Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, or the Politics of Machiavelli in the 19th Century, by a Contemporary

Chronology of Events

1789: the French Revolution begins.
1804: Napoleon I founds the First French Empire.
1808: birth of Louis Bonaparte.
1815: the Bourbon monarchy is restored.
1821: birth of Maurice Joly in Lons-le-Saunier.
1830: in July, the House of Bourbon is overthrown as Louis-Philippe of the House of Orleans becomes king.
1847: Louis-Napoleon publishes *Extinction du paupérisme.*
1848: Marx and Engels publish "The Communist Manifesto." In France, the February Revolution deposes Louis-Philippe and establishes a republic. On 10 December, Louis Napoleon wins the French presidential elections.
1849: Maurice Joly begins 10-year-long stint in the French government.
1851: on 2 December, Louis Bonaparte stages a successful *coup d'état,* which is ratified by a national referendum on 20 December.
1852: in February, Karl Marx completes *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.* In August, Victor Hugo completes *Napoleon the Little.* On 2 December, President Louis Bonaparte dissolves the republic and founds the Second French Empire.
1853: Baron Haussmann begins the destruction and rebuilding of Paris.
1863: publication of Joly's *Le Barreau de Paris* (Paris: Gosselin).
1864: publication of Joly's *Cesar* (Paris: Martin-Beaupre). Publication of Joly's *Dialogue aux Enfers* (Brussels: A. Mertens). The International Workers' Association is founded in London by Karl Marx and others.
1865: Joly arrested, tried and sentenced to 15 months in the Sainte-Pélagie prison for "incitation of hatred and scorn for the government."
1868: publication of Joly's anonymous book *Recherches sur l'art de parvenir* (Paris: Amyot). *Dialogue aux Enfers* reprinted (Brussels: Chez tous les libraires). Hermann Goedsche uses Joly's *Dialogue* as source material for his anti-Semitic series *Biarritz.*
1870: publication of Joly's *Maurice Joly, son passé, son programme, par lui-même* (Paris: Lacroix). On 1 September, Louis Bonaparte is captured and defeated in Battle by the Prussians. On 4 September, the end of the Second French Empire and the beginning of the Third French Republic are proclaimed.
1872: publication of Joly's *Le Tiers Parti républicain* (Paris: E. Dentu). Hermann Goedsche's *Biarritz* is translated into Russian.
1873: death of Emperor Napoleon III.
1876: publication of Joly's *Les Affamés* (Paris: E. Dentu).
1878: death of Joly (suicide), in Paris.
1890: in Paris, Golovinski creates *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (in Russian) using Joly's *Dialogues aux Enfers* and Goedsche's *Biarritz* (among other texts) as source material.
1897: the Russian version of *The Protocols* is circulated privately as a pamphlet.
1905: Sergius Nilus publishes the Russian version of *The Protocols.*
1906: George V. Butmi publishes the Russian version of *The Protocols.*
1920: an English translation of *The Protocols* is published in London. Lucien Wolf exposes the text as a fake.

1921: Philip Graves exposes the English translation of *The Protocols* to be a fake; he shows it is in part a plagiarism of Joly's *Dialogue aux Enfers.*
1935: Herman Bernstein publishes the first English translation of the *Dialogue aux Enfers.*
1948: *Dialogue aux Enfers* reprinted (Paris: Calman-Levy).
1968: *Dialogue aux Enfers* reprinted (Paris: Calman-Levy). First theatrical version, scripted by Pierre Fresnay.
1983: Pierre Franck's adaptation of *Dialogue aux Enfers* for the stage is performed in Paris.
1992: publication of *Dialogue aux Enfers* with preface by Michel Bounan and a previously unpublished epilogue (Paris: Allia).
2002: publication of John S. Waggoner's translation of *Dialogue aux Enfers* (Maryland: Lexington).
2006: Publication of Pierre Tabard's version of Pierre Fresnay's theatrical adaptation of *Dialogue aux Enfers* (Paris: L'Harmmattan). Release of film version of *Dialogue aux Enfers,* directed by Daniel Coche.

Translator's Preface

Maurice Joly was born in Lons-le-Saunier in 1821. Taking after his father, who was the Councilor General of the Jura, Maurice studied law as a young man. In the wake of the February 1848 revolution, which toppled the regime of King Louis-Philippe and led to the creation of the French Second Republic, Joly moved to Paris. In the capital, he was hired as a secretary to Jules Grevy, who had been a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1848. Joly worked at the newly restored Ministry of State for the next 10 years. During that period, he completed his legal studies and, in 1859, he was admitted to the bar in Paris. His first work, a satire entitled *Le Barreau de Paris* ("The Bar of Paris"), was published in Paris in 1863. The following year, Joly published *Caesar,* which belittled the pretensions of the dictator who called himself "Napoleon III" (Louis Bonaparte). His third work, the *Dialogue aux Enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* ("Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu") – another attack on Louis Bonaparte – was published anonymously, printed in Belgium and smuggled into France. About a year later, on 25 April 1865, Joly was sentenced to a prison term of fifteen months at Sainte-Pélagie for "incitement of hatred and scorn for the government." Immediately after his release, and apparently undeterred by his prosecution, he found another Belgian publisher for the *Dialogue in Hell* and a Parisian publisher for a new work, *Recherches sur l'art de parvenir* ("Research into the Art of Success"). Over the course of the next decade, Joly published three more books: the autobiographical *Maurice Joly, son passé, son programme, par lui-même* (1870), *Le Tiers Parti républicain* (1872) and *Les Affamés* (1876). In 1878, he committed suicide in Paris.

During Joly's lifetime, but unknown to him, his *Dialogues in Hell* began to be put to nefarious purposes. In 1868, a Prussian secret policeman and propagandist named Hermann Goedsche (also known as Sir John Retcliffe) used portions of it to generate an anti-Semitic, three-volume series called *Biarritz: Ein Historisch-politischer Roman* ("Biarritz: A Political-Historical Novel"). A reader of the novels of Eugène Sue, who had described a fictional conspiracy by the Jesuits in his ten-volume series of novels titled *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-1843), Goedsche found it expedient to replace the Jesuits with the Jews. In 1872, *Biarritz* was translated into Russian and began to circulate in the Russian Empire. Eventually, both Goedsche's *Biarritz* and Joly's *Dialogue in Hell* came to the attention of one Matvei Golovinski,

a Russian secret police agent and propagandist who was stationed in Paris, where his job was to write pro-Czarist articles for *Le Figaro.* According to the Ukrainian scholar Vadim Skuratovsky, author of *The Question of the Authorship of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"* (Judaica Institute, Kiev, 2001), it was Charles Joly – Maurice Joly's son – who provided Golovinski with a copy of *Dialogue in Hell.* As early as 1897, Golovinski had fashioned out of the materials at his disposal a book that he called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* which purported to be the minutes of a secret meeting of powerful Jewish conspirators. In 1905 and then again in 1906, the *Protocols* was published in Russian. Over the course the 20th century, it was translated into dozens of languages and used to justify virulent anti-Semitism, especially the German extermination campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s. Today, the Bible and the *Protocols* are the top two best-selling books in the world.

In 1920, the *Protocols* was denounced as a fake by the British writer Lucien Wolf in his book *The Jewish Bogey and the Forged Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (London: The Press Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies), which responded to an inflammatory article about "The Cause of World Unrest" in the *Morning Post* for 12-30 July 1920. The following year, the *Protocols* was denounced by a British journalist named Philip Graves, who had access to a copy of Joly's *Dialogue in Hell* and compared passages from the two texts side-by-side to prove his contention. That same year, Herman Bernstein, a reporter for the *New York Herald*, published *The History of a Lie: the Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion: A Study* (New York: J.S. Ogilvie Publishing Company, 1921), which traced the origin of the *Protocols* back to Sir John Retcliffe. In a subsequent book, *The Truth About 'The Protocols of Zion': A Complete Exposure* (New York: Covici Friede, 1935), Bernstein managed to trace the *Protocols* all the way back to Joly. And, finally, a French secret agent named Henri Rollin, the author of *L'Apocalypse de notre temps: Les dessous de la propagande allemande d'après des documents inédits*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1939) – seized and destroyed by the Germans when they occupied France – denounced the *Protocols* as a plagiarism and a fake, and quoted from Joly's book to prove these allegations.

Out of print and largely unavailable for eight decades after its original publication, the *Dialogue in Hell* was finally reprinted in France in 1948, when it was brought out by the Parisian publishing house Calman-Levy, which – thanks to Raymond Aron – reprinted it again in 1968. This second reprint seems to have been the inspiration for the book's first theatrical adaptation, which was made by Pierre Fresnay in that same year. In 1982, Pierre Franck's theatrical adaptation of the *Dialogue in Hell* was performed in the Theatre de Petit Odeon in Paris. In 1983, *France Culture* broadcast a version of Joly's book on the radio. In 2002, an English translation of Joly's book was undertaken by John S. Waggoner and published by Lexington Books. And, just a few years ago, in 2006, Pierre Tabard offered a revision of Pierre Fresnay's theatrical adaptation (published in Paris by L'Harmmattan), and Daniel Coche directed a movie version of the book.

We are aware that, for some people (especially those who have never read it), Joly's *Dialogue in Hell* is noteworthy because it exposes the falsity of the *Protocols.* But we are in full agreement with Michel Bounan, who asserts in his essay *L'État retors* ("The Crafty State"), which was published as the preface to a reprint of Maurice Joly's book by Éditions Allia (Paris, 1992), that "the *Dialogue in Hell* was not recently rescued from oblivion so as to demonstrate the falsity of the *Protocols*; on the contrary, it was the media-police operation of the *Protocols* that proved the truth of Maurice Joly." Indeed, the *Dialogue in Hell* merits reading and careful study for its own merits. Not only is it a remarkably bold indictment of the reign of the man who called

himself Napoleon III, but it is also a startling prescient view of totalitarianism and "democratic" capitalism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.

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Karl Marx clearly believed that the reign of Charles Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, who was elected president of France in 1848, would not last long. Writing in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx declared,

> If he still shares with the peasants the illusion that the cause of their ruin is to be sought not in the small holdings themselves but outside – in the influence of secondary circumstances – his experiment will shatter like soap bubbles when they come in contact with the relations of production. [...] If the natural contradictions of his system chase the Chief of the Society of December 10 across the French border, his army, after some acts of brigandage, will reap, not laurels, but thrashings. [...] With the progressive deterioration of small property owners, the state structure erected upon it collapses. [...] But when the imperial mantle finally falls on the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze statue of Napoleon will come crashing down from the top of the Vendome Column.

But in 1869, when *The 18th Brumaire* was reprinted, President Louis Bonaparte was still in power. Indeed, just a few months after Marx's book was first published, Louis Bonaparte seized power in a *coup d'état,* inaugurated the Second French Empire, and crowned himself Napoleon III. And though there were assassination attempts in the late 1850s, and strikes by workers in the late 1860s, Louis Bonaparte was not toppled by a revolution. Indeed, he remained on the throne until September 1870, when he was defeated in battle and captured by the Prussians at Sedan. Marx had been wrong about the strength of Louis Bonaparte's hold on power and, though the second edition of *The 18th Brumaire* corrected a large number of misprints in the first one, he did not take the occasion to say so.

Marx wasn't the only analyst of French society who was wrong about Louis Bonaparte's ability to stay in power: so was Victor Hugo. In his *Napoléon le Petit* ("Napoleon the Small"), published in 1852 (London: Jeffs), an imaginary skeptic says, "Don't deceive yourselves, it is all solid, all firm; it is the present and the future." To which Hugo responds:

> But it is not to be; men will awaken. [...] Louis Bonaparte thinks that he is mounting the steps of a throne; he does not perceive that he is mounting those of a scaffold. [...] By all the blood we have in our veins, no! this shall not last. [...] [The dictator of ancient times] was appointed for a very short period – six months only: *semestris dictatura,* says Livy. But as if this enormous power, even when freely conferred by the people, ultimately weighed upon him, like remorse, the dictator generally resigned before the end of his term. [...] [C]ivil war is brewing under this melancholy peace of a state of siege. [...] If it rained newspapers in France for two days only, on the morning of the third nobody would know what had become of M. Louis Bonaparte. [...] Assuredly, a short time hence, – in a year, in a month, perhaps a week, – when all that we now see has vanished, men

> will be ashamed of having, if only for an instant, bestowed upon that infamous semblance of a ballot [...] the honor of discussing it.

In "The Crafty State," Michel Bounan notes that Louis Bonaparte managed to do something that none of the rulers on the Continent had managed to do: bring about long-lasting social peace in the midst of a century dominated by political revolution. "There would still be the insurrection of the Commune [in 1871]," Bounan notes; but thereafter there was "nothing for a century, even between the two world wars, when there were jolts in Germany, Italy and then Spain." As a result, "one can definitively say that, in a few years, the French Second Empire alone had accomplished the work undertaken by the European dictatorships and by their liberators, that is to say, the great succession of the statesman by what Nietzsche would call 'the coldest of the cold monsters.'"

In meticulous detail, the *Dialogue in Hell* describes the construction of the first truly "modern" (that is to say, bureaucratic capitalist) State. Over the course of 25 dialogues, virtually all of the building blocks are discussed at length: the radical changes that Louis Bonaparte undertook to make in constitutional law, the judiciary, politics, the electoral system, the press, the printing and distribution of books, architecture, urbanism, finances, the banks, the police forces, and morals and customs. Precisely because so many States, both democratic and totalitarian, became like or modeled themselves upon Louis Bonaparte's cold monster, Joly's book reads like it was written in 1964 and not a hundred years earlier.

It is certain that Joly had read *Napoleon the Little*. There are at least six very clear allusions to its content in the *Dialogue in Hell*. For example, in Chapter VI ("Portrait") of Book I, Hugo writes of Louis Bonaparte:

> To feign death, that is his art. He remains mute and motionless, looking in the opposite direction from his object, until the hour for action arrives; then he turns his head, and leaps upon his prey.

And in the 24th Dialogue of the *Dialogue in Hell,* Joly has Machiavelli say of the absolute monarch whom he would become:

> I would have the gift of stillness, it would be my goal; I look away and, when it is in my reach, I would suddenly look back and pounce on my prey before it has had the time to utter a sound.

In that same Dialogue, Joly has Machiavelli say, "The height of skillfulness would be to make the people believe in one's frankness, even though one has a Punic faith," which is a clear echo of Hugo's remark in Chapter VIII, Book II of *Napoleon the Little* that "in the centre [of French society] is the man – the man we have described; the man of Punic faith."

But when taken in context, these passages are *not* instances of plagiarism, which is a tool used by authors who agree with the other author(s) from whom they are taking words, phrases or whole sentences: plagiarizers are just too lazy to come up with their own, and certainly hope that no one recognizes their thefts. Instead, what Joly offers his readers are instances of what the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals called *détournement*, which is a tool used by authors who are engaged in a critical dialogue with the other author(s) from whom they are taking *and*

altering words, phrases or whole sentences: users of *détournement* hope that their readers will recognize both their borrowings and the telling changes that they have made to them.

Why did Joly believe that Hugo's book had to be *détourned* before it could be truly useful in the struggle against the Second Empire? Let's say it was a matter of perspective.

In his *Notre Dame de Paris, 1482* (first published in 1832 and known in English as "The Hunchback of Notre Dame"), Hugo portrays what was happening to Paris – its alleged modernization – as already completed.

> Let us add that if it is right that the architecture of an edifice be adapted to its purpose in such a way that the purpose be readable from the edifice's exterior alone, we can never be sufficiently amazed at a monument which can equally well be a royal palace, a house of commons, a town hall, a college, a riding school, an academy, an warehouse, a tribunal, a museum, a barracks, a sepulcher, a temple, a theatre. For the time being it is a Stock Exchange. . . . We have that colonnade going round the monument, under which on the great days of religious observance there can be developed in majestic style the theories of stockbrokers and commission agents. Without a doubt these are quite superb monuments. Add to them a quantity of handsome streets, amusing and varied like the Rue de Rivoli, and I do not despair that Paris, seen from a balloon, should one day present that richness of line, that opulence of details, that diversity of aspect, that hint of the grandiose in the simple and unexpected in the beautiful, which characterizes a checkerboard.

Note well that this description precedes the beginning of "Haussmannization" (the destruction and rebuilding of Paris by Louis Bonaparte's Prefect of the Seine, Georges-Eugene Haussmann) by twenty years and that, even as late as the 1860s, Haussmannization had still not been completed or, rather, had only incompletely rebuilt Paris.

In his superb book, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), T.J. Clark notes that

> We might say of these writers [Victor Hugo and those who quoted him] that they seem to *want* the city to have a shape – a logic and a uniformity – and therefore construct one from the signs they have, however sparse and unsystematic. They see or sense a process and want it finished, for then the terms in which one might oppose it will at least be clear. The ultimate horror would be to have modernity (or at any rate not to have what had preceded it), to know it was hateful, but not to know what it was.

For Victor Hugo, this "ultimate horror" is moral and limited to the crimes committed by Louis Bonaparte: he says in *Napoleon the Little* that, "this government feels that it is hideous. It wants no portrait; above all it wants no mirror." But Clark sees something else at work here, something far more general and certainly not limited to a single ruler. Drawing upon the work of Jeanne Gaillard, who declared in *Paris, La Ville: 1852-1870* that "it seems to us that more profoundly, in the Second Empire, the powers-that-be took advantage of the diverse changes which Paris was undergoing in order to effect a permanent change in the relation between the city and its inhabitants," Clark writes that

> Capital did not need to have a representation of itself laid out upon the ground in bricks and mortar, or inscribed as a map in the minds of its city-dwellers. One might even say that capital preferred the city not to be an image – not to have form, not to be accessible to the imagination, to readings and misreadings, to a conflict of claims on its space – in order that it might mass-produce an image of its own to put in place of those it destroyed. [...] I shall call that last achievement the spectacle, and it seems to me clear that Haussmann's rebuilding was spectacular in the most oppressive sense of the word. We look back at Haussmannization now and see the various ways in which it let the city be consumed in the abstract, as one convenient fiction. But we should be careful of too much teleology: the truth is that Haussmann's purposes were many and contradictory, and that the spectacle arrived, one might say, against the grain of the empire's transformations, and incompletely. (The spectacle is never an image mounted securely and finally in place; it is always an account of the world competing with others, and meeting the resistance of different, sometimes tenacious forms of social practice.)

Thus, the precise problem with Hugo's wish to see the "checkerboard" already completed, or his wish to hold a "mirror" up to Louis Bonaparte's face, is not so much his intentions, but that he has imagined that the Second Empire's efforts to change France forever were already completed. The battle was already lost. Thus, social practice at that point was both vain and useless.

Joly, on the other hand, did not believe what he has Machiavelli say in the last of his dialogues with Montesquieu: "Everything will have been done, everything will have been completed; no more resistance will be possible." Instead, Joly believed that, despite his impressive victories and accomplishments, Napoleon III was a weak leader; that his successes could be overturned; and that resistance was not only possible, but could also be effective, provided that it found new means of expressing itself, new means of acting in the world. And, of course, he was right. On 4 September 1870, "the busts of the Emperor and Empress were thrown out of the windows of the houses in which they were found; and on one ladder I saw a well-dressed *bourgeois* effacing the street name of the Boulevard Haussmann, and substituting that of 'Victor Hugo'"; and in October of that same year, "Furniture is smashed. A splendid plan of Paris, draw up by Haussmann's engineers and Napoleon's Haussmann, is cut to pieces by the vengeful Reds" (N. Sheppard, *Shut Up in Paris,* quoted by T.J. Clark).

Joly's systematic *détournement* of Hugo's *Napoleon the Little* focuses upon the controversial figure of Machiavelli. In Hugo's book, Machiavelli is a figure of evil and amorality:

> Machiavelli made small men; Louis Bonaparte is one of them. [...] As for the plan in itself, as for that all-embracing idea of universal repression, whence came it? who could tell? It was seen in the air. It appeared in the past. It enlightened certain souls, it pointed to certain routes. It was a gleam issuing from the tomb of Machiavelli.

But in the *Dialogue in Hell,* Machiavelli is not the one who is on trial; he is not the one to blame for the rise and success of Louis Napoleon. Instead, it is Montesquieu who is positioned as the

architect of the Second Empire, albeit an unwitting one. Using the figure of Machiavelli as his prosecuting attorney, Joly tries and convicts Montesquieu for allowing four institutions – described by Victor Hugo as the "four false supports: centralized government, standing army, irremovable judges, [and] salaried priesthood" – to thrive or, if you will, for failing (in Hugo's words) to "transform your government root and branch," for failing to "suppress here, retrench here, remodel everything." Because Montesquieu and his followers did not do this, they left in place all the tools that Louis Bonaparte – that "perjured executive power" – would need to turn republicanism into despotism. "I have already said many times, and I will repeat it again," Machiavelli tells Montesquieu in the Fourteenth Dialogue, "that I do not need to create everything, to organize everything; I find a large part of the instruments of my power in the already existing institutions." Karl Marx agreed: in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* he wrote: "Present-day France was already contained in the parliamentary republic. It only required a bayonet thrust for the bubble to burst and the monster to leap forth before our eyes."

It was obviously for reasons of personal safety that Joly doesn't have Machiavelli and Montesquieu speak about Louis Bonaparte and the Second French Empire directly, in the present tense. It was also for reasons of personal safety that Joly didn't sign his name, leaving his book the work of an anonymous author. In his "Modest Foreword," he writes,

> One will not ask where is the hand that traced out these pages: a work such as this is, in a certain way, impersonal. It responds to an appeal to consciousness; everyone has conceived it; it is executed;

Instead, Joly – the author who "effaces himself, because he is only the editor of a thought that is in the general sense; he is only a more or less obscure accomplice of the coalition for good" – has Machiavelli tell Montesquieu what kind of government he (Machiavelli) would fashion *if* he were in power today. Everything remains hypothetical and conditional. *Men from the past have been brought into the present to discuss a* possible *future.* This indirect way of looking at the real or actual present – France as it was in 1864 – via a Science Fiction-like hindsight is accomplished by having Machiavelli, though he lived two centuries before Montesquieu, envision the future (the potential present), while it is the Frenchman who looks back to the past; and by depriving Montesquieu of any knowledge of what took place in France between 1847 and 1864, while Machiavelli somehow knows all. In their Third Dialogue, the latter explains: "Here the last are the first, O Montesquieu! The statesman of the Middle Ages, the politician of barbaric times, knows more about modern times than [you,] the philosopher of the 18th century."

Thus, the enlarged, omniscient figure of Machiavelli is in fact doubled: he represents both Louis Bonaparte and Maurice Joly, the critic of Louis Bonaparte. In this figuration, Machiavelli doesn't end up representing a single despot. For his part, Hugo insists upon showing his readers what Louis Bonaparte looks like:

> [A] man of middle height, cold, pale, slow in his movements, having the air of a person not quite awake. [...] He has a heavy mustache, covering his smile, like that of the Duke of Alva, and a lifeless eye like that of Charles IX.

But Joly's Machiavelli – despite his careful attention to detailing the "physiognomy of the Prince" in the Twenty-Fourth Dialogue, despite his insistence that his features must be imprinted on every coin and building – *withholds* or *refuses to describe* the actual face of the despot whom

he would be. And this is because, in the dialogues of Joly's book, Machiavelli represents *all* despots.

In the Twenty-Second Dialogue, by which time he has talked Montesquieu into a gloomy silence, Machiavelli says he

> would cross the Alps, like Hannibal; I would make war in India, like Alexander; in Libya, like Scipio; I would go from the Atlas to the Taurus [Mountains], from the banks of the Ganges to the Mississippi, from the Mississippi to the Amur River. The Great Wall of China would fall before my name; my victorious legions would defend the Tomb of the Savior in Jerusalem and the Vicar of Jesus Christ in Rome; their steps would tread upon the dust of the Incas in Peru, on the ashes of Sesostris in Egypt, on those of Nebuchadnezzar in Mesopotamia. Descendant of Caesar, Augustus and Charlemagne, I would avenge the defeat of Varus on the banks of the Danube; the rout of Cannes on the banks of the Adige; and the outrages against the Normands on the Baltic Sea.

And in the Twenty-Fifth Dialogue, he says he would be "Washington, Henri IV, Saint Louis, Charles the Wise; I mention your best kings so as to honor you. I would be a king of Egypt and Asia, at the same time; I would be Pharaoh, Cyrus, Alexander, Sardanapalus."

There are no stage directions, no indications of how Machiavelli and Montesquieu are to be dressed, no indications of what Hell is supposed to look like. Though we are told that there are crowds of other "shadows" in Hell, we never hear them speak or wail, and so we never see them, either. Nor can these shadows see the two protagonists. "Do you see the shadows that pass not far from you, *covering their eyes*? Do you recognize them?" (emphasis added), Machiavelli asks Montesquieu at the very end of the book, as Machiavelli starts to disappear, *right before Montesquieu's eyes.* First, there were two isolated and disembodied protagonists, wandering around a virtually empty wasteland; then there is only one, who is about the see the truth about his own blindness.

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While translating Joly's *Dialogue in Hell* into English, we consulted the books by Herman Bernstein and John S. Waggoner. But, unlike the former, whose purposes were very narrow, ours are broad and have nothing to do with exposing the falsity of the *Protocols*; and, unlike the latter, who reduced Joly's elegant French into an English that would be easily understood by his college students (Waggoner tends to paraphrase, rather than translate, and even deletes words, phrases and whole sentences that he doesn't think students will understand them), we are not academics. Like Maurice Joly himself, we are writers and political revolutionaries. We hope that this new translation, which includes footnotes that draw the reader's attention to contemporary critical theories of capitalism and which hopefully retains the grand style of the original, is read by other enemies of the cold monster: libertarian socialists and Marxists, council communists, situationists and anarchists. We also hope that we have brought to Joly a little of the joy and the political playfulness that he knew so well how to offer and invent. More so than perhaps any other writer, he has wept over how his words have been used.

Bill Brown, New York City, 2008

Author's "Modest" Foreword

> "Soon we will see a frightful calm, during which all will unite against the power that violated the law."
>
> "When Sylla wanted to yield liberty back to Rome, it could no longer receive it."
>
> (Montesquieu, *The Spirit of The Laws*.)

This book has traits that can be applied to all governments, but it has one precise goal: to personify one political system in particular that has not varied in its methods for a single day since the unfortunate and, alas, already too faraway date of its *inauguration.*

This is not a lampoon or a pamphlet; the senses of modern people are already too *policed* to accept violent truths about contemporary politics. The supernatural duration of certain successes [in this field] is furthermore intended to corrupt honesty itself; but public consciousness still lives, and the heavens will one day interfere in the games being played against it.

One better judges certain facts and certain principles when one sees them outside of the framework in which they habitually move before our eyes; the change of optical perspective sometimes terrifies the eyes!

Here, everything is presented under the form of fiction; it would be superfluous to provide the key in anticipation. If this book has an import, if it contains a lesson, it will be necessary for the reader to understand it and not have it given to him. Furthermore, such reading will not fail to have quite lively distractions; it is necessary to proceed with it slowly, as is suitable with writings that are not frivolous things.

One will not ask where is the hand that traced out these pages: a work such as this is, in a certain way, impersonal. It responds to an appeal to consciousness; everyone has conceived it; it is executed; the author effaces himself, because he is only the editor of a thought that is in the general sense; he is only a more or less obscure accomplice of the coalition for good.

[Maurice Joly]
Geneva, 15 October 1864

Brussels, Mertens and Son, Printer Rue de l'escalier, 22 1864

PART ONE

First Dialogue

Machiavelli Defends His Legacy

Machiavelli: On the borders of this desert clime, one has told me, I will encounter the shadow of the great Montesquieu. Is this him who is before me?
Montesquieu: The name "Great" belongs to no one here, O Machiavelli! I am he whom you seek.
Machiavelli: Among the illustrious personages whose shadows people the sojourn of darkness, there is none I desire to meet more than Montesquieu. Driven back into unknown spaces by the migration of souls, I give thanks to the happenstance that finally places me in the presence of the author of *The Spirit of the Laws.*
Montesquieu: The former Secretary of State of the Florentine Republic has still not forgotten the language of the courts. But what can those who have crossed the somber shores exchange, if not anguish and regret?
Machiavelli: Is this the philosopher or the statesman who speaks thus? What importance can death have for those who have lived through thought, since thought does not die? As for me, I do not know a more tolerable condition than that which is made for us here until the day of the Last Judgment. To be delivered from the cares and concerns of material life, to live in the domain of pure reason, to converse with the great men who have filled the universe with the sound of their names; to follow from afar the revolutions of the States, the fall and transformation of empires; to meditate upon their new constitutions, on the changes in the customs and the ideas of the people of Europe, on the progress of their civilization, in politics, the arts and industry, as in the sphere of philosophical ideas: What theatre for thought! What subjects for astonishment! What new points of view! What unheard-of revelations! What marvels, if one can believe the shadows that descend here! For us, death is like a profound retirement, in which we finish receiving the lessons of history and the qualifications of humanity. Nothingness itself has not broken all the ties that bind us to the earth, because posterity still speaks of those who, like you, have imparted great movements to the human spirit. Your political principles rule, at present, over nearly half of Europe; and if someone could be freed from fear by effectuating the somber passage that leads from hell to the heavens, who can do it better than he who presents himself with titles of pure glory before eternal justice?
Montesquieu: You do not speak of yourself, Machiavelli; it would be too modest, when one leaves behind the immense reputation as the author of *The Prince.*
Machiavelli: I believe I comprehend the irony that hides behind your words. The great French publicist thus judges me like the crowd that only knows my name and a blind prejudice? That book made a fatal reputation for me, I know it: it has rendered me responsible for all the tyrannies; it has attracted to me the malediction of the people who have personified in me their hatred of despotism; it poisoned my last days and the disapproval of posterity seems to have followed me this far. Yet what did I do? For 15 years, I served my homeland, which was a Republic; I conspired for its independence; and I defended it without respite against Louis XII, the Spanish, Jules II and Borgia himself who, without me, would have suffocated it. I protected it against the bloody intrigues that grew in all senses around it, fighting with diplomacy like another fights with a sword; dealing with, negotiating with, joining or breaking the threads in

accordance with the Republic's interests, which were then crushed between the great powers and tossed around by war like a skiff. And it was not an oppressive or autocratic government that we supported in Florence; these were popular institutions. Was I among those whom one saw change with fortune? The Medicis' torturers knew to come after me, following the fall of Soderini. Elevated along with liberty, I succumbed with it; I lived in banishment without the glance of a prince deigning to turn towards me. I died poor and forgotten. This was my life and these were my crimes that won me the ingratitude of my party, the hatred of posterity. The heavens, perhaps, will be more just towards me.

Montesquieu: I know all this, Machiavelli, and this is why I have never been able to comprehend how the Florentine patriot, how the servant of a Republic, was made to be the founder of the somber school that has given you, as disciples, all the crowned heads, but that is proper to justify tyranny's greatest crimes.

Machiavelli: And if I tell you that the book was only a diplomat's fantasy; that it was not intended for publication; that it has received publicity to which its author has remained a stranger; that it was conceived under the influence of ideas that were then shared by all the Italian principalities that were keen to aggrandize themselves at the expense of each other and that were directed by an astute politics in which the most perfidious was reputed to be the most skillful. . . .

Montesquieu: Is this truly your thinking? Since you speak to me with such frankness, I can confess to you that such was mine and that, in this respect, I shared the opinion of many of those who knew your life and had attentively read your works. Yes, yes, Machiavelli, and this avowal honors you: then you did not say what you thought or you only spoke under the influence of personal feelings that, for a moment, clouded your great reason.

Machiavelli: This is what deceives you, Montesquieu: as well as those who have judged as you have. My only crime was telling the truth to the people as well as to the kings; not moral truth, but political truth; not the truth such as it should be, but as it is, such as it will always be. It was not me who was the founder of the doctrine whose paternity one has attributed to me; it was the human heart. *Machiavellianism came before Machiavelli.*

Moses, Sesostris, Solomon, Lysander, Philippe and Alexander of Macedonia, Agathocles, Romulus, Tarquin, Julius Cesar, Augustus and even Nero, Charlemagne, Theodoric, Clovis, Hugues Capet, Louis XI, Gonzalves of Cordova, Cesare Borgia – these are my doctrine's ancestors. That's not all, I could go on,[1] without, of course, speaking of those who came after me, the list of which would be long, and who learned nothing from *The Prince* that they didn't already know from the practice of power. Who in your time rendered me more brilliant homage than Frederic II? Pen in hand, he denied me in the interest of his own popularity but, in politics, he rigorously applied my doctrines.

By which inexplicable failing of the human spirit does one complain to me about what I wrote in this book? So many would like to reproach the scientist for seeking the physical causes that bring about the fall of the bodies that injure us by falling; the physician who describes the illness; the chemist who records the history of poison; the moralist who paints the vices; and the historian who writes history.

Montesquieu: Oh, Machiavelli! That Socrates is not here to unravel the sophistry that hides within your words! Nature did not make me apt for discussion, but it is hardly difficult for me to respond to you: you compare the evils engendered by the spirit of domination, cunning and violence to poison and sickness; and these are the illnesses whose means of communication your

[1] *J'en passe et des meilleurs*: see the portrait scene in Victor Hugo's *Hernani* (1830).

writings teach to the States; these are the poisons that you teach one to distill. When the scientist, the physician, and the moralist research evil, it is not to teach its propagation; it is to cure it. But this is what your book does not do; but this doesn't matter to me and I am not less appeased. From the moment that you do not erect despotism as a principle, from the moment that you yourself consider it to be an evil, it seems to me that, by this alone, you condemn it and, on this point at least, we can be in agreement.

Machiavelli: We are not at all in agreement, Montesquieu, because you have not understood all of my thought; I have laid you open to a comparison in which it was too easy to triumph. Socrates' irony doesn't worry me, because he was only a sophist who used a false instrument – *logomachy* – more cleverly than the others. This isn't your school and it isn't mine: thus let us leave words and comparisons so that we can concern ourselves with ideas. Here is how I formulate my system and I doubt that you can weaken it, because it is only made up of deductions from moral and political facts of an eternal truth: bad instincts among men are more powerful than the good ones. Man has more enthusiasm for evil than for good; fear and force have more control over him than reason. I do not stop to demonstrate such truths; only the scatterbrained coterie of Baron Holbach – in which J.-J. Rousseau was the great priest and Diderot was the apostle – has contradicted them. All men aspire to domination and there is none who would not be an oppressor if he could; all or almost all are ready to sacrifice the rights of others for their own interests.

What restrains the devouring animals that one calls men? At the origin of society, there was brutal and unchecked force; later it was the law, that is to say, force still, ruled by forms. You have consulted all the sources of history; everywhere force appears before rights.

Political liberty is only a relative idea; the necessity to live is what dominates the States as well as individuals.

In certain European latitudes, there are people incapable of moderation in the exercise of liberty. If liberty is extended there, it becomes license; civil or social war occurs and the State is lost, either it is divided into factions and dismembered by the effect of its own convulsions, or its divisions render it prey to foreigners. In such conditions, people prefer despotism to anarchy. Are they wrong?

Once constituted, the States have two kinds of enemies: enemies within and enemies without. What weapons can they employ in a war against foreigners? Do the two general enemies reciprocally communicate their battle plans so as to mutually place each other in a position to defend themselves? Do they prohibit nocturnal attacks, traps, ambushes, battles of unequal numbers of troops? No, no doubt they do not and such combatants would make us laugh. And do you not want one to employ these traps, these artifices, all of these strategies that are indispensable to war, against [internal] agitators? No doubt one would use less rigor, but basically the rules are the same. Is it possible to use pure reason to lead the violent masses that are only moved by feelings, passions and prejudices?

Whether management of affairs is confided in an autocrat, an oligarchy or the people, no war, no negotiation, no internal reform can be successful without the help of those combinations that you appear to disapprove of, but that you yourself would be obligated to use if the king of France tasked you with the least affair of State.

What puerile disapproval has struck *The Prince*! Is it that politics has nothing to do with morality? Have you ever seen a single State that conducts itself in accordance with the principles that govern private morality? But then any war would be a crime, even when it has a just cause; any conquest that had no other motivation than glory would be a heinous crime; any treaty in

which a power tilts the balance in its own favor would be an undignified fraud; any usurpation of sovereign power would be an act that would merit death. Nothing would be legitimate if it wasn't founded on rights! But I have told you all along and I maintain it, even in the presence of contemporary history: all the sovereign powers have had force at their origins or the negation of rights (which is the same thing). Is this to say that I should proscribe rights? No, but I regard them as an extraordinarily limited application, as much in the relationships of the nations amongst themselves as in the relationships between the governors and the governed.

Moreover, do you not see that this word "rights" is infinitely vague? Where do they begin and where do they end? When will rights exist and when will they not? I'll cite some examples. Here is a State: there is bad organization of the public powers, the turbulence of democracy, the powerlessness of the laws against agitators, disorder that reigns everywhere until ruin is precipitated. An audacious man springs forth from the ranks of the aristocracy or from the heart of the people; he breaks up all of the constituted powers; he puts his hands upon the laws, he revises the institutions and he brings 20 years of peace to his country. Did he have the right to do what he has done?

