POWER, BUT NOT GLORY
The example of Agathocles of Syracuse in Machiavelli's *Prince*

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Abstract

In *The Prince'*s chapter 8, Niccolò Machiavelli introduces the case of Agathocles of
Syracuse, an ancient ruler who succeeded in acquiring and maintaining power. However,
Machiavelli refuses to praise his deeds and condemns him. This constitutes one of the
most striking enigmas in Machiavelli's work. The present thesis conducts an
interpretative reading on the ambiguous case of Agathocles, supported by the approaches
of contemporary commentators who give simultaneous attention to the content of
Machiavelli's thought and the specific literary form in which they are introduced. The
result of the research proves that Machiavelli intentionally draws an ironic and
contradictory explanation around Agathocles, with the purpose of building a novel
meeting point between instrumental and moral teachings, which, at the same time, are
mirrored in two types of *virtù*.

<u>Acknowledgments</u>

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The Prince is a unique piece of writing. There are several well-known assumptions about this work that, surprisingly, are still subject to severe dispute among contemporary interpreters. It is usually said that, being preoccupied with the dramatic situation of Italy, through *The Prince* Machiavelli gives birth to a new science of politics, based in the realist observation of things, and therefore, separated from the authority of morality and religion, which, observed from a broader historical and theoretical point of view, is the emergence of modern political theory. But each of these points are still contested.

It may be an impossible challenge to synthetize the interpretative approaches on Machiavelli's work, since every author defens specific assumptions on the Florentine and criticize others. Disputes towards interpretations on Machiavelli can be found in many of the most prominent works in political thought from the previous century. Justo to point the example of whether or not Machiavelli was the founder of a new science separated from morality, in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958:10, 11), Leo Strauss defined the author as an 'immoralist' and criticized the idea of conceiving him as a patriot or a scientist, but observes his work as the 'first wave of Modernity' (Strauss, 1989), and praised him for contributing to the recovery of 'permanent problems' in political philosophy. In contrast, several renowned interpreters have seen in Machiavelli the founder of a new science, but even if they agree on this point, they do not share a common view on which is specifically the contribution of the new science: for example, in his publication *The Myth of the State* from 1946, Ernst Cassirer observes that Machiavelli is the first intellectual who fully understood the emergence of the new modern state, and therefore, he became the founder of 'a new type of science of a political static and a political dynamic', by providing a

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'technique on politics'. However, similar to what Strauss would argue twelve years later, Cassirer denies the possibility to attribute any sort of morality to Machiavelli's work (Cassirer, 1974:136). Other interesting case is the famous publication *Politics and Vision* from 1960, where Sheldon Wolin also sees in Machiavelli the founder of a new science, but he defines it as 'economy of violence', understood as a 'science of the controlled application of force' (1960:223); yet, at the same time, Wolin relativizes the idea that Machiavelli clearly broke the link between politics and morality, since the Florentine showed that 'it is difficult to govern a society and gain support if all of the ruler's actions violated the moral usages cherished by society', (1960:230). In *Rationalism in Politics*, from 1962, Michael Oakeshott undermines the notion of Machiavelli as a scientist: he defines the author as a thinker whose project was to 'provide a crib to politics' and a 'technique for rulers', but, at the same time and in contrast to Cassirer's view on these 'technique on politics', Oakeshott observes that Machiavelli was 'aware of the limitations of technical knowledge' and therefore never lost 'the sense of politics' (1962:29-30).

This list of debates can continue *ad infinitum* on every aspect of Machiavelli's work, and especially on *The Prince*. Moreover, Machiavelli has been a battlefront for the clash between opposing approaches in political thought: the Straussian approach, which understands that 'philosophers in the past did not always present their thoughts openly and explicitly', and that 'philosophy in its original Socratic form is still possible by showing the persistence of certain fundamental problems' (Zuckert, 2011:24); and the Cambridge School, which 'locates authors in their historical milieu', 'situate texts in their contexts' and prove their interpretations correct by 'establishing empirical facts' (Bevir, 2011:11-14).

