike. Significantly, these are the ‘virtues’ that Machiavelli identifies with Christianity. Could it be that the imitation of these men would also imply setting aside Christian morality? Certainly, for this is not just a slight innuendo in Machiavelli’s writings on war. Earlier in the same book he discusses the issue in a more direct manner:

“[E]ssendo questa una arte mediante la quale gli uomini d’ogni tempo non possono vivere onestamente, non la può usare per arte se non una reppublica o uno regno; e l’uno e l’altro di questi, quando sia bene ordinato, mai non consenti ad alcuno suo cittadino o suddito usarla per arte; né mai alcuno uomo buono l’esercitò per sua particolare arte. Perché buono non sarà mai giudicato colui che faccia uno esercizio che, a volere d’ogni tempo trarne utilità, gli convenga essere rapace, fraudolento,

violento e avere molte qualità le quali di necessità lo facciano non buono; né possono gli uomini che l'usano per arte, così i grandi come i minimi, essere fatti altrimenti, perché questa arte non gli nutrice nella pace: donde che sono necessitati o pensare che non sia pace, o tanto prevalersi ne' tempi della guerra, che possano nella pace nutrirsi. E qualunque l'uno di questi due pensieri non cape in uno uomo buono" (*Arte della guerra*, I).

The concept of a Christian soldier seemed paradoxical even to the early Christians, and St. Augustine reproached those soldiers who had converted to Christianity but returned to their old habits like "dogs to their vomit". Could a soldier, enlisted for the work of the sword in the service of coercive temporal rule, be a true Christian? Luther addressed the question specifically in his pamphlet of 1526, *Whether Soldiers Too Can be Saved*. As Maddox (1996, 106) argues, "Luther denounced the majority of princes as the world's biggest fools, yet did their office the honour of according it a high place in God's plan for ordering the natural world. A ruler is relatively good if he helps stabilize the world. To do this he is not necessarily a good person in the Christian sense. A Christian's calling, as Christian, is not to rule at all". Hence, in assisting a prince to do his lawful duty of protecting the peace a soldier is merely taking part in God's plan. Luther 'solved' the problem related to the different virtues constituting a good soldier and a good Christian by moving the responsibility to the prince. "Clemency, though appropriate for a Christian as a person, is not one of his attributes as a soldier, for it may involve a dereliction of his coercive duty. The responsibility for the consequences of coercive action must lie with the ruler who gives the orders. On the other hand, if a soldier is given an order he knows to be unlawful, his duty is not to obey, for no one has the right to counsel anyone to act unrighteously" (ibid.). Once again, Machiavelli approaches the question very differently. First of all, he never ponders the problem of doing wrong from the individual soldier's point of view. In a sense, for him too the responsibility is ultimately the prince's. But Machiavelli would never add that the soldiers should not obey unjust orders. Machiavelli saw this as a problem of efficiency, not of redemption.

In Machiavelli's view, Christianity, apart from being politically devastating, has also changed the way men behave in war. In the *Arte della Guerra*, Machiavelli argues that this comes about because the Christian way of living does not impose the same necessity for defending oneself as antiquity did:

"perché, allora, gli uomini vinti in guerra o s'ammazzavano o rimanevano in perpetuo schiavi, dove menavano la loro vita miseramente; le terre vinte o si desolavano o ne erano cacciati gli abitatori, tolti loro i beni, mandati dispersi per il mondo; tanto che i superati in guerra pativano ogni ultima miseria. Da questo timore spaventati, gli uomini tenevano gli esercizi militari vivi e onoravano chi era eccellente in quegli. Ma oggi questa paura in maggior parte è perduta; de' vinti, pochi se ne ammazza; niuno se ne tiene lungamento prigioniero, perché con facilità si liberano. Le città, ancora ch'esse si sieno mille volte ribellate, non si disfanno; lasciandosi gli uomini ne' beni loro, in modo che il maggior male che si tema è una taglia; talmente che gli uomini non vogliono sottomettersi agli ordini militari e stentare tuttavia sotto quegli, per fuggire quegli pericoli de' quali temono poco". (*Arte della guerra*, II).

The charitable mechanisms of Christianity that celebrate cloistered metaphysicians more than active men are part of the same *ethos* that Machiavelli is criticising here. Even though, Machiavelli marvels, “civil laws are nothing else than opinions given by the ancient jurists, which, brought into order, teach our present jurists to judge” and “medicine too is nothing other than the experiments made by the ancient physicians, on which present physicians base their judgments”, not a single prince or republic resorts to the example of the ancients in “setting up states, in maintaining governments, in ruling kingdoms, in organising armies and managing war, in executing laws among subjects, in expanding an empire” This, says Machiavelli, results from nothing else than the present religion and education, or “from the harm done to many Christian provinces and cities by a conceited laziness, as much as from not having a true understanding of books on history, so that as we read we do not draw from them that sense or taste that flavour which they really have”. (*Discorsi*, preface).

“Above all”, writes Machiavelli, “one should avoid any half-way measure” (*tutto la via del mezzo*) in treating conquered cities or prisoners of war (*Discorsi*, II/23). As concerns rebelling cities, “it is necessary either to wipe them out or to treat them with kindness”. Prisoners should be allowed to go away with honour or they should be killed. Adopting any other course is dangerous, because the conquered immediately think of revenge. Machiavelli’s advice for consolidating a divided city is the killing of the leaders of the disorders (*Discorsi*, III/27). Such “decisive actions have in them something great and noble”, but “men’s feebleness in our day, caused by their feeble education (*debole educazione*) and their slight knowledge of affairs, makes them judge ancient punishments partly inhumane, partly impossible”. Feeble education in Machiavelli’s vocabulary is a synonym for Christian education. The original “*debole educazione*” refers specifically to “weak education” which he identifies with Christianity (e.g. in *Discorsi*, II/2).

In his *Considerazioni* on Machiavelli’s *Discorsi*, Guicciardini noted Machiavelli’s frequent, shocking examples of force and fraud and went on to imply that Machiavelli’s inordinate fondness for such examples was motivated as much or more by a love of dramatic effect as by political concerns. In Guicciardini’s view, Machiavelli’s penchant for spectacular violence amounted paradoxically to political naiveté, even to an idealism of grand gestures. He advised the prince not to take “for an absolute rule what Machiavelli says, who is always excessively pleased by unusual and violent remedies.” Elsewhere in his *Considerazioni*, he recast Machiavelli’s naiveté as bookish idealism, remarking that some of the examples Machiavelli adduced of tyrants and monarchs giving up their power “are more easily portrayed in the books and the imaginations of men, than they are accomplished in reality”. And in his *Ricordi*, in maxims later readers have taken to refer to Machiavelli, he linked political naiveté with the humanist rhetoric of exemplarity when he complained, “How wrong it is to cite the Romans at every turn”; “To judge by examples is very misleading.” For Guicciardini, Machiavelli’s shocking recommendations of force and fraud were

perfectly compatible with bookish idealism and a humanist fondness for ancient Roman examples. (Kahn 1994, 15-16)

Hence, the crucial question is whether Machiavelli was using these examples for literary purposes only, or did he recommend such methods to be adopted in actual conduct. The ostensibly cruel methods of warfare were imported to Machiavelli's Italy by foreigners. As long as they remained intra-Italian, the battles between the *condottieri* were in fact rather bloodless as compared to those battles which included foreigners. Those Italians who ventured abroad had some experience with total war and terror tactics, applied especially by the Turks, who slaughtered everyone and occasionally sawed in half those who surrendered. Although the northerners did not torture people in the Saracen fashion, their method of warfare with mass killings of surrendered soldiers was quite as ruthless from the Italian point of view (cf. Murrin 1994, 202). In fact, it was the north that brought these tactics to Italy. In 1494, the French slaughtered whole cities or fortresses of Italy to make bigger ones surrender. The tactics worked and was soon emulated by other nations. In 1512, the Spanish soldiers who sacked Prato, a small fortified town near Florence, put to death more than four thousand people, raping virgins, looting and burning everything. Seeing this, the Florentine republic soon surrendered and once again had to allow the exiled Medicis to return.

In the preface to *Discorsi* Machiavelli says: "in organising armies and managing war... not a single prince or republic now resorts to the examples of the ancients". This is not entirely true. Indeed, it is paradoxically this reliance on ancient examples that made the Italians so feeble in their warfare. The Italian rules of warfare in that period made the battles rare, occurring only after formal challenge and resembling more organised spectacles than real combats. The troops often let a fort be bombarded for several days without attempting to succour it, thus ensuring more pay and less risk for the soldiers. Not surprisingly, e.g. Florentine Luca Landucci reflected that the Italians require to be taught by the Ultramontanes how to make war (cf. Clough 1995, 193). The Continental way of fighting was imported to Italy by the French in 1494 and, as opposed to the Italian *spettacolo*, it consisted of surprise attacks, of giving no quarter, and of violence against non-combatants. The Milanese, in league with the French against the Neapolitans, proclaimed that for their part the warfare would be by Italian rules, not 'a gorgia', an allusion to Plato's *Gorgias*, which denied morality and natural justice (ibid.). The French, who fought with might and terror, were successful from the very beginning of their Italian expedition. As Machiavelli complains in *Il Principe* (XII), the mercenaries "seemed valiant against each other; but when the foreigner came, they showed what they were, so that Charles the king of France was allowed to take Italy with chalk". The terror tactics worked so well that the French quartermasters only had to mark with chalk the houses where they wished to stay in occupied cities. The strategies of the ancient generals as well as the classical techniques of warfare were used precisely by the *Italian* mercenary leaders such as Francesco Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro, not the victorious French (Clough 1995, 214). The

French were successful because they were not limited by the imitation of supposed classical models and the associated chivalry. The Italians were disunited both politically and militarily and had for a long time relied on hired soldiers instead of traditional militias. The consequences of this were evident in the events of 1494. What Machiavelli thought of the debacle when it happened we do not know, simply because very little is known of his life before the year 1498. It is very probable that the events shaped his political vision, proving both the political ineptitude of the Italians and the feebleness of their methods of warfare.

Machiavelli's comments on warfare aim to establish that Christian ethics prohibits the use of effective means in war and thus brings ruin rather than victory. In his poem *Dell'Ambizione* (lines 166-168) he writes that San Marco, "to his cost, and perhaps in vain, discovers late that he needs to hold the sword and not the book in his hand". St. Mark is the patron saint of Venice and the lion, his symbol, is normally depicted holding a book in its hand. In times of war, however, the lion is depicted as holding a sword instead of the Bible. This change in imagery could characterise the need to abandon Christian ethics in times of war⁶³. In a letter from Verona (7.12.1509) he refers to the same change concluding that the Venetians have found out to their cost that, for holding states, studies and books are not enough. According to Machiavelli, Cosimo de Medici was accustomed to say that "gli stati non si tenevano co' paternostri in mano", i.e. that states can not be run with paternosters (*Istorie fiorentine*, VII/6). This and other sayings gave material for Cosimo's enemies for saying that he loved "più questo mondo che quell'altro" (*ibid.*). Thus, the fact that Christianity is not the best possible religion from a political viewpoint was, according to Machiavelli, known among rulers as well.

Sereno (1953) argues that this famous political acumen is based on misunderstanding. First of all, it has become famous through Machiavelli's pen, which casts a doubt on its authenticity. In fact, Cosimo's friend and biographer Vespasiano da Bisticci, careful as he is of citing instances of Medicean wisdom, gives no account of this saying. As Sereno notes, this sentence has been thought

⁶³ In a short text on contemporary history of Florence, Machiavelli would like to see his fellow Florentines "reopen the temple of Mars" (*Decennale primo*, lines 549-550). Does this simply mean that they should start worshipping pagan deities? More probably it means that they should prepare for war, and with their own army. Like the lion of St. Mark, the temple doors in ancient Rome signified the change from times of peace to those of war. But, significantly, in times of war the doors were opened from the temple of Janus, not of Mars. But the worship of Mars was clearly associated with war. He was the Roman counterpart of Ares, but unlike him, Mars had many dimensions. Before it went to war, the Roman army gathered near the temple of Mars Gradivus, and the army was trained at Campus Martius, outside city walls. On the Forum Romanum, the "hastae Martiae" ("lances of Mars") were kept. Any movement of the lances was seen as a portent of war. The leader of the army also had to move the lances while saying "Mars vigila" ("Mars awaken"). Perhaps it was something like this Machiavelli had in mind when he told to reopen the temple of Mars. The worship of Mars and the coming of war were also joined by the fact that Mars was originally an ancient chthonic god of spring, nature, fertility and cattle. Hence, the month Martius (i.e. March) is named after him because wars were often started or renewed in spring.

to contain *in nuce* all of Renaissance political thought. It has been interpreted as a maxim implying disregard for religious norms and “Machiavelli, so keen on ideal princes, but so short on real ones, appeared to many a writer to have found the perfect political lips to utter a perfect political apothegm”. Yet, according to Sereno, the illustrious sentence means nothing of the kind. In this sentence, *paternostro* is not employed in its normal meaning of prayer, and in fact it has no religious implications whatsoever. The word *paternostro* is to be understood as a rosary, or a string of beads, which many persons fondled to when they had nothing else to do. Thus, the meaning of the whole sentence is that “a leader cannot remain idle while his enemies are at work against him”. The *paternostri* in this context mean any *passatempo*, and *paternostri in mano* is just a fancier way of saying *le mani in mano*. This may very well be what Cosimo actually meant, but it is not what Machiavelli wanted to say. How can we explain Machiavelli’s next sentence, where he says that this and other sayings gave material for Cosimo’s enemies for saying that he loved more this world than the other? It is obvious that either Machiavelli or Cosimo’s enemies (or both) understood this maxim so that it implied disregard for religious norms.

3.10 The Soul

“For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul?”

- Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36, Luke 9:25

“I love my native city more than my soul”

- Machiavelli -

In his famous letter to Francesco Vettori (16.4.1527) elderly Machiavelli says: “I love my native city more than my soul”. Another similar idea we find in his *Arte della Guerra*. Praising Cosimo Rucellai, the opening words say: “I do not know what possession was so much his (not excepting, to go no further, his soul) that for his friends he would not willingly have spent it; I do not know of any undertaking that would have frightened him, if in it he had perceived the good of his native land” (*The Art of War*, I). The third passage with similar flavour is in his *Istorie fiorentine*, where Machiavelli praises the heroes of the so-called War of the Eight Saints (1376-1378). He writes: “So much higher did those citizens then value their city than their souls!” (*Istorie Fiorentine*, III/7). According to Maurizio Viroli, Florentine patriotism assumed a marked secular and anticlerical connotation during this war (Viroli 1998, 152). But even before that, a fourteenth century Florentine Dominican Remigio dei Girolami appeared to argue in a 1302 tractate that the superiority of the common good over individual good requires that a citizen be willing to be damned to Hell in preference to his commune’s damnation. However, this idea is very complicated, since there is no explicit doctrine on damning a commune to Hell

in the Christian religion or in the Canon law. But still, Remigio might have had his strange idea from the Bible. We may briefly sum up this line of thought in order to understand that Machiavelli was not simply taking this idea further but meant something different.

Remigio's analysis⁶⁴ aims to establish that the citizen ought to have greater love for common good than for his own, individual good. Both of his political treatises, *De bono communi* and *De bono pacis*, were probably inspired by the aftermath of the Florentine Revolution of 1301. As Holmes has noted, they are works of a man appalled by the evidence of faction and greed exhibited by these events, and who turned to the ancient writers for arguments that would show the citizens they were conducting politics in the wrong manner (Holmes 1986, 84). The application of the ideas of classical authors, such as Aristotle and Cicero, who wrote about the politics of ancient cities to the similar situation of the Renaissance Florence is a line of thought that commences from Remigio and has its heyday two centuries later with Bruni and Machiavelli. Remigio's treatment of the subject is partly based on corporeal metaphors drawn from e.g. Aristotle and Albertus Magnus. In addition, his analysis also spells out the political consequences of St. Augustine's aesthetics. But as Kempshall notes, it is the hierarchy of the *ordo caritatis* which provides Remigio with the thesis which dominates his entire treatise (Kempshall 1999, 298).

Remigio regards dependence as a principle inherent in every part of Creation. The whole (*maius*), he argues, is 'better' than the part (*melius*) because the entire goodness of the part depends on the whole. The part owes its existence to the whole, since without the whole it would not be a part at all. A part that exists outside the whole exists only in potential, whereas the whole exists in actuality⁶⁵. The application of this principle to community leads Remigio to his famous statement, the statement that has been interpreted as a sign of extreme corporatism and as a sinister elevation of the claims of the community over the individual (see Kantorowicz 1957, 478-479 and Rupp 2000). Remigio stresses the idea to such an extent that he concludes with the infamous words: *si non est civis, non est homo*. Aristotle, on the other hand, had made the famous utterance according to which a person incapable of living within a community, or a one who is so self-sufficing that he has no need to do so, is not a human, but either a lower animal or a god (*Politics*, 1253a 25-30).

According to Kempshall, in arguing that the common good is the manifestation of a correctly ordered love, Remigio was following a well-trodden path, already set by Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome and Godfrey of Fontaines (Kempshall 1999, 299). Remigio's argument adopts a similar line connecting love with the exercise of virtue, identifying it as a unitive and transformative power, separating concupiscent love from the benevolent love of

⁶⁴ My discussion of Remigio is much indebted to Kempshall 1999.

⁶⁵ Aristotle's example in *Politics* (1253a20-22) had been that of a hand separated from a body. It is a hand only equivocally or homonymously, in a similar fashion that a sculpted hand is a hand. Since all things are defined by their capacity and function, it follows that when they are no longer able to perform their function "they must not be said to be the same things, but to bear their names in an equivocal sense".

friendship, and most importantly, making a separation between different categories of love. In the Bible, God's love for humans is not *eros*, concupiscent, lustful love, but *agape*. Adding one more dimension to this dichotomy, the *ordo caritatis* acknowledged three types of love: natural, rational and divine – the love of one's self, the love of neighbours, and the love of God.

But Remigio's real contribution to the discussion is his analysis of the individual who sins on behalf of his community. However, this idea is very dubious and complicated, as there is no explicit doctrine on damning a commune to Hell. Remigio considers three passages where the idea is expressed: Exodus 32:32, Romans 9:1-4 and Hebrews 13:12. In the passage of Exodus, Moses turns to God and asks for forgiveness for the Israelites who have fashioned the idolatrous⁶⁶ golden calf: "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, blot me, I pray You, out of your book which You have written" (Exod. 32:32). In Paul's letter to the Romans it is stated "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off and banished from Christ, for the sake of my brethren and instead of them, my natural kinsmen and my fellow countrymen" (Rom. 9:3). The third passage describes the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus suffered and died "in order that he might purify and consecrate the people through His own blood" (Hebr. 13:12). The first two of these passages, Remigio argues, are in accordance with the *ordo caritatis*. Before his request to God, Moses had already inflicted the punishment of death on three thousand Israelites, and had thus showed love that placed God above the multitude and the multitude above a minority of three thousand. Like Moses, Paul had already demonstrated his love for God, and for fellow-humans (1.Cor. 10:33; 2.Cor. 12:15). Paul's desire to be cursed was accompanied by the knowledge that this would be impossible to fulfil. He knew that a sinless and upright individual like himself could not be separated from Christ, no matter what he wished. Hence, the hypothetical wish is only a rhetorical move that demonstrated his love for the Jews. (Kempshall 1999, 305-306)

It is only with the third passage (Hebr. 13:12) that Remigio finds an example of an individual who lacked sin or guilt, but still incurred the greatest punishment on behalf of the community. Remigio does not discuss whether the sacrifice of Christ should be taken as an example to be imitated, or as an act that only Christ himself could perform. He only quotes Matthew 20:28, where it is stated: "...the Son of man came not to be waited on but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many...". Nevertheless, Kempshall argues that it is clear from Remigio's discussion of Moses and Paul that an individual should will his own damnation instead of community's only if his damnation does not involve any evil done on his own part⁶⁷. (Kempshall 1999, 306)

⁶⁶ In the Old Testament there are a number of passages that criticize or attack other gods, explicitly demanding that Israel should worship Yahwe exclusively. Interesting, however, is the fact that this intolerant monolatry never denied the existence of other gods (see Pakkala 1999).

⁶⁷ Needless to say, this condition is impossible for anyone other than Christ.

The idea behind this reasoning is curious. The argument is based on the old Augustinian distinction between evil done and evil suffered. Evil done should never be desired, for it causes offence to God. Evil suffered, on the other hand, harms only the individual who is experiencing it (see Kempshall 1999, 304). But if doing evil indeed causes offence to God and thus potentially makes the community susceptible to collective discipline⁶⁸, the community should have an interest in cleansing itself from any harm done by individual sinners. The standard way of doing this is, of course, the age-old ritual of sacrificing scapegoats, symbolically loaded with the sins of each individual and then released to the desert. It is also interesting that Remigio dismisses the diplomatic move made by Moses in Exodus 32:11-14. In these passages, Moses succeeds in dissuading God from the destruction of Israelites, because it would have done for the Egyptians what they were unable to do.