Pisistratus seized the citadel through force and prepared the age of Pericles. Brutus violated the monarchical Constitution of Rome, expelled the Tarquins and, at dagger-point, founded a republic, the grandeur of which was the most imposing spectacle that the universe has ever seen. But the struggle between the patriarchy and the plebeians, which – as long as it was restrained – made the Republic vital, led to dissolution and all perished. Caesar and Augustus appeared; they too were lawbreakers, but the Roman Empire that succeeded the Republic – thanks to them – lasted as long as it did and only succumbed by covering the entire world with its debris. So! Was "right" with these audacious men? According to you, no. And nevertheless posterity has covered them in glory; in reality, they served and saved their country; they prolonged its existence through the centuries. You see that, in the States, the principle of rights is dominated by the principle of self-interest, and what can be extracted from these considerations are the ideas that *good can come from evil, that one arrives at the good through evil*,[2] as one cures with poison, as one saves life by cutting with iron. I am less preoccupied with what is good and moral than with what is useful and necessary; I take society such as it is and I provide rules as a consequence of these facts.

Speaking abstractly, are violence and cunning evils? Yes, but it is quite necessary to use them in governing men as long as men are not angels.

Anything can be good or bad according to the usage that one makes of it and the fruit that one can derive from it; the end justifies the means and, if you now ask me why I – a republican – give preference to absolute government, I would say to you: witness the fickleness and cowardice of the populace in my homeland, its innate taste for servitude, its incapacity to conceive of and respect the conditions of free life; in my eyes, it is a blind force that dissolves itself sooner or later if it is not in the hand of a single man. I would respond that the people, left to their own devices, would only know how to destroy themselves; that they would never be able to administrate, judge or make war. I would say to you that Greece only shone in the eclipses of liberty; that, without the despotism of the Roman aristocracy, and that, later on, without the despotism of the emperors, this brilliant civilization would never have been developed.

Can I find examples among the modern States? They are so striking and so numerous that I will take the first ones that come to mind.

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[2] A contradiction of Victor Hugo's statement in Book VI, Chapter VII, of *Napoleon the Little*: "Nothing good has evil for its basis."

Under which institutions and which men have the Italian republics shone? With which sovereigns have Spain, France and Germany constituted their power? Under Leon X, Jules II, Philippe II, Barberousse, Louis XIV, and Napoleon – all heavy-handed men, and more often poised upon the hilt of their swords than on the charters of their States.

But I am surprised at having spoken for so long to convince the illustrious writer who listens to me. If I am not mistaken, are not some of these ideas in *The Spirit of the Laws*? Has this discourse injured the serious and cold man who, without passion, meditated on the problems of politics? The Encyclopedists were not Catos: the author of the *Persian Letters*[3] was not a saint, nor even a fervent devotee. Our school, which is called immoral, was perhaps more attached to the True God than the philosophers of the 18th century were.

Montesquieu: You last words do not anger me, Machiavelli, and I have listened to you with attention. Would you like to hear me and let me speak with the same liberty?

Machiavelli: I will be like a mute and I will listen in a respectful silence to the one whom one calls *the legislator of the nations.*

Second Dialogue

Montesquieu States His Position

Montesquieu: Your doctrines are nothing new to me, Machiavelli; and if I have difficulty in refuting them, this will less be because they disturb my reason but because, true or false, they have no philosophical basis. I quite understand that you are, above all, a political man and that deeds touch you more deeply than ideas. But, nevertheless, you agree that, when it is a question of government, it is necessary to have certain principles. You make no place in your politics for morality, religion or rights; you only have two words in your mouth: *force* and *cunning.* If your system only says that force plays a great role in human affairs, that cleverness is a necessary quality for a statesman, you understand quite well that these are truths that have no need of demonstration; but if you erect violence as a principle, and cunning as a maxim of government, if you do not account for any of humanity's laws in your calculations, the code of tyranny is no more than the code of the brute, because the animals are also adroit and strong, and indeed there is no other right among them than the right of brute force. But I do not believe that your fatalism goes that far, because you recognize the existence of good and evil.

Your principles are that *good can come from evil* and that it is permitted to do evil when it can result in good. Thus, you do not say: it is good in itself to betray one's word or it is good to make use of corruption, violence and murder. Instead, you say: one can betray when it is useful, kill when it is necessary, and take the goods of others when it is advantageous to do so. I hasten to add that, in your system, these maxims are only applied to the princes and when it is a question of their interests or those of the State. Consequently, the prince has the right to violate his oaths; he can spill blood in torrents to seize power or to maintain his control over it; he can skin those whom he has banished, overturn all the laws, make new ones and violate them, too; squander finances, corrupt, repress, punish and strike down without cease.

[3] That is to say, Montesquieu.

Machiavelli: But was it not you yourself who said that, in despotic States, fear is necessary, virtue useless and honor dangerous; that blind obedience is necessary and that the prince would be lost if he ceased to raise his arm for an instant?[4]

Montesquieu: Yes, I said that, but after I found out, as you did, the frightening conditions in which tyrannical power maintains itself, I tried to weaken tyranny and not elevate it to the altar; it was to inspire horror in my homeland where – fortunately for it – the head has never bent under a similar yoke. How can you not see that force is only an accident in the progression of legitimate societies and that the most arbitrary powers are obligated to seek their sanction in considerations that are foreign to theories of force? This is not simply in the name of self-interest, but also in the name of the duty that stirs all oppressors. They violate it, but they invoke it; the doctrine of self-interest is thus as inadequate as the means that this doctrine employs.

Machiavelli: Here I must stop you: you make allowances for self-interest, which suffices to justify all of the political necessities that are not in accord with rights.

Montesquieu: This is the national security [*la raison d'état*] that you invoke. Thus, you remark that I cannot give as a basis for society precisely that which destroys it. In the name of self-interest, the princes and the people – like the citizens – can only commit crimes. The self-interest of the State, you say! But how could I know if it is really profitable for it to commit this or that iniquity? Do we not know that the self-interest of the State is most often the self-interest of a particular prince or that of the corrupt people who surround him? I am not exposed to the same consequences by presupposing rights as the basis for the existence of society, because the notion of rights traces the limits that self-interest must not cross.

If you ask me what is the foundation of rights, I would say to you that it is morality, whose precepts are neither doubtful nor obscure; because they are inscribed in all the religions and they are imprinted in luminous characters in the conscience of man. It is this pure source from which all civil, political, economic and international laws must be derived.

Ex eodem jure, sive ex eodem fonte, sive ex eodem, principio.[5]

But this is what bursts your inconsistency: you are Catholic, you are Christian; we adore the same God, you accept his commandments, you accept morality, you accept rights in the relations among men, and [yet] you tread upon all these rules when it is a question of the State or a prince. In a word, *politics, according to you, has nothing to do with morality.* You allow to a monarch what you deny to his subjects. Depending on whether the actions are accomplished by the weak or by the strong, you glorify them or you disapprove of them; they are crimes or virtues, depending on the social rank of those who commit them. You praise the prince for having committed them, *and you send the subject to the galleys.* Thus, you do not imagine that no society could live according to such maxims; you believe that the subjects would keep their oaths though they see the sovereign betray his; that they would respect the laws though they know that the one whom has given them has violated these laws and that he violates them all the time; you believe they will hesitate along the road to violence, corruption and fraud, though they see ceaselessly march along it those who are tasked with leading them. Enlighten yourself; know that

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[4] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book III, Chapter IX. [*Translator*: "But when a despotic prince ceases for one single moment to uplift his arm, when he cannot instantly demolish those whom he has entrusted with the first employments, all is over: for as fear, the spring of this government, no longer subsists, the people are left without a protector."]

[5] Latin for "From the same right, or from the same source, or from the same principle."

each usurpation by the prince in the public domain authorizes a similar infraction in the sphere of the [private] subject; that each political perfidy engenders a social one; that each instance of violence above legitimates violence below.[6] This is what concerns the citizens.

As for what concerns them in their relations with the governors, I do not need to tell you that it is civil war introduced, in a state of ferment, into the heart of society. The silence of the people is only the truce of the vanquished, for whom complaining is a crime. Expect that they will awake; you have invented the theory of force; be sure that they have retained it. At the first opportunity, they will break their chains; they will break them under the most futile pretext, perhaps, and they will take back by force what force has taken from them.

The maxim of despotism is the Jesuits' *perinde ac cadaver*;[7] kill or be killed: this is its law; it is idiocy today, civil war tomorrow. At least that is the way things happen in the European climes: in the East, the people sleep in peace in the debasement of servitude.

Thus the princes cannot take liberties with what private morality does not allow: this is my conclusion; it is strict. You have believed that you have troubled me by proposing the example of many great men who, by bold action accomplished through the violation of the laws, have brought peace to their countries, sometimes [even] glory; and it is from this that you have derived your great argument: *good comes from evil.* I am not convinced; it hasn't been demonstrated to me that audacious men have wrought more good than evil; it has not at all been established that societies cannot be saved or sustained without them. The means of salvation that they provide do not compensate for the seeds of dissolution that they introduce into the States. Several years of anarchy are often much less harmful for a kingdom than many years of silent despotism.

You admire great men; I only admire great institutions. I believe that to be happy, people have less need of men of genius than men of honesty; but I grant you, if you would like, that some of the violent enterprises for which you have made apologies have turned out to be advantageous to certain States. These acts could have been justified in ancient societies in which slavery and the dogma of fatalism ruled. One again found them in the Middle Ages and even in modern times; but gradually customs grew milder, guiding lights spread among the diverse peoples of Europe; especially as the principles of political science became better known, rights were substituted for force in principles as well as in deeds. No doubt the storms of liberty still exist and crimes are still committed in its name: but political fatalism no longer exists. If you had said in your era that despotism was a necessary evil, you could not do so today, because despotism has become impossible in the current state of customs and political institutions among the principal peoples of Europe.

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[6] Compare this to the following passage in Victor Hugo's *Napoleon the Little*: "Bring before the assizes a malefactor of any sort: the thief will say to the judges: 'The chief of State robbed the Bank of twenty-five million'; the false witness will say to the judges: 'The chief of State took an oath in the sight of God and man, and that oath he has violated'; the sequestrator will say: 'The chief of State has arrested, and detained in violation of all laws, the representatives of the sovereign people'; the swindler will say: 'The chief of State got his election, got power, got the Tuileries, all by swindling'; the forger will say: 'The chief of State forged votes'; the footpad will say: 'The chief of State stole the purses from the Princes of Orleans'; the murderer will say: 'The chief of State shot, sabered, bayoneted, massacred passengers in the street'; and, all together, swindler, forger, false witness, footpad, robber, and assassin, will add: 'And you judges, you have seen fit to salute this man, to praise him for having perjured himself, to compliment him for committing forgery, to praise him for stealing and swindling, to thank him for murdering! What do you want of us?'"

[7] Latin for "as if he were a dead body."

Machiavelli: Impossible? . . . If you can manage to prove this to me, I will agree to take a step towards your ideas.
Montesquieu: I will prove it to you very easily, if you will follow me further.
Machiavelli: Very willingly, but watch out: I believe that you promise much.

Third Dialogue

Things Have Changed Since Your Time

Montesquieu: A thick mass of shadows are headed for this clime; our region will soon be invaded. Come to this side; if not, we will soon be separated.
Machiavelli: I have not found in your last words the precision that characterized your language at the beginning of our interview. I find that you have exaggerated the consequences of the principles that are contained in *Spirit of the Laws.*
Montesquieu: In this work, I intentionally avoided the elaboration of long theories. If you knew it other than through what had been reported to you, you would see that the particular developments that I have given you here effortlessly derive from the principles that I proposed. Moreover, I do not have difficulty in confessing that the knowledge that I have acquired from recent events has modified or completed several of my ideas.
Machiavelli: Do you seriously intend to claim that despotism is incompatible with the political situation of the peoples of Europe?
Montesquieu: I do not say all of the peoples, but I will cite for you, if you like, those whom the development of political science has led to this great result.
Machiavelli: Who are these people?
Montesquieu: [Those in] England, France, Belgium, a part of Italy, Prussia, Switzerland, the German Confederation, Holland and even Austria, that is to say, as you can see, almost all of Europe into which the Roman world had previously extended.
Machiavelli: I know something of what has happened in Europe from 1527 to modern times and I confess to you that I am curious to hear you justify your proposition.
Montesquieu: So! Listen to me and perhaps I will manage to convince you. It is not men, it is institutions that assure the rule of liberty and good customs in these States. All of the good depends upon the perfection or imperfection of these institutions, but all of the evil that can result for men from their unification in society also necessarily depends on them; and when I demand the best institutions, you will understand that – following the very beautiful remark made by Solon[8] – I mean *the most perfect institutions that the people can support.* This means that I do not conceive of them based upon impossible conditions of existence and that, by this, I separate myself from the deplorable reformers who claim to construct societies upon pure, rational hypotheses without bearing in mind the climate, habits, customs and even prejudices.

At the origin of the nations, institutions are what they can be. Antiquity has shown us marvelous civilizations, States in which the conditions of free government were admirably understood. The peoples of the Christian era have had more difficulty putting their Constitutions into harmony with the movements of political life, but they have profited from the teachings of antiquity and, with infinitely more complicated civilizations, they have arrived at more perfect results.

[8] One of the Seven Sages of Greece, Solon was an Athenian statesman, lawmaker and political philosopher.

One of the primary causes of anarchy and despotism, as well, is the theoretical and practical ignorance in which the European States have lived concerning the principles that preside over the organization of power. When the principle of sovereignty resides uniquely in the person of the prince, how can the rights of the nation be affirmed? When the one who is tasked with executing the law is, at the same time, the legislator, how can his power not be tyrannical? When the legislative and executive powers are confounded, when the juridical power comes to be united in the same hands, how can the citizens be protected against the arbitrary?[9]

I know well that certain liberties, that certain public rights which are sooner or later introduced into the least advanced political morals, do not fail to provide obstacles to the unlimited exercise of absolute royalty; that, on the other hand, the fear of making the people cry out, the spirit of gentleness, brings them to use with moderation the excessive powers with which they are invested; but it is no less true that such precarious guarantees are at the mercy of the monarch who, in principle, possesses the goods, rights and persons of his subjects. The division of power has posed the problem of free societies in Europe and, if something can soften for me the anxiety of the hours that precede the Final Judgment, it is the idea that my passage on the earth was not foreign to this great emancipation.

You, Machiavelli, were born within the limits of the Middle Ages, and – with the renaissance of the arts – you saw the aurora of modern times open up; but the society in the midst of which you lived, permit me to say so, was still stamped with the erring ways of barbarity; Europe was a tournament. The ideas of war, domination and conquest filled the heads of the statesmen and princes. Force was everything; rights were nothing, I agree; the kingdoms were prey for conquerors; within the States, the sovereigns struggled against great vassals; the great vassals crushed the towns. In the midst of the feudal anarchy that armed all of Europe, the downtrodden people were used to regarding the princes and great men as fateful divinities to whom the human race was delivered. You lived in times full of tumult, but also full of grandeur. You saw intrepid captains, men of iron and audacious geniuses; and the world, filled with somber beauty in its disorder, appeared to you as it would appear to an artist whose imagination is struck more than his moral sense; this is what, in my eyes, explains *The Prince,* and you were not so far from the truth when, a little while ago – in an Italian feint – it pleased you to sound me out by attributing the book to a diplomat's caprice. But, since then, the world has progressed; today the people regard themselves as the arbiters of their own destinies: they have, in fact as in law, destroyed privilege and destroyed the aristocracy; they have established a principle that will be quite new to you and that is descended from the Marquis [Victor] Hugo: they have established the principle of equality; they no longer see anything but authorized representatives in those who govern them; they have realized the principle of equality in civil laws, which no one can take from them. They hold to these laws as to their own blood, because these laws have actually cost the blood of their ancestors.

You spoke to me a little while ago of war, which still rages, I know, but the first progress made was no longer giving the property of the vanquished States to the victors. Rights that you

[9] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XI, Chapter VI. [*Translator*: "When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty; because apprehensions may arise, lest the same monarch or senate should enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner. Again, there is no liberty, if the judiciary power is not separated from the legislative and executive. Were it joined with the legislative, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control; for the judge would be then the legislator. Were it joined to the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression."]

hardly knew, international rights, today govern the relations of the nations amongst themselves, just as civil rights govern the relations of the subjects amongst themselves in each nation.

After having assured their private rights by civil laws, and their public rights by *treaties,* the people wanted to put themselves in order with their princes and they assured their political rights through *constitutions.* Long yielded up to the arbitrary by the confusion of power, which allowed the princes *to make tyrannical laws so as to exercise them tyrannically,* the people separated the three powers (legislative, executive and judiciary) by constitutional lines that cannot be crossed without sounding the alarm throughout the entire political body.

By this sole reform, which is an immense deed, domestic public rights were created and the higher principles that constituted them were extracted. The person of the prince ceased to be confounded with that of the State; sovereignty appeared as having its source in the very heart of the nation, which distributed power between both the prince and the independent political bodies. I do not want to offer to the illustrious statesman who hears me a developed theory of the regime that, in England and in France, is called *the constitutional regime*; it has come to pass today in the customs of the principal European States, not only because the constitutional regime is the expression of the highest political science, but especially because it is the sole practical mode of government when one is faced with the ideas of modern civilization.

In all this time, under the rule of liberty as well as under the rule of tyranny, one has only been governed by *laws.* It is thus on *the manner in which the laws are made* that all of the guarantees of the citizens are founded. If the prince is the unique legislator, he will only make tyrannical laws, that is, if he does not overturn the State's Constitution in a few years; but, in any case, there is absolutism; if the unique legislator is a senate, there is oligarchy, which is a regime odious to the people because it provides as many tyrants as masters; if it is the people, one approaches anarchy, which is another way of ending up in despotism; if it is an assembly elected by the people, the first part of the problem is already resolved, because this is the very basis of representative government, which today is in effect in all of the southern part of Europe.

But an assembly of representatives of the people that possesses in itself all legislative sovereignty cannot fail to abuse its powers and bring the greatest perils to the State. The regime that is definitively constituted – as a fortunate compromise between aristocracy, democracy and monarchy – by the simultaneous participation of these three forms of government, by means of a balancing of power, seems to be the masterpiece of the human spirit. The person of the sovereign remains sacred, inviolable; but, by conserving a mass of capital assignations that – for the good of the State – must remain in his power, his essential role is simply that of *the procurator of the execution of the laws.* No longer having in his hand the plenitude of power, his responsibility is effaced and passes to the ministers he brings into his government. The laws, of which he has the exclusive proposition (or concurrently with another State body), are prepared by a council composed of men who are mature in their experience of the affairs of State; they are submitted to an Upper Chamber (hereditary or [elected] for life) that examines them to see if their dispositions are in any way contrary to the Constitution; they are voted upon by a Legislative Body that emanates from the suffrage of the nation; and they are applied by an independent magistracy. If the law is vicious, it is rejected or amended by the Legislative Body: the Upper Chamber can be opposed to a law's adoption if it would be contrary to the principles upon which the Constitution rests.

The triumph of this so profoundly conceived system (the mechanisms of which – you understand – can be combined in a thousand ways, following the temperament of the people to whom it is applied) was to reconcile order with liberty, stability with movement; to involve the

participation of all the citizens in political life by suppressing the agitations of public space. This is the country governing itself, through the alternating shifts of majorities, which in the chambers influence the nominations of the government's ministers.

The relations between the prince and the subjects rest – as you can see – upon a vast system of guarantees in which the unshakable bases are in civil order. No one can be injured in his person or his goods by an act of administrative authority; individual liberty is under the protection of the magistrates; in criminal matters, the accused are judged by their peers; above all jurisdictions, there is the supreme jurisdiction that is tasked with nullifying the decrees that are made in violation of the laws. The citizens themselves are armed, for the defense of their rights, by the institution of bourgeois militias that cooperate with the police of the cities; the simplest particular person can – through a petition – bring his or her complaint to the very feet of the sovereign assemblies that represent the nation. The communes are administered by public officials who are named by elections. Each year, large provincial assemblies – also issued from suffrage – are held to express the needs and wishes of the populations that surround them.

Such is the all-too-weak image, O Machiavelli, of some of the institutions that today flourish in the modern States and especially in my beautiful homeland; but as publicity is essential in free countries, all of these institutions cannot live long if they do not function in broad daylight. A power that was still unknown in your country, and that was only born in my times, has come to give them the last breath of life. This is the *press,* long proscribed and still decried by ignorance, but to which one can apply the beautiful phrase that Adam Smith used with respect to credit: *It is a public road.* It is indeed by this road that all of the movements of all of the ideas of modern peoples are manifested. In the State, the press exercises the same function as the police: it expresses the needs, renders the complaints, denounces the abuses and the arbitrary acts; it constrains all the depositories of power to morality; to do this, it is sufficient for it to put them before public opinion.

In societies that are ruled in these ways, O Machiavelli, what part would you give to the ambitions of the princes and the enterprises of tyranny? I do not ignore the painful convulsions through which this progress has triumphed. In France, liberty drowned in blood during the revolutionary period and only re-surfaced with the Restoration. In that country, new commotions still ready themselves; but all the principles, all the institutions of which I have spoken to you, passed into the customs of France and the people who gravitated towards the sphere of its civilization. I have finished, Machiavelli. Today, the States, like the sovereigns, govern themselves by the rules of justice. The modern [government] minister who is inspired by your lessons would not remain in power a year; the monarch who would put into practice the maxims of *The Prince* would stir up against him the reprobation of his subjects; he would be banned from Europe.

Machiavelli: Do you think so?

Montesquieu: Will you pardon my frankness?

Machiavelli: Why not?

Montesquieu: Shall I think that your ideas have been slightly modified?

Machiavelli: I propose to demolish, piece by piece, all the beautiful things that you have said, and to demonstrate to you that it is my ideas alone that have carried the day, despite the new ideas, the new customs, your so-called principles of public rights, all the institutions of which you have spoken to me; but permit me, before I do so, to ask you a question: where are you in contemporary history?

Montesquieu: The notions that I have acquired about the various European States go up to the last days of 1847. The accidents of my wandering course through the infinite spaces and the confused multitudes of souls that fill them have not allowed me to encounter anyone who can inform me about events beyond the epoch of which I have spoken to you. Since my descent into the sojourn of darkness, I have passed approximately half a century among the people of the ancient world, and it has only been during the last quarter of a century that I have encountered the legions of modern people; still it is necessary to say that the majority come here from the furthest corners of the universe. I do not even know what year it is today.
Machiavelli: Here the last are the first, O Montesquieu! The statesman of the Middle Ages, the politician of barbaric times, knows more about modern times than the philosopher of the 18th century. Today it is the year of grace 1864.
Montesquieu: Would you inform me, Machiavelli – I beg you, do so instantly – what has occurred in Europe since 1847?[10]
Machiavelli: If you will permit it, not before I have had the pleasure of bringing ruin to the heart of your theories.
Montesquieu: As you wish; but believe me I am not worried in this respect. Centuries are needed to change the principles and forms of the governments under which the people have become accustomed to living. No new political teaching could result from the 15 years that have elapsed; and, in any case, if such has occurred, it could not be Machiavelli's doctrines that have triumphed.
Machiavelli: So you think: and so, listen to me in your turn.

Fourth Dialogue

The Principle of Popular Sovereignty

Machiavelli: Listening to your theories of the division of power and the benefits that it has brought to the people of Europe, I could not keep myself, Montesquieu, from admiring the point at which the illusion of systems seizes hold of the greatest minds.

Seduced by the institutions of England, you have believed that you could make the constitutional regime the universal panacea for all States; but you have not accounted for the irresistible movement that today tears society from its old traditions. It will not take two centuries before this form of government, which you admire, is no longer in Europe anything but an historical memory, something as superannuated and weak as Aristotle's rule of the three unities.

At first permit me to examine your political mechanism: you balance the three powers, and you confine each in their department: one makes the laws, another applies them, and a third executes them: the prince reigns, the ministers govern. A marvelous thing, this constitutional scale! You have foreseen everything, ruled everything, except movement: the triumph of such a system is not action, but immobility so that the mechanism functions with precision; but, in reality, things do not happen this way. On the first occasion, movement will be produced through the rupture of one of the springs that you have so carefully forged. Do you believe that the powers will remain within the constitutional limits that you have assigned them and that they

[10] The reader knows the answer: *revolution.* In 1848 alone, there were revolutions in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary and Wallachia.

will not manage to cross? What independent legislative assembly does not aspire to sovereignty? What magistracy does not give way to public opinion? What prince especially – the sovereign of a kingdom or the leader or a republic – unreservedly accepts the passive role to which you have condemned him; who, in the secrecy of his thoughts, does not meditate on the overthrow of the rival powers that hinder his action? In reality, you have put into motion all of the contrary forces, incited all of the enterprises, given weapons to all of the parties. You have surrendered power to the assault launched by the ambitions, and have made the State an arena in which the factions are unleashed. In a little while, there will be disorder everywhere; inexhaustible rhetoricians will transform the deliberating assemblies into oratory jousts; audacious journalists and unbridled pamphleteers will attack the person of the sovereign every day, will discredit the government, the ministers, the men in positions of power. . . .

Montesquieu: I have long known these reproaches that are addressed to free governments. They have no value in my eyes; abuse does not condemn these institutions. I know of many States that have long lived in peace and under such laws: I pity those who cannot.

Machiavelli: Wait: in your calculations, you have only accounted for social minorities. There are gigantic populations riveted to work by poverty, as they were in the past by slavery. What importance do all your parliamentary fictions have to their happiness? In short, your great political movement has only ended in the triumph of a minority privileged by chance, as the ancient nobility triumphed through birth. What importance to the proletarian bent over his work, overwhelmed by the weight of his destiny, is the fact that a few orators have the right to speak, that a few journalists have the right to write? You have created rights that will eternally remain in the state of pure faculty for the masses of people, because they will not make use of them. These rights, of which the law recognizes the ideal enjoyment and necessity refuses the real exercise, are only a bitter irony of the people's destiny. I respond to you that one day they will take them in hatred and will destroy them by hand so as to then place their trust in despotism.

Montesquieu: What scorn does Machiavelli have for humanity and what idea does he have of the baseness of modern people? Powerful God, I do not believe that you have created them so vile. Machiavelli, whatever he says about it, is unfamiliar with the principles and conditions of existence of contemporary civilization. Today, work is the communal law, as it is the divine law; and, far from being a sign of the servitude of men, it is the link of their association, the instrument of their equality.

Political rights are not illusory for the people in those States in which the law does not recognize privileges and in which all careers are open to individual activity. No doubt, and in no society would it be otherwise, the inequality of intelligence and fortune involves, for the individual, inevitable inequalities in the exercise of their rights; but does it not suffice that these rights exist so that the wish of an enlightened philosophy is fulfilled, so that the emancipation of men is assured to the extent that it can be? Even for those whom chance has caused to be born in the most humble conditions, is it nothing to live with the feeling of their independence and their dignity as citizens? But this is only an aspect of the question, because if the moral grandeur of the people is tied to liberty, they are no less bound by their material interests.

Machiavelli: Here I have anticipated you. The school to which you belong has proposed principles, the final consequences of which it appears not to have perceived: you believe that they lead to the reign of reason; I will show you that they lead to the reign of force. In its original purity, your political system consists in giving a practically equal part of the action to the diverse power groups of which society is composed, to allow these groups to cooperate in social activity in a just proportion; you do not want the aristocratic elements to take priority over the democratic

elements. Nevertheless, the temperament of your institutions is to give more power to the aristocracy than to the people, and more power to the prince than to the aristocracy, thus dividing power in proportion to the political capacities of those who must exercise them.
Montesquieu: This is true.
Machiavelli: You make the different classes of society participate in political functions according to the degree of their aptitude and their knowledge; you emancipate the bourgeoisie through the vote, you restrain the people through the poll tax; popular liberties create the power of popular opinion, the aristocracy provides the prestige of great manners, the throne casts upon the nation the splendor of supreme rank; you keep all the great traditions, all the great memories, the worship of all the great things. On the surface, one sees a monarchical society, but it is at base completely democratic, because, in reality, there are no barriers between the classes and work is the instrument of all fortunes. Is this not right?
Montesquieu: Yes, Machiavelli: you know how to comprehend the opinions that you do not share.
Machiavelli: So, all these beautiful things have taken place or will take place as in a dream; because you have a new principle with which all the institutions decompose with a frightening rapidity.
Montesquieu: What is this principle?
Machiavelli: That of popular sovereignty. One will find – do not doubt it – the squaring of the circle before being able to reconcile the balance of power with the existence of a similar principle in the nation where it is admitted. By an absolutely inevitable consequence, the people will, one day or another, seize all the powers that in principle one has recognized in them. Will this seizure be undertaken so as to keep them? No. After several days of madness, they will throw them over due to lassitude for the first soldier of fortune who comes along. In your country, in 1793, you saw how the French head-cutters treated representative democracy: the sovereign people were affirmed by the punishment of their king, then they trampled on their rights; they gave themselves to Robespierre, Barras, Bonaparte.

You are a great thinker, but you do not know the inexhaustible cowardice of the people; I do not speak of those of my times, but those of yours; groveling before strength, pitiless before weakness, implacable concerning faults, indulgent of crime, incapable of tolerating the annoyances of a free regime and patient to the point of martyrdom with all of the violence of bold despotism, breaking thrones in moments of anger and then giving themselves masters whose offenses they pardon, though they decapitated 20 constitutional monarchs for much less.

Thus, you seek out justice; you seek out rights, stability, order, the respect for the very complicated forms of your parliamentary mechanisms among the violent, undisciplined and uncultivated masses to whom you have said: "You have rights, you are the masters, you are the arbiters of the State!" Oh! I know well that the prudent Montesquieu, the politically circumspect Montesquieu, who proposes principles and sets aside the consequences, did not inscribe the dogma of popular sovereignty in *Spirit of the Laws*; but, as you said a little while ago, the consequences derive from the principles that you have proposed. The affinity of your doctrines with those of the *Social Contract*[11] are easy to see. Also, ever since the day on which the French revolutionaries (swearing *in verba magistri*)[12] wrote that "A constitution can only be the free creation of a convention of associates," the monarchical and parliamentary government was

[11] By Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762).
[12] Latin for "in words of the master." See Horace, Epistle I, 1, 14: *iurare in verba magistri* ("to swear in the words of the master").

sentenced to death in your country. In vain one has tried to restore the principles; vainly has your King, Louis XVIII, by returning to France, tried to return power to its source by promulgating the declarations of ’89 as a precedent for the royal grant; this pious fiction of the aristocratic monarchy was in too flagrant a contradiction with the past: it had to vanish into the noise of the revolution of 1830, as did the government of 1830, in its turn. . . .

Montesquieu: Finish.

Machiavelli: Let us not get ahead of ourselves. What you (as much as I) know of the past authorizes me, in the present, to say that the principle of popular sovereignty is destructive of all stability, that it indefinitely consecrates the right to revolution. It puts society in open war against all the human powers and even against God; it is the very incarnation of force. It made of the people a ferocious force that sleeps when it is satiated with blood and chained up; and here is the invariable progression that follows in societies in which movement is ruled by this principle: popular sovereignty engenders demagoguery, demagoguery engenders anarchy, anarchy leads to despotism. For you, despotism is barbarism. So! You see that the people return to barbarism along the road of civilization.

But this is not all, and I claim from other points of view that despotism is the only form of government that is really appropriate for the social situation of modern people. You have said to me that their material interests bind them to liberty; here, you play too fine a game. In general, which States need liberty? Those that live through great sentiments, great passions, heroism, faith, and even honor, as you said in your era when you spoke of the French monarchy. Stoicism can make a free people; in certain conditions, Christianity can have the same privilege. I can understand the necessity of liberty in Athens, in Rome, among the nations that only breathe through the glory of arms, that satisfy all their expansions through war, that moreover need all the energies of patriotism, all the civic enthusiasms to triumph over their enemies.

The public liberties were the natural patrimony of the States in which the servile and industrial functions were relegated to the slaves, where a man was useless if he was not a citizen. I can still conceive of liberty in certain periods of the Christian era and especially in the small States that were linked together by the systems of confederation analogous to those of the Hellenic republics, as in Italy and Germany. Here again I find some of the natural causes that make liberty necessary. It was almost inoffensive during the times in which the principle of authority was not questioned, in which religion had absolute control over men, in which the people – placed under the tutelary regime of the guilds – docilely marched under the leadership of its shepherds. If political emancipation had been attempted then, it would have succeeded without danger, because it would have been accomplished in conformity with the principles upon which the existence of all societies rests. But, with the advent of your great States, which only live through industriousness, with the appearance of our godless and faithless populations, when the people are no longer satisfied by war and when their violent activities necessarily carry them back to internal affairs, liberty – along with the principles that serve it – can only be a cause of dissolution and ruin. I add that liberty is no more necessary to the moral needs of individuals than it is to the States.

From the lassitude of ideas and the shock of revolutions have come cold and disabused societies that have arrived at indifference in politics as well as in religion, that have no other stimulants than material pleasures, that only live through self-interest, that have no other worship than that of gold, whose mercantile customs compete with those of the Jews,[13] whom they have taken as models. Do you believe that it was for the love of liberty in itself that the lower classes

[13] This is the only passage in the entire book that mentions Jewish people.

tried to launch an assault on power? It was due to their hatred of those who possess it; basically, it was to tear from them their wealth, the instrument of the pleasures that they envied.

Those who possess wealth implore an energetic arm, a strong power, from all sides; they only demand one thing from them: to protect the State against the agitations that its weak Constitution cannot resist, to give to them the necessary security so that they can enjoy and conduct their affairs. What forms of government would you apply to societies in which corruption is everywhere; in which fortunes are only acquired by the surprises of fraud; in which morality is only guaranteed by repressive laws; in which the feeling of patriotism itself is extinguished in some sort of universal cosmopolitanism?

I do not see any other salvation for such societies, veritable colossi with feet of clay, than in the institution of a maximum concentration that puts all public power at the disposition of those who govern; in a hierarchical administration similar to that of the Roman Empire, which mechanically ruled all the movements of individuals; in a vast system of legislation that takes back in detail all of the liberties that had been imprudently granted; in a gigantic despotism, finally, that could strike immediately and at any time all those who resist, all those who complain. The Caesarism of the Lower Empire appears to me to have realized quite well what I desire for the well-being of all modern societies. Thanks to the vast apparatuses that already function – one tells me – in more than one European country, they could live in peace, as in China, Japan and India. It is not necessary for common prejudice to make us scorn the Eastern civilizations, whose institutions one learns every day to appreciate better. For example, the Chinese people are very commercial and very well administered.

Fifth Dialogue

The Principle of Popular Sovereignty, continued

Montesquieu: I hesitate to respond to you, Machiavelli, because in your last words there is some kind of Satanic raillery, which leaves me with the internal suspicion that your discourse is not completely in agreement with your secret thoughts. Yes, you have the fatal eloquence that emits traces of the truth, and you are quite the somber genius whose name is still the fright of contemporary generations. Nevertheless, I willingly recognize that, faced with such a powerful spirit, one loses too much by keeping silent; I want to listen to you to the end, and I even want to respond to you, although at present I have little hope of convincing you. You have made a truly sinister picture of modern society; I do not know if it is faithful, but it is at least incomplete, because, in all things, on the side of evil there is good and you have only shown me the evil; furthermore, you have not given me the means of verifying the point at which you are correct, because I do not know of which people and States you spoke when you made this black painting of contemporary morals.

Machiavelli: So, let us admit that I have taken as an example the country that, of all the nations of Europe, is the most advanced in civilization and that – I hasten to add – would be the last to apply to itself the portrait that I will make. . . .

Montesquieu: Thus, it is France that you would like to speak about?

Machiavelli: Yes, indeed.

Montesquieu: You are right to do so, because it is there that the somber doctrines of materialism have penetrated the least. It is France that has remained the home for the great ideas and the great

passions, the source of which you believe to be drained, and it is from France that travel the great principles of public rights, for which you make no place in the government of the States.
Machiavelli: You can add that it is also the field for experimentation in political theory.
Montesquieu: I do not know any experiment that has profited in any durable manner from the establishment of despotism, either in France or elsewhere, among the contemporary nations; and this is what, above all, makes me find very little of your theories about the necessity of absolute power to be in conformity with the reality of things. Until now, I have only known two European States that are completely deprived of liberal institutions, that have kept the pure monarchical element on all sides: Turkey and Russia, and, even if you closely regard the internal movements that operate in the heart of this last power, perhaps you will find there the symptoms of an imminent transformation. It is true that you announce to me that – in a more or less near future – the people, threatened by inevitable dissolution, will return to despotism as to the Ark of Salvation; that they will constitute themselves under the form of the great absolute monarchies, analogous to those of Asia; [but] this is only a prediction. In how much time will this take place?
Machiavelli: Within a century.
Montesquieu: You are a fortune-teller; a century: that is a long time. But let me tell you why your prediction will not come true. Modern societies no longer need be envisioned with the eyes of the past. Their customs, habits and needs have all changed. Thus, one need not unreservedly have faith in the inductions of historical analogies when judging these societies' destinies. One must especially take care not to take the facts that are only accidents for universal laws, or to transform the necessities of particular situations or times into general rules. From the fact that despotism has occurred several times in history, as a consequence of social disturbances, does it follow that it must be taken as a rule of government? From the fact that it has served as a transition in the past, should I conclude that it is the proper way to resolve the crises of modern epochs? Isn't it more rational to say that different ills call for different remedies, different problems for different solutions, different social customs for different political customs? An invariable law of society is that it tends towards perfection, towards progress; eternal wisdom – if I can say so – has condemned it to progress; eternal wisdom has refused movement in the opposite direction. This progress: it is necessary that society attains it.
Machiavelli: Or it dies.
Montesquieu: Do not place us at the extremes; societies never die as they are being born. When they are constituted in the mode that suits them, their institutions can be altered, fall into decadence and perish; but they will have lasted many centuries. It is thus that the diverse peoples of Europe have passed, through successive transformations, from the feudal system to the monarchical system to the constitutional regime. This progressive development, the unity of which is so imposing, has nothing fortuitous about it; it has occurred as the necessary consequence of the movement that is operative in ideas before being rendered into deeds.

