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The Machiavellis Introduced

Having introduced my thesis, I am obliged to document it, as I do in the following chapters, which explore a number of quite different human landscapes. Here, before the exploring begins, I want to defend wide-ranging comparisons of the kind I am making and then to characterize Machiavellism and introduce the Machiavellians—the Machiavellis, as I call them—with whom the following chapters deal. For the moment, these thinkers can be little more than names, but by taking them out of context it is easy to show what is common to them, what makes them all Machiavellis in spite of their differences in time, culture, and personality. In the course of this introductory discussion, I propose that the Machiavellis, with their overwhelming urge to understand political power, were able to assess politics more accurately than could thinkers whose sight was averted from political reality by their moral ideals, metaphysical principles, or need to build a system.

First, a word on the legitimacy of taking political theory and practice out of context. It is likely that my attempt to describe a transcultural Machiavellism will be criticized as implausible because, by ignoring the unique context of each civilization, I compare what is essentially incomparable. Such an objection rests on a misunderstanding of the limits of the idea of uniqueness. It is true, or at least irrefutable, that each civilization is unique; but there is no good reason to stop with civilizations. To be exact, everything human, for that matter, everything biological, is unique. To restrict ourselves to the human, a moment's thought should make it clear that even identical twins can never be exactly identical. Like other human beings, they are both the same and different, though more subtly different.

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It should be altogether clear that all human beings, simply in being human, are always unique and, at least in nuances, very different from one another, but, in being human, are always very much alike. If not for their uniqueness, we could neither recognize them as human nor relate to them as individuals; but if not for their likeness to one another and to ourselves, it would be impossible to relate to them as, like ourselves, human beings. Physiologists or doctors will discover significant differences between the people they are most familiar with and those who live in a very different environment; but, even so, the resemblances will be great enough to make it possible to use the analogies to distinguish and understand the differences. Psychologists, too, discover pronounced differences but are likely to find (in fact have found) that the basic signs of emotion (smiling, laughter, a pained look, weeping) are largely (not completely) the same (in fact, people born blind smile for the same reasons as others—they have not learned to smile by watching others smile).[1]

On the basis of such analogies and whatever historical and anthropological reading I have done, I make the unremarkable assumption that human traits like kindness and cruelty, love and hate, altruism and egoism, cheerfulness and bad humor, and ambition and lack of ambition are universal. Even though such traits come to expression in different kinds of acts or avoidances and are accentuated or minimized by different social circumstances, they are always present (I assume) and are recognized, on the background of the prevailing culture, for what they are. The differences between kindness and cruelty and truth-telling and lying, the traits we will refer to most, are universal.

Now what are we to take as more real, true, or important, the uniqueness of the individual or the individual's likeness to others? Because groups of individuals, too, are uniquely individual, we can add the question: Is the uniqueness of every family, clan, town, city, country, and civilization more real, true, or important than the likeness between the individuals who constitute them all, including civilizations and mankind as a whole? A similar question can be asked about the uniqueness and likeness of the members of analogous groups—about their family-membership, clan-membership, and so on, up to their membership in civilizations as different as those to be discussed here. I mean—to speak of families only—how important is the likeness conferred on people by the fact that they belong to families and are fathers, mothers, children, and so on, as compared with their unlikeness as members of different kinds of families?

Surely the only reasonable answer to the question, What are we to take as more real, true, or important? is that, as asked, the question is

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absurd because, to make sense, it would have to be modified to something like, Are we to take uniqueness or likeness in such-and-such a particular respect as more or less important for such-and-such a particular purpose? This purpose might be the diagnosis of a disease or, in an instance more relevant to the present theme, the loyalty, that is, the depth of identification, of people with a state whose survival, in a moment of crisis, depended on their readiness to come to its defense.

With respect to what I am calling *Machiavellism*, my first response to the question of likeness and difference is this: In each of the three civilizations, as in the "tribal" cultures I deal with later, the difference between kindness and cruelty, altruism and egoism, truthfulness and lying, ambition and lack of ambition, and, of course, ruling and being ruled were very clear; and in China, India, and Europe, the difference was reflected in a bitter debate between the Machiavellians and the anti-Machiavellians, between, generally, the defenders of a morality with a single standard and the defenders of a *raison d'état* with its implication of a moral standard for the ordinary person different from that of the state and state's leader. It is this common likeness and common debate that justifies the use here of the term *Machiavellism*.

