Milan M. Brdar[1]
Institute of Social Sciences
Belgrade (Serbia)

UDC 141.7 Макијавели Н.
321.01
Original scientific article
Received: 27.11.2025.
Accepted: 21.12.2025.
doi: 10.5937/napredak6-63060

Rethinking Machiavelli's *The Prince*: Humanist Critique and the Ethics of Objective Inquiry

Abstract: This paper demonstrates that a proper understanding of Machiavelli's *The Prince* requires a careful reconstruction of the historical and cultural context of the Renaissance at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. Particular attention is given to the humanists' teaching on the virtuous man (*vir virtutis*) and the "mirror for princes" genre that emerged from it. Within this framework, the persistent humanist critique of Machiavelli – one that continued to exert influence well into the twentieth century – can be fully comprehended. In contrast, the interpretation advanced here contends that Machiavelli was the first to introduce a principle of methodological objectivity, later described as the value-neutral inquiry. By adopting this stance, Machiavelli can be regarded as a pioneer of political science: without the methodological foundation he established, the discipline itself could not have developed. Through adherence to this principle, he was able to present an objective account of political reality and to make it publicly intelligible, demonstrating remarkable intellectual courage. In light of this achievement, Machiavelli deserves rehabilitation from the long-standing accusations and recognition as an impartial investigator of the nature of politics— a role that humanist criticism has never been able acknowledge.

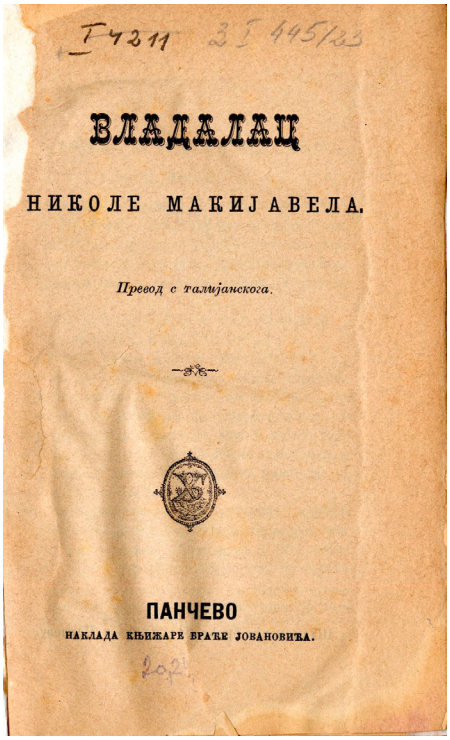
Keywords: Machiavelli, politics, mirror for prince, humanism, hypocrisy, moral appearance, ruler.

> *That book brought me, I am well aware, a sinister fame: it made me responsible for all tyrannies; it drew down upon me the curse of peoples who saw in me the embodiment of their hatred of despotism; it poisoned my final days, and the condemnation of posterity seems to pursue me still.*
>
> *Machiavelli, Dialogue between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*

Introduction

It must be acknowledged that in the literature, no figure has been as relentlessly attacked, condemned, and, quite literally, slandered as Machiavelli. How is it that no one finds it strange that such negative criticism has persisted as a constant for half a millennium? Are the reasons for this attitude truly to be

[1] mbrdar14@gmail.com



The first translations of Niccolò Machiavelli's The Prince in Serbia were published in Pančevo and Belgrade in 1881 and 1907. The first Serbian editions were printed by the publishing houses of Jovanović Brothers and Bookstore Geca Kon.
Photo: Matica Srpska Library.

found in him, or should they be sought elsewhere? It is time to finally resolve this dilemma.

A sound interpretation of Machiavelli's intellectual achievement requires at least a minimal reconstruction of the historical and socio-political context of the Renaissance – restricted, of course, to what is heuristically relevant. In this study, that context will encompass the period from the thirteenth century (*Duecento*) to the early sixteenth century (*Cinquecento*), culminating in the appearance of Machiavelli.

A second condition for an objective interpretation and assessment of Machiavelli's work is a critique of humanism. This is indispensable because, from the Renaissance onward, humanism has functioned as a spontaneously imposed and authoritative interpretive horizon, one that remains operative to this day. Bearing this in mind, we will understand how it was possible for the deeply negative assessments of Machiavelli – assessments bound to Renaissance circumstances – to become universalized and treated as valid regardless of time and place. Since we do not accept these assessments in the slightest, as we will later explain, we shall leave aside all previous interpretations of Machiavelli

in this text. It will be of greater importance for the reader to see what a new – and indeed more just – interpretation of *The Prince* looks like.

For a historically grounded and contextually sensitive interpretation of Machiavelli's work, as well as for drawing conclusions relevant to our own time, three elements are essential:

1. The fundamental characteristics of the Renaissance mode of intellectuality;
2. A central thematic axis conducive to linking with Machiavelli;
3. The contextual consequences of Machiavelli's innovations.

As regards the broader context, the emergence of humanism in Italy was conditioned by two positive and two negative factors. The positive factors were the Italian rhetorical tradition and the revival of the cultural heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. The negative factors were the socio-political crises that beset the city-republics during the Renaissance and the consolidation of scholasticism as the dominant form of learned culture.

Circumstances and Conditions in the Formation of Humanist Thought

Ars dictaminis

The intellectual figure we later identify as the humanist arose from the milieu of the rhetorical teacher – specifically, from that branch of medieval rhetorical practice known as *ars dictaminis*, the art of composing letters. Those who taught the rules of epistolary style were known as *dictatores*. The central purpose of rhetorical training in this sense was to prepare students to draft official letters and administrative documents with clarity, precision, and persuasive force, thereby equipping them for notarial and administrative posts in the city-republics or, alternatively, in the Papal Curia.

From the twelfth century onward, the ability to compose well-formed letters was highly valued in Italy. Together with rhetoric, *ars dictaminis* constituted the core of the legal *curriculum* at Italian universities (Wieruszowski, 1971, 361). Adalbert of Samaria, the leading rhetorician at Bologna, was the first to describe himself as a *dictatore* (Murphy, 1974, 213), a designation he employed upon composing his instructional handbook *Praecepta dictaminum* (dated between 1111 and 1118) (Adalbertus, 1961; see also Haskins, 1927, 173; 1929). His work is generally taken as the moment at which *ars dictaminis* became a systematic discipline governed by formalized rules.[2] These rules dealt not with the substance of letters but with their structure: their compositional arrangement, their functional types, and their respective rhetorical purposes. In one of his treatises, Adalbert supplied forty-five *formulae*, or model letters. His templates were quickly taken up by later *dictatores* (Murphy, 1974, 212, 220; Skinner, 1979, 29), so that by the end of the twelfth century there existed a substantial body of *dictamina* offering model letters to the pope, to cardinals, to emperors, to civic magistracies, to consuls, professors, and a variety of other officials.

[2] According to the editor of Adalbert's manual, he is the father of the *ars dictaminis* (Adalbertus, 1961, p. V).

Once these epistolary types had become codified, a significant shift occurred – from the technicalities of form to the substantive issues that letters addressed. This development, visible from the mid-twelfth century onward, unfolded along two distinct lines. First, treatises on *ars dictaminis* increasingly took up the *subject matter* of political, legal, and social concerns confronting the Italian communes. The *dictatores* thus began to function not merely as technical instructors but as commentators on the civic problems of their day. This tendency gained momentum in the first decades of the thirteenth century (*Duecento*), marking the second major expansion of *ars dictaminis*.

The second line of development involved the increasingly common practice of pairing instruction in letter writing with *ars arengendi*, the art of public oratory. Guido Faba (1190–1240), one of the most distinguished rhetoricians of the period, was the first to combine the two disciplines. Around 1230 he published a collection of speeches and letters that would decisively shape the rhetorical culture. (Kantorowicz, 1941–43, 256, 275; Fulhaber, 1978).

The convergence of *ars dictaminis* and *ars arengendi*, set against the backdrop of the growing political tensions within the city-republics, transformed rhetoric into a vehicle for civic and political engagement (Kantorowicz, 1943, 41–57). The rhetorical instructor – once devoted primarily to technical competence – now emerged as an intellectual commentator who authored letters and speeches addressing the political challenges faced by the commune (Wieruszowski, 1971, 360, 365–66). By the mid-*Duecento*, the transformation of *ars dictaminis* had been largely completed: in combination with oratory, it acquired an explicitly moral and political orientation. As it continued to expand through the thirteenth century, this hybrid rhetorical culture gave rise to two new genres of socially and politically engaged writing (see Banker, 1974, 153–68).

The first of these genres appeared in the new style of civic chronicles produced by jurists and *dictatores*. These works departed from earlier historiography through their rhetorical coloration and overtly partisan, often propagandistic, tone.