Societies cannot have other forms of government than those that are related to their principles and it is against this absolute law that you go when you believe that despotism is compatible with modern civilization. To the extent people have regarded sovereignty as a pure emanation of the divine will, they have submitted to absolute power without complaint; to the extent their institutions have been insufficient to assure their progress, they have accepted the arbitrary. But from the day that their rights were recognized and solemnly declared; from the day that more fecund institutions determined all the functions of the social body through liberty, the politics at the disposal of the princes fell from its heights; power became like a dependent upon the public domain; the art of government became an administrative affair. Today, things are

ordered in such a way that, within the States, the ruling power only appears as the motor of the organized forces.

It is certain that, if you suppose such societies to be infected by all the corruptions, with all the vices of which you spoke to me just a moment ago, they proceed in a rapid fashion towards decomposition; but how can you not see that the conclusion that you drew from this is a veritable begging of the question? Since when does liberty debase souls and degrade character? These are not the lessons of history, because they attest instead in strokes of fire that the greatest peoples have been the freest. If morals have deteriorated – as you have said – in some part of Europe of which I am unfamiliar, it is because despotism has taken control there; because liberty has been extinguished; thus it is necessary to maintain liberty where it exists and reestablish it where it exists no longer.

At this moment, we are – do not forget – on the terrain of principles; and if yours differ from mine, I ask that they be invariable; therefore, I no longer know where I am when I hear you praise liberty in antiquity and proscribe it in modern times, repel it or allow it according to the time or place. These distinctions, supposed to be justified, do not leave the principle intact and it is to this principle alone that I am attached.

Machiavelli: Like a skillful pilot, you have avoided the reef by keeping to the high seas. Generalities are a great aid in discussions; but I confess that I am very impatient to know how the grave Montesquieu will navigate the principle of popular sovereignty. At this moment, I no longer know if it is or is not a part of your system. Do you or do you not allow a place for it?

Montesquieu: I cannot respond to a question if it posed in these terms.

Machiavelli: I know that your reason is troubled by this phantom.

Montesquieu: You are deceived, Machiavelli; but before I respond to you, I must recall to you my writings and the character of the mission that they fulfilled. You have rendered my name in solidarity with the iniquities of the French Revolution: this is a very severe judgment for a philosopher who has taken such prudent steps in search of the truth. Born in a century of intellectual effervescence, on the eve of a revolution that would – in my country – carry off the old forms of monarchical government, I can say that none of the immediate consequences of the movement that grew in these ideas escaped my view. I cannot ignore the fact that the system of the division of power would one day necessarily displace the seat of sovereignty.

This principle – badly understood, badly defined, and badly applied, especially – could engender terrible uncertainties and upset French society from the bottom to the top. The feeling for these perils became the rule for my works. While imprudent innovators (who immediately attacked the source of power) prepared a formidable catastrophe without realizing it, I uniquely applied myself to the study of the forms of free government, to extract the principles, properly speaking, that preside over their establishment. Statesman rather than philosopher, jurisconsult rather than theologian, practical legislator (if the boldness of such a word is permitted to me) rather than theoretician, I believed I could do more for my country by teaching it to govern itself than by questioning the very principle of authority. Nevertheless, God forbid that I try to make for myself a purer merit at the expense of those who, like me, sought the truth in good faith! We have all committed mistakes, but each has the responsibility for his own works.

Yes, Machiavelli – and this is a concession that I do not hesitate to make to you – you were right when, a little while ago, you said that it was necessary that the emancipation of the French people was in conformity with the higher principles that preside over the existence of human societies and this reservation lets you foresee the judgment that I will provide on the principle of popular sovereignty.

First of all, I do not allow a designation that seems to exclude from sovereignty the most enlightened classes of society. This distinction is fundamental, because it will make a State either a pure democracy or a representative State. If sovereignty resides anywhere, it resides in the entire nation; thus I would call it national sovereignty. But the idea of this sovereignty is not an absolute truth: it is only relative. The sovereignty of human power corresponds to a profoundly subversive idea, namely, the sovereignty of human rights; it was this materialist and atheist doctrine that precipitated the French Revolution in the blood and inflicted on it the opprobrium of despotism after the delirium of independence. It is inexact to say that the nations are the absolute masters of their respective destinies, because their sovereign master is God himself and they are never outside His power. If they possessed absolute sovereignty, they would be everything, [and thus] even against eternal justice, against God himself: who would dare to go that far? But the principle of the divine right [of kings], with the meaning that is communally attached to it, is not a less fatal principle, because it condemns the people to obscurantism, to the arbitrary, to nothingness; it logically reconstitutes the regime of castes; it makes the people into a herd of slaves, led – as in India – by the hands of the priests and trembling under the rod of the master. How could it be otherwise? If the sovereign is the envoy of God, if he is the very representative of the Divinity on earth, he has complete power over the human creatures submitted to his control, and this power could only be braked in accordance with the general rules of equity, which would always be easy to break.

It is on this field (that separates these two extreme opinions) that the furious battles of partisanship are fought: one side cries "No divine authority!" while the other cries "No human authority!" O Supreme Providence, my reason refuses to accept one or the other of these alternatives; they both appear to me as an equal blasphemy against your wisdom! Between the divine right that excludes mankind and the human right that excludes God, there is the truth, Machiavelli; the nations, like individuals, are free in the hands of God. They have all the rights, all the powers, on the condition that they are used according to the rules of eternal justice. Sovereignty is human in the sense that it is given by men and that it is men who exercise it; it is divine in the sense that it is instituted by God and that it can only be exercised according to the precepts that He has established.

Sixth Dialogue

The Principle of Popular Sovereignty, continued

Machiavelli: I wish to arrive at the precise consequences. How far does the hand of God extend over humanity? Who is it that makes the sovereigns?
Montesquieu: The people do.
Machiavelli: It is written: *Per me reges regnant*.[14] What does this literally mean? God makes the kings.
Montesquieu: This is a translation in the manner of *The Prince,* O Machiavelli, and it was borrowed from you in this century by one of your most illustrious partisans,[15] but it is not from Holy Scripture. God instituted sovereignty; he did not institute the sovereigns. His all-powerful

[14] Latin for "By me kings reign." *Proverbs* 8:15.
[15] *Original publisher's note:* Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), whose name will be mentioned later. [*Translator*: Joseph-Marie, Comte de Maistre was an influential spokesperson for the restoration of the hereditary monarchy in the aftermath of the French Revolution.]

hand stopped there, because it was there that human free will begins. "The kings rule according to my commandments; they must reign following my law": such is the meaning of the Divine Book. If it were otherwise, it would be necessary to say that the good and the bad princes are established by Providence; it would be necessary to bow before Nero as well as Titus, before Caligula as well as Vespasian. No, God did not want the most sacrilegious domination to invoke his protection, the vilest tyrannies to appeal to his investiture. He left responsibility for their respective acts to the people as well as to the kings.

Machiavelli: I strongly doubt that all this is orthodox. According to you, it is the people (whomever they are) who wield the sovereign authority?

Montesquieu: Take care: by contesting it, you set yourself against a truth of pure common sense. This is not a novelty in history. In ancient times, in the Middle Ages, especially when domination was established outside of invasion or conquest, sovereign power originated through the free will of the people in the original form of the election. To cite only one example: in France the leader of the Carolingian race succeeded the descendants of Clovis and the dynasty of Hugues Capet those of Charlemagne.[16] No doubt heredity came to be substituted for election.

The splendor of services rendered, the public renaissance and traditions have fixed sovereignty among the principle families of Europe, and nothing is more legitimate. But the principle of national omnipotence is constantly found at the basis of revolution; it has always been summoned for the consecration of new powers. It is an anterior and preexisting principle that only realizes itself more narrowly in the diverse Constitutions of the modern States.

Machiavelli: But if it is the people who choose their masters, can they also overthrow them? If they have the right to establish the form of government that suits them, what prevents them from changing it at the whims of their caprice? It would not be the rule of order and liberty that emerges from their doctrines, but the indefinite era of revolution.[17]

Montesquieu: You confound rights with the abuse that can result from their exercise, the principles with their application; these are fundamental distinctions, without which we could not understand each other.

Machiavelli: Do not hope to escape me: I asked you about the logical consequences; refuse them to me if you like. I wish to know if, according to your principles, the people have the right to overthrow their sovereigns.

Montesquieu: Yes, in extreme cases and for just cause.

Machiavelli: Who will be the judge of these extreme cases and of the justice of these extremities?

Montesquieu: And who would you like it to be, if not the people themselves? Have things happened otherwise since the beginning of the world? This is a redoubtable sanction, no doubt, but salutary and inevitable. How can you not see that the contrary doctrine, the one that commands men to have respect for the most odious governments, would make them fall back under the yoke of monarchical fatalism?

Machiavelli: Your system has only one disadvantage: it supposes the infallibility of the people's reason; but do they not have – as men and women – passions, errors and injustices?

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[16] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XXXI, Chapter IV. [*Translator*: this citation is incorrect. The correct citation is Book XXXI, Chapter XVI.]

[17] In a work published in 1961, Christopher Hill referred to the period from 1603 to 1714 in England as "the century of revolution." In "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" (1843) Frederick Engels called the 18th century the "century of revolution." And, of course, the 19th century was also a "century of revolution," especially in France.

Montesquieu: When the people make mistakes, they will be punished like men who have sinned against moral law.
Machiavelli: And how is that?
Montesquieu: They will be punished by the scourges of discord, anarchy, even despotism. There is no other justice on earth, while awaiting that of God.
Machiavelli: You have used the word despotism: you see that one returns to it.
Montesquieu: Your objection is not worthy of your great spirit, Machiavelli; I imagined the most extreme consequences of the principles that you oppose, which was sufficient for the notion of the true to be falsified. God does not accord to the people either the power or the will to change the forms of government that are the essential mode of their existence. In political societies as in organic beings, the nature of things limits the expansion of free forces. It is necessary that the scope of your argument limits itself to what is acceptable to reason.

You believe that under the influence of modern ideas, revolutions would be more frequent; they will not be, [indeed] it is possible that they will be less frequent. Actually, the nations – as you said a little while ago – currently live through industry, and what appears to you as a cause of servitude is in fact a principle of order and liberty. Industrial civilizations have problems that I do not ignore, but one must not deny their benefits or denature their tendencies. The societies that live by work, exchange and credit are essentially Christian societies, whatever one says, because all of these very powerful and varied forms of industry are fundamentally the application of several great moral ideas borrowed from Christianity, the source of all strength and all truth.

Industry plays such a considerable role in the movement of modern society that – from any point of view – one cannot make any exact calculation without accounting for its influence; and this influence is not at all that which you have believed you can assign to it. The science that seeks the connections between industrial life and the maxims that can be extracted from it reveals that there is more contrary to [than in favor of] the principle of the concentration of power. The tendency of political economy is to only see the political organism as a necessary mechanism, but also a very costly one, of which one must simplify the motives, and to reduce the role of the government to such elementary functions that its greatest disadvantage is perhaps the destruction of its prestige. Industry is the natural enemy of revolution, because, without social order, it perishes and the vital movement of modern peoples stops along with it. It cannot do without liberty, because it only lives through the manifestations of liberty; and – remark this well – liberties in matters of industry necessarily engender political liberties, so well in fact that one can say that the people who are the most advanced in industry are also the most advanced in liberty. Forget about India and China, which live under the blind destiny of absolute monarchy, and cast your eyes on Europe and you will see.

"You have again used the word *despotism.*" So, Machiavelli: you, whose somber genius has so profoundly assimilated all the subterranean passages, all the occult combinations, all the artifices of the law and government, with the aid of which one can chain the movements of the people's arms and their thoughts; you, who scorn mankind; you, who dream for it the terrible dominations of the East; you, whose political doctrines are borrowed from the frightening theories of Indian mythology – please tell me, I entreat you, how will you organize despotism among the peoples for whom public rights essentially rest upon liberty and for whom morality and religion develop all movement in the same direction; among the Christian nations that live through commerce and industry; in the States whose political bodies are confronted by the publicity of the press, which throws floods of light into the most obscure corners of power?

Appeal to all the resources of your powerful imagination, search and invent; and if you resolve this problem, I will declare with you that the modern spirit is vanquished.
Machiavelli: Be careful: you give me an easy score; I will take you at your word.
Montesquieu: Do so, I entreat you.
Machiavelli: I will not fail.
Montesquieu: In several hours, we will be separated. These regions are not known to you; follow me through the detours that I will make with you along this somber path; for several hours we can still avoid the reflux of shadows that you see there below.

Seventh Dialogue

A Monster Called the State

Machiavelli: We can stop here.
Montesquieu: I will listen to you.
Machiavelli: At first I must say that you are completely deceived about the application of my principles. In your eyes, despotism always presents itself in the decrepit forms of Eastern monarchicalism, but this is not what I imagine; in new societies, one must employ new procedures. Today, governing is not a matter of committing violent iniquities, decapitating enemies, stripping subjects of their goods, the liberal use of torture; no, death, despoliation and physical torment can only play secondary roles in the internal politics of modern States.
Montesquieu: That is fortunate.
Machiavelli: There is no doubt, I confess, that I have little admiration for your civilization *of cylinders and shafts*; but, believe me, I move with the times; the power of the doctrines to which my name is attached is the fact that they can accommodate themselves to all times and situations. Today, Machiavelli has *grandsons* who know the value of his lessons. One believes me to be quite old and every day I am rejuvenated on the earth.
Montesquieu: Are you joking?
Machiavelli: Listen to me and judge for yourself. Today, it is less a question of doing violence to men than disarming them, of repressing their political passions than *effacing them,* of combating their instincts than deceiving them, of proscribing their ideas than changing them by appropriating them.
Montesquieu: And how? I do not understand this language.
Machiavelli: Permit me. Here is the moral part of politics; in a little while we will come to the applications. The principal secret of government consists in weakening the public spirit to the point of completely disinteresting the people in the ideas and principles with which one makes revolution these days. In all eras, peoples – like individual men – are paid with words. Appearances are almost always sufficient for them; they do not demand more. Thus, one can establish artificial institutions that respond to a language and ideas that are equally artificial; one must have the talent of snatching from the parties *the liberal phraseology* with which they arm themselves against the government. One must saturate the people to the point of exhaustion, to the point of disgust. Today, one often speaks of the power of public opinion; I will show to you that one can make it express what one wants when one knows the hidden springs of power. But before dreaming of directing it, one must stun it, strike it with uncertainty by astonishing contradictions, work incessant diversions upon it, dazzle it by all sorts of diverse movements, imperceptibly lead it astray from its routes. One of the great secrets of the day is knowing how to

seize hold of popular prejudices and passions so as to introduce into them a confusion of principles that render all understanding impossible among those who speak the same language and have the same interests.

Montesquieu: Where are you going with these words, the obscurity of which has something sinister about it?

Machiavelli: If the wise Montesquieu intends to put sentiment in the place of politics, perhaps I should stop here; I have not claimed to place myself on the terrain of morality. You have challenged me to stop the movement in your societies, which are ceaselessly tormented by the spirit of anarchy and revolt. Would you like to allow me to say how I would resolve the problem? You can shelter your scruples by accepting this thesis as a matter of pure curiosity.

Montesquieu: So be it.

Machiavelli: I understand, furthermore, that you ask me for more precise indications; I will provide them; but let me tell you first which essential conditions the prince can hope for today, to consolidate his power. Above all, I must strive to destroy the parties, to dissolve the collective forces wherever they are, to paralyze individual initiative in all its manifestations; then the level of the people's character will fall by itself and all arms will soon weaken against servitude. Absolute power will no longer be an accident; it will become a need. These political precepts are not entirely new, but, as I have said to you, they are the procedures that must come to be. A great many of these results can be obtained by the use of simple police-relayed and administrative regulations. In your beautiful, well-ordered societies, you have placed – in the stead of absolute monarchs – *a monster called the State,* a new Briareus[18] whose arms extend everywhere, a colossal organism of tyranny in the shadow of which despotism will always be reborn. So, under the invocation of the State, nothing would be easier than consummating the occult work of which I was just speaking to you, and the most powerful means of action, perhaps, would be precisely those that one has the talent of borrowing from the very industrial regime that has won your admiration.

With the help of regulatory power, I would institute, for example, immense financial monopolies, reserves of the public fortune, which would depend so narrowly on the fate of all the private fortunes that they would be swallowed up along with the State's credit the day after any political catastrophe. You are an economist, Montesquieu: weigh the value of this arrangement.

As the leader of the government, my edicts and ordinances (all of them) would consistently tend towards the same goal: annihilating the collective and individual powers; excessively developing the preponderance of the State by making it the sovereign protector, promoter and remunerator.

Here is another arrangement borrowed from the industrial order: at present, the aristocracy has disappeared as a political force; but the landed bourgeoisie is still an element of dangerous resistance to the government because it is independent; it would be necessary to impoverish it or even ruin it completely. To do this, it would suffice to increase the taxes that weigh upon landed property, to maintain agriculture in a state of relative inferiority, to favor commerce and industry to the limit, but principally speculation, because the too-great prosperity of industry can itself become a danger by creating a too-great number of independent fortunes.

One would react usefully against the great industrialists, against the manufacturers, by the excitation of a disproportionate luxury, by the elevation of the rates of pay of salaried workers, by profound injuries skillfully brought to the sources of *production.* I do not need to develop these ideas; you can certainly tell in which circumstances and under which pretexts all this could

[18] A Greek mythology, monster with one hundred arms and fifty heads.

be done. The interests of the people, and even a kind of zeal for liberty, for the great economic principles, could easily cover over – if one wishes – the real goal. It is useless to add that the perpetual maintenance of a formidable army, ceaselessly engaged in foreign wars, must be the indispensable complement of this system; it is necessary to reach a situation in which – in the State – there are only proletarians, several millionaires, and soldiers.

Montesquieu: Continue.

Machiavelli: So much for the internal politics of the State. Outside, it would necessary to excite – from one end of Europe to the other – the very revolutionary ferment that one represses at home. This would result in two considerable advantages: liberal agitation outside justifies repression inside. Moreover, one would keep alive doubts about the powers, which one could – to one's liking – order or disorder. The point is to use political intrigue to tangle up all the threads of European politics so as to play by turns the powers with which one deals. Do not believe that such duplicity, if it is well supported, could turn to the detriment of the sovereign. Alexander VI was always deceptive in his diplomatic negotiations and yet he always succeeded because he knew the science of guile.[19] But in what you, today, call *the official language,* a striking contrast is necessary and here one could not affect the spirits of loyalty and conciliation too much; the people, who only see the appearances of things, will make a wise reputation for the sovereign who knows how to conduct himself in this way.

To any internal agitation, the sovereign must be able to respond through external war; to any imminent revolution, he must be able to respond through general warfare; but as words must never be in agreement with actions (as in politics), it is necessary that, in diverse conjunctions, the prince is quite skillful at disguising his real designs under contrary ones; he must always have the air of yielding to the pressure of public opinion when he executes what his hand has secretly prepared.

To summarize the word system in a phrase, revolution must be contained within the State: on the one side, by the terror of anarchy, on the other, by bankruptcy, and – all things considered – by general warfare.

You have already seen, in the rapid indications that I have given you, the important role the art of speech is summoned to play in modern politics. I am far from disdaining the press, as you will see, and I need to make use of the grandstand; the essential is to employ against one's adversaries all of the weapons that they employ against you. Not content to rely upon the violent force of democracy, I would like to borrow from the subtleties of the law their most learned resources. When one makes decisions that could appear unjust or reckless, it is essential to know how to enunciate them in good terms, to support them with the most elevated reasons that derive from morality and the law.

The power of which I dream – quite far from having barbaric customs, as you can see – must attract to it all the forces and the talents of the civilization in the heart of which it lives. It must surround itself with publicists, lawyers, jurisconsults, practical men and administrators, people who thoroughly know all the secrets, all the motives of social life; who speak all the languages, who have studied man in all his milieus. It is necessary to take them everywhere, no matter where, because such people render astonishing services through the ingenious procedures that they apply to politics. It is necessary to bring along with them a world of economists, bankers, industrialists, capitalists, men of vision and millionaires, because everything will actually be resolved by numbers.

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[19] *Author's note*: *The Prince,* Chapter XVII. [*Translator*: This appears to be a mistaken citation. It is in Chapter XI, not Chapter XVII, that Machiavelli discusses Pope Alexander VI.]

As for the principal positions of leadership, the principal departments of power: one must arrange things so as to give them to men whose antecedents and characters place an abyss between them and other men, each of whom only expects death or exile in case of a change of government or the necessity of defending all that exists to their last breaths.

Suppose for an instant that I have at my disposition the different moral and material resources that I have indicated to you, and that you give me a nation to rule: you will understand! In *Spirit of the Laws,* you regarded it as a capital point *to not change the character of a nation*[20] when one wants to preserve its original vigor: so, I would only need 20 years to transform the most indomitable European character in the most complete manner and to render it as docile to tyranny as the smallest people of Asia.

Montesquieu: By enjoying yourself, you have added a [new] chapter to *The Prince.* I will not discuss your doctrines, whatever they are; I will only make an observation. It is obvious that you have not kept the promise that you made; the use of all these means presupposes the existence of absolute power, and I asked you precisely how you could establish it in the political societies that rest upon liberal institutions.

Machiavelli: Your observation is perfectly just and I do not intend to escape from it. This debut was only a preface.

Montesquieu: I put before you a State founded on representative institutions, a monarchy or a republic; I spoke to you of a nation long familiar with liberty and I asked you how, starting here, you could return to absolute power.

Machiavelli: Nothing could be easier.

Montesquieu: Let us see.

PART TWO

Eighth Dialogue

The Politics of Machiavelli in Action

Machiavelli: I will take the hypothesis that is the most contrary to me: a State constituted as a republic. With a monarchy, the role that I propose to play would be too easy. I will take a republic because, with such a form of government, I would encounter resistance – apparently almost insurmountable – in its ideas, customs and laws. Are you opposed to this hypothesis? I will accept from your hand a State, whatever its form, large or small; I will suppose it to be endowed with all the institutions that guarantee liberty and I will address to you a single question: Do you believe it can be protected from a blow or what today one calls a *coup d'état*?

Montesquieu: No, this is true, but you will at least grant me that such an enterprise would be singularly difficult in contemporary political societies, such as they are organized.

Machiavelli: And why is this? Are not these societies prey to factions at all times? Are there not elements of civil war, parties and pretenders?

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[20] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XIX, Chapter V. [*Translator*: "It is the business of the legislature to follow the spirit of the nation, when it is not contrary to the principles of government; for we do nothing so well as when we act with freedom, and follow the bent of our natural genius."]

Montesquieu: This is possible, but I believe I can draw your attention to an error you have made. These usurpations – which are necessarily very infrequent because they are full of perils and because they are repugnant to modern customs –, supposing that they succeed, do not have the importance that you appear to attribute to them. A change of power does not bring about a change of institutions. A pretender will trouble the State, true; his party might triumph, I will admit it; power might be in other hands, yes; but public rights and the very foundations of the institutions will remain steady. This is what concerns me.
Machiavelli: Is it true that you have such an illusion?
Montesquieu: Establish the contrary.
Machiavelli: Thus you will, for the moment, grant me the success of an armed enterprise against the establish order?
Montesquieu: Yes.
Machiavelli: Remark the situation in which I would find myself placed. I have momentarily suppressed all power other than mine. If the institutions still standing can raise some kind of obstacle, it would be purely formal; in fact, the acts of my will cannot encounter any real resistance; finally, I am an extra-legal situation, which the Romans described in a very beautiful and powerfully energetic word: *dictatorship.* That is to say, I can do everything I want to do, since I am legislator, executor, judge and the head of the army, on horseback.

Retain this. I have triumphed through the support of a faction, that is to say, this event could only have been accomplished in the midst of a profound internal dissent. One can say, at random, but without deception, what the cause was. It would be an antagonism between the aristocracy and the people, or between the people and the bourgeoisie. At the basis of things, it could only be this; on the surface, there would have been a jumble of ideas, opinions, influences and contrary currents, as in the States in which liberty has been momentarily unleashed. There would have been political elements of all kinds, sections of previously victorious parties that were vanquished, unbridled ambitions, ardent covetousness, implacable hatreds, terrors everywhere, men of every opinion and every doctrine, restorers of old regimes, demagogues, anarchists, utopians – all at work, all working equally from their sides on the overthrow of the established order. What must one conclude from such a condition? Two things: first, that the country had a great need for rest and it would have refused nothing to the one who could bring it; second, that, in the midst of this division of parties, there was no real force or, rather, there was only one, namely, the people.

I would be a victorious pretender; I suppose that I would bear a great historical name, one likely to work upon the imagination of the masses. Such as Pisistratus, Caesar, even Nero;[21] I would lean upon the people; this is the *a b c* of any usurper. Here is the blind power that will provide the means of doing everything with impunity: authority, the name that will cover for everything. You will see how the people actually care for your legal fictions and your constitutional guarantees!

I had been silent in the midst of these factions, and now you will see how I operate.

[21] Or, for that matter, "Napoleon," as in Napoleon III, the ruler of France when these dialogues were written and published. "Historical tradition gave rise to the French peasants' belief in the miracle that a man named Napoleon would bring all glory back to them. And there turned up an individual who claims to be that man because he bears the name Napoleon, in consequence of the Napoleonic Code, which decrees 'Inquiry into paternity is forbidden.' After a twenty-year vagabondage and a series of grotesque adventures, the legend is consummated, and the man becomes Emperor of the French. The fixed idea of the nephew was realized because it coincided with the fixed idea of the most numerous class of the French people." Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).

Perhaps you will recall the rules that I established in *The Prince* for conserving conquered provinces. The usurper of a State is in a situation analogous to that of a conqueror. He is condemned to renew everything, to dissolve the State, to destroy the city, to change the face of customs.[22]

This would be the goal, but, at the moment, it is only necessary to reach it through oblique routes, diverted means, clever arrangements and – as far as possible – without violence. Thus, I would not directly destroy the institutions, but I would link them, one to the other, by an unperceived blow that would disturb their [respective] mechanisms. Thus, I would by turns touch the judiciary organizations, suffrage, the press, individual liberty and education.

On top of the old laws, I would place a new legislation that, without expressly abrogating the old ones, would first mask them, then soon after efface them completely. Such are my general conceptions; now you will see the details of the execution.

Montesquieu: Too bad you are not still back in the gardens of Rucellai,[23] O Machiavelli, professing these beautiful lessons; it is regrettable that posterity cannot hear you!

Machiavelli: Be reassured: for those who know how to read, all this is in *The Prince.*

Montesquieu: So, it is the day after your *coup d'état.* What would you do now?

Machiavelli: A great thing, then a small one.

Montesquieu: Can we first see the great one?

Machiavelli: After the success of a blow against established power, all is not finished and the parties do not generally see themselves as beaten. One still does not exactly know what the energy of the usurper is worth, one tries it, one raises oneself against him, weapons in hand. The moment has come to impart a terror that strikes the entire city and weakens the most intrepid souls.

Montesquieu: What would you do? You told me you had repudiated [the spilling of] blood.

Machiavelli: Here it would not be a question of false humanity. Society is threatened; it is in a state of legitimate self-defense; an excess of rigor and even cruelty will prevent new bloodbaths in the future. Do not ask me what one would do; it would be necessary that the souls are terrified once and for all, and that fear soaks them.

Montesquieu: Yes, I recall: it is here in *The Prince,* when you recount the sinister execution of Borgia in Cesena.[24] You haven't changed.

Machiavelli: No: as you will see much later; I would only act in this way due to necessity, and I would suffer for it.

Montesquieu: But who would spill this blood?

Machiavelli: The army, that great judge of the States, whose hand never dishonors its victims! Two results of the greatest importance would be produced by the intervention of the army into the repression. From that moment, it would – on the one hand – always be in a situation of hostility with respect to the civilian population, which it would chastise without discretion; it would – on the other hand – be attached in an indissoluble fashion with the fate of its chief.

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[22] *The Prince,* Chapter V, as translated by Angelo M. Codevilla (Yale University Press, 1997), from which all further citations will come: "And whoever becomes lord of a city accustomed to living free and does not undo her, he may expect to be undone by her; because in rebellion it always has for a refuge the name of liberty and of its ancient orders; which one never forgets either because of the passage of time or because of [the ruler's] beneficence. And whatever one might do or provide, if one does not disunite or disperse the inhabitants, they do not forget the name nor those orders, and suddenly in every accident they come back."

[23] Cosimo Rucellai was a friend of Machiavelli who died young: Machiavelli's *The Art of War* is set in Rucellai's gardens.

[24] *Author's note*: *The Prince,* Chapter VII.

Montesquieu: And you believe that this blood will not fall back on you?
Machiavelli: No, because, in the eyes of the people, the sovereign would be a stranger to the excesses of the soldiers, who are always difficult to restrain. Those who can be held responsible would be the generals, the ministers, those who executed my orders. They will be – I affirm to you – devoted to me to their very last breaths, because they will know what awaits them after me.
Montesquieu: This is the first act of your sovereignty. Can we see the second?
Machiavelli: I do not know if you have remarked the power of slight means in politics. After doing what I have told you, I would stamp my image upon all new monies, of which I would issue a considerable quantity.
Montesquieu: But this would be a puerile measure among the primary concerns of the State.
Machiavelli: Do you believe so? You do not have experience with power. The human face imprinted upon money is the very sign of power. First of all, there will be proud spirits who will shake with anger, but one will get used to it; the very enemies of my power will be obligated to have my portrait in their purses. It is quite certain that one would little by little get used to regarding with the most loving eyes the features that are stamped upon the material sign of our pleasures. From the day on which my image is on the money, I would be king.
Montesquieu: I will confess that this view is new to me; but let us move on. Have you forgotten that new peoples have the weakness of giving themselves constitutions that are the guarantors of their rights? With your power issuing from force, with the projects that you have revealed to me, perhaps you would find yourself embarrassed in the presence of a fundamental charter, whose principles, rules and arrangement are contrary to your maxims of government.
Machiavelli: I would make another constitution, that's all.
Montesquieu: And do you think this would be easy?
Machiavelli: Where would the difficulty come from? For the moment, there would be no other will, no other force than mine and, for my basis of action, I would have the popular elements.
Montesquieu: This is true. Nevertheless, I have a qualm: following what you have said to me, I imagine that your Constitution would not be a monument to liberty. You think a single crisis of power, a single instance of fortunate violence would be sufficient to snatch from a nation all of the rights, conquests, institutions and principles with which it has become accustomed to living?
Machiavelli: Permit me! I would not go so quickly. I would say to you that there are a few instances in which peoples are like individual men, who adhere more to appearances than to the reality of things: in politics, this is a rule whose directions I would scrupulously follow; allow me to recall the principles that you hold dearest and you will see that I am not as embarrassed as you to believe them.
Montesquieu: What are you going to do, O Machiavelli?
Machiavelli: Fear nothing: name them to me.
Montesquieu: I do not trust myself, I will confess.
Machiavelli: So, I will recall them to you myself. No doubt you would not fail to speak to me of the separation of the powers, freedom of speech and the press, religious liberty, individual liberty, the right of [free] association, equality before the law, the inviolability of property and the home, the right of petition, the free consent to taxes, the proportionality of penalties, and the non-retroactivity of the laws. Is this sufficient? Do you desire more?
Montesquieu: I believe that this would be much more than necessary, Machiavelli, to put your government ill at ease.

Machiavelli: Here you are deceived and this is so true that I do not find it inconvenient to proclaim such principles; indeed, I would even make them the preamble of my Constitution, if you like.
Montesquieu: You have already proved to me that you are a great magician.
Machiavelli: There is no magic involved here, only political know-how.
Montesquieu: Having inscribed these principles at the head of your Constitution, how could you not apply them?
Machiavelli: Ah! Be advised: I said to you that I would proclaim these privileges, but I did not say that I would inscribe them or designate them explicitly.
Montesquieu: What do you mean?
Machiavelli: I would not make any recapitulation; I would limit myself to declaring to the people that I recognize and confirm the great principles of modern law.
Montesquieu: The import of this reticence escapes me.
Machiavelli: You will recognize how it is important. If I were to expressly enumerate these rights, my freedom of action would be chained to those that I had declared; I do not want this. By not naming them, I appear to grant them all and I do not grant any in particular; this would later permit me to set aside – by way of exception[25] – those that I have judged to be dangerous.
Montesquieu: I understand.
Machiavelli: Furthermore, among my principles, some belong to political and constitutional rights properly speaking, while others belong to civil law. This is a distinction that must always exist in the exercise of absolute power. It is their civil rights that the people hold the dearest; I would not touch them, if I can, and, in this manner at least, a part of my program would be accomplished.
Montesquieu: And, as for political rights. . . ?
Machiavelli: In *The Prince,* I included the maxim that was and has not ceased to be true: "Whenever one takes neither things nor honor from the general run of men, they live contented, and one only has to fight against the ambition of the few, which one brakes in many ways, and with ease."[26] My response to your question is here.
Montesquieu: Keeping to the letter, one might not find this sufficient; one could respond to you that political rights are also goods; that it also matters to the honor of peoples to maintain them and that, by infringing them, you in reality harm their goods as well as their honor. One could add that the maintenance of civil rights is tied to the maintenance of political rights by a close solidarity. Who will guarantee the citizens that, if you strip them of political liberty today, you will not strip them of individual liberty tomorrow; that, if you make an attempt on their liberty today, you will not make an attempt on their fortunes tomorrow?[27]
Machiavelli: It is certain that the argument is presented with much vivacity, but I believe that you also understand the exaggeration perfectly well. You still seem to believe that modern people are starved for liberty. Have you foreseen the case in which they no longer want it, and can you imagine that the princes have more passion for it than the people do? Therefore, in your profoundly lax society, in which the individual only lives in the sphere of his egoism and his material interests, ask the greatest number of people, and you will see if, from all sides, one does

[25] A "state of exception," in which the entire constitution is suspended due to an emergency.
[26] *The Prince,* Chapter XIX.
[27] See Victor Hugo's *Napoleon the Little,* Book II, Chapter V: "Marvelous identity of principles: freedom suppressed is property destroyed."

not respond to you: “What does politics matter to me? What does liberty mean to me? Are not all the governments the same? Should not a government be able to defend itself?”

Remark it well, moreover, that it won’t only be the people who will speak this way: so will the bourgeois, the industrialists, the educated people, the rich, the literate, all those who are in a position to appreciate your beautiful doctrines concerning public rights. They will bless me; they will cry that I have saved them, that they are a minority, that they are incapable of ruling themselves. The nations have a kind of secret love for the vigorous geniuses of force. To all the violent acts marked by the talent for artifice, you will hear with an admiration that will exceed the blame: “This is not good, but it is skillful, it is well played, it is strong!”

Montesquieu: Thus, you return to the professional part of your doctrines?

Machiavelli: No, we are at their execution. I would have certainly taken several steps further if you had not obliged me to make a digression. Let’s resume.

Ninth Dialogue

The Constitution

Montesquieu: You were up to the day following the institution of a Constitution created by you without the assent of the nation.

Machiavelli: Here I must stop you: I never claimed to scorn the received ideas whose supremacy I know.

Montesquieu: Really?

Machiavelli: I speak very seriously.

Montesquieu: Thus you plan to associate the nation with *the new, fundamental work* that you are preparing?

Machiavelli: Yes, no doubt. Does this surprise you? I would do even better: I would ratify by popular vote the blow of force that I had landed on the State: I would say to the people, in the terms that would be suitable: “Everything was going badly; I broke it all; I have saved you; do you want me? You are free to condemn me or absolve me by your vote.”

Montesquieu: [They would be] free under the weight of terror and armed force.

Machiavelli: One would acclaim me.

Montesquieu: I believe it.

Machiavelli: And the popular vote, which I made the instrument of my power, would become the very basis of my government. I would establish universal suffrage (without distinction for class or property qualifications), with which absolutism could be organized in a single blow.

Montesquieu: Yes, because – with a single blow – you will have broken the unity of the family, you will have depreciated suffrage, you will have annulled the preponderance of luminaries and you will have made the masses into a blind force that are directed according to your liking.

Machiavelli: I will accomplish the kind of progress to which, today, all the peoples of Europe ardently aspire: I would organize universal suffrage as [George] Washington did in the United States, and the first use I would make of it would be to submit my Constitution to it.

Montesquieu: What? Would you have it discussed in the primary or secondary assemblies?

Machiavelli: Oh! Let us leave here – I beg you – your 18th century ideas; they are no longer relevant to the present.

Montesquieu: So, in what manner would you organize the acceptance of your Constitution? How will the organic articles be discussed?

