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Machiavelli's Reader

Leone Gazziero

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Machiavelli : Introduction

Confusion verging on chaos aptly describes Italian politics between any two points in time. That being said, the amount of outright violence, political backstabbing and social upheaval Machiavelli had to put up with – as a successful bureaucrat and diplomat first (1498-1512), and afterwards as a disgraced citizen (1512-1527) – is, with few if any exceptions, virtually unmatched in the history of Italian philosophy. At any rate, it is conspicuous enough to put him in a league (of political thinkers) of his own. All the more so since, in Machiavelli's own words ([T1]), his claim to originality rested on a return to the things themselves and the « real truth » they convey through experience, as opposed to the traditional proclivity to speculate on « imaginary things », most notably by portraying fanciful characters and devising political regimes that can only exist on paper. Indeed, philosophers have been lecturing – either in flawless syllogistic fashion or in vivid rhetorical style – both rulers and subjects on how they should behave and get along. However, they have taken little notice of how they actually go about their business. Conversely, what does unbiased, direct observation of the present and extensive, informed reading of the past teach us about the ways of the world? Excerpts from [T2] provide us with a colourful reminder of Machiavelli's views on what human beings are capable of and how best to deal with them. In a nutshell, when it comes to human relationships, there is no such thing as being too dumb to be wicked. As a matter of fact, ordinary people are guilty as charged on both counts. (One might as well dispense with labels, as Machiavelli does in [T2] Excerpt 3, insofar as non-ordinary people are so extraordinarily few as to make no difference). Men are a sorry lot (they are peevish, greedy, selfish and treacherous), and a credulous bunch to boot (they can't help rising to the bait when they are told what they want to hear). No wonder Machiavelli came up with some peculiar pieces of advice concerning state management and social control. A couple of straightforward recommendations of his will help us get the gist of (Machiavelli's) Machiavellianism, and then some. It should be understood from the start that enjoying an excellent reputation is one thing and being righteous is quite another. It should also be understood that, when they happen to be at odds, Machiavelli urges whoever is running things to surrender moral principles and embrace whatever course of action keeps him ahead of the competition. In other words, for all practical purposes, good politics and bad ethics get on together far better than the other way around ([T3], Excerpt 3). As a matter of fact, to take one's moral notions for political realities is a recipe for failure. So, as far as Machiavelli is concerned, the real issue is not so much whether or not one should get his hands dirty, since nobody in his right mind would keep them clean when the situation calls for extreme measures. For it can't be helped, the only problem one ought to worry about is rather how to get away with questionable practices such as betrayal, assassination or cruelty (three examples Machiavelli treats as a matter of political course, as in [T3], Excerpt 5). Even though the vast majority of people do not care much about the way the powers that be deliver a reasonable amount of peace and security at home, Machiavelli's golden rule has been met with a certain amount of suspicion. Yet, he definitely had a point and – like every rule of thumb worthy of the name – it makes things a lot easier while reducing the risk of getting hurt in the process. As Machiavelli puts it in devising ways to avoid being hated and despised, rulers should have someone else endorse and especially enforce unpopular policies, whereas they should claim credit for those actions which will increase their popularity. Given the overall purpose of the chapters ([T3], Excerpt 3-4) and their broad moral compass, no stretch of the imagination is required to infer that, in order to succeed, a ruler had better take the merit whenever it is convenient to do the right thing and lay the blame at someone else's door whenever criminal behaviour is in his best interest. What if there's nobody around either to help with the dirty work or, failing that, to conveniently take the fall? Machiavelli spelled out his answer in a number of different ways, but – bottom line – his counsel remains pretty much the same and it emphasizes convenient timing ([T3], Excerpt 4) and careful dissimulation ([T3], Excerpt 1). When the time has come to match violence with more violence and subtlety with more subtlety, one should put some extra care into keeping up with moral appearances, at least until, having no further use for those his previous façade of respectability has deceived, one can afford – on top of dealing with his current foes – to treat old friends as new enemies ([T3] Excerpt 2). In this respect, it is worth noting that it is rather commonplace, albeit inaccurate and somewhat misleading, to saddle Machiavelli with a clear-cut distinction between ethics and politics. True enough, according to Machiavelli, politics has reasons and rules of its own, which morality condemns more than it understands. And true enough again, when push comes to shove, political expediency and moral integrity are mutually exclusive. Still, always according to Machiavelli, good faith, mercy and honour, as well as whatever else passes for good manners or helps you win your neighbour's love and respect, are an asset as long as they don't become a liability. All these fine qualities have their uses in the political arena, provided we use them, that is

