

The Patron Saint of Atheists
or The Reception of Machiavelli

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ABSTRACT:

This study concentrates on the reception of Machiavelli’s ideas and on the doctrine of reason of state. For some reason, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) has been regarded as the inventor or re-inventor of the doctrine of “reason of state”. This is particularly odd, because Machiavelli did not use the term or any of its synonyms. In fact, it could be claimed that the doctrine was alien and irrelevant to him. It would have proved more useful to theorist with a Christian viewpoint.

I argue that it was not reason of state but Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity and his utilitarian view of religion in general that brought about the anti-Machiavellian genre. Writers who opposed to Machiavelli’s ideas, not necessarily opposed to reason of state. In stead, it was Machiavelli’s ‘atheism’ and his glorification of the secular state that caused the stir.

This study mostly concentrates on the negative reception of Machiavelli. The pro-Machiavellian genre, i.e. authors and texts praising Machiavelli, is also considered, but only to the extent of relevance considering the argument. In pro-Machiavellian arguments, I try to point out the fact that those who agree with him on a more general level, share with him also his indictment of Christianity, and/or his harnessing of religion to serve politics.

KEYWORDS: Machiavelli, reason of state, Christianity, Machiavellism, anti-Machiavellism, politics and religion

“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)* -

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1. Introduction

Over the centuries, for some reason, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) 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 state¹. 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.

Even (modern) commentary literature 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.). Accordingly, for example George L. 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).

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 they really are Machiavelli’s thoughts or not. Somewhere along the course emerged the view of Machiavelli as the inventor or re-inventor of reason of state. In fact, ‘reason of state’ is nowadays more commonly known as ‘Machiavellism’².

What many commentators have omitted, is Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity. I argue 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

¹ On this transformation from politics to reason of state, see Viroli 1992a and Viroli 1992b.

² 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“.

we find Machiavelli opposed and depicted as the very hand of the Devil. His 'immoral' ideas concerning the conduct of the prince were hardly news to contemporaries familiar with the writings of the ancient authors such as e.g. Tacitus. It is also true that among his contemporary or near-contemporary writers, he was not the most 'Machiavellian' (pardon me the oxymoron). Why, then, was he chosen as the archenemy of moral conduct in politics? I argue it was because of his ideas concerning the relationship between politics and Christianity - the 'true religion' – and not because of his 'ragione 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.

In the history of philosophy, Machiavelli is an interesting case. There are not many thinkers whose name has come to mean almost everything immoral, vicious, irreligious etc. Similarly, there are not many thinkers like Machiavelli, whose ideas have raised the opinions to such an extent that there exists a bulk of literature termed as anti-Machiavellian. In this study, I will mostly concentrate on the negative reception of Machiavelli. The pro-Machiavellian genre, i.e. authors and texts praising Machiavelli, is also considered, but only to the extent of relevance considering my argument. I will omit the discussions on whether Machiavelli was the first political scientist³, whether he was modern or not⁴, and other such things he is often lauded for. In pro-Machiavellian arguments, I try to point out the fact that those who agree with him on a more general level, share with him also his indictment of Christianity, and/or his harnessing of religion to serve politics.

There is also an intrinsic programmatic statement in this discussion. Those familiar with the thinking of Machiavelli know too well that his thinking is not systematic. His statements are often paradoxical, and if one is looking for coherence, then Machiavelli is not the man worth to be studied. This may stem from the fact that his style of writing is rhetorical and aims to provoke action. But I would like to suggest

³ I am thinking here especially Ernst Cassirer's and Leo Strauss's treatment of Machiavelli (see Cassirer 1950, esp. pages 116-162, Strauss 1958, and also Hariman 1989).

⁴ On this question, see Parel 1995 and Mansfield 1998, 258-280.

that there is a sense in which he is coherent, namely in regard to his critique of Christianity. If he occasionally speaks of the “true religion” that has showed the truth and the true way, it must be interpreted as irony. Machiavelli is also coherently patriotic (except for some omissions, but I argue that they result from something else than his un-patriotism⁵).

2. The Negative Reception

Machiavelli was not immediately made an object of rejection and opposition, but on the contrary was mostly honoured by his immediate contemporaries (like e.g. Vettori, Buondelmonti, Salviati, and Buonaccorsi). Accordingly, some of his books were printed by Antonio Blado, the Pope’s own printer. There is no evidence that he, within his lifetime or immediately afterwards, caused much stir as an innovator on the field of political thought. 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). Brian Richardson has noted that in texts intended for private circulation, Florentines could reveal their fascination with Machiavelli’s analysis of statecraft, but in public it was not possible to approve what he had dared to say (Richardson 1995, 36). This seems rather odd, keeping in mind the fact that Machiavelli’s analysis was hardly news to any literate contemporary. Texts of the ancient authors, the ones the Renaissance scholars collected and translated, were by far more Machiavellian in character than any writings of Machiavelli. As Garret Mattingly’s fantastic book on renaissance diplomacy shows, the ‘new’ temporal values of politics were commonly accepted as a fact even before Machiavelli was even born (see Mattingly 1962). There had to be something ‘new’ or revolutionary in his writings that caused the objections afterwards.