Machiavelli: But I do not mean that they should be discussed at all; I believe that I already told you so.
Montesquieu: I have only followed you on the terrain of principles that it has pleased you to choose. You have spoken to me of the United States of America: I do not know if you are a new Washington, but it is certain that the current Constitution of the United States was discussed, deliberated and voted upon by the nation's representatives.
Machiavelli: For mercy's sake, do not confound times, places and peoples. We are in Europe; my Constitution will be presented *en bloc,* it will be accepted *en bloc.*
Montesquieu: By acting in this way, you will not disguise anything from anyone. How could the people – voting in such conditions – know what they were doing and how far they were plunging in?
Machiavelli: And where have you ever seen a Constitution that is truly worthy of the name, truly durable, been the result of popular deliberations? A Constitution must come fully formed from the head of a single person or it is merely a work condemned to nothingness. Without homogeneity, without the liaison of its parties, without practical force, it would necessarily carry the imprints of all the weaknesses of the views that presided over its redaction.

Once again: a Constitution can only be the work of a single person; never have things been done otherwise; I can call as witnesses all of the founders of empire: Sesostris, Solon, Lycurgus, Charlemagne, Frederic II, Peter the First.
Montesquieu: It is a chapter from one of your disciples that you are developing for me here.
Machiavelli: And who would this be?
Montesquieu: Joseph de Maistre. There are general considerations here that are not without truth, but I find them to be without application. To hear you, one would think that you would be pulling the people from out of chaos or the profound night of their primary origins. You do not appear to remember that, in the hypothetical situation in which you placed us, the nation had attained the apogee of its civilization, that its public laws had been established and that it possessed legitimate institutions.
Machiavelli: I do not say "no." You will also see that I would have no need to destroy your institutions from the bottom to the top to arrive at my goal. It would be sufficient for me to modify the economy and change the arrangements.
Montesquieu: Will you explain?
Machiavelli: You have given me a course in constitutional politics; I aim to benefit from it. I am not, moreover, as foreign as one generally believes in Europe to all these ideas about political balance: you can perceive this in my *Discourses on Titus Livy.* But let us return to the deed. You rightly remarked just a moment ago that, in the European parliamentary States, the public powers are distributed practically everywhere, in the same manner, between a certain number of political bodies, the regularized interaction of which constitute the government.

Thus one finds everywhere – under diverse names, but with practically uniform assignations – a ministerial organization, a senate, a legislative body, a State Council, and a Court of Cassation. I must spare you from the useless development of the respective mechanisms of these powers, the secret[s] of which you know better than I; it is obvious that each one corresponds with an essential function of the government. You will remark that it is the function, not the institution, that I have called essential. Thus, it would be necessary to have a ruling power, a moderating power, a legislative power and a regulating power – none of this is in doubt.
Montesquieu: But, if I understand you well, these diverse powers would, in your eyes, compose a single power and you would give it all to a single man by suppressing the institutions.

Machiavelli: Once more, you are deceived. One could not act in such a fashion without danger. One could not do it during your century and in your country, especially, given the fanaticism that reigns there for what you call the principles of '89, but please listen to me well. In statics, the displacement of a fulcrum can change the direction of force; in mechanics, the displacement of a spring can change movement. But in appearances, everything remains the same. Likewise, in physiology, temperament depends on the state of the organs. If the organs are modified, the temperament changes. So, the diverse institutions of which we speak function in the governmental economy like real organs in the human body. I would touch the organs, the organs would remain, but the political complexion of the State would be changed. Can you understand this?

Montesquieu: This is not difficult and circumlocution is not necessary. You keep the names, and you remove the things they refer to.[28] This is what Augustus did in Rome when he destroyed the Republic. There was still a consulate, a praetorship, a censor, a tribunal; but there were no consuls, praetors, censors or tribunes.

Machiavelli: You must confess that one could have chosen worse models. Everything can be done in politics on the condition that one flatters public prejudices and keeps respect for appearances intact.

Montesquieu: Do not return to generalities; get back to work, I am following you.

Machiavelli: Do not forget that my personal convictions would be the sources of each of my actions. To my eyes, your parliamentary governments are only schools for dispute, homes for sterile agitation, in the midst of which are exhausted the fecund activities of the nations that the grandstand and the press condemn to powerlessness. Consequently, I would not have remorse; I would begin from an elevated point of view and my goals justify my actions.

For abstract theories, I would substitute practical reason, the experiences of the centuries, the examples of men of genius who have done great things by the same means; I would begin by returning to power its vital conditions.

My first reform would immediately focus upon your so-called ministerial responsibility. In the centralized countries – such as yours, for example, where public opinion, through an instinctive sentiment, yields up everything to the Chief of State, the good as well as the bad – one would need to inscribe, at the top of the charter, the idea that the sovereign is not responsible, this is to lie to the public sentiment, this is to establish a fiction that always vanishes in the noise of revolution.

Thus I would begin by crossing out from my Constitution the principle of ministerial responsibility; the sovereign whom I would institute would be the only one responsible to the people.

Montesquieu: Fine! There are no circumlocutions here.

Machiavelli: In your parliamentary system, the nation's representatives – as you have explained to me – have the sole initiative for the proposal of laws or have it concurrently with the executive power. This would be the source of the most serious abuses, because, in a similar ordering of things, each deputy could at every turn substitute himself for the government by presenting the least studied, the least thorough proposals. With parliamentary initiative in place, the Chamber could – when it wanted to – overthrow the government. I would cross out parliamentary initiative. The proposition of the laws would belong to the sovereign alone.

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[28] See Guy Debord's *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988): "The methods of spectacular democracy are of great subtlety, contrary to the brutality of the totalitarian *diktat*. It can keep the original name when the thing itself has been secretly changed (beer, beef or philosophers)."

Montesquieu: I see that you would enter into the career of absolute power by the best route, because in a State in which the initiation of the laws belongs to the sovereign alone, the sovereign is the only legislator; but, before, you go too far, I would to make an objection. You would like to erect yourself upon this rock, but I find that you are seated upon sand.
Machiavelli: How so?
Montesquieu: Have you not taken popular suffrage as the basis of your power?
Machiavelli: Without doubt, yes.
Montesquieu: So you are only a representative, revocable at the whim of the people, in whom the real sovereignty resides. You believe that you can make this principle serve the maintenance of your authority. Have you not perceived that one could overthrow you when one wanted to? On the other hand, you have declared yourself to be the only one responsible; do you reckon yourself to be an angel? But whether you realize it or not, one would not blame you any less for any evil that could take place, and you would perish during the first crisis.
Machiavelli: You are anticipating: the objection comes too soon, but I will respond to it, since you force me. You strangely deceive yourself if you believe that I have not foreseen this argument. If my power was threatened, it could only be so by factions. I would be guarded against them by the two essential rights that I have placed in my Constitution.
Montesquieu: What are these rights?
Machiavelli: The appeal to the people, [and] the right to put the country into a state of emergency. I am chief of the army, I have all of the public force in my hands; at the first [signs of] insurrection against my power, the bayonets would allow me to get the better of the resistance and I would again find in the popular ballot a new consecration of my authority.
Montesquieu: You make arguments to which no reply can be made; but let us return – I beg you – to the Legislative Body that you have installed. On this point, I do not see you to be clear of difficulties; you have deprived this assembly of parliamentary initiative, but it retains the right to vote upon the laws that you present to it for adoption. No doubt you do not intend to let it exercise this right.
Machiavelli: You are more distrustful that I, because I confess to you that I do not see any difficulties here. Since no one other than myself can present laws, I have nothing to fear if someone does something against my power. Thus, I have said to you that it would be part of my plans to let the appearance of these institutions continue. I simply declare to you that I do not intend to leave to the Chamber what you would call the right of amendment. It is obvious that, with the exercise of such a faculty, the law could be deflected from its original goal and the economy could be susceptible to being changed. The law must be accepted or rejected: there can be no other alternative.
Montesquieu: But this faculty would not be needed to overthrow you: it would be sufficient if the legislative assembly systematically rejected all your proposed laws or if it refused to vote for any taxes to be levied.
Machiavelli: You know perfectly well that things could not take place like that. A chamber of whatever kind that, through such an act of temerity, hindered the movement of public affairs would be committing suicide. Furthermore, I would have a thousand means of neutralizing the power of such an assembly. I could reduce the number of representatives by half and thus I would have half the political passion to combat. I could reserve for myself the nomination of the presidents and vice-presidents who would lead the deliberations. In place of permanent sessions, I could reduce the tenure of the assembly to several months. I could especially do something that would be of a very great importance, something of which the practice has already started (so one

tells me): I could abolish the gratuity of the legislative mandate; I could have the deputies receive a salary; their functions could be salaried. I regard this innovation as the surest means of tying the nation's representatives to my power. I do not need to develop this for you: the efficacy of these means is easily understood. I would add that, as the head of executive power, I would have the right to convoke or dissolve the Legislative Body and, in case of its dissolution, I would reserve for myself the longest period of time to convoke a new one. I understand perfectly well that the legislative assembly cannot remain independent of my power without presenting dangers to it, but be reassured: we will soon encounter other practical means of tying it in. Are these constitutional details sufficient for you? Would you like more?
Montesquieu: This will not be necessary at all, and you can now move on to the organization of the Senate.
Machiavelli: I see that you have very well understood that this will be the principal part of my work, the keystone of my Constitution.
Montesquieu: Truly I do not know what more you could do, because – from this moment – I regard you as the complete master of the State.
Machiavelli: It pleases you to say so, but, in reality, sovereignty cannot be established on such superficial bases. Alongside the sovereign, one must have bodies that are imposing due to the splendor of their titles and dignity, and due to the personal glory of those who compose them. It is not good that the person of the sovereign is constantly in play, that his hand is always perceived; it would be necessary that his action could, if needed, be covered under the authority of the great magistracies that surround the throne.
Montesquieu: It is easy to see that you intend the Senate and the Council of State to play these roles.
Machiavelli: One cannot hide anything from you.
Montesquieu: You speak of the throne: I see that you are the king and we were in a republic just a moment ago. The transition has hardly been arranged.
Machiavelli: The illustrious French publicist cannot ask me to decide upon the details of the execution: from the moment that I became all-powerful, the hour at which I would proclaim myself king was simply a matter of opportunity. I would become king before or after the promulgation of my Constitution: it hardly matters.
Montesquieu: This is true. Let us return to the organization of the Senate.

Tenth Dialogue

The Constitution, continued

Machiavelli: In the advanced studies that you made in preparation for the composition of your memorable work, [*Considerations on*] *The Causes of the Grandeur and Decadence of the Romans*,[29] you remarked the role that the Senate played alongside the emperors, starting with the reign of Augustus.
Montesquieu: If you will permit me to say so, this is a point that historical investigation has not yet completely clarified. It is certain that, up to the last days of the Republic, the Roman Senate had been an autonomous institution, invested with immense privileges and real power; the depth of its political traditions and the grandeur that it imparted to the Republic were the secrets of its

[29] Published in 1734.

power. Starting with Augustus, the Senate became a mere instrument in the hands of the emperors, but it is unclear by what succession of actions it came to be stripped of its power.
Machiavelli: It was not exactly to elucidate this historical point that I asked you to report upon this period of the Empire. For the moment, this question does not preoccupy me; I simply wanted to say to you that the Senate that I conceive must (alongside the prince) fulfill a political role that would be analogous to the role played by the Roman Senate in the aftermath of the fall of the Republic.
Montesquieu: So. But at that time, the laws were not voted upon by the popular associations; this was done with the aid of the senatusconsult. Is this what you would want?
Machiavelli: No: this would not be in conformity with the modern principles of constitutional rights.
Montesquieu: What thanks should one give you for such a scruple?
Machiavelli: I would have no need of it to decree what appears necessary to me. No legislative arrangement – as you know – can be proposed, except if it comes from me, and my decrees have the force of law.
Montesquieu: It is true, you had forgotten to mention this point, which is not minor; but then I do not see to what ends you would reserve the Senate.
Machiavelli: Placed at the highest constitutional sphere, its direct intervention would only take place during solemn circumstances: for example, if it were necessary to engage in a fundamental covenant or if the sovereignty was in peril.
Montesquieu: This language is still very divinatory. You love to prepare your effects.
Machiavelli: Until now, the fixed idea of your modern constituents was to anticipate everything, to rule everything according to the charters that they gave to the people. I would not make such a mistake; I would not want to shut myself into an impenetrable circle; I would only fix things that are impossible to leave uncertain; I would leave a wide enough margin for change so that, in great crises, there would be other means of salvation than the disastrous expedient of revolution.
Montesquieu: You speak wisely.
Machiavelli: And, concerning the Senate, I would inscribe this in my Constitution: "That the Senate, through a senatusconsult, rules upon everything that has not been anticipated by the Constitution and that is necessary for its progress; that it fixes the meaning of the articles of the Constitution that might give rise to different interpretations; that it supports or annuls all the acts that are referred to it as unconstitutional by the government or denounced by petitions lodged by the citizens; that it can propose the bases for projected laws that have great national interest; that it can propose modifications in the Constitution that will be handed down by a senatusconsult."
Montesquieu: All this is very good, and such a senate would truly be a Roman Senate. I will only make a few remarks about your Constitution: it would be drafted in very vague and ambiguous terms because you have judged, in advance, that the articles that it contains would be susceptible to different interpretations.
Machiavelli: No, it will be necessary to anticipate everything.
Montesquieu: I would have believed that your principle in such matters would have been to avoid anticipating and regulating everything.
Machiavelli: The illustrious President did not haunt the Palace of Themis without profit, nor did he wear the round judicial cap uselessly. My words have not had any other import than this: it is necessary to anticipate what is essential.
Montesquieu: Tell me, I beg you: your Senate, the interpreter and guardian of the fundamental pact: does it have a proper power?

Machiavelli: Indubitably, no.
Montesquieu: Everything that the Senate does, you would be the one doing it?
Machiavelli: I am not saying the contrary to you.
Montesquieu: Whatever it interprets, you would be the one interpreting; whatever it modifies, you would be the one modifying; whatever it annuls, you would be the one annulling?
Machiavelli: I do not deny it.
Montesquieu: Thus, you would reserve for yourself the right to undo what you have done, to take back what you have given, to change your Constitution, be it good or bad, or even to make it disappear completely if you judge this to be necessary. I am not prejudging your intentions or your motivations, which might make you act in this or that given circumstance; I only ask you where would the weakest guarantee for the citizens be found in the midst of such a vast arbitrariness, and especially how could they ever agree to submit to it?
Machiavelli: I see that the philosophical sensibility returns to you. Be reassured: I would not make any modification of the fundamental bases of my Constitution without submitting it for the acceptance of the people by means of universal suffrage.
Montesquieu: But it would still be you who would be the judge of the question of knowing if these modifications that you proposed carry within themselves the fundamental trait that requires that they be submitted to the sanction of the people. Nevertheless, I want to allow that you could not accomplish through a decree or senatusconsult what must be accomplished by plebiscite. Would you yield your constitutional amendments to discussion? Would you have them deliberated upon in the popular associations?
Machiavelli: Incontestably no. If the debate over constitutional articles were ever undertaken in the popular assemblies, nothing could prevent the people from taking possession of the examination of everything by virtue of their right to evocation, and the next day there would be revolution in the streets.
Montesquieu: At least you are logical. So, constitutional amendments would be presented and accepted *en bloc*?
Machiavelli: Not otherwise.
Montesquieu: So, I believe that we can now move on to the organization of the Council of State.
Machiavelli: You truly lead these debates with the consummate precision of a president of the sovereign court. I forgot to tell you that I would appoint [the members of] the Senate as I would appoint [the members of] the Legislative Body.
Montesquieu: That was understood.
Machiavelli: Moreover, I need not add that I would also reserve for myself the nomination of the presidents and vice-presidents of this upper assembly. Concerning the Council of State, I will be brief. Your modern institutions are such powerful instruments of centralization that it is almost impossible to make use of them without exercising sovereign authority.

According to your principles, what is the Council of State? It is a simulacrum of a political body that is intended to put into the hands of the prince a considerable power, the regulatory power, which is a kind of discretionary power, which can be used to make real laws when one wants to do so.

Moreover, the Council of State – according to your ideas (so one tells me) – is invested with a special attribute that is, perhaps, even more exorbitant. In contentious matters, it can (one assures me) claim by the right of evocation, and can reclaim by its own authority, in front of the ordinary tribunals, knowledge of all the litigation that appears to it to have an administrative character. Thus – and to summarize in a phrase what is completely exceptional in this attribute –

the courts must refuse to judge when they find themselves in the presence of an act of administrative authority, and the administrative authority can, in such cases, supersede the courts so as to refer the discussion to the Council of State.

Once more, then: what would the Council of State be? Would it have proper power? Would it be independent of the sovereign? Not at all. It would only be an Editorial Committee. When the Council of State makes a regulation, it would in fact be the sovereign who makes it; when it renders a judgment, it would in fact be the sovereign who renders it or, as one says today, it would be the administration, the administration that would be the judge and the jury of its own cases. Do you know anything stronger than this, and do you believe that there is more to do to establish absolute power in the States that are similarly organized?

Montesquieu: Your critique is quite just, I agree, but since the Council of State would be an excellent institution in itself, nothing could be easier than giving it the necessary independence by isolating it – to a certain extent – from power. No doubt this would not be what you would do.

Machiavelli: Actually, I would maintain the type of unity in the institution that already exists there, I would restore it where it does not exist, by tightening the links of solidarity that I regard as indispensable.

We need not continue any further, because my Constitution is now finished.

Montesquieu: Already?

Machiavelli: A small number of skillfully ordered arrangements would suffice to change the march of the powers completely. This part of my program is completed.

Montesquieu: I believe that you still must speak to me of the Court of Cassation.

Machiavelli: What I have to say to you would be better placed elsewhere.

Montesquieu: [OK then.] It is true that, if we evaluate the sum of the powers that would now be in your hands, you must begin to be satisfied.

Let us recapitulate. You would make the laws in the form of 1) propositions by the Legislative Body; 2) decrees; 3) senatusconsults; 4) general regulations; 5) decrees of the Council of State; 6) ministerial regulations; and 7) *coups d'état.*

Machiavelli: You do not appear to suspect that what remains for me to accomplish would be precisely the most difficult.

Montesquieu: Actually, I do not suspect this.

Machiavelli: You have not remarked that my Constitution was silent about a crowd of established rights that would be incompatible with the new order of things that I would bring about. For example: freedom of the press, the right of free association, the independence of the magistracy, the right to suffrage, the election of municipal officials by the communes, the institution of the civic guards and many other things that would have to disappear or be profoundly modified.

Montesquieu: But have you not implicitly recognized all these rights, since you solemnly recognized the principles of which these rights are the application?

Machiavelli: I said to you that I would not recognize any principle or right in particular; moreover, the measures that I would take are only exceptions to the rule.

Montesquieu: And these exceptions confirm it; this is just.

Machiavelli: But to do this, I would have to choose my moment well, because an error in timing could ruin everything. In *The Prince,* I wrote a maxim that must serve as a rule of conduct in such cases: "In taking a state, its occupier must consider all those offenses which it is necessary for him to do, and do them all in one stroke, in order not to have to renew them every day, and not renewing them to reassure men and to earn them to himself by benefiting them. Whoever

does otherwise, either out of timidity or because of bad counsel, is always constrained to keep the knife in hand; nor can he ever base himself upon his subjects, these being not able to be sure of him because of the fresh and continuous injuries."[30]

The very day after the promulgation of my Constitution, I would issue a succession of decrees that would have the force of law and that would, in a single blow, suppress the liberties and rights of which the exercise would be dangerous.

Montesquieu: That moment would be well chosen. The country would still be terrorized by your *coup d'état.* Concerning your Constitution, one could not refuse you anything, because you could take everything; concerning your decrees, one could not allow you anything, because you haven't demanded anything, and you have taken everything.

Machiavelli: You have a quick tongue.

Montesquieu: Not as quick as your actions, you will agree. Despite your vigorous hand and your insight, I confess to you that I have difficulty believing that the country would not revolt in response to a second *coup d'état* held in reserve behind the scenes.

Machiavelli: The country would willingly close its eyes, because, in this hypothesis, it would be weary of agitation, it would hope for rest like the desert sands do after the shower that follows the tempest.

Montesquieu: You expressed this with beautiful rhetorical figures; it was too much.

Machiavelli: I hasten to tell you that I would solemnly promise to give back the liberties that I had suppressed after the parties are pacified.

Montesquieu: I believe that one would wait forever.

Machiavelli: It is possible.

Montesquieu: Certainly, because your maxims allow the prince to not keep his word when he finds it to be in his interest.

Machiavelli: Do not be in such haste; you will see the use that I would make of this promise. Soon after, I would pass myself off as the most liberal man in my kingdom.

Montesquieu: I was not prepared for such a surprise; in the meantime, you would directly suppress all liberties.

Machiavelli: "Directly" is not the word of a statesman; I would not suppress anything directly; here the fox must work with the lion.[31] What use is politics if one cannot gain through oblique routes the goal that cannot be obtained by a straight line? The bases of my establishment are set; my forces are ready; there is nothing left but to put them into motion. I would do so with all the discretion that the new constitutional customs allow. It is here that all the artifices of government and legislation that prudence recommends to the prince would, naturally, be used.

Montesquieu: I see that we are about to enter a new phase; I plan to listen to you.

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[30] *Author's note*: *The Prince,* Chapter VIII.

[31] *The Prince,* Chapter XVIII: "Therefore, since a prince is constrained by necessity to know well how to use the beast, among [the beasts] he must choose the fox and the lion; because the lion does not defend itself from traps, the fox does not defend itself from the wolves. One therefore needs to be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to dismay the wolves."

Eleventh Dialogue

The Laws

Machiavelli: In *Spirit of the Laws,* you quite rightly remarked that the word "liberty" is one to which one attaches many diverse meanings. One says that in your work one can read the following proposition: "Liberty is the right to do what the laws permit."[32] I can easily accommodate myself to this definition, which I find to be just, and I can assure you that my laws would only permit what is necessary. You will see the spirit in which this is meant. How would you like to begin?

Montesquieu: I would not be sorry to see how you would defend yourself with respect to the press.

Machiavelli: You indeed place your finger on the most delicate part of my task. The system that I conceive is as vast as it is numerous in its applications. Fortunately, here I would have a free hand; I could cut and slice in full security and without involving hardly any recriminations.

Montesquieu: Why is this?

Machiavelli: Because in the majority of parliamentary countries, the press has the talent of making itself hated, because it is always in the service of violent, egotistical and exclusive passions; because it disparages fixed opinions, because it is venal, because it is unjust, because it is without generosity or patriotism; finally and especially, because you will never make the great masses of the people understand what purpose it serves.

Montesquieu: Oh! If you seek complaints about the press, it would be easy to accumulate them. But if you ask what purpose it serves, that's another thing. It quite simply hinders arbitrariness in the exercise of power; it forces one to govern constitutionally; it constrains the trustees of public authority to honesty, modesty and respect for oneself and others. Finally, to summarize it all in a phrase, the press gives to anyone who is oppressed the means of complaining and being heard. One can forgive much of an institution that – despite so much abuse – necessarily renders so many services.

Machiavelli: Yes, I know this appeal, but try to make it understood by the masses, if you can; count those who are interested in the fate of the press and you will see.

Montesquieu: For this reason it would be better if you move on to the practical means of *muzzling* it (I believe that is the right word).

Machiavelli: That is indeed the right word, but it is not only journalism that I intend to curb.

Montesquieu: It is printing itself.

Machiavelli: You begin to use irony.

Montesquieu: In a moment you will take it away from me because you will chain the press in all its forms.

Machiavelli: One cannot find weapons against playfulness when its character is so witty [*spirituel*]; but you will understand marvelously well that it would not be worth the difficulty of escaping from journalistic attacks if one still had to remain exposed to those of the book.

Montesquieu: So, let us begin with journalism.

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[32] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XI, Chapter III. [*Translator*: "It is true that in democracies the people seem to act as they please; but political liberty does not consist in an unlimited freedom. In governments, that is, in societies directed by laws, liberty can consist only in the power of doing what we ought to will, and in not being constrained to do what we ought not to will. We must have continually present to our minds the difference between independence and liberty. Liberty is a right of doing whatever the laws permit, and if a citizen could do what they forbid he would be no longer possessed of liberty, because all his fellow-citizens would have the same power."]

Machiavelli: If I would contrive to purely and simply suppress the newspapers, I would very imprudently antagonize the public's sensibility, which is always a dangerous thing to brave; I would proceed by a series of provisions that would appear to be simple measures of foresight and policing.

I would decree that, in the future, no newspaper could be founded without the authorization of the government; right there the development of the evil would be stopped, because you can easily imagine that the newspapers that would be authorized would only be organs devoted to the government.

Montesquieu: But since you enter into all the details, please permit me to say that the spirit of a newspaper changes with changes among its editors. How would you set aside an editorial group hostile to your power?

Machiavelli: The objection is quite weak because, in the final analysis, I would not – if possible – authorize the publication of any new paper; but I have other plans, as you will see. You ask me how I would neutralize a hostile group of editors. In truth, in the simplest way possible. I would add that the government's authorization is necessary for all changes among the editors in chief or managers of the newspaper.

Montesquieu: But the older newspapers, which remain enemies of your government and whose editors have not changed, will speak of this.

Machiavelli: Oh, but wait: I would strike all current and future newspapers with fiscal measures that would jam up all the publicity enterprises as appropriate; I would subject the political papers to what today you call the seal and the surety bond. The industry of the press would soon be so expensive, thanks to the elevation of taxes, that one will only indulge in it hesitantly.

Montesquieu: The remedy is insufficient because the political parties have no regard for money.

Machiavelli: Be calm: I have what will shut their mouths; here come the repressive measures. There are States in Europe where one refers to a jury one's knowledge of offenses committed by the press. I do not know a more deplorable measure than this, because it can agitate public opinion with respect to the least nonsense written by a journalist. Offenses committed by the press have such an elastic character – the writer can disguise his attacks in such varied and subtle forms – that it is not even possible to refer the knowledge of such offenses to the courts. The courts will always remain armed – this goes without saying – but the repressive everyday weapons must be in the hands of the administration.

Montesquieu: Thus there would be offenses that would not be adjudicated by the courts or, rather, you would strike with both hands: the hand of justice and the hand of the administration?

Machiavelli: Great evil! That is what comes from coddling several bad and malicious journalists who expect to attack all, to disparage all; who behave towards the government like the bandits whose muskets encounter voyagers along their routes. They constantly place themselves outside the law. So what if one outlaws them?

Montesquieu: Thus, would your strictness fall upon them alone?

Machiavelli: I would not limit myself to them, because such people are like the heads of the Hydra of Lerne; when one cuts off 10, 50 return. It would principally be the newspapers, as publicity enterprises, that I would attack. I would simply speak to them in a language such as this: "I could have suppressed you all, but I did not; I could still do so, I have left you alive, but it goes without saying that this is conditional, provided you do not hinder my progress or discredit my power. I do not want to have to put you on trial all the time, or to ceaselessly amend the laws so as to repress your infractions; I can no longer have an army of censors tasked with examining tonight what you will publish tomorrow. You have pens, write; but remember this well: I reserve

for myself and my agents the right to judge when and if I am attacked. A matter of subtleties. When you attack me, I will feel it and you will also feel it; in such cases, I will take justice into my own hands, not right away, because I want to put some thought into it; I will warn you once, twice; upon the third time, I will suppress you."

Montesquieu: I see with astonishment that it is not exactly the journalist who would be struck by your system, but the newspaper, the ruin of which involves that of the interests that are grouped around it.

Machiavelli: Let them re-group elsewhere; one cannot concern oneself with such things. Thus would my administration strike, without, of course, prejudicing the condemnations pronounced by the courts. Two condemnations in one year would incontestably cause the suppression of the newspaper. I would not stop there; I would say to the newspapers in a decree or law: "Reduced to the narrowest circumspection in what concerns you, do not hope to agitate public opinion through commentaries on the debates in my chambers; I forbid you from making reports about them, I even forbid you from reporting on judicial debates about matters concerning the press. No longer count on impressing the public's mind with so-called news that comes from abroad; I will punish false news with criminal punishments, whether they are published in good or bad faith."

Montesquieu: This appears to be a little harsh, because, finally, the newspapers – no longer being able to engage in political appreciation without running the greatest risks – would only be able to survive by [publishing] the news. But when a newspaper did publish some news, it appears to me that it would be quite difficult for it to claim it is the truth, because most often it could not guarantee it, and when it could be morally sure of the truth, it would lack the material proof.

Machiavelli: One would think twice before troubling public opinion: this is what would be necessary.

Montesquieu: But there's something else. If one could no longer fight you with newspapers published at home, one could fight you with newspapers published abroad. All the dissatisfaction, all the hatred would be written upon the doors of your kingdom; one would throw beyond the borders the inflammatory newspapers and writings.

Machiavelli: Oh! Here you touch upon a point that I count on regulating in the most rigorous manner, because the foreign press is indeed very dangerous. First of all, any introduction or circulation of unauthorized newspapers or writings in the kingdom would be punished by imprisonment, and the penalty would be sufficiently severe to remove the desire to do it.[33] Finally, all of my subjects who have been convicted of having written against the government while abroad will, upon their return to the kingdom, be sought out and punished. It is a real indignity to write against one's government from abroad.

Montesquieu: This depends. But the foreign press would speak of it.

Machiavelli: You think so? Let us suppose that I rule over a great kingdom. The small States that border my frontiers would be trembling, I swear to you. I would make them pass laws that would prosecute their own nationals in case of attacks upon my government through the press or otherwise.

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[33] Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little* Book II, Chapter VI: "The book I am now writing will, therefore, be tried in France, and its author duly convicted; this I expect, and I confine myself to apprising all those individuals calling themselves magistrates, who, in black and red gowns, shall concoct the thing that, sentence to any fine whatever being well and duly pronounced against me, nothing will equal my disdain for the judgment, but my contempt for the judges."

Montesquieu: I see that I was right to say in *Spirit of the Laws* that the frontiers of a despot would be ravaged. It would necessary that civilization does not penetrate them [from outside]. I am sure that your subjects would not know their own history. As in the image presented by Benjamin Constant,[34] you would make your kingdom an island on which one would be ignorant of what was taking place in Europe, and your capital would be another island, on which one would be ignorant of what was taking place in the provinces.
Machiavelli: I would not want my kingdom agitated by the noise that comes from abroad. How does foreign news arrive? Through a small number of agencies that centralize the information that is transmitted to them from the four corners of the globe. So, one would have to be able to bribe these agencies and, from then on, they would only provide news that was controlled by the government.
Montesquieu: Very good. You can move on now to the policing of books.
Machiavelli: This subject preoccupies me less, because in an era in which journalism has been so prodigiously extended, one hardly ever reads books. Nevertheless, I do not intend to leave the door open for them. In the first place, I would obligate those who would want to pursue the professions of printer, publisher or bookseller to be provided with a license, that is to say, an authorization that the government could always revoke, either directly or through legal decisions.
Montesquieu: But then these businesses would be kinds of public functionaries. The instruments of thought would become the instruments of power!
Machiavelli: You would not complain, I imagine, because things were the same in your time, under parliamentary rule; one must conserve the old procedures when they are good. I would return to fiscal measures; I would extend to books the seals that were to be placed on newspapers or, rather, I would impose the weight of the seal upon the books that were not of a certain number of pages. For example, a book that was not two hundred or three hundred pages long would not be a book, but only a pamphlet. I believe that you will see perfectly the advantage of such an arrangement: on one side, through the use of taxes, I would disperse the cloud of short writings that are like journalistic annexes; on the other, I would force those who want to avoid the seal to devote themselves to long and expensive compositions that would hardly sell or would only be read with difficulty. Today, there are only a few poor devils who have the conscience to make books; they would renounce them. The bureau of internal revenue would discourage literary vanity, and penal law would disarm the printer itself, because I would make the publisher and the printer criminally responsible for the contents of the books they publish. It would be necessary that, if there were writers who dared to write books against the government, they could not find anyone to print them. The effects of this salutary intimidation would indirectly re-establish a censorship that the government could not exercise on its own, because of the discredit into which this preventive measure has fallen. Before bringing new works to light, the printers and publishers would consult, they would inform each other, they would only produce the books that were demanded of them. In this manner, the government would always be informed in a useful fashion of the publications that were being prepared against it; it would preemptively seize them when it judged this to be appropriate and it would refer their authors to the courts.

[34] Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) was a liberal Swiss writer and politician, active during the French Revolution.

Montesquieu: You told me that you would not touch civil rights. You do not appear to realize that it would be both liberty and industry that you would strike through such legislation; the right to property would find itself implicated, and it would pass away in its turn.[35]
Machiavelli: These are [merely] words.
Montesquieu: Then I would think you are now done with the press.
Machiavelli: Oh, not so!
Montesquieu: What remains?
Montesquieu: The other half of my task.

Twelfth Dialogue

The Press

Machiavelli: I have only showed you the "defensive" part of the organic regime that I would impose on the press. Now I would like to show you how I would employ this institution for the profit of my power. I dare say that, until today, no government has had a bolder conception than the one of which I will speak to you. In the parliamentary countries, governments almost always perish due to the press; so, I foresee the possibility of neutralizing the press by the press itself. Since it is as great a force as journalism, do you know what my government will be? It will be journalistic; it will be journalism incarnate.
Montesquieu: Really, you make me pass through many strange surprises! You display a perpetually varied panorama in front of me; I am quite curious, I will confess, to see how you would go about realizing this new program.
Machiavelli: It would take much less fresh imagination than you might think. I would count the number of newspapers that represent what you would call the opposition. If there were 10 for the opposition, I would have 20 for the government; if there were 20, I would have 40; if there were 40, I would have 80. This is how – you will now understand – I would make use of the faculty that I reserved for myself of authorizing the creation of new political papers.
Montesquieu: Indeed, this would be very simple.
Machiavelli: Not as much as you might think, because it is necessary that the public masses do not suspect this tactic; the arrangement would fail and public opinion would detach itself from the newspapers that openly defend my politics.

I would divide into three or four categories the papers devoted to my power. In the first rank, I would place a certain number of newspapers whose tone would be frankly official and which – at every turn – would defend my actions to the limit. These would not be, let me tell you, the ones that would have the most influence on public opinion. In the second rank, I would place another phalanx of newspapers whose character would not be official and whose mission would be to rally to my power the masses of lukewarm or indifferent people who accept without scruple what exists, but do not go beyond their political religion.

It is in the following categories of newspapers that the most powerful levers of my power would be found. Here the official or unofficial tone would be completely lost – in appearance, of course – because the newspapers of which I speak would all be attached by the same chain to my government: a visible chain for some; an invisible one to others. I will not undertake to tell you

[35] See Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little,* Book II, Chapter V: "Marvelous identity of principles: freedom suppressed is property destroyed."

what would be their number, because I would assign a dedicated organ to each opinion, in each party; I would have an aristocratic organ in the aristocratic party, a republican organ in the republican party, a revolutionary organ in the revolutionary party, an anarchist organ – if need be – in the anarchist party. Like the God Vishnu, my press would have a hundred arms and these arms would place their hands upon all the nuances of opinion throughout the entire country. One would be of my party without knowing it. Those who believe they speak their language would actually be speaking mine; those who believe they were acting in their party would be acting in mine; those who believe they were marching under their flag would be marching under mine.
Montesquieu: Are these realizable ideas or phantasmagoria? This gives me vertigo.
Machiavelli: Mind your head, because you are not at the end.
Montesquieu: I only asked you how you could direct and rally all these militias of publicity that are clandestinely hired by your government.
Machiavelli: This would only be a matter of organization, you must understand; for example, I would institute – under the heading of the Department of Printing and the Press – a center of common action at which one could seek the password and from which the signal would come. Then, for those who would only be half in on the secret of this arrangement, this center would appear to be a bizarre spectacle: one would see papers that are devoted to my government and that cry out, that cause me a crowd of troubles.
Montesquieu: This is beyond my reach; I no longer understand.
Machiavelli: But it is not so difficult to conceive, because (remark it well) neither the bases nor the principles of my government would be attacked by the newspapers of which I speak; they would only make a polemic of skirmishes, a dynastic opposition within the narrowest limits.
Montesquieu: And what advantage would you find in this?
Machiavelli: You question is quite ingenuous. The result, already considerable, would be to have it said by the greatest number of people: "But you see that we are free, that under this regime we can speak freely, that the regime is unjustly attacked, that instead of repressing – which it could do – it suffers, it tolerates." Another, no less important result would be to provoke observations such as this: "See the point at which the bases of this government, its principles, are respected by all of us; here are newspapers that allow themselves the greatest freedoms of speech, but they never attack the established institutions. It is necessary that these institutions are beyond the injustices of the passions, because the very enemies of the government cannot help themselves from rendering homage to them."
Montesquieu: This, I confess, is truly Machiavellian.
Machiavelli: You honor me, but there is even better to come. With the help of the occult devotion of these public papers, I can say that I would direct public opinion to my liking in all questions of domestic and foreign policy. I could excite or lull minds, I could reassure or disconcert them, I could plead for and against, the true and the false. I could announce a deed and then deny it, according to the circumstances; thus I could sound out public thinking, I could try out combinations, projects and sudden determinations, finally what you in France call trial balloons. I could combat my enemies to my liking without ever compromising my power, because – after having made these papers speak – I could, if need be, inflict upon them the most energetic denials; I could solicit opinions about certain resolutions, I could reject or retain them, I would always have my finger on the pulsations, which would reflect – without knowing it – my personal impressions and they would sometimes be astonished at being so constantly in agreement with their sovereign. One could then say that I have the popular sensibility, that there is a secret and mysterious sympathy that unites me with the movements of my people.