But this is only half of what should be said, because, once the likeness has been identified and exploited for whatever points one wants to make, it is quite legitimate to pay attention to the differences, declare the term *Machiavellism*, with its presumption of uniformity, misleading, and then begin—on the background of the likeness now perceived as oversimple—to make out the unique qualities of each civilization (or period, thinker, politician, or event). Nothing in the emphasis on either likeness or uniqueness prevents the recognition of the other of the pair; in both thought and practice, the existence of the one requires that of the other. This mutuality of likeness and uniqueness is what makes it possible for us to learn general truths and practical habits, and, at the same time, how and when to modify or abandon them. Here, my interest is clearly to establish and make intellectual use of the likeness between the Machiavellism of the three civilizations, and yet I describe the contexts and individuals in enough detail to make possible the verdict, opposite to mine, that the Machiavellism each civilization displays is unique to itself.[2] A more useful response to the opposite possible verdicts might be to distinguish different conditions, types, and consequences of Machiavellism; but such a response does not, in itself, escape the danger of identifying theoretical distinctions with actual occurrences.

Much of what I have to say could have been based on western sources alone. But if you ask why these strangers—ancient Chinese, Indians, and others—are needed in our company, the answer is that

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their strangeness, in many ways real, is superficial when it comes to their advocacy of deception and force. It is just because they are really variants of ourselves that they make it easy for us to see ourselves more clearly and, in Machiavellism, more cruelly than we prefer. They serve as what may be called *un*distorting mirrors. Unless we see ourselves in them, we are likely to excuse our less attractive traits as accidents of time and place that will change when we learn to become our true selves. But though we may think that we are really more beautiful than we have seemed till now—the beauty lies, after all, in the beholder's hopes—we learn that as true humans we are also true animals with the animal goal of power for ourselves and our kin, whom we defend—hate them or love them—against those of other kin groups.

Is this rhetorical, reductive exaggeration? Hardly so, though in time I will qualify because there are many facts to absorb and arguments to be considered before a balanced judgment can be attempted. Machiavellism is too deeply involved in human life to be unravelled quickly. Amoral though it is, it absorbs morality by accepting the moral rules that do not endanger the group or, above all, the state, which is based on the more artificial, nongenetic kinship of many kin groups. Typically enough, what does or does not endanger the group or state is determined by the leader, who voices what is, or what he proclaims to be, the collective will. Although this will is limited by habitual morality, the limits are violated with the help of excuses of many convenient sorts.

The rare candid Machiavelli goes so far as to proclaim that where the state is concerned, no excuses are needed; being essential to human life, it should be defended irrespective of moral rules. In other words, because the state makes moral rules possible, it is superior to them, or, to put it differently, the state, the source of morality, is the supreme moral value. Therefore, argues the candid Machiavelli, the state is empowered to use every means, including every form of deception and force, in order to protect its life. In practice, it is argued, a government can remain viable only if it acts in accord with the Machiavellian principles that allow it to subordinate everything else to the state's health or power. This is because, as I have been saying in the Machiavelli's name, the welfare of the many who make up the state transcends the welfare of all individuals except the ruler, without whom the state cannot exist. An equivalent justification is that the most tyrannical social order is better than social chaos. Therefore, by a simple reappraisal of terms, it becomes possible to argue that what is immoral for the individual is moral for the state, and even that the basic importance of individual morality is that it helps to maintain the state. By this argument, individ-

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ual morality is approved because the more honest, industrious, and brave the citizens, the stronger the state and the better the chance that the ruler, whose ruling principle is effective political action, will remain in power and aggrandize whatever is possible for his own and his state's glory.