The second genre consisted of moral and advisory treatises addressed to rulers and civic governments. The most widely known example of this emerging literature is John of Viterbo's *On the Government of Cities* (*De Regimine civitatum*), composed around 1240.

One immediate consequence of this development was a shift in the intended audience of such works. Advisory literature no longer targeted the student but the ruling authorities of the commune. Thus the epistolary *dictatore*, once a technical expert, moved ever closer to the figure of the moral and political counsellor.

A further condition shaping the rise of humanism consisted of the socio-political crises that beset the Italian city-republics. Their causes – well documented in the secondary literature – included external military threats, the erosion of republican institutions, the ascent of the *popolani* (the emerging bourgeois strata), the rise of *signorie* and local tyrants (*condottieri*) who displaced older aristocratic factions (Bowsky, 1962; 1967), and the factional struggles that continually destabilized civic life. These developments formed the broader environment within which the rhetorical culture of the communes evolved into what would later be recognized as the earliest phase of Italian humanism.

Scholasticism and the Classical Legacy

The third factor – arguably the most consequential for the formation of humanist modes of thought and intellectual orientation – was the consolidation of scholastic learning and the renewed engagement with the classical heritage. This subject warrants fuller discussion, particularly given how superficially it is often treated in contemporary scholarship.

The rediscovery of classical models was not an achievement of Italian humanism, but of the so-called "medieval renaissance" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, centered primarily in France (see Post, 1964, ch. 11, 505, *passim*). At precisely the time when the aforementioned transformations in the *ars dictaminis* were taking shape (mid-twelfth century), Greek and Roman classics were already being widely read in Paris and at the school of Chartres (Delumeau, 1989, 85; see also Copleston, 1991, 167–73).

A large number of Italian rhetoricians active in the second half of the thirteenth century were trained in France. From there they brought back a new orthodoxy – one grounded in the synthesis of rhetoric with the classical legacy of ancient and Roman practical philosophy. This did not prevent later humanists, in their self-promotional narratives, from attributing the rediscovery of the classics to themselves. For a long time it therefore remained insufficiently recognized that what proved decisive was the *curriculum* of the University of Paris, through which generations of Italian students passed in the latter half of the *Duecento*.

The importation of French rhetorical culture mediated the final shift within the *ars dictaminis* tradition toward the classical inheritance, a tradition already transformed through its engagement with practical-political concerns. For humanist thought, the legacy of ancient Greece and Rome became a repertoire of models to imitate, with Cicero receiving the highest esteem and with the primacy of *oratio* over *ratio* firmly established. This turn toward moral content and civic engagement was thus completed through the imitation of classical exemplars – an imitation that would prove decisive for the formation of humanist political thought.

Brunetto Latini [1220–1294] (Latini, 1948) played a pioneering role in this development. Upon returning from Paris in 1266, he published his translation of Cicero's *De Inventione*, praising it as "the greatest work of rhetoric ever written" (East 1968, 242). The first rhetorical manual written in Latin explicitly modeled on Cicero was produced in Bologna by Giovanni Bonandrea (1296–1321), whose work won him renown throughout Italy (Banker, 1974, 159). The recovery of the classical heritage also reshaped the previously dominant *trivium*: history now assumed pride of place, followed by moral philosophy, and finally rhetoric, which served to integrate the two (Baron, 1966, 494).

The central figure at the close of the *Trecento* was Petrarch, in whom the traditions of the *ars dictaminis* and classical thought – especially Ciceronian – converged. In his rhetorical writings he emphatically underscored the primacy of moral instruction (Seigel, 1968, 222, 231–32, 215, 224; Burckhardt, 1989, 167; Hay & Law, 1989, 290; Cassirer, 1948, 105). He extended the core theme of *vir virtutis* – the "true man of virtue," or the morally excellent citizen – to encompass the broader civic community.

As scholasticism grew in influence and popularity, attitudes toward it became increasingly hostile (Kristeller, 1956, 563; Gray, 1963). Together

with the classical heritage, this antithetical stance played a decisive role in shaping humanist self-consciousness. Petrarch's motifs – *uomo universale*, the ideal unity of theory and practice, and the practical-moral significance of intellectual labor – were developed by *Quattrocento* humanists largely in opposition to scholastic learning.

Petrarch also supplied the template for anti-scholastic criticism, a paradigm that would shape humanist attitudes toward scholasticism throughout the *Quattrocento* and well into the next five centuries. He dismissed scholastics as "arrogant ignoramuses," and regarded their dialectical reasoning as an obstacle to knowledge of genuine practical and moral value. Their "barbarous method," he argued, yielded only "barren disputations," devoid of concern for the "common good" [*bonum commune*] (Skinner, 1979, 106). Accordingly, he claimed that their debates contributed nothing to the improvement of life, even when they happened to contain truths. Moreover, they failed to recognize the need for a philosophy which, combined with eloquence, might exert practical influence on political life (Gray, 1963, 505; Struever, 1970, 60–61).

In a moment of anger, Petrarch uttered what would become the enduring refrain of later humanist criticism: a fierce "anathema upon the foolish Aristotelians who waste their time inquiring what virtue is rather than acquiring it" (quoted in Garin, 1988). He further reproached scholastics for not knowing "that it is better to will the good than to know the truth" (Cassirer, 1948, 105; Hay & Law, 1989, 290; Skinner, 1979, 107). This claim was, in a basic sense, inaccurate: scholastic thinkers were also deeply concerned with the *res publica* and, in their writings, acted as engaged intellectuals of their time. Humanism would, however, chronically suppress this fact.

This collection of Petrarch's arbitrariness – at times ascending to unrestrained sophistry – would enter the very core of humanist propaganda. The seriousness of humanist thought is revealed, in fact, by the striking absence of any perceived problem in these outbursts; on the contrary, Petrarch was elevated into an icon of subsequent humanism.[3] Moreover, few interpreters have recognized, in similar humanist invectives and even in programmatic principles, the unmistakable signs of a revived "Second Sophistic" of the IV century BCE (Bowie, 1970; Trinkhaus, 1976). The reason lies not only in the appropriation of Protagoras's dictum that "man is the measure of all things," but also in the very idea for which Plato

[3] Petrarch's positions are representative of humanism in general throughout the following six centuries. Identical accusations against scholasticism and Aristotelianism would reappear in Protestant thought, then in seventeenth-century rationalism, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they would continue to be rekindled by Marxist humanism, directing them against science and philosophy as specialized disciplines and against professionalized intellectual labor, lumping them under the heading of "positivism" and of an idiotic indifference to practical social issues. Typical variations of Petrarch's critique include: how can the positive scientist concern himself with the contradictions of scientific theories while ignoring the real contradictions of society (Adorno)? How can the analytical philosopher occupy himself with Wittgensteinian questions about "the broom in the corner" while war is raging in the world (Marcuse, 1968: 166)? And how can analytic philosophers quibble about meanings and definitions without attending to the necessity of transforming what exists? Finally, the most famous variation on Petrarch's stance — 'it is better to will the good than to know the truth' — becomes the credo of Marxist humanism: 'The world is not to be interpreted but changed.' The possession of ultimate truth was simply presupposed.

had condemned the sophists in the *Protagoras*: the claim that virtue can be taught. This aporetic thesis became, for the humanists, an axiom – the conceptual nucleus of their pedagogical identity.

Petrarch's critique of scholasticism, formulated at the end of the fourteenth century, would be amplified throughout the *Quattrocento* as a kind of summa of incontestable truths, repeated in the voices of countless followers. Aristotelian logic was rejected in favor of the *studia humanitatis*, which, in the words of Coluccio Salutati, "persuade and guide." Humanists reiterated accusations of the scholastics' "arrogance and ignorance" (Leonardo Bruni), denouncing their pretense to philosophy despite their supposed incompetence in matters of writing and rhetoric. Scholastic learning was burdened with the charge of being detached from practical life; theoretical reasoning was dismissed in the name of immediate practical engagement. Francis Bacon would later repeat this almost verbatim in his polemic against "speculation," thereby transmitting the humanist attitude into modern thought down to the present day. Wisdom, from this perspective, was no longer an intellectual (dianoetic) excellence but a moral (ethical) virtue.