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However, the richness of interpretations around *The Prince* cannot be reduced to the dispute between these two dominant approaches in the discipline: several great contributions for the understanding of Machiavelli have been stated independently from these perspectives. The interpretative approach developed by Eric Voegelin is an example. It can be seen not only as an independent contribution from the Straussian approach and the Cambridge School, but also as an intermediary point between their fundamental theoretical assumptions on 'permanent problems' and 'historical contextualization'. In his earliest introduction from 1940 to *History of Political Ideas*, Voegelin defines political ideas as an imaginary 'little world of order, a cosmic analogy, a cosmion', which creates a 'world of meaning out of the human desires', with a descriptive, cognitive and also formative function (1997:225-227). Since these cosmic analogies are linguistic constructions, they are provided of the 'magic power of language', in the sense that 'the primary purpose of the political idea is to evoke a political unit, the cosmion of order, into existence; once this purpose is achieved, the cosmion is a real social and political force in history; and then a series of descriptive processes sets in, trying to describe the magic unit as something not magically but empirically real' (1997:231). This allows Voegelin to build a prudent combination between historical contextualism, since these ideas 'are closely interwoven with the history of definite political units' in which they are created (1997:233), and the relevance of the ideas in themselves.

From this perspective, Voegelin observes Machiavelli's political ideas to be 'historically unique', and the product of the convergence between 'genius and circumstances' (1951:142). This historical particularity in Machiavelli can be also addressed through Ernst Cassirer's previously quoted work. In *The Myth of the State,*

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Cassirer brings a specific interpretation of Machiavelli which can perfectly cohabit with Voegelin's idea of cosmic analogy: he links *The Prince* with the works of Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno, in order to argue that Machiavelli represents, in the field of political thought, a new interaction between 'a new cosmology and the new politics of the Renaissance', where the 'difference between the "lower" and the "higher" world vanishes' (Cassirer, 1974:136). This allows Cassirer to formulate two immediate implications. First, Machiavelli would then be studying and analyzing 'political movements in the same spirit as Galileo, a century later, did with the movement of falling bodies', and therefore, the Florentine by no doubts would be founding a brand-new science of politics. Second, Machiavelli would be representing 'the gateway of the modern world', where 'the state has won full autonomy' and the political world 'has lost its connection not only with religion or metaphysics but also with all the other forms of man's ethical and cultural life' and 'it stands alone, in an empty space' (Cassirer, 1974:140). By building a dialogue between Voegelin and Cassirer, one can argue that Machiavelli's thought appeared in a unique historical moment, when fundamental and eternal truths became obsolete for the explanation of politics, and his timeless contribution resided in giving an intellectual answer to this new context. If political ideas are cosmic analogies, a plausible argument would be that Machiavelli's work resembles the downfall of the Christian cosmology that determined the medieval view on politics, and therefore represents the birth of the autonomous sphere of politics.

Another unique element in Machiavelli resides in the structure of his work, especially in *The Prince*. Among the many debates introduced above, one specific issue is whether or not Machiavelli can be understood as a 'political theorist', a 'political philosopher', or other kind of intellectual figure. Even before the twentieth century,

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different interpreters and readers started to pay attention not only to the specific content of *The Prince*, but also to the way in which Machiavelli develops his argumentation. This literary sensibility would reach a solid elaboration with Leo Strauss' approach, who famously argued that those who misunderstand the author and derived mistaken assumptions are being 'corrupted by Machiavelli', and therefore, behave like 'their pupils' (1958:34), since the Florentine is himself writing like a prince, in the way of Xenophon and Plato. Harvey Mansfield justifies Strauss' idea by saying that 'is not really strange once Machiavelli is recognized as a philosopher', since 'he is a new philosopher and a new prince, "wholly new" as he insists the new prince must be' (Mansfield, 2013:654).