Remigio could also have been influenced by the story of Marcus Curtius, who saved Rome by leaping into a hole that went *ad infernum*⁶⁹. Anyway, for Machiavelli the question is not about community's damnation, but of saving the community from temporal corruption. As a pupil of St. Thomas Aquinas, Remigio operated with Aristotelian terminology. In his view the citizen must love the city more than himself, because the city is his only possible actuation. Being perfect means being more of the likeness of God. Remigio stressed this to such an extent that he denied the qualification of man from individual deprived of his city. Oddly enough, by devaluating the individual and praising the community as a resemblance of God, Remigio seems to have disregarded the fact that according to Genesis, it was man, not the community, which was created in the likeness of God.

But for Machiavelli, God plays no role in this game. He and his heroes are ready to risk the salvation of their souls simply because they see that the requirements of patriotism or temporal politics are not compatible with the requirements of the Christian doctrine. That is the reason why he says that he prefers going to Hell rather than to Heaven (cf. *Mandragola* IV/1.; Ridolfi 1963, 249-250; de Grazia 1990, 341-342; Viroli 2000, 3-4). A citizen willing to sacrifice his own soul for the fatherland is a product of a lengthy and slow process. According to Mattingly, this process originated in the conflict between the emperor and the pope, which conflict produced first purely temporal states in the Christendom. The slowness of this process is described by the fact that only a generation before Machiavelli's birth, when Filippo Maria Visconti, the Duke of Milan, told an angry pope that, as for himself, he valued his soul more than his body, but his state more than either, the answer could still seem either a monstrous flippancy or a moral monstrosity. But by the 1490s, when Machiavelli was about to begin his political career, men of high moral seriousness – Machiavelli among them – could take the Duke's response as a

⁶⁸ As I noted before, there is no explicit doctrine of damning a community to Hell, but it is very clear that God will destroy all who turn their hearts away from him (Deut. 30:17-18), as well as those who hate Him (Psalm 21:8-9).

⁶⁹ See also Augustine's discussion of Curtius in *De Civ. Dei*, V, 18.

principle of political conduct. In Machiavelli's time, new egoistic and omniscient states were beginning to demand this kind of total allegiance - at least from their ambassadors. The ambassador exists to serve the state. As Mattingly puts it, the ambassador "must execute the orders and carry out the policies of his government, scrupulously and to the uttermost, no matter what they may be, no matter how completely they may contradict his political convictions or his personal sentiments. The ambassador can have no private views". But what is interesting is the fact that making the expected gestures men were coming to feel the appropriate emotions. (Mattingly 1962, 117)

Had Machiavelli accepted Christian morality and the prospect of divine judgment, he probably would not have wanted to break the legacy of silence on the awful and immoral things men do in their lust for power, as Kristol maintains. "He would have been fearful of depraving the imagination of men, especially princes, and of incurring responsibility of their damnation. Had he even accepted the moral code of the Greco-Roman writers (who did not believe in divine judgment either) he would at least have indicated how awful these things were, no matter how inevitable in the course of human affairs. But instead he declared that an honest and enlightened man had no right to regard them as awful at all. They were inherent in the nature of things; and with the nature of things only fools and sentimentalists would quarrel." (Kristol 1961, 147)

One possible dimension in Machiavelli's critique of 'transcendental *patria*' is its despotism. Christian *viator* strives towards a world, which, in certain aspects, is monarchical or even despotic. In the end of Gospel of Matthew Jesus says: "All authority - all power of rule - in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Matt. 28:18). This is by no means the ideal situation for a republican citizen. In his satirical sermon, *Esortazione alla Penitenza*, Machiavelli points to this fact in an explicit manner by referring to Jesus as "our Emperor Jesus Christ in the heavenly kingdom" (*Esortazione alla Penitenza*, see also Norton 1983, 34). This is, of course, a very interesting connection between Machiavelli and John Milton. Like Machiavelli, Milton argues that God is a tyrant, whereas Satan is more like a republican figure, because after the angelic fall and the expulsion from Heaven he is among his peers, i.e. other doomed angels. Satan also led a 'republican revolt' against the "Throne and Monarchy of God" (*Paradise Lost*, book I). Tyrannical Heaven may also be one of the reasons why Machiavelli would gladly go to Hell. It is interesting to notice that during the classical period in Rome, *imperium* was not called a *patria* whereas the *res publica*, as well as the city of Rome, was always referred to as such (Kantorowicz 1957, 233). Therefore, strictly speaking, the celestial kingdom cannot be a *patria*. This is the governmental difference between Heaven and Hell. Heaven is a hereditary kingdom whereas Hell can be seen as a republic.

In the passage below, Machiavelli explains why Messer Rinaldo degli Albizzi, after being exiled and having lost every hope to return to Florence, participated on a crusade.

"... e per guadagnarsi la celeste patria, poi che gli aveva perduta la terrestre, se ne andò al sepulcro di Cristo." (*Istorie Fiorentine*, V/34)

The passage reveals what Christian religion is offering. Christianity has displaced patriotism by providing a transcendental fatherland in the hereafter. The promise of a better fatherland is clearly stated in the Bible (Hebr. 11:13-16), and God's eternal fatherland is naturally far more important to a Christian than temporal ones. Thus placing one's hope in the hereafter leads to resignation in temporal affairs. Since Christian's visit on earth is considered short from the viewpoint of eternity, it actually makes no difference whether you suffer or joy, because in the end you will be entitled to perennial happiness⁷⁰. This contradiction between *vita activa* required by politics and *vita contemplativa*⁷¹ required by Christian religion is Machiavelli's main concern in his critique of Christianity. Notice that Machiavelli writes of Messer Rinaldo who seeks comfort from the heavenly city only *after* he has lost every hope to return to his earthly city. This is, according to Machiavelli, the correct order of the two cities. Religion should by no means displace the primacy of the temporal fatherland.

What Machiavelli is actually describing in his critique is the displacement of patriotism. This has, in his view, alienated Christians from temporal communities. In fact, alienation from worldly issues did not just happen – it was recommended. In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus is very clear on the issue: “My kingdom is not of this world”. “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews”. But his kingdom is in the hereafter, and his servants do not fight. As Prezzolini (1970, 33) notes, it is only the optimistic, fashionable Christianity that has claimed that his kingdom ought to be of this world, thus abandoning this pessimistic strain.

It is also interesting that “Dante can imagine a *Purgatory* or a *Paradise*, but Machiavelli can imagine only a *Hell*” (Mazzeo 1970, 40). At first, this would seem to place them at the opposite ends of the spectrum of moral and imaginative possibilities. But, Mazzeo notes, the category of Hell in fact unites the two great Florentines, for Machiavelli's analysis of experience is made entirely in terms of incontinence, force, and fraud – Dante's three categories of sin. In Machiavelli, however, we “find them not as three great stages in a descent to the abyss, but as the three moments of a dynamic system in terms of which life is lived...” (ibid.). For Machiavelli, the whole of collective life was Hell in the Dantesque sense⁷².

⁷⁰ J-J. Rousseau makes a similar argument against the transcendental nature of Christianity in his *Social Contract*, book IV, ch.8. Here, as so many times, Rousseau is relying heavily on Machiavelli. For the relation between Rousseau's and Machiavelli's critique, see Viroli 1988, 175.

⁷¹ Actually, the Christian ideal is best described by the term *vita transitoria*, since in this life, the Christian truly is nothing but a *viator* on his way to heaven (cf. Ladner 1967 and Ullmann 1977, 17-19).

⁷² The fact that Machiavelli is silent about purgatory (he speaks of heaven and hell) would actually again curiously tangent with the pessimistic Augustinian/Lutheran tradition. Luther removed everything from Christianity that was not in the Bible. Thus, there is no doctrine on purgatory in Protestantism. Another noteworthy fact is that the dichotomy of heaven and hell prevailed in the bipolar form through centuries, until the notion of purgatory was added to the scheme. According to Jacques Le Goff (1984), this transformation, the emergence of an intermediate place between heaven and hell, was closely bound up with profound changes in the social

In his influential book "The Machiavellian Moment" Pocock discusses a view of salvation that according to him prevailed in the Renaissance. Like Christianity's fallen man, the man of this Aristotelian analysis of the Renaissance could not obtain salvation by himself. Instead of Augustinian intervention of divine providence, this analysis placed the political action of one's fellow-citizens as a condition for salvation (Pocock 1975, 74). This, in turn, meant the politicisation of virtue. Virtue was considered forming in a community, where citizen was ruling and being ruled with others. According to Pocock, salvation had thus become social: "In embracing the civic ideal, therefore, the humanist staked his future as a moral person on the political health of his city. He must in a totally non-cynical sense accept the adage that one should love one's country more than one's soul; there was a sense in which the future of his soul depended on it, for once the justice which was part of Christian virtue was identified with the distributive justice of the polis, salvation became in some degree social, in some degree dependent upon others" (ibid., 75). Similarly, Qviller argues that the "emancipation of politics from religion is not absolute in the system of Machiavelli. His break with the thinking of the Middle Ages consists in the fact that he removes salvation from the horizon of the politicians who acted. Instead he substituted the republic as a form of secular salvation." (Qviller 1996, 343). It seems rather obvious that this idea of social salvation is not what Machiavelli had in mind. His aim is not to provide a new way to salvation through temporal state, which is not a form of social salvation, but simply a temporal state. And, in addition, it should be noted that trying to obtain salvation by man's own merits is a sin - an expression of man's boasting. If it would be possible to attain salvation without faith in Christ⁷³, then Christ died in vain (cf. Räisänen 1986, 33). What he would have liked to see is Christianity reformed in such a way that it would not

and intellectual reality of the Middle Ages. Le Goff dates the birth of purgatory somewhere between 1170 and 1200, when purification after death was first said to be carried out in a particular place. This third place became an intermediate zone located between three polarities: morally between good and evil, spatially between heaven and hell, and temporally between the death of the individual and the Final Resurrection.

⁷³ The possible exception is, of course, the case of those who lived before Christ, and therefore could not have faith in him. This salvation of the ancient just has aroused a number of questions: how could the ancients, who had no opportunity to learn of Christ, gain salvation? It seemed unjust, even cruel, of God to condemn men to eternal punishment simply for the fault of having been born before His son's sacrifice. This was 'solved' by Christ's descent into Hell (described in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus), where he freed the ancient just. Thus medieval Christians who admired classical thought and letters could hope to meet their favorite authors in paradise and still remain orthodox. (cf. Turner 1966) Related to this problem is also the question of *apocatastasis*. The crucial issue was whether Divine Love could be limited in any way, even to the extent of Satan's exclusion from Grace (see Patrides 1967; Sachs 1993). For example in Origen's view, the punishments inflicted by God, including the pains of Hell, were regarded as curative, not penal, as remedies intended to restore all sinners to their original state of righteousness and purity. Infinite Love will ultimately end the torments of Hell and restore the damned, including Satan, to Grace.

comprise any fundamental conflict between this-worldly activities and its demands for salvation.

It has also been claimed that Machiavelli's great lawgivers, founders and saviours of countries can count on God's friendship. "If judged like the others, they would be damned; but God can exempt them from judgment. A man who has saved his country deserves to be saved in turn. His deed was extraordinary; the reward must be accordingly extraordinary" (Viroli 1995, 39). The problem is that Machiavelli himself never argues anything like this. It is Fortune, not God, who favours the brave. In Machiavelli's view the great statesmen are residing in Hell since the nature of their game forces them to act contrary to traditional morality. True, Machiavelli writes that God may be favourable to the one who should liberate Italy from foreign domination (*Il Principe*, XXVI). Yet, I think Machiavelli's focus is in this world instead of the next one. What he means is that God or Heavens or Fortune will assist in this endeavour. He points to the examples of Moses, Theseus and Cyrus, whose people were scattered and enslaved like the Italians, and writes that "their undertaking was not more just than this, nor easier, nor was God more friendly to them than to you". What does God's friendship actually mean? Does it mean that he assists the "righteous" endeavours of his friends or that he offers them redemption as a reward of their actions? Since all three of Machiavelli's heroes are non-Christians, the latter option seems to be excluded. Furthermore, since God befriends only winners and not losers, it becomes clear that only the outcome of the events in question can reveal whose friend God is. God who favours only the politically successful is hardly a Christian conception of God, as Parel (1992, 57) has noted.

In *Vita di Castruccio Castracani* Machiavelli says that God is the lover of strong men because He punishes the weak by means of the strong. Voegelin ended his article on Machiavelli with the following observation: "The closing remark of this characterization is of special interest because it introduces the element of the *ira Dei* that we know from the *Vita Tamerlani*; the victorious prince becomes the *ultor peccatorum* [punisher of sins]. Neither in the *Principe* nor in the *Discorsi* has Machiavelli become so explicit in according to power and *virtù* the meaning of a providential order of politics." (cf. Cooper 1999, 259-260) Is there any reason to assume that Machiavelli finally detected a providential order in politics? I think there is no reason to make such an assumption since Machiavelli's adage is really only a remnant of the older saying "Fortune favours the brave" in which God has replaced Fortune. Yet, the equivalence between God and Fortune has one important outcome: since strong men can, according to Machiavelli, master Fortune by taking her roughly, could it be that strong men can master God as well?

Viroli (1998, 23-24) thinks that Machiavelli adapts the classical idea of God as a friend to founders and saviours of republics, whose origin is in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and which had been kept alive with little variation by Petrarch and by Quattrocento humanists like Matteo Palmieri, for rhetorical purposes. "However", Viroli continues, "his political God is more

'understanding' than the God of Cicero and the humanists. For them, God is ready to help and reward founders, rulers, and redeemers of republics who have practiced the political virtues: justice, fortitude, prudence, and temperance. For Machiavelli, God is also willing to excuse princes who perpetrated 'well-committed' cruelties, if that was necessary to establish their power, or to redeem kingdoms or republics". Viroli refers to the eighth chapter of *Il Principe*, where Machiavelli distinguishes between well used and badly used cruelty.

Those who have used cruelties well ("se del male è lecito dire bene" Machiavelli adds with an apparent understanding that he is reverting the moral code *tout court*), can, "before God and before men, make some improvement in their position, as Agatochles could" (*Il Principe*, VIII). On the other hand, those who use cruelties badly, "cannot possibly sustain themselves". But what is the meaning of this improvement in their position? The original "qualche rimedio" is linked with "allo stato loro", which would be closer to "some kind of remedy to their stato". Now, it is debatable whether this means their personal status or their state. Another English translation⁷⁴ says that they "are able, by aid of God or man, to mitigate in some degree their rule, as Agatochles did". I think this is closer to the idea, especially since the other option is that they cannot maintain power. So, the idea is that those who use cruelties well stay in power with God's or men's help, whereas those who use cruelties badly, lose their position. I don't think this passage shows that Machiavelli's heroes can hope to be saved, especially because the example is Agatochles, of whom Machiavelli says earlier in the same chapter: "his outrageous cruelty and inhumanity together with his countless wicked acts do not permit him to be honored among the noblest men".

There is some discussion on the topic also in *Istorie fiorentine* (VI/20) where the Milanese protest against Sforza's treachery:

"E quando pure l'ambizione ti accecassi, il mondo tutto, testimone della iniquità tua, ti farà aprire gli occhi; faratteli aprire Iddio, se i pergiurii, se la violata fede, se i tradimenti gli dispiacciono, e se sempre, come in fino ad ora per qualche occulto bene ha fatto, ei non vorrà essere de' malvagi uomini amico. Non ti promettere adunque la vittoria certa, perché la ti fia dalla giusta ira di Dio impedita".

The orator, unnamed by Machiavelli, says the Count should not think his victory certain because the just anger of God will impede it. The reason for this is that He will not always befriend the wicked, even though He has done so in the past for the sake of some hidden good. In the next chapter (VI/21) the Count justifies himself and says:

"Il che se fusse vero o no, lo dimosterrebbe, con il fine di quella guerra, quello Iddio ch'eglino chiamavano per vendicatore delle loro ingiurie; mediante il quale vedranno quale di loro sarà più suo amico, e quale con maggiore giustizia arà combattuto".

⁷⁴ Wordsworth edition, 1993.

The outcome of the battle, Sforza argues, will show who fights with greater justice and who is God's friend. In the next chapter (VI/22) Machiavelli explains how the Count outwits both the Milanese and the Venetians (who abandon him and side with the Milanese) by promising that he will give up the whole enterprise, but in fact does not do so. "This plan was the cause of his victory", writes Machiavelli, thereby affirming that it was the Count's own ruse that secured the victory for him. Hence, God was not the cause of the victory, unless He was the cause of the cause and somehow seduced the Count into this plan. Is there any reason to believe that God wanted the Count to subjugate the Milanese and therefore is willing to excuse his perjury?

We should also remember that the immortality of the soul was a question that aroused much discussion during the Renaissance (see e.g. Garin 2001, 93-126; Kristeller 1979, 181-196). In fact, along with the eternity of the world, it was the most crucial question of Renaissance philosophy. A somewhat common misunderstanding is embedded in the very idea of immortality of the soul. Should there be some kind of eternal torment after death, it would require that some part of the person, namely the soul, should survive after death. However, there is no Biblical authority for this view. Not in a single passage is it hinted that the soul is immortal. Life after death is described only as a reward to those who have lived according to God's commandments, not as a punitive state for wrongdoers. Furthermore, this new life after death is rendered possible through resurrection, meaning that it does not rely on the idea of immortality. The Christian doctrine of immortality is not found in the Scripture, but in the works of the early apologists and Church Fathers - from Justinus Martyr to St. Augustine. These writers, unlike the biblical authors, were familiar with Greek philosophy, and had an eager wish to reconcile Christian doctrine with it.

Thus the Christian notion of the immortality of the soul, as it was finally formulated by St. Augustine, is clearly derived from Greek philosophy, and in particular from that of Plato and the Neoplatonists. The soul is incorporeal and by nature immortal. Of the Neoplatonic doctrine of immortality, Augustine merely rejected those parts that were incompatible with the Christian doctrine, i.e. transmigration and preexistence (Kristeller 1979, 186). Thus modified, the concept of immortality without preexistence lost some of its consistency and led to certain disputes later on.

In many religions and civilizations - whether primitive or not - spirits of the dead are thought to continue to live and demand the attention of their descendants. As Kristeller has noted, among the many problems and concepts that have occupied the thinkers of the past, and particularly Renaissance thinkers, the doctrine of immortality seems especially remote from the discussions and concerns of our time (Kristeller 1979, 181). As contrast to the preceding thought, our outlook is very much confined to the problems of this world, and we seem to worry very little about our fate in the next world, provided that we even believe in the existence of any such thing. Almost everything is measured by the present and its needs, and the present seems to live at the expense of the past and the future. People who have an ambitious

spirit, eagerly seek publicity that is quickly forgotten, and the quest for everlasting fame, once so powerful an incentive for political or cultural achievement, is no longer felt or, at least, no longer admitted to be a living impulse for human endeavor. But similar this-worldliness was not common in the Renaissance, although it definitely was much more concerned with the affairs of this world than the Middle Ages.

It is of the highest importance to note that Machiavelli's adage of the incompatibility of Christian conviction and political action has its predecessor in the bishop of Hippo. His central message is somewhat similar to the one St. Augustine was purporting a thousand years earlier. According to Augustine, the foundation of politics is not justice but domination by force or the threat of its use. And here, in respect to the foundation of politics, Machiavelli actually agrees with Augustine, but his solution is not resignation but *virtù*. For Augustine, Christians are to use (*uti*), not to love (*frui*, literally 'to enjoy'), the state on their pilgrimage towards salvation. The Christian does obey the state and its laws, not least because he would not set himself up against the inscrutable ways of God's working in history. But loving the temporal state is not permitted. This conception is something Machiavelli wanted to reform.