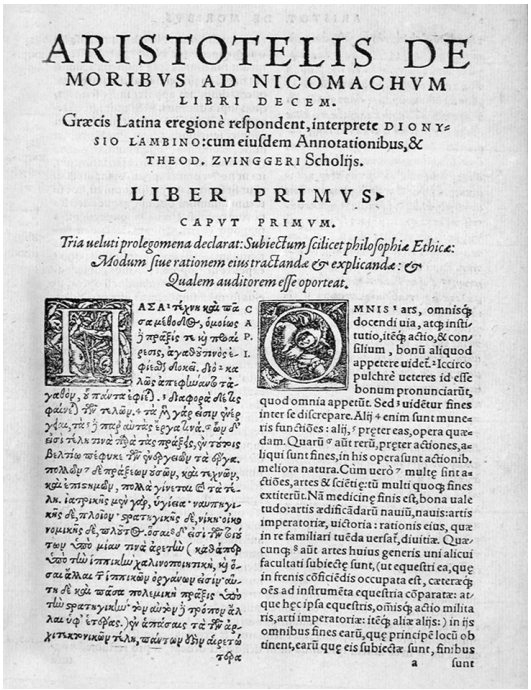
This critique is hardly surprising: humanists felt at home in literature, poetry, and eloquence. Their intellectual terrain is best captured by the expression "the genre of all genres," for their thought during the Renaissance remained largely undifferentiated by disciplinary boundaries. In this lay the basis of their universality – their desire to try their hand at everything, often oblivious to the fact that breadth of learning was necessarily accompanied by superficiality in any given field. For this reason they were known in the Renaissance simply as *letterati* or "men of letters" (*belle lettere*). The term *umanista* itself does not appear until the mid-nineteenth century.

Humanist and scholastic represented two opposed intellectual types: the former emerged as an extra-institutional figure, while the scholastic occupied the institutional position once held by the traditional *dictatore* within the university. The enduring themes of their conflict revolved around the role of rhetoric, the tension between commitment to the common good versus commitment to learnedness, and the perennial question of which form of rule is superior: the authority of an individual or the authority of an institution.

For the scholastics, rhetorical skill played a subordinate role in political life, for it taught only the techniques of verbal ornamentation. Moreover, they offered no moral instruction to rulers; their attention was directed instead toward the mechanism of governance. In doing so, they downplayed the virtues of individual leaders, and gave priority to conceptualizing effective institutions as instruments for promoting the common good and securing peace. Consequently, they were far less moralistic and far more akin to political analysts.

Whereas scholastics emphasized learnedness as a form of expertise and favored the supremacy of institutions, humanists consistently championed personal rule (cf. Kristeller, 1961). They understood the purpose of their activity as pedagogical influence upon citizens and magistrates – not as technical competence or deeper conceptual mastery, but as the broad cultivation of learning under the banner of the "universal man" (*uomo universale*).

Scholasticism symbolized the medieval synthesis of knowledge and power – the union of scientific reason and ecclesiastical authority. The scholastic



ARISTOTELIS DE
MORIBVS AD NICOMACHVM
LIBRI DECEM.

Græcis Latina eregionè respondent, interprete DIONYSIO LAMBINO: cum eiusdem Annotationibus, & THEOD. ZVINGGERI Scholijs.

LIBER PRIMVS.

CAPVT PRIMVM.

Tria ueluti prolegomena declarat: Subiectum scilicet philosophiæ Ethicæ: Modum siue rationem eius tractandæ & explicandæ: & Qualem auditorem esse oporteat.

OMNIS ars, omnisq; docendi uia, atq; institutio, itèq; actio, & consilium, bonū aliquod appetere uidē. Iccirco pulchrè ueteres id esse bonum pronunciarūt, quod omnia appetūt. Sed uidētur fines inter se discrepare. Alij enim sunt munēris functiōes: alij, præter eas, opera quædam. Quarū aūt rerū, præter actiones, aliqui sunt fines, in his operasunt actionib. meliora natura. Cùm uerò multę sint actiōes, artes & scientię: tū multi quoq; fines extiterūt. Nā medicinę finis est, bona ualetudo: artis ædificādarū nauiū, nauis: artis imperatoriæ, uictoria: rationis eius, quæ in re familiari tuēda uersat, diuitiæ. Quæcunq; aūt artes huius generis uni alicui facultati subiectę sunt, (ut equestri ea, quę in frenis cōficiēdis occupata est, cæteræq; oēs ad instrumēta equestria cōparatæ: atque hęc ipsa equestris, omnisq; actio militaris, arti imperatoriæ: itèq; aliæ aliis:) in iis omnibus fines earū, quę principē locū obtinent, earū quę eis subiectæ sunt, finibus

a sunt

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, the first page of an edition published in Greek and Latin, 1566.
Photo: Wikipedia

legitimated faith and official Christian doctrine, and was institutionally bound to the Church. Humanism, by contrast, introduced a new configuration characteristic of modernity: the union of knowledge and power as the alliance of intellect and the state. The humanist legitimated usurped authority, personally bound to the princely court or to the state (*il stato*). Whereas scholastics defended Christian faith, humanists gradually implemented its systematic delegitimation: (a) by delegitimization scholastic learning, (b) by reviving and normatively hypostatizing the pagan tradition, and (c) by legitimating forms of authority whose practices deviated radically from Christian principles.

The "Mirror for Prince" Genre

The leading theme of Renaissance humanism was the question of virtue (*virtù*), considered across a spectrum ranging from the individual citizen to the political order and its ruler. A particular variant of this theme was *vir virtutis* ("the virtuous man" or the true man of virtue) – directly significant for understanding Machiavelli. Coupled with this were the themes of *uomo universale* – the universal perfection of human nature, the unity of theory and practice, and the practical-moral significance of intellectual engagement. Humanism would develop all of these

themes in critical opposition to scholastic learning (Skinner, 1979, 99), since it was through this antithetical stance that it refined its self-consciousness.[4]

The themes of the virtuous man and the universally educated individual were brought together in a specific genre known as the *mirror for princes*. The central question of this genre was: "What should constitute a good ruler?"

The pioneer of this genre was Bruno Latini, active in the second half of the thirteenth century (East, 1968, p. 242). In Florence, he was celebrated as "a great philosopher who instructed in the refinement of eloquence and civic virtue" (Skinner, 1979, p. 39). Following the model of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he enumerated the virtues of the good ruler: wisdom as the foremost virtue, encompassing foresight, care, and knowledge; sobriety, honesty, steadfastness, decisiveness, strength, patience; a sense of justice; adherence to faith; and avoidance of the sin of avarice.

From the last third of the thirteenth century (*Duecento*) onward, this theme would be taken up and elaborated over the following two and a half centuries, from Francesco Patrizi and Poggio Bracciolini to Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni. These authors added to the list of desired qualities education, skill in writing, knowledge of Greek and Latin, literature, poetry, and philosophy, noble conduct, and courteousness; they emphasized that the ruler should be a friend and patron of artists, a flatterer, and a connoisseur of refined manners.

All works in this genre shared a normative core: the depiction of the ruler as an individual full of virtues. The purpose of writing in this genre was to maintain a moral exemplar for rulers themselves to emulate in their education, conduct, and governance. Literature also addressed the virtues that city administrations should cultivate among citizens. Latini insisted that citizens should dedicate themselves day and night to the common good of their city. The step from the *mirror for princes* to the creation of "mirrors of good society" or the state was thus only a short one.

This genre formed the core of humanist political thought, especially in its fusion with the ideal of unity between politics and ethics. Its essentially extra-political portrayal of rulers would remain a constant in Renaissance political thought up to Machiavelli and his *Prince* (1513). It bears witness to the extent to which humanism, due to its normative and pedagogical hypnopedy, remained incapable of achieving a positive understanding of politics.

The Alliance of Sword and Pen

During the Renaissance, three significant historical figures were shaped in the spheres of politics, ethics, and economy: the tyrant, as ruler in the political domain; the bourgeois or entrepreneur in the economic realm; and the humanist intellectual

[4] We must not lose sight of two things: although the kabbalistic celebration of the human being in Pico della Mirandola's *De hominis dignitate* (1486) represents a major opposition to Augustinianism, the humanists were, first, not opposed to Christianity; on the contrary, in Augustine they saw their patron saint. Second, Pico's oration appears a century and a half after the humanist genre had been fully formed. For this reason we may justifiably say that instead of the celebration of the human being, two things were essential to humanism: first, moral-practical engagement; and second, generic undifferentiation, that is, universality.

in the ethical sphere. What these three figures had in common was that they were typically individuals *sine nobilitate*, who sought social elevation through all available means, including alliances with one another. Humanism provided a legitimizing framework for these historically novel figures, elaborating the theme of *vir virtutis* while discarding virtues and *nobilitas* inherited through lineage and tradition. In its place, a plebeian ethics of the self-made individual was promoted, favoring ascent based on personal talent and effort.

This necessitates a reflection on the alliance between the ruler and contemporary humanist intellectuals. Given that the notion of an alliance between condottieri – usurpers of power – and humanists, who prided themselves on high ideals, integrity, and moral virtue, seems at first incredulous, one must ask: how was this possible, and by what means did it arise?