But Machiavelli's interpreters have been paying considerable attention to the way in which *The Prince* is written beyond the Straussian approach, to the point of developing specific interpretative frameworks for the study of this canonical work. The way in which Machiavelli develops and formulates his arguments cannot be dissociated with their content. In other words, Machiavelli applies the political teachings that he gives to the reader as narrative decisions within his text. The study of Machiavellian style of political writing has become an object of attention of several contemporary scholars, who, at the same time, incorporate the historical background as a source of further meaning for the work. This is the case of Victoria Kahn (1986, 1994, 2013), and more recently, Erica Benner (2009, 2013).

Victoria Kahn is an interesting example on the contemporary emphasis on Machiavelli's style of argumentation, since she has dedicated the major part of her career to the study of English literature. She approaches Machiavelli's political thought by working on the concept of 'rhetoric' that she tracks back to the humanist tradition, and

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argues that Machiavelli's style is strategic and not an ornament. For her, Machiavelli is providing a 'rhetoric of political theory' for dealing with the 'realm of de facto political power, rather than a political theory with a coherent thematic content' (Kahn, 1994:4-5). As one can observe, the debates around Machiavelli appear to be interconnected: by arguing that his style is strategic, Kahn states that Machiavelli may not be precisely a coherent political theorist; same as Strauss suggested that this dialectical relation between form and content is observable once Machiavelli is understood as a philosopher. In order to formulate a convincing description of this uniqueness in Machiavelli, Kahn quotes Roland Barthes, who argued that the structure of Machiavelli's discourse 'attempts to reproduce the structure of the dilemmas actually faced by the protagonists' (Kahn, 1994:33).

In the recent publication *Machiavelli's Prince*, from 2013, Erica Benner provides an interesting approach on this issue, by pointing that 'Machiavelli was a literary man as well as a political one, and *The Prince* is a carefully structured work of art as well as a work of full razor-sharp, profound political analysis' (2013:xxxviii). She applies a careful and detailed reading on each chapter from Machiavelli's work, focusing on the use of ironies and dissimulation in order to uncover deeper meanings. Benner's thesis can be synthetized in conceiving Machiavelli as a moral and republican philosopher whose purpose is to educate the reader, a proposal that she has been developing since her first publication on the topic, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, in 2009, and traces its origin back to the sixteenth century. By reconstructing important elements of Machiavelli's personal life, and specially his private letters, Benner proves that the author 'conveys messages by dropping hints or signs (*cenni*) between the lines of innocently chatty text, due to the sensitive content of some exchanges', what finally makes *The Prince* a 'masterwork of

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ironic writing with a moral purpose', since it 'warns aspiring princes about the dangers of trying to assert absolute control over people who care about freedom', while, at the same time, 'it teaches ordinary citizens to recognize early warning signs of control-hungry behavior in their leaders, and to impress on them the need to establish political and military 'order' that can keep tyranny at bay' (Benner, 2013:xxi, xxii, xxviii).

Although Benner and Kahn carry deep and careful interpretative readings on Machiavelli, and therefore it is foreseeable that their findings may differ in several aspects, there are, overall, many similarities between their approaches, a fact that allows to conceive them as complementary. Both understand *The Prince* to be built upon a dialectical exchange between style and content, with the final purpose of educating the reader -both citizen and prince- by challenging the ability to judge, discern, and evaluate. Benner understands *The Prince*'s pedagogical purpose as exercising the reader's 'capacities to see through misleading political spin' (2013:xxii), while Kahn conceives it as a 'test of *virtù*' to the reader, and she points the case of Agathocles of Syracuse, which appears in *The Prince*'s chapter 8, as a complex example of this Machiavellian test to the reader.