⁵ See the discussion in “Conclusions”.

2.1. The Range of Distribution

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 1980, 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. But, on the other hand, the wide array of translations and anti-Machiavellian treatises give us a good reason to think that he never ceased to be an interesting topic, even though it was forbidden, to some, to read his books.

Despite the fact that Machiavelli's writings had been put on the Index in 1559⁶ (and therefore was forbidden to Catholics to read) the treachery of the St. Bartholomew's Massacre in 1572 was blamed on Machiavelli by the Protestants⁷. The English Civil

⁶ In 1562, the Council of Trent confirmed this papal edict by Paul IV. "The Prince" remained in the Index until 1890.

⁷ In these situations there are, sometimes, rather strange and simplistic views of historical causation and inevitability at work among many thinkers. Jacques Maritain argues that Machiavelli's arguments taught Henry VIII, they taught Catherine de Medici to massacre thousands of Protestants for coolly calculated purposes of state alone, and thus they outlined "almost exactly ... what Adolf Hitler set out to do" four hundred years later (quoted in Cochrane 1961, 117). [sic!] Because we now know what happened after this and that historical event, we are easily led to assume that they had some causal relationship. This stems from our "innate" anguish to present events in the form of stories. However, this story-fetishism often does violence on facts. Organization of discrete historical events into "stories" and arbitrary principles of inclusion and exclusion have shaped the writing of history. It has

War (1642-1649) was fought also with pens, between writers, like John Milton, drawing heavily on Machiavelli's writings, while later Cromwell was presented as an archetype of the Machiavellian ruler rising through his own *virtù*. 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, as is shown above.

2.2. The Formation of Old Nick

However, I would argue that the reason why there was this "affair" around Machiavelli's work was not so much due to his alleged ideas concerning reason of state than his ideas concerning religion. First attacks on Machiavelli were based on his hostility towards Christianity. 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 irrelevant⁸. 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 reason of state. In Machiavelli, they saw primarily an atheist and a proponent of secular state. Machiavelli simply chose to clothe his view of politics to a garb thoroughly offensive to an age when the reality of Christianity 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 (see Fernández-Santamaría 1983). In England, in France, in Spain and almost everywhere,

been noted by Hayden White that life does not present itself in the form of a story - there is no beginning or ending of anything but moral judgment makes it so (see e.g. White 1987). It is only the demand of the individual narrator for the closure that account for the existence of discrete "stories" in history. For a recent example of such an endeavour to defend storytelling, see Guaraldo 2001.

⁸ This point is supported by e.g. McKenzie 1980, 219.

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.

How, then, has the sinister reputation Machiavelli’s name bears, developed? There is a class of commentators who argue that Machiavelli was a vile, monstrous, immoral and irreligious thinker - the “Murdrous Machiavel” or “Old Nick”. Some have actually argued that Old Nick, the English byword for Satan, derives from ‘Nick’ Machiavelli. The image of the ‘Murdrous Machiavel’ is propounded in the Elizabethan drama - in characters such as Iago and Richard III. In the prologue of Christopher Marlowe’s (1564-1593) “Jew of Malta”, character named Machiavel states:

*To some perhaps my name is odious;
But such as love me, guard me from their tongues,
And let them know that I am Machiavel,
And weight not men, and therefore not men’s words.
Admir’d I am of those that hate me most:
Though some speak openly against my books,
Yet will they read me, and thereby attain
To Peter’s chair; and, when they cast me off,
Are poison’d by my climbing followers.*

And truly, many have spoken openly against Machiavelli, but yet have they read his books and used the best parts to serve their own purposes - one such example being Sir Walter Raleigh (see Kempner 1928).

However, in negative reception, we must remember one often omitted point of view. In her argument regarding Leo Strauss, Shadia B. 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 wonderful 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 1957, 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). In fact, our own time has witnessed an extension in the demonization of his name. Making a shift from the accusations concerning pure *raison d'état*, his name has recently been connected even to phenomenon such as psychopathic behaviour. Social psychology tends to see the 'Machiavellian' as someone who views and manipulates others solely for his own purposes (Christie 1970a, 1)⁹. A psychopath, in short.

But why Machiavelli? Why not Guicciardini who was more shrewd and realistic an analyst of contemporary politics¹⁰? Guicciardini has also been termed as being more Machiavellian than Machiavelli himself (see Skinner 1978, 185), and he definitely was more ardent a pagan and anticlerical in comparison to Machiavelli. Felix Raab thinks the reason for picking Machiavelli was his passionate enthusiasm (Raab 1965, 4). Unlike the restrained reflections of Guicciardini, the aristocrat and successful politician, Machiavelli's writings are filled with the fervour of his conviction, his passion, his rejection of any *via media*. Where Guicciardini, and the like, refine and correct, Machiavelli exhorts and adumbrates, and even distorts facts to dramatise his points. Raab may be on the right track, but the explanation sounds too simple. I

⁹ Christie actually constructs a scale measuring how 'Machiavellian' you are. High scores reflect the acceptance of Machiavellian viewpoint, and low scores a rejection of such an outlook (Christie 1970b, 10). On Machiavellism and psychopathic behaviour, see for example McHoskey, Worzel & Szyarto 1998.