Machiavellism tends to be shy of public exposure. Leaders do not commonly avow it in public, either because they have not made their peace with it—they act by its rules, but it makes them uneasy—or because the avowal would subvert their ability to make use of its tactics. For the same reason that the liar, to lie effectively, wears an honest face, the Machiavellian leader prefers to wear an unchangingly moral face. Or, often, he restricts his more open Machiavellism to international relations, in which his tactics are approved by his subjects or citizens because they promise them a common gain. However, even when active in politics, the candid Machiavellians who are the main subject of this book are not themselves full rulers but subordinates or theoreticians who offer leaders their advice. Their preference to remain subordinate and act as the ruler's faithful advisers rather than his competitors hints at a possible quandary in Machiavellian thought.

Granted the ruler's desire for an industrious, brave, and loyal population, it stands to reason that the political doctrines taught in his name should be anti-Machiavellian, not only for the sake of the state's internal life but, as far as possible, to justify its external politics as well. God or gods are invoked to enhance an earthly army with superhuman weaponry, but they are equally useful in their role as the judges who are most likely to rule in the state's favor. Their presumed ability to declare what actions are just is important because justice, by which the accepted principles of fairness are said to be enforced, is always proclaimed to be the ruler's aim.

The kind of justice most useful to state and ruler is driven home by means of a suitable legendary history. Children accept this history because they know no better; and they are taught, more or less successfully, to grow up into consenting adults. Everyone is exhorted to be compliant, faithful, honest, and otherwise decent, and, to make compliance attractive, is promised a social, psychological, or religious reward—social approval, self-approval, or the favor of heaven. But while Machiavellism in its main, political sense prefers conventional morality for ordinary citizens, it does not assume that this morality is easy to inculcate. On the contrary, because its appraisal of human nature is negative, it anticipates that people will very often be selfish, cowardly, aggressive, aggrandizing, lying, and venal. So it is taken for granted that ordinary individuals will use the Machiavellian kind of tactics against one

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another and, if possible, against the state. When it seems expedient, the Machiavellian leader therefore tries to exploit the individual's Machiavellian tendencies or, when expedient, to suppress them by brutal punishment.

Apart from ambitious, faithless citizens, the state has as its other internal Machiavellian rivals any leaders or groups that assume that its right to existence defines or transcends the claims of morality. The state's most natural, most serious rival is religion, which sees itself as the ultimate moral authority. Later, in the last chapter, I will give an extended example of how a religion, like a state, develops Machiavellian characteristics.

So far, I have been calling Machiavellism by the name that European political history has made appropriate, but, as this book shows in detail, it has a Chinese and an Indian analogue—in China called *Legalism* and, in India, *Political Science*, as *arthashastra* may be translated. The differences between the European, Chinese, and Indian forms will become clear, but what is above all important (here, at least) is their underlying likeness.

Let me take a first step and introduce the protagonists of Machiavellism in the three civilizations. For China, these protagonists are three in number: Shang Yang, Han Fei, and Li Ssu, all of the fourth and third centuries B.C. and all grouped together retrospectively under the name of *Legalists*. For India, the leading protagonist is the Brahman Kautilya, whose systematic book, called the *Arthashastra*, is dated somewhere between the fourth and first centuries B.C. For Europe, represented by Italy of the Renaissance, there are Machiavelli himself and his friend and doctrinal critic, Guicciardini.

Can the appearance of Machiavellism in the three civilizations be explained by the influence of any one on the others? There were contacts, we know, between China and India even before the fourth century B.C., and there were contacts, especially after the conquest of Alexander the Great, between India and Greece, from which Renaissance Italy got so much of its culture. But the texts themselves on which we will draw show, by their rhetoric, their organization, the particulars on which they dwell, and the traditions they reflect, that they are quite independent of one another. They therefore furnish us with an extraordinary historical experiment in what I take to be universal traits of human politics.

To show in a concentrated way that this conclusion fits the evidence, I will now compare the doctrines of the Machiavellis I have introduced. To avoid misrepresenting them, I put their ideas mostly in

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their own words, as far as translation conveys them. The comparison takes into account (1) likeness in social and political backgrounds, (2) likeness in conceptions of human nature, (3) likeness in conceptions of the ruler's function, and (4) a number of the common stratagems they recommend.