In general, we can note that Christianity according to Augustine, in its essence, and for a number of reasons, is hostile toward politics. Politics is seen as evil and resulting from fallen man's perverse *libido dominandi*. The state is a tool of God's mercy, a tragic necessity whose function is to shackle man's free will from boasting. According to Augustine's famous description, earthly kingdoms lacking justice are nothing but robber bands. For St. Augustine, even the very idea of men living in cities reflects their sinfulness, for the city was founded by a fratricide, Cain ("tiller of ground", Gen. 4:2), whereas the killed brother, Abel, was described in the Bible as a "keeper of sheep" who built no city⁷⁵. Ironically, fratricide is also the origin of Rome, the greatest of worldly states. Thus Augustine detects a similarity between Cain and Romulus. Machiavelli 'forgives' Romulus his fratricide because the result excuses him (*Discorsi*, I/9), but St. Augustine definitely does not⁷⁶. Justice will not reside in this world. Those who are only visitors in this world, i.e. true Christians, cannot form their state in this world, and for the damned, justice will exist in hell. Hence it comes about that Christianity prescribes obedience to all established states - but it is necessary only to use them, not to love them. It is indifferent whether you suffer or joy in this world, since the visit on earth is rather short compared to eternal happiness in God's kingdom.

⁷⁵ St. Augustine makes Abel a type of the regenerate, and Cain of the natural, man: "Cain founded a city on earth, but Abel as a stranger and pilgrim looked forward to the city of the saints which is in heaven" (*De Civ. Dei*, XV, 1).

⁷⁶ Another example where Machiavelli and Augustine hold opposite opinions is the story of Numa introducing the Roman religion. For Machiavelli, Numa's pretended discussion with the nymph is a proof of wise use of religion, but for Augustine the story stands as evidence of the search of false gods with false piety and *perniciosissima curiositas* (Canfora 2005, 48-49).

Augustine and Machiavelli also have in common the pessimistic view of human beings (cf. Prezzolini 1970; Qviller 1996). According to the Renaissance astrology, some planets are benign and some are malignant. One would expect them to produce an equal amount of good and bad people. Yet Machiavelli's people are without exception bad. As Qviller maintains, the easiest way is to accept that Machiavelli's negative anthropology does not follow from astrology or the theory of bodily humours related to it. The nearest parallel to Machiavelli's anthropology⁷⁷ is to be found in the Augustinian doctrine of original sin.

It is Machiavelli's 'negative anthropology' that separates him from the ethical community of the ancients, as well as from the mixture of Aristotelianism and Christianity common in his time. In fact, man as a creature who is naturally inclined to self-gain, treachery, and deception - inclined to 'bad' conduct instead of 'good' behaviour - is a product of late antiquity. We do not encounter such view in the classical antiquity. The Christian counterpart of Machiavelli's pessimistic anthropology is to be found in the writings of Augustine, or in the Gnostic-Manichaean tradition. Frederick of Prussia noted in his *Anti-Machiavel* of 1740 that Machiavelli "portrays the world as a hell and all men as demons" (1981, 100). According to the crown prince, some authors were guilty of portraying the world too good, but Machiavelli "portrays it as vicious to the extreme". This, according to Frederick, is a serious misinterpretation: "Starting from a principle laid down in his drunkenness, he can only deduce false consequences from it. It is as impossible to reason justly without the right principle as it is to draw a circle without a common center" (ibid.). Machiavelli clearly anticipates Hobbes's anti-Aristotelianism with his doctrine of the selfish man. In Machiavelli's view, Christianity fails because it supposes that humans are naturally inclined to goodness.

In the beginning of *Discorsi*, Machiavelli describes the origin of society:

"perché nel principio del mondo, sendo gli abitatori radi, vissono un tempo dispersi a similitudine delle bestie; dipoi, moltiplicando la generazione, si ragunarono insieme, e, per potersi meglio difendere, cominciarono a riguardare infra loro quello che fusse più robusto e di maggiore cuore, e fecionlo come capo, e lo ubedivano. Da questo nacque la cognizione delle cose oneste e buone" (*Discorsi*, introduzione)

In Machiavelli's Polybian version men are gathered together not because they have speech and reason, but to defend themselves. When they chose a leader and obeyed him, this gave birth to honest and good things. Hence, there is no natural justice, and men are not friends and intimates. Whatever is good and honest, is so only because somebody has set those standards. This also means that those standards can be changed.

⁷⁷ On Machiavelli's anthropology, see also Huovinen 1951.

4 MACHIAVELLI'S LEGACY

Over the centuries, Machiavelli has been regarded as the man responsible for the dismissal of the notion of politics as the art of republic, and the spiritual father of the doctrine of reason of state⁷⁸. Writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries blamed Machiavelli for corrupting the true (Aristotelian) idea of politics and pointed to him as the thinker who transformed the most noble of humane arts into the art of tyrannical rule. On the other hand, there were also many authors who recognised him as one of the greatest republicans ever.

Still today, commentary literature often tends to see 'reason of state' as an invention of Machiavelli. According to Meinecke, Machiavelli's "whole political way of thought is nothing else but a continual process of thinking about *raison d'état*." (Meinecke 1984, 29). Meinecke also lauds Machiavelli as the person, with whom the history of the idea of *raison d'état* in the modern Western world begins (ibid.). For decades, this erroneous view has persisted in modern scholarship on the subject⁷⁹. Morgenthau discusses the attitude proclaiming the permanent exemption of political action from ethical limitations and claims that this attitude "is connected with the names of Machiavelli and Hobbes and is known in the history of ideas as 'reason of state'" (Morgenthau 1945, 4). Accordingly, for example Mosse writes of the Puritan views of reason of state and argues that the "modern origins of this concept are to be found in the Italian Renaissance and especially, by implication, in the writings of Niccollo Machiavelli, who endowed the state with a moral personality of its own" (Mosse 1952, 68). And recently Armitage, writing on Edmund Burke and reason of state, suggests that to place Burke within the traditions of reason of state is a category error, since Burke scorned the Machiavellian politicians and condemned the maxims of Machiavelli (Armitage 2000, 619). However, to

⁷⁸ On this transformation from politics to reason of state, see Viroli 1992a and Viroli 1992b.

⁷⁹ Meinecke's book was published in the 1920's. Naturally, I am not arguing that all scholarship on the subject would include the error.

identify reason of state with Machiavellian doctrines is nothing but another category error.

Black, in his article on Christianity and republicanism, wonders why Skinner and Pocock have in their different ways associated republicanism closely with liberty, humanism and Machiavelli, and deems it strange “that one searches the writings of both Pocock and Skinner in vain for any sustained discussion on *raison d'état*” (Black 1997, 654). Black also argues that a generation before, “Meinecke expressed a very different but no less plausible interpretation of Machiavelli’s influence on European statecraft and thought” (*ibid.*).

Hundreds and hundreds of commentators have read Machiavelli just the way they have wanted, and used ideas attributed to Machiavelli to serve their own purposes, in total indifference to the question whether these really are Machiavelli’s thoughts or not. Somewhere along the line emerged the view of Machiavelli as the inventor or re-inventor of reason of state. In fact, ‘reason of state’ is nowadays commonly associated with ‘Machiavellism’⁸⁰. In the later sixteenth century and onwards, reason of state was a term of practical discourse, not a theory-backed concept. In order to cope with what they thought it contained, various thinkers had first to construct a coherent identity for it. Curiously, those who opposed the tenets associated with *ragion di stato*, were actually the ones defining the term.

What many commentators have omitted, is Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity. It might not be erroneous to claim that it was not so much due to his alleged praise of unscrupulous ‘reason of state’ than to his critique of Christianity and subordination of religion to politics that we find Machiavelli opposed. His ‘immoral’ ideas concerning the conduct of the prince were hardly news to contemporaries familiar with the writings of the ancient authors such as Tacitus. Why, then, was he chosen as the archenemy of moral conduct in politics? Maybe it had something to do with his ideas concerning the relationship between politics and Christianity - the ‘true religion’ - and not because of his ‘*ragion di stato*’, which he surely did not invent. Subordination of religion to politics in the writings of Machiavelli was, in a sense, a revolution in the history of ideas (see Raab 1965, 87). The conflict of such a principle with traditional views, and its reversal of standard priorities require no elaboration. And so men saw it - as a true revolution.

Actually, the term “reason of state” came to be popularised with the help of Botero’s “*Della ragion de stato*” of 1589, and after that it has been taken to symbolise the political doctrines of Machiavelli. It could be argued, that for Machiavelli the doctrine of reason of state was alien and irrelevant⁸¹. In fact, neither the term nor any synonym appears in his writings. In addition, all of those who attacked Machiavelli’s doctrines did not repudiate the doctrine of

⁸⁰ Note that for example Meinecke’s “*Die Idee der Staatsräson in der Neueren Geschichte*” is translated into English as “Machiavellism. The Doctrine of *Raison d’Etat* and Its Place in Modern History”.

⁸¹ This point is supported by e.g. McKenzie 1980, 219.

reason of state. In Machiavelli, they saw primarily an atheist and a proponent of secular state.

The concept of reason of state is another way of describing Machiavelli's problem: when Machiavelli claimed that it is not possible to remain Christian in politics, those who wrote on reason of state claimed that it is the state which operates according to different morality. The conclusion of this problem would be that the state cannot operate according to Christian morality.

4.1 Reason of State

As a European literary *topos*, reason of state had its heyday during a period extending roughly from 1580's to 1680's. The amount of literature produced on the topic during the period is truly immense – it was a favourite topic in every kind of controversy related to religious wars of Europe, in pamphlet literature, in dissertations and university lectures. With only few exceptions, the topic ceased to arouse any interest after 1680's. Modern historians have often argued that the concerns discussed under the title were discovered only when the concept had arrived on the European scene. More likely, these notions had been there for a quite a long time and what really happened was simply a refocusing on and crystallising of a broad range of ideas around a newly emerged and highly fashionable catchword (Dreitzel 2002, 170).

Perhaps the most usual approach is to see reason of state as characterized by a set of rules concerning the conduct of government, which differ greatly from the ones that are believed to regulate private conduct⁸². To put it simply, the state has different morality than private persons – what is not acceptable in private life, may be a necessity in public conduct. In addition, the virtues of private life may very well turn out to be vices when they are applied in politics, i.e. public conduct.

But this view is in an essential sense, although it is often forgotten, bound with Christian ethics. Meinecke, the most famous scholar on *raison d'état*, says that the modern Western world has had certain problems of conscience, because it has inherited a conflict between the law of God and laws of the state (Meinecke 1984, 28-29). Reason of state has been viewed as sinful, wrong and bad. The ancient world, on the other hand, was already familiar with the 'sins' of *raison d'état*, and did occasionally even criticise them, but without taking them very much to the heart (*ibid.*). The very secularity of the ancient world made it possible to view reason of state with certain calmness and consider it the outcome of natural forces which were not to be subdued. As Meinecke notes, the sinfulness in antiquity was still perfectly naïve, not yet disquieted and frightened by the gulf between heaven and hell, which was opened up with

⁸² In fact, the principle of reason of state does not differ essentially from our modern term "national security". Both imply that there are times when, for the good of the state, it is necessary to forego the normal standards of conduct.

the introduction of Christianity. This introduction of dualistic world has, according to Meinecke, given the problem of reason of state the deeply felt overtone of tragedy, which it never carried in antiquity.

Meinecke's treatment of the subject, however, gives too strong an impression that it was Machiavelli who revived the tenet of 'reason of state'. This is not the case at all. Mattingly's aforementioned book on Renaissance diplomacy shows that the ambassadors analysed political situations in similar fashion a generation or more before Machiavelli. Burke notes that there is a sense in which the idea of reason of state goes back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Burke 1991, 484). John of Salisbury spoke of *ratio communis utilitatis*, and Thomas Aquinas argued that "*Necessitas legem non habet*".

Actually, the seeds of reason of state can be found from classical antiquity. It is particularly Tacitus, whose writings are usually understood as anticipating reason of state. But it is also in the writings of Cicero that we encounter similar ideas. For Cicero, according Fischer, the "reason of republic" (*ratio reipublicae*) commands magistrates and citizens to do what is expedient (*utile*) or necessary (*necessarius*), even though it may clash with the formal rules of morality (*honestum*), if the substantive welfare of the republic and its members (*salus rei publicae*) cannot be preserved by other means (Fischer 2000, 94). But Cicero is not willing to justify all acts that are done in the name of the common good. To break formal rules for the sake of matters that do not belong to the substance of republican life, such as territorial aggrandizement or wealth, constitutes false public utility (*publicae utilitatis species*) and is never permitted. Cicero repeats tirelessly that nothing is really expedient if it is not at the same time morally right. Consequently, to assume that what is morally wrong can be useful to the political good is to lapse into a contradiction, for morality is fundamental to political order (*ibid.*, 96).

Sometimes reason of state is also understood to be interchangeable with the terms 'Machiavellism' or 'Tacitism'⁸³. Clearly, this is an erroneous view. In contrast to *raison d'état*, Machiavellism and Tacitism refer to modes of personal as well as public conduct (see Bakos 1991, 401). As Bakos shows in her article on Louis XI and *raison d'état*, Louis XI was, with his (alleged) famous maxim "*Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare*", used by some writers to distinguish *raison d'état* principles from the far more reprehensible doctrines of Machiavelli.

The first time, in fact, that the Italian term 'ragione degli stati' had been employed was by Giovanni della Casa in an oration composed around 1547 to the emperor Charles V. But it was only by the 1580s when the new coinage passed into general currency. After Botero's "*Ragione di Stato*" (1589) the term appears in at least eight more Italian treatises on politics by the year 1635. With

⁸³ Machiavellism and Tacitism were not always associated with each other. In sixteenth-century France, Cicero seemed an appropriate source for the definition of tyranny and Tacitus for its illustration. Tacitus was often seen as an exposé of tyrants, not as an exponent of tyranny. Thus, Gentillet, for example, never accused Tacitus of being a precursor of Machiavelli. Like Gentillet, Bodin saw no resemblance between Tacitus and Machiavelli. The Florentine secretary was whom they attacked, not the Roman historian. (see Salmon 1980, 320)

the translations of Botero, the terms *razón de estado*, *ratio status*, and *raison d'état* became generalised. The Germans tended to use the Latin phrase, whereas the English used the Italian until 1620s, or simply replaced it with 'policy'. In an age when abstractions were frequently personified, reason of state appeared in woodcuts and engravings in female form, and once on stage in Johann Rist's 1647 play as a doctor, "Meister Ratio Status", who offered his patients 'pills of hypocrisy'. (Burke 1991, 479)

In treatises immediately following Botero's, there was a discussion of the 'right' and 'wrong' reason of state. The right one was thought to be simple political prudence, whereas the wrong was sometimes seen as pursuit of self-interest or resorting to illegal actions. Occasionally the distinction was made between theory and practice. It was more common, however, to draw the line between the pursuit of common good and the pursuit of self-interest⁸⁴. Alternatively it was thought that the right one is limited by justice, while the false one relies on treachery, assassinations etc. However, it was generally agreed that the ruler needs to know the wrong means, in a similar fashion that a doctor needs to know poisons. When the state is considered as a body politic that can get sick, the ruler must occasionally act as a doctor, and therefore he must know the cures⁸⁵. (Burke 1991, 481-482)

The metaphors are quite appropriate, since many of the writers on reason of state were in fact physicians. An associated idea is that politics is a professional skill, which can be described as a 'science' or an 'art'. Quite another question, on the other hand, is whether these treatises on reason of state were intended as manuals of *politics*, or perhaps something completely different. It is, however, problematic to treat 'reason of state' as a technique or an art, and especially problematic when this is done in association with the idea of *prudentia*. Seeing *prudentia* as a doctrine, or a set of techniques for political conduct, is paradoxical. Reason of state is not an expertise of the politician, since *prudentia*, or political, situational prudence in the classical sense of the term, is not *tekhne* – skilful production of artefacts and the expert mastery of objectified tasks – but *praxis*. From Aristotle onwards, the aim of politics (as a part of practical philosophy) cannot be compared in its claim to knowledge with a rigorous science, with the apodictic *episteme*. By contrast, the capacity of the classical doctrine of politics has been *phronesis*, a prudent understanding of the situation. It could be claimed that Machiavelli does not mark a shift in this tradition. For him, politics is about prudence, about analysing situations. His prudence, however, is not the prudence of Aristotle. Machiavelli deprives it of its intrinsic directedness towards virtuous ends. For him, prudence has no

⁸⁴ In the Roman Law, and a number of medieval codes and principles derived from it, the lawmaker (*artifex legum*) should act for the *utilitas populi*, so that it may be apparent that the legislator has acted not for his private gain, but for the *utilitas communis omnium civium*. The legislator should regard public matters from the point of view of love for the *patria*, so that the community may look upon him as the father or the lord in whose service one would give up his life. (see Brynteson 1966, 425)

⁸⁵ In medieval legislation, the king was often understood as a healer or corrector of the law. The vocabulary actually goes back to St. Augustine (see Brynteson 1966, 424-425).

extra-political aims. It too now pursues security and well-being which the ancients had regarded as merely the conditions of virtue (see Orwin 1978, 1219). It is with Hobbes that we encounter the idea that politics should secure knowledge of the essential nature of justice itself, namely the laws and compacts. Machiavelli's interest is in *mantenere lo stato*, not in the acquisition and establishment of one.

It is clear that the term 'reason of state' did not have a clear and well-developed theoretical content, but was rather understood as a gesture towards acknowledging the presence of a cluster of troublesome questions related to the *prudentia gubernandi*. It was a provocative notion, presenting a challenge to all existing political theories and, as Dreitzel (2002, 168) has noted, could acquire a distinctive character only when embedded in one version or another of the competing political theories of the age. The literature on reason of state produced during the period is immense, but much of the term's success can be explained by the fact that the wide range of issues discussed in political theory at least since the medieval reception of Aristotle's moral and political writings and by the commentators of Roman law, were now eagerly subsumed under *ratio status*.

For both Guicciardini and della Casa the concept intimated a distinction between the demands of (Christian) morality, justice, legality and the exigencies of the state. As Skinner (2002a) among others has shown, the use of the term 'state' during the period was ambiguous and could refer to the ruler's status, regime, territory, and finally, with the flowering of Renaissance republicanism, to an independent apparatus of government. But the gap between this new language of the state and the traditional republican public language of legitimation was exceptionally wide. Thus reason of state carried overtones of political cynicism, since it aimed at stabilising the position of the new and *eo ipso* illegitimate princes (cf. Höpfl 2002). The identification of *status* with *respublica* only emerged, and even then quite tentatively, towards the end of the 17th century (Dreitzel 2002, 171-172). According to Dreitzel, the meaning of *status* was understood as a derivation of *stare*, that is, of 'standing', and accordingly *status* was that which had to be preserved, i.e. the *status quo*. In this sense *status* also stood in contrast to *actio* and *mutatio*. The term is characteristically linked to the notion that there is a threat to preservation and existence. Consequently, it was associated with the traditional idea of *necessitas*. The primary aim of action was *conservatio status* – and in that errand, utility was understood to be the main criterion of success. Because of the close ties between *utile* and *conservatio status*, reason of state and expediency became virtually synonymous with the preservation and improvement of life (ibid.). Echoing Stoic doctrines, there was also a tendency to make (individual as well as collective) preservation the leading, if not the sole, principle of the foundations of morality.

Furthermore, reason of state was most commonly associated, and sometimes even felt to be interchangeable, with the interest of the state. However, as Sheldon Wolin has noted, the vital interests of the state were not

necessarily identical with the interests of those who happened to be ruling, and consequently *Staatsräson* could not be invoked simply because rulers believed that it was in *their* interests to exercise exceptional powers or ignore recognised norms (Wolin 1987, 480). Rulers quite often separated their own interest from the interest of the state, royal marriages being more than once the ultimate test. Even though it was considered a sin, many, if not most princes of absolutism, in their *Maitressenwirtschaft*, proceeded along the line that princes ought to have two wives, one for *ragione di stato* and the other to please themselves. Later, marriages overriding true love and arranged solely for state reasons, or forbidden by them, are standing subjects of the *Staatsroman* of the Baroque age⁸⁶.

When princely politics was in fact reduced to reason of state, it quickly earned the titles of 'Machiavellism' and 'despotism'. By the same token, this was a crisis of the Aristotelian doctrine, according to which despotism signified a regime where rule was exercised primarily in the interest of the ruler and only secondarily for the benefit of his subjects. Reason of state signified a serious threat to the idea of reasonable politics, as it was understood in the 17th century; it implied a contraction in the justifiable goals of the state. When *conservatio status* was elevated as the highest goal of the state, the move was criticised by the Aristotelians and the upholders of *politica christiana* alike. The Aristotelians tended to emphasise the idea of *bene et beate vivere*, and the latter sung praise for a *gute Policey*. When it became clear that the higher goals of political community, such as religion, were in the danger of becoming mere instruments to the preservation of the political state, the critique grew even sharper. (Dreitzel 2002, 174)

The discussions on reason of state convey the answer to Machiavelli's significance. His new path cannot be the return to the ancients in political matters, since his doctrines (or what later writers thought were his doctrines) represented a challenge to any reasonable idea of politics, even to those of ancient pedigree. Surely, this is partly due to the fact that his advice is fitted for those rulers who also might be termed tyrannical. Nevertheless, Machiavelli's innovation may be in the removal of the religious restraints of the rulers and in his indictment of the Christian religion. A vast majority of the critique of Machiavelli's doctrines is religiously motivated.