¹⁰ On Machiavelli and Guicciardini, see Gilbert 1965 and McKenzie 1980.

argue, again, that the reason why he was chosen, is at least partly embedded in Machiavelli's discussion of Christianity.

3. Raison d'Etat and Machiavelli on Religion

My claim that Machiavelli was opposed mainly because of what he had dared to say of Christianity and not because of his alleged reason of state can be dealt with only after we have examined what it is that these viewpoints include. In other words, what Machiavelli actually says of Christianity, and what is this tenet of 'ragione di stato'.

3.1. Machiavellism and Reason of State

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 conduct¹¹. To put it simple, 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. Friedrich 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 (see 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

¹¹ 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.

(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 the introduction of Christianity. This introduction of dualistic world¹² has given the problem of reason of state this deeply felt overtone of tragedy, which it never carried in antiquity.

Meinecke's treatment of the subject gives too strong an impression that it was Machiavelli who revived the tenet of 'reason of state'¹³. This is not the case at all. Or, perhaps, this is a question of interpretation. 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 e.g. 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 goods that do not belong to the substance of republican life, such as territorial

¹² Noteworthy is also the fact 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 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 (see also Bernstein 1984). On the formation of Hell, see Bernstein 1996, and for a history of Heaven, see Russel 1999.

¹³ See also Vasoli 1994.

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'. 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.

For the first time, in fact, the Italian term 'ragione degli stati' had been employed 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 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 simply 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-interest. Alternatively it was thought that the right one is limited by justice, while the false one relies on treachery, assassinations etc. However, it was pretty much agreed that the ruler needs to know the wrong means, in

a similar fashion than 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. (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 an other 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 a well-known fact that the term 'politics' does not appear even once in Machiavelli's "The Prince"¹⁴. According to Maurizio Viroli, this is because Machiavelli wanted to reserve politics to mean particularly republican public action as opposed to autocratic art of the state or governing of the prince (Viroli 1992a, 6, 8, 128-129, 131). He did not use the term simply because he was not writing about politics as he understood the term. But does it actually have to mean that the book does not deal with politics, if the word is not mentioned? After all, the Godfather trilogy by Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola pretty much deals with the Mafia, even though the word does not occur a single time in the movie script. Curiously enough, apart from 'politics', Machiavelli does not use the term 'reason of state' either.

But it is 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 civilis*¹⁵. Seeing *prudentia* as a doctrine, or a set of techniques for political conduct, is paradoxical. Reason of state definitely 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*. Treating politics as a technique for the correct establishment for the state marks a shift in the classical tradition of politics as pedagogical cultivation of character (see Habermas 1977, 42). 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

¹⁴ The first one to make the point is Dolf Sternberger (Sternberger 1974). See also Rubinstein 1987; Viroli 1990 and Viroli 1992b.

¹⁵ Something like this is suggested in Dean 1999, 84-89.

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 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 justice¹⁶ itself, namely the laws and compacts. Machiavelli's interest is in *mantenere lo stato*, not in the acquisition and establishment of one.

Moreover, there are those who see 'reason of state' essentially as a systematisation of the "belief in the superiority of the state over all private rights and privileges" (Mosse 1952, 68). This view has little if anything to do with Machiavelli, who never concerned himself with the concept of individual rights (see Skinner 1984, 218).

In a sense, then, Machiavellism owes its existence less to Machiavelli than to the anti-Machiavellians. If Machiavellism is understood as containing a doctrine of *raison d'état*, then it does not originate in Machiavelli's writings but in his reception. Many of the polemicists writing against Machiavelli knew little if any of his writings, and made no particular effort to understand the intrinsic nature of his thought. Instead, they were mainly interested in what he could represent. It was quite common for the anti-Machiavellians to summon Machiavelli only to distort and exaggerate his thoughts and use him as a device by which to slander adversaries. Nevertheless, if Machiavelli does not use the term 'reason of state', it must be something else that gave rise to anti-Machiavellism¹⁷.

¹⁶ On Machiavelli's notions of justice, see Parel 1990.

¹⁷ Spackman actually suggests that it was not the content, but the form that was so shocking in Machiavelli: "...the peculiar openness of *The Prince* is an effect of a particular rhetorical form, the maxim, and of a particular rhetorical trope, irony." (see Spackman 1990).

3.2. Machiavelli on Religion

What is it, then, that Machiavelli actually says about Christianity, or religion in general? One could claim that the theme was very important to Machiavelli, even though he is famous for being irreligious. It should be noted that I am not making any stance whatsoever on the question concerning whether he *really* was a devout catholic, a heretic, a damnable atheist or whatever. At all events, there is an important religious or theological subtext in his writings that is occasionally pushed to the background and at times emerges as a central theme.

In Machiavelli's view the function of religion is primarily social unification of a people or a military unit (see e.g. "Golden Ass", ch. 5, lines 118-127; "Discourses", bk. 3., ch. 33; "Art of War", bk. 4.). 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" ("Discourses" bk. 1, ch. 11). According to him, 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". ("Discourses, bk. 1, ch. 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 (see e.g. "Discourses", bk. 1, ch. 14& 15 and Najemy 1999). In similar fashion, he tells 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'" ("Art of War", bk. 6). 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.