(1) *The likeness of the Machiavellis' social and political backgrounds:* As one would expect, the more closely one looks at these thinkers in their backgrounds, the more different they are, the more they become three individual Chinese, a single, vaguely individual Indian, and two Renaissance Florentines, quite different from one another in status and personality. But if one is willing to back away and view them from the neutralizing distance that makes their comparison rewarding, the similarities are striking.[3]

These Machiavellis, who all regarded their thought as immediately useful, were all experienced in politics. Shang Yang, Li Ssu—as powerful an instigator of change as ever lived—and the Kautilya to whom the *Arthashastra* is plausibly attributed were strong-minded ministers. One of the Machiavellis, Han Fei, was briefly an adviser to the same emperor as Li Ssu but soon, so to speak, failed to death. Of the two Italians, Machiavelli was an experienced diplomat who was ousted for his republican sympathies, while Guicciardini was for a time a ruler in almost his own right.

Apart from their direct political experience, what stimulated these men to think as they did was a political situation similar in its broad outlines: many neighboring states, large and small, in alliance and conflict with one another, so that at each of their courts there was a ferment of fears, hopes, and intrigues. In each of the three civilizations, there was also a tradition of political analysis varied enough for the exponents of different views to draw on; and there was an active intellectual culture that bred thinkers of different kinds who were eager to put their theories to the test. Naturally, the more Machiavellian among them were sooner or later denounced by the others. Kautilya, whose book is a comprehensive manual of government, was denounced mainly by Buddhists and Jains, who refused to distinguish between morality and political practice. But the ancient Hindus, unlike many of their descendants today, seem to have accepted the manual as the summation of the science of government; and although the text itself was lost for a long time, other, widely known books continued to teach its doctrines.[4]

(2) *The Machiavellis' conceptions of human nature:* Looked at closely, their conceptions of human nature may not always have been self-consistent, may have changed in time, and are certainly different from one another. But for this general account it is enough that all six Machiavel-

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lis make an estimate of human nature that is negative. Because they assume that human nature is bad or weak—meaning open to temptation, self-centered, lazy, cowardly, vindictive, or the like—they demand rigorous laws and exemplary punishments. This demand is expressed in the following four passages, the first two from Han Fei, the third from Kautilya, and the fourth from Machiavelli. The Rod of which Kautilya speaks is a symbol of authority and a synonym for rule by means of punishment or threat of punishment:

> It is the people's nature to delight in disorder and detach themselves from legal restraints. However, if they pursue ease, the land will waste; if the land wastes, the state will not be in order. If the state is not in order, it will become chaotic.[5]
>
> Severe penalty is what the people fear, heavy punishment is what the people hate. Accordingly, the wise man promulgates what they fear in order to forbid the practice of wickedness and establishes what they hate in order to prevent villainous acts. For this reason the state is safe and no outrage happens.[6]
>
> The Rod, used after full consideration, endows the subjects with spiritual good, material well-being and pleasures of the senses . . . If not used at all, it gives rise to the law of the fishes. For, the stronger swallows the weak in the absence of the wielder of the Rod.[7]
>
> A wise prince . . . is more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, let evils continue.[8]

Having a negative estimate of human nature, a Machiavelli is sure that love is a less effective instrument of government than fear. Sometimes the Machiavelli adds that the use of fear really expresses the ruler's love and, by imposing peace and justice, eventually causes his subjects to love him. The following passages, which express these ideas, are taken, respectively, from Shang Yang, Han Fei, Kautilya, and Machiavelli. In the quoted passages, Kautilya is milder than the others; elsewhere, all six object to ruthlessness so unconsidered that it defeats its own purpose:

> If penalties are made heavy and rewards light, the ruler loves his people and they will die for him; but if rewards are made heavy and penalties light, the ruler does not love his people, nor will they die for him.[9]

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> I can see that the sage in governing the state pursues the policy of making the people inevitably do him good but never relies on their doing him good with love. For to rely on the people's doing him good with love is dangerous. . . . [10]

> The (king), severe with the Rod, becomes a source of terror to beings, the (king), mild with the Rod is despised. The (king), just with the Rod, is honored.[11]