provided we treat ethical concerns as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. Granted that the realm of political possibilities is wide enough to include everything short of mindless violence and random destruction ([T4] Excerpt 2) and, as a result, it encompasses what is morally acceptable, how do we get to choose whether to stay within the boundaries of either the ethically or the politically correct? Although apparently well-formed, questions along these lines rest on a fundamental confusion to the extent that they overlook the basic fact that we don't really carry the burden – or have the luxury, for that matter – of choosing between the two. Of course, there's plenty to be right or wrong about, but one simply does not decide when it is expedient to go rogue and when, on the contrary, it is unwise to push the moral envelope ([T3] Excerpt 1). Eventually, situations sort themselves out and, when the dust settles, the head count provides a reliable indicator of who got his priorities straight and who didn't. This is, arguably, the most distinctive feature of Machiavelli's talk of skill, fortune and how statesmen are supposed to prevail through a solid display of the former and a healthy respect for the latter. First of all, it accounts for the remarkable scope of Machiavelli's « virtue », which is a constant disposition to do whatever circumstances require, be it good, evil or a bit of both. Secondly, it goes a long way toward explaining why Machiavelli's prince is so flexible a character that tycoons and gangsters no less than political and military leaders have boasted they borrowed a page from his book. No surprise there, either: in a world where everything is negotiable and virtue is simply the art of getting the upper hand, it is immaterial whether it takes a good or a bad person to be a successful ruler. As a matter of fact, it is immaterial whether it takes a person at all. While Dante portrayed Farinata as an individual who would have rather died than give up everything he stood for and thus become somebody he could not live with, Machiavelli is the prophet of another kind of humanity altogether. His prince is less an individual than a calculating force who doesn't let anything personal – neither his moral scruples nor his nasty habits – interfere with his commitment to success. A model which matches humans (monarchs, executives, bureaucrats, diplomats, etc.) as much as human institutions (political parties, state cabinets, corporate boards, criminal cartels and any combination thereof). And this alone should be enough to ensure Machiavellianism a place of choice amongst the archetypes of philosophical wisdom.

Machiavelli : Texts

[T1 Machiavelli] Excerpt 1

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, G. Inglese (éd.), Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013, XV :

« *De his rebus quibus homines et praesertim principes laudantur aut vituperantur* (Di quelle cose che li òmini, e spezialment'e' principi, sono laudati o biasimati). Resta ora a vedere quali debbano essere e' modi e governi di uno principe co' sudditi o con li amici. E perché io so che molti di questo hanno scritto, dubito, scrivendone ancora io, non essere tenuto prosuntuoso, partendomi massime nel disputare questa materia dalli ordini delli altri; ma, sendo l'intento mio, scrivere cosa utile a chi la intende, mi è parso più conveniente andare dietro alla verità effettuale della cosa che alla immaginazione di essa. E molti si sono immaginati republiche e principati, che non si sono mai visti né conosciuti essere in vero, perché elli è tanto discosto da come si vive a come si doverrebbe vivere, che colui che lascia quello che si fa per quello che si doverrebbe fare, impara più presto la ruina che la preservazione sua, perché uno omo che voglia fare in tutte le parte professione di buono conviene che ruini fra tanti che non sono buoni. Onde è necessario a uno principe, volendosi mantenere, imparare a potere essere non buono e usarlo e non usarlo secondo la necessità. Lasciando adunque adretto le cose circa uno principe immaginate e discorrendo quelle che sono vere, dico etc. »

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005 :

« (Of those things for which men, and particularly princes, are praised or blamed). Now, it remains to be considered what should be the methods and principles of a prince in dealing with his subjects and allies. Because I know that many have written about this, I am afraid that by writing about it again I shall be considered presumptuous, especially since in discussing this material I depart from the procedures of others. But since my intention is to write something useful for anyone who understands it, it seemed more suitable for me to search after the effectual truth of the matter rather than its imagined one. Many writers have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen nor known to exist in reality. For there is such a distance between how one lives and how one ought to live, that anyone who abandons what is done for what ought to be done achieves his downfall rather than his preservation. A man who wishes to profess goodness at all times will come to ruin among so many who are not good. Therefore, it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself to learn how not

to be good, and to use this knowledge or not to use it according to necessity. Leaving aside, therefore, matters concerning an imaginary prince, and taking into account those that are true, let me say that etc. ».