4.2 Religion and Machiavelli's Reception

"I will not be of the opinion of the Machiavellians that one should never concern oneself with the Christian religion except to disparage it as obscure, contentious and unfit for a great republic: Here is the ridiculous opinion put forth by that devil of an atheist, nonetheless admired by his Italian compatriots, that apostle from the depths of hell according to whose doctrines the prince is advised to have contempt for all religion."

- François de Gravelle, *Politiques Royales* (1596) -

⁸⁶ For the discussion, see Vagts 1969.

The large amount of translations and anti-Machiavellian treatises give us a good reason to think that Machiavelli never ceased to be an interesting topic, even though it was forbidden, for some, to read his books⁸⁷. Despite the fact that Machiavelli's writings had been put on the Index in 1559⁸⁸ (and therefore were forbidden to Catholics to read) the treachery of the St. Bartholomew's Massacre in 1572 was blamed on Machiavelli by the Protestants. In the religious wars of Europe, it was quite common that both parties blamed the other for being Machiavellians. There was also a growing general interest in his writings, which can be inferred from the increasing amount of translations and literary references.

It could be argued, however, that the reason why there was this "affair" around Machiavelli's works was not so much due to his alleged ideas concerning reason of state than his ideas concerning religion. The first attacks on Machiavelli were based on his hostility towards Christianity. In a way, many of the anti-Machiavellians found themselves caught between the rock and the hard place. They were rejecting Machiavelli's doctrines which questioned their values, but at the same time they were perfectly aware that political conduct had never been, was not, and never would be subordinated to those same values. That is why most self-proclaimed anti-Machiavellians were in fact crypto-Machiavellians⁸⁹.

The Portuguese Jerónimo Osorio da Fonesca attacked Machiavelli in his "De nobilitate christiana" as early as 1540⁹⁰. Also the bishop of Cosenza, Ambrogio Catarino-Politi, condemned his writings on religious grounds (see Mittermaier 1990, 415-416). Reginald Pole's central argument in his 1539 "Apologia ad Carolum Quintum" is that the evil actions of Henry VIII, his claims to be the head of the church, the desecration of shrines and monasteries

⁸⁷ We can infer that the reading of Machiavelli's works was quite common, since there was a large bulk of translations available by the 1640's at the latest. In English there were the "Arte of Warre" (1563, 1573 and 1588), "Florentine Historie" (1595), and by Edward Dacres in 1636 and 1640, "The Discourses" and "The Prince". It is likely that "The Prince" was known to Spanish thinkers before its publication in 1531, and two editions of the "Discourses" were published in Spanish in 1552 and 1555. "The Discourses" were partly translated into French as early as 1544 and the editions of "The Discourses" joined with "The Prince" succeeded at a regular rhythm in 1572, 1577, 1579, 1583, 1586, 1597, 1600, 1606 until 1614 when an effusive outpouring of six different editions marked the most prolific year for the translations of Machiavelli in France (see Mayer 1979, 212). In England, there were also Italian manuscripts (with false imprints) circulating during the 1580's (see Raab 1965, 52-53). Ironically, Innocent Gentillet's anti-Machiavellian treatise of 1576 was translated into Latin in 1577, and into English in 1602, some thirty-eight years before "The Prince" itself (see Coyle 1995, 2). These kinds of "accidents" are surely major factors in explaining why Machiavelli's name became a byword for unscrupulous politics.

⁸⁸ In 1562, the Council of Trent confirmed this papal edict by Paul IV. "The Prince" remained in the Index until 1890.

⁸⁹ See Bleznick 1958 and McKenzie 1980, esp. 217-268.

⁹⁰ Osorio criticised Machiavelli for blaming Christianity as the cause of the decline of the Roman Empire. He took Machiavelli to task for asserting that the Christian Church was militarily and spiritually weak while paganism stimulated men to accomplished great deeds. These arguments frequently cropped up in Spanish anti-Machiavellian literature (Bleznick 1958, 545).

etc., all flow from the adherence to a secret doctrine⁹¹, namely that of Machiavelli's "Il Principe", which he claimed to be satanic in inspiration and whose influence in England is a sign of the coming of the Antichrist before the Last Days (see Donaldson 1992, 1-35). Especially in England Machiavelli was, from the beginning, an object of abuse. The sinister Machiavel-figure flourished on the stage, very much divorced in content from anything that can be found in Machiavelli's writings.

But the tradition of the exploitation of Machiavelli's works begins with the Italian Agostino Nifo da Sessa, a professor at Pisa, whose Latin work "De regnandi peritia ad Carolum V imperatorem", a blatant plagiarism of Machiavelli's "The Prince", was published as early as 1523⁹²! The preface to the 1532 edition of "The Prince", as well as the preface of the 1531 edition of the "Discourses" both complained the illegal appropriation of Machiavelli's works (Ruffo-Fiore 1982, 133). One problem in writing about reception of Machiavelli's works is, of course, the fact that his works were, from the very beginning, plagiarized, borrowed and quoted without attribution. There is also a great number of works that are nothing but pure translations of Machiavelli published under another title and author.

Within the Church, it was the Jesuits who made the most ardent attacks against Machiavelli, whom they labelled as atheist and amoral. The first large-scale onslaught on Machiavelli in Spain was made by two Jesuits (see Bleznick 1958), Pedro de Rivadeneira in his "Treatise on Religion, and Virtues which the Christian Prince Must Have to Govern and Conserve his States, against what Machiavelli and *Políticos* of this time teach" (1595) and Claudio Clemente in "Machiavellianism Decapitated by Christian Wisdom of Spain and Austria" (Latin version 1628, Spanish 1637). Rivadeneira was horrified by the perfidious, impious and godless Machiavelli. He also attacked some others (like e.g. Bodin) whom he considered enemies attempting to undermine the Catholic faith. Rivadeneira actually considered Machiavelli even lower than the heretics who at least possessed some religion which, although replete with errors, still had some truths. Then he declares that Machiavelli and his followers feigned friendship with the Catholic Faith, but in reality professed no religion but their *razón estado*. It is worth noticing that in this respect Rivadeneira is mostly speaking of the *Políticos* of his time, not Machiavelli. Machiavelli never feigned friendship with Christianity, and he does not speak of reason of state. It is the impact of Botero that we witness here. Clemente's book, something like a sequel to Rivadeneira's, amplified his predecessors list of despised political theorists whom he called *atheopolíticos*. According to him, these men had deified politics and rejected religion. Throughout his work he elaborated these points, and especially the anti-Catholic, demonical and heretical viewpoints of the *políticos*.

⁹¹ Especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the idea of *arcana imperii*, or the mysteries of statecraft, was a common topic.

⁹² Even though Machiavelli's "The Prince" was published posthumously in 1530s, he had probably completed it in 1510s, perhaps as early as 1513. He tells about the composition of the work in a 1513 letter to his friend, Francesco Vettori.

Bleznick crystallises the Spanish reaction to Machiavelli in the following way: "Spanish writers adjudged Machiavelli *persona non grata* for two principal reasons: he subordinated religion to the state, and he preached amorality" (ibid., 546). In Spain in general, Machiavelli was the symbol of tyranny, a convenient scapegoat on whom to pin the authorship of anti-Christian doctrines.

In France, according to Beame (Beame 1982), Machiavelli's notion of a despiritualised religion, serving as nothing more than a means towards a political goal, clashed with the traditional view that the state was part of a divinely ordered political world. This view of religion as an *instrumentum regni* is what, according to Beame, aroused the greatest bitterness against him (ibid., 51). Actually, it could be claimed that the anti-Machiavellian genre was born in the fires of French political and religious conflict. There were two sorts of reactions to Machiavelli in France. First of all, there were the serious students of politics who read his works carefully, frequently with fascination and without ardent passions to any direction⁹³. Much less sophisticated use of Machiavelli was made by a large variety of polemicists who used his name in an indiscriminate and irreverent manner. It was the latter who were responsible for the French face of Machiavelli.

From the start, it was Machiavelli's irreligiousness that caused the stir in France. Even before "The Prince" was in the hands of French readers, some felt obliged to ward off the accusations of irreligion. Beame wonders whether this feature of Machiavelli's reputation had preceded his arrival in France or whether his treatment of religion had already begun to rank Gallic sensitivities (Beame 1982, 37). However, it was the Massacre of St. Bartholomew that raised the Florentine to the arena of political and religious struggle. In this sense, his appearance coincides with the deep-seated Italophobia in France. Attention was called especially to the Italian-style plot behind the massacre. Thus, it was not Gentillet who started anti-Machiavellism in France. Many of its ingredients were present in the resentment against Italian influences at court that swept France during the 1560s. The Italian adventurers who crowded Catherine de Medici's court in France were normally seen as 'fetching the quintessence' out of the purses of the French people. Those Florentine courtiers, swimming in wondrous wealth, became part and parcel of the Machiavellian bugbear. After Edward Meyer's *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama* (1897) it has been assumed that Gentillet was largely responsible for the bad reputation of the Florentine *segretario* in England. Meyer's evidence is, however, out-dated, and we now know that Machiavelli had been known in Scotland for a long time, and we find him already mentioned with a sinister connotation in the Sempill Ballads referring to Scottish political events, before Gentillet's book was

⁹³ Donald R. Kelley (Kelley 1970) reads the history of French anti-Machiavellism from the viewpoint of certain *Methodenstreit*. This conflict stems, according to him, from two different ways of perceiving reality. Machiavelli's mind was shaped by concrete experience in military and diplomatic services, whereas the French tended to follow academic and especially legal careers. Most Frenchmen were also very disillusioned about the use of power and policy-making as one civil war succeeded another.

published in French (Praz 1966, 93-94). It seems quite natural that the Machiavelli legend hatched by the Huguenots in the religious and political quarrels of France first found its way to the hands of the Scottish Reformers. As early as 1568 we find William Maitland of Lethington, the Secretary of Mary Queen of Scots, styled as “false Machivilian”, which is interesting since it is the first appearance of the derivative form in English literature, which seems to presuppose an advanced stage of the Machiavelli legend (ibid., 94). As Praz (ibid., 129-130) notes, Gentillet did little else but give the finishing touch to the sinister legend the Catholic clergy had been elaborating for half a century against the anticlerical writer, whose comparison between the Pagan and the Christian religion in *Discorsi* (II/2) was purposely misconstrued into an atheistic argument.

Gentillet’s grasp of Machiavelli is actually a lot weaker than that of his compatriots like Bodin or even Le Roy. Gentillet’s main target is Machiavelli’s atheism. He, like many later Catholic anti-Machiavellians, developed arguments against religious toleration:

“The primary and principal object for which he [a prince] must employ his counsel ... is that the pure and true Religion of God be understood, and, being understood, that it be observed by him and his subjects. Machiavelli, on this matter, like a true atheist and despiser of God, teaches his Prince otherwise; for he would not have his Prince concern himself whether the religion he holds is true or false...” (Gentillet, *Discovers ... contre Nicolas Machiavel* (1576), quoted in Beame 1982, 43, n. 30)

Beame discerns a fairly consistent correlation between the periods of crisis and the frequency with which Machiavelli’s name appears in disputatious tracts and pamphlets. A new surge of anti-Machiavellism in France was brought on by the series of crises of the Wars of Religion. From then on, Machiavelli’s intimacy was with the *politiques*, “those who prefer the peace of the kingdom ... to the salvation of their souls” (ibid., 46). This description taken from Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes clearly shows that Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity and even his letters were known and that they were used to express pejorative connotations attributed to his doctrines. If Machiavelli was still associated with Henry III, it was not because of the king’s tyrannical rule, but because he “used religion as he saw it expedient to the state”. The *politique* opponents of conversion argued that it was Machiavellian to change religion for political reasons. Many feared that the wish to subordinate religion to politics was a deliberate Machiavellian plot to undermine Catholicism through religious toleration. In “Dialogue d’entre le Maheustre at la Manant” of 1593, a Catholic interlocutor Manant says:

“It is a horrible blasphemy to subordinate religion to the state ... I see you know your Machiavelli ... You would place God in a corner of the state.” (quoted in Beame 1982, 50)

As we see, at the very least Machiavelli represented a political system that was indifferent to religion. Not even Descartes, writing in the seventeenth century, could agree with Machiavelli's amorality and irreligiousness⁹⁴.

The English reaction to Machiavelli is recorded in detail in Felix Raab's classical "The English Face of Machiavelli" (Raab 1965). His point is that we do not have to posit ignorance to explain certain authors', like Pole's or Ascham's, dislike of Machiavelli. Seen from within the confines of a Christian *Weltanschauung*, be it Catholic or Protestant, Machiavelli emerges badly. Most authors were not ready to admit that political events have an inner logic, an earthly dynamic. Machiavelli was unacceptable because he does not fit in the Augustinian world-complex, where everything must be squared with the Will of Providence, which is logically external to the social machine over which it presides.

Raab argues that Machiavelli was rejected mainly because the authors familiar with his writings saw all too clearly the direction in which his theories were pointing, namely the secular state (Raab 1965, 61). Some absorbed certain parts of his thoughts and managed to avoid the deeper secular implications. But not many, if any, swallowed him whole. It was, again, his subordination of religion to politics that caused the horror. The anonymous author of the "Treatise of Treasons against Queen Elizabeth and the Crown of England" (1572) writes:

"...[T]he hazard of turning one of the most principal and Auncient Monarchies of Christendome, from a most Christian Governement unto a Machiavellian State ... And that is it, that I cal a Machiavellian State and Regiment: where Religion is put behind in the second and last place: where the civil Policie, I meane, is preferred before it, and not limited by any rules of Religion, but the Religion framed to serve the time and policy; wher both by word an example of the Rulers, the ruled are taught with every change of Prince to change also the face of their faith and Religion: where, in apparence and show only, a Religion is pretended, now one, now other, they force not greatly which, so that at hart there be none at all: where neither by hope nor fear of ought after this life, men are restrained from all manner vice, nor moved to any vertue what so ever ... without ... conscience of heaven or hell, of God or Diuel: ... that I cal properly a Machiavellian State and Governance." (quoted in Raab 1965, 60)

During the reigns of James and Charles the standard reaction to Machiavelli continued to be a conflict between 'policy' and 'religion' (ibid., 77-101). Most attacks, like that of the Jesuit Thomas Fitzherbert, were made on Providential grounds. However, to refute Machiavelli, one must agree with him on certain basic assumptions and combat him on his own terms. Thinkers like Fitzherbert, whose priorities were those of medieval Christianity, and who were not willing to admit the autonomy of the political sphere, were in a sense disqualified before they even began to criticise Machiavelli. Nonetheless, most writers felt unable to play the game according to Machiavelli's rules and took refuge in Scriptural authority.

⁹⁴ See his two letters to German Princess Elizabeth (1618-1680), where he comments on Machiavelli's thoughts. He does not, however, mention Machiavelli by name, since his books were in the Index.

The general tenor of the English reception was anti-Machiavellian in the sense that most men could not accept the basic assumptions of Machiavelli. Although they occasionally cited Machiavelli as a weighty author, there was a point at which his blatant secularism aroused hostility and rejection. For many, that point was 'politick religion', the principle of religion as a political device. Given a little determination, however, even this pill could eventually be swallowed by those who were sufficiently convinced that the realities which mattered were those of Machiavelli and *this* world, not those of St. Augustine and the next life. (Raab 1965, 90)

Machiavelli's thoughts subverted all the premises of the Englishmen, proclaims the standard interpretation. He was both republican and impious, and it took some time before these features could be seen as laudable. On the other hand, concepts like "Augustinian universe" and "Elizabethan world picture" are perhaps not extremely helpful or exhaustive for describing the modes of political thought in early modern England, as Peltonen (1995, 17) has argued. There were also "secular" approaches to politics by Tudor and early Stuart Englishmen, inspired by the classical authors and the whole humanist tradition. Still, these approaches retained their Christian outlook. The references to Machiavelli tended to huddle around the dichotomy between politics and religion, but he was not read exclusively as a theorist and spokesman of the former. Peltonen aims to establish that the most extensive usage of Machiavelli's republican writings in pre-Civil War England did not mention his name at all (*ibid.*).

Most Puritan writers were careful to add the prefix "atheistical" to those politicians whom they denounced and accused of "policy" or "reason of state". In this they followed a well-established pattern, which, ever since the middle of the sixteenth century, has linked Machiavelli and the ideas he represented to atheism and religious heresy. The prefix "atheistical" is of great importance. For what the Puritan pamphleteers attacked was not the use of "policy" (understood as concrete application of the idea of reason of state) as such. Rather, they deplored the divorce of policy or reason of state from a Christian purpose, which seemed to them obvious in the use of these concepts for the mere preservation of a secular state. (Mosse 1952, 70) Thus, it was the un-Christian character of Machiavelli's thought that aroused the hostility towards him, not reason of state.

In the pamphlet wars of the Dutch Revolt, both parties used Machiavelli and Machiavellism as weapons to slander the other side. For the insurgents peace seemed impossible because the Spaniards, who followed the maxims of pope and Machiavelli, broke treaties, because for them "*haereticis non est servanda fide*". The Spaniards were all considered Machiavelliques. The other side, naturally, blamed William of Orange of using religion as a cloak for his political purposes when he turned from the Catholic Church to Protestantism. Caspar Barlaeus, a professor at Amsterdam, wrote a whole *oratio* against Machiavelli's "The Prince" in 1633. Barlaeus argues that in the Florentine's work words like 'virtue' and 'prudence' have lost their meaning, and he has

changed a pious prince into a 'fox clad in purple'. But the worst accusation was, again, that "religion for him meant mere merchandise to be used for the benefit of what he considered to be best for himself and the commonwealth". (Haitsma Mulier 1990, 248-250)

The German reception of reason of state was somewhat belated. According to Dreitzel (2002, 166), the way the Germans read Machiavelli also should be understood in the context of their sluggish response to reason of state. While *Il Principe* was more or less consistently cited as a negative reference point in the reason of state controversy, the general absorption of his thought (which included his thoughts on republics) had too much of an Aristotelian flavour to have any special impact. At least Machiavelli failed to generate any kind of republicanism in Germany. At best one can say that the Protestants read him not as an anti-Christian, but as an anti-papal heretic writer (ibid.). The Germans were also sensitive to the distinction between Machiavellism and Machiavelli's own views. Frequently Machiavelli was not even regarded as the source of Machiavellism and it was acknowledged that Aristotle, Xenophon and Tacitus had all presented more extensive accounts of tyrannical practice before him. *Il Principe* was classified as an exercise in pathological diagnosis, as administering a poison, and could thus be neutralised as such. In the Protestant territories Machiavelli's writings were not prohibited and many professors actually put them on the list of recommended reading for university courses in politics (ibid., 167).

Kahn (1994, 61) has argued that the rhetoric of Machiavellism in the Renaissance is first and foremost the product of a religiously motivated critique of Machiavelli. She argues that Botero and his contemporaries were intelligent readers of Machiavelli not simply because they understood his "discourse of necessity," but because they understood his rhetoric: unlike many modern interpreters, Counter-Reformation readers were sensitive to the rhetorical form of Machiavelli's work, and to the rhetorical dimension of his conception of politics. "They read Machiavelli as Machiavelli had read Livy - as a storehouse of historical examples that could be appropriated for a variety of uses, analyzed in terms of a range of thematic and formal topics. Precisely because they had been schooled in the assumptions of humanist rhetoric and poetics, and the rhetorical dimension of princely conduct, they were able to understand how Machiavelli's rhetorical conception of politics was applicable to the needs of Christian princes. They recognized the role that rhetoric and imitation can play in the construction of necessity and of political power; and they were particularly sensitive to the moral ambiguity - the potential immorality - of Machiavelli's recommendations regarding the uses of representation - of reputation, simulation, and dissimulation. What was disturbing to Counter-Reformation critics of Machiavelli was less his discourse of necessity, and the possible conflict between the politic world of necessity and the city of God, than the realization that necessity can be feigned".