> The wise prince makes himself feared in such a way that, if he does not gain love, he escapes being hated. . . .[12]

(3) *The Machiavellis' conceptions of the function of the ruler*: The Chinese emperor was supposed to rule by the grace of Heaven, that is, by the life that Heaven had infused into his dynasty. In India, apart from the Buddhists and Jains, kingship was regarded as having been founded by the supreme being; and sometimes the king was identified with the god supposed to have founded his dynasty. The more modest Indian belief, according to which the king was not himself a god, resembled the European belief that kingship had been established by God and that the king's rule was the natural imitation of rule by God. Both in India and (usually) in Europe, kingship was therefore assumed to be the only natural form of government. However, the king was believed to be obliged to share the regulation of society with the religious authorities. In China, the Confucians came to assert that their morality should take precedence even over the will of an emperor. Kautilya and the other Indian writers on *arthashastra* did not reject the idea that religion had an independent right to existence, but to them, as to Machiavelli and Guicciardini, institutional religion was important only because it could help or hinder the welfare of the state. The Chinese Machiavellis, who had to make their peace with the traditional forms of Chinese ceremony and religiosity, probably felt the same.

It was only in Europe, beginning in the independent cities of Greece and republican Rome and continuing in the Middle Ages, that the idea developed that a community had the right to govern itself; and only in Europe did there develop a clear, consistent belief in the right to revoke the social contract—the best-known expressions of this right came after Machiavelli's time.[13] Therefore, among the Machiavellis we are discussing, only Machiavelli and Guicciardini applied their political theory to republican states, which they favored, as well as to kingdoms and tyrannies.

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Machiavellis, of course, agreed in stressing that the ruler, by the virtue itself of his position, must be acknowledged as preeminent in the state; sometimes they dreamed of men who were fit for such preeminence. The following excerpts from Han Fei and Kautilya are evidence of the stress:

> Nothing is more valuable than the royal person, more honorable than the throne, more powerful than the authority of the sovereign, and more august than the position of the ruler.[14]

> For the king trained in the sciences, intent on the discipline of the subjects, enjoys the earth alone without sharing it with any other ruler, being devoted to the welfare of all beings.[15]

I do not believe that Machiavelli, who went back to republican Rome for his ideal, ever wrote an equivalent to this passage. It is true that he composed a panegyric on the notorious Cesare Borgia, but this praise is the opposite of Han Fei's and Kautilya's in the sense that it is a glorification not of the ruler's position as such but of Cesare's personal qualities. Machiavelli praises Cesare as a prince who is as severe or magnanimous as the occasion demands, who can replace old customs with newer ones, who knows how to compel princes to help him graciously or harm him reluctantly, who is, above all, able

> to win friends, to conquer by force or by fraud, to make himself loved and feared by the people, followed and respected by the soldiers. . . .[16]

The closest equivalent in Kautilya is the praise of the ideal king, who is not identified with any historical personage. Pious qualities aside, the king is

> born in a high family, endowed with good fortune, intelligence and spirit, given to seeing elders . . . not breaking his promises, grateful, liberal, of great energy, not dilatory, with weak neighboring princes, resolute . . . [and having the energetic qualities of] bravery, resentment, quickness and dexterity.[17]

Kautilya's ruler is basically dedicated to war. As will be explained later, this ruler is conceptualized as a natural aggressor encircled by natural enemies. Machiavelli's prince, as the second quotation shows, is equally concerned with the making of war:

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> The king . . . is the would-be conqueror. Encircling him on all sides, with territory immediately next to his is the constituent called the enemy.[18]

> A wise prince . . . has no other object and no other interest and takes as his profession nothing else than war and its laws and discipline; that is the only profession fitting one who commands.[19]

According to Han Fei, the ruler who fails is the one who neglects laws and prohibitions, disregards defence works and other essentials, and has a strong interest in ideas and plans. But this last trait, which, for reasons that will be explained, spells failure to Han Fei, is necessary for a successful ruler as Kautilya and Machiavelli see him. The kingly ideal of Han Fei shows a peculiarly alert Taoistic nonactivity:

> By virtue of resting empty and in repose, he waits for the course of nature to enforce itself so that all names will be defined of themselves and all affairs will be settled of themselves. Empty, he knows the essence of fullness: reposed, he becomes the corrector of motion.[20]

(4) *Some stratagems recommended by the Machiavellis:* The Machiavellis are at their natural best in suggesting political stratagems. One feels that it is the invention of ways to get around political obstacles and of dirty tricks and counter-tricks that particularly (though by no means exclusively) fired their imaginations. In one Machiavellian matter, that of spying, Han Fei and Kautilya go far beyond Machiavelli himself. Unlike them, he does not hold that every person should be encouraged to spy on every other and does not emphasize the need for a great network of secret agents. Also unlike Han Fei and Kautilya, he does not dwell much on the means for thwarting the treachery of the ruler's intimates. Maybe the reason is that, in spite of all Machiavelli's difficult experiences and his negative estimate of the people of his times, he tends to trust them more and finds it easier than Han Fei and Kautilya to advise his prince to put trust in his ministers.

Observe how suspicion rules the immediately following quotations from Han Fei, who advises the ruler to discover his ministers' views by keeping his own completely secret, and advises, with drastic finality, that the ministers be forbidden to exchange views with one another. He also gives the ruler the advice, usual among Machiavellis, to attribute all successes to himself and all failures to someone else. Like the other Machiavellis, he has an acute sense of the possible sources of

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danger—it takes one Machiavelli to assume the presence of others of his kind—and he knows that the closer the relationship, the greater the danger:

> The ruler must not reveal his views. For, if he reveals his views, the ministers will display their hues differently . . . Place every official with a censor. Do not let them speak to each other.[21]

> How to get rid of delicate villainy? By making the people watch over one another in their hidden affairs.[22]

> In the case of merits the ruler gains the renown and in case of demerit the ministers face the blame so that the ruler is never at the end of his reputation.[23]

> Favorite vassals, if too intimate with the ruler, would cause him personal danger. Ministers, if too powerful, would overturn the august position of the sovereign. Wives and concubines, if without distinction of rank, would cause legitimate sons danger. Brothers, if not subservient to the ruler, would endanger the Altar of the Spirits of Land and Grain.[24]

In one matter Kautilya recommends greater precautions against treachery than even Han Fei. He advises the king not only to spy on his ministers, as on everyone else, but to test them by putting them to the strongest possible temptations. He also favors carefully considered "silent punishment," by which he means assassination by unknown agents. Of course, the king's wives and sons are assumed to be a main source of danger:

> After appointing ministers to ordinary offices . . . [the king] should test their integrity by means of secret tests . . . When he has set spies on the high officials, he should set spies on the citizens and country people.[25]

> He should employ "silent punishment" towards his own party or that of the enemy, without hesitation[26]

> A king protects the kingdom (only) when (he is himself) protected from persons near him and from enemies, first from his wives and sons.[27]

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Machiavelli's advice on uncovering the true nature of minsters, while reasonable, is far less Machiavellian than Han Fei's. For example, he advises a prince that a minister who thinks mainly of himself can never be good at his work.[28] Quite like Han Fei, he advises the ruler to avoid blame and take only credit:

> Wise princes have affairs that bring hatred attended to by others, but those that bring thanks they attend to themselves.[29]

With this small sample of stratagems, I conclude my introduction to the shared ideas of the Machiavellis. To complete the comparison and, I think, to make the Machiavellis' agreement the more impressive, I add a description of their individuality as thinkers.

All the Machiavellis make the impression of forceful men with experience in the tactics they recommend. Kautilya stands out for his encyclopedic motives and detailed, usually dry text, written in the style of the Brahman pandit he is. Unlike the others, he means to put on record the whole of the tradition of political science, responding with his own interpretations to those of his predecessors. Also unlike the others, he makes next to no use of history, and writes, so it seems, not to answer any pressing contemporary need but to give advice for any and all times. Surprisingly, there are no direct references in his *Arthashastra* to the king he is supposed to have served or the political events he himself experienced.