The defining characteristic of the tyrant was power without legitimacy. Conversely, a similar trait among the *popolani* (the early bourgeoisie) and humanist intelligentsia was existence without security. The man of the pen faced challenges in securing the means of subsistence, while the bourgeois had resources but remained uncertain about the future. Both were subject to the arbitrary will of the tyrant. All three types were constantly threatened by competition: the bourgeois by other bourgeois and by the tyrant himself; the tyrant by rival claimants to power;[5] and the humanist by fellow humanists, competing for the limited employment opportunities available in city-states. This intense competition resulted in the absence of any substantial moral restraint within these circles. This is why the humanists also 'very quickly fell into disrepute', as Jakob Burckhardt writes (Burckhardt, 1989, 111).

For their part, rulers – being usurpers – were receptive to the man of the pen and the practitioner of *belle lettere*: lacking legitimacy, they required counterweights in textual form, presented in a favorable light which reality often denied them. This represented a new type of legitimacy, achieved through the textual production of a specialized stratum of humanist intellectuals (Burckhardt, 1958, 8; 1989, 10).

Humanists, in turn, had their own incentive to engage with such offers. In pursuit of existential security, they sought financial support or stable positions (Burckhardt, 1989, p. 111). Within the context of the time, many could serve as scribes in city administrations, few reached the status of lawyers, and the fortunate few became court tutors and entertainers for the tyrant and instructors of his children – a functional equivalent of the medieval court jester.[6] Crucially, nearly all participants in public life wrote panegyrics to the ruling authority.

[5] It often happened that a usurper remained in power only a few hours before being overthrown and killed by a rival. *Cf.* Hay & Law, 1989, p. 166.

[6] It is not superfluous to note that the humanist nevertheless differed from the court jester in the northern European monarchies of the time. While the jesters grimaced to amuse their rulers, the humanist entertained – and even lulled – the tyrant by reading Cicero, Virgil, and other classical authors. The tyrants had a great desire for knowledge and even attempted to engage the humanists in learned conversation. Moreover, they were the first to grasp the new power of the written word. Thus the Florentine tyrant Giangaleazzo Visconti was known to say that the pen of his chancellor Coluccio Salutati (1375–1406) 'was worth more to him than a troop of cavalry.' *Cf.* Hay and Law, 1989, 238.

The alliance between the humanist – providing necessary *laudatio* to justify or legitimize – and the tyrant was mutually beneficial, a union of knowledge and power. Beyond securing existential security for the humanists, tyrants patronized incisive their scholarly endeavors, financing, for example, the translation of the complete works of Plato into Latin.[7] The humanists responded with literary panegyrics. And just as the tyrant publicly displayed himself in silk and velvet, the humanist's task was to 'gild' him with his pen and his words.

The Genesis of Humanism: From Virtue to Force

The final element necessary for understanding the emergence of Machiavelli is the genesis of humanism into anti-humanism. The most productive thread for tracing this transformation during the Renaissance runs along a spectrum whose poles are, on one side, virtue (*virtù*) without force, and on the other, force (*vis*) without virtue – situated within the horizon of power, between ethics and political physics, and within the sphere of aesthetics (or visibility).

Within this genesis, humanism effectively implements an aestheticization of both morality and politics, in full mannerist concord with its reverence for classical theories of political life and its central orientation toward literature and the arts. In the aestheticization of political power, an inherently problem field emerges, one in which the appearance of Machiavelli becomes possible. His discourse, taken contextually, in its outcomes functions as anti-humanist, literally deconstructive, and critically inciseve. It marks the terminus of humanism's developmental arc: from that point onward, humanism ceases to produce anything of comparable significance and is overshadowed by the historical realities of a new era – the Reformation – to which it nonetheless made a profound contribution.

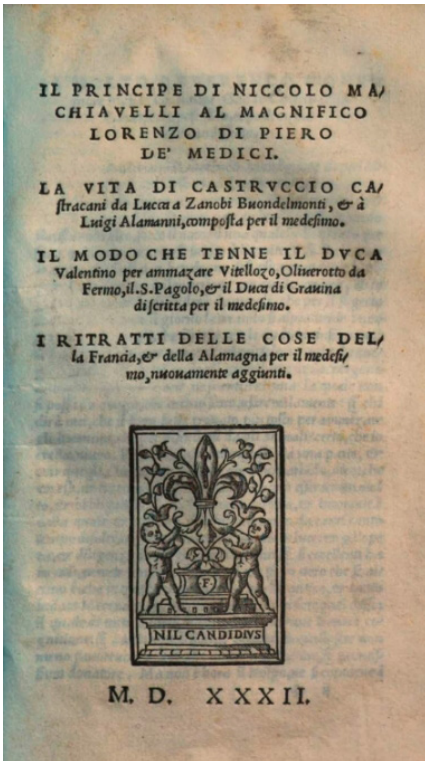
When Machiavelli completed *The Prince*, Erasmus of Rotterdam protested against the emptiness of Ciceronians (*De Ciceronianus*) and composed *On the Education of a Christian Prince* (*De institutio principis christiani*, 1517). In this work, he engages with the Christian virtues of the ruler in the *vir virtutis* genre, a tradition shaped by Bruno Latini two centuries earlier. Erasmus presents the virtuous man in the figure of the true or virtuous Christian (*cf.* Phillips, 1949). The image synthesized the priestly with the humanist ideal of the intellectual in a pedagogical and moral mission. The only substantive difference, however, consists in the confinement of pedagogy to a mode of instruction grounded in the principles of Christian morality – an instruction oriented toward a human being who, in accordance with the ideal of the vita activa over and against the vita contemplativa, is enjoined to enact these principles throughout the manifold spheres of everyday life.

[7] The condottieri, as men *sine nobilitate*, not only paid humanists generously to present them in a moral light; they also possessed a strong desire for education. A survey of their private libraries produced a surprising result: although they were soldiers, they owned the fewest books on military technique and tactics. The greatest number consisted of works of ancient classical literature – so many, in fact, that their libraries were indistinguishable from those of contemporary humanists. See in more detail Mallett, 1976.

The emergence of Erasmus demonstrates that, while Northern European humanism was only beginning to orient itself around questions of Christian virtue and preparing the way for the Reformation initiated by Luther (Buck, 1984; Goodman & MacKay, 1990; Green, 1985),[8] in Italy humanism had already shifted its focus toward the question of force, as evidenced by Machiavelli's work. This, together with the broader shift from poetry to scientific prose – most clearly traceable from Petrarch to Machiavelli – represents the final stage in the transformation of humanism, on which the modern conception of politics ultimately becomes possible.

Machiavelli's Innovation

The practical and political philosophy inspired by Cicero and the classical tradition amounted to an appealing form of moral–political propagandistic prose – one that captivates the heart, leaves reason in a state of perplexity, and remains entirely irrelevant for any genuine understanding of politics. Machiavelli's thought, in contrast, is radically different. It is not the product of imagination, nor the outcome of a search for refuge in classical texts that would lead one into moral–political poetry. Rather, it privileges reality: the reading of historiographical texts apart from their propagandistic use, as informative accounts of *res gestae*, of how events actually transpired. Moreover, it entails the observation of current events and the decision to speak publicly about matters that that are effectively public secrets – known to nearly everyone, yet about which all remain silent.


IL PRINCIPE DI NICCOLO MA/
CHIAVELLI AL MAGNIFICO
LORENZO DI PIERO
DE' MEDICI.

LA VITA DI CASTRVCCIO CA/
stracani da Lucca a Zanobi Buondelmonti, & à
Luigi Alamanni, composta per il medesimo.

IL MODO CHE TENNE IL DVCA
Valentino per ammazare Vitellozo, Oliverotto da
Fermo, il S. Pagolo, & il Duca di Gravina
di scritta per il medesimo.

I RITRATTI DELLE COSE DEL/
la Francia, & della Alamagna per il medesi/
mo, nuouamente aggiunti.

NIL CANDIDIVS

M. D. XXXII.

1532 edition of The Prince in Italy.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

[8] This Erasmian story set the head spinning of a provincial priest, Martin Luther, prompting him to rise up against the corruption of Rome and the Pope himself in the name of restoring original Christian values. Once turmoil erupted, Erasmus withdrew into a mouse-hole and abandoned his disciple Luther to his fate. This is a frequent pattern among humanists – something rarely discussed in the literature, since it largely remains under their control: they know how to lead people into adventurous undertakings, but when danger approaches, their civic courage evaporates; they flee and lie low until the storm passes, only to resume acting as generals after the battle.