The present thesis will conduct a close reading on the example of Agathocles, which is still a point of debate in contemporary interpretations on Machiavelli. In *The Prince*'s chapter 8, Machiavelli presents the cases of those who acquired power through crimes, and provides to the reader two examples: one ancient, Agathocles of Syracuse, and one modern, Liverotto da Fermo. In contrast to the treatment that the author has been developing upon historical examples since the beginning of the book, the case of Agathocles represents a complex and ambivalent dissertation, which denies to the reader the possibility to arrive into a definite conclusion.

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Regardless of their interpretative approaches, a majority of Machiavelli's contemporary commentators have been pointing their attention, in different degrees, to the problematic case of Agathocles. Many have expressed their concern towards the manifested ambiguity through which Machiavelli narrates the case (Sasso, 1977:210, Plamenatz, 1972:219), or even suggest that the author does not always provide an accurate historical account (Skinner, 1988:30). Others have decided to face the dilemma and provide possible interpretations, by comparing Agathocles with other historical examples cited by Machiavelli, whether in the *Prince* or in the *Discourses*. As it was mentioned, Victoria Kahn has been giving close attention to Agathocles in her studies. By reviewing how the secondary literature has been addressing this case, she observes that they have tended to interpret the example in two ways: some argue that Machiavelli 'registers his own discomfort with the notion of *virtù* he has been elaborating', while others 'see the story as an illustration of a cruel but effective use of violence, (...) and then differ as to whether this use of violence is immoral or amoral' (Kahn, 1994:28). In her opinion, there is 'hardly a less reassuring experience of reading in *The Prince* than that of chapter 8, and it is a chapter whose disturbing effect increases as we read on'. In her concluding interpretation, Kahn observes that Agathocles, as a new prince, may represent the initial stage for the transformation of the political unit into a republican system (1994:40), although she understands that Machiavelli's condemnation on the Sicilian implies that his deeds should not be imitated in the context of sixteenth century Florence and the liberation of Italy, requested in the final chapter 26.

In her reading on chapter 8, Erica Benner also gives a personal account on the case of Agathocles. She agrees that it includes 'one of *The Prince*'s most surprising passages' (Benner, 2013:113), and, similar to Kahn, her reading on the example derives in an

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important reflection on the concept of *virtù*, where she distinguishes an instrumental and a moral dimension of it (2013:121).

In addition, another contemporary interpreter who has been giving recent attention to Agathocles is John P. McCormick (2015a, 2015b). Located in his interpretative perspective on class conflict, which was characterized in his previous publications, such as *Machiavellian Democracy* (2011), McCormick reads in Agathocles a highly praised ruler who killed the corrupted oligarchy and, therefore, 'serves as Machiavelli's chief *exemplum* of precisely the appropriate political action necessary to establish a long-lasting principality and, perhaps more remarkably, to reform a corrupt republic' (2015a:125).

I argue that Agathocles's case is a moment of political education for the reader. The so-called 'ambivalence' that the example presents is intentionally built by Machiavelli with the purpose of testing the reader's ability to observe beyond what is immediately written. Located close to the recent contributions of Victoria Kahn, Erica Benner and John P. McCormick, I argue that the case of Agathocles represents a point of meeting of two different political teachings provided by Machiavelli: on the one hand, the teaching on the necessity of using force and violence for political stability, that has been worked in previous chapters like 3 and 8, finds its most radical exponent in Agathocles's crimes and efficiency; on the other hand, the same chapter 8 provides a moral judgement towards the historical example that is kept open to interpretations. The observed 'ambivalence' of Agathocles's case, I argue, consist in the fact that the example is located within this collision of two different political teachings.

In order to corroborate this statement, I conduct a double research that combines a literary reading with the analysis of its findings. First, with the aid of both Kahn and

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Benner's interpretative frameworks, this work advances into a detailed and careful reading of Machiavelli's account on Agathocles, in order to observe the ways in which the author builds his rhetorical exposition, and creates the enigmatic ambivalence that surrounds his opinion on the ancient example. Second, the findings of the reading will be subject of a three-step analysis: first, the interpretative arguments will be formalized; second, they will be interpreted with the set of teachings provided by Machiavelli in the group of chapters 15 to 19, where he works on the relation between the prince and the subjects; third and final, following the comparative strategy of contemporary interpreters, I conduct a comparison between Agathocles and Septimius Severus from chapter 19.