[T2 Machiavelli] Excerpt 1

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XVII :

« *De crudelitate et pietate; et an sit melius amari quam timeri, vel e contra* (Della crudeltà e pietà, e s'elli è meglio essere amato che temuto o più tosto temuto che amato). Nasce da questo una disputa, s'elli è meglio essere amato che temuto o e converso. Responsesi che si vorrebbe essere l'uno e l'altro; ma perché elli è difficile accozzarli insieme, è molto più sicuro essere temuto che amato, quando si abbi a mancare dell'uno de' dua, perché delli òmini si può dire questo generalmente, che sieno ingrati, volubili, simulatori, fuggitori de' pericoli, cupidi di guadagno, e, mentre fai loro bene, sono tutti tua, offeronti el sangue, la roba, la vita, e' figliuoli, [...], quando el bisogno è discosto, ma, quando ti si appressa, e' si rivoltano ; [...], e li òmini hanno meno rispetto ad offendere uno che si facci amare che uno che si facci temere, perché l'amore è tenuto da uno vincolo di obbligo, il quale, per essere li òmini tristi, da ogni occasione di propria utilità è rotto, ma il timore è tenuto da una paura di pena, che non ti abandona mai ».

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« (Of cruelty and mercy, and whether it is better to be loved than to be feared or the contrary). From this arises an argument: whether it is better to be loved than to be feared, or the contrary. The answer is that one would like to be both one and the other. But since it is difficult to be both together, it is much safer to be feared than to be loved, when one of the two must be lacking. For one can generally say this about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, simulators and deceivers, avoiders of danger, and greedy for gain. While you work for their benefit they are completely yours, offering you their blood, their property, their lives, and their sons, as I said above, when the need to do so is far away. But when it draws nearer to you, they turn away. [...]. Men are less hesitant about injuring someone who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared, because love is held together by a chain of obligation that, since men are a wretched lot, is broken on every occasion for their own self-interest; but fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that will never abandon you ».

[T2 Machiavelli] Excerpt 2

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XVIII :

« *Quomodo fides a principibus sit servanda* (In che modo e' principi abbino a mantenere la fede). Quanto sia laudabile in uno principe mantenere la fede e vivere con integrità e non con astuzia, ciascuno lo intende; nondimanco si vede per esperienza ne' nostri tempi quelli principi avere fatto grandi cose, che della fede hanno tenuto poco conto e che hanno saputo con la astuzia aggirare e' cervelli delli òmini, e alla fine hanno superato quelli che si sono fondati in sulla lealtà. [...]. Non può pertanto uno signore prudente né debbe osservare la fede, quando tale osservanzia li torni contro e che sono spente le cagioni che la feciono promettere; e se li òmini fussino tutti buoni, questo precetto non sarebbe buono, ma perché sono tristi e non la osserverebbero a te, tu etiam non la hai a osservare a loro. Né mai a uno principe mancorono cagioni legittime da colorare la inosservanzia. Di questo se ne potrebbe dare infiniti esempli moderni e mostrare quante pace, quante promesse sono state fatte irrite e vane per la infidelità de' principi; e quello che ha saputo meglio usare la golpe è meglio capitato; ma è necessario, questa natura, saperla bene colorire e essere gran simulatore e dissimulatore; e sono tanto semplici li òmini e tanto obediscano alle necessità presenti, che colui che inganna troverrà sempre chi si lascerà ingannare. Io non voglio, delli esempli freschi, tacerne uno: Alessandro VI non fece mai altro, non pensò mai a altro che a ingannare òmini, e sempre trovò subietto da poterlo fare, e non fu mai omo che avessi maggiore efficacia in asseverare e con maggiori giuramenti affermassi una cosa che l'osservassi meno; nondimeno sempre li succedono l'inganni ad votum, perché conosceva bene questa parte del mondo. »