However, in negative reception, we must remember one often omitted point of view. In her argument regarding Strauss, Drury (Drury 1988, 117) has noted that Strauss used Machiavelli as his mouthpiece in order to avoid pronouncing unpleasant and dangerous truths in his own name. This “immunity of the commentator” allows him to speak of things that he thinks a wise man dare not speak openly, except through the mouth of a morally dubious, devilish madman like Machiavelli. Drury’s observation is that Strauss refers to Machiavelli’s conception of the relation between politics and morality as shocking, repugnant, evil, irreligious, diabolical and dangerous, but never as *false* (ibid.). This could very well be generalised to other commentators as well. Machiavelli has been used as a mouthpiece in bringing forth topics too delicate to speak in one’s own name. Attacking Machiavelli has enabled at least some kind of a discussion on these dangerous topics. Even the most ardent anti-Machiavellians were often crypto-Machiavellians. Bleznick writes of the Spanish reaction to Machiavelli and aims to establish that “Spaniards were far from being unanimously anti-Machiavellian and that even some of the more rabid anti-Machiavellians espoused in some guise or other certain Machiavellian practices.” (Bleznick 1958, 542). Nonetheless, as a by-product of anti-Machiavellism, hell has become Machiavelli’s permanent address in the hereafter. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find Machiavelli depicted as the very hand of the devil, as an imp of Satan, as a damnable fiend of the underworld etc. (Anglo 1969, 271).

The first to challenge the sinister view of Machiavelli were the philosophers of the seventeenth century. Bacon admired Machiavelli as a man who openly describes what men do and not what men ought to do. According to Spinoza, Machiavelli was “an advocate of freedom, and also gave some very sound advice for preserving it” (Spinoza 1965, 313). This interpretation is connected to the question of whether Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* was a satire or not⁹⁵. Rousseau thought that it was a “book of the republicans”. Apart from “Du contract social”, Rousseau claims also elsewhere that Machiavelli’s genre is satire, which is also Diderot’s interpretation of him (see Viroli 1988, 168-169). In general, the demonization of Machiavelli finally turns into deification with the help of e.g. Spinoza, Rousseau, Fichte⁹⁶ and Hegel, and reaches a certain climax in the Italy of the *Risorgimento*, when Machiavelli is seen as an early advocate of the unification of Italy⁹⁷.

Why was somebody defending Machiavelli, when the generality of commentators were objecting to his thoughts? The case of Rousseau is illuminating. While the philosophers of the Enlightenment unanimously discarded the caricature that had so long passed for Machiavelli’s portrait, they could not be wholly at ease with his immorality (see Gay 1995, 285-287). Hume,

⁹⁵ Dietz has made a suspicious argument according to which Machiavelli was deliberately giving bad advice [sic!] to Lorenzo Medici in order to hasten his overthrow (see Dietz 1986).

⁹⁶ On Fichte’s Machiavelli, see Moggach 1993.

⁹⁷ Which he definitely was, esp. in chapter XXVI of “The Prince”.

who thought that Machiavelli was “a great genius” and a fine historian, argued that the cynical age in which Machiavelli lived, seduced him into pessimism and consequently into giving bad advice. Some of them, like Montesquieu, were too strongly imbued with Stoic ethics to approve of Machiavelli’s program of systematic treachery and deception. Still, he followed Machiavelli closely in his own analysis of politics. Diderot’s short article in the “Encyclopédie” interprets “The Prince” as a vivid warning against tyranny, misread by some contemporaries as eulogy⁹⁸. Moreover, the article sharply distinguishes between the man and the doctrine. Machiavellism, “detestable politics”, is seen as evil, whereas Machiavelli himself is depicted as an erudite man of genius who died like a philosopher, and was reported to have said at his deathbed that he “preferred being in Hell with Socrates, Alcibiades, Caesar, Pompey, and other great men of antiquity, to being in heaven with the founders of Christianity” (Diderot, “Euvres”, XVI, 32, quoted in Gay 1995, 286).

This brings us close to the answer to the question above. The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment felt certain sympathy for Machiavelli because he had turned his back on myths like Christianity and given his critical faculties full range. Enlightenment’s Machiavelli was, then, like Bacon’s Machiavelli – the historian, the innovator, the defender of experience as the source of knowledge. These were counted as virtues and seen as opposing the wisdom of cloistered metaphysicians. As Gay states: “That Machiavelli should have been a virulent adversary of the Papacy and an astringent critic of Christian morality struck the philosophes as merely an added virtue, a sign of good sense, proof of his capacity to learn from his experience; it confirmed their view of him as an antique Humanist in the modern world” (Gay 1995, 287). In other words, the thinkers of the Enlightenment shared with Machiavelli his critique of Christianity. Their own critique of Christianity rested on slightly different grounds (*ibid.*, 207). First of all, they thought, it flourished in an age of decadence and among the lower orders. Secondly, its doctrines were formed through persecutions, conflicts over trivial matters, endless assemblies etc. In sum, Christianity claimed to bring light, hope, and truth, but its central myth was incredible, its dogma a conflation of rustic superstitions, its sacred book an incoherent collection of primitive fairytales, its church a cohort of servile fanatics as long as they were out of power and of despotic fanatics when they did gain power. And finally, it was hostile towards learning, and consequently for centuries, darkness covered the Earth in form of the Middle Ages.

But there were also those, who agreed with Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity on the same grounds. I would like to discuss especially Rousseau, for he was certainly familiar with the writings of Machiavelli, which cannot be said of all of his contemporaries. In his 1755 “Encyclopédie”-article “Economie Politique” Rousseau discusses governments that are not based on the *volonté* of the people and sees these kinds of governments “dans les archives de l’histoire et dans les satyres de Machiavel” (see Mayer 1979, 484). In respect to “The

⁹⁸ However, there is little evidence that he ever knew more of Machiavelli than the sparse content of his article composed from Brucker and Bayle (see Mayer 1986, 482).

Prince", Rousseau has built a very strong interpretation of it as a satirical work. In its stead Machiavelli's true message, his "intention secrete" in "The Prince", is found in "The Discourses" and in the "History of Florence". I would like to highlight the fact that Rousseau's own thoughts, and especially his thoughts on Christianity, owe a great deal to Machiavelli. We may take a brief look at Rousseau's treatment of Christianity in his "Du contract social" (IV/8).

Rousseau argues against Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), who holds that religion can be of no use to the body politic, and William Warburton (1698-1779), who, on the contrary, maintains that Christianity is its strongest support. To them Rousseau wishes to point out that no state has ever been founded without a religious basis, and that the law of Christianity at bottom does more harm by weakening than good by strengthening the constitution of the state. Religion, considered in relation to society, may be divided into two kinds: the religion of man, and that of the citizen. The former is pure and simple, confined to the purely internal cult of the supreme God and the eternal obligations of morality, while the latter is a sort of national religion which is codified in a single country and gives it its gods, its own tutelary patrons. According to Rousseau, there is a

"third sort of religion of a more singular kind, which gives men two codes of legislation, two rulers, and two countries, renders them subject to contradictory duties, and makes it impossible for them to be faithful both to religion and to citizenship. Such are the religions of the Lamas and of the Japanese, and such is Roman Christianity, which may be called the religion of the priest. It leads to a sort of mixed and anti-social code which has no name. In their political aspect, all these three kinds of religion have their defects. The third is so clearly bad, that it is waste of time to stop to prove it such. All that destroys social unity is worthless; all institutions that set man in contradiction to himself are worthless." (*On the Social Contract*, IV/8)

Such is Rousseau's view of Catholicism. Against this corrupted Christianity he sets the religion of the Gospels in which all men recognise one another as brothers. But since this religion has no particular relation to the body politic, it leaves the laws in possession of the force they have in themselves without making any addition to it. Thus, according to Rousseau, one of the great bonds that unite society fails to operate: far from binding the citizens to the state, it has the effect of taking them away from all earthly things. Corrupted Catholicism is clearly bad, but so is the religion of the Gospels too: "I know of nothing more contrary to the social spirit. We are told that a people of true Christians would form the most perfect society imaginable. I see in this supposition only one great difficulty: that a society of true Christians would not be a society of men.". In the perfect society of Christians every citizen would do his duty; the people would be law-abiding, the rulers just and temperate; the magistrates upright and incorruptible; the soldiers would scorn death; there would be neither vanity nor luxury. But Christians are, in Rousseau's view, indifferent to the success of the state:

"Christianity as a religion is entirely spiritual, occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christian is not of this world. He does his duty, indeed, but does it with profound indifference to the good or ill success of his cares. Provided he has

nothing to reproach himself with, it matters little to him whether things go well or ill here on earth. If the State is prosperous, he hardly dares to share in the public happiness, for fear he may grow proud of his country's glory; if the State is languishing, he blesses the hand of God that is hard upon His people." (*On the Social Contract*, IV/8)

Rousseau's view of Christianity is similar to that of Machiavelli. For both, Christianity had become corrupt because of the priests, but they thought that Christianity is unsuited for a well-ordered state also in its essence, even without its corrupt interpretations. The Christian thinks only of salvation, which orientation deprives political action of its value. Furthermore, Christianity is based on erroneous conception of human nature:

"For the State to be peaceable and for harmony to be maintained, all the citizens without exception would have to be good Christians; if by ill hap there should be a single self-seeker or hypocrite, a Catiline or a Cromwell, for instance, he would certainly get the better of his pious compatriots. Christian charity does not readily allow a man to think hardly of his neighbours. As soon as, by some trick, he has discovered the art of imposing on them and getting hold of a share in the public authority, you have a man established in dignity; it is the will of God that he be respected: very soon you have a power; it is God's will that it be obeyed: and if the power is abused by him who wields it, it is the scourge wherewith God punishes His children. There would be scruples about driving out the usurper: public tranquillity would have to be disturbed, violence would have to be employed, and blood spilt; all this accords ill with Christian meekness; and after all, in this vale of sorrows, what does it matter whether we are free men or serfs? The essential thing is to get to heaven, and resignation is only an additional means of doing so." (*On the Social Contract*, IV/8)

Rousseau's view is clearly reminiscent of Machiavelli's objection to Christianity. True Christianity would destroy liberty and help tyrants to power: "But I am mistaken in speaking of a Christian republic; the terms are mutually exclusive". Rousseau is, however, even more critical of Christianity than Machiavelli ever dared to be:

"If war breaks out with another State, the citizens march readily out to battle; not one of them thinks of flight; they do their duty, but they have no passion for victory; they know better how to die than how to conquer. What does it matter whether they win or lose? Does not Providence know better than they what is meet for them? Only think to what account a proud, impetuous and passionate enemy could turn their stoicism! Set over against them those generous peoples who were devoured by ardent love of glory and of their country, imagine your Christian republic face to face with Sparta or Rome: the pious Christians will be beaten, crushed and destroyed, before they know where they are, or will owe their safety only to the contempt their enemy will conceive for them. It was to my mind a fine oath that was taken by the soldiers of Fabius, who swore, not to conquer or die, but to come back victorious – and kept their oath. Christians would never have taken such an oath; they would have looked on it as tempting God." (*On the Social Contract*, IV/8)

The issue of Christianity and martial valor is also discussed by Rousseau. Again, he seems to draw the conclusions that Machiavelli was only hinting at. In Rousseau's view, there is no military valour in Christians:

"I shall be told that Christian troops are excellent. I deny it. Show me an instance. For my part, I know of no Christian troops. I shall be told of the Crusades. Without disputing the valour of the Crusaders, I answer that, so far from being Christians, they were the priests' soldiery, citizens of the Church. They fought for their spiritual country, which the Church had, somehow or other, made temporal. Well understood, this goes back to paganism: as the Gospel sets up no national religion, a holy war is impossible among Christians. Under the pagan emperors, the Christian soldiers were brave; every Christian writer affirms it, and I believe it: it was a case of honourable emulation of the pagan troops. As soon as the emperors were Christian, this emulation no longer existed, and, when the Cross had driven out the eagle, Roman valour wholly disappeared." (*On the Social Contract*, IV/8)

Rousseau's national religion unites the divine cult with love of the laws, and, making country the object of the citizens' adoration, teaches them that service done to the state is service done to its tutelary god. He is, however, also critical of this kind of Machiavellian view of religion, since being founded on lies and error, it deceives men, makes them credulous and superstitious, and drowns the true cult of the Divinity in empty ceremonial. It can also become tyrannous and exclusive, and make a people bloodthirsty and intolerant, "so that it breathes fire and slaughter, and regards as a sacred act the killing of every one who does not believe in its gods. The result is to place such a people in a natural state of war with all others, so that its security is deeply endangered". These are the rather obvious objections one could make against Machiavelli's view of religion.

Rousseau's writings on religion contain the fullest expression of the Enlightenment critique of all religions and especially Christianity. Yet, Rousseau paradoxically also initiates the post-Enlightenment renewal of Christianity (cf. Melzer 1996). Going beyond the efforts to "manage" religion found in Enlightenment writers such as Locke and Hume, Rousseau made an earnest attempt to revive Christianity in a more politically salutary form. Rousseau's critique of religion extends to a critique of modern rationalism, and hence he is led back to religion as something politically and morally necessary (ibid., 344). For Rousseau, Christianity had ruined politics and made terms like citizen and fatherland useless, as he bitterly remarks. The three characteristics of Christianity, universalism, other-worldliness and passivity, all combined in Rousseau's view to destroy republican spirit and political freedom (ibid., 347). But modern philosophy, with its antireligious thrust, tended to be just as hostile to political life as Christianity. The combination of abstract universalism based on reason and restless scepticism made modern philosophy subvert all particular worldly attachments and thus destroyed the wholeness of political life. Therefore, it was necessary to reshape religion in the quest for unity. Rousseau finds the basis for belief in sincerity, or even communal sincerity understood as the prescriptive custom of the nation. This, in turn, would remove both the basis and motive for intolerance and subvert the claims to

authority made by priests and philosophers, since truth would be replaced with sincerity (ibid., 359).

Rousseau's view of Christianity is much reminiscent of Machiavelli's⁹⁹. His analysis seems to spell out what Machiavelli only hints at. Christianity, or its false interpretation, is anathema to republicanism and political life in general. In my opinion, Rousseau is one of the very few who have understood this aspect of Machiavelli's political theory and its centrality to Machiavelli himself.

4.3 The Significance of Machiavelli's Critique of Christianity

"In praxi treibt auch der christliche Fürst die Politik Macchiavels: vorausgesetzt nämlich dass er nicht schlechte Politik treibt"

-Friedrich Nietzsche-

Norberto Bobbio, the grand old man of Italian political science, once lamented the fact that Italian political thought has contributed very little to the formation of liberal democratic theory. There are no Italian equivalents of Locke, Tocqueville, or of J. S. Mill. On the contrary, when the Italians have systematically reflected on the basic tenets of liberalism, the aim has been denunciation rather than constructive engagement. Italian political science has been no friendlier to liberal democracy – after all, elite theories seem to suggest that democracy is more myth than reality, and history little else than a graveyard for ever-recurring aristocracies. Bobbio thinks the reason for all this aversion to liberal values is embedded in different conceptions of the state. The prevalent doctrine in Italy has not been the one of natural law and contract theories but the German version where the state is deemed to have an irreducibly ethical component, giving it priority over the individual. Femia (1998, 1-2) continues Bobbio's line of reasoning and argued that all this aversion to the abstract individual of liberal political philosophy in the Italian tradition of thought stems from its dismissal of transcendence, which he labels as

⁹⁹ Another writer who agrees with Machiavelli on his critique of Christianity is, of course, Nietzsche. Nietzsche's explicit references to Machiavelli are, however, only fragments scattered throughout his works, most of them in his "Nachgelassene Fragmente". Mostly he is praising Machiavelli's style and his spirit that resembles the ancients, i.e. is not polluted by Christianity. He also says that he would have wanted to write an evil book, as bad as Machiavelli's. More interesting would be the passages where he is obviously using Machiavelli without referring to him. In Germany before Nietzsche's time, the national romantics were the ones praising Machiavelli. Hegel recognizes in Napoleon the Machiavellian prince who can inaugurate the well-ordered state in Germany. Fichte sees the Germany of his time in a state similar to Machiavelli's Italy, and invokes Machiavelli to connect national unity with a popular insurrection against foreign domination (Moggach 1993). For both Fichte and Hegel, the reference to Machiavelli also evokes the idea of "die Bildung zum Gehorsam", the education to obedience.

Machiavelli's legacy. What united thinkers like Mosca, Pareto, Gramsci and Labriola was their hostility to essentialism, universally valid modes of conduct, supra-historical essences, positing of a priori goals etc. The main source of inspiration for these diverse thinkers was, according to Femia, in Machiavelli's rejection of Christian universalism¹⁰⁰. More recently, Femia has argued that "anyone interested in denigrating the pieties of liberal democracy can find plenty of ammunition in his [i.e. Machiavelli's] writings" and that the "defining characteristics of fascism are normally deemed to be Machiavellian in origin" (Femia 2004, 1). What is actually Machiavelli's legacy? One way to look at his legacy is to see it in relation to Christianity.

As Moulakis (1993) has noted, Machiavelli never says evil is not evil. His language gains a lot of its force from the deliberate contrast between goodness, measured by the Christian standards of decent behaviour, and what he sees the hard necessities of politics. Indeed, it is his view of necessities that detaches him from more conventional writers. Fischer has interpreted Machiavelli's un-Christian lessons from the viewpoint of necessity. According to Fischer, Machiavelli's preference for the immanent goods of Fortune surely places him in conflict with Christianity, or any transcendental religion, which depreciates the pleasures of this life and exalts the salvation of the soul in the next one (Fischer 2000, 93). At the centre of this conflict over the proper ends of man lies glory. And truly, the contrast is very sharp between Machiavelli and St. Augustine, the latter condemning glory as praise of self instead of God. Insofar as Machiavelli opts for glory as the most attractive alternative to the Christian life, he reveals himself as something of a forerunner of those modern theorists whose ethic asserts the primacy of choice as a 'solution' to the vacuum generated by nihilism (Rist 2002, 55). But Machiavelli never spoke of the actual decision. He needed no 'leap of faith', understood as the fundamental decision to follow a certain path. He contents himself with delineating the two alternative ways with rather little consideration of the choice itself (ibid., 56). This is where his silence is most revealing. He presented the two paths but left it for the reader to make the decision. But the admiration of worldly glory had already been underway when Machiavelli burst onto the scene, as we learn from Burckhardt's classical work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. The Renaissance humanists revived the ancient esteem for glory as the proper reward for *vir virtutis*. Thus, it could not have been the reason why Machiavelli's doctrines were so shocking. According to Fischer, Machiavelli's innovation lie not so much with his determination of ends, but rather with the kinds of means he advocated in pursuing them.

¹⁰⁰ This seems to be another version of the commonly cherished assumption that there is a continuity or "national character" in Italian speculative tradition, which is defined by its pursuit of the natural world of immanence. Gentile, for example, stood self-consciously in the tradition of Leonardo, Machiavelli, Telesio, Campanella, Bruno and Vico. Italian positivism, no less than idealism, took on the character of a surrogate religion and continued the attempt to 'make Italians' (cf. Bellamy 1987, 9).

According to Fischer, it was Cicero's penetrating analysis of acts of necessity that remained the standard well into the modernity (Fischer 2000, 94). Cicero's analysis was reflected in the actual Roman law. There were cases of ephemeral necessity when one man or a group of men could act outside the law. Most famous of these is the classical system of *dictatores*, but e.g. in 146 B.C. the Senate attained the right to issue emergency decrees and therewith to declare anyone an enemy of republic that ought to be killed on sight. If the authorities failed to prevent the threat to the republic, any citizen was allowed to take their place. In the imperial Rome, the *princeps* could act outside the law on the grounds of his *imperium*, the fullness of power granted to him by the Roman people. But it is Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis* that finally distilled these cases of necessity into a number of succinct legal maxims. Drawing on these sources, then, a number of medieval thinkers developed the idea that would later enhance into the concept of "reason of state".

For medieval writers, the concept of *ratio status* referred to the reasoning that guided the ruler in upholding the *utilitas publica*. Accordingly, they argued that extraordinary measures, such as levying special taxes for funding a just war, were permitted in cases of necessity. Similarly, in certain circumstances, the pope could authorize breaches of Canon law for the welfare of the Church and the Christian faith. This consequentialism, however, was thought to be in conformity with the reason that comes from God, and it was based on the classical idea of the coherence of the moral world. This means that the acts were not, in fact, contrary to law and justice. Acts of *casus necessitatis* were not illegal or immoral, as long as they remained a *casus* that could be applied only *casualiter*, not *normaliter*, meaning only accidentally, not normally.

This is where Machiavelli steps in. The whole Judeo-Stoic-Christian tradition had maintained that cases of necessity are mere accidents in a world where it is natural and ordinary for morally right actions to have good consequences. Similarly, as Thomas Aquinas says, situations where an agent must do one wrong deed to avoid another, can arise only *secundum quid* (consequent to a prior wrongdoing of the agent). This chain can be traced back to the original sin, which entangles the sinner in situations where he cannot but commit more sins. According to Fischer, it was this reassuring reliance in the coherence of the moral world that Machiavelli tore to shreds (Fischer 2000, 97). The classical tradition assumed that from good deeds, only good consequences could follow, and from bad deeds, only bad ones. Now, let us contrast this with Machiavelli's claim that injustice is essential to the good of the political order, and with his idea of natural necessity.