The results corroborate the initial claim and give more light to Machiavelli's strategy performed on Agathocles. By inserting moral judgements against Agathocles and a careful instrumental narration of his criminal deeds, Machiavelli simultaneously manages two different argumentative registers. Each of these turns is mirrored on a constant tension between two correlative types of *virtù*: a 'low-quality' or 'bodily' *virtù*, which is the reason of Agathocles's success in acquiring and maintaining power, and a moral *virtù*, a sort of 'higher-quality' attribute that Agathocles lacks, and prevents him from acquiring a new goal that Machiavelli introduces by the term 'glory'. Nonetheless, these two types of *virtù* are located in different dimensions: Machiavelli speaks of instrumental *virtù* as something which can be effectively possessed, while the moral *virtù* appears to be something that is recognized, attributed or called on the ruler. This difference is corroborated by contrasting Agathocles with Septimius Severus, a new prince who also acquired power through criminal means, but at the same time, gained the glorious reputation that Agathocles missed.

Overall, what initially appeared to be an ambiguous treatment from Machiavelli towards an ancient example, after careful consideration, reveals to be a link for the ongoing discussion on whether the Florentine proposes a moral view on politics or a separation between politics and morality. Based on the results of this research on chapter 8, the present thesis challenges the popular and classical idea that Machiavelli brings a radical and clear separation between politics and morality.

Chapter 2
Methodology and Interpretative Framework

From the most recent commentators on Machiavelli, Erica Benner is the only one who provides a detailed guide for conducting a reading. She explains that 'most that readers can do is to spell out the strongest reasons that led them to their interpretation', and gives the kinds of evidence that she applied for strengthening her own reading on *The Prince*: other statements, terms or examples used in the text, other texts by Machiavelli, and 'external' contexts, like works by other writers and historical background (Benner, 2013:xliii). In this sense, there is not an orthodox guide to follow in order to conduct a reading: not even Leo Strauss proposed a univocal model (Zuckert, 2011:29). Therefore, I build my own reading framework by following the example of classical and contemporary commentators, and mixing different advices from them that can cohabit without contradiction.

First, the thesis is based on the assumption on the affinity between form and content in *The Prince*: Machiavelli is simultaneously teaching to the reader and applying his own teaching on his discourse, and therefore, educating the reader not only by a direct message, but also through the example. In this sense, I consider Machiavelli to be taking linguistic and narrative decisions within the text as political decisions. Victoria Kahn clarifies this idea by stating that Machiavelli compares 'skill in government to skill in reading, by making the ruler's landscape into a text and the text into a realm of forces' (Kahn, 1994:20). Therefore, facing a text like *The Prince* undoubtedly forces the reader to build an active behavior, and approach the reading as a political challenge.

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This dialectical way of approaching *The Prince* by simultaneously analyzing its form and its content may find a solid theoretical, even philosophical, legitimization in *The Prince* itself. In chapter 15, Machiavelli gives at least two highly relevant views on the phenomenon of politics. First, he clarifies what is considered one of the cores of his framework, by arguing that he will consider 'the effectual truth of the thing' (Machiavelli, 1998:61). But it is by the end of this chapter that he introduces a remarkable observation about reality: 'for if one considers everything well, one will find something appears to be *virtù*e, which if pursued would be one's ruin, and something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being' (1998:62). This observation is the theoretical key for interpreters who conceive Machiavelli's style to be strategic and, therefore, and object of careful study. Supported by this passage, Sheldon Wolin argues that 'there is no literal translation of ethical acts into ethical situations', and that 'Machiavelli substituted instead a notion of the irony of political condition, (…) the alchemy in the political condition whereby good was transmuted into evil, and evil into good' (Wolin, 1960:234).

