

EDITORIAL

Machiavelli: Natural right and historicism

Elias VAVOURAS

Abstract: *The purpose of this investigation is to ascertain whether Machiavelli's political thought communicates with classical and modern natural right. This task is not so easy, because the basis of Machiavellian thought is in common with the fundamental beginning of the classical political philosophy: the knowledge of human nature. From this point of view Machiavelli starts from the same starting point as classical natural right and uses the same methodological tools as it. On the contrary, the outcome of his theoretical course is different. While for classical natural right the human purpose derives from human nature and any aim of political philosophy must serve this inviolable relationship, for Machiavelli the purpose is not completely disconnected from human nature but partially. When we talk about political domination we cannot ignore the human nature, there is no politics without the human essence. On the other hand, the fact that we start from human nature does not mean that we necessarily act for the benefit, for the betterment of human. By knowing the human essence we can benefit or destroy human. But even this is indifferent; the purpose of the political thought is not the improvement or the destruction of human, but the unimpeded exercise of domination or control over human by going into historicist or individualistic paths.*

Keywords: *Machiavelli, natural right, historicism, power, political philosophy, summum bonum, human nature.*

Introduction

Leo Strauss in his book *Natural Right and History* ranks Machiavelli on the verge of classical and modern natural right. In fact, he believes that Machiavelli and later Hobbes, whose thought contains Machiavellian directions, are the founders of modern natural right and hence of modern political philosophy. For Strauss

Machiavelli, by challenging the universal agreement that Socrates is the founder of political thought, will succeed in re-establishing political philosophy by disconnecting the means of domination from the pursued goal¹. This resulted in a reduction of purpose or in an indifference to the purpose of politics. While classical political thought sought to improve human through the knowledge of

human nature, modern political thought seeks through the knowledge of human nature to decisively control human nature rather than to improve it. The consequence of this change is that the purpose deviates from its original almost utopian aim, that is, the improvement of human², but on the contrary confirms the success of political domination. Where the purpose was the improvement of human, now the purpose is identified with the control of human.

Natural right

However, this dividing line between classical and modern natural right is not so obvious, nor can it remove the channels of communication between these two directions. Machiavelli starts precisely from the idea that there is a natural right, which determines or must determine historical and political realities. The core of human historical-political development is the human nature and its stability over time. Human was, is and will be the same, as long as his nature remains the same³. Machiavelli accepts from the outset the essence of classical political thought. To define human, we must first know his essence, his nature. There is no other fundamental principle for the knowledge of human things than the knowledge of human himself. This finding has the consequence that the knowledge of the political development or behavior of human is also based on the knowledge of the human substance. Political art or

science is impossible without the knowledge of human nature, but also without the confession that human nature remains the same in the movement and change⁴ of the history. We are therefore led to the assumption that any discussion about human and civil society is impossible without accepting the existence of a natural right, which is constantly in force. This legacy of classical political philosophy carries with it Machiavellian contemplation⁵. The natural right of human is the discovery of the eternal natural laws that determine his natural existence. The discovery of natural human right therefore marks the possibility of interpreting the human condition under the force of a fixed point of reference: the human nature and the manifestations, which it takes on in specific historical contexts.

Human nature

Human nature is the cornerstone of all human thinking⁶. Machiavelli introduces a pessimistic view of human⁷ – which he inherited from Thucydides and later bequeathed to Hobbes – not because he wants to consolidate a political pessimism, but because his goal is to remove any utopian conception of human, which hinders the accurate knowledge of human substance⁸. In order for political science to develop, the prism of morality of every age, which defines human as he wants to be, and not as he really is, must disappear from our field of vision. Human should not be defined by any moral theory that

nurtures excessive delusions about him, nor by any philosophical theory that sets the ultimate goal of the human condition in the land of the impossible⁹. Human must be defined by his own nature and as human nature should not be considered primarily the highest rational process but the most humble passions¹⁰. Human is defined by his passions, most of the time he uses rationality as a servant of his passions, as a tool to achieve his passions, rather than as a means of controlling his passions. The element that distinguishes human from other living beings is not the rationality, but the special nature of his passions. Although Machiavelli does not proceed to a scientific review of human passions, from his claims within his work we can conclude that the strongest human passions are the *instinct of self-preservation* that is constantly accompanied by the *fear of violent death*, or the identification of *pleasure with good (summum bonum)* and the *individualism* invested with the constant tendency of *greed*¹¹. People with these innate characteristics are not “evil” by nature, but they appear to be “evil” under the influence of moral norms, such as Christian morality. The Machiavellian interpretation of human is not really pessimistic, but it is considered pessimistic in the light of current ethics¹². Although not explicitly stated by Machiavelli, one could say that human passions are so powerful and uncontrollable that political domination becomes necessary in order to limit them, because

otherwise human would be led to destruction. Political domination is inevitable because the human passions are uncontrollable for the vast majority of the people¹³.