The other Machiavellis write what are, at least in part, tracts for their times, occasionally about very specific matters. The advice Han Fei gives is for a particular emperor at a particular time, and his generalizations are meant to support the tactics he recommends. When Machiavelli writes, he is often thinking of what is happening in Florence or somewhere else nearby, and he gathers just those historic instances that will verify his argument of the day—an argument Guicciardini may oppose with examples chosen for an opposite purpose. It would be most unfair to accuse these thinkers of not reflecting seriously on their own and others' experience, but their thinking was often short-range, and they wanted their ideas to be put into immediate practical use.

Not only did the Machiavellis have a relatively uniform message, but they were almost alike in avoiding any attempt to create a metaphysically based philosophy. Kautilya was engaged in completing a science, Indian style, that is, amassing legal and sociological details, and not in what we would consider a philosophy; and Machiavelli and Guicciardini had little interest in any but practically useful political

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rules, or, in Guicciardini's case, in a well-schooled alertness rather than uniform rules, which could only be misapplied, he thought, to an always changing history. The two Italians were not interested in creating a system of thought or even in remaining closely consistent in the arguments they made at different times. They knew that the abstractions of political thought, although inescapable, were too rigid to encompass the inexhaustible variety of the here and now; as distinguished from political thought, political wisdom may flaunt its little apothegms, but it deserves its name only if it can adapt to individual, that is, unique cases. So the question to themselves of Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and their likes had to be, Is this advice useful here and now? and not, Is the advice I am giving now consistent with what I advised in an earlier, apparently similar case?"

The Machiavellis must have showed some consistency of character, because they must have been (and must partly remain) intelligible as persons. This consistency was reflected in their general attitude toward politics, but not in any special concern with the consistency of the larger abstractions in which they expressed themselves from time to time. In this lack of concern they resembled many of the other well-known thinkers of their times. The lack shows that the Machiavellis I am discussing do not belong among the philosophers, or shows them to be only primitive philosophically. Knowingly self-refuting philosophers such as Montaigne, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche care enough about consistency to be brazen in their defiance of it, but our Machiavellis do not find it necessary to defy what they are not much interested in.

The only one among the Machiavellis who is likely at times to makes the impression of a philosophical mind—in a perhaps relaxed philosophers' sense of the word—is Han Fei, because of the way he combines Legalism with Taoism. I will later explain the not unreasonable meaning of this combination. In Han Fei's case, however, it makes for what an unkind critic might call practical foolishness tinged with paranoiac suspicion. Yet it is just this combination that creates the possibility of depth, the result of the conjuncture in him of different lines of thought—of the quietistically mystical and the politically practical, or the disabused and the idealistic. Some of Han Fei is high-flown rhetoric directed at an emperor for a personal purpose not unlike Machiavelli's in his dedication of *The Prince*. Some is only a listing of aphoristic political warnings saying, watch out for this problem and for that, all not, I suppose, very helpful in practice though interesting enough to read and calculated to inspire a general suspiciousness. The book of Han Fei Tzu also contains commentaries on and illustrations to the philosophy of

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Lao Tzu; some sound as if they may have been written by a different person.

The only protagonists of Machiavellianism to whom the reader can feel close are the two Florentines, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, of whom Machiavelli is the warmer. Both are skilled writers, both are close to our times, and both are revealed in reports, memoirs, and letters to which we have access. Machiavelli appreciated the freedom to express dissenting opinions. To him, the clash of opinions that represent different social interests was a creative political force, provided it was contained within the framework of the law. The Chinese and Indian Machiavellians were ready enough to tolerate differences in local culture, but the political order they envisaged was one determined by the will of the ruler.

In the preceding comparisons, I have left out much that might have been added, but there is enough for the general conclusion: Each of the three distinct civilizations gave rise to a relatively sophisticated body of thought that advocated the use of deception and force to maintain the state, in disregard of ordinary moral standards. I should stress that those who held this view did not mean to argue against the morality observed in everyday life. All these Machiavellians held ordinary religious views, and although they had no compunctions about using religion for state purposes, there is no sign that their acceptance of religion as such was cynical. To them, politics was a field that had to take other matters into consideration, politics and religion being different pursuits with necessarily different principles.