Montesquieu: These diverse arrangements appear to me to be an ideal perfection. Nevertheless, I submit to you an observation, very timid this time: if you break the silence of China, if you permit the militia of your newspapers to make (to the profit of your designs) the false opposition of which you have spoken to me, in truth I do not see how you could prevent the non-affiliated newspapers from responding with real blows to these annoyances, the trick of which they could divine. Do you not think they would end up raising one of the veils that covers so many mysterious springs? When they know the secret of this comedy, could you prevent them from laughing? This game seems quite risky to me.
Montesquieu: Not at all. I would say to you that I have employed a great deal of my time here examining the strengths and weaknesses of these arrangements; I am well informed about what concerns the conditions of existence of the press in the parliamentary countries. You must know that journalism is a kind of Freemasonry: those who live in it are more or less attached to each other by the links of professional discretion; just like the ancient augurs, they do not easily divulge the secrets of their oracles. They gain nothing by betraying them, because for the most part they have more or less shameful secrets. It us quite probable, I agree, that in the center of the capital, in a certain circle of people, things would not be a mystery; but everywhere else, one would not suspect anything, and the large majority of the nation would march with the most complete confidence along the guided routes that I will have provided.

What would it matter if, in the capital, a certain world could be up-to-date concerning the artifices of my journalism? It would be in the provinces that the greatest part of its influence would be felt. There I would always have the temperature of public opinion that would be necessary for me, and each of my blows would surely hit home. The provincial press in its entirety would belong to me, because neither contradiction nor discussion would be possible there; from the administrative center in which I would be seated, one could regularly transmit to the governor of each province the order to make the newspapers speak in this or that way, so well that – at any given time, all over the country – great impetus would be felt, even before the capital suspects it. You see that public opinion in the capital would not preoccupy me. It would, when necessary, lag behind the external movement that would envelop it, if need be, unknown to it.
Montesquieu: The interlinking of your ideas invests everything with so much force that you make me lose the feeling for a final objection that I want to make to you. It remains the case, despite what you have said, that there would still be a certain number of independent newspapers. It is certain that it would be practically impossible for them to speak politically, but they could make a war of small details against you. Your administration would not be perfect; the development of absolute power involves a number of abuses of which even the sovereign is not the cause; one would be vulnerable for all your agents' acts that concern private interests; one would complain, one would attack your agents; you would necessarily be responsible for them and your reputation would succumb in detail.
Machiavelli: I would not fear this.
Montesquieu: But it is true that you will have so multiplied the means of repression that you would only have your choices of blows [against you].
Machiavelli: This is not what I would say. I do not want to be obligated to ceaselessly repress; I would like to use a simple injunction to be able to stop all discussion of subjects that concern the administration.
Montesquieu: And how would you accomplish this?

Machiavelli: I would obligate the newspapers to welcome at the top of their columns the corrections that the government would communicate to them; government agents would pass to them notes in which one would say to them categorically: "You have advanced such and such a fact, but it was not accurate; you are permitted to make such and such a criticism, [but] you have been unjust, you have been improper, you were wrong, you must say so." As you can see, this would be an honest and open censure.
Montesquieu: To which one could not reply, of course.
Machiavelli: Obviously not: the discussion would be closed.
Montesquieu: In this manner you would have the last word, you would have it without using violence: very ingenuous. As you told me just a little while ago, your government would be journalism incarnate.
Machiavelli: In the same way that I would not want the country to be agitated by noise from abroad, I would not want it to be agitated by noise from within, even by simple news about private affairs. When there has been an extraordinary suicide, some gross financial affair that is too wormy, some misdeed by a public functionary, I would prohibit the newspapers from speaking of it. Silence on such matters would show the public's honesty much better than noise would do.
Montesquieu: And, during this time, you would engage in journalism to the limit?
Machiavelli: It would be quite necessary to do so. To use the press, to use it in all its forms: such is the law of the powers that want to survive today. It is quite singular, but it is true. I would plunge into this much deeper than you could imagine.

To understand the scope of my system, one would have to see how the language of my press is called upon to cooperate with the official acts of my politics. Suppose that I would want to publicize a solution to such and such a complication abroad or at home; this solution – indicated by my newspapers, each of which has been leading the public's mind along for several months – would show up one fine day as an official event. You know the discretion and ingenuous considerations with which an authority's documents must be drafted at important conjunctures: the problem to resolve in similar cases is to give a feeling of satisfaction to all the parties involved. So, each one of my newspapers, following its respective nuance, could strive to persuade each party that the resolution that one has reached favors it the most. What could not be inscribed in the official document would, instead, be published as an interpretation; what could only be indicated [in the document] would be rendered more overtly by the official newspapers; the democratic and revolutionary newspapers could cry the news from the rooftops; and while one could dispute it, while one could make the most diverse interpretations of my actions, my government could respond to one and all: "You are deceived about my intentions, you have read my declarations poorly; I have never wanted to say this or that." The essential would be to never place myself in contradiction with myself.
Montesquieu: What? After what you have said to me, you still have such a pretension?
Machiavelli: No doubt I do, and your astonishment proves to me that you have not understood. It would be more a question of reconciling words than actions. How would you like the great masses of the nation to judge things if it is logic that leads their government? If would be sufficient to give it to them. Thus, I would like the diverse phases of my politics to be presented as the development of a unique thought that is connected to an unchanging goal. Each foreseen or unforeseen event would be a wisely provided result; the digressions of direction would only be different faces of the same question, the diverse routes would lead to the same goal, the

variable means would be part of a self-same solution pursued through obstacles without respite. The most recent event would be presented as the logical conclusion of all the others.

Montesquieu: In truth, one must admire you! Such strength of mind and such activity!

Machiavelli: Every day my newspapers would be filled with official speeches, reviews, reports to the ministers, reports to the sovereign. I would not forget that I live in an era that believes itself able to resolve all of society's problems through industry, in an era in which one ceaselessly occupies oneself with the improvement of the lot of the working classes. I would be very devoted to such questions, which are a very fortunate distraction from the preoccupations of domestic politics. Among the southern peoples [of Europe], it would be necessary for the governments to appear ceaselessly occupied; the masses consent to be inactive, but on the condition that those who govern them provide them with the spectacle of an incessant activity, a kind of fever; that they constantly attract their eyes with novelties, surprises and dramatic turns of events;[36] this would perhaps be bizarre, but, once again, it would be necessary.

I would place myself in point-by-point conformity with these indications; consequently, I would make – in matters of commerce, industry, the arts and even administration – studies of all kinds of projects, plans, arrangements, changes, revisions and improvements, the effects of which would be covered in the press by the voices of the most numerous and most fertile publicists. Political economy has (one says) made fortunes among you; so, I would leave your theoreticians, your utopians and your most passionate declaimers with nothing to invent, nothing to publish, nothing to say. The well being of the people would be the unique and invariable object of my public confidences. Either I myself would speak or I would have my ministers and writers speak; one would never shut up about the grandeur of the country, prosperity and the majesty of my mission and its destiny; one would not cease to glorify the great principles of modern rights, the great problems that agitate humanity. The most enthusiastic and the most universal liberalism would breathe in my writings. Western people love the Eastern style; and so the style of all official discourse, all the official manifestations, must always be embellished, constantly pompous, full of lofty thoughts and reflections. The people do not love atheistic governments; so, in my communications with the public, I would never fail to place my actions under invocations of the Divinity, thereby skillfully associating my own star with that of the country.

I would like that, at every instant, one compares the actions of my rule with those of past governments. This would be the best manner of making my good deeds evident and of promoting the recognition that they merit.

It would be very important to highlight the faults of those who preceded me, to show that I have known how to avoid them. One would thus harbor against the regimes that my power has succeeded a kind of antipathy, even aversion, which will become as irreparable as expiation.

Not only would I give to a certain number of newspapers the missions of ceaselessly exalting the glory of my reign and putting upon governments other than mine the responsibility for European politics, but I would also like a great deal of these published praises to be mere echoes of foreign papers, of which one would reproduce the articles – true or false – that render brilliant homage to my own politics. In addition, I would have in foreign countries newspapers that I have bought, the support of which would be all the efficacious if I could give them an oppositional color in several details.

My principles, ideas and acts would be represented with the halo of youth, with the prestige of the new rights in opposition to the decrepitude and irrelevance of the old institutions.

[36] In short, a spectacular society, a society of the spectacle.

I am not unaware that it would be necessary for the public's mental valves that intellectual activity – driven back on one point – could surge forth somewhere else. This is why I would not fear to throw the nation into all the theoretical and practical speculations about the industrial regime.

Beyond politics, moreover, I will say to you that I would be a very good prince, that I would let philosophical and religious questions be debated in complete peace. In matters of religion, the doctrine of free inquiry has become a kind of monomania. One should not thwart this tendency; one could not do so without danger. In the most advanced European countries, the invention of the printing press ended up giving birth to crazy, furious, frightening and almost unclean literature: a great evil. So, it is sad to say it, but it would almost be sufficient to not hinder it, so that this rage to write – which possesses your parliamentary countries – is practically satisfied.

This plague-ridden literature, the course of which one could not stop, and the platitudes of the writers and politicians who would practice journalism, would not fail to form a repulsive contrast with the dignity of the language that will descend from the steps of the throne with the lively and colorful dialectic that one would have the care to apply to all the manifestations of power. You will now understand why I have wanted to surround the prince with a swarm of publicists, administrators, lawyers, men of business and jurisconsults, who would be essential to the redaction of the vast quantity of essential communications of which I have spoken to you, and of which the impression on the public's mind would always be very strong.

In brief, such would be the general economy of my press regime.

Montesquieu: Are you now finished with it?

Machiavelli: Yes, regretfully, because I have been much more brief than would actually be necessary. But our time is short: we must move on rapidly.

Thirteenth Dialogue

Conspiracies

Montesquieu: I need to recover a little from the emotions that you have made me feel. Such fecundity of resources, such strange conceptions! There is poetry in all this and the fatal beauty that a modern-day Byron could not disavow; one again finds the scenic talents of the author of *Mandragore*.[37]

Machiavelli: Do you believe so, Monsieur de Secondat? Yet something tells me that you are not reassured in your irony; you are not sure that such things are impossible.

Montesquieu: If my admiration preoccupies you, you have it. I await the conclusion.

Machiavelli: I am still not there yet.

Montesquieu: So, continue.

Machiavelli: I am at your service.

Montesquieu: From the beginning, you would control the press through formidable legislation. You would quiet all voices other than your own. There would be mute parties all around you. Would you not fear conspiracies?

Machiavelli: No, because I would hardly be far-sighted if I did not disarm them at the same time with the other side of my hand.

[37] *La Mandragola* was a play written by Machiavelli (written between 1518 and 1519).

Montesquieu: What would your means be?
Machiavelli: I would begin by deporting by the hundreds those who welcomed the ascension of my power with weapons in their hands. One tells me that in Italy, Germany and France it was through secret societies that the men of disorder who conspired against the government were recruited; I would break the dark threads that weave plots like cobwebs in the dens.
Montesquieu: Afterwards?
Machiavelli: The acts of organizing a secret society or being affiliated with one would be rigorously punished.
Montesquieu: In the future, that would be good; but what about the existing secret societies?
Machiavelli: In the interests of the general security, I would expel all those who were known to belong to them. Those whom I could not reach would remain in the shadow of a perpetual threat, because I would institute a law that would permit the government to use administrative means to deport anyone who was affiliated with them.
Montesquieu: That is to say, without trial and conviction.
Machiavelli: Why do you say so? Would not the decision of the government be a conviction? You surely know that one would have little pity for agitators. In the countries that are incessantly troubled by civil discord, it would be necessary to bring about [social] peace through acts of implacable rigor; if there would be an accounting for victims that assures tranquility, it would be made. Finally, the appearance of the commander must become so imposing that no one would dare to make an attempt on his life. After covering Italy in blood, Sylla[38] could live in Rome as a common person: no one dared to touch a hair on his head.
Montesquieu: I see that you would enter into a period of terrible execution; I do not dare to make any observations. Nevertheless, it seems that, even by following your designs, you could be less severe.
Machiavelli: If one were to seek my clemency, I would think about it. I can even confide to you that a portion of the severe provisions that I would include in the law must be purely comminatory, on the condition that one would not force me to use them otherwise.
Montesquieu: This is what you call comminatory? Yet your clemency reassures me a little; there are moments when – if a mortal heard you – you would freeze his blood.
Machiavelli: Why? I lived very close to the Duke of Valentinois,[39] who left behind a terrible renown and quite merited it, because he had moments of no pity; nevertheless, I can assure you that the necessities of execution aside, he was a very good-natured man. One could say the same thing of nearly all the absolute monarchs; they were basically good people; they were especially good to the children.
Montesquieu: I think I might like you better when you are angry: your gentleness frightens me more. But let us return. You had annihilated the secret societies.
Machiavelli: Do not go so quickly; I would not do this. You create confusion.
Montesquieu: Why and how?
Machiavelli: I would prohibit the secret societies, whose character and machinations escape my government's surveillance, but I would not deprive myself of a means of information, of an occult influence that could be considerable if used properly.
Montesquieu: What would you do?
Machiavelli: I foresee the possibility of giving to a certain number of such societies a kind of legal existence or, rather, centralizing them all into a single one, of which I would be the

[38] Lucius Cornelius Sylla, a Roman statesman (138 - 78 BCE).
[39] Also known as Cesare Borgia.

supreme leader. Thus, I could keep in my hands the diverse revolutionary elements that the country contains. The people who compose such societies belong to all nations, classes and social ranks; I would be up-to-date on the most obscure intrigues of politics. Such a centralized society would be like an annex to my police, of whom I will soon speak to you.

The subterranean world of the secret societies is full of empty minds, which do not concern me in the least, but in this world there would be directions to give and forces to set in motion. If it does something, it will be my hand that moves; if it prepares a conspiracy, its leader will be me; I will be the leader of the league.

Montesquieu: And you believe that these cohorts of democrats, republicans, anarchists and terrorists would let you approach and break bread with them; you believe that those who refuse human domination would accept a guide who would be their master?

Machiavelli: The fact is that you do not know, O Montesquieu, the powerlessness and even the foolishness of the majority of the people involved in European demagogy. These tigers have the souls of sheep, heads full of wind; it suffices to speak their language to penetrate into their ranks. Their ideas, moreover, have unbelievable affinities with the doctrines of absolute power. Their dream is the absorption of individuals into a symbolic unity. They demand the complete realization of equality by virtue of a power that can only be definitive in the hands of a single man. You see that, even here, I would be the leader of their school! And then it is necessary to say that they would have no choice in the matter. The secret societies would exist in the conditions that I set or they would not exist at all.

Montesquieu: The finale *sic volo jubeo*[40] would not have to wait long with you. I firmly believe that here you would be well guarded against conspiracies.

Machiavelli: Yes, it is good of you to say so, but my legislation would not permit meetings or discussions that exceed a certain number of people.

Montesquieu: How many?

Machiavelli: You want these details? One would not permit meetings of more than 15 or 20 people.

Montesquieu: What? Friends could not dine together beyond this number?

Machiavelli: You are already alarmed, I can see, in the name of Gaulish gaiety. So, yes, one could dine in larger numbers, because my regime would not be as unsociable as you might think, but on the condition that one does not speak of politics.

Montesquieu: Could one speak of literature?

Machiavelli: Yes, but on the condition that, under the pretext of literature, one would not meet with a political goal. Note that one might not speak of politics at all and yet give a banquet a demonstrative character that would be understood by the public as political. That must not happen.

Montesquieu: Alas! In such a system it would be difficult for the citizens to live without offending the government!

Machiavelli: This is an error, [because] only agitators would suffer from such restrictions; no one else would feel them.

It goes without saying that here I do not occupy myself with acts of rebellion against my power, attacks that attempt to overthrow it, or attacks against the person of the prince, his authority or his institutions. These would be real crimes, which would be repressed by the common rights of all the legislation. They would be foreseen and punished in my kingdom

[40] "I command it" in Latin. Taken from Juvenal, *Satires,* vi, 223: *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas* ("I want, I *command* it: let my will suffice as reason."

according to a classification and following the definitions that would not allow the slightest direct or indirect attack against the established order of things to take place.
Montesquieu: Permit me to have confidence in you in this regard and to not inquire into your means. Nevertheless, it would not suffice to establish Draconian laws; one would have to find a magistracy that wants to apply them. This point is not without difficulty.
Machiavelli: There would be no difficulty here.
Montesquieu: You would destroy the judicial organization?
Machiavelli: I would destroy nothing: I would modify and innovate.
Montesquieu: So you would establish courts-martial, provost courts, finally courts of exception?
Machiavelli: No.
Montesquieu: What would you do then?
Machiavelli: First of all, it is good that you know that I would have no need of decreeing a great number of severe laws whose application I would have to pursue. Many already exist and would still be in force, because all governments, free or absolute, republican or monarchical, experience the same difficulties: they are all obligated in moments of crisis to have recourse to rigorous laws, some of which remain, while others are weakened after the necessities that gave birth to them. One must make use of both; with respect to the latter, one recalls that they would not be explicitly abrogated, that they were perfectly wise laws, and that the return of the abuses that they prevented would render their application necessary. In this way, the government would only appear to take an action of good administration (and this would often be the case).

You see that it would only be a question of giving a little jurisdiction to the actions of the courts, which is always easy to do in the centralized countries, where the magistracy is in direct contact with the administration through the ministry on which it depends.

As for the new laws that would be made under my reign and that would for the most part be rendered as simple decrees, their application would perhaps not be as easy, because – in the countries in which the magistrates are not removable – they tend to resist the direct deployment of power in the interpretation of the law.

But I believe I have found a very ingenuous, very simple and apparently purely regulatory arrangement that – without attacking the permanence of the magistracy – would modify what is truly absolute in the consequences of this principle. I would issue a decree that would require the retirement of magistrates when they reach a certain age. I do not doubt that here I would have public opinion with me, because it is a painful – and all too frequent – spectacle to see a judge who is called upon at every moment to hand down rulings on the highest and most difficult questions evince a frailty of mind that renders him incapable of doing so.
Montesquieu: If you will permit me, I have several notions concerning the things you are speaking about. The assertion that you advance is not at all in conformity with experience. Among the men who live by the continual exercise of mental work, intelligence does not weaken; this is – if one can say so – the privilege of thought among those for whom it becomes the principal element. If the faculties of a few magistrates falter with age, in the majority of cases these faculties are retained and in fact the magistrates' knowledge and understanding constantly improves; there would be no need to replace the old ones, because death will impose natural vacancies in their ranks; but if there would actually be as many examples of decadence as you claim, it would be a thousand times better for the interests of good justice to suffer this evil than to accept your remedy.
Machiavelli: I have higher reasons than yours.
Montesquieu: National security?

Machiavelli: Perhaps. If you are sure about something, it should be that – in this new arrangement – the magistrates will not deviate more than previously when it is a question of purely civil interests.
Montesquieu: Why should I be sure? According to what you have said, I already see that they would deviate when it is a question of political interests.
Machiavelli: They must not do so; they must do their duties as they must be done, because – in political matters – it will be necessary for [public] order that the judges are always on the side of power. The worst thing would be a situation in which a sovereign is subject to dissenting decrees that the entire country could take up, at that very moment, against the government. What use would be the imposition of silence upon the press if the press-function is recovered in the judgments of the courts?
Montesquieu: Under its modest appearances, would your way be very powerful, since you attribute to it such a wide scope?
Machiavelli: Yes, because it would dissipate the spirit of resistance, the *esprit de corps* that is always so dangerous in the judicial institutions that conserve the memory – perhaps [even] the worship – of past governments. My way introduces into these institutions' hearts a mass of new elements, the influences of which would be completely favorable to the spirit that would animate my reign. Every year, 20, 30, [even] 40 judges' benches would become vacant due to [forced] retirement, thus causing a displacement of all judicial personnel, who could thus be renewed from top to bottom every six months. As you know, filling a single vacancy can involve the making of 50 appointments due to the successive effects of displacing permanent post holders of different grades. You can judge what the effect would be if there were 30 or 40 vacancies occurring at the same time. Not only would the collective spirit disappear in its political aspects, but the judiciary would also get closer to the government, which disposes of an even greater number of seats. One would have young men who have the desire to make their own way, who would no longer be stopped in their careers by the perpetuity of those who preceded them. They would know that the government loves order, that the country also loves it and that it is only a question of serving them both by rendering good judicial decisions when order is concerned.
Montesquieu: But unless there is a nameless blindness, you would be reproached for exciting in the magistracy a spirit of competition that would be fatal for the judiciary corps; I won't show you what the consequences would be, because I believe that they would not stop you.
Machiavelli: I do not have the pretense of trying to escape criticism; it matters little to me, provided that I cannot hear it. In all things, my principle would be the irrevocability of my decisions, despite the murmurs. A prince who acts in this way would always be sure of imposing respect for his will.

Fourteenth Dialogue

Previously Existing Institutions

Machiavelli: I have already said many times, and I will repeat it again, that I do not need to create everything, to organize everything; I find a large part of the instruments of my power in the already existing institutions.[41] Do you know what the constitutional guarantee is?

[41] Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852): "Present-day France was already contained in the parliamentary republic. It only required a bayonet thrust for the bubble to burst and the monster to leap forth before

Montesquieu: Yes, and I am sorry, because – without wanting to do so – I have taken away a surprise that perhaps you wanted to spring on me with your usual skillful staging.
Machiavelli: What are you thinking?
Montesquieu: I think that, at least in the France of which you seem to want to speak, it is true that this is a "law of circumstance" that must be modified, if not completely removed, under a regime of constitutional liberty.
Machiavelli: In find you very moderate on this point. According to your ideas, it is simply one of the most tyrannical restrictions in the world. Why? When private citizens are injured by government agents during the exercise of their official functions, and when they haul these agents into court, the judges must respond to the plaintiffs: "We cannot render you justice, the door to the court is closed: go demand authorization from the administration to prosecute its functionaries." But this would be a real denial of justice. How many times would a government have to authorize such prosecutions?
Montesquieu: What makes you complain? It seems to me that this would suit your affairs very well.
Machiavelli: I have only said this to show you that, in the States in which the action of justice encounters such obstacles, a government would not have anything to fear from the courts. It is always as transitional arrangements that one inserts such exceptions into the law, but once the period of transition passes, the exceptions remain, and rightly so, because when order reigns, they do not inconvenience, but when it is troubled, they are necessary.

This is another modern institution that serves the efficacy of centralized power's actions: the creation, near the courts, of a great magistracy that you call the Public Prosecutor and that, with much more reason, one previously called the Ministry of the King, because this function is essentially removable and revocable at the discretion of the prince. I do not need to tell you the influence of this magistracy on the courts around which they sit: it is considerable. Remember all this. Now I must speak to you of the Court of Cassation, about which I have restrained myself from speaking and which would play a considerable role in the administration of justice.

The Court of Cassation is more than a judicial body: in a certain way it is a fourth power in the State, because to it belongs the last word in fixing the meaning of the law. So I will repeat here what I believe I told you with respect to the Senate and the Legislative Assembly: an equal court of justice that would be completely independent of the government could – by virtue of its sovereign and nearly discretionary power of interpretation – overthrow the government when it wanted to do so. For this to happen, it would suffice for it to systematically curtail or extend (where liberty is concerned) the dispositions of the laws that rule the exercise of political rights.
Montesquieu: And, apparently, you would demand the contrary?
Machiavelli: I would demand nothing of it; it would do on its own what is fitting for it to do. Because here the different influences of which I spoke to you earlier would most strongly compete. The closer the judge is to power, the more he belongs to it. The conservative spirit of the reign would develop here to a much greater degree than anywhere else, and the higher laws of the political police would receive – at the heart of this great assembly – an interpretation so favorable to my power that I could do without a host of restrictive measures that would otherwise be necessary.

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our eyes." See also Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little,* Book VIII, Chapter IV: "Your political system bears that within it that will destroy it."

Montesquieu: Listening to you speak, one could truly say that the laws are susceptible to the most fantastic interpretations. Is it that the legislative texts are not clear and precise? Can they loan themselves to the extensions or restrictions that you have indicated?

Machiavelli: I would not have the pretense of teaching jurisprudence to the author of the *Spirit of the Laws,* to the experienced magistrate who rendered so many excellent decrees. There is no text, no matter how clear it is, that cannot accommodate the most contrary solutions, even in pure civil rights; but I beseech you to note that we deal with political matters here. Therefore, it is a common habit among legislators of all eras to adopt in some of their provisions a quite elastic phrasing so that they can, according to circumstances, rule on cases or introduce exceptions, the precise explication of which would not be prudent.

I know perfectly well that I must give you examples, because without them my propositions will appear too vague to you. The difficulty for me will be to find one of sufficient generality to allow me to dispense with going into details. Here is one example for which I have a preference, since we touched upon it a little while ago.

Speaking of the constitutional guarantee, you said that the law of exception would have to be modified in free countries.

So, I will suppose that this law exists in the State that I would govern; I will suppose that it has been amended; thus I can imagine that, previous to my ascension, a law had been promulgated that, in electoral matters, allowed the prosecution of government agents without the authorization of the Council of State.

The question might come up under my rule, which, as you know, would introduce great changes in public rights. One might want to prosecute a functionary on the occasion of an electoral event. A magistrate of the Public Prosecutor's office could rise and say: "The privilege that one wants to avail oneself of today no longer exists; it is not compatible with the current institutions. The old law that permitted the authorization of the Council of State in such cases has implicitly been abrogated." The courts may respond favorably or unfavorably; in the end, the debate would be carried on before the Court of Cassation and this superior jurisdiction would thus set forth the public rights on this point: the old law is implicitly abrogated; the authorization of the Council of State is necessary to prosecute public functionaries, even in electoral matters.

Here is another example: it is more particular; it is borrowed from the policing of the press. One tells me that, in France, there is a law that – under criminal sanction – obligates all the people who work in the distribution and peddling of writings to be provided with an authorization from the public functionary who is in charge of general administration in that particular province. The law is intended to regulate peddling and to subject it to close surveillance; such is the essential goal of this law, but the text of it, I suppose, reads: "All distributors or peddlers must be provided with an authorization, etc."

So, if the question comes before the Court of Cassation, it could say: "It is not only the professional trades that the law has in view. It is all distribution and peddling that is covered." Consequently, the author of a text or a work who delivers one or several copies, even as complimentary gifts, without prior authorization, would commit the act of distribution and peddling, and would consequently fall under the penal provision of this law.

You can see what would result from a similar interpretation: instead of a simple law of policing, you would have a law that restricts the right to publish one's thinking through the means of the press.

Montesquieu: You have not failed as a writer on legal matters.

Machiavelli: This has been absolutely necessary. Today, how does one overthrow governments? By legal distinctions, by the subtleties of constitutional rights, by using against power all the means, weapons and arrangements that are not directly prohibited by the law. And these legal artifices, which the various parties employ against power with so much fury: would you not want power to employ them against these parties? If not, the struggle would not be equal; resistance would not even be possible; it would be necessary [for the sovereign] to abdicate.
Montesquieu: You would have so many stumbling blocks to avoid: it would be a miracle if you could foresee them all. The courts would not be bound by their judgments. With jurisprudence such as the one you would employ under your reign, I see you fighting lawsuits on all sides. Those subject to your jurisprudence would not tire of knocking on the door of the courthouses to seek other interpretations.
Machiavelli: At first, this would be possible; but when a certain number of decrees have definitively established this jurisprudence, no one will take the liberty of doing what it prohibits, and the source of the lawsuits will be drained. Public opinion will even be so appeased that the people will yield to the administration's unofficial opinions concerning the meaning of the laws.
Montesquieu: And how, I beg you?
Machiavelli: In this or that given conjuncture, when one would have reason to fear that some difficulty would arise concerning this or that point of law, the administration would declare in the form of an opinion that this or that act falls under the jurisdiction of the law, that the law covers this or that case.
Montesquieu: But these would only be declarations that would not bind the courts in any way.
Machiavelli: No doubt, but these declarations would still have a very great authority, a very great influence over judicial decisions, coming from an administration as powerful as the one that I would organize. Such declarations would especially have a very great control over individual resolutions and – in the vast majority of cases, if not always – they would prevent annoying lawsuits. One would abstain from bringing them.
Montesquieu: As we advance, I see that your government becomes more and more paternal. These would almost be patriarchal judicial customs. In fact, it seems impossible to me that one would not keep in mind a solicitude that would be shown for so many of your ingenuous forms.
Machiavelli: Nevertheless, here you are obliged to recognize that I am far from the barbarous governmental proceedings that you seemed to attribute to me at the beginning of this discussion. You see that violence would play no role in all this; I would place my support where everyone does today: in the law.
Montesquieu: In the strongest law.
Machiavelli: The law that makes itself obeyed is always the strongest law; I do not know any exception to this rule.

Fifteenth Dialogue

Suffrage

Montesquieu: Although we have wandered in a very large circle,[42] and you have already organized almost everything, I must not hide from you the fact that there is still much for you to

[42] An interesting ambiguity: has the conversation traveled in a circle or have its two participants wandered around in one (a circle of hell)?

do to completely reassure me about the durability of your power. The thing that astonishes me the most is the fact that you have based your power upon popular suffrage, that is to say, the most inconsistent element I know. Tell me, then, I beseech you: have you said that you would be king?
Machiavelli: Yes, king.
Montesquieu: For life or hereditarily?
Machiavelli: I am a king as one is a king in all the kingdoms of the world: a hereditary king with descendants called upon to succeed me from male to male, in order of progeny, with the perpetual exclusion of the women.
Montesquieu: You are not gallant.
Machiavelli: If you will permit me, I am inspired by the traditions of the Frankish and Salian monarchies.[43]
Montesquieu: No doubt you will explain to me how you believe you can reconcile hereditary monarchy with the democratic suffrage of the United States.
Machiavelli: Yes.
Montesquieu: What? You hope to bind the will of the future generations with this principle?
Machiavelli: Yes.
Montesquieu: For the present, I would like to see the manner in which you would deal with this suffrage when it comes to applying it to the nomination of public officers.
Machiavelli: What public officers? You know quite well that in monarchical States it is the government that names the functionaries of all levels.
Montesquieu: This depends on the functionaries. Those who are in charge of the administration of the villages are generally named by the inhabitants, even under monarchical governments.
Machiavelli: One would change this with a single law; in the future, they would be named by the government.
Montesquieu: And the nation's representatives: it would be you who named them?
Machiavelli: You know quite well that this would not be possible.
Montesquieu: Then I pity you, because if you leave suffrage to its own devices, if you cannot find a new arrangement here, then the assembly of the nation's representatives would not delay to stock itself – under the influence of the [various political] parties – with deputies who are hostile to your power.
Machiavelli: But I would never leave suffrage to its own devices.
Montesquieu: I would not expect you to. But what arrangement would you adopt?
Machiavelli: The first point would be to bind to the government all those who would want to represent the country. I would impose the solemnity of the oath upon all candidates. It would not be an oath to the nation, as your revolutionaries of '89 swore; I would require an oath of loyalty to the prince himself and his Constitution.
Montesquieu: But in politics, since you would not fear to violate your oaths, how could you hope that they would be more scrupulous than you on this point?
Machiavelli: I count little upon the political conscience of men; I count upon the power of public opinion; no one would dare to debase himself in front of this power by openly failing to uphold his sworn faith. Even less would one dare do so if the taking of this oath preceded the election instead of following it, and one would have no excuse for seeking out votes in these conditions if one did not decide in advance to serve me. It would now be necessary to give the government the means of resisting the influence of the opposition, of preventing the opposition from causing

[43] In Germany and Franconia, between 1024 and 1125.

desertions among the ranks of those who want to defend the government. During the elections, the parties have the habit of proclaiming their candidates and proposing them instead of those of the government. I would do as they do: I would have my own declared candidates and I would propose them instead of those of the parties.
Montesquieu: If you were not all-powerful, these means would be detestable, because – by openly offering to do battle – you would provoke blows.
Machiavelli: I intend to have things so that the agents of my government (from the first to the last) would strive to have my candidates triumph.
Montesquieu: This goes without saying.
Machiavelli: Everything is of the greatest importance in this matter. "The laws that establish suffrage are fundamental; the manner in which suffrage is given is fundamental; the law that sets the manner of giving the notices of suffrage is fundamental."[44] Was it not you who said this?
Montesquieu: I do not always recognize my language when it comes from your mouth; it seems to me that the words you quoted apply to democratic governments.
Machiavelli: No doubt, and you have already been able to see that my politics would essentially consist in basing myself upon the people; that my real and declared goal would be to represent them, although I wear a crown. Depository of all the power that they have delegated to me, I alone would be their authorized representative. What I want, they would want; what I do, they would do. Consequently, it is indispensable that, at the time of the election, the various factions do not substitute their influence for the one of which I am the armed personification. I have also found other means of paralyzing their efforts. It is necessary that you know, for example, that the law that prohibits meetings would naturally apply to those that could be held with the elections in mind. In this matter, the parties could neither get together nor understand each other.
Montesquieu: Why do you always foreground the parties? Under the pretext of imposing impediments upon them, do you not impose them upon the voters themselves? It is certain that the parties are only collections of voters; if the voters could not enlighten themselves through meetings or parleys, how would they vote with adequate knowledge of the matters at hand?
Machiavelli: I see you are unfamiliar with the infinite art and boldness with which political passions thwart prohibitive measures. Do not bother with the voters; those who are animated by good intentions will always know how to vote. Furthermore, I would make use of tolerance; not only would I not prohibit the meetings that would be formed in the interests of my candidates, but I would go as far as closing my eyes to the machinations of several popular candidacies that might noisily agitate in the name of liberty; but it is good to tell you that those who would cry the loudest would be my own men.
Montesquieu: And how would you control the voting?
Machiavelli: First of all, in what concerns the countryside, I would not want the voters going to vote in the large metropolitan centers, where they could come into contact with the oppositional spirit of the market towns and cities, and receive the instructions that could come from the capital; I would like that one votes according to village. The results of such an arrangement, which is apparently so simple, would nevertheless be considerable.
Montesquieu: This is easy to understand: you would obligate the votes of the countryside to be divided among insignificant celebrities or, lacking well-known names, to refer them to the

[44] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book II, Chapter II. [*Translator*: "The laws therefore which establish the right of suffrage are fundamental to this government [...] As the division of those who have a right of suffrage is a fundamental law in republics, so the manner of giving this suffrage is another fundamental."]

candidates designated by your government. I would be quite surprised if, in such a system, many able or talented people blossomed.

Machiavelli: Public order has less need of men of talent than men devoted to the government. Great ability sits upon the throne and among those who surround it; elsewhere it is useless; it is even harmful, because it can only be exercised against power.

Montesquieu: Your aphorisms cut like a sword; I have no arguments to oppose what you say. Thus, please take up the rest of your electoral regulations.

Machiavelli: For the reasons that I have stated, I also would not want balloting by list, which could falsify the election, which could permit the coalition of men and principles. Furthermore, I would divide the electoral colleges into a certain number of administrative districts in which there would only be room for the election of a single deputy and in which, consequently, each voter could only place one name on his ballot.

Moreover, it would be necessary to have the possibility of neutralizing the opposition in the districts in which it would make itself too vividly felt. Thus, let us suppose that in previous elections, a district has made itself remarkable for the majority of its hostile votes or one had reason to foresee that it would come out against the government's candidates: nothing would be easier than remedying this situation. If this district only has a small population, one could unite it with a nearby or faraway district (but either way much larger), in which the hostile voices would be drowned out or their political spirit would be lost. If, on the contrary, the hostile district has a large population, one could split it into several parts that would be annexed by nearby districts and that could annihilate them.

You will understand that I am passing over a mass of details that would only be accessories to the ensemble. Thus, if needed, I could divide the colleges into sections, so as to give greater range of action to the administration when needed, and I would have the municipal officers whose nominations depend on the government preside over the colleges and the sections of the colleges.

Montesquieu: I note with a certain surprise that here you would not make use of a measure that you suggested at the time of Leo X[45] and that consisted in the submission of the ballots to inspectors after the vote.

Machiavelli: This would be difficult to do today, and I believe that one should only use this means with the greatest prudence. A skillful government would have so many other resources! Without directly buying the vote, that is to say, with hard cash, nothing would be easier for such a government than making the populations vote as it wished by means of administrative concessions, by promising to build a port here, a market there, a road or a canal somewhere else; inversely, by giving nothing to the cities and towns in which the vote is hostile.

Montesquieu: I have nothing to reproach in the basics of these arrangements, but would you not fear that one would say that you were corrupting or oppressing the popular vote? Would you not fear compromising your power in the struggles in which it would always find itself directly engaged? The least success that one could have over your candidates would be a brilliant victory that would put your whole government in check. What does not cease to worry me on your account is that I see you obligated to succeed in all things, under the pain of a [complete] disaster.

Machiavelli: You speak the language of fear: be reassured. By that point, I would have succeeded in so many things: I would not perish due to infinitely small things. Bossuet's grain of sand was not made for real statesmen. I would be so advanced in my career that I could even

[45] Pope Leo X (1475-1521). See Chapter XI of *The Prince.*

brave storms without danger. What could the infinitesimal administrative inconveniences of which you speak mean? Do you believe that I have the pretense of being perfect? Do I not know that more than one mistake would be made around me? No, no doubt I could not arrange things so that there would not be a few pillages, a few scandals. Would this prevent the totality of my affairs from progressing and progressing well? The essential would be not so much committing no mistakes as maintaining responsibility with an energetic attitude that overwhelms my detractors. Although the opposition might manage to introduce into my chamber a few declaimers, why would this matter to me? I am not one of those who wants to do without the necessities of their time.