Human rationality – virtue (virtú)

But is human nature structured only by lower passions? Does not the famous rationalism, which according to classical natural right is considered the most powerful human natural characteristic, play any role in Machiavelli’s philosophical view? This is clearly not the case. Machiavelli considers that human nature is dual, structured by the element of rationality and the element of passions. Passions are the ones that direct the actions of most people, however some people manage through rationalism to realize the special function of their nature and to control their passions or to turn them in the right direction¹⁴. The ancient Greeks symbolically simulated this process with the Centaurs, these strange beings, who were half human and half animal and were the teachers of the most important heroes, such as Hercules or Achilles. This symbolism shows that the supreme teaching is the perception of the dual human nature and the understanding of the function of both passions and rationality¹⁵. Human must understand that half of his nature is an animal, that is, he is dominated by blind passions, while the other half is governed by rationalism as a means of self-perception and self-control of his passions¹⁶. Anyone who realizes

the dual nature of the Centaur is closer to the virtue. Few can escape from the complete influence of passions, activate the rational element of their nature, and understand human natural right¹⁷. Therefore, the first stage of the virtue is the self-knowledge of the function of passions, to know that human nature is dominated by passions and that these passions have a decisive influence on the behavior of most people. The second stage to the acquisition of the virtue is the detachment of rationality from the service of the passions and its placement in a position of governance over the passions. This dimension of virtue separates the holder of rationality from other people, who continue to be dominated by natural passions¹⁸. The third step to virtue is to prevail over others¹⁹. If a person can control his own passions through rationalism, then he can also control the passions of others, so that he becomes their master²⁰. Machiavelli does not question the political situation of the human, he does not examine whether human is by nature a political being or whether political society arose through an agreement, a social contract. He believes that the human condition is governed by inescapable political relations of domination and submission, but also that people due to their hedonistic and individualistic character are in a perpetual state of competition with each other to satisfy their passions to a greater degree than others. Virtue is therefore defined as domination over others²¹ through the rational control

of their passions. But when we talk about sovereignty, we are necessarily referring to political relations²². Sovereignty over others is sovereignty at the level of the political community. Absolute sovereignty belongs to the ruler. So the absolute realization of the virtue coincides with absolute sovereignty over others, that is, with political sovereignty²³.

Fortune

But is the rational control of the passions of both the human subject himself and other human beings enough to define someone as virtuous? Definitely not. Human lives and develops in a specific historical-political environment that shapes the prospects of merit or virtue. One may have managed to rationally control one's passions, have understood the natural right both in relation to himself and to others, but have never been able to control others through the knowledge²⁴ of the function of their passions. The catalyst for the acquisition of virtue is the acquisition of power over others. One cannot be supremely virtuous if he is not in a position of authority, in a position of control over others. Also, one may be in a position of power by chance, but not have the possibility of rational reading of the natural right both in his individual condition and in his political relations of power and submission with the others, so that the goal of virtue remains unfulfilled. Therefore, here this unbalanced factor, the *fortune*, plays a decisive

role in the path to virtue. The coincidence of power and individual merit paves the way for the final acquisition of the virtue, which is the rational control of the circumstances²⁵.

Thus, the acquisition of virtue presupposes four factors: a) the knowledge of the natural right regarding the function of human nature and its interaction with the historical-political environment²⁶, b) the individual establishment of virtue based on this knowledge, c) the evolution into position of political power, so that the control of the human nature is done through decisive governance over the other parts of the civil society²⁷ and d) the most effective possible reduction of the unforeseen factor of fortune²⁸. If any of these factors are not valid for any reason, we cannot speak of the presence of virtue in a human subject. In fact, one can have the first three preconditions adequately and only the inability to control his fortune may not allow him to complete his path to virtue.

However, Machiavelli believes that the factor of fortune can be drastically reduced and controlled effectively. Fortune is something that can be subdued by the determination of the bearer of virtue. Fortune is like a woman who, if one wants to have her under his control, must hit and beat her, while accordingly she prefers young lovers, because they are possessed by greater determination. The key to the control of fortune is the decisive action in the field of history²⁹. The knowledge of natural right allows the prediction of human

behavior and the unfolding of the historical events. If there is knowledge of the uniform evolution of human affairs due to the existence of a stable natural right, then the decisive taking of the threads of the history almost nullifies the fortune. Fortune can be an excuse or a really inaccessible factor only in limited cases, when the combination of facts and circumstances really makes the realization of virtue impossible. Most of the times, however, the prediction of human things through the knowledge of the human nature and the decisive action in the historical field make the factor of fortune maximally controllable³⁰.

Matter (*materia*), form (*forma*) and necessity (*necessita*)

Therefore, the process of realizing virtue equates to the decisive shaping of human and historical material³¹. Matter is human nature and historical circumstance, in which the possessor of Machiavellian virtue attempts to give the form he desires. This conceptual dipole *matter-form* of the ancient Greek philosophy is introduced by Machiavelli with a different meaning, to interpret the decisive action of the virtuous human subject in history. If we transfer the image from the Platonic *Timaeus*³², the possessor of Machiavellian virtue forms as creator the human and historical-political material that is in front of him under the knowledge offered to him by the textbook of the natural human right. Human creation, how-

ever, is not arbitrary; it is limited by the nature of its material. The human nature and the physiognomy of historical circumstances determine the actions of the virtuous creator. For example, one cannot go against the flow of the historical circumstances, because in this way the historical necessity will overcome and destroy him³³. In the same way, he must not ignore the necessity of natural human right, that is, the peculiar relationship between rationality and passion. Human can become the creator and the regulator of the history only if he reconciles himself with the necessity of the interaction of historical circumstance and human nature³⁴. Just as the Platonic creator convinces the irrational natural necessity to assist in the rational design of the creation, so the Machiavellian creator of the historical and political becoming realizes all the parameters and the inescapable relations created by human and historical necessity and succeeds to become a sovereign of its individual existence and of the historical time to which he belongs³⁵. Necessity is the essential mediator in the relation of the matter and form. No formulation of matter can be crowned with success without the proper adaptation to the law and to the causality³⁶ of the natural necessity³⁷. The human nature and the history are developed not by fortune, but by obeying a necessary law and an inviolable cause-and-effect relationship. The concept of fortune has been introduced by humans due to their inability to understand its nature