The Prince emerges from a tradition of advisory, engaged writing. Like Bruno Latini before him, Machiavelli asks questions regarding the qualities of the ruler. Yet he introduces a subtle but decisive modification that completely sets him apart from this entire tradition: whether a ruler must genuinely possess all the virtues advocated by Renaissance humanist thought? In response, he would have no objection to a ruler cultivating all the virtues and qualities enumerated by the humanists, provided that he does so in his leisure time – while not engaged in politics (all the more so since these values have nothing to do with politics). While a ruler is actively engaged in politics, Machiavelli emphasizes that adherence to these virtues can only lead him to ruin. Thus, he offers indirect counsel to the ruler: first, that he need not conform to the model of virtue prescribed by Renaissance humanist thought; and second, that it is not necessary for him to possess these virtues, so long as he appears to possess them.

This dualism between appearance and reality in rulership is evident in the central portion of *The Prince*, particularly in the fragment of chapter XVIII, which encapsulates the essence of the work as a whole:

"There are two modes of contest: one by law, the other by force. The former is proper to human beings, the latter to beasts; yet because the former is often insufficient, a prince must learn how to draw upon both the nature of man and that of the beast. Thus the ancient writers, in their allegories, taught that Achilles and other princely figures were entrusted to the centaur Chiron, so that they might acquire mastery of both dispositions.

Since a ruler must therefore make use of the beast within, he ought to be at once a fox and a lion: a fox to discern snares, and a lion to terrify wolves. Those who rely solely upon the lion's strength understand little of the art of rule.

A prudent prince cannot, and ought not, keep his word when keeping it turns to his disadvantage, and when the reasons that once obliged him to pledge it have vanished. Were all men good, such counsel would be unnecessary; but because they are wicked and do not keep faith with you, you are under no obligation to keep faith with them.

One will always find plausible grounds on which to excuse the breach of a promise; history abounds with examples of treaties rendered void by the perfidy of princes. And he has ever fared best who has best known how to employ the fox's craft. It is essential, however, to know how to conceal such qualities, and to be a consummate actor and dissembler.

For men are simple and governed by the necessities of the moment; thus he who is skilled in deception will always find those willing to be deceived.

A prince, then, need not truly possess all the virtues considered good, but he must unfailingly appear to possess them. Indeed, I dare affirm that actually possessing them and adhering to them at all times is harmful, whereas seeming to possess them is advantageous. He must present himself as merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, and devout – and, if possible, he should indeed be so – but he must retain a disposition that allows him, when necessity demands, to act contrary to these very qualities.

For a ruler, and especially a new prince, is often compelled, in order to preserve the state, to act against faith, against mercy, against humanity, and against religion. He must not depart from the good

when circumstance permits, but he must know how to enter into evil when constrained by necessity.

Therefore, whenever the prince is observed or heard, he must seem the very embodiment of mercy, fidelity, honesty, humanity, and piety. Nothing is more essential than that he appear to possess these virtues. Men judge more readily by the eye than by the ear; all can see what you seem to be, few can discern what you truly are. And these few will not dare oppose the judgment of the many, especially when the many are buttressed by the majesty of the state.

Let the prince, then, concern himself with securing and maintaining his dominion; his means will always be deemed honorable, and all will praise them, for the multitude is captivated by appearances and by the success of the deed itself – and the few matter little when the majority rests upon the authority of power."

When this passage is subjected to analytical scrutiny, Machiavelli's innovation may be distilled into three fundamental observations:

– that politics and ethics are external to one another;
– that, consequently, their internal unity (in the sense of ethics *within* politics) is impossible; yet
– that it is also impossible their complete separation.

The conclusion follows that ethics may well exist without politics, whereas politics cannot subsist without ethics. And since political action cannot itself be moral in the way humanist imagination depicts it, it must nonetheless *appear* moral if it is to be legitimate and accepted by the citizenry.

The resolution of this tension lies in the thesis that what the prince requires of ethics is only a moral *semblance*, for it suffices so long as what it conceals remains undisclosed. The maintenance of that moral appearance is, as it were, entrusted to the humanists through their discourse – not only in the Renaissance but throughout subsequent epochs, down to our own time.

Machiavelli thus established the unity of politics and ethics in the sphere of *aesthesis*. Such an elevation of appearance within political life was, in Renaissance thought, largely unknown and scarcely imaginable. In earlier portrayals, the prince had been bound exclusively to virtue. Yet, from Latini to Machiavelli, the very notion of virtue had undergone a dramatic transformation: it became specified, narrowed, and ultimately reduced to a strictly political meaning.

Machiavelli's treatise also stands within the conflict between humanism and scholasticism regarding the educational dilemma: the formation of the whole person versus the training of the specialist. His counsel requires that the ruler be a specialist – specifically, in the manipulation of force. Virtue assumes a new meaning as mastery of force within the realm of secrecy (*res arcanae*). This mastery is indispensable to the man of politics if he is to be a ruler. At the same time, the ruler must skilfully combine force with a moral appearance, which becomes decisive within the sphere of public affairs (*res publicae*).

Machiavelli likewise brings the tradition of dictatorial instruction to its consummation, completing the entire arc of the dictator's genealogy. It was shown at the outset that the *dictatore* appeared as the teacher of formal technical rules for letter-writing, and thereafter as the instructor in moral norms. Machiavelli, as a *dictatore*, is identical to the pioneer Adalbert, insofar as he returns to

the dictate of technical rules, the difference being that he does so for the sake of acquiring and maintaining political power.

This closure of the circle, through a return to technical precepts, is instructive for all interpreters of Machiavelli. Namely, the pieces of advice he gives to the ruler have as much to do with morality as Adalbert's lessons on letter writing. Just as the original *dictatore* was indifferent to what the letter conveyed, so Machiavelli remains indifferent to the content or aims of power. Whatever they may be, and whomever they may serve, the rules remain one and the same. They apply equally to one who seeks to destroy the world and to one who seeks to make it the best imaginable.

Alongside the indispensability of moral appearance, Machiavelli establishes a further positive insight: that citizens will swiftly forget the immoral or repugnant means employed – should they be discovered – provided that they derive tangible benefit from their use.[9] For this, Machiavelli has often been denounced for a misanthropy.[10]

Deconstruction of the Genre as a Critique of Humanism

Machiavelli emerges as the singular point at which Italian humanism brings forth its own anti-humanist culmination. *The Prince* stands as the last significant work issuing from the venerable tradition of the "mirror-for-princes" genre. His treatise follows the formal conventions of the genre with meticulous precision, even as it breaks out of its inherited frame with a disarming abruptness. Machiavelli's mirror is the first to be free of distortion precisely because it is purely descriptive, stripped of all normative elements. The consequences of such a mirror are extensive, above all in its critical thrust:

1) It is a critical deconstruction of the genre itself, akin to shattering a mirror; in addition,
2) it constitutes a critique of humanist propagandistic political rhetoric; and
3) it is a critique of all previous political philosophy that rests on the internal unity of ethics and politics.

[9] At the height of humanism, buildings that survived from Ancient Rome were being plundered throughout Italy, while the extermination of the Inca and the Aztecs in South America was underway. Not one humanist ever spoke or wrote a word about this. All the while, they professed their love of mankind.

[10] Let us dispense with humanist hypocrisy: with the professed love of man joined to indifference before the destruction of millions. Has anyone ever condemned Robespierre for severing the heads of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, or the Revolution for the slaughter to which it led? Did the humanists perhaps condemn Lenin, who, as a true usurper, in the arcane manner of a condottiere, orchestrated the vile extermination of the imperial family and brought an entire nation to the brink of ruin? They defended him with brazen falsehoods – claiming he "knew nothing of it" (as if he would have saved them had he known) – and attributed the national catastrophe to foreign intervention.
And what shall we say of our own humanists who extolled Tito as a genius "born once in a thousand years," "equal to Einstein," one who "entered into a child's dreams" and was "beloved more than father and mother"? Throughout history, humanists speak only of the successes of rulers whom they deify; concerning the means – especially when they are abhorrent – they first pretend they never existed, and when exposed, defend them without shame. (Have we not heard endlessly from Marxists: "One cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs," or "There is no revolution without broken heads.") And above all, instead of analyzing politics as it truly is, they persist in writing of what it *ought* to be – doing so for centuries, to the point of tedium.

What is genuinely new – indeed without precedent – is Machiavelli's disclosure of the true character of the link between politics and ethics. Its character is nothing other than the truth of their unity. What proved intolerable was not that unity itself – for the humanists knew well enough what it entailed and simply concealed it – but the fact that Machiavelli made it public. Only with him does the secret sphere of politics (*res arcanae*) enter the domain of the public (*res publicae*). The secret is not only what the ruler enacts under the cover of night, but also what the humanists perform openly, by crafting his gilded image through their rhetoric.