One of my great principles would be to set equals against each other. In the same way that I would use the press against the press, I would use the grandstand against the grandstand; as much as necessary, I would have men who are trained in speechmaking and capable of speaking for several hours without stopping. The essential would be to have a compact majority and a president of whom one is sure. There is a particular art in conducting debates and carrying off the vote. Would I need the artifices of parliamentary strategy? Nineteen of the twenty members of the Chamber would be my men, they would vote according to orders, while I would pull the strings of an artificial and clandestinely purchased opposition; once this was in place, one could make beautiful speeches, [but] they would enter the ears of my deputies like the wind into the keyhole of a lock. Would you like me now to speak of my Senate?

Montesquieu: I know what this would be like from Caligula.[46]

Sixteenth Dialogue

Certain Guilds

Montesquieu: One of the salient points of your politics would be the annihilation of the parties and the destruction of the collective forces. You have not failed this program; nevertheless, I still see around you things upon which you have not touched. You still have not laid your hands upon the clergy, the University, the bar, the national militia or the commercial guilds. It seems to me that, among them, there is more than one dangerous element.

Machiavelli: I cannot speak to you of everything at once. Let us deal with the national militias, because I would not have to occupy myself with them; their dissolution would necessarily have been one of the first acts of my power. The organization of a citizen's guard could not be reconciled with a regular army, because the armed citizens could transform themselves into agitators at any moment. Nevertheless, this point is not without difficulty. The National Guard is a useless institution, but it bears a popular name. In military States, it flatters the puerile instincts of certain bourgeois classes that – due to a quite ridiculous fault – ally the taste for military parades with commercial habits. As such, the National Guard is an inoffensive prejudice; it would be much more maladroit to clash with it, because the prince must never have the air of separating his interests from those of the city that believes it has found a guarantee in the arming of it inhabitants.

Montesquieu: But then you would dissolve this militia.

Machiavelli: I would dissolve it so as to reorganize it on other bases. The essential would be to place it under the immediate orders of the agents of civilian authority and to remove from it the

[46] Under Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (12-41 AD), the Roman Senate was publicly humiliated.

prerogative of recruiting its leaders through elections; I would be the one to do this. Furthermore, I would only organize it in the places that are suitable, and I would reserve the right to dissolve it again and reestablish it on other bases if circumstances demand it. I have nothing more to say to you on this subject.

Concerning the University, the current order of things is satisfactory to me. You are indeed not unaware that the great bodies of education are no longer organized as they once were. One assures me that, almost everywhere, they have lost their autonomy and are now only public services supported by the State. Thus, as I have told you more than once, the State would be the prince; the moral direction of the public establishments would be in his hands; it would be his agents who inspire the minds of the young. Both the leaders and the members of the teaching bodies of all levels would be named by the government; they would be tied to it; they would depend on it. If there remained – here or there – a few traces of independent organization in some public school or Academy, it would be easy to lead it back to a common center of unity and direction. This would be a matter of a regulation or even a simple ministerial decree. I swiftly pass over the details that do not call for my attention. Nevertheless, I must not abandon this subject without telling you that I regard it as very important that, in the teaching of law, studies of constitutional politics would be prohibited.

Montesquieu: Indeed, you would have very good reasons for this.

Machiavelli: My reasons would be very simple: I do not want the young people who are at the conclusion of their studies to be carelessly occupied with politics. To get mixed up in writing constitutions at the age of 18 is to prepare a tragedy.[47] Such instruction could only falsify the ideas of the young people and prematurely initiate them into matters that surpass the limits of their reason. It is with badly digested, badly understood notions that one prepares fake statesmen, utopians whose temerity of spirit will later be translated into temerity of action.

It will be necessary that the generations that are born under my reign are raised with respect for established institutions and with love for the prince. I would also make a quite ingenuous use of my control over education: in general, I believe that it is a great wrong to neglect contemporary history in the schools. It is at least as essential to know one's own time as that of Pericles. I would like the history of my reign to be taught in the schools while I am still alive. This would be how a new prince enters into the hearts of a generation.

Montesquieu: Of course, this would be a perpetual apology for all of your actions.

Machiavelli: It is obvious that I would not let myself be denigrated. The other means that I would employ would aim at acting against free instruction, which one cannot directly proscribe. The universities contain [veritable] armies of professors whom one can use – outside of the classroom, in their spare time – for the propagation of good doctrines. I would have them open free courses in all the important towns; through these means would I mobilize the instruction and influence of the government.

Montesquieu: In other words, you would absorb, you would confiscate, the very last glimmers of independent thinking for your profit.

Machiavelli: I would confiscate nothing at all.

Montesquieu: Would you permit professors other than yours to popularize science by the same means and without diplomas, without authorization?

Machiavelli: What? Would you want me to authorize clubs?

Montesquieu: No: let us pass on to another subject.

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[47] Here the author is speaking from experience: at the age of 18, he undertook the study of law; his studies were interrupted by the 1848 Revolution.

Machiavelli: Among the multitude of regulatory measures that assure the salvation of my government, there would be those concerning the bar, to which you have called my attention: this would extend the action of my hand beyond what is necessary for the moment. Here I would be touching civil interests and you know that, in this matter, my rule of conduct would be to abstain as much as possible. In the States in which the bar is constituted as a guild, those who are accountable regard the independence of this institution as a guarantee that is inseparable from the right to mount a defense before the courts; that it is a question of their honor, their self-interest, or their lives. It would be quite serious to intervene here, because public opinion could become alarmed over a cry that would not fail to be echoed throughout the entire guild. Nevertheless, I would not be unaware that this order would be a center of influence constantly hostile to my power. You know better than I, Montesquieu, that this profession develops characters who are cold and opinionated in their principles; it develops minds of which the tendency is to seek in the acts of power the element of pure legality. The lawyer does not have the same degree of the elevated sense of social necessity that is possessed by the magistrate; he sees the law from too close and from sides that are too small to have the just sentiment, whereas the magistrate –
Montesquieu: Spare me the apology.
Machiavelli: Yes, because I have not forgotten that I have before me a descendant of the great magistrate who so brilliantly supported the throne of the monarchy in France.
Montesquieu: And who were seldom willing to record edicts that violated the law of the State.
Machiavelli: Thus they ended up overthrowing the State itself. I do not want my courts of justice to be parliaments and the lawyers to be policymakers under the immunity of their robes. The greatest man of the century, whom your homeland had the honor of producing, would say: "I want things such that one can cut out the tongue of a lawyer who speaks ill of the government."[48] Modern customs being gentler, I would not go so far. On the first day and in the circumstances that are suitable, I would limit myself to doing a rather simple thing: I would issue a decree that, with full respect for the independence of the guild, would force the lawyers to receive the nominations for their profession from the sovereign. In the exposition of the motivations for my decree, I believe that it would not be too difficult to demonstrate to those who are accountable that they would find this method of nomination a more serious guarantee than when the guild recruits for itself, that is to say, with elements that are necessarily a little confused.
Montesquieu: It is only too true that one can attribute to the most detestable measures the language of reason! But let us see: what would you do with respect to the clergy? Here is an institution that only depends upon the State on one side and that wields a spiritual power of which the seat is located somewhere else. I declare to you that I know nothing more dangerous for your power than the power that speaks in the name of the heavens and whose roots are everywhere on the earth: do not forget that the Christian word is the word of liberty. No doubt the laws of the State have established a profound demarcation between religious authority and political authority; no doubt the word of the religion's ministers only makes itself heard in the name of the Gospels; but the divine spiritualism that was extracted from the Bible is the stumbling block of political materialism. It was this humble and gentle book, it alone, that destroyed the Roman Empire, Caesarism and its power. The frankly Christian nations still escape the clutches of despotism because Christianity elevates the dignity of mankind too high for

[48] Emperor Napoleon I, decree of 14 December 1810.

despotism to reach it, because it develops the moral forces that human power cannot seize.[49] Beware of the priest: he only depends on God and his influence is everywhere, in the sanctuary, in the family, and in the school. You could have no power over him: his hierarchy is not yours; he obeys a Constitution that does not decide things according to the law or the sword. If you reigned over a Catholic nation, and if you had the clergy as an enemy, you would perish sooner or later, even though the entire population was behind you.

Machiavelli: I do not know why it pleases you to make the priest the apostle of liberty. I have never seen this, neither in ancient nor modern times; I have always found a natural support for absolute power in the priesthood.

Remark it well, if – in the interests of my establishment – I have to make concessions to the democratic spirit of my age, if I take universal suffrage as the basis of my power, these would only be artifices demanded by the times; I would no less claim the benefit of divine right; I would no less be king by the grace of God. By virtue of these things, the clergymen would have to support me, because my principles of authority would be in conformity with theirs. If, nevertheless, they were seditious, if they would profit from their influence so as to make an undeclared war against my government –

Montesquieu: So?

Machiavelli: You who speak of the clergy's influence: are you ignorant of the extent to which it has made itself unpopular in several Catholic States? In France, for example, journalism and the press have ruined it so much in the mind of the masses, they have so ruined its mission, that, if I were to reign there, do you know what I would do?

Montesquieu: What?

Machiavelli: I would provoke a schism in the Church that would break all the ties that bind the clergy to the Court of Rome, because that is the Gordian Knot. I would have my press, my publicists and my politicians all say the following: "Christianity is independent of Catholicism; what Catholicism prohibits, Christianity permits; the independence of the clergy, its submission to the Court of Rome, are purely Catholic dogmas; such an order of things is a perpetual threat to the security of the State. Those loyal to the kingdom must not have a foreign prince as a spiritual leader; this leaves domestic order at the discretion of a power that could turn hostile at any moment; this hierarchy from the Middle Ages, this tutelage of people in their infancy, can no longer be reconciled with the virile genius of modern civilization, with its luminaries and its independence. Why seek in Rome a director of consciences? Why would not the leader of political authority also be the leader of religious authority at the same time? Why should the sovereign not be the pontiff?" Such would be the language that one would have published by the press, especially the liberal press, and it is very probable that the people would listen to it with joy.

Montesquieu: If you believe this, and if you dared to try such an enterprise, you would promptly learn – and in a terrible manner, certainly – the power of Catholicism, even in the nations in which it seems to have weakened.[50]

Machiavelli: Try it? Great God! On bended knee, I beg pardon from our divine master for simply espousing this sacrilegious doctrine inspired by the hatred of Catholicism; but God, who instituted human power, did not forbid it from protecting itself from the enterprises of the clergy,

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[49] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XXIV, Chapter I. [*Translator*: "The Christian religion, which ordains that men should love each other, would, without doubt, have every nation blest with the best civil, the best political laws; because these, next to this religion, are the greatest good that men can give and receive."]

[50] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XXV, Chapter XII.

which furthermore violates the precepts of the Gospels when it is not subordinate to the prince. I know well that the clergy would only conspire due to an elusive influence, but I would find the means of stopping the intention that directs the influence, even if it came from the Court of Rome.

Montesquieu: How?

Machiavelli: It would be sufficient for me to point out to the Holy See the moral state of my people, shuddering under the yoke of the Church, aspiring to break it, capable of separating itself in its turn from the heart of Catholic unity, and throwing itself into the schism of the Greek or Protestant Church.

Montesquieu: A threat instead of action!

Machiavelli: How you deceive yourself, Montesquieu, and you seem to underestimate my respect for the pontifical throne! The only role that I would want to play, the only mission that would belong to my [hypothetical] Catholic sovereign, would precisely be defender of the Church. In contemporary times, as you know, temporal power is seriously threatened by irreligious hatred and the ambition of the northern regions of Italy. So, I would say to the Holy Father: "I will defend you against them all; I will save you; this will be my duty, my mission; but at least do not attack me, support me with your moral influence." Would this be too much to ask when I myself risk my popularity by coming to the defense of temporal power, which today, alas, is completely discredited in the eyes of what one calls European democracy? This would not stop me; not only would I put into check any enterprise against the sovereignty of the Holy See on the part of the neighboring States, but if by misfortune it was attacked, if the papacy was chased from the pontifical States (as has already been seen), only my bayonets would be able to bring it back and would always maintain it, while I am alive.

Montesquieu: Actually, this would be a masterstroke, because if you would make Rome a perpetual garrison, you could almost dispose of the Holy See, as it would reside in a province of your kingdom.

Machiavelli: Do you believe that, after such service rendered to the papacy, it would refuse to support my power; that even the Pope would refuse to crown me in my capital? Are such events without example in history?

Montesquieu: Yes, one sees everything in history. But, finally, if instead of finding in the pulpit of Saint-Peter someone like Borgia or Dubois[51] – as you appear to reckon – you would have in front of you a pope who would resist your schemes and brave your anger: what would you do?

Machiavelli: Why, then it would be quite necessary to come to a decision: under the pretext of defending temporal power, I would bring about his fall.

Montesquieu: You have what one calls genius!

Seventeenth Dialogue

The Police

Montesquieu: I have said that you have genius; genius of a certain kind would truly be necessary to conceive and execute so many things. Now I understand the apologue of the god Vishnu: like the Indian idol, you have a hundred arms and each of your fingers touches a spring. Just as you touch everything, would you be able to see everything?

[51] Pierre Dubois Davaugour was the Governor of New France between 1661 and 1663.

Machiavelli: Yes, because I would make such a vast institution of the police that, at the heart of my kingdom, one half of the people would be able to see the other half. Will you permit me several details on the organization of my police?
Montesquieu: Do so.
Machiavelli: I would begin by creating a ministry of the police, which would be the most important of my ministries and which would centralize – as much abroad as domestically – the many services with which I would endow this part of my administration.
Montesquieu: But if you would do this, your subjects would immediately see that they were enveloped in a frightening net.
Machiavelli: If this ministry displeases, I would abolish it and I would, if you like, name it the Ministry of State. Furthermore, I would organize in the other ministries corresponding services, the great majority of which would be founded, quietly, in what today you call the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You will understand perfectly well that here I would not at all be concerned with diplomacy, but uniquely with the means capable of assuring my security against factions, as much abroad as domestically. So, you can believe that, in this connection, I would find the majority of the monarchs in practically the same situation as I was in, that is to say, very disposed to seconding my views, which would consist in creating international police services in the interests of reciprocal security. If I were to attain this result, which I do not doubt, here would be some of the forms in which my foreign police services would be produced: men of pleasure and good company in the foreign courts, who have their eyes on the intrigues of the princes and those of the so-called exiles, banished revolutionaries among whom – for money – I would not fail to find some to serve me as agents of transmission with respect to the schemes of shady demagogy; who would found political newspapers in the great capitals, printing houses and bookstores placed in the same conditions and secretly subsidized to follow closely the movements of thought through the press.
Montesquieu: It would no longer be against the factions in your kingdom that you would end up conspiring, but against the very soul of humanity.
Machiavelli: As you know, I am not afraid of great words. I would want things so that any statesman who would like to form cabals abroad would be observed, followed from point to point, up to the moment of his return to my kingdom, where he would be incarcerated for good so that he could not be in the position to try again.[52] So as to have the thread of revolutionary intrigues better in my hand, I dream of [implementing] an arrangement that would be quite clever.
Montesquieu: Great God! What would this be?
Machiavelli: I would like to have a prince of my house, seated upon the steps of my throne, who would pretend to be dissatisfied.[53] His mission would consist in posing as a liberal, as a detractor of my government, and in rallying – so as to observe them closely – those who would like to perpetrate a little demagogy at the highest ranks of my kingdom. Insisting upon domestic and foreign intrigues, the prince to whom I would confide these missions would thus play a fool's game with those who would not be in on the secret of the comedy.
Montesquieu: What? You would confide the assignments that you yourself classify as police-related to a prince of your house?

[52] Napoleon III (Charles Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte) launched two failed *coups d'Ét*at (in 1836 and 1840) before finally being successful in 1851.
[53] Louis Bonaparte called upon his nephew, Eugene Louis, to play this role. His faction was called the Palais Royal Group.

Machiavelli: And why not? I knew reigning princes who, in exile, were attached to the secret police of certain cabinets.
Montesquieu: If I continue to listen to you, Machiavelli, it is to have the last word in this frightening wager.
Machiavelli: Do not be indignant, Monsieur de Montesquieu: in the *Spirit of the Laws,* you called me a great man.[54]
Montesquieu: You make me atone for it dearly: it is for my punishment that I listen to you. Pass over the sinister details as fast as you can.
Machiavelli: Within the country, I would be obliged to reestablish the Black Cabinet.[55]
Montesquieu: Reestablish it?
Machiavelli: Your best kings have made use of it. The secrecy of letters must not serve as the cover for conspiracies.
Montesquieu: Here is what would make you tremble: I understand.
Machiavelli: You are deceived, because there would be conspiracies under my reign: there must be.
Montesquieu: Still?
Machiavelli: Perhaps there would be real conspiracies, I am not sure, but there would certainly be simulated ones, as well.[56] At certain moments, when the prince's popularity has decreased, they could be an excellent means of exciting the sympathy of the people in favor of him. By intimidating the public spirit, one could thus obtain, if needed, the severe measures that one would want or one could maintain those that exist. False conspiracies, which of course should only be used with the greatest restraint, would have another advantage: they could permit me to discover real conspiracies, by giving rise to investigations that lead one to seek out everywhere the traces of what one suspects.

Nothing is more precious than the life of the sovereign: it would be necessary that he is surrounded by innumerable guarantees, that is to say, innumerable agents, but it would be necessary that this secret militia is quite hidden, so that the sovereign would not have the air of being afraid when he appears in public. One tells me that in Europe such precautions have been perfected to the point that a prince who walks the streets can have the appearance of a simple citizen who promenades amongst the throngs without being guarded, whereas he is actually surrounded by two or three thousand protectors.

Moreover, I would have my police officers sprinkled among all the ranks of society. There would be no meeting, no committee, no salon, no intimate foyer in which one could not find an ear to hear what is said everywhere, all the time. Alas, for those who wield power, the facility with which men are made into paid informers is a surprising phenomenon. What is even more surprising are the faculties of observation and analysis that develop among the political

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[54] *Author's note*: Book VI, Chapter V. [*Translator*: "Machiavelli attributes the loss of the liberty of Florence to the people's not judging in a body in cases of high treason against themselves, as was customary at Rome. For this purpose they had eight judges: 'but the few,' says Machiavelli, 'are corrupted by a few.' I should willingly adopt the maxim of this great man."]
[55] A secret operation in which the letters written by people under the suspicion were intercepted, opened and read before being sent back on their way. Conducted with some regularity before the French Revolution, especially under the reign of Louis XV.
[56] Guy Debord, *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988): "Thus, a thousand of conspiracies in favor of the established order tangle and clash almost everywhere, with the overlapping of networks and secret questions or actions always pushed harder; and the process of rapid integration is pushed into each branch of the economy, politics and culture."

police; you have no idea of their ruses, disguises and instincts, of the passion they bring to their work, their impenetrability; there are men of all ranks who pursue this trade – how can I describe it? – due to a kind of love for the art.
Montesquieu: Ah! Draw the curtain!
Machiavelli: Yes, there are indeed, in the depths of power, secrets that terrify those who see them. I will spare you any further dark things. With the system that I would organize, I would be so completely informed that I could even tolerate certain actions, because at any minute of the day I would have the power to stop them.
Montesquieu: Tolerate them? Why?
Machiavelli: Because in the European States, the absolute monarch must not indiscreetly use force; because at the bottom of society there are always subterranean activities about which one can do nothing if they are not formulated; because it is necessary to use great care not to alarm public opinion about the security of power; because the [political] parties are content with murmurs, inoffensive teasing, when they are reduced to powerlessness; and because pretending to disarm them down to their bad mood would be folly. Thus, one would hear them complain, here and there, in the newspapers, in books; they would make allusions to the government in several speeches or in several legal appeals; under diverse pretexts they would make several small demonstrations of their existence – all this would be quite timid, I swear to you, and if the members of the public would be informed of it, they would laugh. One would find me quite good because I tolerate it; I could pass for too good-natured. This would be why I would tolerate what of course appears to me to be harmless; I would not want it said that my government is touchy.
Montesquieu: This language reminds me that you have left a lacunae, and a very serious one, in your decree.
Machiavelli: What's that?
Montesquieu: You have not touched upon individual liberty.
Machiavelli: I would not touch it.
Montesquieu: Do you believe so? If you conserve the faculty of toleration, you would principally conserve the right to hinder all that appears dangerous to you. If the interests of the State or even a slightly pressing concern demands that a man should be arrested, at a particular moment somewhere in your kingdom, how could you do that if there were still some law relating to *habeas corpus*? Wouldn't the arrest of an individual be preceded by certain formalities, certain guarantees? While we were doing that, time would be passing.
Machiavelli: If you will permit me: if I would respect individual liberty, I would not in this regard prohibit myself from making several useful modifications in the judicial organizations.
Montesquieu: I know it well.
Machiavelli: Oh, do not be triumphant: this would be the simplest thing in the world. In general, who hands down rulings concerning individual liberty in your parliamentary States?
Montesquieu: It is the Council of Magistrates, the number and independence of which are the guarantees of those who are held accountable by it.
Machiavelli: This is a completely vicious organization. How can justice have the speed necessary to apprehend malefactors if it moves with the slowness of a Council's deliberations?
Montesquieu: What malefactors?
Machiavelli: I speak of the people who commit murder, theft, the crimes and offenses subject to common law. It will be necessary to give this jurisdiction the unity of action that is necessary for it; I would replace your Council with a single magistrate tasked with handing down rulings concerning the arrest of malefactors.

Montesquieu: But here it would not be a matter of malefactors. With the help of this disposition, you would threaten the liberty of all citizens. At least you should distinguish between accusations.
Machiavelli: This is precisely what I do not want to do. Is not the one who undertakes something against the government as guilty, and even guiltier, than the one who commits an ordinary crime or offense? Passion or poverty might explain many mistakes, but what forces people to be occupied with politics? I also would not want any distinctions between common-law offenses and political offenses. What modern governments have the spirit to establish criminal courts for their detractors? In my kingdom, the insolent journalist would be confounded in the prisons with the simple thief and hauled before the same correctional jurisdictions. The conspirator would be seated before the criminal jury, side by side with the forger, with the murderer. This would be an excellent legislative modification, you will note, because public opinion – upon seeing the conspirator treated just like the ordinary malefactor – would end up confounding the two types in the same scorn.[57]
Montesquieu: You would ruin the very basis of the moral sense. But what would that matter to you? What astonishes me is that you would keep the criminal jury.
Machiavelli: In the centralized States such as mine, there would be public functionaries who would impanel the members of the jury. In matters of simple political offenses, my minister of justice could still, when necessary, fill the chamber with judges called upon to be knowledgeable.
Montesquieu: Your domestic legislation is irreproachable. It is time to move on to other subjects.

PART THREE

Eighteenth Dialogue

Finances and their Spirit

Montesquieu: Up until now, you have only occupied yourself with the forms of government and the rigorous laws necessary for its maintenance. This is much; it is not everything. You must still resolve the most difficult problem for a sovereign who wants to bring about absolute power in a European State that is accustomed to representative customs.
Machiavelli: And what is that problem?
Montesquieu: The problem of your finances.
Machiavelli: This point has not remained foreign to my preoccupations, because I recall having told you that everything would be resolved by a question of numbers.
Montesquieu: Very well, but here it is the very nature of things that would resist you.
Machiavelli: You worry me, I will confess, because I come from a century of barbarity from the standpoint of political economy and I understand very little of such matters.
Montesquieu: I am reassured about you. Nevertheless, permit me to address a question to you. I recall having written in the *Spirit of the Laws* that an absolute monarch is constrained by the

[57] See the following comment in Book II, Chapter VI, of Victor Hugo's *Napoleon the Little*: "Call the causes: correctional police, sixth chamber; first cause, one Roumage, swindler; second cause, one Lamennais, writer. This has a good effect, and accustoms the citizens to talk about writers and swindlers without distinguishing them."

principles of his government to only impose weak tributes upon his subjects.[58] Would you at least give the voters this satisfaction?

Machiavelli: I would not promise this and, in truth, I know nothing more contemptible than the proposition that you have expressed. How could the apparatus of monarchical power, the splendor and the representation of a great court, exist without the imposition of heavy sacrifices on the nation? Your thesis might be true in Turkey or Persia, among the little people who have no industry, who moreover do not have the means of paying taxes. But in European societies, in which wealth overflows from the sources of work and presents itself to taxation under so many forms; in which luxury is a means of governing; in which the support and expenditures of all the public services are centralized in the hands of the State; in which the high public officials, all of the dignitaries, are salaried at great cost: once more, how could one restrain oneself from reasonable tributes, as you say, when one is sovereign master?

Montesquieu: This is very just and I abandon my thesis, the true meaning of which has escaped you. Thus, your government would cost dearly; it is obvious that it would cost more dearly than a representative government.

Machiavelli: This is possible.

Montesquieu: Yes, and it is here that the difficulty would begin. I know how representative governments provide for their financial needs, but I have no idea about the means of existence of absolute power in modern societies. If I interrogate the past, I see very clearly that absolute power can only exist in the following conditions: in the first place, the absolute monarch must be a military leader; no doubt you realize this.

Machiavelli: Yes.

Montesquieu: It would moreover be necessary that he is a conqueror, because it is during war that he must demand the principal resources that are necessary for him to maintain his pomp and his armies. If he would [also] demand taxes from his subjects, he would crush them. You can see from this that it is not true that the absolute monarch must husband his resources because he spends less: the law of his subsistence is elsewhere. Therefore, war today no longer brings profits to those who make them: it ruins the victors as well as the vanquished. Here a source of revenue escapes you.

Taxes remain, but of course the absolute prince must be able to do without the consent of his subjects in this regard. In despotic States, there is a legal fiction that permits their leaders to collect discretionary taxes: in the law, the sovereign is supposed to possess all the goods of his subjects. When he takes something from them, he only takes what belongs to him. With the result that there is no resistance.

Finally, it is necessary that the prince can, without discussion or oversight, dispose of the resources that taxes have procured for him. In this matter, such are the inevitable bad habits of absolutism; you will agree that there would be much to do to return from it. If modern people are as indifferent to the loss of their liberties as you say they are, this would not be the case when it comes to their [financial] interests; their interests are tied to an economic regime that excludes despotism. If you do not have despotism in financial matters, you will not have it in matters of politics. Your entire reign would collapse under the weight of budgetary pressures.

Machiavelli: I am very tranquil on this point, as on the others.

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[58] *Author's note*: Book XIII, Chapter X. [*Translator*: "Taxes ought to be very light in despotic governments: otherwise who would be at the trouble of tilling the land? Besides, how is it possible to pay heavy duties in a government that makes no manner of return to the different contributions of the subject?"]

Montesquieu: This is what remains to be seen; let us proceed. The vote on taxes by the representatives of the nation is a fundamental rule of the modern states: would you accept the vote on taxes?
Machiavelli: Why wouldn't I?
Montesquieu: Oh! Beware, this principle is the most purposeful consecration of the sovereignty of the nation: because it recognizes the right to vote on taxes, it also recognizes the right to refuse them, to limit them, to reduce to nothing the prince's means of action and, consequently, to annihilate them, if need be.
Machiavelli: You are categorical. Continue.
Montesquieu: Those who vote on taxes are the very ones who pay them. Here their interests are in close solidarity with those of the nation, to the point that the nation would necessarily have its eyes open. You would find its representatives as little accommodating concerning legislative appropriations as you found them easy concerning their liberties.
Machiavelli: Here the weakness of your argument becomes apparent: I beseech you to take note of two considerations that you have forgotten. In the first place, the nation's representatives would be salaried; taxpayers or not, they would personally be disinterested in the vote on taxes.
Montesquieu: I agree that this arrangement would be practical and that your remark is just.
Machiavelli: You see the disadvantage of envisioning things too systematically; the smallest skillful modification alters everything else. Perhaps you would be right if I had based my power on the aristocracy or the bourgeois classes that could – at any given moment – refuse me their cooperation. But (and this is second consideration you forgot) my base of action would be in the proletariat, in the masses who possess nothing. The State's taxes would not weight so heavily on them, and I would even arrange things so that taxes do not weigh on them at all. Fiscal measures hardly preoccupy the working classes; they do not reach them.
Montesquieu: If I have understood you well, this is very clear: you would make those who possess property pay, according to the sovereign will of those who do not possess property. This would be the price that the many and the impoverished impose on the rich.
Machiavelli: Would this not be just?
Montesquieu: This is not even true, because in contemporary societies – from the economic point of view – there are neither rich nor poor people. The artisan of yesterday is the bourgeois of tomorrow by virtue of the law of labor. If you were to touch the territorial or industrial bourgeoisie through taxation, do you know what would happen?

In reality, you would render the emancipation through work more difficult; you would keep a great number of workers in the ranks of the proletariat. It is an aberration to believe that the proletarian would profit from injuries made to production. By using fiscal laws to impoverish those who possess property, one would only create artificial situations and, at a given time, one would even impoverish those who do not possess property.
Machiavelli: These are beautiful theories, but I am quite decided upon opposing them with theories that are just as beautiful, if you would like me to.
Montesquieu: No, because you still have not resolved the problem that I posed to you. First you must obtain that which offsets the expenditures of absolute sovereignty. This would not be as easy as you might think, even with a legislative chamber in which you would be assured of the majority, even with the complete power of the popular mandate with which you would be invested. For example, tell me how you would bend the financial mechanisms of modern States to the exigencies of absolute power. I repeat to you: here the very nature of things would resist you. The civilized people of Europe have surrounded the administration of their finances with

such tight, jealous and numerous guarantees that they do not leave more room for either tax collection or the arbitrary use of public funds.

Machiavelli: What is this marvelous system?

Montesquieu: I can indicate it to you in a couple of words. The perfection of the financial system in modern times rests upon two fundamental bases: *inspection* and *publicity*. It is here that the guarantee of the taxpayers essentially resides. A sovereign cannot touch either one without indirectly saying to his subjects: "You have order, I want disorder; I want obscurity in the management of public funds; I have need of it because there are a mass of expenditures that I want to be able to make without your approval; there are deficits that I want the ability to mask; there are debts that I want to have the means of disguising or enlarging according to the circumstances."

Machiavelli: You begin well.

Montesquieu: In the free and industrious countries, everyone knows financial matters intimately, due to necessity, self-interest and situation, and your government would not deceive anyone in this regard.

Machiavelli: Who told you that one wanted to deceive?

Montesquieu: In the final analysis, all of the work of financial administration – as vast and complicated in the details as it is – ends up in two very simple operations: *receiving* and *spending*.

It is around these two orders of financial actions that gravitate multitudes of laws and special regulations, which have two very simple things as their common objects: to somehow make the taxpayer only pay the necessary and regularly established taxes; and to somehow make the government only apply public funds to the expenses approved by the nation.

I leave to the side all that relates to the basis and method of tax collection, to the practical means of assuring the completeness of the collection, the order and precision of the movements of public funds; these are details of accounting that I do not have to explain to you. I only want to show you how publicity proceeds along with accounting in the best-organized systems of financial policy in Europe.

One of the most important problems to resolve is how to fully bring out of obscurity, to render visible to all eyes, the elements of collection and expenditures on which the use of the public fortunes held in the hands of the government is based. This result was obtained by the creation of what one calls in modern language the State budget, which is the outline or estimate of collected taxes and expenditures, previewed not for a distant period of time, but each year for use the following year. The annual budget is thus the capital point and, in a certain way, the generator of the financial situation that improves or worsens in proportion to its proven results. The items that compose the budget are prepared by the different ministers in the departments into which their services are placed. As the basis for their work, these ministers take the allocations of previous budgets, to which they introduce modifications, additions and necessary cutbacks. The whole thing is submitted to the minister of finance, who redacts the documents that have been transmitted to him and who presents to the legislative assembly what one [today] calls the projected budget. This great work – published, printed and reproduced in a thousand newspapers – unveils to all eyes the domestic and foreign policies of the State, as well as its civil, judicial and military administration. It is examined, discussed and voted upon by the country's representatives, after which it is executed in the same manner as the other laws of the State.

Machiavelli: Allow me to admire the clarity of deduction and the propriety of terminology – completely modern – with which the illustrious author of the *Spirit of the Laws* has extracted the

slightly vague financial theories and sometimes slightly ambiguous financial terms from the great work that has rendered him immortal.
Montesquieu: The *Spirit of the Laws* is not a financial treatise.
Machiavelli: Your sobriety on this point all the more merits being praised, as you have been able to speak quite competently. Please continue, I beseech you: I follow you with the greatest interest.

Nineteenth Dialogue

The Budgetary System

Montesquieu: One can say that the creation of the budgetary system has involved all the other financial guarantees that are today shared by the well-regulated political societies.

Thus, the first law that was necessarily imposed by the economy of the budget mandated that the requested appropriations are in relation to the existing resources. This is an equilibrium that must constantly be rendered visible by the real and authentic figures. To better assure this important result – so that the legislator who votes on the propositions that are made to him does not submit too enthusiastically – one has had recourse to a very wise measure. One has divided the general budget of the State into two distinct budgets: *the budget of expenditures and the budget of collections,* which must be voted upon separately, each one according to a special law.

In this manner, the attention of the legislator is obligated to concentrate, by turns and independently, upon the active and passive situations, and his determinations are not influenced in advance by the general balance of receipts and expenditures.

He scrupulously checks these two elements and, in the final analysis, it is from their comparison, their close harmony, that the general vote on the budget is born.
Machiavelli: All this is very good, but is it by chance that the expenditures are contained within an impassable circle by the legislative vote? Is this possible? Can a chamber prohibit a sovereign in power from unforeseen expenses by [passing] emergency measures, but without paralyzing the exercise of executive power?
Montesquieu: I see that this would inconvenience you, but I do not regret it.
Machiavelli: In the constitutional States, is not the faculty of using ordinances to set up supplementary or extraordinary appropriations between legislative sessions formally reserved by the sovereign?
Montesquieu: Yes, this is true, but on the condition that these ordinances are converted into law at the next meeting of the chambers. Their approval must intervene.
Machiavelli: I would not find it bad if they intervened once the expenses was made, so as to ratify what had already been done.
Montesquieu: I can believe that, but, unfortunately, one is not limited to this fact alone. The most advanced modern financial legislation prohibits departures from the normal provisions of the budget, other than by laws that set up supplementary and extraordinary collections. Expenditures can no longer be made without the intervention of legislative power.
Machiavelli: But then one could no longer govern.
Montesquieu: It appears that one can. Modern States have understood that legislative votes on the budget end up being illusory if supplementary and extraordinary collections are abused; that expenditures must definitely be limited when resources are naturally limited; that political events cannot make financial actions vary from one instant to another; and that the recess between

sessions is not so long that it is impossible to provide usefully for them through extra-budgetary votes.

One has gone even further: the modern States have made things such that, once the resources are voted for this or that service, they can be returned to the treasury if they were not used; these States have thought that the government – remaining within the limits of the allotted revenues – should not use the funds assigned to one service to finance another; the government should not cover this one, expose that one, by the means of transferring funds from ministry to ministry through the use of ordinances; because any of these means would elude their legislative destination and, by an ingenious detour, return the country to financial arbitrariness.

For that purpose, one has imagined what one calls *the specialization of collections by headings*, that is to say, that the vote on expenditures takes place according to special headings that only pertain to correlative services and that are of the same nature for all the ministries. Thus, for example, heading A includes expense A for all the ministries; heading B, expense B; and so forth. The result of this arrangement is that unused revenues must be annulled in the accounts of the various ministries and reported as receipts in the budget of the following year. I do not need to tell you that ministerial responsibility is the sanction of all these measures. That which forms the crowning achievement of the financial guarantees is the establishment of a chamber of accounting, a kind of Court of Cassation, tasked with permanently exercising the functions of jurisdiction and auditing of the accounts, the handling and use of public funds, even indicating the parts of the financial administration that can be bettered from the double point of view of expenditures and collections. These explanations will have to suffice. Do you not find that, with an organization such as this, absolute power would be quite obstructed?

Machiavelli: I am still dismayed by this financial foray. You have taken me from my weak side: I have told you that I understand little of these matters, but I would have – you best believe it – ministers who would know how to respond to all this and demonstrate the danger of the majority of these measures.

Montesquieu: Could you not do this yourself?

Machiavelli: If need be. It is up to my ministers to come up with beautiful theories: this would be their principal occupation. As for me, I would rather speak to you of finances as a statesman than as an economist. There is something that you too easily forget: of all political matters, those that concern finances most easily loan themselves to the maxims of *The Prince.* The States that have such methodically ordered budgets and such well-regulated official writings remind me of the merchants who have perfectly kept books and who finally come to ruin. Thus, which among your parliamentary governments have the largest budgets? Which one requires more money than the democratic republic of the United States or the royal republic of England? It is true that the immense resources of this latter power are placed at the service of the deepest and best-understood politics.

Montesquieu: You have exceeded the question. What are you getting at?

Machiavelli: This: the regulations of the financial administration of the States have no relation to those of the domestic economy, which appear to be the type of your conceptions.

Montesquieu: Ah! The same distinction as between politics and morality?

Machiavelli: Yes, indeed. Is this not universally recognized and practiced? Are not things the same today as they were in your times (which were much less advanced in this regard), and did not you yourself say that the States allow lapses in financial matters that would make the son of the most excessive family blush?