and environment of development. Fortune arises when there is an inability to rationally understand the necessary interaction between the elements and the material of the creation. The ignorance or the inability to interpret this causal necessity introduces the concept of fortune, which, however, should not be an excuse. Fortune is like those rushing rivers that carry everything in their path, while nothing foretells this situation. But the possessor of virtue must be prepared for any change of the historical circumstances, since there is even the slightest possibility, if he ignores them, that they will destroy him. The case of a rapid historical or political catastrophic torrent does not exist for anyone who provides and builds embankments that will drastically reduce the potential damage from a catastrophic storm of fortune³⁸.

Power and deception

The basic tools of reality shaping are the power and the deception. The ideal ruler, the possessor of Machiavellian virtue must be a mighty lion to frighten the wolves and at the same time a cunning fox that avoids traps³⁹. The power and the deception are key tools for exercising political power and consequently virtue⁴⁰. In fact, their presence must be simultaneous, as the absence of one of the two elements invalidates the power of the other. Power is the ultimate avoidable means of shaping, when the influence of the deception can no longer prevail⁴¹. It is better for the

ruler to create a virtuous image of himself in accordance with the norms of the existing morality while promoting his selfish goals, than to be forced to use hard violence⁴². In any case, on the other hand, it is better to use violence to the extent it is necessary, than to try unsuccessfully to gain the sympathy of the political body and thus lose the power. It is good for subjects to love and fear the sovereign, which shows the effective application of both the power and the deception, but if he cannot persuade them to love him, he must force them to fear him. The virtuous human shapes the historical or the political reality either by creating images that dominate through their persuasive power or through the direct application of his will to the particular relief of the historical circumstance⁴³. The function of the force or persuasion is not based on a scientific theory that they serve, but on the purpose pursued⁴⁴. Isocrates, for example, as Machiavelli's theoretical and practical forerunner, expressed the position that it is of no interest to prove why Pheidias' creations are beautiful, we are not interested in mathematical analogies or architectural knowledge⁴⁵ that certifies their superiority, their value is the convincing influence because of their beauty and their use for domination over others. We are not interested in proving the reason for the superiority of the Greek language or of the Greek culture of the classical era, but in using its convincing domination against the barbarians, against the

Persian Empire. The reason for the superiority of Greek culture has no value, but the fact that at that historical moment he convinces others of its superiority and this convincing power or this created image must be used for domination over others. In fact, Isocrates was absolutely convinced that not only the power of arms was enough for the domination of the Greeks in the East, but it was necessary and the convincing influence of the Greek spirit⁴⁶.

In exactly the same way, Machiavelli considers that the shaping of historical-political conditions has the dual character of the power and deception. Of course, he proposes the creation of convincing images, which can impose the power of the virtuous subject painlessly on others, without the need for the manifestation of immediate, *hard power*. The first part of domination is based on persuasion in the form of a *soft power*, while the second is based on hard power through the immediate application of violence⁴⁷. From this point of view, the creation of realistic images of domination is another aspect of power. The tyrant of Syracuse, Agathocles⁴⁸, took all the necessary steps to become virtuous and to be able to impose his will on history. No one can deprive him of the prize of virtue, as from an ordinary individual he managed to control the human nature and the physiognomy of the times and to become a ruler. The only thing Machiavelli accuses Agathocles of is that he used the *hard power* of violence instead of

the *soft power* of persuasion to achieve his goal. The virtue of Agathocles is unquestionable, that what Machiavelli raises is the failure of a virtuous realistic image of him according to the model of morality, which was in force at these times⁴⁹. Machiavelli denies morality in the definition of the true political virtue or art, but he does not deny the prevailing morality as a servant of political purpose, as a material for the creation of convincing, plausible images that promote the imposition of power, even in a soft manner.

Also, the *power* and the *deception* are the two basic virtues of the war. In a war, the positive law has no force, but only the *power* and the *deception* can give the victory or at least help to avoid the defeat. Machiavelli perceives the possessor of the virtue in a constant state of combat readiness in the process of shaping the material of creation. The creator of history is constantly, as Hobbes would say, in a state of war both with others he seeks to control through the knowledge of human nature and with the historical becoming, which is dominated by the constant movement and change. The historical or the political creation is an ongoing war condition, where rest is tantamount to a catastrophic defeat. The path to the acquisition or maintenance of the virtue is a constant warfare both with the others and with the circumstances, whoever does not know how to deceive⁵⁰ or prevail is far from virtue.