As previously noted, aesthetics forms the fundamental sphere of humanism; within this sphere, ethics and politics converge. The question of the ruler's morality is settled on the plane of aesthetics – a plane endowed with the capacity to persuade the public that his deeds are moral even in their innermost core.

Machiavelli's revelation of this dualism constituted an implicit indictment of humanism:

1. for its superficial affirmation of the unity of politics and ethics without ever probing the nature of their relation;
2. because they sell that supreme ideal in service of both their own and the ruler's interest – while simultaneously urging others to sacrifice private interest to the "common good" (*buono comune*);
3. By elevating the ideal of the unity of politics and ethics on the basis of reality, they not only provide the ruler with a semblance of legitimacy, but also dangerously mislead the citizens into error and onto a political wrong path; and
4. The humanists were publicly exposed as actors serving the function of bought deceit, despite presenting themselves as supposedly autonomous and highly moral independent writers. It turned out that they did not merely misrepresent the tyrants, but also themselves.

Machiavelli's recognition of the humanists' political function – namely, their role in sustaining the dualism between moral appearance and amoral truth, not through the education of the ruler but through the fabrication and maintenance of his public image – amounted to a complete delegitimization of humanism. Brought into the open was the reality that their refuge was never in ethics, as they claimed, but in a deep hypocrisy aligned with the tyrants. This would be Machiavelli's unforgivable transgression – not merely "his conception" of politics. The humanists' retaliation was still to come.

The Humanist Revenge, Intensified by Jesuitism

When *The Prince* is read within the social and political constellation of the early sixteenth centuries, the seemingly benign sentence in which Machiavelli discloses the dualism of appearance and truth assumes the force of an implicit interrogation addressed to the humanists themselves: Why do you speak of virtue when the real matter is force? Why do you praise your own virtue when you are steeped in hypocrisy? And from his assessment of the centrality of appearance, the message to the tyrant follows with equal clarity: O ruler, forget not the humanists, for you require them to maintain your moral semblance.

Niccolo Machiavelli
Photo: Wikipedia

The hypocrisy permeating the public life of the Florentine republic on the eve of *The Prince* had already become a commonplace, a shared civic habitus. The duplicity of both rulers and humanists had reached the level of a "public secret"; all that remained was for someone to name it aloud. Machiavelli's discourse, presented with the claim to strict factuality, could by necessity win no approval. All recoiled – though none could deny he had spoken the truth, no one was willing to acknowledge it openly. Thus Machiavelli's renewed lesson for the instruction of prince was destined to remain futile: the Medici ruler already knew it – else he would not have been a ruler – and in any case, he could not

publicly affirm it without tarnishing his own legitimacy, especially having seized power only a year earlier. The humanists knew this as well, yet were compelled to maintain silence and conceal their own hypocrisy even among themselves. Machiavelli was fated to stand alone.

Because hypocrisy reigned universally, those implicated could have chosen simply to ignore him. However, the humanists regarded a more vociferous counterattack as their only means of salvation. This posed no difficulty: Machiavelli, isolated and without patrons, was a convenient object for blows that entailed no danger. No one would come to his aid, and the assaults would arrive from every quarter.

That Machiavelli sealed his fate for centuries by unveiling the ethos of duplicity is evident from the scale of the hunt unleashed against him – one that far exceeded the boundaries of the Renaissance. It is therefore unsurprising that the torrent of humanist invective directed at him subsequently acquired the status of "criticism," though it scarcely rose above the level of unrestrained defamation. Reappearing in waves over time, it always returned to the same counter-narrative: that *The Prince* does not reveal the truth of politics, but merely Machiavelli's own "conception," which is monstrous, amoral, cynical, even diabolical. Having thus dehumanized him – nearly transforming him into a figure sprung from hell – his critics restored their own tranquillity at the cost of abandoning even minimal moral restraint.

From the Renaissance to the present, the humanist mode of responding to *The Prince* has remained structurally unchanged; it is a defensive maneuver played out on the terrain of aesthetics. To Machiavelli's de-aestheticization of politics and of humanist discourse itself, they answered with the aestheticization of Machiavelli as a figure – above all through the same mechanism of attributing to him a morally demonized appearance. This rehearsed gesture enabled the humanists to perpetually restore their angelic façade, so they might continue their hypocrisy under the guise of moral authority. Their alleged "critique" of Machiavelli thus merely continued their own duplicity. For that reason, such criticism is devoid of scholarly value.

The apologetics of princes, politics, and of themselves never disturbed the duplicity that had already been laid bare. The humanists' efforts were, and remained, futile, for they became perpetual victims of a boomerang effect: the portrait of hypocrisy and cynicism they projected onto Machiavelli – intending to "destroy" him – proved to be nothing other than a collective self-portrait, sustained to this day by their characteristic absence of self-reflection and their conviction that they had settled accounts with him once and for all. The point is clear: they were not defending politics from Machiavelli; they were defending themselves. This applies to the entire line of his critics over five centuries – from Renaissance humanists to the Jesuits from the sixteenth century onward, and ultimately the Marxists, the leading humanists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Indirectly, Machiavelli's analysis also amounted to a critique of the Roman Church. By approaching political phenomena from a standpoint that privileges fact over normativity, he separated politics from Christian values – values which, as normative foundations, impede the objective thematization of politics itself (Wolin, 1961, 86–87,

et passim). The anti-political character of Christianity is expressed in the belief that the course of the world lies under divine jurisdiction, such that the individual can only accept an unavoidable fate. Machiavelli, by contrast, reasons within a field of contingency, in which opportunity, or chance appears – and is recognized only by the Fortune's favorite.

The Paradox of Christianity

The paradox of Christianity lay in the fact that it dismissed the significance of politics for human life (Wolin 1961, 86), while the Roman Church had always been immersed in politics up to its neck. For centuries it operated as a deft political actor within a dualism of its own making: on one side, the public profession of theodicy and divine law; on the other, the relentless exploitation of opportunities arising from the contingencies of worldly affairs – proceeding, when advantageous, in open contradiction to God's commandments, reducing their force to the space of the confessional, where absolution for misdeeds was granted and received.

In contrast to the moral question – *may I do what I am able to do?* – the political question asks: *how may I make possible what I will?* Since politics is not governed by moral principles, abandoning the norms of Christian ethics becomes permissible whenever full exploitation of the field of possibilities requires it. Thus, within its sphere, lying becomes allowable (contra *"Thou shalt not bear false witness"*), as does killing one's Christian brother (contra *"Thou shalt not kill"*), stealing (contra *"Thou shalt not steal"*), and professional or private indifference toward one's neighbor (contra *"Love thy neighbor as thyself"*), and so on.

In violating the Christian ethical code, the Roman Church lagged not a step behind the condottieri in perpetrating every manner of atrocity. It even sanctified these acts as accomplished *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*, and required no humanist stylization to appear in evangelical guise, since it did so on its own. The case of the Borgia house, under Pope Alexander VI, together with the reforming counter-blow it provoked, bears sufficient witness.[11] Not to mention that the Holy See, to escape the fury of the Roman populace, was forced to flee to Avignon, where it would remain for seven decades.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the Jesuit order was established to defend the Roman Church in the turmoil of the Reformation. Ready to employ every means beneath the veil of the Gospel, the Jesuits joined the humanists in attacking Machiavelli. The only difference lay in motive: the humanists defended themselves, while the Jesuits defended the radiant evangelical image of the Roman Church and the pope personally. They quickly reached consensus with the humanists around a shared, discrediting counter-narrative: that Machiavelli was a messenger of the devil, that

[11] Because Catholicism had sunk into vile politics, corruption, and the complete betrayal of Christian values, the Reformation began – four years after *The Prince* was published. Luther, well-read in Erasmus, struck at the very foundations of the Church in the name of original Christianity. The subsequent spread of Protestantism throughout Western Europe would itself serve as evidence for the legitimacy of this critical blow.

the metaphysics of misanthropy lay at the core of his doctrine, that he was an unprecedented degenerate and cynic advocating an "unacceptable conception of politics." And always with the obligatory flourish: that his separation of politics from ethics reduces the former to a cold technology of crime.

In this self-apologetic framework, it is entirely irrelevant whose maxim – *the end justifies the means* – is at issue, around which the literature endlessly speculates. The maxim is not Machiavelli's; it is the principle of politicians and rulers, and thus of the Roman Curia and the Jesuits, to the extent that they acted as political agents rather than people of authentic faith. It was not introduced by anyone, as if it had been unknown until then. It was merely *disclosed*: revealed as one of the operative components of political skill on the far side of all morality.

The Scope of Machiavelli's Critique of Political Philosophy

Machiavelli was the first to introduce *par excellence* the explicitly political question of acquiring and maintaining power. His individual achievement may appear modest, yet its consequences are profoundly far-reaching: it is not only the humanist tradition – from Bruno, Latini, to Machiavelli – that comes under scrutiny, but the entirety of preceding political philosophy, in regard to its epistemic value.