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 (“The Prince”, chap. 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 knows “how to do wrong when he must” (ibid.).

This is the right use of religion in Machiavelli’s view. But the rulers, or the Rome of his day, did not use religion as wisely¹⁸. In contrast to ancient religion, Christianity favours contemplation, withdrawal, humility, and other such apolitical virtues. Christian doctrine 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). Christianity has displaced patriotism by providing a transcendental fatherland in the hereafter. Somewhat similar tenet of two regiments, or the idea that person is born into two states (*cosmopolis* and the [accidental] native city), was also a part of the Stoic doctrine (cf. Hill 2000). This promise of a better fatherland is clearly stated in the Bible (Hebr. 11:13-16). God’s eternal fatherland is far more important to a Christian than temporal ones. But 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 happiness¹⁹. This contradiction between *vita activa* required by politics and *vita contemplativa*²⁰ required by

¹⁸ For a recent study of Machiavelli’s romantic longing to ancient Rome and its religion, the world where *grandezza dell’animo* and *fortezza del corpore* combined to create heroism, see Sullivan 1996.

¹⁹ 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). But the question of time is important also from the viewpoint of glory and fame. “Remembrance could only appear tawdry when compared to a life everlasting. It was this replacement of immortality in time with an immortality beyond time which underlay the ‘providential’ coup of Christianity over the ancient world. But this expropriation of human fear [of having left without a trace] did not exhaust Christianity’s assault on the culture of glory. 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 human power and effort.” (Smith 1985, 44). 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).

²⁰ 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).

Christian religion is Machiavelli's main concern in his critique of Christianity. In his "Discourses On the First Decade of Titus Livius" Machiavelli writes:

"Ours, because it shows us the truth and the true way, makes us esteem less the honour of the world; whereas the pagans, greatly esteeming such honour and believing it their greatest good, were fiercer in their actions.... Ancient religion.... attributed blessedness only to men abounding in worldly glory, such as generals of armies and princes of states. Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative men rather than active ones. It has, then, set up as the greatest good humility, abjectness and contempt for human things; the other put it in grandeur of mind, in strength of body, and in all the other things apt to make men exceedingly vigorous. Though our religion asks that you have fortitude within you, it prefers that you be adapted to suffering rather than to doing something vigorous." ("Discourses", bk. 2., ch. 2)

Machiavelli blames Christianity, or its false interpretations, for glorification of *vita contemplativa* and contempt of *vita activa*. This has some severe implications considering the republican ideal:

"This way of living, then, has made the world weak and turned it over as prey to wicked men, who can in security control it, since the generality of men, in order to go to Heaven, think more about enduring their injuries than about avenging them.... By reason of this education, then, and such false interpretations, there are in the world fewer republics than in ancient times, and, as a result, the people do not have such great love for freedom as then." (*Discourses*, bk. 2., ch. 2)

Because men are more interested in going to Paradise than defending their fatherland, the world has grown effeminate and "Heaven has laid aside her arms". On the other hand, temporal patriotism calls for employment of means that are distinctively un-Christian. To be a good citizen and a good Christian is simply paradoxical in Machiavelli's view.

What Machiavelli is actually describing here is the displacement of patriotism. Christianity has displaced the fatherland and patriotism by providing a transcendental fatherland in the hereafter. This is clearly stated in the Bible²¹. God's eternal

²¹ "...acknowledging and confessing that they were strangers and temporary residents and exiles upon the earth. Now those people who talk as they did, show plainly that they are in search of a fatherland - their own country. If they had been thinking with [homesick] remembrance of that country from which they were emigrants, they would have found constant opportunity to return to it; But the truth is that they were yearning for and aspiring to a better and more desirable country, that is, a heavenly [one]" (Hebr. 11:13-16).

fatherland is the one that matters to a Christian, not any temporal state. Person can be a citizen of two regiments, the divine and the temporal, but love of fatherland is directed towards the one or the other²². This is due to the fact that these two distinct patriotisms would inevitably collide. Hobbes tried to solve this problem by claiming that “*Temporall* and *Spirituell* Government, are but two words brought into the world, to make men see double, and mistake their *Lawfull Sovereign*....there is....no other Government in this life; neither of State, nor Religion, but Temporall” (*Leviathan*, part III, ch. 39). Hobbes wanted these two governments to be the one and the same. In a way, he agrees with Machiavelli. They both (as well as Rousseau, Hegel etc.) wanted a civil religion, which would support the state (cf. Tuck 1989, 79). Unification of Christian religion and the state is not, however, the solution of Machiavelli. His ‘dream’ would also be a unification of state and religion, but not just any religion or any state. The state must be a republic, and the religion must *not* be Christianity.