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« (How a prince should keep his word). How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his word and to live with integrity and not by cunning, everyone knows. Nevertheless, one sees from experience in our times that the princes

who have accomplished great deeds are those who have thought little about keeping faith and who have known how cunningly to manipulate men's minds; and in the end they have surpassed those who laid their foundations upon sincerity. [...]. A wise ruler, therefore, cannot and should not keep his word when such an observance would be to his disadvantage, and when the reasons that caused him to make a promise are removed. If men were all good, this precept would not be good. But since men are a wicked lot and will not keep their promises to you, you likewise need not keep yours to them. A prince never lacks legitimate reasons to colour over his failure to keep his word. Of this, one could cite an endless number of modern examples to show how many pacts and how many promises have been made null and void because of the faithlessness of princes; and he who has known best how to use the ways of the fox has come out best. But it is necessary to know how to colour over this nature effectively, and to be a great pretender and dissembler. Men are so simple-minded and so controlled by their immediate needs that he who deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived. I do not wish to remain silent about one of these recent examples. Alexander VI never did anything else, nor thought about anything else, than to deceive men, and he always found someone to whom he could do this. There never has been a man who asserted anything with more effectiveness, nor whose affirmations rested upon greater oaths, who observed them less. Nevertheless, his deceptions always succeeded to his heart's desire, since he knew this aspect of the world very well. »

[T2 Machiavelli] Excerpt 3

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XVIII :

« Facci dunque uno principe di vincere e mantenere lo stato: e' mezzi sempre saranno iudicati onorevoli e da ciascuno laudati, perché el vulgo ne va preso con quello che pare e con lo evento della cosa, e nel mondo non è se non vulgo e li pochi non ci hanno luogo, quando li assai hanno dove appoggiarsi. Alcuno principe de' presenti tempi, quale non è bene nominare, non predica mai altro che pace e fede, e dell'una e della altra è inimicissimo; e l'una e l'altra quando e' l'avessi osservata, li arebbe più volte tolto e la reputazione e lo stato »

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« Therefore, let a prince conquer and maintain the state, and his methods will always be judged honourable and praised by all. For ordinary people are always taken in by appearances and by the outcome of an event. And in the world there are only ordinary people; and the few have no place, while the many have a spot on which to lean. A certain prince of the present times, whom it is best not to name, preaches nothing but peace and faith, and to both one and the other he is extremely hostile. If he had observed both peace and faith, he would have had either his reputation or his state taken away from him many times over ».

[T3 Machiavelli] Excerpt 1

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XVIII :

« A uno principe adunque non è necessario avere tutte le soprascritte qualità ^[1], ma è bene necessario parere d'averle; anzi, ardirò di dire questo, che, avendole e osservandole sempre, sono dannose, e parendo di averle, sono utile, come parere pietoso, fedele, umano, intero, relligioso e essere, ma stare in modo edificato con l'animo che, bisognando non essere, tu possa e sappi mutare el contrario. E hassi a intendere questo, che uno principe, [...], non può osservare tutte quelle cose per le quali li òmini sono tenuti buoni, sendo spesso necessitato, per mantenere lo stato, operare contro alla fede, contro alla carità, contro alla umanità, contro alla religione; e però bisogna che elli abbi uno animo disposto a volgersi secondo che e' venti della fortuna e la variazione delle cose li comandano, e, [...], non partirsi dal bene potendo, ma sapere intrare nel male necessitato ».

[1] XV : « <esser>liberale, donatore, pietoso, fedele, animoso, umano, casto, intero, grave, religioso ».

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« Therefore, it is not necessary for a prince to possess all of the above-mentioned qualities ^[1], but it is very necessary for him to appear to possess them. Furthermore, I shall dare to assert this: that having them and always observing them is harmful, but appearing to observe them is useful: for instance, to appear merciful, faithful, humane, trustworthy, religious, and to be so; but with his mind disposed in such a way that, should it become

necessary not to be so, he will be able and know how to change to the opposite. One must understand this: a prince, [...], cannot observe all those things for which men are considered good, because in order to maintain the state he must often act against his faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion. And so it is necessary that he should have a mind ready to turn itself according to the way the winds of Fortune and the changing circumstances command him. And, as I said above, he should not depart from the good if it is possible to do so, but he should know how to enter into evil when forced by necessity ».

[1] XV : « <to be> generous, open-handed, merciful, faithful, fierce, humane, trustworthy, serious, religious ».