The purpose

However, this necessary *matter-form* relationship does not negate the will of the creator. Human creation in the field of the history bears the unique imprint of the human subject. The creator is limited by his own material, but can include his creation in his own subjective purpose. This is where the great difference with the ancient Greek perception of the matter-form relationship is located. For ancient Greek philosophy, the essence of the creation contains its purpose. The nature of a being also gives us the purpose of this being. There can be no purpose to a natural being independent of its nature. There is a proper natural order within the human body that equates to a state of health. The purpose of the human body is perfectly connected with its proper natural order. Bliss is a proper natural state of the soul that is directly related to the whole natural order of the human being. Therefore, human bliss is identified with the right natural order, with the natural right of human. Every philosophical theory serves this purpose, the knowledge of the human nature and the attainment of the correct natural order within it. Human stands out from other living beings because of his rational ability. So the peculiarity of human nature lies in the possibility of the rationalization. Human natural right imposes the rule of rationality within the human natural order. Human bliss is a state of natural human right, therefore a state of

rationality. Accordingly the blissful human must approach a life of maximum rational activity, a state approaching the life of the wise. The wise human, if we rely on the order of human natural right is clearly closer to bliss than a human dominated by bodily pleasures. The *summum bonum* for human cannot be the pleasure; the good cannot be identified with the pleasant. This does not invalidate the proposition that bliss, which based to rationality is something pleasant, on the contrary it is the most pleasant state from which all pleasant things spring. In the case of the human political community the situation is not much different from that of the human being. The civil society is a natural or artificial entity that is structured in terms of rationality. It is a whole, an organization whose parts perform a specific purpose serving the rational purpose of human bliss. If the individual prosperity has as purpose the rationality, civil prosperity must shape the conditions for the prosperity of rationalism within the political community.

The maximum service of this purpose can occur only if the wise men are placed in a position of government or at least they can legislate aiming at the maximum natural order of the political whole. It is obvious that those who have established rationality in themselves and know the natural purpose of the human being must be placed in a position of power, because only in this way can the political body be improved. Putting people in a position of political

governance, who fail to grasp natural right and insist on equating good with pleasure, is an act of irrationality and blatant natural injustice. The ultimate goal of classical political philosophy is to improve the human beings under its care. Political power is not simply about controlling people but about their natural, anthropological improvement, that is, creating as rationally as possible people who maintain their political unity through their common obedience to natural human right. Of course, the purpose of classical political philosophy is not something that can be easily achieved. The accomplishment of the purpose of the human being on the basis of the human essence is the supreme good, which is equivalent to bliss. For Aristotle this can only happen on the margins of the civil society (which serves only to achieve self-preservation and the necessary sociability), in a theoretical-philosophical life with plenty of free time away from the occupations of political life, which keep human far from achieving the natural purpose of the rationalism. While according to Plato the philosophers, knowing the nature and the purpose of human beings, achieve the ultimate goal of the bliss of rationalism, they seem to be on the *islands of the blessed*, although they are still alive, they are far from the world of tangible reality. The problem is growing in the implementation of a political philosophy that seeks to integrate people as political parts of a larger political organization. Aristotle suffices to make socio-

political remarks on the current regimes in order to strengthen the presence of rationalism within the civil society. He does not seem to believe that the political formations of his time can provide a complete anthropological integration for all political parties⁵¹. Certainly political reforms can be implemented for the natural betterment of the people, but the perfect integration or the perfect political bliss is not present in Aristotelian work.

Plato, respectively, foreseeing the imperfection of the human political things, will suggest the creation of an ideal state, which will aim at the maximum political integration of human collectivity under the distinction of the natural role of each political party. The placement of philosophers in a position of power guarantees the maximum diffusion of rationality and natural order in a society that approaches to the maximum extent the absolute human individual and collective bliss. However, such a thing, despite its philosophical, rational or scientific documentation by Plato or his absolute coexistence with the human natural right, has never had a real application in the historical field; it remains to this day an inaccessible utopia.

Machiavelli does not deny all this; he believes that the goals of the political philosophy must be as high as possible, just like the capable archers, to achieve difficult goals, aim as high as they can⁵². In addition, he accepts the idea of the classical philosophy about the existence of a

stable human background, a natural right that allows the interpretation of the human things through the knowledge of the human nature. Any political art or science must begin and end in human essence, in natural human right. Also, according to the classical philosophical model, he does not deny the dual character of the human nature, human is structured by rationality and passions; he is both human and animal. We can also say that he favors, just like ancient Greek philosophy, the rationalism over the passions in the task of defining virtue⁵³. The virtuous human in Machiavelli is someone who can rationally control both his own passions and those of the others, but also adapt to the historical circumstances⁵⁴. The origins of Machiavellian thought are purely classical, from there it starts and within this direction it argues. Machiavelli does not deny classical political thought, but instead he considers that continues or improves it⁵⁵.

What Machiavelli certainly denies is the utopian character of classical political thought⁵⁶. It is important that he does not try to break the *substance-purpose* relationship with regard to human bliss. The bliss, the human integration may well be associated with a state of rational domination over the passions in a condition of contemplation and theoretical preoccupation, as Machiavelli emphasizes of himself at the beginning of the *Prince*. The picture given to us, with Machiavelli retiring every night to his library and discussing

with the texts of the great men of the past, not at the center of the political action but on the sidelines, resembles the *theoretical life* that Aristotle suggests in *Nicomachean Ethics*⁵⁷. The relation of the human natural integration to the rationalism, the close relation of human nature and purpose, is not directly disputed by Machiavelli, at least as far as individual bliss is concerned. What is disputed is the purpose of political philosophy or science. Ancient Greek philosophy proposed as its goal the improvement of the people under its care, its purpose was to achieve both individual and collective bliss by following the natural order, the natural human right. On the contrary, Machiavelli, based on experience, finds that the reduction of human improvement to a project of collective bliss is something utopian, if not irrational. Human natural integration can be achieved through the domination of the rationalism, but in the vast majority of people this cannot happen. The majority of people are defined by the most humble passions and not by rationalism. Trying to apply the natural integration to the human majority is pure irrationality, an attempt that is initially thwarted by failure and carries serious risks for the one who takes the responsibility for this implementation. The relationship of a rational human with the others, no matter how much he is governed by humanitarian feelings towards them, can only take the form of the relation of rationality to the passions, that is, only the form of

submission. Human relations can only take the form of political relations, that is, relations of power and submission. Leaving someone at the disposal of the others is like leaving himself as a pawn of his passions, in which case the catastrophe is unavailable.