The conventional literary claim that Machiavelli's conception of politics is limited to the modern age or to modern politics is a mistaken humanist fable. In fact, Machiavelli's discovery applies to politics in general, from Hammurabi to the present day. That his insight into the nature of the bond between politics and ethics is unprecedented merely indicates that only at the dawn of the Modern Age were the conditions ripe for reliable knowledge in this domain. Prior obstacles to such knowledge lay not merely in Renaissance humanism but in the entire corpus of political philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome.

Machiavelli's work dismantles the illusory vision of unity between politics and ethics in antiquity. The problem lies in the fact that the reception of that era, concentrated in the aesthetic-ethical dimension of humanism, could not arrive at an accurate understanding, despite the fact that the truth is discernible in the political histories of Polybius, Thucydides, Livy, and others. Humanism has, to this day, perpetuated its errors, clustered around the normative models of the idealized vision of ancient Greek polis.

An intrinsic unity of politics and ethics never existed anywhere, except in the imagination of humanists. In this light, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and their heirs offer no practical guidance, for they left no instructions concerning the methods of acquiring or sustaining power. Accordingly, tales of the ideal state or typologies of political regimes carry absolutely no relevance to this question.

Humanist historiography has never been able to recognize the full historical significance of Machiavelli, for such recognition would have required abandoning its cherished ideal of the unity of politics and ethics. And what would remain of it then? It is precisely this "happily guided illusion" of humanism that has served as a chronic impediment to the

stabilization of positive knowledge regarding the nature of politics, at the level of a political science properly conceived.

Why Machiavelli is the Founder of Political Science

Machiavelli's achievement does not reside in any systematic theory – because he had none (Allen, 1961, 465, 470), nor did he intend to develop it – nor is it to be found in metaphysics, which some interpreters imagine as "the foundation or the underlying principle of his thought." He is a pioneer, the initiator of political science, if we consider that he laid its cornerstone. And the cornerstone is method.

His achievement was made possible, as we have already noted, by the fact that in Florentine public life the truth of politics was practically "at hand," a tacitly acknowledged public secret:

a) through the intrusion of reality into the very dimension of appearance and visibility, and
b) through the shift from the purely aesthetic sphere toward the ethical and epistemological, which characterizes the genesis and transformation of humanism to the point at which a figure like Machiavelli could emerge at all.

Regarding the relationship between politics and ethics, although Machiavelli acknowledges their unity, he maximally departs from humanism in the novelty he introduces. This novelty can be discerned on two levels, corresponding to a differentiation in the very concept of political science:

1. *At the object level (the subject of analysis):* politics and ethics are indeed and must be inextricably linked. Yet, because they are external to one another, their simultaneous impossibility of complete unification and separation renders their relation akin to Schopenhauer's "prickly hedgehog": neither too close, nor too distant. Consequently, in politics the decisive and sufficient factor is moral aesthetics – the appearance of morality.

This constellation of insight reveals several significant consequences. First, when we speak of politics as the art of the possible, it must be borne in mind that the field of possibilities not constrained by moral norms, but by obstacles that a politician can overcome through force. The entire point lies in how that force is represented and whether it is mentioned at all.

It is this realization that revealed the political field as existing beyond morality, with relations among actors analogous to the interactions of pagan gods. In the field of political physics, individuals are personifications of opposing forces. And since these events occur among humans, the field must be endowed with the semblance of moral appearance. Hence, there must always exist a legitimizing envelope: philosophers in antiquity, humanists in the Renaissance, Jesuits in the Reformation, and progressive writers, in the age of Enlightenment, and Marxists, and other humanists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Max Weber aptly characterized this political field through his brilliant insight that the rationalization and secularization of the modern world is accompanied by increasing irrationalization, through a revival of ancient paganism and polytheism. In modern politics, every actor follows the directives

of their own "god," making the Other not a brother, but solely a threat – a phenomenon Weber termed "double rationality" (*Dopelrationalität*) of modernity (Spinner, 1986).

2. *At the meta-level, or theoretical level:* Machiavelli's innovation consists in the complete separation of ethics from politics. This is realized through the depoliticization (and de-ideologization) of thought about politics, with the fundamental principle: *Do not lie, even when speaking about politics!* In other words, in contrast to the inextricable unity at the object level in the aesthetic sphere, at the meta-level there is a deliberate separation and foundation of observation in the ethics of truth (*in stricto sensu*).

Machiavelli's discourse is profoundly anti-humanist, first because it is formed in opposition to humanist discourse, second because it is not normatively corrupted, and third because it is formulated on the basis of a moral stance and a decision to break with the pervasive hypocrisy and reciprocal deceit of the governing ethos of humanism in public speech. His discourse is grounded in the ethics of truth, with a corresponding attitude that constitutes a necessary condition for an objective or positive depiction of the phenomena under scrutiny. In this sense, he is the initiator of a mode of thought whereby political philosophy transitions into political science.

Although political science, in its fully modern form, cannot yet be said to exist, it would be inconceivable without the principle introduced by Machiavelli. It would later appear as a methodological axiom: "subordination of imagination to observation" (Auguste Comte). In Machiavelli's case, this meant subordinating the humanist fable of politics and the ruler to the revealed facts that the propagandistic fable had previously concealed. Because this principle guides the establishment of facts, humanism would later deride it as "crawling positivism" and, over the centuries, would continually hinder the formation of political science, smothering it beneath the pillow of its moralizing imagination – all the way to the twentieth-century humanists-Marxists.

The methodological stance underlying Machiavelli's insights would much later be recognized as the principle of value-neutrality. In line with the claim made above that it is rooted in ethics, this value-neutrality is by no means detached from all moral considerations; on the contrary, it presupposes a very specific moral ethos, which we may call the *ethics of truth*. It is the stance of uncompromising discourse on what has been established, a presentation delivered impartially – colloquially, 'without favoritism' – combined with a readiness to endure all the consequences of such discourse, all in the pursuit of objective knowledge.

Such a stance was always alien to humanism, weighed down as it was by normative overload and by the primary task of promoting narratives about "how man ought to be understood" and what politics "ought to be" as a form of humanitarian endeavor. We need not here recall what was written about Hobbes, another founder of modern political science, who, like Machiavelli, was castigated for revealing the so-called "misanthropy" inherent in human nature as unacceptable.[12] This was intrinsic

[12] We would leave the faculty with our minds saturated by such accounts. Indeed, it is only the humanists—among whom the Marxists also belong—who remain convinced that science can be constructed out of desiderata, idealized representations, and

to humanist thinking, so much so that it produced countless testimonies against value-neutrality. Nor should we forget what Marxists – likewise operating within a humanist register – wrote in opposition to Max Weber regarding this principle. It is unsurprising: any particular political or ideological commitment (and thus value-laden stance) had to be propagandistically represented as a posture of "true science."

The humanist image of Machiavelli, long entrenched as a conventional cliché, as a superficial anti-propagandistic tale that appeals more to normative benchmarks than to positive truth, remains a scandal of humanism that is still hushed to this day. This is possible because humanism has maintained a near-monopoly in the social sciences and political PHILOSOPHY, enabling it to censor truths about itself and to chronically sustain its errors and falsehoods concerning politics. Consequently, the positive truth of Machiavelli's achievement, as with much else, cannot and will not attain the status of a commonplace until science becomes autonomous from humanism itself.

Conclusion

Through the preceding exposition, we have presented Machiavelli in stark contrast to the image of a cynic and hypocrite that humanists imposed upon him – and continue to impose to this day. His only "fault" was that, surrounded by hypocrites, he was honest and sincere to an almost unbearable degree. Modernity, grounded in both the principle of Machiavellianism and the hypocrisy of humanism, has been unable to forgive him for this for five centuries. This characteristic of the modern age explains how an utterly unfounded accusation – an openly fabricated lie about him – has retained its force up to the present day.