[T3 Machiavelli] Excerpt 2

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, F. Bausi (ed.), Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2001, I, 41 :

« *Saltare dalla umiltà alla superbia, dalla pietà alla crudeltà, senza i debiti mezzi, è cosa imprudente e inutile.* Oltre agli altri termini male usati da Appio per mantenere la tirannide, non fu di poco momento saltare troppo presto da una qualità a un'altra. Perché l'astuzia sua nello ingannare la plebe, simulando d'essere uomo popolare, fu bene usata; furono ancora bene usati i termini che tenne perché i Dieci si avessero a rifare; fu ancora bene usata quella audacia di creare se stesso contro alla opinione della Nobiltà; fu bene usato creare compagni a suo proposito: ma non fu già bene usato, come egli ebbe fatto questo, secondo che disopra dico, mutare, in uno subito, natura; e, di amico, mostrarsi inimico alla plebe; di umano, superbo; di facile, difficile; e farlo tanto presto, che, senza scusa niuna, ogni uomo avesse a conoscere la fallacia dello animo suo. Perché chi è paruto buono un tempo, e vuole a suo proposito diventar cattivo, lo debbe fare per i debiti mezzi; ed in modo condurvisi con le occasioni, che, innanzi che la diversa natura ti tolga de' favori vecchi, la te ne abbia dati tanti de' nuovi, che tu non venga a diminuire la tua autorità: altrimenti, trovandoti scoperto e senza amici, rovini ».

H.C Mansfield and N. Tarcov, *Niccolò Machiavelli. Discourses on Livy*, London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996 :

« *To Leap from Humility to Pride, from Mercy to Cruelty, without Due Degrees Is Something Imprudent and Useless.* Among the other means badly used by Appius to maintain his tyranny, it was of no little moment to leap too quickly from one quality to another. For his astuteness in deceiving the plebs, pretending to be a man of the people, was well used; also well used were the means he adopted so that the Ten would have to be remade; also well used was the audacity of creating himself against the opinion of the nobility; creating partners to his purposes was well used. But it was not at all well used, when he had done this, as I say above, to change nature of a sudden and from a friend of the plebs show himself an enemy; from humane, proud; from agreeable, difficult; and to do it so quickly that without any excuse every man had to know the falsity of his spirit. For whoever has appeared good for a time and wishes for his purposes to become wicked ought to do it by due degrees and to conduct himself with opportunities, so that before your different nature takes away old favour from you, it has given you so much new that you do not come to diminish your authority; otherwise, finding yourself uncovered and without friends, you are ruined »

[T3 Machiavelli] Excerpt 3

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XIX :

« *De contemptu et odio fugiendo* (In che modo si abbia a fuggire lo essere sprezzato e odiato). E qui si debbe notare che l'odio s'acquista così mediante le buone opere come le triste; e però, [...], uno principe, volendo mantenere lo stato, è spesso sforzato a non essere buono. Perché, quando quella università, o populi o soldati o grandi ch'e' si sieno, della quale tu iudichi avere per mantenerli, più bisogno, è corrotta, ti conviene seguire l'umore suo per satisfarle; e allora le buone opere ti sono nimiche »

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« (Of avoiding being despised and hated). Here, one must note that hatred is acquired just as much through good actions as by sorry ones. And so, [...], if a prince wishes to maintain the state, he is often obliged not to be good, because whenever that group you believe you need to support you is corrupted— whether it be the people,

the soldiers, or the nobles– it is to your advantage to follow their inclinations in order to satisfy them, and then good deeds are your enemy »

[T3 Machiavelli] Excerpt 4

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, VIII :

« *De his qui per scelera ad principatum pervenere* (Di quelli che per scelleratezze hanno acquistato principati). Potrebbe alcuno dubitare donde nascessi che Agatocle e alcuno simile, dopo infiniti tradimenti e crudeltà, possé vivere lungamente sicuro nella sua patria e difendersi da li inimici esterni, e da' suoi cittadini non gli fu mai con spira to contro – con ciò sia che molti altri mediante la crudeltà non abbino etiam ne' tempi pacifici potuto mante nere lo stato, non che ne' tempi dubiosi di guerra. Credo che questo avvenga da le crudeltà male usate o bene usate. Bene usate si possono chiamare quelle – se del male è lecito dire bene – che si fanno a uno tratto per la necessità dello assicurarsi, e di poi non vi si insiste drento ma si convertono in più utilità de' sudditi che si può. Male usate sono quelle le quali, ancora che nel princi pio sieno poche, più tosto col tempo crescono che le si spenghino. Coloro che osservano el primo modo possono con Dio e con li uomini avere allo stato loro qualche rimedio, come ebbe Agatocle; quegli altri è impossibile si mantenghino. Onde è da notare che nel pigliare uno stato debbe lo occupatore d'esso discorrere tutte quelle offese che gli è necessario fare, e tutte farle a uno tratto per non le avere a rinnovare ogni dì e potere, non le innovando, assi curare li uomini e guadagnarseli con benificarli. Chi fa altrimenti o per timidità o per mal consiglio, è sempre necessitato tenere il coltello in mano; né mai può fondarsi sopra e' sua sudditi, non si potendo quegli per le fresche e continue iniurie mai assicurare di lui. Per che le iniurie si debbono fare tutte insieme acciò che, assaporan dosi meno, offendino meno; e' benefizi si debbono fare a poco a poco acciò si assaporino meglio ».