So in order to be able to have relations with the majority of the people, one must treat them just like in the irrational passions, that is, after understanding their function, to impose his rational domination on them. Therefore, the political philosophy or science, since it is an occupation based on the political relations of the people, must aim at the control of the majority of the people through the reasonable domination over their passions. Political philosophy does not aim at the rationalization according to the natural right of the political body, but at its absolute control through the knowledge of human passions. The rational integration of human does not concern the collective civil society but only the ruler or some wise men, who live on the margins of political activity.

If all this applies the purpose of human bliss or natural integration and the purpose of the political philosophy are radically different. Human integration as the goal of the political philosophy is something out of place, it can never happen. On the contrary, political sovereignty through the understanding and the control of human natural passions is something that can be accomplished in realistic terms. In this sense, the purpose of

the political philosophy, although derived from the human nature, is not identified with the natural rational integration of man but with rational domination over man. Machiavelli, starting from classical political thought, considers the natural human right as the only core of any political science, but emphatically refuses to equate the natural integration of human with the purpose of political science. Political science must start from the human essence, the human natural order, but not to perfect it, but to control it, to dominate it. The purpose of political science is not the collective bliss through the imitation or reproduction of the natural order, but the control of the majority of people through the knowledge of the natural order.

Political philosophy or political methodology?

But here an important question arises. If we cut the essence of a being from its purpose can we talk about a rationally structured science? Medical science, for example, aims at the human health, which is based on the correct order of human nature. The purpose of the doctor is to maintain the natural order of a healthy person through prevention and to restore the natural order of a patient through treatment. Medicine does not want to control or dominate human nature for the benefit of the doctor, but aims to improve the patient through prevention and treatment⁵⁸. If we disconnect the human substance

from the purpose of medicine, we cannot speak of science, but of the exploitation of the sick man or of quackery. Ancient Greek philosophy fully accepts this inseparable relation of substance -purpose and on this relation the concept of science is developed. The same scientific basis applies in the case of virtues. Aristotle perceives the supreme moral and political virtue, the prudence as knowledge-science of the appropriate means to achieve virtuous goals. To be someone prudent means to know the essence of human and to seek the natural perfection of human based on the scientific knowledge of the human natural order. Instead, it defines as formidability the knowledge of the means to achieve whatever goal the human subject sets. Formidability is a kind of knowledge, but it is not a science, because it does not see the purpose of human as an extension of its essence, but flows into the uncertainty of the subjectivity. The purpose depends on the will of the human subject. But science that flows into subjectivity does not exist, because science is a rationally structured process, where the essence of the object under study, its cognitive object, is the basis of the rational proof of its purpose. In classical political thought, political philosophy and political science are the same thing, because the essence and the purpose of human, either as an individual or as a member of a civil society, are directly interdependent.

If all this is true, under the terms of the ancient Greek philosophy

Machiavelli does not suggest a political philosophy or science but a political methodology of human control. As he states in the beginning of the *Prince*, his research was based on the knowledge of the ancients and the experience of the events of his time⁵⁹. For ancient Greek philosophy, knowledge is a feature of philosophy or science, while experience is a feature of the sophistic methodology of human control. Sophistic movement does not deny the philosophical knowledge but uses it to construct theoretical or moral images that convince people of their truthfulness. The sophistic methodology moves between existence and non-existence in order to serve a subjective purpose. It adapts to the circumstances⁶⁰ and skillfully changes forms like a chameleon, to achieve selfish goals. Machiavellian thought moves in the same direction, based on the *experience* of things and using the *knowledge* of human natural right from the classics creates a methodology of domination over human. This *instrumental function*⁶¹ of the political art lacks a purpose based on the knowledge of human substance and creates as many purposes as the human subjects who use it. Machiavelli's *political methodology* is completely neutral, offering an instrument of domination tailored to the targeting of the subject of action. The purpose that it sets may well be constantly changing depending on the circumstances. So there are as many purposes as the subjects of action, but also as many purposes as the adaptations of

the human subject to historical necessity. The only thing that is certain in this political methodology is the possibility of domination over human nature through the knowledge of natural human right through the power or the deception. So the means of domination are as much as the means of enforcing power or deception⁶². Nothing restricts the use of a means to aim a selfish purpose than the risk of losing sovereignty and thus of losing the intended purpose. Machiavelli's objections to the use of soft power to achieve sovereignty (as in the case of Agathocles) are not related to moral or humanitarian concerns, but to the risk of tarnishing the image of the sovereign, which may cost the loss of the sovereignty and the non-completion of virtue. Any means of power or deception is legitimate in the exercise of sovereignty as long as it does not call into question the sovereignty itself. The use of a harmful means for domination itself is a condition of irrational reading of the history and adaptation to the necessity of circumstances.