However this may be, the likeness in Machiavellism between the three civilizations raises the possibility that such thought is natural to civilized life as such. Politics as in fact practiced seems to give rise to such a point of view. In other words, what gives the Machiavellian position its (hypothesized) universal relevance is the degree of its truth to universal political experience.

This conclusion leads to a contrast between the Machiavellis and most philosophers as political thinkers. The Machiavellis claim that they are only pointing out the rules by which states in fact live or die. Having made and illustrated this claim, they ordinarily feel no need to justify their principles any further but go on to practical strategy, which interests them more. This makes for a philosophical primitivity—a few general, quickly expressed ideas supported by a choice of probably biased examples. Yet there is a cardinal trait in which the Machiavellians have the advantage over even the philosophers who were influenced by them—in Europe, notably Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hegel. This

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advantage is the obverse of what I have considered to be the Machiavellians' philosophical primitivity.

The explanation is simple. As I have pictured it, Machiavellism is a utilitarian doctrine based on a notion of the good of the community, whose members are regarded as so weak and untrustworthy that they need leaders who are firm, flexible, and prepared to be ruthless. The contest for leadership within and between countries is by nature unrelenting, with the victory often going to the most clever, insightful, flexible, brave, ruthless, attractive leader—but often also to the luckiest among the contestants, because, as experience teaches, the future can never be predicted in detail.

As it appears in the works of the Machiavellis, the temper of this doctrine seems to reflect the disillusionment taught by personal experience supported by a disillusioned reading of history. By the usual philosophical standards—Han Fei perhaps excepted—the doctrine is, I repeat, primitive or shallow. I mean that it is concerned with ambitions, suspicions, tactics, and practical experience but makes no sustained attempt to understand the universe or to penetrate into the nature of even the ordinary human beings about whom it makes such unflattering assumptions. But this shallowness by ordinary philosophical standards is Machiavellism's strength. When Hobbes makes the same unflattering assumptions about human beings, he does so in the framework of a mathematized quasi-materialism that tries to be perfectly logical, and with the help of a radical and (in intention) consistent theory of human speech. Spinoza's elaborate metaphysics does not leak much into his unsentimental political theory, but those who know his *Ethics* are aware of his belief that the true philosophy can be proved exactly and beyond doubt. This philosophy leads to the eternal intellectual love of God arising from the highest, third kind of knowledge.[30] In too summary words, Spinoza may be said to believe in absolute, unchanging, metaphysically provable truth and in some kind of union with God who is Nature. And Hegel, who considers Machiavelli's conception great and true, holds that everything is contained within the intricate synthesis of construction and destruction that comes to full conscious light only in his own philosophy.[31]

Each of these great philosophers makes an intellectually exciting, even genial construction of ideas; but in the end, each construction is a picture of the world that the philosopher has made to express his own, idiosyncratic view. In constructing, he is necessarily subjective in much the way in which a great painter is subjective. To the extent that the philosopher is ruled by his individual picture of the world, his image of human beings is made to fit his picture, which is very different from the

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world that ordinary experience or empirical science recognizes. That is why it is so easy to feel that these philosophic systems are artificial constructs. By their nature as powerful artificial constructs, they can stimulate and give refuge, but little is left in them of what we ought to recognize (along with Aristotle) as the incompleteness of even true principles and of the intrusion of chance into every life.[32]

Typically, the Machiavellians are truer to political experience, less drawn away from it by system, more alert to fate as the unexpected, more aware that history turns and twists often beyond our ability to master it. Machiavellism is less a system of thought than a collection of disabused opinions, examples, and parables meant to extend our experience of human life and make us alert to its dependence not on abstractions but on the variable nature of human beings living in an unpredictable world. Of course, the Machiavellism considered here is primarily the advice given by ambitious teachers to ambitious rulers—rulers at present most often identifiable as politicians—who in the West read Machiavelli with interest, I imagine, but soon dispense with him because they realize that their lives have taught them most of what he says, and that even he does not fit their particular problems closely enough to be helpful.

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