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« (Of those who have become princes through wickedness). One might well wonder how, after so many betrayals and cruelties, Agathocles and others like him could live for such a long time secure in their native cities and defend themselves from foreign enemies without being plotted against by their own citizens. Many others, employing cruel means, were unable to hold on to their state even in peaceful times, not to speak of the uncertain times of war. I believe that this depends on whether cruelty be badly or well used. Those cruelties are well used (if it is permitted to speak well of evil) that are carried out in a single stroke, done out of necessity to protect oneself, and then are not continued, but are instead converted into the greatest possible benefits for the subjects. Those cruelties are badly used that, although few at the outset, increase with the passing of time instead of disappearing. Those who follow the first method can remedy their standing, both with God and with men, as Agathocles did; the others cannot possibly maintain their positions. Hence it should be noted that, in conquering a state, its conqueror should weigh all the injurious things he must do and commit them all at once, so as not to have to repeat them every day. By not repeating them, he will be able to make men feel secure and win them over with the benefits he bestows upon them. Anyone who does otherwise, either out of timidity or because of bad advice, is always obliged to keep his knife in his hand. Nor can he ever count upon his subjects, who, because of their recent and continuous injuries, cannot feel secure with him. Therefore, injuries should be inflicted all at once, for the less they are tasted, the less harm they do. However, benefits should be distributed a little at a time, so that they may be fully savoured ».

[T3 Machiavelli] Excerpt 5

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XVII :

« Ma quando el principe è con li esserciti e ha in governo moltitudine di soldati, allora al tutto è necessario non si curare del nome del crudele, perché senza questo nome non si tenne mai essercito unito né disposto a alcuna fazione. In tra le mirabili azioni di Annibale si connumera questa, che, avendo uno essercito grossissimo, misto di infinite generazioni di uomini, condotto a militare in terre aliene, non vi surgessi mai alcuna dissensione né in fra loro né contro al principe, così nella cattiva come nella sua buona fortuna. Il che non possé nascere da altro che da quella sua inumana crudeltà: la quale, insieme con infinite sua virtù, lo fece sempre nel conspetto de' suoi soldati venerando e terribile. E, senza quella, a fare quello effetto l'altre sua virtù non bastavano: e li scrittori, in questo poco considerati, da l'una parte ammirano questa sua azione, da l'altra dannano la principale cagione di essa. E

che sia vero che le altre sua virtù non sarebbero bastate si può considerare in Scipione, rarissimo non solamente ne' tempi sua ma in tutta la memoria delle cose che si fanno, dal quale li esserciti sua in Ispagna si ribellorno: il che non nacque da altro che da la sua troppa pietà, la quale aveva data alli sua soldati più licenza che alla disciplina militare non si conveniva; la qual cosa gli fu da Fabio Massimo in senato rimproverata e chiamato da lui corruttore della romana milizia ».

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« But when the prince is with his armies and has a multitude of soldiers under his command, then it is absolutely necessary that he should not worry about being considered cruel, for without that reputation he will never keep an army united or prepared for any action. Numbered among the remarkable deeds of Hannibal is this: that while he had a very large army made up of all kinds of men that he commanded in foreign lands, there never arose the slightest dissension, either among themselves or against their leader, both during his periods of good and bad luck. This could not have arisen from anything other than his inhuman cruelty, which, along with his many other virtues, made him always venerable and terrifying in the eyes of his soldiers. Without that quality, his other virtues would not have sufficed to attain the same effect. Having considered this matter very superficially, historians on the one hand admire these deeds of his, and on the other condemn the main cause of them. That it is true that his other virtues would not have been sufficient can be seen from the case of Scipio, a most extraordinary man, not only in his time but in all of recorded history, whose armies in Spain rebelled against him. This came about from nothing other than his excessive compassion, which gave his soldiers more licence than is suitable to military discipline. For this he was censured in the Senate by Fabius Maximus, who called him the corruptor of the Roman army ».