Montesquieu: It is true, I did say this, but if you can derive an argument that is favorable to your thesis, I would be really surprised.
Machiavelli: No doubt you would like to say that it is not necessary to avail oneself of what is done, but what must be done.
Montesquieu: Precisely.
Machiavelli: I would respond that it is necessary to want the possible and that what is universally done cannot fail to be done.
Montesquieu: In pure practice, I would agree.
Machiavelli: And I have some idea that, if we would balance the accounts, as you say, my government – absolute, as it would be – would cost less dearly than yours. But let us leave aside this dispute, which is without interest. You are truly quite deceived if you believe that I would be distressed by the perfection of the financial systems that you have explained to me. I rejoice with you about the regularity of tax collection and the completeness of it; I rejoice – quite sincerely – about the exactitude of the accounting. Thus, you believe that, for the absolute sovereign, it would be a question of sticking his hands into the State's coffers, of personally handling public funds. This luxury of precautions is truly puerile. Is the danger really here? Once more: so much the better if the funds would be collected, moved and circulated with the miraculous precision that you have described. I intend to make use of all of these marvels of accounting, all of these organic beauties in financial matters, for the splendor of my reign.
Montesquieu: You have the *vis comica*.[59] What is more surprising to me in your financial theories is the fact that they are in formal contradiction with what you said in *The Prince,* in which you rigorously recommend, not just economy in financial matters, but avarice, as well.[60]
Machiavelli: If you are surprised, you are wrong, because – in this point of view – the times are no longer the same, and one of my most essential principles is to accommodate myself to the times. Let us return and, I beseech you, leave a little to the side what you have just told me concerning your chamber of accounting. Does this institution belong to the judiciary?
Montesquieu: No.
Machiavelli: Then it is a purely administrative body. I suppose that it is perfectly irreproachable. But the Good advances when this body has verified all of the accounts! Can it prevent the appropriations from being voted upon, the expenditures from being made? Its verifications do not reveal any more about the situation than the budgets do. It is a chamber for recording without remonstrance; it is an ingenious institution; let us not speak of it; I would maintain it such as it is, without worry.
Montesquieu: You would maintain it? Thus you would count upon touching other parts of the financial organization?
Machiavelli: I imagine that you would not doubt this. After a political *coup d'état,* is not a financial one inevitable? Should I not use my all-powerful position for this, as for the rest? What magic virtue would preserve your financial regulations? I am like a giant in some story,[61] whom the pygmies have tied down while he slept; upon rising, he breaks these bounds without even

[59] Latin for "comic force."
[60] *Author's note*: *The Prince*, Chapter XVI. [*Translator*: "[I]f he is prudent he must not worry about the reputation of miser: because with time he will be considered even more liberal, when it is seen that because of his parsimony his income suffices him, that he can defend himself against whomever makes war on him, and that he can undertake enterprises without weighing down the peoples; by which token he comes to use liberality towards all those from whom he does not take, who are infinite, and miserliness toward all those from whom he does not give, who are few."]
[61] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

perceiving them. The day after my ascension, voting upon the budget would not even be a question; I would decree it, extraordinarily; I would dictatorially set up the necessary appropriations and I would have them approved by my Council of State.
Montesquieu: And you would continue in this way?
Machiavelli: No. Starting the following year, I would return to legality, because I do not intend to destroy anything directly, as I have already told you several times. One has regulated matters before me; I would regulate in my turn. You have spoken to me of the vote on the budget through two distinct laws: I consider this to be a bad arrangement. One would make a better accounting of the financial situation when one votes for the budget of collections and the budget of expenditures at the same time. My government would be a laboring government; the precious time needed for public deliberations would not be lost in useless discussions. Thenceforth, the budgets of collections and expenditures would be included in a single law.
Montesquieu: Good. And the law that prohibits supplementary appropriations other than by the preliminary vote of the chamber?
Machiavelli: I would abrogate it. You will understand why.
Montesquieu: Yes.
Machiavelli: It is a law that would be inapplicable under any regime.
Montesquieu: And the specialization of appropriations, the vote according to headings?
Machiavelli: It would be impossible to maintain them: one would no longer vote upon the budget of expenditures by heading, but by ministry.
Montesquieu: This appears to me as big as a mountain, because voting according to ministry would only provide a total for examination in each case. This would be like using a bottomless barrel instead of a sieve to sift through the public expenditures.
Machiavelli: This is not exact, because each appropriation, proposed *en bloc,* would present distinct elements or headings, as you call them. One could examine them if one wanted, but one would vote for them according to ministry, with the option of transferring funds from one heading to another.
Montesquieu: And from ministry to ministry?
Machiavelli: No, I would not go as far as that; I would remain within the limits of necessity.
Montesquieu: Your moderation is consummate. Do you believe that these financial innovations would not throw the country into a state of alarm?
Machiavelli: Why would it be more alarmed by this than by my other political measures?
Montesquieu: Because these would touch everyone's material interests.
Machiavelli: Oh! These would be very subtle distinctions.
Montesquieu: Subtle? I find this word well chosen. Do not engage in any subtlety yourself, and simply say that a country that cannot defend its liberties cannot defend its money.
Machiavelli: Why would one complain, since I have conserved the essential principles of public rights in financial matters? Are not taxes regularly established and regularly collected? Are not appropriations regularly voted upon? Is not everything here, as elsewhere, supported by the base of popular suffrage? No, no doubt my government would not be reduced to indigence. The people who acclaimed me their king: not only would they easily tolerate the splendor of the throne, but they would want it, they would seek it out in a prince who is the expression of their power. They really hate only one thing: the wealth of their equals.
Montesquieu: Don't try to get away just yet; you are not at the end; I would rein you in with the unyielding hand of the budget. Whatever you say, its very organization would repress the development of your power. It is a framework that one could exceed, but one only exceeds it at

one's risk and peril. The budget would be published; one would know its elements; it would remain a barometer of the situation.
Machiavelli: Let us finish this point, since you wish to.

Twentieth Dialogue

The Budgetary System, continued

Machiavelli: You have said that the budget is a framework. Yes, but it is an elastic framework that can stretch as far as one wants. I would always be within it, never outside.
Montesquieu: What do you mean?
Machiavelli: Is it me who must inform you about how things work, even in the States in which the budgetary organization is pushed to its highest point of perfection? Perfection consists precisely in knowing how to use ingenious artifices to escape from a system of limitation that in reality is purely fictional.

What is your annually approved budget? Nothing other than a provisional regulation, an outline of the principal financial developments. The situation is only definite after the completion of the expenditures that necessity has required over the course of the year. In your budgets, one recognizes many kinds of appropriations that respond to all possible contingencies: appropriations that are complementary, supplementary, extraordinary, exceptional and so forth. And each one of these appropriations forms, on its own, as many distinct budgets. Therefore, this is how things work: the general budget, which is voted on at the beginning of the year, totals (I suppose) an appropriation of 800 million. When one has reached the mid-year point, the financial facts already no longer correspond to the first provisions; then one presents to the Chambers what one calls a corrected budget, and it adds 100 or 150 million to the original figure. Then comes the supplementary budget: it adds on another 50 or 60 million; finally, there is the liquidation [the funds needed to amortize the debt], which adds 15, 20 or 30 million more. In brief, in the general balance of accounts, the total difference is a third of the foreseen expenditures. It is in this last figure that, in the form of a validation, the legislative vote of the Chambers survives. In this manner, at the end of 10 years, the budget could double or even triple.
Montesquieu: I do not doubt that this accumulation of expenditures can be the result of your financial improvements, but nothing similar would happen in the States in which one would avoid your bad habits. In addition, you are not yet at the end: it would be quite necessary, in sum, that the expenditures are balanced by the tax collections. How would you do this?
Machiavelli: Here everything would consist in what might be called the art of grouping the figures and in certain distinctions among expenditures, with the aid of which one could obtain the necessary latitude. Thus, for example, the distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary budgets would be a great help. Under the cover of the word "extraordinary," one could quite easily get passed certain contestable expenditures and certain more or less problematic collections. For example, I might have 20 million in expenditures, and it is necessary to come up with 20 million in collections. I bear a war indemnity of 20 million, still not collected, but which will be collected later, or I bear as a receipt an increase of 20 million in taxes, which will be realized the next year. So much for the collections; I need not multiply examples. As for the expenditures, one could appeal to the opposite procedure: in place of adding, one would subtract. Thus, one would detach the costs of the collection of taxes from the budget of expenditures.
Montesquieu: And, I beseech you to explain, under what pretext?

Machiavelli: One could say, and with reason (according to me), that this is not a State expenditure. Thanks to the same reason, one could even have the costs of provincial and communal services not figure in the budget of expenditures.
Montesquieu: I dispute none of this, as you can see; but what would you do with the appropriations that are deficits and the expenditures that you would eliminate?
Machiavelli: In this matter, the key idea is the distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary budgets. It is to the extraordinary budget that the expenditures that preoccupy you would refer.
Montesquieu: But, finally, these two budgets are totaled together and the definitive figure of the expenditures appears.
Machiavelli: One must not total them: on the contrary, the ordinary budget would appear alone; the extraordinary budget would be an annex to which one attends by other means.
Montesquieu: And what would they be?
Machiavelli: Do not make me anticipate. Thus you see that, above all, there would be particular manners of presenting the budget, of hiding the growing increase in it, if need be. It would not be the government that has the necessity of acting in this fashion; there are inexhaustible resources in the industrious countries, but – as you have remarked – these are avaricious, suspicious countries: they dispute the most necessary expenditures. No more than the other forms, financial politics cannot put its cards on the table: one would be stopped at each step; but, in short, and (I agree) thanks to the perfecting of the budgetary system, everything is regained, everything is classified and, if the budget has its mysteries, it also has its clarities.
Montesquieu: But no doubt only for the initiates. I see that you would make of financial legislation a formalism as impenetrable as the judicial procedures of the Romans during the era of the Twelve Tables.[62] But let us proceed. Since your expenditures would increase, it would be quite necessary that your resources increase in the same proportion. Like Julius Caesar, would you find a value of two billion Francs in the State's coffers or would you discover the sources of the Potosi?[63]
Machiavelli: Your barbs are quite ingenuous. I would do what all governments do: I would borrow.
Montesquieu: It is here that I wanted to lead you. It is certain that few governments do not have the necessity of resorting to loans; but it is also certain that they are obligated to use them with discretion; they do not know how – without involving immorality and danger – to burden the generations to come with loans that are exorbitant and disproportionate to probable resources. How are loans made? By the issuance of securities that contain obligations on the part of the government to pay sums proportionate to the capital that is deposited with it. If the loan is at 5 percent, for example, the State – at the end of 20 years – must pay a sum equal to the loaned capital; at the end of 40 years, a double sum; at the end of 60 years, a triple sum, and yet it still remains a debtor for the totality of that capital. One can add that, if the State indefinitely increases its debts, without doing anything to diminish them, it will be brought to the impossibility of borrowing any more or bankruptcy. Such results are easy to grasp: there is no country in which every person would not understand them. The modern States have also wanted to set necessary limitations on the growth of taxes. To this purpose, they have imagined what one has called the system of amortization, which is an arrangement truly admirable for the simplicity and the practical method of its execution. One creates a special fund, of which the capitalized

[62] Circa 449 BCE, the display of laws previously understood to be unwritten.
[63] An area in Peru, known for its silver mines.

resources are intended for the permanent redemption of the public debt through successive fractions, with the result that, every time the State borrows, it must endow the amortization fund with a certain amount of capital intended to wipe out the new debts in a given period of time. You will see that this method of limitation is indirect and that this it its power. By means of the amortization, the nation says to its government: "You will borrow if you are forced to, but you must still preoccupy yourself with meeting the new obligations that you incur in my name. When one is ceaselessly obligated to amortize, one will look twice before borrowing. If you regularly amortize, I will allow your loans to pass."

Machiavelli: Any why would you want me to amortize, I ask you? In which States is amortization a regular practice? Even in England it is suspended; your example falls flat, I imagine: what is done nowhere cannot be done.

Montesquieu: Thus you would suppress amortization?

Machiavelli: I did not say so, not at all. I would let this mechanism function and my government would use the funds that it produces; this arrangement presents a great advantage. During the presentation of the budget, one could from time to time make the products of amortization figure as revenues for the following year.

Montesquieu: And in the following year, they would figure an as expenditures.

Machiavelli: I do not know, it would depend on the circumstances, because I would regret it if this financial institution did not proceed more regularly. My ministers would explain the matter in an extremely sad manner. My God, I would not claim that – from the financial standpoint – my administration might not have some criticizable aspects, but, when the facts have been presented, one would pass over many things. Do not forget that the administration of finances would also be *an administration of the press.*

Montesquieu: How is that?

Machiavelli: Did you not tell me that the very essence of the budget would be publicity?

Montesquieu: Yes.

Montesquieu: So: would not the budgets be accompanied by reviews, reports and official documents of all kinds? What resources of public communications would not available to the sovereign if he is surrounded by skillful men? I would want my minister of finances to speak the language of figures with an admirable clarity and that his literary style would also be of an irreproachable purity.

It would be good to ceaselessly repeat what is true: "The management of public funds is now placed in the light of day."

This incontestable proposition would have to be presented in a thousand forms. I would like that one writes lines like these: "Our accounting system, the fruit of long experience, is distinguished by the clarity and certitude of its procedures. It puts obstacles in the way of abuse and gives to no one – from the least functionary *to the Chief of State himself* – the means of diverting the least sum from its destination or of making irregular usages of it."

One would keep to your language. How could one do better? And one would say: "The excellence of the financial system rests upon two bases: *accounting* and *publicity.* Accounting prevents a single coin from leaving the hands of the taxpayers and entering the public coffers, from passing from one coffer to another, or from going into the hands of a creditor of the State without the legitimacy of its collection, the regularity of its movements or the legitimacy of its use being controlled by responsible agents, verified by irrevocable magistrates and definitively sanctioned in the legislative accounts of the Chamber."

Montesquieu: O, Machiavelli! You still joke around, but your banter has something infernal about it.
Machiavelli: You forget where we are.
Montesquieu: You defy the heavens.
Machiavelli: God fathoms all hearts.
Montesquieu: Continue.
Machiavelli: At the beginning of the budgetary year, the administrator of finances would announce: "Until now, nothing has altered the provisions of the current budget. Without creating illusions, one has the most serious reasons to hope that, for the first time in years, the budget – despite the recourse to loans – will present a real balance in the final accounting. This result, which is so desirable, obtained in exceptionally difficult times [such as these], is the best proof that the ascending movement of the public treasury has never slowed down." Is this well said?
Montesquieu: Continue.
Machiavelli: One would speak of amortization, which preoccupied you a little while ago, and one would say: "Amortization will soon function. If the project that one has conceived in this regard is completed, if the State's revenues continue to grow, it will not be impossible that – in the budget that will be presented in five years – the public accounts will be balanced by an surplus of tax revenues."
Montesquieu: Your hopes are long term. But, with respect to amortization: if, after having promised to make it work, one has not done so, what would you say?
Machiavelli: One would say that the moment was not well chosen, that it will be necessary to wait longer. One could go even further: recommendable economists would contest the real efficacy of amortization. You know these theories: I could recall them to you.
Montesquieu: That would be useless.
Machiavelli: One would publish these theories in the unofficial newspapers; one could insinuate them oneself; finally, one could avow them more openly.
Montesquieu: How? After you recognized the efficacy of amortization and exalted its benefits?
Machiavelli: Does not the data available to the science change? Is there an enlightened government that, little by little, does not follow the economic progress of its century?
Montesquieu: Nothing more [that is] peremptory. Let us leave amortization. When you have not kept any of your promises; when you find yourself overwhelmed by expenses; after having to foreseen a surplus of tax revenues: what would you say?
Machiavelli: If need be, one would brazenly agree. If it emanated from a strong power, such frankness would honor the government and touch the people. On the other hand, my minister of finances would devote himself to removing all significance from the elevation of expenditures. He would say what is true: "Financial practice demonstrates that deficits are never entirely confirmed; a certain quantity of new resources ordinarily survives over the course of the year, notably due to the accumulation of tax revenues; moreover, a considerable portion of approved appropriations – not having been put to use – were annulled."
Montesquieu: Would this happen?
Machiavelli: As you know, sometimes in financial matters there are readymade words, stereotypical phrases, that have great effect on the public, calming it, reassuring it.

Thus, by artfully presenting this or that debt, one would say: "This figure is not at all exorbitant; it is normal, it is in conformity with previous budgets; the amount of the floating debt is nothing but reassuring." There are a host of similar locutions of which I will not speak to you because there are other, more important artifices to which I must draw your attention.

First of all, in all official documents, it would be necessary to insist upon the development of prosperity, commercial activity and the *ever-advancing progress of consumption*.[64]

Taxpayers riot less due to the disproportion of the budgets – [even] when one repeats such things to them, and one can repeat them to the point of satiety without ever challenging them – than authentic accounts produce a magical effect on the minds of bourgeois fools. When the balance of the budget is broken and when one wants to prepare the public for some kind of miscalculation or misfortune in the following year, one should say in advance in some kind of report: *next year the deficit will only be such and such.*

If the deficit is lower than expected, this would be a real triumph; if it is greater, one would say: "*The deficit was greater than what we expected, but it was greater the preceding year.* In the final accounting, the situation is better, because we spent less and yet we have been through exceptionally difficult circumstances: war, shortages, epidemics, unforeseen crises of subsistence, etc. But next year, the increase of collections will in all probability permit the attainment of a long-desired balance: the debt will be reduced, the budget *properly balanced.* This progress will continue, one hopes, and, except for extraordinary events, equilibrium will become the custom of our finances, as well as the law."

Montesquieu: This is high comedy: "the custom will become the law." It will never happen, because I imagine that, under your reign, there will always be some extraordinary circumstances, some war, some crisis of subsistence.

Machiavelli: I do not know if there will be crises of subsistence. What is certain is that I will hold the flag of national dignity very high.

Montesquieu: That would be the least that you could do. If you receive glory, one should not be grateful to you for it, because in your hands it would only be a means of governing: it will not amortize the debts of your States.

Twenty-First Dialogue

Loans

Machiavelli: I fear that you have some prejudice against loans. They are precious for more than one reason: they attach families to the government; they are excellent investments for private citizens; and modern economists today formally recognize that – far from impoverishing the States – public debts enrich them. Would you like to permit me to explain how to you?

Montesquieu: No, because I believe I know these theories. Since you always speak of borrowing and never of reimbursing, I would like to know from whom you would ask so much capital and with respect to what you would ask for it.

Machiavelli: Here foreign wars would be a great help. In the great States, such wars permit the borrowing of five or six hundred million. One would only spend half or two-thirds of this amount and the rest would find its place in the Treasury for domestic expenditures.

Montesquieu: Five or six hundred million! And who are the modern bankers who would negotiate loans in which the capital would be the entire fortune of certain States?

[64] That is, the consumption of commodities. In John S. Waggoner's translation, this phrase is rendered as "a constantly rising standard of living," which is not quite the same thing.

Machiavelli: Ah, so you are still at the rudimentary procedures of borrowing! If you will allow me to say so, such an idea is barbaric when it comes to matters of financial economy. Today one no longer borrows from bankers.
Montesquieu: From whom then?
Machiavelli: Instead of passing through the markets with the capitalists, who get along by thwarting bids and whose small numbers annihilate competition, one would address oneself to one's subjects: the rich, the poor, the artisans, the merchants, to whomever has available funds; one would set up what one calls a public offering and, so that each person can buy shares, one would divide them into coupons of very small sums. Then one would sell 10 francs per share, 5 francs per share, up to a hundred thousand francs, a million shares. The day after their issuance, the value of these claims would be high, "prime," as one says: the people would know this and hurry from all sides to buy them; one would say it is "madness." In several days, the coffers of the Treasury would be re-filled; one would receive so much money that one wouldn't know where to put it; nevertheless, one would agree to take it, because if the offering surpasses the capital of the shares issued, one could bring about a great effect on public opinion.
Montesquieu: Ah!
Machiavelli: One would refuse to take money from latecomers. One would do so with a lot of noise, with the great reinforcement of the press. It would be a staged, dramatic turn of events. The excess might be as high as two or three hundred million: you must judge the point at which the public spirit is struck by the confidence of the country in the government.
Montesquieu: A confidence that would be mixed with the spirit of unbridled speculation, from what I can imagine. In fact I had intended to speak of this combination but, in your mouth, all this is truly phantasmagorical. So: you would have money right in your hands, but –
Machiavelli: I would have more than you might think, because – in the modern nations – there are great banking institutions that can lend directly to the State 100 or 200 million at the ordinary rate; the great cities can also make loans. In these very nations, there are other institutions, which one calls contingency reserves: there are savings banks, emergency accounts, retirement funds. The State has the custom of demanding that their capital resources, which are immense and which can sometimes be as much as 500 or 600 million, are deposited in the public treasury, where they function along with the communal mass in exchange for low rates of interest to those who make deposits there.

Moreover, governments can procure funds exactly like bankers. They issue from their coffers demand-notes for sums of two or three hundred million, kinds of bills of exchange, on which one pounces before they enter into circulation.
Montesquieu: Permit me to stop you here: you have only spoken of borrowing or drawing on bills of exchange. Do you ever concern yourself with paying something?
Machiavelli: It is good to tell you that one can, in case of need, sell the State's properties.
Montesquieu: Ah, now you're selling yourself! But, finally, do you ever concern yourself with paying?
Machiavelli: Without a doubt. It is now time to tell you how one would meet debts.
Montesquieu: You say "one would meet debts": I would like a more exact expression.
Machiavelli: I make use of this expression because I believe that it has a real exactitude. One cannot always wipe out a debt, but one can meet it; the word is even very energetic, because debt is a redoubtable enemy.
Montesquieu: So, how would you meet it?
Machiavelli: The means would be very varied. First of all, there would be taxes.

Montesquieu: That is to say, the debt employed to pay the debt.
Machiavelli: You speak to me as an economist and not as a financier. Do not confound [the two]. With tax revenues, one can really pay. I know that taxes make the people cry out; if the tax that has been established is inconvenient, one could reestablish it under another name. As you know, there is a great art to finding the vulnerable points in matters of taxes.
Montesquieu: I would imagine that you soon overwhelm these points.
Machiavelli: There are other means: there is what one calls conversion.
Montesquieu: Ah! Ah!
Machiavelli: This is related to the debt that one calls consolidated, that is to say, the one that comes from the issuance of loans. For example, one could say to the State's stockholders: "Until today, I have paid you 5 percent of your money; this was the rate of your interest. I intend to only pay you 4.5 or 4 percent. Consent to this reduction or receive the reimbursement of the capital that you have loaned me."
Montesquieu: But if one really returned their money, this procedure would be quite honest, in my opinion.
Machiavelli: No doubt one would return it, if they demanded it; but very few would care. Stockholders have their customs; their funds are invested; they have confidence in the State; they love to get a few returns on a sure investment. If every one demanded his money, it is obvious the Treasury would be placed in the hangman's noose. This would never happen and one would, by such means, get rid of several hundred millions in debt.
Montesquieu: This would be an immoral expedient, whatever one says: forced loans lower public confidence.
Machiavelli: You do not know stockholders. Here is another arrangement that relates to another form of debt. I said to you a little while ago that the State would have at its disposition the funds of contingency reserves and that it could make use of them by paying off the interest, subject to demands to return them at the first requisition. If, after having handled them for a long time, the State is no longer in a position to return them, it would consolidate the debts that fluctuate in its hands.
Montesquieu: I know what this would mean. The State would say to the depositors: "You want your money, I no longer have it; here is an annuity."
Machiavelli: Precisely, and it would consolidate all the debts that it could no longer satisfy in the same manner. The State would consolidate the Treasury bonds, the debts to the cities, to the bankers, finally all those debts that form what are very picturesquely called floating debts, because they are debts that have no definite assessment and are of a more or less approximate due date.
Montesquieu: You have singular means of liberating the State.
Machiavelli: What could you reproach me for, if I only did what the others do?
Montesquieu: Oh! If everyone did this, it would be quite difficult, indeed, to reproach Machiavelli for doing it.
Machiavelli: I have only indicated the thousandth part of the arrangements that one could employ. Far from dreading the increase of perpetual annuities, I would like it if the entire public fortune was in the form of annuities; in a certain way, I would make the towns, the commons, and the public establishments convert their buildings and their personal capital into annuities. It would be the very interests of my dynasty that command me to take these financial measures. There would not be a penny in my kingdom that would not be tied to my existence by a string.

Montesquieu: But from this same point of view, this fatal point of view, would you reach your goal? Would you not be marching – in the most direct manner – to your ruin through the ruin of the State? Do you not know that, among all the European nations, there are vast markets of public funds that are backed up by prudence, wisdom and the probity of the governments? Due to the manner in which you manage your finances, your funds would be ruinously rejected from the foreign markets and they would fall to the lowest rates, even in the Stock Exchange of your [own] kingdom.
Machiavelli: This is a flagrant error. A glorious government, such as mine would be, could only enjoy great credit abroad. Domestically, its vigor would dominate all apprehension. In addition, I would not want the credit of my State to depend on the anxieties of several tallow merchants. I would dominate the Stock Exchange through the Stock Exchange.
Montesquieu: What now?
Machiavelli: I would have gigantic credit establishments apparently instituted to make loans to industry, but whose real function would consist in supporting annuities. Capable of throwing 400 or 500 million equities on the market or to rarefy the market in the same proportion, these financial monopolies would always be masters of the exchange rates. What do you say about this arrangement?
Montesquieu: The bargains that your ministers, your favorites, and your mistresses would be able to get from these firms! Would your government thus play the market with the secrets of the State?
Machiavelli: What are you saying?
Montesquieu: Then explain the existence of these firms otherwise. As long as you were on the terrain of ideas, one could be deceived about the real name of your politics; but since you have indicated the applications of these ideas, one can no longer be deceived. Your government would be unique in history; one would never be able to calumniate it.
Machiavelli: If someone in my kingdom took it into his head to say what you have left to the understanding, he would disappear as if struck by a thunderbolt.
Montesquieu: The thunderbolt is a beautiful argument; you would be fortunate to have it at your disposition. Have you finished with financial matters?
Machiavelli: Yes.
Montesquieu: The hour advances at a great pace.

FOURTH PART

Twenty-Second Dialogue

Grandeur of the Reign

Montesquieu: Before listening to you, I knew *neither the spirit of the laws, nor the spirit of finances.* I am indebted to you for having taught me both. You have in your hand the greatest power of modern times: money. You could procure for yourself as much of it as you might want. With such prodigious resources, you would no doubt do great things; you could finally show *that good can come from evil.*
Machiavelli: This is indeed what I intend to show you.
Montesquieu: So, let us see.

Machiavelli: The greatest of my benefits would first of all be bringing domestic peace to my people. Under my rule, the bad passions would be repressed, *the good people reassured and the wicked ones made to tremble.* I would bring liberty, dignity and strength to a country torn apart by factions.
Montesquieu: After having changed so many things, would you end up changing the very meaning of words?
Machiavelli: Liberty does not consist of license; just as dignity and strength do not consist of insurrection and disorder. My empire would be peaceful within and glorious abroad.
Montesquieu: How?
Machiavelli: I would make war in all parts of the world. I would cross the Alps, like Hannibal; I would make war in India, like Alexander; in Libya, like Scipio; I would go from the Atlas to the Taurus [Mountains], from the banks of the Ganges to the Mississippi, from the Mississippi to the Amur River. The Great Wall of China would fall before my name; my victorious legions would defend the Tomb of the Savior in Jerusalem and the Vicar of Jesus Christ in Rome; their steps would tread upon the dust of the Incas in Peru, on the ashes of Sesostris in Egypt, on those of Nebuchadnezzar in Mesopotamia. Descendant of Caesar, Augustus and Charlemagne, I would avenge the defeat of Varus on the banks of the Danube; the rout of Cannes on the banks of the Adige; and the outrages against the Normans on the Baltic Sea.
Montesquieu: Deign to stop, I entreat you. If you would [try to] avenge the defeats of all the great captains, you would not be adequate to the task. I will not compare you to Louis XIV, to whom Boileau[65] said: "Great King, cease to vanquish or I will cease to write"; this comparison would humiliate you. I will grant you that none of the heroes of Antiquity or modern times can be compared to you. But this is not the question. War is itself an evil; in your hands, it would serve to support an even greater evil: servitude. But where in all this is the good that you promised me you would do?
Machiavelli: This is not the moment to equivocate: glory is by itself already a great good; it is the most powerful of the capital that can be accumulated; a sovereign who has glory would have all the rest. He would be the terror of the neighboring States; the arbiter of Europe. His credit would invincibly impose itself because, whatever you might say about the sterility of victory, strength never abdicates its rights. One simulates the war of ideas; one makes a display of being disinterested; and, one fine day, one finishes very well by seizing a province that one had coveted and by imposing a war tribute upon the vanquished.
Montesquieu: But permit me: in this system, one would do perfectly well by acting in this way, if one could; otherwise, the military trade would be too foolish.
Machiavelli: Fine! You see that our ideas begin to come together a little.
Montesquieu: Yes, like the Atlas and Taurus [Mountains]. Let us see the other great things of your reign.
Machiavelli: I would not disdain the parallel with Louis XIV as much as you appear to believe. I would have more than one trait in common with this monarch; like him, I would undertake gigantic constructions;[66] yet, beneath this connection, my ambition would go even further than his and that of more famous potentates. I would like to show the people that the monuments that previously required centuries to construct could be rebuilt by me in a few years. The palaces of the kings who preceded me would fall under the hammers of the wreckers so as to rise again, rejuvenated, in new forms; I would overturn entire towns so as to reconstruct them on more

[65] Nicolas Boileau (1636-1711), a poet and literary critic.
[66] For example, the Palais de l'Industrie, built in 1855.

regular plans, to obtain more beautiful perspectives.[67] You cannot imagine the extent to which construction attaches the people to monarchs. One could say that they easily pardon the destruction of their laws on the condition that one builds houses for them. Moreover, you will see in a moment that construction serves particularly important purposes.

Montesquieu: After such constructions, what would you make?

Machiavelli: You go too quickly: the number of great actions is not unlimited. Please tell me, I beseech you, if – from Sesostris to Louis XIV and Peter I – the two cardinal points of great regimes have not been war and construction.

Montesquieu: This is true, but nevertheless one sees absolute sovereigns who have been preoccupied with making good laws, improving morals and introducing simplicity and decency. One has seen those who have been preoccupied with order in financial matters and the economy; who have dreamed of leaving behind them order, peace, durable institutions, sometimes even liberty.

Machiavelli: Oh, all this would be done! You will see that, according to you, absolute sovereigns do have some good qualities.

Montesquieu: Alas, not enough. Nevertheless, try to prove the contrary to me. Do you have something good to tell me?

Machiavelli: I would bring prodigious growth to the spirit of enterprise; my reign would be the reign of business. I would launch speculation along new and until then unknown roads. My administration would even loosen some of its chains. I would free from regulation a crowd of industries: the butchers, the bakers and the theatrical entrepreneurs would be free.

Montesquieu: Free to do what?

Machiavelli: Free to sell meat, free to bake bread and free to organize theatrical productions without the permission of authority.

Montesquieu: I do not know what this means. Freedom of industry is a common right among modern people. Have you nothing better to teach me?

Machiavelli: I would constantly be occupied with the lot of the people. My government would procure work for them.

Montesquieu: Let the people find it themselves; this would be better. The political powers do not have the right to use the funds of their subjects to make themselves popular. The public revenues are nothing other than a collective assessment, the products of which must only serve the general services; the working classes that one accustoms to counting on the State would fall into debasement; they would lose their energy, their spirit, their funds of intellectual industry.[68] The State's salaries would throw them into a kind of serfdom, from which they could only raise themselves by destroying the State itself. Your constructions would gobble up enormous sums in unproductive expenditures; they would rarefy capital, kill small industry, and annihilate credit in the lower strata of society. Hunger would be at the end of all your arrangements. You should put away savings and build afterwards. Govern with moderation, with justice; govern the least possible and the people would have nothing to ask of you because they would have no need of you.

Machiavelli: Ah, you see the miseries of the people with a cold eye. The principles of my government would be quite different; I would carry in my heart the suffering creatures, the children. I would be indignant when I see the wealthy procure for themselves pleasures that are

[67] A clear reference to Baron von Haussmann's destruction and rebuilding Paris in the 1850s and 1860s.

[68] In John S. Waggoner's translation, this phrase – *leurs fonds d'industrie intellectualle* – is rendered as "intellectual skills." I think that "intellectual capital" is closer to what was intended.

unavailable to the greatest number of people. I would do all that I could to improve the material conditions of the workers, the laborers, those who bend under the weight of social necessity.
Montesquieu: So, you would begin by giving them the resources that you would have assigned to the emoluments of your great dignitaries, your ministers and your consular personages. You should reserve for them the largess that you would have squandered without limit upon your pages, your courtesans and your mistresses.

Do better: dispose of the royal purple, the sight of which is an affront to the equality of men. Get rid of the titles of [Your] Majesty, Highness and Excellency, which enter into proud ears like sharpened iron. Call yourself protector as Cromwell did, but perform the Acts of the Apostles; live in the thatched cottages of the poor, as Alfred the Great did; sleep in the charity hospitals; stretch out on the beds of the sick, as Saint Louis did. It is too easy to engage in evangelical charity when one passes one's life in the midst of banquets; when one reposes upon sumptuous beds all evening, with beautiful ladies; when – upon going to bed and rising – one has great personages hastening to dress you. Be the father of the family and not a despot; a patriarch and not a prince.

If these roles do not suit you, be the leader of a democratic republic, grant liberty, introduce it into customs, [even] by force, if this is your temperament. Be a Lycurgus, be an Agesilas, be a Gracchus, but I do not understand this spineless civilization, in which everything bends, everything fades next to the prince; in which all spirits are thrown into the same mold; all souls into the same uniform. I can understand that one would aspire to rule men, but not automatons.
Machiavelli: Here is an outburst of eloquence that I cannot stop. It is with such phrases that one overthrows governments.
Montesquieu: Alas! You have no other preoccupation than that of maintaining yourself. To put your love of the public welfare to the test, one would only have to ask you to step down from the throne in the name of the salvation of the State. The people, of whom you are the chosen one, would only have to express to you their will in this regard to know the esteem that you would truly have for their sovereignty.
Machiavelli: What a strange notion! Would it not be for their own welfare that I would resist them?
Montesquieu: What do you know about such a thing? If the people are above you, by what right would you subordinate their will to yours? If you were freely accepted, if you were not only right but also necessary, why would you expect everything from force and nothing from reason? You would be right to ceaselessly tremble about your rule, because you are one of those who would [only] last a single day.
Machiavelli: A day?! I would last all my life and my descendants after me, perhaps. You know my political, economic and financial systems. Would you like to know the last means by which I would push the roots of my dynasty into the deepest layers of the soil?
Montesquieu: No.
Machiavelli: If you refuse to hear me out, you are vanquished: you, your principles, your school of thought and your century.
Montesquieu: Since you insist, speak, but this interview will be the last.

Twenty-Third Dialogue

The Diverse Means that Machiavelli Would Employ to Consolidate his Empire and Perpetuate his Dynasty

Machiavelli: I cannot respond to any of your oratory flourishes. These eloquent recitations have only been made [down] here. To say to a sovereign, "Would you like to step down from your throne for the happiness of your people?" is this not folly? To say to him, "Since you are an emanation of popular suffrage, trust yourself to its fluctuations, allow yourself to discuss them," is this possible? Does not all constituted power have as its first law the defense of itself, not only in its own interests, but in the interests of the people whom it governs? Have I not made the greatest possible sacrifice to the modern principle of equality? Is not a government issued from universal suffrage, in short, the expression of the will of the greatest number of people? You tell me that this principle is the destroyer of public liberties: what can I do about it? When this principle has entered into customs, do you know any means of removing it? And if it cannot be removed, do you know a means of realizing it in the great European societies, other than by the arms of a single man? You are severe concerning the means of government: indicate to me another mode of execution, and if there is none other than absolute power, tell me how this power could separate itself from the special imperfections to which its principle condemns it.

No, I would not be a Saint Vincent de Paul, because my subjects would not only need an evangelical soul, but an arm [of strength]; I would not be an Agesilas, nor a Lycurgus, nor a Gracchus, because I would not be among the Spartans or among the Romans; I would be at the heart of a voluptuous society, which allies the fury of the pleasures with those of weapons, the transports of strength with those of the senses; [a society] that no longer wants divine authority, paternal authority or religious restraint. Am I the one who created the world in the midst of which I live? I would be such, because it is such. Would I have the power to stop its inclination? No, I could only prolong its life because it would dissolve itself even more quickly if it yielded to itself. I would grasp this society by its vices, because it only presents me with vices; if it had virtues, I would grasp it by them.

But if austere principles could criticize my power, would it be because they underestimate the real services that I would render, my genius and even my grandeur?

I would be the arm, I would be the sword of the Revolutions that cuts off the harbinger breath of the final destruction. I would contain the senseless forces that have no other motivation, at bottom, than the brutality of the instincts that pursue pillage under the veil of principle. If I could discipline these forces, if I could stop their expansion in my homeland – if only for a century – would I not deserve its gratitude? Could I not also claim the recognition of the European States that would turn their eyes towards me, as towards Osiris, who, all alone, had the power to captivate the shuddering crowds? Raise your eyes higher and bow before the one who carries upon his forehead the fatal sign of human predestination.

