

## **Machiavelli – Discourse on Livy**

Discourses a commentary on the first ten books of Roman historian Titus Livy's history of Rome. Intended to increase understanding of ancient practices to facilitate their rediscovery and adoption. His praise of ancient virtue is simultaneously a critique of Christianity for the political weakness it engenders.

### THE HIGHLIGHTS

- Praise of ancient virtue, advocacy of the imitation of the Ancients
- Ancient virtue – pursuit of honor and glory, all that make man strong is sound and body
- Critique of Christianity
  - religion teaches that the imitation of ancient virtue is impossible
  - Christianity makes rulers weak by encouraging humility and shame
  - Christianity encourages idleness
  - The Roman Catholic Church is to blame for Italy's weakness – too weak to unite Italy, too strong to allow anyone else to unite the country.
- Modernity (departure from the Ancients)
  - Introduces the notion of progress and continual refinement.
  - Rome was not created to be perfect but approached perfection through accidental innovation. A republic has to be founded by an individual and perfected by others after the passing of the individual.
  - eliminates the distinction between the ideal and the actual – should be one in the same

### THE BASIC STORY – Machiavelli's case in favor of republics

There is a contradiction in Mach thought to the extent that we have to constantly reject AND expect both republics and dictatorships. Republics are better (I think he means more stable) states dictatorships because they privilege the common good, the judgements of the collective are superior to those of the prince/dictator. Republicanism is better at selecting princes from among the people. Citizens of the republic like them because they think their kids can be princes by their virtue. Thus, an virtuous prince should favor a republic with transparent institutions and promotes the common good as this will facilitate the maintenance of a stable state. Additionally, the best way to perpetuate the state and glory of a leader after his passing is to make sure that there are multiple caretakers rather than a single person. In this process the "perpetual" republic is achieved, a republic that constantly renews itself.

Republican ends are however dependent on tyrannical means. There needs to be continual refounding of the republic to maintain respect for virtue. Refounding/renewals are important to republics because such thinking takes the republic back to the principles that made it successful/'good". There would be a need for such a renewal when a state faces a new or unusual set of circumstances for which its existing political structures are ill-equipped. This renewal can be accomplished by a single, good-intentioned leader though the exploitation or creation of an external threat to the integrity of the republic. Should engage in more tyrannical acts so that the "justness" of the republic is not taken for

granted, and they cease to have a regard for virtue. There is a moral contradiction between using force to come to power but use that position of power for good.

Leaders should use deceit to pursue overarching republic virtue in the face of to govern those who do not wish to be governed. Having elections gives the illusion of participating in the political process and lulls those reluctant to be governed by giving the illusion that they have a choice. Religion is a human invention, religion is a tool of the state. Religion is needed as a tool in republics to evoke devotion to the state. In making this observation, Mach expresses some admiration for the Catholic Church and its use of religion as a source of power.

#### Basic Comparison of Prince and Discourses

- how to be a tyrant vs. how to have a republic that preserves liberty and is free of corruption
- establishment of a regime v. about its maintenance

#### QUESTIONS

- What is Plato's justice? Compare it with Machiavelli's virtue?  
Plato's justice = rule of the wise; Machiavelli = rule of the wise prince? – aligning knowledge and power ??? [the just society: does it really exist or is it presented as an ideal?]
- What is Plato's Republic about? (Ans: particular conception of justice, which led to)  
Are there any problems with that? Can you separate the just man and the just society?  
Compare this conception of justice with what Machiavelli or Hobbes has to say.  
Hobbes: there is no justice in the state of nature, in the Leviathan, (justice is fulfilling convenance) abiding by the contract with the sovereign – like Cephalus  
Machiavelli: like Thresemacus (will of the stronger)
- What would Machiavelli have to say [about patriotism]?  
Instrument to maintain loyalty to the state (esp. effective in using external threat)
- Which interpretation of Machiavelli's views on morality do you find more persuasive? Do you see more similarities, or more differences, between The Prince and The Discourses?  
[amoral vs immoral vs. moral]
- we began with a discussion of whether Machiavelli was a modern  
\* does not have a telological view of the state (there is no ultimate goal of the state),  
Mach. is concerned with the ultimate improvement of man (takes human nature as the starting point, creates a structure around it)
  - no pre-prescribed concern means, Mach. privlidges order  
[ is there a code of ethics for the Ancients?]
- From there--why does Mach think security is the real political problem?