[T4 Machiavelli] Excerpt 1

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XV :

« Lasciando adunque adreto le cose circa uno principe immaginate e discorrendo quelle che sono vere, dico che tutti li uomini, quando se ne parla, e maxime e' principi per essere posti più alti, sono notati di alcune di queste qualità che arrecano loro o biasimo o laude. E questo è che alcuno è tenuto liberale, alcuno misero – [...] –; alcuno è tenuto donatore, alcuno rapace; alcuno crudele, alcuno piatoso; l'uno fedifrago, l'altro fedele; l'uno effeminato e pusillanime, l'altro feroce e animoso; l'uno umano, l'altro superbo; l'uno lascivo, l'altro casto; l'uno intero, l'altro astuto; l'uno duro, l'altro facile; l'uno grave, l'altro leggiere; l'uno religioso, l'altro incredulo, e simili. E io so che ciascuno confesserà che sarebbe laudabilissima cosa uno principe trovarsi, di tutte le soprascritte qualità, quelle che sono tenute buone. Ma perché le non si possono avere tutte né interamente osservare, per le condizioni umane che non lo consentono, è necessario essere tanto prudente ch'e' sappi fuggire la infamia di quegli vizi che gli torrebbono lo stato e da quegli che non gliene tolgono guardarsi, s'egli è possibile: ma, non possendo, vi si può con meno rispetto lasciare andare. Et etiam non si curi di incorrere nella infamia di quelli vizi senza e' quali possa difficilmente salvare lo stato; perché, se si considerà bene tutto, si troverà qualche cosa che parrà virtù e, seguendola, sarebbe la ruina sua, e qualcuna altra che parrà vizio e, seguendola, ne nasce la sicurtà e il bene essere suo ».

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« Leaving aside, therefore, matters concerning an imaginary prince, and taking into account those that are true, let me say that all men, when they are spoken of– and especially princes, since they are placed on a higher level– are judged by some of those qualities that bring them either blame or praise. And this is why one is considered generous, another miserly [...]. One is considered a giver, the other rapacious; one cruel, the other merciful; one a breaker of faith, the other faithful; one effeminate and cowardly, the other fierce and courageous; one humane, the other proud; one lascivious, the other chaste; one trustworthy, the other shrewd; one hard, the other easygoing; one serious, the other frivolous; one religious, the other unbelieving; and the like. And I know that everyone will admit it would be a very praiseworthy thing to find in a prince those qualities mentioned above that are held to be good. But since it is neither possible to have them nor to observe them all completely, because the human condition does not permit it, a prince must be prudent enough to know how to escape the infamy of those vices that would take the state away from him, and be on guard against those vices that will not take it from him, whenever possible. But if he cannot, he need not concern himself unduly if he ignores these less serious vices. Moreover, he need not worry about incurring the infamy of those vices without which it would be difficult to save the state. Because, carefully taking everything into account, he will discover that something which appears to be a virtue, if pursued,

will result in his ruin; while some other thing which seems to be a vice, if pursued, will secure his safety and his well-being ».

[T4 Machiavelli] Excerpt 2

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, VIII :

« Non si può ancora chiamare virtù amazzare li sua cittadini, tradire li amici, essere senza fede, senza pietà, senza religione, li quali modi possono fare acquistare imperio, ma non gloria: perché, se si considerassi la virtù di Agatocle nello intrare e nello uscire de' pericoli e la grandezza dello animo suo nel sopportare e superare le cose averse, non si vede perché elli abbia a essere giudicato inferiore a qualunque eccellentissimo capitano: nondimanco, la sua efferata crudeltà e inumanità con infinite sceleratezze non consentono che sia in fra li eccellentissimi òmini celebrato »

P. Bondanella, *Niccolò Machiavelli. The Prince* :

« Still, it cannot be called virtue to kill one's fellow citizens, to betray allies, to be without faith, without pity, without religion; by these means one can acquire power, but not glory. If one were to consider Agathocles' virtue in getting into and out of dangers, and his greatness of spirit in bearing up under and overcoming adversities, one can see no reason why he should be judged inferior to any most excellent commander. Nevertheless, his vicious cruelty and inhumanity, along with numerous wicked deeds, do not permit us to honour him among the most excellent of men »