This problem of two patriotisms colliding with each other is distinctively the problem of Christianity. Temporal patriotism calls for employment of means that are distinctively un-Christian. Divine or eternal patriotism, on the other hand, wants you to “turn your other cheek”, which in turn means the corruption of the temporal state (at least in Machiavelli’s view). This problem would not emerge, if religion would not teach the immortality of the soul²³. Men, who like Machiavelli are ready to risk the salvation of their souls in order to serve the temporal fatherland, are hard to find.

²² If we examine Machiavelli’s critique of Christian religion more closely, we find that part of it is due to the fact that Christianity strives towards a world, which is in certain aspects monarchical or even despotic. In the end of Gospel of Matthew Jesus says that all the power and authority has been given to him (Matt. 28:18). This is by no means the ideal situation for a republican, such as Machiavelli. In his satirical sermon, “Exhortation to Penitence”, Machiavelli is explicit on this point and refers to Jesus as “our Emperor Jesus Christ in the heavenly kingdom!” (Exh., 173, cf. 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 their expulsion from Heaven he is among his peers, i.e. other doomed angels (cf. Worden 1990, passim.). Satan also led a ‘republican revolt’ against the “Throne and Monarchy of God” (“Paradise Lost”, bk. I). Tyrannical Heaven may also be one of the reasons why Machiavelli is gladly going to Hell (cf. “Mandragola”, IV, 1.; Ridolfi 1963, 249-250; Viroli 2000, 3-4). Hell is crucial at this point. In order to act for the good of the temporal state, one has to be ready to risk the salvation of his soul and go to Hell. Certain points in some of Machiavelli’s literary works could be read in this light. He is in a way telling that compared to Heaven, Hell is not such a bad place to be after all (cf. “Belfagor”, passim., de Grazia 1990, passim.).

²³ Later, Tocqueville turns this argument upside down and claims that any religion would do, as long as it teaches the immortality of the soul (cf. Jacobitti 1991, 593). Surprising, considering that their aims (i.e. the unity of the people) are alike. See also Tocqueville 1969, 290.

That is why it would be better, if nobody would have to worry about the fate of his soul in the afterlife. It is worth noticing that the immortality of the soul was (along with the eternity of the world) the most important philosophical question of the Renaissance.

3.2.1. Trading Soul for One's Country

In his famous letter to Francesco Vettori (16.4.1527) elderly Machiavelli states “I love my native city more than my soul”. Another similar idea we find in his “Istorie fiorentine”, where Machiavelli praises the heroes of the so-called War of the Eight Saints (1376-1378). He notes that “So much higher did those citizens then value their city than their souls!” (“History of Florence”, bk. 3, ch. 7). According to Maurizio Viroli, Florentine patriotism assumed a marked secular and anticlerical connotation during this war (Viroli 1998, 152). Viroli continues by stating that it was at “that time that the idea that a good citizen ought to be prepared to sacrifice even his own soul to defend his country’s liberty entered in the language of Florentine patriotism”(ibid.). This is a point where Viroli is somewhat misguided. Viroli mentions the fourteenth century Florentine Dominican Remigio dei Girolami and claims that Remigio “does not go so far as to say that a citizen ought to be prepared to sacrifice his soul to save his country, but he stresses that the individual’s good ought to be sacrificed for the common good of peace.” (ibid., 151-152). Viroli’s source here is Remigio’s “De bono pacis”. But in his “De bono communi” (1302) Remigio appears to argue 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 (cf. Rupp 2000). However, this idea is very dubious and complicated. There is no explicit doctrine on damning a commune to Hell in the Christian religion. But still, Remigio might have had his strange idea from the Bible, Paul’s letter to the Romans, where 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). Remigio could also have been influenced by the story of Marcus Curtius, who saved Rome by leaping into a hole that went *ad infernum*. 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. Consequently, being perfect means being more to the likeness of God²⁴. Remigio stressed this to such an extent that he denied the qualification of man from individual deprived of his city (Kantorowicz 1957, 478-479). But for Machiavelli, God plays no role in this game. He is ready to risk the salvation of his soul simply because he sees that the requirements of patriotism are not compatible with the requirements of the Christian doctrine. According to the view of e.g. St. Augustine, the foundation of politics is not justice but domination by force or the threat of its use²⁵. Consequently, Christians are to use, not love, the state on their pilgrimage towards salvation. This is something that Machiavelli could not tolerate.²⁶

Thus, the thinking of Machiavelli poses a dilemma for those who think that his analysis is accurate but still wish to believe in Christian morality. According to Leibniz, this is the Gordian knot which Machiavelli has tied²⁷. 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 artifice²⁸. 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).

²⁴ 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 who was created in the likeness of God.

²⁵ And here, in respect to the foundation of politics, Machiavelli actually agrees with Augustine, but his solution is not resignation but *virtù*. Augustine and Machiavelli also have in common the pessimistic view of human beings (see Qviller 1996). On Machiavelli's view of human nature, see for example Huovinen 1951; Pitkin 1987 and Knauer 1990, 92-104).

²⁶ For additional thoughts on Machiavelli's critique of Christianity and his 'total patriotism', see Korvela 2001a and Korvela 2001b. See also e.g. Strauss 1958; Mansfield 1979, 194-196, 237-238.

²⁷ See Berlin 1980, 25-79.