In the III chapter of *Il Principe*, Machiavelli discusses new princedoms and argues that there are natural difficulties evident in all new princedoms. Thinking that they will better themselves, men gladly change their ruler. This situation is, argues Machiavelli, natural in new princedoms. This belief makes men take up arms against their ruler, but later they learn that they have in fact become worse off. This, Machiavelli continues, results "from another natural and normal necessity [*necessità naturale e ordinaria*], namely that a new prince is

always obliged to damage his recently gained subjects with soldiers and to oppress them in countless ways necessitated by his recent conquest”.

This is a truth that no one had dared to declare in Western thought. According to Fischer, this results from the fact that Plato and his successors had been able to suppress the archaic conception that justice is doing good to friends and harm to enemies, and the Sophist claim that the just is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger (Fischer 2000, 98). Machiavelli’s shock to the Christian social philosophy is in the claim that cases of necessity occur not only accidentally, but regularly, naturally and normally. For Machiavelli, expedient wickedness is fundamental to the political order – not only when a prior transgression had shaken up the moral world, but in its normal condition. This view espoused by Machiavelli is the opposite of the ancient conception of ethical community, where human beings are friends and intimates. It is not Hobbes but Machiavelli who changes the course of political theory in this respect.

Machiavelli’s necessity and expediency are stronger versions of the ones propounded by Cicero. Cicero always restrained some forms of action as immoral, and thus not really expedient. But for Machiavelli, when “it is absolutely a question of the safety of one’s country, there must be no consideration of just or unjust, of merciful or cruel, of praiseworthy or disgraceful; instead, setting aside every scruple, one must follow to the utmost any plan that will save her life and keep her liberty” (*Discorsi*, III/41). The contradiction could not be more manifest.

This is also interesting to contrast with the modern natural law theory. That theory, revived initially by Grotius, took its foundational principle of self-preservation from the Stoics. Seventeenth century theorists of natural law like Grotius and Pufendorf still claimed that what was right (*honestum*) was so because it was fundamentally profitable (*utile*) to an individual in need of protection from his fellow men (Tuck 1987, 105). The idea that *honestum* and *utile* are interconnected, had, of course, been put forth by Cicero. But for Cicero, it was *honestum* that came first – what was profitable was so because it was fundamentally right. For him, nothing could be really profitable if it was immoral. It is Machiavelli who shatters this interconnectedness of *utilitas* and *honestum*. In fact, his claim is that in stately affairs, *utile* and *onesto* have nothing to do with each other. It is fundamentally profitable not to be honest.

As Kahn (1994, 9) has argued, Machiavelli’s rhetorical politics dramatised a tension between a technical and prudential conception of rhetoric that is at the heart of Renaissance humanist culture. Rhetoric in this period was conceived of either as an ethically and ideologically neutral technique of argumentation or as the embodiment of a faculty of practical reasoning or prudential deliberation that is tied to ethical norms. If the first conception of rhetoric as a neutral tool gave rise to considerable anxiety concerning the immoral ends to which rhetoric might be put, the second prudential conception offered the response that the good rhetorician is of necessity a good man. Though Renaissance humanists regularly acknowledged the possible abuse of rhetoric, they just as often

attempted to define rhetoric in such a way that it would preclude such immorality. Machiavelli borrowed from the humanist notion of prudential rhetoric, even though he criticised such rhetoric for its subordination to ethics, that is, for not being practical enough. Focusing on practical reasoning and action that is not constrained by ethical norms, Machiavelli attempted to make rhetoric and prudential deliberation generate a new set of priorities in the domain of politics. Yet, in taking the generative possibilities of a practical conception of rhetoric more seriously than did the humanists themselves, Machiavelli paradoxically appeared to realise the humanists' worst fears about a technical or instrumental conception of rhetoric: its ethical indeterminacy, its concern with success, its use for the purpose of force and fraud, violence and misrepresentation (ibid.). According to Kahn, Machiavelli's Renaissance readers saw that his rhetorical politics engaged a constellation of topics that epitomised the tensions within humanist rhetoric: the relation of imitation to misrepresentation, persuasion to coercion, means to ends, intention to effect, demonic flexibility to allegorical stability, and virtue or *virtù* to success. These topics amounted to a questioning of the Ciceronian ideal of harmony between the *honestum* and the *utile* - they registered a tension between these terms, and an anxiety that the good might be sacrificed to the expedient or that rhetoric might become an instrument of force and fraud.

That *utile* and *onesto* did not meet in political practice was almost a truism for Machiavelli. Christian anti-Machiavellians, however, took some effort in proving that they are not mutually exclusive. As Bireley (1999, 182) notes, two types of arguments characterised anti-Machiavellian efforts to reconcile the good and the useful: providentialist and intrinsic or immanent pragmatism. The providentialist version of pragmatism argued that God bestowed victory and success in this world, at least in most cases, on princes and peoples that served him faithfully and uprightly, either through a direct, miraculous intervention in the course of events, or more likely, through skilful guidance of natural or secondary causes. On the other hand, intrinsic pragmatism argued from the nature of the act itself. It claimed that moral action by its very nature was useful, whereas immoral action was necessarily counterproductive. In other words, violation of the law of nature based on reason inevitably brought its own retribution on individuals and states. The anti-Machiavellians concern with practice gave rise to all sorts of casuistry. But any argument proceeding from the law of nature or natural morality was necessarily beside the mark. Needless to mention, the same applies for the providentialist version of pragmatism. Machiavelli could not be refuted without entering his territory, without adopting his vocabulary and axioms.

Machiavelli's innovative treatment of evil offers a philosophical justification for immoral acts. The contrast between private and public morality and between truth and society is as old as political community itself. Similarly, it has been known for a very long time that justice does not prevail in human communities. The justice of the city is always particular and mixed with group interests and, as such, always opposed to the more general "natural" justice of

humanity. As an answer to this, conceptions of post-mortem retribution were invented. It was Plato who asserted that justice demands the immortality of the soul: "If death were a release from everything, it would be a boon for the wicked" (see Bernstein 1996, 52-61). If the wicked succeeded in this world without being punished, as seemed to be the case, the only possibility was to think that they will have punishment after they die. But what differentiates Machiavelli from previous writers is the fact that he goes beyond describing the evil deeds and gives them a philosophical justification. Pre-Machiavellian philosophers explain why evil and injustice exist in human communities, but they never go so far as to justify culpable evil and injustice (Parel 1992, 159). From Machiavelli's perspective, there is a more general "natural" necessity determining the actions of successful political actors, which countermands any other commandments, whether they are of religious or of moral origin. Injustice is essential to political order, and, even though condemned by religion and ordinary morality, it is based on natural necessities. Following Nietzsche, one could claim that there are no laws in nature, only necessities. Law means obedience to standards set by somebody else and encompasses the introduction of good and evil. Nature is beyond good and evil, beyond justice, and hence Machiavelli's "*necessità naturale e ordinaria*" does not include a moral dimension.

In *De officiis* (1.41) Cicero says that injustice may be done in two ways, either through force or through deceit. Of these, "deceit seems to belong to a little fox, force to a lion. Both of them seem alien to a human being, but deceit deserves a greater hatred". Now, it is obvious that Machiavelli reformulated this when he said in *Il Principe* (XVIII) that the wise ruler must imitate both the fox and the lion to recognise the traps and to frighten the wolves. He continues by claiming that "by no means can a prudent ruler keep his word" and that "never has a shrewd prince lacked justifying reasons to make his promise-breaking appear honourable". The wise prince must "understand well how to disguise the animals nature and must be a great simulator and dissimulator". What he deliberately omitted is the fact that according to Cicero, they both deserve blame and do not bring success. The deceiver who looks honourable is the worst of all, says Cicero. The same concepts, now called *forza* and *froda*, form the core of Dante's political world. For the older Florentine, the gravest sins are subcategories of *forza* (violence) and *froda* (fraud). Just like for Cicero, for Dante *froda* ranks lower than *forza*, because its use of disguise makes it more difficult to recognise as vice. As Northrop Frye (1976, 65-66) has noted, "it is not surprising that European literature should begin with the celebration of these two mighty powers of humanity, of *forza* in the Iliad, the story of the wrath (menis) of Achilles, of *froda* in the Odyssey, the story of the guile (dolos) of Ulysses". In Western literature, the cycle of *forza* and *froda*, where violence and guile are coiled up within each other, changes with the introduction of Christianity. With the rise of the romantic ethos and the Christian myth, masculine heroism comes increasingly to be thought of in terms of suffering, endurance, and patience, which can coexist with feminine weakness often

associated with cunning (ibid., 88). Machiavelli's bestial prince, composed of the qualities of the fox and the lion, harks back to ancient heroism and encompasses the idea that suffering is not a virtue.

In the fifth book of his *Politics*, Aristotle says that there are two opposite ways available for a tyrant to preserve his power. He should either exercise force and fraud or pretend to be a good ruler. The first involves implementing a policy of harsh repression that consists of destroying the common spirit of the people and making them mistrust each other, while the second method involves doing everything to keep the people happy. The first option is, according to Aristotle, the most evil regime imaginable, while the other method would actually bring tyranny closer to kingship. Aristotle counselled tyrants with the idea in mind that he could incorporate moderation and education that would render the tyrant's constitution akin to its more admirable parallel, the kingship. Should the tyrant feign goodness and do everything to make his subjects happy, it would actually result in a good government whether the ruler pretends or not, or whatever his motives for making his subjects happy originally were. But what Aristotle merely describes, Machiavelli recommends. His prince combines both force and fraud and hides these behind ordinary virtues. In sum, he employs both of Aristotle's methods for preserving himself.

Fischer (2000, 204-205) has suggested that the chasm Machiavelli believed he had discovered between the necessities of politics and traditional morality is more apparent than real. In fact, it could be claimed that political life has always digested all the elements of truth contained in Machiavelli, since many "Machiavellian" practices are in fact ethically grounded. Torturing terrorists who are known to have intentionally risked innocent lives by placing a bomb whose whereabouts they refuse to reveal can be ethical, since it aims to save a large number of innocent lives. Similarly it may be "right" to bribe already corrupt public officials if by doing so one can make justice prevail. However, according to Fischer, Machiavelli overestimated the effectiveness of unjust means, and since "attaining political goals without doing harm is often more difficult than resorting to straightforward violence and deception, the truly prudent man needs to be a good deal smarter than a Machiavellian prince".

Fischer may be right about the permanent Machiavellism of political life, but Machiavelli never claimed that all of this was his invention. Political life has always understood the harsh necessities of extreme situations, but Christianity has not. This is what Machiavelli was trying to say. Nor did Machiavelli ever claim that it would not be smarter to attain goals without resorting to "immoral" means. What he did claim was that one cannot always avoid the employment of such methods, and that such means are often more efficient and expedient¹⁰¹. Machiavelli's ideal ruler aims not so much to maximise his power as to minimise his dependence. There should be no principle or character trait

¹⁰¹ Machiavellism is effective only if you are in a position where you do not have to fear the reaction of others, i.e. when you are capable of destroying them if necessary. Far too often we have reduced Machiavellism to foxy deception and forgotten the leonine qualities required from successful Machiavellians.

that constrains his ability to respond to his circumstances (cf. Grant 1997, 55). Religion, and especially Christianity, is certainly a hindrance in a prince's quest for autonomy. However, Machiavelli seems to be less interested of the obvious counter-implication of this autonomy. In a despotic state, the prince, if he is free from religious restraints, is truly free from all restraints.

Garver (1996, 209-210) has emphasised the same thing by arguing that for Machiavelli republics are superior to monarchies in just the way that Machiavelli's neo-pagan morality is better than Christian morality. Republics are more stable and innovative than monarchies and can better oppose the forces of fortune because they are pluralists - they contain within themselves multiple ways of acting and so can respond flexibly, with *charis*, to the times, while individual rulers have to act according to their natures. Machiavelli's new ethics, his "neo-pagan morality" contains within itself plural, incommensurable ways of acting, while Christian morality is doomed to acting in a single way, whether appropriate or not. Machiavelli sees flexibility and appropriateness as virtues, while Christian morality sees them as signs of corruption.

For Blair (2001) there can be little doubt as to the nature of Machiavelli's and Nietzsche's estimations of Christianity as world-view that is essentially opposed to the life-instincts. And to this extent, according to Blair, it is also clear that they were not merely political or philosophical thinkers, but individuals engaged in the broader task of refashioning the entire spiritual outlook of man. "Indeed, at virtually every turn in their paths, we encounter radical transvaluation of the fundamental presuppositions of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics like: "being" is unhinged from its transcendental anchors, and "becoming" from its inherent ends; the possibility of securing stable basis for knowledge in relation to the "thing-in-itself" is dismissed in favour of thoroughgoing perspectivism and distinct form of phenomenism; and the traditional estimation of the "good", as *causa sui*, is superseded by the unsettling effects of genealogical analysis and its problematization of "morality as anti-nature". The great breakthrough of the Machiavellian and Nietzschean experiments thus consists in their setting the stage for critical inversion of some of the most enduring features of Western thought. In the process, many traditional truth will find itself relegated to the status of artifact; and behind every such artifact, we now encounter very different reality than that which we had previously imagined: wherever there had once stood something eternal and immovable, there now emerges, in its stead, the repressed oblivion of that interminable series of tumults and struggles - between interpretations, interests, and full array of disparate forces - which such historical artifacts are temporarily buoyed forth as clear and distinct entities within the eternal vicissitudes of time and circumstance." (ibid., 200) But beyond their largely polemical and often blatantly cynical relation to the traditional foundations of philosophical inquiry, Machiavelli and Nietzsche are both quite willing to lay claims to certain truths of their own; truths of primordial, effectual or genealogical nature, but truths all the same.

For Blair, Machiavelli led the first great assault on the sovereignty of the *logos* and predated Nietzsche and Heidegger by initiating the post-metaphysical era. Thus, it is precisely in *Discorsi* (II/2) that Machiavelli provides his most profound indictment of Christianity, in the process opposing it to the violently affirmative features of what can only be understood as a thoroughgoing argument on behalf of paganism as the potential source of spiritual liberation for early-modern man. Blair's otherwise splendid article fails to acknowledge Machiavelli's role precisely in this respect. Machiavelli was not resurrecting paganism when he looked in adulation towards the Roman use of religion. His point was in the use of religion, not in the religion itself. Nevertheless, he did find a new locus for truth: it was not to be found via abstract reasoning or still less by coupling it with morality.

Garver (1996, 204-205) has argued that Machiavelli needs Christianity as the antipode of his own designs in order not to fall into easy relativism: "He rejects the easy relativism that says that while ancient Romans were able to accomplish these things, times have changed and Roman *virtù* and glory are to be admired, not imitated. Machiavelli has a good reason to reject relativism, both with respect to past achievements and towards his contemporary ethical competitor, Christianity. Relativism is a way of avoiding confrontations. If Christianity can restrict itself to a proper domain, and do the same for Machiavelli's worldly politics, then Machiavelli's princes will not be princes; they will be usurpers. Machiavelli must draw Christianity into conflict so that Machiavellian actors will be legitimate as well as successful, right and not only mighty. The more he can show the availability of past models - and the more indiscriminate their provenance the better - the more he lowers the barriers between Christian and neo-pagan morality. Machiavellian prudence needs the competition of pluralism, not the peace treaty of relativism." Imitating originals is a paradox that animates *Il Principe*, as Machiavelli shows how to convert apparently merely notional *exempla* like Moses, Theseus, Romulus and Cyrus into real options. If those paradigms of *virtù* can be made into real possibilities, anything can.

We can also attribute to Machiavelli a further level of innovation if we see his work as a parallel development to that of the Reformation, as Maddox (2002) has suggested. What he actually initiated was a kind of Secular Reformation as distinct from the Protestant Reformation. While Luther's Protestant Reformation laid foundations, for instance, to Locke's political theory and liberalism, certain republican strands of thought can be seen as a product of Machiavelli's Secular Reformation. Machiavelli's secularisation of the original sin, i.e. his negative anthropology introduced in the XVII chapter of *Il Principe*, became a powerful reinforcement of post-Reformation and neo-Augustinian suspicion of all governments, which in turn had an enduring impact on the modern movement toward written, inflexible constitutions (*ibid.*, 542). If all men are by nature inclined to evil, then any government composed of men bears the same intrinsic inclination towards evil and must for this reason be treated with suspicion. What Luther did in the world of politics, as Figgis noted

in his lectures that were originally delivered in 1900, “was to transfer to the temporal sovereign the halo of sanctity that had hitherto been mainly the privilege of the ecclesiastical; and to change the admiration of men from the saintly to the civic virtues, and their ideals from the monastic life to the domestic. All this as a part of the Divine ordering of the world. It was largely an accident that for the next two centuries these ideals redounded to the advantage of monarchy, and made the prince an autocrat in his own country. It only needed a change in the depositary of the sovereign power to make the same conceptions of the holiness of the State and the duty of non-resistance apply to the citizen of a democracy unified according to the ideas of Rousseau” (Figgis 1999, 57). Machiavelli, however, did not make a similar move. He was not trying to sanctify temporal power but to secularise it.

Figgis continues by claiming that what distinguishes Machiavelli from his predecessors is his entire discarding of any attempt to found a philosophy of right. This is important in many respects. To speak generally, almost all political speculation prior to Machiavelli might be described as directed to that end. To Machiavelli, however, the question which puzzled Cicero and Aquinas and innumerable other writers on the subject of politics, whatever side they took, was beside the mark. “What has vanished from Machiavelli is the conception of natural law. So long as this belief is held, however inadequate may be the conception as a view of the facts of life, it affords some criterion for submitting the acts of statesmen to the rule of justice, and some check on the rule of pure expediency in internal and of force in external politics. The more law comes to be thought of as merely positive, the command of a law-giver, the more difficult is it to put any restraints upon the action of the legislator, and in cases of monarchical government to avoid a tyranny. So long as ordinary law is regarded as to some extent merely the explication of law natural, so long there is some general conception remaining by which governments may be judged; so long, in fact, do they rest on a confessedly moral basis. This remains true, however little their ordinary actions may be justifiable, however much they may in practice overstep their limits. When, however, natural law and its outcome in custom, are discarded, it is clear that the ruler must be consciously sovereign in a way he has not been before, and that his relations to other rulers will also be much freer especially owing to the confusion of *jus naturale* with *jus gentium* which is at the bottom of International Law. The despots of Italy were, in fact, in the Greek sense, tyrants, and Machiavelli did little more than say so. What gives him his importance is that what was true of the small despots of Italy was about to become true of the national monarchs of Europe” (Figgis 1999, 59-60). Machiavelli wanted to liberate the ruler from any restraints imposed by religion, but he is altogether silent about the obvious fact that the ruler liberated from religion is truly liberated from all restraints whatsoever.

This development connects to the inevitable disintegration of the medieval unity. Already in Marsilius of Padua we find the community depicted as the aggregate or corporation of citizens which functions as the *legislator humanus*. The accent lies in the human (and not divine) character of the lawmaker, and

new dimensions were thereby opened for political activity of the citizens (cf. Ullmann 1977, 124). Citizen as the political manifestation of *humanitas* replaced the traditional landmarks of unipolarity, universality and totality by bipolarity, state sovereignty within territorial limits, atomism and consequently autonomy of the religious, political and other norms. In the Marsilian system life can be understood *in duplici modo*, which broke the age-old conjoint unitary character of the earthly and the eternal worlds (ibid., 126). The atomization discernible in the various autonomous norms had its collective and political expression in the developing national states. Various adages of the Roman law were interpreted to fit the national monarchies¹⁰², which were the ferments of the disintegration and fragmentation of the medieval unity. The Council of Constance (1414-1418) was an anti-climax for the all-dominant medieval papacy and expressed for the first time the dawn of nationalism when Emperor Sigismund formally proposed the appointment of two cardinals from each nation, so that the interests of the nation could be taken care of in the curia.

The Council of Constance made an important decision according to which oaths are not to be kept with heretics. "If for heretics we read enemies, and for Church read State, we have the whole of Machiavelli's system in this one decree. We must remember that the fundamental conception of a heretic is not a person who is in intellectual error, but a rebel against ecclesiastical authority, and hence the analogy to politics is even closer than might at first appear. Hus was condemned as a religious outlaw to whom human rights no more belonged. If the Church could do this there is nothing that the State might not also do in its interests, provided that the existence of the State is a good thing. Moreover it became customary to appeal to this decree in justification of practices generally known as Machiavellian" (Figgis 1999, 63).¹⁰³ The practices

¹⁰² The most famous example is: "Rex in regno suo imperator".

