

Moral Reasoning 74:
The Theory and Practice
of Republican Government

Lecture 05:
Machiavellian Republicanism II

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Machiavelli – Major Themes

- I. The Idea of a Republic
- II. The Optimality of the Mixed Regime

Thursday:

III. VIRTU

IV. RELIGION

Conclude Thurs with other features and notes

Virtue and Goodness

- A. Virtue tied to stability and freedom, defined in opposition to corruption.
- Book I, Chapter 17: “having acquired a new freedom, a corrupt people can with the greatest difficulty maintain itself free.”
- “Therefore I say that no accident, even though grave and violent, could ever make Milan and Naples free because their members are all corrupt. ... So it was to Rome’s great happiness that those kings became corrupt quickly, so that they were driven out before their corruption passed into the bowels of that city. This lack of corruption – men having a good end – was the cause that infinite tumults in Rome did not hurt and indeed helped the Republic.” [D I, 17.2, p. 48]

Machiavellian Virtue

Instrumental to political ends, to liberty and freedom.

Contra Aristotle (arete): Less a good thing to be pursued in and of itself, as constitutive of a good life or of happiness (eudaimonia).

But even tho instrumental, absolutely necessary condition for freedom and republican stability.

Machiavellian Virtue Composite Portrait

1. A form of public and military service (Skinner).
 - A cause of the empire the Romans acquired (“the armies’ virtue)
 - Consists in honestly paying duties to state. D I, 55, 2: “When it occurs to those republics [in the province of Germany] that they need to spend some quantity of money for the public account, they are used to having those magistrates or councils that have authority for it assess on all the inhabitants of the city one percent or two of what each has of value. When such a decision has been made, each presents himself before the collectors of such a duty according to the order of the town; and having first taken an oath to pay the fitting amount, he throws into a chest so designated what according to his conscience it appears to him he ought to pay. Of this payment there is no witness except him who pays.”

Machiavellian Virtue Composite Portrait

2. In whom does virtue reside, or not reside?

D I, p. 111. “I say that those are called gentlemen who live idly in abundance from the returns of their possessions without having any care either for cultivation or for other necessary trouble in living. Such as these are pernicious in every republic and in every province, but more pernicious are those who, beyond the aforesaid fortunes, command from a castle and have subjects who obey them.”

Later, see Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Machiavellian Virtue:

Imposition of Necessity, Restraint of Acquisition?

“If [corruption] is well examined, it will make legislators or republics and kingdoms more ready to check human appetites and to take away from them all hope of being able to err with impunity.” [D I, 42: p. 91]

Discorsi (I, 1.5): “So if whoever examines the building of Rome...takes Romulus [for its first progenitor]...he will see that it had a free beginning, without depending on anyone. He will also see, as will be said below, how many necessities the laws made by Romulus, Numa, and the others imposed, so that the fertility of the state, the advantages of the sea, the frequent victories, and the greatness of its empire could not corrupt it for many centuries, and that they maintained it as full of virtue as has ever adorned any other city or republic.”

IV. RELIGION

Uses of religion. 1. Maintain martial excellence, stability.

“Whoever considers well the Roman histories sees how much religion served to command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked. ... for where there is religion, arms can easily be introduced, and where there are arms and not religion, the latter can be introduced only with difficulty. (I, 11, pp. 34-35)

Uses of religion

2. Social Control

Under Numa Pompilius: “As he found a very ferocious people and wished to reduce it to civil obedience with the arts of peace, to turned to religion as a thing altogether necessary if he wished to maintain a civilization; and he constituted it so that for many centuries there was never so much fear of God as in that republic.”

Uses of Religion

3. Maintains fear and veneration [mechanism]

“...I conclude that the religion introduced by Numa was among the first causes of the happiness of that city. For it caused good orders; good orders make good fortune; and from good fortune arose the happy successes of enterprises. As the observance of the divine cult is the cause of the greatness of republics, so disdain for it is the cause of their ruin. For where the fear of God fails, it must be either that the kingdom comes to ruin or that it is sustained by the fear of a prince, which supplies the defects of religion. Because princes are of short life, it must be that the kingdom will fail soon, as his virtue fails. Hence it is that kingdoms that depend solely on the virtue of one man are hardly durable...”

Questions, Problems

1. Need a republic be imperial, acquisitive of territory?

2. How seriously should we take religion as instrumental social control?