²⁸ On Machiavelli's use of *stato*, see Hexter 1957; Mansfield 1983 and also Skinner 1987.

Machiavelli also challenged 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' (see 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, 204). For Greeks, there was no concept for pure good. Everything that was good, was good for something, not good in itself. The 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 utility²⁹. By contrast, Machiavelli's monstrous claim is that virtue does not pay, i.e. virtuous action in the Christian sense leads to devastation.

Thus, the anti-Machiavellians found themselves caught between the rock and the hard place. They were rejecting Machiavelli's doctrines because it questioned their values, but at the same time they were perfectly aware that political conduct had

²⁹ On the humanist concept of the prince, see 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.

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-Machiavellians³⁰.

4. The Offence

As I have argued, it was Machiavelli's monstrous idea of subjecting religion to serve politics that roused the opinions, not his alleged principle of reason of state. The Portuguese Jerónimo Osorio da Fonesca attacked Machiavelli in his "De nobilitate christiana" as early as 1540³¹. Also another bishop, 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 etc., all flow from the adherence to a secret doctrine³², 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 1523³³! The preface to the 1532 edition of "The Prince", as well

³⁰ See Bleznick 1957 and McKenzie 1980, esp. 217-268.

³¹ 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 accomplish great deeds. These arguments frequently cropped up in Spanish anti-Machiavellian literature (Bleznick 1957, 545).

³² Especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the idea of *arcana imperii*, or the mysteries of statecraft, was a common topic.

³³ 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 (see Familiar Letters, No. 137).

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 the 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 1957), 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*. 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 direction³⁴. 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. 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,

³⁴ 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.

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, *Discovrs ... 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 his ‘total patriotism’ 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 yet agree with Machiavelli’s amorality and irreligiousness³⁵.

³⁵ See his two letters to German Princess Elizabeth (1618-1680), where he comments Machiavelli’s thoughts. He does not, however, mention Machiavelli by name, since his books were in the Index. On Descartes’ Machiavelli, see also Sumberg 1994.

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 at, 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 Divil: ... 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.

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)

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, had 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 (Duke of Alba had even a statue of Machiavelli erected in the castle of Antwerpen). The other side, naturally, blamed William of Orange of using religion as a cloak for his political purposes when he turned from 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)

4.1. Occasional Defenders

The first to challenge this sinister view 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 whether Machiavelli’s “Il Principe” was a satire or not³⁶. 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, Fichte³⁷ and Hegel³⁸, and reaches

³⁶ If “The Prince” is thought to be simply a how-to-do-book or an advice book, it follows that it contains an in-built contradiction: it reveals techniques of power that would be more effective if they were kept secret. Does a trick, that is known to be one, still work? (see also Moulakis 1993). Mary G. 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). Some have found satirical elements also in Machiavelli’s “Florentine Histories” (see e.g. Reborn 1988, 195-196). Reborn’s book is an excellent study on Machiavelli’s literary works.

³⁷ On Fichte’s Machiavelli, see Moggach 1993.

³⁸ “We can assume that a man who speaks with such genuine sincerity had neither baseness of heart nor frivolity of mind.” (Hegel 1964, 220)

a certain climax in the Italy of the *Risorgimento*, when Machiavelli is seen as an early advocate of the unification of Italy³⁹.

Why was somebody defending Machiavelli, when the generality of commentators were objecting 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, 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 with Machiavelli's program of systematic treachery and deception⁴⁰. 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 eulogy⁴¹. 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"⁴² (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

³⁹ Which he definitely was, esp. in chapter XXVI of "The Prince".

⁴⁰ In this respect, Maurice Joly's satirical theatre play "Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu" (1864) is very interesting. Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", one of the most famous pieces of anti-Semitic propaganda, is based on this play by Joly.

⁴¹ 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).

⁴² On Machiavelli's 'dream' he is said to have told at his deathbed and my interpretation of the idea behind it, see Korvela 2000, 23-29 and Korvela 2001a, esp. 9-10. Of the 'dream' see also Ridolfi 1963, 249-250; de Grazia 1990 and Viroli 2000, 3-4.

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 doctrine 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 from 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 1986, 484). In respect to “The 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. In “Social Contract”, he writes:

“Christianity is a totally spiritual religion, uniquely concerned with heavenly matters. The Christians homeland is not of this world. ... In order for the society to be peaceful and for harmony to last, all citizens without exception would have to be equally good Christians. But if unfortunately there is a single ambitious man, a single hypocrite – a

Catiline, for example, or a Cromwell – he will very certainly get the better of his pious compatriots. Christian charity makes it hard to think ill of one's neighbour. As soon as he has learned the art how to trick them through some ruse and seize part of the public authority for himself, he will be a man of constituted dignity; it is God's will to respect him. ... It would be against conscience to chase out the usurper, for it would be necessary to disturb the public tranquillity, use violence, shed blood. All of this is inconsistent with the gentleness of a Christian. And after all, what does it matter whether one is free or a serf in this vale of tears? The essential thing is to go to heaven, and resignation is but an additional means of doing it" ("Social Contract, bk. IV, ch. 8).