Historicism

Under these circumstances, the diversion to the historicism is inevitable. The rupture of the substance-purpose relationship inevitably leads to the right of the power as hard violence or elaborate deception. According to historicism, each historical period establishes and explains the human values in a different way. Consequently, there are no absolute

values or truths, but everything is relative, since only the historical moment can objectify a truth. Historicism contrasts with the substance-purpose relationship of ancient Greek philosophy, as the truth or the purpose of a being is not signified by the essence but by the power to impose this truth on history. Machiavelli falls exactly into this line of historicism. He believes that the virtue or the value of a person is not determined by the realization of the natural purpose, but by the power of the human subject to impose his will in history. Therefore each historical moment can justify a different subjective will. The purpose for example, which Machiavelli served, was to unite the small states of Italy into one large nation-state capable of meeting the historical necessity⁶³. On the other hand, the purpose of the Roman Catholic Church was to keep these states divided in order to control them. Both purposes are characterized by objective and moral neutrality⁶⁴, Machiavellian thought cannot morally or virtually applaud either of the two purposes. The correctness, the virtue, the value lies in the correct use of the Machiavellian political methodology, that is, in the decisive use of the means of persuasion or violence in the control of human nature and the predominance of the political subject in the historical necessity. In the background, virtue is identified with the power of domination over others and over history. This relativism as to the purpose of

human virtue is a structural feature of Machiavelli's political thought⁶⁵.

Conclusions

1) Machiavellian thought undoubtedly owes its origins to the ancient Greek philosophy. In fact, it comes as a continuation of the classical philosophical thought based on the proposition that any interpretation of human must have as its beginning the knowledge of human nature. Machiavelli, before proceeding to any philosophical crisis, accepts the background of an unchanging natural right, which regulates the order of human substance and human social and political behavior.

2) In addition, Machiavelli accepts from the classics the distinction between natural and rational part within human nature, where the first is the animal part, while the second is the human. He believes that the majority of the people are defined by the somatic part of human nature, ie by passions, while some who activate the human part, ie rationality, can gain a self-control of their passions but also control others through the knowledge of the human nature and especially through the knowledge of the function of the passions.

3) For Machiavelli, therefore, virtue, just as for the classics, presupposes the dominance of the human rationality over both passions and the movement and change of historical-political things⁶⁶. Virtue is defined as the supremacy of the human element, that is, of rationality, but also as the

domination of the rational subject over others through the knowledge of human nature and the adaptation to the historical necessity.

4) The fundamental difference between Machiavelli and the classics is the rupture by him of the substance-purpose relationship. For the classics, the substance-purpose relationship is inseparable, the essence of a being, its nature, determines the purpose of this being. Under this inseparable relationship the purpose of classical political philosophy is the improvement of human through the knowledge of the human natural right. On the contrary, Machiavelli, by breaking this connection, claims that the knowledge of human nature is not useful to us for the discovery of human purpose or the improvement of human, but for the service of whatever selfish purpose the virtuous human subject sets.

5) This essential difference with the classics casts doubt on whether Machiavelli suggests a political science or philosophy with the strict meaning of the term. For a science or philosophy, its cognitive subject is in absolute relation with the intended

purpose, to the extent that it can prove itself rationally from where it starts and ends. If we deviate from this rational relationship between cognitive object and purpose, we lead to a methodology for the promotion of selfish goals and certainly not to a science or philosophy.

6) Therefore, if Machiavelli proposes a political methodology of domination over human based on the knowledge of human nature as opposed to the classical political philosophy that sought to improve human through the science of the human nature and the political societies he constructs, it means that offers a morally and teleologically neutral tool of political subjugation⁶⁷. This inevitably leads us to historicism, as the successful outcome of domination regardless of the used means and the pursued aims defines the historical reality and establishes any human truth. The moral neutrality of the Machiavellian political method leads to the core of the concept of historicism, that is, that the power of consolidation of subjectivity in human history is the objective historical reality or truth.

Notes

¹ Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago 1953, pp. 4, 58, 61, 65, 162, 177, 178, 179, 180, 190. Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 49-53.

² PLATO, *Statesman*, 293.d-e: *ἔωσπερ ἂν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τῶ δικαίῳ προσχρόμενοι σφζόντες ἐκ χείρονος*

βελτίῳ ποιῶσι κατὰ δύναμιν, ταύτην τότε καὶ κατὰ τοὺς τοιοῦτους ὄρους ἡμῖν μόνην ὀρθὴν πολιτείαν εἶναι ῥητέον.. Cf. Maurizio VIROLLI, *Machiavelli (Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought)*, Oxford University Press 1998, pp. 50-55. Cf. James Hankins, "Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue", *Italian Culture*, Vol. xxxii No. 2,