Montesquieu: Exterminating angel, grandson of Tamerlane, you who would reduce the people to the level of Helots: you would not be able to prevent the fact that, somewhere, there would be free souls who would brave you, and their disdain would suffice to safeguard the rights of the human conscience rendered imperceptible by God.

Machiavelli: God protects the strong.

Montesquieu: I beseech you, come to the last links in the chain that you would forge. Tighten it well; use the anvil and the hammer; do all you can. God will protect you: it is he himself who guides your star.

Machiavelli: I am having difficulty understanding the animation that now reigns in your words. Would I thus be so hard, me, who would not take violence for my final policy, but effacement? Thus, be reassured: I bring to you more than one unexpected consolation. Only let me take several further precautions that I believe would be necessary for my security; you will see that, with those with whom I have surrounded myself, a prince would have nothing to fear from events.

Our writings have more than one connection, whatever you might say about them, and I believe that a despot who wants to be complete must not refuse to read you. Thus, you remark in the *Spirit of the Laws* that an absolute monarch must have a large praetorian guard;[69] this advice is good, I would follow it. My guard would be around a third of my army's personnel. I am a great partisan of conscription, which is one of the most beautiful inventions of French genius, but I believe that it would be necessary to perfect this institution by trying to retain in arms the greatest possible number of those who had completed their tours of duty. I believe that I could attain this goal by resolutely seizing the kind of commerce that is conducted in several States, in France for example, concerning voluntary engagements for money. I would suppress this hideous practice and I would personally exercise it honestly in the form of a monopoly by creating an endowment fund for the army that would allow me to summon [men to take their places] under the banners through use of the bait of money and to use the same means to retain there those who would like to devote themselves exclusively to military service.

Montesquieu: Thus, it would be a kind of mercenary corps that you would aspire to form in your own country!

Machiavelli: Yes, the hatred of the parties would say this, when I would only be motivated by the welfare of the people and by the interests (quite legitimate, moreover) of my preservation, which would be the communal welfare of my subjects.

Let us pass on to other subjects. What will surprise you is that I now return to construction. I had already indicated to you that we would return to it. You will see that the political idea that arises from the vast system of construction that I would undertake. I would realize through it an economic theory that has produced many disasters in certain European States: the theory of the organization of permanent labor for the working classes. My reign would promise them an indefinite salary. [With] me dead, my system abandoned, [there would be] no work; the people would be on strike and would rise to assaults upon the wealthy classes. One would be in the midst of *Jacquerie*:[70] industrial disturbances, annihilation of credit, insurrection in my State; uprisings outside of it; Europe in flames. I stop here. Tell me if the privileged classes, which quite naturally tremble concerning their fortunes, would not make common cause, the closest cause, with the working classes so as to support me, me or my dynasty; [tell me] if, on the other hand, the interests of European tranquility would not provide the powers of the highest order to support me.

The question of construction, which appears slight, is in reality a colossal question, as you will see. When it is a matter of such importance, one must not spare the sacrifices. Have you remarked that nearly all of my political conceptions double as financial arrangements? This is what would happen here, too. I would institute a fund for public works that I would endow with

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[69] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book X, Chapter XV. [*Translator*: this is an incorrect citation. It is in Book X, Chapter XVI, that Montesquieu says: "There should be always a body of faithful troops near the prince, ready to fall instantly upon any part of the empire that may chance to waver. This military corps ought to awe the rest, and to strike terror into those who through necessity have been entrusted with any authority in the empire."]

[70] Peasant revolts.

several hundred million; with the aid of this fund, I would begin constructions over the entire surface of my kingdom. You have already divined my goal: to have worker *Jacquerie* work for us: it would be another army that I could use against the political factions. But this mass of proletarians that would be in my hands: it must not be able to turn against me when it is without bread. This is what I would assure through construction projects, because what would be special in my arrangements would be that each one would furnish corollaries at the same time. The worker who builds for me would, at the same time, build the means of defense (against himself) that I would need. Without knowing it, he would be chasing himself from the great city centers where his presence troubles me; he would render impossible the success of the revolutions that are fought in the streets.[71] The results of these great constructions, indeed, would be to rarefy the space[s] in which the artisan might live, to drive him back to the outskirts,[72] and soon thereafter make him abandon them, because the high cost of food staples increases with the elevation of the rates of rent. My capital would hardly be more habitable for those who live from daily work than the parts closest to its walls. Thus, it would not be in the quarters neighboring the headquarters of the authorities that insurrections could form. No doubt, around the capital there would be an immense population of workers, redoubtable in days of anger, but the constructions that I would erect would all be conceived in accordance with a strategic plan, that is to say, they would yield passage to great boulevards through which cannons could be moved from one end to another. At the extremities of these great roads, there would be a number of barracks, kinds of small fortresses, full of weapons, soldiers and munitions. My successor would have to be an imbecilic old man or a child to let himself fall as the result of an insurrection, because – with a wave of my hand – a few grains of gunpowder would sweep away the rioters up to 20 leagues from the capital. But the blood that flows through my veins is burning and my race has all the signs of strength. Are you listening to me?

Montesquieu: Yes.

Machiavelli: But you quite understand that I would not intend to make material life difficult for the population of workers in the capital, and here I would incontestably encounter a stumbling block. But the fecundity of the resources that my government must have would suggest an idea to me: to build for the people of my country vast cities in which the houses would be low-priced and in which their masses could find themselves united by cohort, as in vast families.

Montesquieu: Mousetraps!

Machiavelli: Oh, the spirit of disparagement, the fierce hatred of the parties, would not fail to disparage my institutions. One would say what you have said. It would hardly matter: if the means did not succeed, one would find another.

I must not abandon the heading of construction without mentioning an apparently insignificant detail, but what is insignificant in politics? It is necessary that the innumerable edifices that I would construct would be marked with my name; one would find on them the trappings, *bas-reliefs,* and clusters that recall a part of my history. My coat of arms, my figure, will have to appear everywhere. Over here, one would see the angels who support my crown; over there, the statues of justice and wisdom, which bear my initials. These points would be of the greatest importance; I would hold to them essentially.

It would be by these signs, these emblems, that the person of the sovereign would always be present; one would live with him, with his memory, with his thought. The feeling of his absolute sovereignty would enter into the most rebellious spirits like the drops of water that

[71] This was one of the explicit goals of "Haussmannization."

[72] In contemporary French society, *le banlieue.*

incessantly fall from the crag and furrow a foothold in the granite. For the same reason, I would want my statue, my bust, and my portraits to be in all the public establishments, especially in the auditorium of the courts; I should be represented in regal costume or on horseback.
Montesquieu: Alongside the image of Christ.
Machiavelli: No, not at all: facing it, because sovereign power is an image of divine power. My image would thus ally itself with those of Providence and Justice.
Montesquieu: It would be necessary that justice itself bears your likeness. You would not be a Christian: you would be a Greek emperor of the Lower Empire.
Machiavelli: I would be a Catholic, apostolic and Roman emperor. For the same reasons as those that I have just pointed out, I would want that one gives my name – my royal name – to all public establishments, whatever their nature. Royal Tribunal, Royal Court, Royal Academy, Royal Legislative Body, Royal Senate, Royal Council of State – as often as possible, this same word would be given to the functionaries, agents and official personnel who surround the government. The King's Lieutenant, the King's Archbishop, the King's Comedian, the King's Judge, the King's Lawyer. In short, the royal name, imprinted on everything (men and things), would represent a sign of power. Only my birthday would be a national festival, and not a royal one. I add that it would be necessary that the streets, public places and squares bear names that recall the historical memories of my reign. If one were to follow these indications – [even] if one was Caligula or Nero – one would be certain of imprinting oneself forever in the memory of the people and transmitting one's prestige to the most distant posterity.

So many things I have not mentioned! But it is necessary that I restrain myself: "Because who tell say all without a fatal tedium?"[73]

I have come to the little means: I regret it, because they are perhaps not worthy of your attention, but for me they would be vital.

The bureaucracy is, one says, a plague upon monarchical governments. I do not believe so. Bureaucrats are thousands of servants who are naturally tied to the existing order of things. I would have an army of soldiers, an army of judges, an army of workers; I would also want an army of employees.
Montesquieu: You no longer take pains to justify anything.
Machiavelli: Do I have the time to do so?
Montesquieu: No, press on.
Machiavelli: In the States that have been monarchical – and they have all been monarchical at least once – I have ascertained that there was a veritable frenzy for sashes and ribbons. These things cost the prince almost nothing and he can, by means of a few pieces of fabric, a few baubles of money or gold, make happy (even better than that) the men who are loyal. In truth, so little would be necessary that I could decorate all those who ask it from me, without exception. A decorated man is a bought man. I would make these marks of distinction into a rallying sign for devoted subjects. I believe that I could have eleven-twelfths of my kingdom at this price. As much as I could, I would realize the egalitarian instincts of the nation. Remark this well: the more a nation holds to equality in general, the more individuals have a passion for distinction. Thus here would be a means of action of which it would be too inept to deprive oneself. Quite far from renouncing titles, as you have advised me to do, I would multiply them all around me. In my court, I would like to have the etiquette of Louis XIV, the domestic hierarchy of Constantine,

[73] See the preface to the *Spirit of the Laws*: "The more we enter into particulars, the more we shall perceive the certainty of the principles on which they are founded. I have not even given all these particulars, for who could mention them all without a most insupportable fatigue?"

a severe diplomatic formalism, and an imposing ceremonial: these would be infallible means of governing the spirit of the masses. Through all this, the sovereign would appear as a god.

One assures me that, in the States that are apparently the most democratic, ancient monarchical nobility has lost almost nothing of its prestige. I would give myself the gentlemen of the oldest salt for my chamberlains. Many antique names would have been extinguished, no doubt; by virtue of my sovereign power, I would revive them along with their titles and one would find in my court the greatest names in history since Charlemagne.

It is possible that these conceptions appear bizarre to you, but what I will affirm is that they would do more for the consolidation of my dynasty than the wisest laws. The worship of the prince is a kind of religion and, like all possible religions, this worship imposes contradictions and mysteries that are above reason.[74] Each of my actions, however inexplicable they might seem to be, would proceed from calculations of which the unique objects would be my salvation and that of my dynasty. Thus, I say in *The Prince* that what is really difficult is acquiring power, but preserving it is easy, because it is in sum sufficient to remove what is harmful and establish what is protective. The essential trait of my politics, as you have been able to see, will be to render myself indispensable;[75] I would destroy as many of the organized forces as would be necessary, so that no one could make progress without me, so that even the enemies of my power would tremble to overthrow it.

What would remain for me to do would only consist in the development of the moral means that are germinating in my institutions. My reign would be a reign of pleasure; you would not be able to stop me from cheering my people with games and festivals, which would make customs milder. One would not dissimulate that this has been a century of money; needs have doubled; luxury has ruined families; from all sides, one aspires to the material pleasures; it would be necessary for a sovereign to not be of his times for him not to know how to turn to his profit the universal passion for money and the sensual fury that consumes men. Misery squeezes them like a vise; lechery presses them; ambition devours them; they will be mine. But when I speak this way, it would basically be the interests of my people that guide me. Yes, I would make good come from evil; I would exploit materialism to the profit of concord and civilization; I would extinguish the political passions of men by appeasing their ambitions, their greed and their needs. I would have for the servants of my reign those who, under the preceding governments, had made the greatest noise in the name of liberty. The most austere virtues are like Joconde's wife:[76] it suffices to always double the price of defeat. Those who would resist money will not resist honors; those who would resist honors will not resist money. By seeing fall, each in their turn, all those whom one believed to be the purest, public opinion would weaken to such a point that it would end up completely abdicating. How could one complain? I would only be severe with those who were political; I would only persecute this [particular] passion; I would even secretly favor the others by the thousand subterranean routes that absolute power would have at its disposal.

Montesquieu: After having destroyed political consciousness, you would undertake the destruction of moral conscience; you killed society, now you must kill mankind. May it please

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[74] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XXV, Chapter II.

[75] *Author's note*: *The Prince,* Chapter IX. [*Translator*: "And therefore a wise prince must think of a means by which his citizens have need of the state and of him, always and in every kind of time, and then they will be faithful ways."]

[76] "Joconde," a tale by Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695).

God that your words ring out on earth; never could a more brilliant refutation of your own doctrines strike human ears.
Machiavelli: Let me finish.

Twenty-Fourth Dialogue

Particularities of the Physiognomy of the Prince as Machiavelli Conceives of it

Machiavelli: Now it only remains for me to indicate to you certain particularities of my manner of acting, certain habits of conduct that will give my government its ultimate physiognomy.

In the first place, I would like my designs to be impenetrable even to those who are the closest to me. In this respect, I would be like Alexander VI and the Duke of Valentinois,[77] of whom one proverbially said at the court of Rome: "The first never does what he says; the second never says what he does." I would only communicate my projects when I have ordered their execution and I would only give my orders at the last moment. Borgia never did otherwise; his own ministers knew nothing and one was always reduced to simple conjectures about him. I have the gift of stillness, it is my goal; I look away and, when it is in my reach, I suddenly look back and I pounce on my prey before it has had the time to utter a sound.[78]

You would not believe what prestige such powers of dissimulation give to the prince. When it is joined with vigorous action, a superstitious respect surrounds him; his advisers wonder what might spring from his head; the people can only place their confidence in him; in their eyes he personifies Providence, whose ways are unknown. When the people see him pass by, they dream with an involuntary terror what he could do with a nod of his head; the neighboring States are always in fear and heap upon him signs of deference, because they never know if some already-ready enterprise will fall upon them today or the next day.
Montesquieu: You would be strong against your own people because you hold them down with your knee, but if you were to deceive the States with which you deal in the same way that your deceive your subjects, you would soon be choked by the arms of a coalition.
Machiavelli: You divert me from my subject, because here I was only occupying myself with my domestic politics; but if you want to know one of the principal means by which I would keep foreign hatreds in check, here it is. I would reign over a powerful kingdom, as I have told you: so, I would seek around my State some great, fallen country that aspired to raise itself up again; I would restore it completely under the cover of some general war, as was done for Sweden, for Prussia, as could be done someday for Germany or Italy; and this country – which would only live thanks to me and which would only be an emanation of my existence – would, as long as I stand, give me three hundred thousand men more against armed Europe.
Montesquieu: And [what about] the salvation of your State, next to which you would thus elevate a rival power and, consequently, a future enemy?
Machiavelli: Above all, I would preserve myself.
Montesquieu: Thus you would have nothing, not even the care of the destiny of your kingdom?
Machiavelli: Who told you this? To provide for my salvation: is this not to provide for the salvation of my kingdom at the same time?

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[77] The Duke of Valentinois was Cesare Borgia.
[78] Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little,* Book I, Chapter VI: "To feign death, that is his art. He remains mute and motionless, looking in the opposite direction from his object, until the hour for action arrives; then he turns his head, and leaps upon his prey."

Montesquieu: Your royal physiognomy becomes more and more visible; I would like to see all of it.
Machiavelli: Deign to not interrupt me.

It is necessary that a prince, whatever his brain power, always finds in himself the necessary resources of spirit. One of the greatest talents of the statesman consists in appropriating for himself the advice that he hears around him. One very often finds luminous opinions in his entourage. Thus, I would make them discuss and debate before me the most important questions. When the sovereign distrusts their opinions or does not have sufficient language skills to disguise his real thoughts, he should remain mute or only speak to engage further discussion. It is very rare that, in a well-composed group of counselors, the real position to be taken in such a situation cannot be formulated in one manner or another. One would seize upon it; very often the one who had very obscurely given his opinion is completely surprised to see it executed the next day.

You have been able to see in my institutions and my actions the attention that I have always paid to the creation of appearances, in words as in deeds. The height of skillfulness would be to make the people believe in one's frankness, even though one has a Punic faith.[79] Not only would my designs be impenetrable, but my words would almost always signify the contrary of what they seem to indicate. Only the initiates would be able to penetrate into the meaning of the characteristic words that, at certain moments, I would let fall from the heights of the throne. When I say "*My reign means peace,*" I would mean war;[80] when I say that I would appeal to *moral means,* I would use the means of force. Are you listening to me?
Montesquieu: Yes.
Machiavelli: You have seen that my press would have a hundred voices and that they would incessantly speak of the grandeur of my reign, of the enthusiasm of my subjects for their sovereign; and that these voices would place into the mouths of the members of the public the opinions, the ideas and even the linguistic formulae that must be the subjects of their conversations; you have also seen that my ministers would ceaselessly astonish the public with the incontestable testimonies of their efforts. As for me, I would rarely speak, only once a year, as well here and there, in several great circumstances. Each of my manifestations would be welcomed, not only in my kingdom, but also in all of Europe, as an event. A prince whose power is founded upon a democratic base must speak in polished and yet popular language. If need be, he must not fear to speak as a demagogue, because, after all, he is [of] the people and he must have their passions. He must have [lavished upon him] certain attentions, certain flatteries, certain demonstrations of feeling that occasionally find their places. It would hardly matter that these means seem trifling or puerile in the eyes of the world: the people would not look so closely and the [necessary] effect would be produced.

In my book, I recommend that the prince take some great man of the past as a model whose tracks he must follow as closely as possible.[81] These historical comparisons still have a great effect on the masses; one grows in their imaginations, one gives oneself (from one's own life) the place that posterity reserves. Moreover, one finds in the histories of these great men the

[79] Treacherous intent
[80] A foreshadowing of the slogan "War is peace" in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four.*
[81] *Author's note*: *The Prince,* Chapter XIV. [*Translator*: "But for the exercise of the mind, the prince must read the histories, and in those consider the actions of excellent men, see how they have carried themselves in the wars, examine the causes of their victory and losses, to be able to avoid the latter and imitate the former; and above all to do as some excellent man has done in the past, who took up imitating someone before his time who had been lauded and glorified, and always kept his deeds and actions close to him."]

parallels, useful indications, and sometimes identical situations from which one can draw precious instruction, because all the great political lessons can be found in history. When one has found a great man with whom one has similarities, one can do even better: you know that the people love a prince who has a cultivated mind, who has a taste for literature, who even has talent. So, the prince should know no better use of his leisure time than to write, for example, the history of the great man from the past whom he has taken as his model. A severe philosophy could tax such things with weakness. When the sovereign is strong, one will pardon him for them and they would even give him a certain grace.

Certain weaknesses and even certain vices can serve the prince as much as virtues. You have been able to recognize the truth of these observations due to the usage that I have made of duplicity and violence. For example, one must not believe that a vindictive character can harm him: quite the contrary. If it would often be opportune to utilize clemency or magnanimity, it would also be necessary that, at certain moments, the prince's anger weighs down in a terrible manner. Man is in the image of God, and the Divinity does not have less rigor in his blows than in his mercy. When I have resolved upon the downfall of my enemies, I would crush them until nothing remains but dust. Men only take revenge against slight wrongs; they can do nothing against the great ones.[82] This is what I expressly state in my book. The prince has only the choice of the instruments that must serve his wrath; he will always find judges ready to sacrifice their consciences in favor of vengeance or hatred.

Do not fear that the people would riot in response to my blows. First of all, they love to feel the vigor of the arms that command, and then because they naturally hate those who raise themselves up, they instinctively rejoice when one strikes those above them. Moreover, perhaps you do not know the ease with which the people forget. When the moment of rigor has passed, even those whom one has struck hardly remember. In Rome, at the time of the Lower Empire, Tacitus reported that the victims ran with a strange pleasure to their torturers. You will understand perfectly well that there is nothing similar in modern times; customs have become much softer; a few banishments, prison sentences, forfeitures of civil rights – these are quite light punishments in comparison. It is true that, to attain sovereign power, it is necessary to shed blood and violate rights; but – I repeat – all will be forgotten. The least cajolery by the prince, some good behavior by his ministers or his agents, would be welcomed with the signs of the greatest recognition.

If it is indispensable to punish with an inflexible rigor, one must compensate with the same punctuality: this is what I would never fail to do. Whoever had rendered a service to my government would be compensated the very next day. Positions, distinctions, and the greatest dignities would be so many certain stages for whoever would possess them in exchange for useful service to my politics. In the army, in the magistracy, and in all the public positions, advancement would be calculated according to opinion and degree of zeal for my government. You are silent.

Montesquieu: Continue.

Machiavelli: I return to certain vices and even certain faults of character that I regard as necessary to the prince. The handling of power is a formidable thing. As clever as a sovereign might be, as infallible as his look might be, and as vigorous as his decisions might be, there would still be an immense *risk* to his existence. He must be superstitious. Keep yourself from

[82] *Author's note*: *The Prince,* Chapter III. [*Translator*: "One has to note that men must either be caressed or extinguished; because they avenge themselves of light offenses, but of grave ones they cannot. So the offense one does to a man must be such that one not fear vengeance for it."]

believing this would be of slight consequence. In the lives of princes, there are situations so difficult, moments so serious, that human prudence no longer counts. In such cases, it is almost necessary to play dice with the outcome. The game that I indicate and that I would follow consists, in certain circumstances, of connecting oneself to historical dates, of consulting fortunate anniversaries, of placing this or that bold resolution under the auspices of a day on which one won a victory or landed a fortunate blow. I must tell you that superstition has another, very great advantage: the people would know this tendency. Such auguring combinations often succeed; it would also be necessary to use them when one is sure of success. The people, who only judge by results, would get accustomed to believing that each of the sovereign's actions correspond to celestial signs, that historical coincidences force the hand of fortune.

Montesquieu: The last word has been said: you are a gambler.

Machiavelli: Yes, but I would have unheard-of good luck, and I would have such a sure hand and such a fertile brain that my fortunes would never turn.

Montesquieu: Since you paint your own portrait, you must have other vices or virtues to pass on.

Machiavelli: I ask your grace for lust. The passion for women serves a sovereign much more than you might think. Henry IV owed a part of his popularity to his adultery. Men are made such that this penchant pleases those who are governed by them. Dissolute morals has, in all times, been a passion, a gallant career in which the prince must arrive ahead of his equals, as he must advance his soldiers ahead of those of the enemy. These ideas are French, and I do not think that they will displease the illustrious author of the *Persian Letters*[83] too much. It is not permitted me to fall into too-common considerations; nevertheless, I can allow myself to tell you that the most real result of the prince's gallantry would be to win him the sympathy of the prettiest half of his subjects.

Montesquieu: You sing a madrigal.

Machiavelli: One can be serious *and* gallant: you have furnished the proof. I will not take back my proposition. The influence of women on the public mind is considerable. In good politics, the prince is condemned to gallantry, even though, at bottom, he may not care for it, but such cases would be rare.

I can assure you that, if I would follow the rules that I have traced out, one would care little for liberty in my kingdom. One would have a vigorous sovereign, profligate, full of the spirit of chivalry, adroit at all the exercises of the body: one would love him. The austere people could do nothing about it; they would follow the general torrent; even more, the independent men would be placed blacklisted; one would turn away from them. One would not believe in their character or in their impartiality. They would seem to be malcontents who want to get themselves bought off. If, here or there, I would not encourage talent, one would repel it from all sides, one would walk on consciences as one walks on the pavement. But, at bottom, I would be a moral prince; I would not allow people to go beyond certain limits. I would respect public modesty everywhere I see that it wants to be respected. Stains would not touch me, because I would shift the odious parts of the administration on to others. At worst, one might say that I am a good prince with a bad entourage, that I always do the right thing when one points it out to me.

If you know how to do it, it is easy to govern when one has absolute power. No contradiction, no resistance; one could follow one's designs at one's convenience; one would have the time to repair one's mistakes. Without opposition, one could make one's people happy, because this is what would always concern me. I can affirm to you that one would not be bored

[83] Montesquieu.

in my kingdom; minds would be ceaselessly occupied with a thousand diverse objects. I would give to the people the spectacle of my retinue and the pomp of my court; one would prepare great ceremonies; I would draw up gardens; I would offer hospitality to the [other] kings; I would bring the ambassadors of the furthest-away countries. Sometimes there might be rumors of war; sometimes [there might be] diplomatic complications about which one would gossip for months: I would go even further; I would even give satisfaction to the monomania for liberty. The wars made under my reign would be enterprises in the names of the liberty of the people and the independence of the nations, and while the people were acclaiming me during my passages [abroad], I would secretly say into the ears of the other absolute kings: "Fear nothing, I am with you; I wear a crown like you do and I intend to keep it: *I embrace European liberty, but so as to suffocate it.*"

There is only one thing that could compromise my fortune: this would be the day that, on all sides, one recognizes that my politics are not frank, that all my actions are marked by calculation.

Montesquieu: Who would be so blind as to not see this?

Montesquieu: My entire people, except for a few cliques, about whom I would care very little. Moreover, I would have formed around me a school of politicians of a very great, relative power. You would not believe the degree to which Machiavellianism is contagious and how its precepts are easy to follow. In all the branches of my government, there would be men of little or no consequence who would be real Machiavellis and who would scheme, dissimulate, and lie with an imperturbable cold-bloodedness; the truth would not come to light anywhere.

Montesquieu: If you had only joked around from one end of this conversation to the other – as I believe you have, Machiavelli – I would regard this irony as your most magnificent work.

Machiavelli: Irony? You deceive yourself if you think so. Do you not understand I have spoken without a veil and that it is the terrible violence of the truth that has given my words the color that you believe you have seen?

Montesquieu: You have finished.

Machiavelli: Not yet.

Montesquieu: Then finish.

Twenty-Fifth Dialogue

The Last Word

Machiavelli: I could reign ten years in these conditions, without changing anything in my legislation; definitive success would only come at this price. Nothing, absolutely nothing, must make me waver during this interval; the lid on the boiler must be made of iron and lead; it would be during this time that the repression of the seditious spirit is elaborated. Perhaps you believe that one would be unhappy, that one would complain. Ah! I would be inexcusable if things went this way; but when the springs are most violently stretched, when I bear down with the most terrible weight upon the breast of my people, this is what they would say: "We are only getting what we deserve; let us suffer."

Montesquieu: You would be quite blind if you took this as an apology for your reign; if you did not understand that these words would express a violent regret for the past. They are stoic words that would announce to you the day of your punishment.

Machiavelli: You trouble me. The hour will have come to relax the tension; I would now yield liberty.
Montesquieu: The excesses of your oppression would be a thousand times better. Your people would respond to you: "Keep what you have taken."
Machiavelli: Ah! Here I recognize the implacable hatred of the parties: grant nothing to one's political adversaries, not even their benefits.
Montesquieu: No, Machiavelli, nothing to you, nothing! The immolated victim does not receive any benefits from his executioner.
Machiavelli: Ah! Here I could easily penetrate into the secret thoughts of my enemies. They flatter themselves, they hope that the expansive force that I hold back would sooner or later launch me into space. The fools! They won't know me well until the end. In politics, is it not necessary to anticipate all dangers with the greatest repression possible? An imperceptible opening: they would seize it.

I would certainly not grant considerable liberties; so, you nevertheless see the degree to which absolutism will have already penetrated into customs. I wager that, at the first indications of liberty, there would rise around me frightening rumors. My ministers, my counselors would exclaim that I am abandoning the helm, that all is lost. One would entreat me – in the name of the health of the State, in the name of the country – to do nothing of the sort. The people would say: "What is he thinking? His genius decreases." Those who are indifferent would say: "He is exhausted." The hateful would say: "He is dead."
Montesquieu: And they all would be right, because a modern publicist[84] has said this with great truthfulness: "Do you want to snatch men's rights from them? You must not do it halfway. What one leaves to them, serves to help them recover what one has taken away from them. The hand that remains free disengages the other one from its irons."
Machiavelli: This is very well thought out; this is very true; I know that such a step would greatly expose me. You see that one would have been unjust towards me, that I love liberty more than people will have said. A little while ago, you asked me if I would abnegate, if I knew how to sacrifice myself for my people, to step down from the throne if need be: now you have my response; I would step down in martyrdom.
Montesquieu: You have softened. What liberties would you grant?
Machiavelli: Each year, upon the New Year, I would allow my legislative chamber to testify to its wishes in an address to me.
Montesquieu: But since the immense majority of the chamber would be devoted to you, what could you gather if not "thank you's" and testimonies of admiration and love?
Machiavelli: Yes, you are right. Would not such testimonies be natural?
Montesquieu: Are not all the liberties?
Machiavelli: But this first concession would be considerable, whatever you say. Nevertheless, I would not limit myself to it. Today in Europe there is a spirited movement against centralization – not among the masses, but the enlightened classes. I would decentralize, that is to say, I would give to my provincial governors the right to settle many of the small, local questions previously submitted to the approval of my ministers.
Montesquieu: If the municipal element is not involved in this reform, you would only make tyranny more intolerable.

[84] Benjamin Constant.

Machiavelli: Here indeed is the fatal haste of those who clamor for reform: one must take prudent steps along the road to liberty. Nevertheless, I would limit myself: I would grant commercial liberty.
Montesquieu: You have already spoken of this.
Machiavelli: It is the industrial aspect that still concerns me: I would not want that my legislation – due to an excess of distrust of the people – proceeds as far as preventing them from providing for their own subsistence. It is for this reason that I would present to the chambers laws that have as their object slight departures from the provisions that prohibit association. Moreover, my government's tolerance would render these measures perfectly useless and, since in the final analysis it would not be necessary to disarm oneself, nothing in the laws would be changed, just the formulae of their redaction. Today, one has deputies in the chambers who lend themselves very well to innocent stratagems.
Montesquieu: Is that all?
Machiavelli: Yes, because this would be much, perhaps even too much, but I believe I could reassure myself: my army would be enthusiastic, my magistracy would be loyal, and my penal laws would function with the regularity and precision of the all-powerful and terrible mechanisms that modern science has invented.
Montesquieu: And so you would not touch the laws concerning the press?
Machiavelli: You would not want me to.
Montesquieu: Nor the municipal legislation?
Machiavelli: Would this be possible?
Montesquieu: Nor your suffrage-protection system?
Machiavelli: No.
Montesquieu: Neither the organization of the Senate, the organization of the Legislative Body, your domestic system, your international system, your economic regime, nor your financial regime?
Machiavelli: I would only touch what I have mentioned to you. Properly speaking, I would have left behind the period of terror and entered into one of tolerance; I could do so without danger; I could even grant real liberty, because one would have to be quite denuded of political spirit to not recognize that, at the imaginary moment that I have supposed, my legislation would have already borne all of its fruit. I would have accomplished the goal that I announced to you: the character of the nation will have been changed; the slight faculties that I would return will, for me, have been the probes with which I measured the depths of the results. Everything will have been done, everything will have been completed; no more resistance will be possible. No more stumbling blocks, no more anything! And yet I would restore nothing. You have said so: this is the practical truth.
Montesquieu: Hasten to finish, Machiavelli. May my shadow never encounter you again and may God efface from my memory what I have heard, down to the last word!
Machiavelli: Be careful, Montesquieu: before the minute that has begun slips into eternity, you will seek my steps with anguish, and the memory of this conversation will eternally distress your soul.
Montesquieu: Speak!
Machiavelli: Then let us return. I will have done all that you know. By these concessions to the liberal spirit of my times, I would disarm the hatred felt by the parties.
Montesquieu: Ah! Thus you would not take off the mask of hypocrisy with which you will have covered the heinous crimes that no human tongue has described. Thus you would want that I

leave the eternal night so as to denounce you! Ah, Machiavelli! Even you have not taught one to degrade humanity to such a point! You did not conspire against conscience; you did not conceive the idea of making the human soul into a mud in which the Divine Creator himself no longer recognizes anything.

Machiavelli: It is true: I am surpassed.

Montesquieu: Vanish! Do not prolong this conversation an instant longer.

Machiavelli: Before the shadows that advance in tumult here below have reached the black ravine that separates them from us, I would like to finish; before they have reached it, you will no longer see me and you will call to me in vain.

Montesquieu: So finish; this will be my atonement for the temerity I committed by accepting this sacrilegious wager!

Machiavelli: Ah, liberty! Such is the force with which you are kept in a few souls when the people scorn you or console themselves with baubles.

Let me provide you with a quite short apologue about this subject: Dio recounts that the Roman people were indignant with Augustus because of certain, very harsh laws that he had made, but that as soon as he brought back the comedian Pilatus, and the agitators were chased from the town, the discontent ceased. This is my apologue. Now, here is the conclusion of the author, for it is an author whom I quote: "Such people would more vividly feel tyranny when one has chased away a mountebank than when one had taken from them all their laws."[85] Do you know who wrote this?

Montesquieu: It hardly matters!

Machiavelli: Thus, recognize yourself. I only see base souls around me: what can I do about it? Mountebanks would not be lacking under my reign and it would be necessary that they conduct themselves quite badly for me to decide to chase them away.

Montesquieu: I do not know if you have recalled my words exactly, but here is a quotation that I can guarantee to you: it will eternally avenge the people whom you calumniate: "The morals of the prince contribute as much to liberty as do the laws. Like them, he can make men into beasts and beasts into men; if he loves free souls, he will have subjects; if he loves base souls, he will have slaves."[86]

Here is my response; and if today I have something to add to this citation, it would be this: "When public honesty is banned from the heart of the courts, when corruption spreads itself out without modesty, it still cannot penetrate into the hearts of those who approach a bad prince; the love of virtue continues to live in the hearts of the people, and the power of this principle is so great that the bad prince has only to disappear for honesty – through the very force of things – to return to the practice of the government at the same time that liberty returns."

Machiavelli: That is very well written, in a very simple form. There is only one mistake in what you have said, and it is that – in the mind as in the soul of my people – I would personify virtue; even better, I would personify *liberty* (do you hear?), as I would also personify revolution, progress, the modern spirit, all that there is of the best in the basis of contemporary civilization. I

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[85] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XIX, Chapter II. [*Translator*: it is in fact Book XIX, Chapter III, that Montesquieu writes: "The same writer [Dio] informs us that the Romans were exasperated against Augustus for making certain laws which were too severe; but as soon as he had recalled Pylades the comedian, whom the jarring of different factions had driven out of the city, the discontent ceased. A people of this stamp have a more lively sense of tyranny when a player is banished than when they are deprived of their laws."

[86] *Author's note*: *Spirit of the Laws,* Book XII, Chapter XXVII. [*Translator*: "The manners of a prince contribute as much as the laws themselves to liberty; like these he may transform men into brutes, and brutes into men. If he prefers free and generous spirits, he will have subjects; if he likes base, dastardly souls, he will have slaves."]

do not say that one would respect me; I do not say that one would love me; I say that one would venerate me; I say that the people would adore me; [I say] that, if I like, I could have altars erected for me, because I would have the fatal gifts that act upon the masses. In your country, one guillotined Louis XVI, who only desired the welfare of the people, who wanted it with the complete faith, with the complete ardor, of a sincerely honest soul and, several years previously, one had erected altars to Louis XIV, who cared less for the people than for the most recent of his mistresses; who, at the least impulse, would have bullets fired at the rabble while he played dice with Lauzun. But much more than Louis XIV, I would be based upon popular suffrage; I would be Washington, Henri IV, Saint Louis, Charles the Wise; I mention your best kings so as to honor you. I would be a king of Egypt and Asia, at the same time; I would be Pharaoh, Cyrus, Alexander, and Sardanapalus; the soul of the people would light up when I passed by; they would run after my steps in rapture; the mother would invoke my name in her prayers; the young woman would regard me with sighs and would dream that, if my glance should happen to fall upon her by chance, she could perhaps repose upon my couch for a moment. When the unfortunate one is oppressed, he would say: "*If the King only knew*"; when one wanted to get revenge, when one hoped for help, one would say: "*The King would know how.*" Moreover, one would never approach me without finding my hands full of gold. Those who surround me would be harsh, violent; they would sometimes deserve a beating, it is true; but it would be necessary for them to be this way, because their hateful, contemptible character, their base cupidity, their excesses, their shameful wastefulness and their crass avarice would make a [strong] contrast with the sweetness of my character, my simple aspects and my inexhaustible generosity. One would invoke me, I tell you, like a god; in hailstorms, during shortages, in conflagrations, I would rush in; the population would throw themselves at my feet; they would carry me to the heavens in their arms, if God were to give them wings.

Montesquieu: Which would not prevent you from crushing them with artillery fire at the least sign of resistance.

Machiavelli: True, but love cannot exist without fear.

Montesquieu: Is this frightening dream finished?

Machiavelli: A dream? Ah, Montesquieu: you will weep for a long time. Tear up the *Spirit of the Laws,* ask God to give you forgetfulness for your part in the heavens, because here comes the terrible truth of which you already have a presentiment. There was nothing of a dream in what I have spoken to you of.

Montesquieu: What are you telling me?

Machiavelli: What I have described to you – this ensemble of monstrous things before which the spirit recoils, terrified; this work that only Hell itself could accomplish – all this has been done, all this exists, all this thrives under the sun, right now, on a part of the globe that we have left.

Montesquieu: Where?

Machiavelli: No, to tell you this would inflict upon you a second death.

Montesquieu: In heaven's name, speak!

Machiavelli: Well. . . .

Montesquieu: What?

Machiavelli: The time has passed! Do you not see that the whirlwind carries me away?

Montesquieu: Machiavelli!

Machiavelli: Do you see the shadows that pass not far from you, covering their eyes? Do you recognize them? They are the glories that are the envy of the entire world. They now ask God for their homeland back!

Montesquieu: Eternal God, what have you permitted?