¹⁰³ Without entering the current debates on the positive effects of trust in the form of social capital, it can be noted that trust was a crucial concept in creating the economic miracle of the late medieval Italian city-states. In Villani's chronicle of Florence trust is elevated as the highest communal virtue: "In providing for the needs of the republic, faith (*fede*) is more useful than anything else." According to Brucker (2005, 83), Villani was referring specifically to Florence's large municipal debt, which, in 1345, had been consolidated into a funded debt with regular payments of interest to the debt's shareholders. "Villani believed that Florentines were willing to subsidize the commune through forced loans because they trusted the government's promise to repay its obligations. This notion of the crucial importance of honoring civic commitments was not limited to the fisc, but extended to every aspect of public and private activity: from the commune's diplomatic relations with other states to the regulation of private contracts between Florentines, and between Florentines and foreigners". Based on *fiducia* - the belief that contracts would be honoured and penalties enforced against violators - this economic system remained in place for centuries. A special court called *mercanzia* was established to preside over economic issues and as the reputation for probity of this guardian of economic *fiducia* declined, so too (it was claimed) did the ethical standards of the citizenry. Cases of fraud increased and people tended to hide their assets from tax collectors. Yet, the moral taint attached to individuals who violated their trust was a powerful deterrent to businessmen of every rank and condition, from wealthy bankers to retail merchants and artisans, whose fortunes depended on their reputation for probity in their business affairs: "Bankrupt artisans and shopkeepers were expelled from their guilds and threatened with loss of their livelihood. Business failure brought dishonor to upperclass delinquents and their kin, excluding them from civic office and from respectable marriage for their

of the Church were not far from the doctrines of Machiavelli, but Machiavelli does not have any competitive value system in addition to the needs of the temporal politics. In Machiavelli's view, oaths are not to be kept with anybody.

As MacIntyre (2000, 124) has noted, Luther, like Calvin, bifurcated morality. For them, there are on the one hand the absolutely unquestionable commandments, which are, so far as human reason and desires are concerned, arbitrary and contextless, and on the other hand, there are the self-justifying rules of the political and economic order. While this is just another way of saying that life can be understood *in duplici modo*, Machiavelli understood life only one way, namely in this-worldly fashion. In Luther's view, to obey God's commandments cannot be to satisfy our desires; for our desires derive from the total corruption of our nature, and thus there is a natural antagonism between what we want and what God commands us to perform. Human reason and will cannot do what God commands because they are enslaved by sin; we therefore have to act against reason and against our natural will (*ibid.*, 122). We are not saved by works, for none of our works are in any way good. They are all the product of sinful desire. Machiavelli saw the same incompatibility between what ought to be done and what we want to do (or what is rational or necessary

children. Among the rituals of humiliation civic authorities in Florence devised were the display of bankrupts' portraits on the walls of public buildings alongside those of criminals" (*ibid.*, 90-91). These developments took place in the field of politics as well. "The burgeoning cities of north and central Italy during the eleventh and twelfth centuries plunge us into a turbulent milieu of familial and factional conflict, of Montagues and Capulets, with their armed clienteles and their penchant for violence. Though the documentation on the origins of the Italian communes is scanty, it is received wisdom that the urban residents formed associations to defend themselves against overmighty families and factions. The oath taken by this first generation of communards who joined these urban societies was the glue designed to hold them together, to guarantee their members' commitment to collective action in defense of their interests" (Brucker 2005, 91). Yet not many of these communities survived and the majority of them succumbed into some sort of tyranny or distrust and factional strife. The betrayal of trust was, then as always, especially common in inter-communal relations into which the mercenaries gave their own addition. One of the primary reasons why this system did not work was that the mercenaries were particularly untrustworthy. "No phenomenon contributed more to the climate of mistrust and suspicion than the mercenary companies which, like a swarm of locusts, ravaged the Italian peninsula throughout the fourteenth century. These bands were formed by foreign soldiers- German, Hungarian, French, English- and also by Italian recruits. Though these companies were never able to conquer and pillage walled towns, they did enormous damage to the unprotected rural areas- looting, burning, killing- and thus to the local economies of the cities. From the 1340s to the end of the century, the commune of Siena spent nearly 300,000 florins in bribes to these companies, whose members frequently violated their promises not to pillage Sienese territory" (*ibid.*, 100). The beleaguered communes sought to fortify their treaties with these bands by requiring their leaders to swear an oath to abide by their commitments, but in practice this was of no help in making them trustworthy. Representing the Florentine commune in negotiations with the Italian company of San Giorgio in 1379, the chronicler Marchionne Stefani laboured in vain since the company soon violated the pact, but he appeared to believe that Italian mercenaries were more likely than foreigners to honour their obligations, since he noted that the breach of *fede* by the San Giorgio company was the first such transgression by an Italian mercenary band (*ibid.*). The mercenary leaders who dishonoured their oaths were often killed (some even pre-emptively), and a larger number of them died in the hands of their employers than in the battlefield. Yet the punishments for not keeping *fede* were normally less serious in the field of politics than in the field of economy

to do). Unlike Luther, however, Machiavelli did not need the concept of grace or any other such remedy. At the time of Machiavelli and Luther the state becomes distinct from the society. During this period, the individual also emerges. A man is no longer related to the state via a web of social relations binding superiors and inferiors in innumerable ways, but just as subject. A man is related to the economic order not via a well-defined status in a set of linked associations and guilds, but just as one who has the legal power to make contracts. The individual is also capable of carving his own fortune and making his own choices between Heaven and Hell or profit and loss. As MacIntyre (ibid., 128) has noted, the individual appears as starkly in Machiavelli as in Luther. He appears thus because society is not only the arena in which he acts but also a potential raw material, to be reshaped for the individual's own ends, law-governed but malleable. The individual is unconstrained by any social bonds. His own ends - not only those of power, but also those of glory and reputation - are for him the only criteria of action, apart from the technical criteria of statecraft. Machiavelli's is the first ethics, at least since some of the sophists, in which actions are judged not as actions, but solely in terms of their consequences.

Machiavelli's position is, naturally, fundamentally alien to Christianity since the state is seen as the encompassing framework of meaning containing religion, rather than *vice versa*. But at the same time, as Moulakis has noted, Machiavelli's position is not only anti-Christian but also anticlassical (Moulakis 1993). In Machiavelli's thought, the state is not the state of Aristotle - an extension of human nature, the field in which man as a political animal is fulfilled - but a product of human artifice¹⁰⁴. Furthermore, the meaning and value of a public order is determined by its beginnings and not by its ends (which would be that of a Christian or classical order).

And truly, if one chooses to be a Christian, Machiavelli gives a bad impression. In the context of English reaction to Machiavelli, Raab (1965, 61) argues that Machiavelli was rejected mainly because the authors familiar with his writings saw all too clearly the direction in which his theories were pointing, namely the secular state. Some absorbed certain parts of his thoughts and managed to avoid the deeper secular implications. But not many, if any, swallowed him whole. The general tenor of the English reception was anti-Machiavellian in the sense that most men could not accept the basic assumptions of Machiavelli. Although they occasionally cited Machiavelli as a weighty author, there was a point at which his blatant secularism aroused hostility and rejection. For many that point was 'politick religion', the principle of religion as a political device. Given a little determination, however, even this pill could eventually be swallowed by those who were sufficiently convinced that the realities, which mattered, were those of Machiavelli and *this* world, not those of Christianity and the next life.

¹⁰⁴ On Machiavelli's use of *stato*, see Hexter 1957; Mansfield 1983.

When Hobbes later wrote in favour of civil religion, his contemporaries were particularly sensitive to this because they already had before their eyes the example of Machiavelli who argued that a society's religion should be purely a matter of civil politics. Hobbes now seemed to give a philosophical justification for Machiavelli's cavalier treatment of religious dogma, and there were many people around in the 1650s and 1660s who were happy to read Hobbes this way: a good example is Henry Stubbe, a follower of Hobbes in Oxford, who seriously considered the question of whether Islam might not on political grounds be a better religion for Western countries to adopt than Christianity (Tuck 1989, 89).

"Wise men", wrote Lord Macaulay in his essay on Machiavelli, "have always been inclined to look with great suspicion on the angels and daemons of the multitude" (Macaulay 1879, 29). The multitude, for sure, has associated Machiavelli with the latter group. Most of Machiavelli's early reception can be described by the word demonization. Machiavelli was not, however, immediately made an object of rejection and opposition, but on the contrary was mostly honoured by his immediate contemporaries (e.g. Vettori, Buondelmonti, Salviati, and Buonaccorsi). There is no evidence that he, within his lifetime or immediately afterwards, caused much stir as an innovator on the field of political thought. Accordingly, some of his books were printed by Antonio Blado, the Pope's own printer. It is not until the Catholic Church began to re-Christianise itself through Counter-Reformation when Machiavelli was beginning to be viewed as a special problem (see Raab 1965, 3). But if Machiavelli did not cause much stir as an innovator in political thought, was this due to his very radicalism? It is undoubtedly true that radical innovators can have only a limited effect on their more conventional contemporaries and immediate successors precisely because they are radical. This was arguably the case for two of fifteenth-century Italy's most original figures, Valla and Poliziano, and perhaps for Machiavelli as well. One of Valla's most original contributions was his philological study of the New Testament, which was a truly revolutionary step, since the Vulgate had been revered as divinely inspired and authoritative during the Middle Ages. But in his own century Valla's biblical criticism remained an aberration, unpublished until Erasmus's edition of 1505 (Black 2001, 15). Hence, it may be that Machiavelli's writings bear certain resemblance to those of Valla in this respect.

The Renaissance not only saw the emergence of perspective in art¹⁰⁵, but also the rise of a new historical perspective. Renaissance scholars turned their backs on myths and universal histories, and descended to the particulars. Many of these figures were concerned to establish the legitimacy of the laws and institutions of particular states against the universal claims of imperial and ecclesiastical Rome. Many groups within the church were turning to history to

¹⁰⁵ Italian painters like Giotto began to show a greater sense of real space and form, but they still lacked a theory of perspective. The credit from the invention of perspective goes to Masaccio, who was the first artist to use full perspective in his painting "La Trinità", dating back to mid 1420's. The painting is located in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.

legitimise their authority, and many scholars depicted the Papacy in malevolent role (Paolo Sarpi), as the tool of the anti-Christ (Matthias Flacius Illyricus) or claimed that those condemned by it constituted a hidden church that had kept true faith alive since antiquity (John Foxe). Whatever the motives behind such works were¹⁰⁶, they did not prevent them from making real advances in historical understanding (Bouwsma 2002, 58-64). Recognition of change in the heavens was related to a growing consciousness of the role of change in human affairs. Change was no longer dismissed as the meaningless work of fortune that made all human efforts futile.

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century the keen interest in history persisted but Machiavelli, who had been moved by an intense faith in the possibility of change, was abused and rejected, even apart from his impiety (Martines 1980, 336). The framework of politics in the era of Tridentine Catholicism excluded the very possibility of change. Italy plunged into religious fanaticism soon after the conclusion of the Council of Trent in 1563: the age of the Index of Forbidden books had started and anti-clericalism became tantamount to heresy. Machiavelli's writings had been put on the Index in 1559 and *Il Principe* remained there until 1890. Christian ends were put back into the heart of political discourse through Counter-Reformation, and, leaving aside the mythicising of Venetian republic, Italian political thought turned eminently monarchist (*ibid.*). The fight against the Mohammedans in southern parts of Spain welded Spanish State and Church into a unity of crusading fervour, and via its viceroys and agents, it also ruled large parts of Italy. Learned Italy was returning to piety, poets were turning back to sacred poetry, and Pope Paul IV was passionately hunting heretics. In his religious fervour, he actually entrusted Daniel of Volterra with the task of clothing some of the nakedness of the Sistine Chapel (Chadwick 1985, 271). Thus, the spirit of the Renaissance was waning very quickly and transforming into Counter-Reformation, which was a triumph of the conservatives and the militants over the conciliatory and the liberal. The culture of the Counter-Reformation was, in an important sense, an attempt to bring to a halt the processes associated with the Renaissance. The primary adversaries of Counter-Reformation are symbolised by Florence and Venice rather than by Wittenberg and Geneva, as Bouwsma (1968, 294) has argued. In the long run, the Curia was probably less interested in suppressing Protestantism, a passing challenge in their view, than to turn back the growing political particularism of the age.

¹⁰⁶ For instance, when Foxe spoke of the hidden church, one of his aims was to further the cause of Protestant reformation by showing its hidden history dating back to men like Wyclif and Hus. The propaganda of the early Lutherans in fact helped to encourage most of the surviving Lollard and Hussite communities to link up with the wider movement of Protestantism and in turn helped to widen the basis of its support. Luther's concept of the church as nothing more than a *congregatio fidelium* implied a strong dislike of Papacy's role as a landlord and tax-gatherer, as well as of its role as an independent legal authority. (cf. Skinner 1978[II], 34, 49) These, and other political motives, were most likely at work among the writers of the Later Renaissance.

While the Christian roots of the Renaissance have been often dismissed, the role religion played in people's lives during the early sixteenth century and especially the division between Protestants and Catholics has been largely exaggerated. The Catholics were hardly more united than the Protestants and often as likely to protest against papal monarchy and universalist claims of the Holy See. A Catholic in this period was simply a person who insisted on the institutional unity of the church and acknowledged the leadership of Rome, while Protestants were those who protested against papal leadership (Bouwsma 2000, 101). The rulers of the time could easily see the choice between Catholicism and Protestantism as political rather than spiritual and superconfessionality, the participation in the rites of both sides, was denounced by religious authorities but still remained rather common especially in France and the Netherlands (ibid., 102-103). Nevertheless, when the fires of religious fanaticism were lit and Europe plunged into the era of the Wars of Religion, Machiavelli was ironically the name mentioned in almost every political and religious controversy.

Some Renaissance humanists like Cusanus and Pico della Mirandola spoke in favour of religious tolerance, which was based on the assumed harmony between all religions. They thought that all religions contain some truths of the one and same God, and thus they also advocated religious tolerance and perpetual peace between all mankind. When Machiavelli wrote about the defects of Catholicism, his criticism was easily read as a defence of religious tolerance. At first sight, Machiavelli was not a particularly obvious target in this controversy. There was no dispute between him and his most vociferous orthodox critics that a civil religion was indispensable in a well-ordered state. As Höpfl (2002, 231) has noted, the critical issue was *which* religion? On the denominational differentiations that were constitutive of orthodoxy in the late sixteenth century, Machiavelli had nothing whatsoever to say. But for orthodoxy this posed no great difficulty: Machiavelli could be said to have advocated serviceability to the state as the sole criterion for choosing between denominations. "But anti-Machiavellians did not in the least dissent from the view that the serviceability of a denomination as a civic religion is a point in its favour. One of the Jesuits' most powerful arguments was precisely that no religion was more favourable to princes and indeed to patriotism and valour than true - that is, Catholic - Christianity. Although cruelly oppressed by the heretics in Scotland, England, France, Flanders and many parts of the Holy Roman Empire, Catholics proved obedient to their rulers, as the Gospel demands. By contrast, the followers of Luther, Calvin and the rest, but notably the Calvinists, everywhere exploit all discontents, incite subjects against their superiors and ultimately turn everything both public and private upside down. The rebellious tendencies of heresy therefore mean that no government is safe with heretical subjects, and certainly no *prince's* government (Calvin's antimonarchical sentiments were well known to Jesuits, and their knowledge of the Calvinist literature was encyclopaedic). Protestantism is thus entirely unsuitable as a civil religion, whereas true religion is the mainstay of a well-

ordered commonwealth, as ought to have been obvious a priori in any case" (ibid., 231-232).

Machiavelli never mentions Luther or the Reformation in any of his writings. He was not attempting to show the defects of Catholicism compared to another strand of Christianity. In stead, he spoke of the defects of Christianity. It seems that the critics of Machiavelli did not understand that when he criticised Christianity, he was speaking of the Christian way of life, not just criticising some particular theological points. When he wrote that Christianity is incompatible with military valour and that Christianity is not the best civil religion, these were speculative points, and he knew that. He never tried to prove them. Eager as he is to prove things with examples drawn from history, he never tries to prove the weakness of Christianity in the same way.

Some of Machiavelli's near-contemporaries were perhaps aware that the art of the politician is not the most Christian of professions. Nevertheless, some of them, especially those under the influence of Renaissance neo-Platonism, responded to this problem very differently. Marsilio Ficino, the leading Platonist of the era, held according to Guicciardini's *Dialogo*, that "when cities are well instituted and are governed well, good men should as far as possible avoid getting involved in politics and public affairs" (Guicciardini 1994, 51). This Platonic otherworldliness and insistence on supererogation as the ruling political value found no favour with Machiavelli. His critique of Christianity rests mainly on this disclaimer of earthly pursuits. The proud indolence (*ozio*) of Christianity, derivative of the Stoic *otio* and even the Platonic and Aristotelian *schole*, which permitted the life of ataraxia and contemplation (cf. Springborg 1992, 213), has in Machiavelli's view turned the world effeminate and left it over as prey for potential tyrants.

If men think only of their own salvation, they do not differ essentially from those who place their own interest above common good. "In spite of the necessity of membership in the true Church for salvation, the Calvinist's intercourse with his God was carried on in deep spiritual isolation. To see the specific results of this peculiar atmosphere, it is only necessary to read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, by far the most widely read book of the whole Puritan literature. In the description of Christian's attitude after he had realized that he was living in the City of Destruction and he had received the call to take up his pilgrimage to the celestial city, wife and children cling to him, but stopping his ears with his fingers and crying, 'life, eternal life', he staggers forth across the fields. No refinement could surpass the naïve feeling of the tinker who, writing in his prison cell, earned the applause of a believing world, in expressing the emotions of the faithful Puritan, thinking only of his own salvation ... It is worlds removed from that spirit of proud worldliness which Machiavelli expresses in relating the fame of those Florentine citizens who, in their struggle against the Pope and his excommunication, had held 'Love of their native city higher than the fear for the salvation of their souls'. And it is of course even farther from the feelings which Richard Wagner puts into the mouth of Siegmund before his fatal combat, 'Grüsse mir Wotan, grüsse mir Wallhall -

Doch von Wallhall's spröden Wonnen sprich du wahrlich mir nicht'" (Weber 2001, 63).

Like Machiavelli, some Renaissance thinkers contested Christian morality in stately matters. Guicciardini (1994, 158-159) juxtaposes his "ragione e uso degli stati", reason and practice of states, with Christian morality and concludes that "it is impossible to control governments and states, if one wants to hold them as they are held today, according to the precepts of Christian law". Therefore, "one would need always to murder all the Pisans captured in the war, to decrease the number of our enemies and make the rest more timid" (ibid., 157). In 1499, the Florentine government decided to behead condottiere Paolo Vitelli without any proof of his alleged treasonable negotiations with Florence's enemies, mainly because he would never have forgiven the Florentines his imprisonment and would have been a powerful enemy. The preemptive strike was thought to be fit for the situation, because one can not use the usual standards of fairness in affairs of state (cf. Gilbert 1965, 43). In the case of Vitelli, the worldly wisdom of Renaissance political thought celebrated its greatest triumph. Generally, however, the Florentines were not inclined to take an exclusively religious or mundane attitude towards political decisions - they delighted in the use of human *ragione*, but the first advice was always to turn to God (ibid.).

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Machiavelli is often regarded as a theorist who is partly responsible for the secularization of the Western societies. He was among the first to turn his back on myths like Christianity and by doing so paved the way for a more secular and rational approach to politics, the standard interpretation proclaims. His secularization of politics is considered as a step towards modernity, since thinkers like Marx, Durkheim, Weber et al. have claimed that modernity means a decline in the level of religiosity. Machiavelli, for sure, is a crucial theorist in the “disenchantment of the world” in the Weberian sense, but he never imagined that less religiosity would do good for a people. In his view, religion is absolutely necessary and he never advocated a society where reason would prevail over religious beliefs. He was not very confident of the intellectual capacities of the common people and hence he thought that religion is necessary in keeping them organized.

If secularization means the separation of the state and religious institutions, then Machiavelli would not have supported secularization, had he known the term. On the other hand, if by secularization we mean the individual transition from *ultimate* concerns to *proximate* concerns, meaning a turn away from post-mortem concerns to this-worldly concerns, then Machiavelli is an advocate of secularization. What he actually advocated was a religion that would place more emphasis on proximate concerns, while at the same time keeping the potential wrongdoers in check with the fear of post-mortem punishments. In a sense, Machiavelli shares the aim of the reformers, be they Catholic or Protestant. What they wanted was a religion that took more interest in the actual world around them.