- September 2014, 98-109, p.102-103.
 Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, p. 63.
- ³ Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's politics*, University of Chicago 2017, p. 99.
- ⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, III*.
- ⁵ Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli (Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought)*, Oxford University Press 1998, pp. 50-55.
- ⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XVII, XVIII*.
- ⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XVII, XXIII*. Cf. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's politics*, University of Chicago 2017, p. 19.
- ⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XV*.
- ⁹ Cf. Alison Brown, "Philosophy and religion in Machiavelli" in John M. Najemy (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion To Machiavelli*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 157-172.
- ¹⁰ Cf. E. A., Rees, *Political thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2004, pp. 3-4.
- ¹¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, III, XVII, XIX*.
- ¹² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XVIII*.
- ¹³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XVIII*. Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading*, Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 69-88.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XIV*. Cf. Hubert Schleichert, "Border-Value Morality and Semantical Coherence in Machiavelli's *Prince*" in Leonidas Donskis (ed.), *NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI: History, Power, and Virtue*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2011, pp. 15-26.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 197-200.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire*, Cambridge University Press 2004, pp. 30-39. Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 156-165.
- ¹⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XVIII*.
- ¹⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, XXII*. Cf. Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire*, Cambridge University Press 2004, pp. 21-28.
- ¹⁹ Cf. E. A., Rees, *Political thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2004, pp. 7-8.
- ²⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, VI*. Cf. E. A., Rees, *Political thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2004, pp. 9-11.
- ²¹ Cf. Peter S., Donaldson, *Machiavelli and mystery of state*, Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 10. Cf. John Plamenatz, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau*, Oxford University Press 2012, pp. 29-40.
- ²² Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli (Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought)*, Oxford University Press 1998, pp. 43-46.
- ²³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, VII*. Cf. Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and power: on the relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 74-90. Cf. E. A., Rees, *Political thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2004, pp. 17-18.

- ²⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VII. Cf. Erica BENNER, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading*, Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 89-110.
- ²⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXV. Cf. John P. McCormick, "Of Tribunes and Tyrants: Machiavelli's Legal and Extra-Legal Modes for Controlling Elites", *Ratio Juris*, Vol. 28 No. 2, June 2015 pp. 252-266.
- ²⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XLX.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁸ *Ibidem*, *The Prince*, I.
- ²⁹ *Ibidem*, *The Prince*, XXV.
- ³⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, III, XXIV, XXVI. Cf. John T. Scott, *The Routledge guidebook to Machiavelli's The Prince*, Routledge 2016, pp. 219-238.
- ³¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXVI.
- ³² Plato, *Timaeus*, 48a-e.
- ³³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VI. Cf. Maurizio Viroli, *The quotable Machiavelli*, Princeton University Press 2016, pp. xxiv- xxvii.
- ³⁴ Cf. Quentin Skinner, "Machiavelli on the maintenance of liberty", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Routledge 1983, 18:2, pp. 3-15. Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 147-149.
- ³⁵ Alissa M. Ardito, *Machiavelli and the Modern State: The Prince, the Discourses on Livy, and the Extended Territorial Republic*, Cambridge University Press 2015, p. 65.
- ³⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VII.
- ³⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXV.
- ³⁸ *Ibidem*, *The Prince*, XXV.
- ³⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVIII, XIX. Cf. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's politics*, University of Chicago, 2017, p. 17.
- ⁴⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VI, VII.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Manfred J. Holler, "Niccolò Machiavelli on Power" in Leonidas DONSKIS (ed.), *Niccolò Machiavelli: History, Power, and Virtue*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2011, pp. 27-48.
- ⁴² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVIII.
- ⁴³ Cf. Virginia Cox, "Rhetoric and ethics in Machiavelli", in John M. Najemy (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion To Machiavelli*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 173-189. Cf. Victoria Ann., Kahn, *Machiavellian rhetoric: from the counter-reformation to Milton*, Princeton University Press 1994, pp. 19, 23.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Maurizio Viroli, "Machiavelli's Realism", *Constellations*, Volume 14, No 4, 2007, pp. 466-482.
- ⁴⁵ Isocrates, *Encomium of Helen*, 5: πολὺ κρεῖττόν ἐστιν περὶ τῶν χρησίων ἐπεικῶς δοξάζειν ἢ περὶ τῶν ἀχρήστων ἀκριβῶς ἐπίστασθαι.
- ⁴⁶ Isocrates. *Panathenaicus*. 50.
- ⁴⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVII. Cf. Vasileios Syros, "'Soft' and 'Hard' Power in Islamic Political Advice Literature", *Violence in Islamic Thought*, vol. 2: *From the Mongols to European Imperialism*, ed. Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 165-190. Vasileios Syros, "Evil Lords, Benign Historians: Strongman Politics in Medieval India and Renaissance Florence", *Intellectual History Review* 29:1, Special Issue: *From Ancient Theology to Civil*

- Religion*, ed. Francesco Borghesi 2019, pp. 11-34. Cf. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Powers to Lead*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 29-32, 38-44.
- ⁴⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VIII. Cf. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's politics*, University of Chicago, 2017, p. 7. Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading*, Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 111-122.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli (Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought)*, Oxford University Press 1998, pp. 97-113.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 136-139.
- ⁵¹ Pasquale Pasquino "Machiavelli and Aristotle: The anatomies of the city", *History of European Ideas* 35 (2009), pp. 397-407.
- ⁵² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VI. Filippo Del Lucchese, *The political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Edinburgh University Press 2015, pp. 25-27.
- ⁵³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIII.
- ⁵⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVIII. Filippo Del Lucchese, *The political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Edinburgh University Press 2015, pp. 36-38.
- ⁵⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Lettera a Francesco Vettori*.
- ⁵⁶ Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 367-372.
- ⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 1178a: τὸ γὰρ οἰκεῖον ἐκάστω τῇ φύσει κράτιστον καὶ ἡδιστόν ἐστιν ἐκάστω· καὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δὴ ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος, εἴπερ τοῦτο
- μάλιστα ἀνθρώπος. οὗτος ἄρα καὶ εὐδαιμονέστατος.
- ⁵⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, III. Cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press 2009, pp. 64-70.
- ⁵⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince: Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici*. Cf. Leonidas Donskis, "The Modern Who Believed that He Was the Ancient: Niccolò Machiavelli in European Thought and Political Imagination" in Leonidas Donskis (ed.), *Niccolò Machiavelli: History, Power, and Virtue*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2011, pp. 49-66.
- ⁶⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, II. Cf. Maureen Ramsey, "Machiavelli's Political Philosophy in *The Prince*" in Nigel Warburton, Jon Pike, Derek Matravers (ed.), *Reading political philosophy: Machiavelli to Mill*, Routledge 2000, pp. 33-42.
- ⁶¹ Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago 1953, pp. 4-5. Cf. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's politics*, University of Chicago 2017, p. 11.
- ⁶² Cf. E. A., Rees, *Political thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2004, pp. 8-9.
- ⁶³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXVI.
- ⁶⁴ John Plamenatz, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau*, Oxford University Press 2012, pp. 17-28.
- ⁶⁵ Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago 1953, pp. 4-5: *Such a science is instrumental and nothing but instrumental: it is born to be the handmaid of any powers or any interests that be.*
- ⁶⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VI.