Having repositioned the details of the constructed image of Machiavelli according to their true context and rightful place, we may conclude that the "principle of Machiavellianism," as a principle of dualism and the unity between the inner truth of politics and its public (external) appearance, deserves to bear his name – just as a unit of magnetic field strength bears Tesla's name. This principle is Machiavelli's discovery, not his personal trait. That alone provides ample justification for the long-overdue rehabilitation of his name from five centuries of unjust accusation.

a selective partitioning of what is deemed "acceptable" and "unacceptable." Consequently, their works on politics offered little of genuine intellectual substance. Nor could they have, given that they routinely and without reservation repudiated the most significant political thinkers—from Machiavelli, through Hobbes and de Sade, to Carl Schmitt, and beyond. All were dismissed as aberrant figures, malign reactionaries, and misanthropes. These writings are propagandistic in nature, characteristically marked by the overt display of personal ideological commitments—precisely the defining feature of the humanist lecturer. Their thought, guided by images of "how the human being ought to be understood" and what politics "ought to be," is *par excellence* normatively compromised, with no prospect of attaining the scholarly rigor required for serious theoretical reflection. For this reason, their discrediting treatments of Machiavelli never exceeded the level of amateur comprehension, whose superficiality and dilettantism remained insulated by the enforced humanistic monopoly. Even today, in our academic milieu, the highest commendation one can bestow upon a scholar in the social sciences or philosophy is that he is (or was) a "person of humanist convictions" and of the corresponding activist orientation. We have, moreover, a century of publicly self-declared humanists behind us—and yet not a single monograph on humanism itself.

References

Adalbertus Samaritianus (1961). *The Precepts of Letter Writing (Praecepta Dictaminum).* Frantz-Jozef Schmale [eds.]. MGH, Weimar.

Allen, J. W. (1960). *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Methuen & Co. Ltd. London.

Aristotle (1982). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Zagreb: SNL. [In Serbian]

Baron, H. (1966). *The Crisis of Early Italian Renaissance*. Princeton.

Baron, H. (1938). The Franciscan Poverty and Civic Wealth as Factors in the Rise of Humanistic Thought. *Speculum*, 13, pp. 1–37.

Banker, J. R. (1974). The *Ars Dictaminis* and Rhetorical Textbooks at the Bolognese University in the XIV Century. *Medievalia et Humanistica*. *New Series*, 5, pp. 153–168.

Bowie, E. L. (1970). Greeks and their Past in the Second Sophistic. *Past & Present*, 46, pp. 3–41.

Bowsky, W. M. (1962). The *Buon Governo* of Siena (1287–1355): A Medieval Italian Oligarchy. *Speculum*, 37, pp. 368–381.

Bowsky, W. M. (1967). The Medieval Commune and Internal Violence: Police Power and Public Safety in Siena, 1287–1355. *The American Historical Review*, 73, pp. 1–17.

Buck, A. (1976). *Die Reception der Antike in dem romanischen Literaturen der Renaissance*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

Burckhardt, J. (1958). *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag.

Burckhardt, J. (1989). *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Sremski Karlovci: IK Z. Stojanovića. [In Serbian]

Cassirer, E. P. *et al*. [eds.] (1948). *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Clough, C. H., [ed.] (1976). *Cultural Aspects of Italian Renaissance. Essays in Honour of Oscar P. Kristeller.* Manchester: University Press.

Coplestone, F. (1991). *A History of Philosophy*, vol. II: *Medieval Philosophy*. Beograd: BIGZ. [In Serbian]

Delumeau, J. (1989). *La civilisation de la Renaissance*. Novi Sad, 1989. [In Serbian]

Dannenfeldt, K. H. [ed.] (1959). *The Renaissance: Medieval or Modern?* Boston: D. C. Heath & Co.

Davis, Ch. T. (1965). Education in Dante's Florence, *Speculum*, 40, pp. 415–435.

Durant, W. (1955). *Die Renaissance. Eine Kulturgeschichte Italiens von 1304 bis 1576. Die Geschichte der Zivilisation.* Band V, Bern: Francke Verlag.

East, J. R. (1968). Brunetto Latini's Rhetoric of Letter Writing, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 54, pp. 241–246.

Faulhaber, Ch. (1978). The *Summa dictaminis* of Guido Faba, Murphy [ed.] (1978): pp. 85–111.

Garin, E. (1988). *Italian humanism; philosophy and civic life in the Renaissance*. Novi Sad: KZ. [In Serbian]

Gerl, H.-B. (1974). *Rhetorik als Philosophie. Lorenzo Valla.* München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Gray, H. (1963). Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence, *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24, pp. 497–514.

Goodman, A., MacKay, A. [eds.] (1990). *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*. London and New York: Longman.

Green, V. H. H. (1985). *Renaissance and Reformation*, 2nd ed. London: Edward Arnold.

Haskins, Ch. H. (1927). *The Renaissance of Twelfth Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Haskins, Ch. H. (1929). The Early *Ars Dictandi* in Italy. *Studies in Medieval Culture*. Oxford, pp. 170–192.

Hay, D. (1961). *The Italian Renaissance: In Its Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Hay, D., Law, J. (1989). *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1380–1530*. London and New York: Longman.

Helton, T. [ed.] (1964). *The Renaissance: A Reconsideration of the Theories of the Age*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Kantorowicz, E. H. (1941–1943). An 'autobiography' of Guido Faba, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1, pp. 253–280.

Kantorowicz E. H. (1943). Anonymi "Aurea Gemma", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 1, pp. 41–57.

Kristeller, P. O. (1956). *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*. Rome: Ediz. di Storia e Litter.

Kristeller, P. O. (1959). The Place of Classical Humanism in Renaissance Thought. In: H. Karl [ed.], *Dannenfeldt*, pp. 75–78.

Kristeller, P. O. (1961). *Renaissance Thought I: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanistic Strains*. New York.

Kristeller, P. O. (1964). Changing Views of the Intellectual History of the Renaissance since Jacob Burkhardt., Helton, [ed.], pp. 27–52.

Kristeller, P. O. (1965). *Renaissance Thought II: Papers on Humanism and the Arts*. New York.

Latini, B. (1948). *The Book of Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor).* California.

Mahoney, E. P. [ed.] (1976). *Philosophy of Humanism. Renaissance Essays in Honour of O. P. Kristeller*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Mallett, M. E. (1976). Some Notes on a Fifteenth-Century *Condottiere* and his Library. In: C. H. Clough (ed.) Cultural Aspects of Italian Renaissance (1976), pp. 202–215.

Marcuse, H. (1968). *One-Dimensional Man*. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša. [In Serbian]

Mc Keon, R. (1942). Rhetoric in the Middle Ages, *Speculum*, 17, pp. 1–32.

Mommsen, T. (1942). Petrarch's Conception of the "Dark Ages", *Speculum*, 17.

Murphy, J. J. (1971). *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*. Berkeley, California.

Murphy, J. J. (1974). *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance*. Berkeley, California.

Murphy, J. J. [ed.] (1978). *Medieval Eloquence. Studies in the Theory of Medieval Rhetoric.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Murray, L. (1986). *The High Renaissance and Mannerism: Italy, the North and Spain 1500–1600*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Phillips, M. M. (1949). *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance*. London.

Post, G. (1964). *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State 1100–1322*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Potter, G. R. [ed.] (1957). *The Renaissance, 1493–1520*. *The New Cambridge History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Rand, E. K. (1929). The Classics in the Thirteenth Century, *Speculum*, 4, pp. 249–269.

Robey, D. (1973). P. P. Vergerio the Elder: Republicanism and Civic Values in the Work of an Early Humanist, *Past & Present*, 58, pp. 3–37.

Schulte, H. K. (1935). *Orator. Untersuchungen über Ciceronianische Bildungsideal.* Frankfurt am M.: Vittorio Klosterman.

Siegel, J. E. (1966). "Civic Humanism" or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni, *Past and Present*, 34, pp. 3–48.

Siegel, J. E. (1968). *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Wisdom and Eloquence from Petrarch to Valla.* New Jersey: Princeton.

Skinner, Q. (1979). *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought.* Vol. I: *The Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spinner, H. F. (1986). Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, Bert Brecht als Wegweiser zum ganzen Rationalismus der Doppelvernunft, *Merkur*, 40 (November 1986), Heft. 11, pp. 923–948.

Struever, N. (1970). *Language of History in the Renaissance.* New Jersey: Princeton.

Trinkhaus, Ch. (1976). Protagoras in the Renaissance: An Exploration. In: Mahoney, Edward, P. [ed.], *Philosophy and Humanism. Renaissance Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller.* Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Ullmann, B. L. (1941). Some Aspects of the Origin of Italian Humanism, *Philological Quarterly*, 20, pp. 212–223.

Weisinger, H. (1943). The Self-Awareness of the Renaissance as a Criterion of the Renaissance, *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, 29, pp. 561–567.

Weisinger, H. (1945a). The Renaissance Theory of the Reaction against the Middle Ages as a cause of the Renaissance, *Speculum*, 20, pp. 461–467.

Weisinger, H. (1945b). Ideas of History during the Renaissance, *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 6, pp. 415–435.

Wieruszowsky, H. (1971). *Ars Dictaminis* in the Time of Dante, *Politics and Culture in Medieval Spain and Italy.* Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Litteratura, pp. 359–377.

Wolin, Sh. (1961). *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. London: George Allen & Unwin.