Clearly, this attack towards Christianity follows the lines written by Machiavelli in his "Discourses". The arguments are similar: (a) Christianity favours tyranny, since it does nothing to prevent usurpers, but on the contrary, produces ethos that is more suitable to slaves than to free men, and (b) Christians are more interested in going to heaven than acting politically.

Another writer who agrees with Machiavelli on his critique of Christianity is, of course, Nietzsche. Nietzsche's explicit references to Machiavelli are, however, only delirious fragments scattered around his works, most of them in his "Nachgelassene Fragmente"⁴³. 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 are the passages where he is obviously using Machiavelli without referring to him. However, considering the scope of this study, recording them here is not purposeful. 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 similar state than Machiavelli's Italy, and invokes Machiavelli to connect national

⁴³ The passages where Nietzsche in fact refers to Machiavelli, are (in the critical edition of his Werke by Colli and Montinari): 2/189, 710; 5/47; 6/156; 7/669, 707; 11/19, 21, 28, 87, 237, 241, 454, 473; 12/344, 375, 532; 13/625; 14/448, 747. The only reference to Machiavellian politics is in "Nachgelassene Fragmente", Herbst 1887 (Werke, Band 12, page 532): "In praxi treibt auch der christliche Fürst die Politik Macchiavels: vorausgesetzt nämlich dass er nicht schlechte Politik treibt".

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.

Besides Bacon, the most notable defender of Machiavelli in the seventeenth century England was James Harrington, who saw Machiavelli as the “learned disciple” of the ancients and “the only politician of later ages” (“Oceana”, p. 10). Henry Neville goes so far as to speak of Machiavelli as incomparable and even divine (see Skinner 1998, 47). Then there were also men like Charles Davenant and Algernon Sidney who, according to Multamäki, combined Machiavellian republicanism and mercantilism, which was one of the crucial intellectual preconditions of England’s rise to predominance in Europe (Multamäki 1999). But perhaps the most interesting defender, who was not always very explicit in his praise of Machiavelli, was John Milton (see e.g. Armitage, Himy & Skinner 1995). It should also be noted that Harrington’s own adaptation of Machiavelli’s civic humanism influenced the opposition thinkers of the eighteenth century. In turn, these thinkers (especially the writers of “Cato’s Letters”, i.e. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon) shaped the thinking of the American revolutionaries, when they turned to the English opposition for inspiration (see Pocock 1975 and Sullivan 1994)⁴⁴.

In Italy, the list of Machiavelli’s defenders is naturally longer than elsewhere, since there is this sympathy for him on grounds of his patriotism. The eighteenth century, through patriotic writers such as e.g. Alfieri, Parini, and Algarotti, transmitted to the nineteenth century the image of a republican Machiavelli, a prophet of Italian unity (Ruffo-Fiore 1982, 134-135). Even Vico, whose thinking proceeds from religious beginnings inconsistent with the thoughts of Machiavelli, continued to reflect Machiavelli’s influence (see Mazzotta 1993)⁴⁵. According to Ruffo-Fiore, the nineteenth century is notable for (1) its historical approach, (2) its discovery and vindication of Machiavelli’s nationalism, and (3) its recognition of the interrelationship of Machiavelli’s works, and particularly the reconciliation between

⁴⁴ For a study of Machiavelli’s impact in America, see Pansini 1966.

⁴⁵ Mazzotta actually suggests that Vico marks a shift in the understanding of Machiavelli in Italy, which, in turn, unsettles the common assumption that there is a continuity in Italian speculative tradition. For example Gentile outlines a specifically Italian tradition of philosophy, focused on the pursuit of the natural world of immanence and its will to abide in the matters of this world, including Leonardo, Machiavelli, Telesio, Campanella, Bruno and Vico.

“The Prince” and the “Discourses” (Ruffo-Fiore 1982, 136). In the twentieth century, Machiavelli never ceased to be an obligatory point of reference, especially in the debates of Croce, Gentile and Gramsci⁴⁶ – thinkers whose theories span the whole spectrum of twentieth century’s ideologies. Machiavelli’s vast influence can be inferred from the fact that they all felt him very close. And truly, Machiavelli has been used in the leftist considerations of Gramsci the Marxist and, on the other hand, in building of the Fascist ideology by Gentile and Ercole. In Fascist thinking, “The Prince” demonstrated disjointed Italy’s need for an all-powerful dictator supported by a national army. Mussolini paid Machiavelli tribute by encouraging the distribution of the book in thousands of cheap copies. The article on Machiavelli in the “Encyclopedia Italiana” is written by no other than Mussolini himself. Adolf Hitler, according to his own word, kept “The Prince” by his bedside, where it served as a constant source of inspiration.