It can be rightfully noted that Copernicus, Darwin and Freud made the world less man-centred. But, significantly, that process had already begun with men like Machiavelli, Galileo, de Sade and Nietzsche, who made the world less Christian. It has been said that with Galileo the starry world ceased to be Christian. The same is true with Nietzsche and philosophy, Marquis de Sade and sexual behaviour, and, most significantly, Machiavelli and politics. With him, political history ceased to be Christian. In a sense, then, he truly is the

“Galileo of politics”, but this is not because he founded modern political science and anticipated the systematic geometrical analysis of Hobbes (cf. Barbuto 2003, 224), but because his political theory is a kind of a naturalism exempt from the dominating Aristotelianism and Christianity.

In a sense, Machiavelli occupies a position in the history of practical reason roughly analogous to that of Descartes in the realm of theoretical reason (cf. Garver 1987, 3). Descartes initiated a story of progress from ignorance to knowledge whose success and costs have only recently been questioned. Machiavelli initiated a similar process, but whereas Descartes liberated theoretical reason from the traditional restraints of custom and belief, Machiavelli’s innovative treatment of prudence seemed to remove the restraints that tradition had placed on immoral, selfish and corrupt behaviour. Unlike the prudence of Aristotle, Machiavelli’s practical reason does not entail intrinsic directedness towards virtuous ends. While the autonomy of theoretical reason at least initially seemed to be an advance from darkness to light, from doubt to certainty, the autonomy of practical reason has always been felt to be a mixed blessing. The Machiavellian practical reason is not guided by morality, or by the *recta ratio*, and as such it is more of instrumental nature and capable of calculating on the brinks of appropriate behaviour. Machiavelli’s prudence is also situational; what is reasonable and necessary in one situation is not so in another. Thus, for him, prudence oxymoronically consists in knowing when it is necessary to break even prudential rules. At the same time, he seems to reduce human freedom to the sheer anticipation of necessity. It is not hard to see why this has disquieted many moralists ever since.

Paradoxically, Machiavelli broke the tradition of prudential reasoning in its Aristotelian sense, but also remained within that tradition. As Fischer (2000, 42) has noted, Machiavelli decidedly did not take the crucial step from *prudentia* to *scientia*. It was Hobbes who accomplished this in the field of politics. Machiavelli opts for the Aristotelian alternative and assumes that human reality can be known only approximately. The necessities arising from the heavens and human nature would allow for rules that are certain, but Fortune introduces contingency in the field of human action and thus reduces these rules to the status of heuristic statements, guidelines for action that are “normally true” or “rarely fail”. But since Machiavelli counsels wicked deeds and repudiates the Pauline injunction against doing evil so that good may come, he breaks off from the Aristotelian prudence, which is tightly connected with the idea of its virtuous use. Since circumstances change, the virtues must change too. There are no eternal virtues, unless the ability to adapt to times is counted as one. Whereas Dante could find symmetry and coherence in the world, Machiavelli would appear to find only fragmentary and tenuous relations (Mazzeo 1964, 90). All mundane things are in a constant flux and a successful political actor must be able to adapt to changes and even make changes himself. Machiavelli can perhaps be seen as the first prophet of that wholly contingent world which the abolition of Christian providentialism entails (cf. Kennedy 2004).

Mazzeo (1964, 92) has suggested that Machiavelli revived the old dichotomy between Fortuna and virtù because their very indefiniteness permitted greater fidelity to the problematic character of both personal and political affairs. Machiavelli's cosmology "is not an end in itself but the most appropriate frame for containing a universe of discourse about action which will be true to all of the ambiguities inherent in it" (ibid.). Machiavelli knew that action with chaotic and ruinous consequences can first appear as rationality and morality, and that the best advice and most virtuous action cannot always succeed. "Therefore all attempts at rational prediction must take account of what we might call an irreducible element of chaos, fatality, necessity or ignorance, a realm of darkness whose boundary, however, can never be clearly defined" (ibid., 93). In this sense, Christianity is anathema to political action, since it imposes a kind of moral monopoly with allegedly eternal virtues, which fail to grasp the plurality of political world¹⁰⁷.

In a way, Machiavelli's political theory acknowledges the possibility of change (and chance) related to political action. Because times and circumstances change, no rules can be said to have universal validity. Introducing new modes and orders is dangerous, because the generality of men dislike changes. Reform, however, is a different type of change, since it is taking something back to its original state that has been deformed. Even in reforming the institutions of cities, one must be careful, since whoever wants to reform a city, should retain at least a shadow of the ancient forms:

"Colui che desidera o che vuole riformare uno stato d'una città, a volere che sia accetto, e poterlo con soddisfazione di ciascuno mantenere, è necessitato a ritenere l'ombra almanco de' modi antichi, acciò che a' popoli non paia avere mutato ordine, ancorché, in fatto, gli ordini nuovi fossero al tutto alieni dai passati; perché lo universale degli uomini si pascono così di quel che pare come di quello che è: anzi, molte volte si muovono più per le cose che paiono che per quelle che sono." (*Discorsi*, I/25)

Since the general mass of men are satisfied with appearances, as if it exists, and many times are moved by the things which appear to be, rather than by the things that are, it is necessary for a reformer to retain at least the names or forms, even though in fact the new institutions should be entirely different from the past ones. This view of change and reform may also be behind Machiavelli's own critique of Christianity. It would not be very realistic or wise to eradicate Christianity altogether. In stead, it should retain its name and forms, at least to some extent, but its message should be reinterpreted according to *virtù*.

¹⁰⁷ Machiavelli can thus be understood as the first exponent of the rather post-modern attitude towards politics. If politics is the art of dealing with the contingent event, where conditions do not remain serialized, reproduced or structured, this requires transformation from the actors themselves. Since political action is action that aims to alter the world, it must sooner or later alter the conditions on which it originally rested. Thus, it renders itself impossible, but only if it remains immutable. Plurality and ambivalence might be seen as effects of divergent standpoints and conflicting interests, but also as causes of the unpredictable nature of politics. (see also Hänninen 2000, 28-29).

Machiavelli's critique of Christianity is based on rhetorically constructed dichotomies. He never specifies what he means by Christianity, or by the ancient Roman religion. With this rhetorical contrasting of the two, Machiavelli argues that Christianity is a religion of *ozio* compared to the Roman one. Thus, all other qualities are arranged according to this dichotomy:

Ancient Roman religion	Christianity
Virtù	Ozio
Active	Contemplative
Spectacular ceremonies	Ceremonies with delicate pomp
Ferocity in action	Meekness in action
Beatified worldly glory	Glorified humbleness
Masculine	Effeminate
This world	Paradise
Republican liberty	Servitude
Armed	Unarmed
Possibility of change	Resignation

Machiavelli's dichotomy is a rhetorical device rather than an accurate description. The Roman religion, for example, was introduced by a king, and therefore can not be *per definitionem* an instrument of republican liberty. Christianity too can be "armed", as Machiavelli himself in other occasions admits.

Machiavelli, as we know, is not very convincing as a historian of Antiquity. Though he might have come close to observing his contemporary events 'objectively' and 'dispassionately', he certainly shows some mixed emotions in discussing the Antiquity. For example, Machiavelli's emphasis on Rome's republican form of government as a cause of its greatness is strange, if we keep in mind the fact that Rome did prosper and conquer also under the reign of the emperors. In fact, Rome controlled the largest territories at the end of Trajan's reign in A.D. 117. And when Machiavelli turns his glance at the Greek world at all, it is mostly to the princes of the Hellenistic era after the Macedonian conquest, or to the great lawgivers - *ordinatori* and *riordinatori* - of earlier days (Roberts 1994, 123). The *poleis* were clearly of secondary interest. One of Machiavelli's often quoted maxims is: "all armed prophets win, and unarmed ones fall" (*Il Principe*, VI). He discusses Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus as examples of the former type. From the unarmed ones, he mentions only Fra Girolamo Savonarola. First of all, it is striking that all of Machiavelli's heroes are mythical or semi-mythical. This is particularly interesting, since Machiavelli is supposed to be the realist, the first political scientist, basing his

judgment on facts instead of myths. Secondly, from the unarmed prophets, he does not bother to mention the most obvious case, namely that of Jesus Christ. Perhaps Jesus is not mentioned because he would not support Machiavelli's argument. After all, he was an unarmed prophet who *did* win. He and his followers brought the mighty Roman Empire to its knees without even grasping the sword.

The point is that Machiavelli's argumentation is rhetorical – it has other aims than historical correctness. Where writers like Guicciardini observe politics from the position of a successful aristocrat and thus have few enthusiasms for extreme courses, Machiavelli often rejects any *via media* (cf. Raab 1965, 4). Likewise, where Guicciardini refines and corrects, Machiavelli exhorts and adumbrates, and even distorts facts to dramatise his point. Hence, whether Christianity really is a religion of *ozio* or whether ancient Roman religion really was the cause of its greatness is irrelevant. It nevertheless works on the rhetorical level. There is also a difference in the "politics" in question. Machiavelli does not speak of the petty politics between different Italian city-states, whether some monasteries are on their territories or not etc., but politics on the empire-building scale. This grand politics opposed to the petty diplomacy is one that is above morality, at least Christian morality.

The thought that Christianity and politics do not fit together without some damage to either the one or the other is actually genuinely Christian. It is a central theme in the writings of Augustine, but it was abandoned when, during the subsequent centuries, the Church made a shift from pessimism to optimism (with the exception of Luther, a deep student of Augustine, of course). Basically, then, Machiavelli remained within the framework of Christianity when he maintained that Christians should not meddle with stately affairs and statesmen should not worry about the fate of their souls in the afterlife. Politics is a game played by the damned. Both Augustine and Machiavelli knew that very well. Machiavelli challenged the prevailing understanding, based on the rather dubious synthesis of Aristotelianism and Christianity, but he did not need a pagan alternative. It may be noted that the God of Aristotle had almost nothing in common with the God of the Sermon on the Mount, though, by one of the strangest and most momentous paradoxes in Western history, the philosophical theology of Christendom identified them and set as the chief end of man the imitation of both (Lovejoy 1960, 5).

Prominent voices within the Christian tradition sided with Machiavelli on the incompatibility of political success with Christian morality and called for great reserve towards the active life in a sinful world. Spiritual writers popular in the sixteenth century, such as Thomas à Kempis, whose *Imitatio Christi* was probably the most widely read book after the Bible, warned about participation in its affairs. "But this was not the view prevalent in early modern Catholicism. It rather reaffirmed the position of pre-Machiavellian Renaissance humanism that the active life, and especially participation in politics, was a noble Christian calling. Then the renewed Thomism of the sixteenth century stamped its imprint on the Catholic Reform, and with it an optimistic vision of human

nature and of a widespread harmony between nature and its completion in grace. A powerful, pessimistic Augustinian countercurrent persisted, particularly among French Jansenists, which stressed man's and the world's sinfulness, but it did not predominate. Francisco Vitoria brought with him to Spain in 1522 the revived Thomism whose spirit he had breathed in at Paris. Cajetan represented it in Rome. Both of them defended the rights based in natural law of the peoples across the seas. Ignatius Loyola and his early companions were influenced by the lectures they attended as students in Paris on Aquinas's *Compendium of Theology*. By the time they came to Rome, Aquinas was in vogue there. For them humanist education fitted well with the study of Aristotle and Aquinas. Not surprisingly, Aquinas was the author recommended by the Jesuit Constitutions for the study of theology. Later the Jesuit schools, and especially the theatre, exalted the active life in the world and aimed to exhibit the harmony between it and the Christian virtues". (Bireley 1999, 177) It is curious that the three enemies of Jesuits, Machiavelli, Luther and Jansenists, all came close to Augustinian ideas. Luther and Jansenists took, of course, their inspiration directly from Augustine, but Machiavelli's Augustinianism is another question. In a way, the freedom Augustine imputes to natural man is a questionable one as it makes man responsible for his sins, but denies him the capacity to resist them. Thus, if one examines it carefully, one notices that Augustine's system excludes ethics and carries the seeds of moral nihilism, hence paving the road for Machiavelli's anthropology.

Augustine's writings inspired many seminal writers of the Renaissance, which is partly due to the fact that there were changes in Augustine's outlook. While Luther and Calvin read the anti-Pelagian bishop, some Catholic writers because of the Reformation were interested in the young Augustine. Renaissance writers appropriated the "Augustine" that suited them best, and thus we should not speak of "Augustinianism" but different Augustinian strains (Bergvall 2001, 14). The importance of Augustine's writings was not limited to theology and philosophy alone, for his distinction between the City of God and Babylon resembles one of the most important political controversies in sixteenth-century Europe. To which extent should good Christians meddle in the affairs of the earthly city? For Augustine, the secular state is part of the divine plan and its purpose is to deal with the disorganisation and havoc resulting from the original sin. Whatever his religious views were, this is the function of the secular state in Machiavelli as well. Its purpose is to deal with the havoc and disorganisation resulting from the corrupt nature of men. He does not need any other facts, or explanations as to *why* men are evil, the fact that they are is enough.

It is perhaps not necessary to think that Machiavelli's view of the world is graceless. For Machiavelli, like for St. Augustine, grace was politically irrelevant. St. Augustine, "among Christian thinkers, to whose pessimism Machiavelli would appear to be most nearly related, did not believe that the Holy Spirit was a God of Battles and indeed affirmed that God gave Empire to the good and bad alike. With this judgment Machiavelli would have heartily

agreed, and yet St. Augustine thought the same thing in a 'graceful' world that Machiavelli thought in a 'graceless' one" (Mazzeo 1964, 95-96). It is perhaps an overstatement to say that Machiavelli was influenced by Augustinian theology, but there certainly are similarities between the two writers. To my knowledge, Machiavelli's only direct reference to Augustine is in his short fragment *Libro delle persecutione d'Africa*, where he writes: "sancto Agostino, huomo degno di ogni laude, perché el fiume della sua eloquentia correva per tucti e campi della Chiesa". The question whether or not these respectful words imply something more than mere similarities between the two would provide a fruitful subject for further studies.

In a way, it is curious that books like "Augustinian perspectives on the Renaissance" or "The Catholic Reformation" are altogether silent about Machiavelli. He is not considered as a reformer but as an enemy of the Catholic Church and a neo-pagan. But where does he speak on behalf of polytheism (neo-paganism, if understood as the resurrection of ancient Roman religious practices, would inevitably mean this)? The conflict between conforming to the world and fidelity to the Christian standards, as well as the corruptness of the ecclesiastics, were common themes in the reform literature of the era from Savonarola to Erasmus. Machiavelli differed from these in the sense that he was not so much interested in the theological points. Nevertheless, he pointed at the possibility that Christianity too could be interpreted according to *virtù*, which would provide greater fidelity towards the actual world and the contingent nature of politics.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Uskonnon asema Niccolò Machiavellin (1469-1527) politiikan teoriassa on herättänyt laajaa keskustelua. On esitetty näkemyksiä, joiden mukaan Machiavelli oli pohjimmiltaan harras katolilainen ja huolestunut siitä, että poliittisessa toiminnassa ei voi seurata kristillisiä ohjeita. Toisaalta on väitetty, että Machiavelli oli ateisti, jonka tarkoituksena oli erottaa politiikka ja moraali toisistaan ja hävittää uskonto kokonaan. Ehkä yleisimmin hänet nähdään kuitenkin jonkinlaisena uuspakanallisuuden kannattajana, sillä hän tunnetusti ihaili antiikin Roomaa ja myös sen uskonnollisia käytäntöjä.

Työssä esitetään, että kaikki nämä näkemykset ovat osittain harhaanjohtavia. Näkemys Machiavellista pakanallisuuden kannattajan palautuu osittain virheelliseen kuvaan koko renessanssista. 1800- ja 1900 -lukujen vaihteessa kanonisoitu tulkinta renessanssista pakanallisuuden esiinnousuna on epäilemättä vaikuttanut myös Machiavelli-tulkintoihin. Renessanssi ei kuitenkaan ollut pakanallinen aikakausi, vaan lähtökohdiltaankin hyvin pitkälle kristillinen. Kiinnostus antiikkiin ei johtanut kristillisen opin todelliseen haastamiseen. Taiteesakin kristilliset ja pakanalliset teemat esiintyivät yhdessä, eikä pakanallisten aiheiden tarkoituksena ollut kilpailla kristillisten aiheiden kanssa vaan täydentää niitä.

Monet ovat päättelleet Machiavellin kuuluisasta antiikin Rooman uskonnon ihailusta että hän olisi sen vuoksi anti-kristillinen ajattelijana, tai että hän olisi halunnut korvata kristinuskon antiikin Rooman uskonnolla. Machiavelli kuitenkin ihaili ensisijaisesti antiikin roomalaisten tapaa käyttää uskontoa ja tulkita sitä sopivasti. Hän siis suosittaa että uskontoa pitäisi käyttää kuten roomalaiset, mutta sen ei suinkaan tarvitse olla sisällöltään sama kuin heillä, vaikkakin kristinuskoon verrattuna siihen sisältyi poliittisesti ”järkevempiä” elementtejä.

Tästä johtuen Machiavelli itse asiassa ehdotti, että kristinuskokin voisi tulkita *secondo la virtù*, siis siten, että sekin sallisi urhoollisen toiminnan eikä ylistäisi ainoastaan kontemplatiivisia ja maailmasta syrjään vetäytyviä ihmisiä. Machiavelli näki kristinuskon orientoivan ihmisiä liikaa tuonpuoleiseen, kun se voisi oikein tulkittuna pitää hyveinä myös maallisen toiminnan kannalta tärkeitä asioita. Tässä mielessä Machiavellia voidaan pitää jonkinlaisena reformaattorina: hän jakoi monien muiden uskonpuhdistajien päämäärän, eli sen että uskonnon tulisi ottaa enemmän huomioon ympärillä oleva maailma, eikä se saisi sisältää fundamentaalista konfliktia maallisen elämän vaatimusten ja pelastukseen tähtäävän toiminnan välillä.

Kun Machiavelli kritikoiki aikansa kristinuskoa, hän ei välttämättä tarvinnut pakanallista vaihtoehtoa. Monet muutkin, kuten esimerkiksi Luther, kritikoivat 1500-luvun alun korruptoitunutta kirkkoa ja katolisuutta, mutta hekään eivät olleet sen vuoksi pakanoita. Machiavellin pessimistinen ihmiskäsitys (jota ei löydy klassisen antiikin kirjoittajilta) on kiinnostavalla tavalla samanlainen kuin Augustinukseen pohjautuvan kristillisen tradition näkemys. Optimistisen aris-

totalis-tomistisen näkemyksen kyseenalaistaminen ei siis välttämättä tarkoittanut paluuta pakanallisuuteen.

Machiavelli kuitenkin erosi radikaalisti muista reformaattoreista, sillä hän keskittyi pääosin temporaaliseen maailmaan eikä puuttunut teologisiin yksityiskohtiin. Hän puhui ensisijaisesti uskonnon poliittisista seurauksista ja piti uskontoa ennen kaikkea politiikan välineenä. Tämä uskonnon alisteinen asema suhteessa politiikkaan oli monille Machiavellin kommentaattoreille kohta, johon he eivät voineet yhtyä. Se, että poliittisessa toiminnassa joutuu käyttämään kristinuskon näkökulmasta epäsovinnaisia keinoja, "ratkaistiin" myöhemmin kehittämällä oppi ns. valtiojärjestä (*ragion di stato*), jonka mukaan valtiot eivät voi toimia saman moraalin mukaan kuin sen yksittäiset kansalaiset, koska joskus on tarpeen käyttää moraalittomia keinoja valtion säilyttämiseksi. Machiavellille poliittisen elämän moraalittomuus kristillisestä näkökulmasta katsottuna oli kuitenkin jatkuvaa, siis sen normaali tila, eikä poikkeus. Poliittisessa toiminnassa vaaditut hyveet olivat Machiavellin mielestä myös hyvin erilaiset kuin kristilliset kardinaalihyveet. Tiettyihin hyveisiin sitoutuminen ei Machiavellin mielestä ollut järkevää, koska politiikan kontingentit tilanteet vaativat ennen pitkää kuitenkin niiden hylkäämistä. Menestyksekkään poliittisen toimijan ei siis ole viisasta sitoutua mihinkään hyveisiin, etenkin kristillisiin.

Machiavelli kritikoii kristinuskoa, ei mitään sen tiettyä lahkoa tai tiettyjä yksilöitä. Hänen argumenttinsa kristinuskoa vastaan eivät palaudu kirkon maallisen vallan vastustamiseen. Hänen kritiikkinsä on perustavampaa ja tietyllä tavalla reformatorisempaa kuin usein on ajateltu. Hänen analyysinsä antiikin Rooman uskonnosta on lähinnä retorinen konstruktio, jonka tarkoituksena on osoittaa kuinka kristinuskokin voisi käyttää poliittisesti järkevämmiin.

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