⁶⁷ Filippo Del Lucchese, *The political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli*,

Edinburgh University Press 2015, pp. 34-36.

References

- ARDITO, Alissa M., *Machiavelli and the Modern State: The Prince, the Discourses on Livy, and the Extended Territorial Republic*, Cambridge University Press 2015.
- ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean ethics*.
- BENNER, Erica, *Machiavelli's ethics*, Princeton University Press, 2009.
- IDEM, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading*, Oxford University Press 2013.
- BROWN, Alison, "Philosophy and religion in Machiavelli" in John M. NAJEMY (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 157-172.
- COX, Virginia, "Rhetoric and ethics in Machiavelli", in John M. NAJEMY (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 173-189.
- DEL, LUCCHESI Filippo, *The political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
- DONALDSON, Peter S., *Machiavelli and mystery of state*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- DONSKIS, Leonidas, "The Modern Who Believed that He Was the Ancient: Niccolò Machiavelli in European Thought and Political Imagination" in Leonidas DONSKIS (ed.), *NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI: History, Power, and Virtue*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY, 2011, pp. 49-66.
- FONTANA, Benedetto, *Hegemony and power: on the relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1993.
- HANKINS, James, "Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue", *Italian Culture*, Vol. xxxii No. 2, September 2014, 98-109, p.102-103.
- HOLLER, Manfred J., "Niccolò Machiavelli on Power" in Leonidas DONSKIS (ed.), *NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI: History, Power, and Virtue*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2011, pp. 27-48.
- HÖRNQVIST, Mikael, *Machiavelli and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- ISOCRATES, *Encomium of Helen*.
- ISOCRATES. *Panathenaicus*.
- KAHN, Victoria Ann., *Machiavellian rhetoric: from the counter-reformation to Milton*, Princeton University Press, 1994.
- MACHIAVELLI, Niccolò, *The Prince*, translated with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield. - 2nd ed., The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- MCCORMICK, John P., "Of Tribunes and Tyrants: Machiavelli's Legal and Extra-Legal Modes for Controlling Elites", *Ratio Juris*, Vol. 28 No. 2, June 2015, pp. 252-66.
- NYE, Joseph S. Jr., *The Powers to Lead*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- PASQUINO, Pasquale "Machiavelli and Aristotle: The anatomies of the city", *History of European Ideas* 35 (2009), pp. 397-407.
- PLAMENATZ, John, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau*, Oxford University Press 2012.
- PLATO, *Statesman*.
- PLATO, *Timaeus*.

- RAMSEY, Maureen, “Machiavelli’s Political Philosophy in *The Prince*” in Nigel WARBURTON, Jon PIKE, Derek MATRAVERS (ed.), *Reading political philosophy: Machiavelli to Mill*, Routledge 2000, pp. 33-42.
- REES, E. A., *Political thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: revolutionary Machiavellism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- SCHLEICHERT, Hubert, “Border-Value Morality and Semantical Coherence in Machiavelli’s *Prince*” in Leonidas DONSKIS (ed.), *NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI: History, Power, and Virtue*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2011, pp. 15-26.
- SCOTT, John T., *The Routledge guidebook to Machiavelli’s The Prince*, Routledge 2016,
- SKINNER, Quentin, “Machiavelli on the maintenance of liberty”, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Routledge 1983, 18:2, pp. 3-15.
- STRAUSS, Leo, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, 1953.
- SYROS, Vasileios, “‘Soft’ and ‘Hard’ Power in Islamic Political Advice Literature”, *Violence in Islamic Thought*, vol. 2: *From the Mongols to European Imperialism*, ed. Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 165–190.
- SYROS, Vasileios, “Evil Lords, Benign Historians: Strongman Politics in Medieval India and Renaissance Florence”, *Intellectual History Review* 29:1, Special Issue: *From Ancient Theology to Civil Religion*, ed. Francesco Borghesi, 2019, pp. 11–34.
- VIROLI, Maurizio, *Machiavelli (Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought)*, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- IDEM, *The quotable Machiavelli*, Princeton University Press, 2016.
- IDEM, “Machiavelli’s Realism”, *Constellations*, Volume 14, No 4, 2007, pp. 466-482.
- ZUCKERT, Catherine H., *Machiavelli’s politics*, University of Chicago, 201