5. Conclusions

Machiavelli never used the term ‘reason of state’ or its synonyms. Still, it has often been said to describe his political doctrines. One possible explanation why he does not use the term is simply the fact that he did not feel any need to do so. His intention was not to describe or legitimate political action with reference to a Christian code of values. ‘Ragione di stato’ would have proved more useful to a theorist with a Christian viewpoint. In this respect, Meinecke is finally close to truth when he says: “Fond as he [Machiavelli] was of forceful and meaningful catch-words (coining many himself), he did not always feel the need to express in words the supreme ideas which filled him; if, that is, the thing itself seemed to him self-evident, if it filled him completely. For example, critics have noticed that he fails to express any opinion about the real final purpose of the State, and they have mistakenly deduced from this that he did not reflect on the subject.” (Meinecke, 1984, 29). In science, it is sometimes illuminating to ask the Holmesian question: “Why the dog did not

⁴⁶ On Gramsci’s Machiavelli, see Fontana 1994 and Struever 1993.

bark?”⁴⁷. The fact that the dog did nothing in the night-time inspires us to infer that the dog obviously knew the nightly visitor. All the more so, if it normally barks at strangers. The case of Machiavelli is analogous to this example. He did not make any stance whatsoever on ‘reason of state’, because he already “knew it”, so to say. Unlike Meinecke, however, I am not arguing that Machiavelli is nevertheless reflecting on the subject.

The other possible explanation is, of course, the fact that the term might not have been invented by the time Machiavelli was writing his books. We encounter it in 1547, but it is naturally possible that it existed some thirty-five years earlier. And, it is possible, even likely, that Machiavelli knew the *concept*, ignorant though he might have been of the *term*. At all events, should Machiavelli have wanted to use such an expression, he could have harked back to Cicero and other ancient and medieval writers who propounded similar ideas.

Machiavelli did not concern himself with similar topics than his contemporaries. This ‘relieves’ him of certain themes that we have been taught to regard as being the standard intellectual assumptions of the age⁴⁸. In his writings he omits many important topics that his contemporaries troubled their minds with. There aren’t any references to natural law⁴⁹. In Machiavelli’s Florence, there were artists like Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci⁵⁰, Botticelli etc. This artistic grandeur was the pride of his fellow-Florentines, but Machiavelli (who was a super-patriot in other issues) does not even mention it. Machiavelli also omits the meaning of the whole emerging industries of banking, trade etc⁵¹. These were the sources of wealth for the city-states of his time. But still, no reference to their importance in the writings of Machiavelli. No reference to discovery of America. No single passage on the

⁴⁷ See the episode “Silver Blaze” in the “Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes”.

⁴⁸ In regard to ‘standard intellectual assumptions’ of a given epoch, we must be very careful. The danger of anachronism is not the only, or not even the greatest danger. We must also be careful not to impose our own assumptions of the age to a given text or author. Usually we tend to think that past authors were somehow barbaric or childish in their beliefs. One of the most persistent fallacies concerning the Middle Ages is the modern myth according to which people during the Middle Ages really believed that the earth is flat. In fact, no educated person in the Middle Ages, or in the classical antiquity, did ever question the spherical form of the earth. On the origin of this ‘flat error’, see Russel 1997.

⁴⁹ See Berlin 1980, 36.

⁵⁰ On Machiavelli and Leonardo, there is a marvellous book by Roger D. Masters (Masters 1999).

⁵¹ On these omissions, see also Huovinen 1970.

importance of colonies or the significance of the great voyages. Not even though one of his subordinates in the Florentine chancery was a member of the Vespucci family. Why should this be? I would argue that Machiavelli was so thoroughly inside the world of Livy and other ancient authors⁵² that he dismissed the events in the real world around him. Not that he would not know of them, but that he did not regard them as important in his political thought, which imitated that of the ancients. Livy, Polybius, etc. do not trouble their minds with arts, banking, trade, rights and other such issues. Following them, Machiavelli omits these themes. But, more significantly, he adopts also their views concerning the relation between religion and the state. He does not divorce politics and morality (as is usually claimed) but offers an alternative morality, namely that of the ancients. Adoption of the ancient morality allows him to observe political life with certain calmness, without the fear of hell, so to say. Precisely because of this he does not need the concept of 'ragione di stato'. For him, it is perfectly clear from the very beginning that the state has a different morality than private citizens. It is so obvious, that he does not even mention it. Same goes for the relation between religion and politics. For Machiavelli, it is axiomatic that religion should serve politics and not the other way around. And in this respect, Christianity is something like the worst possible religion there is – which, in turn, is the reason why Machiavelli criticises it. His virtues, Christian vices that are through paradiastolic redescription termed as good, were naturally objectionable to any true Christian. But they might have been more tolerable had he not committed the unpardonable sin of coupling amorality, impiety and hypocrisy with a utilitarian view of religion. This is what gave birth to the anti-Machiavellian genre, not his alleged principle of reason of state – the principle, which Machiavelli does not even bother to mention.

It is also noteworthy that all who rejected Machiavelli did not necessarily reject the idea of reason of state. The Puritans could find some kind of a justification for reason of state in the writings of Calvin. But it was thought to be justified only if it be exercised for the Lord's sake. That is why they were careful to add the prefix "atheistical" to the doctrines of Machiavelli and his followers. Hence, it was Machiavelli's un-Christian lessons that provoked the spirit of opposition against him.

⁵² Compare de Grazia's claim: "For historical and other reasons the past so fascinated Machiavelli, that one might say, he became an habitué of the other world" (de Grazia 1984, 148).

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