Victoria Kahn synthetizes this idea with mastery. She defines this situation as the 'irony of politics', understood as the 'gap or lack of correspondence between intention and result', against which Machiavelli 'wants to control this irony' because he 'conceives the man of *virtù* as someone who can use the ironies of political action to achieve political stability', because 'the world of Machiavellian politics is intrinsically ironic, and often the most effective mode of actin—and teaching—in such a world is theatrical and hyperbolic' (Kahn, 1994:24-25). Therefore, the rhetorical structure of the Machiavellian cosmion can only be understood as the author's response to the irony that he observes in politics, and at the same time, this observation is the product of his historical context of

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disconnection from fundamental truths. There are no more ultimate answers, and politics appear to be, as Cassirer pointed, floating in an 'empty and disconnected space'. In this sense, the question of how to build political stability and preserve the order becomes critical, and the mastery of Machiavelli's 'genius and circumstances', as Voegelin defined him, was to understand that the new education for the new prince resided basically in the attempt to control this indomitable irony as much as possible.

From Kahn's approach, I borrow the concept of 'rhetoric' by which she understands 'a repertoire of means of persuasion ranging from the figurative language and formal organization of a text to the ethos and pathos of the speaker' (Kahn, 1994:5). To this concept, I add Benner's specific notion of irony, through which Machiavelli 'seems to say one thing while hinting indirectly at another message, by means of signs, puzzles or other provocations' (Benner, 2013:xxii). She provides a compilation of 'Machiavelli's ironic techniques', from which I apply what she defines as 'normatively coded use of language', and specifically, the set of 'understated praise' coded words. The way in which Benner disarticulates the ambiguities of Machiavelli by applying direct questions that break his ironies, and her highly detailed observation on the use of language will be the main guide for the present thesis.

Another widely used strategy of analysis within *The Prince* is to compare one specific historical example with another, in order to contrast different variations in Machiavelli's judgement. John P. McCormick provides a solid defense of this strategy: 'Machiavelli's lessons emerge most clearly through a cross-comparison of the actions undertaken, or the actions eschewed' by the examples (McCormick, 2015b:31). McCormick observes that these 'politics of exemplarity', as he calls it, are specially striking in the case of chapter 8, since 'Machiavelli invites, but does not necessarily direct,

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readers also to evaluate Agathocles through careful consideration of other similarly situated political actors and the measures they took or refrained from taking in such circumstances' (2015a:126). By explaining this, McCormick moves into the comparison between Agathocles and Scipio Africanus. I consider his notion of 'Machiavelli's politics of exemplarity' to be highly relevant for the case of Agathocles, and for the purpose of the present thesis, I apply it in order to conduct a comparison with Septimius Severus. In addition, McCormick also adds that Machiavelli's rhetorical techniques include 'linguistic cues, intellectual tropes and literary (often Biblical) allegories' (2015a:124). It is important to mention that the analysis of the present thesis is delimited within *The Prince*, and Machiavelli's account on Agathocles present in the *Discourses* will not be included, since the author does not address the historical example in the rhetorical ways observed in *The Prince*.

Finally, I clarify a personal reading strategy that constitutes my interpretative framework on Machiavelli. In sections 3.1 and 4.2.2, while conducting the readings on the cases of Agathocles and Septimius Severus, I constantly contrast Machiavelli's narration with the ancient sources. In the case of Agathocles, I contrast it with the Book XXII of Justin's *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*; in the case of Septimius Severus, with *Epitome of Book LXXIV* from Cassius Dio. In both occasions, I prove that Machiavelli can be understood as a modern 'storyteller' of ancient history. I utilize the notion of *storytelling* with the purpose of expressing that, in *The Prince*, Machiavelli re-organizes the ancient narrations on the historical examples that he presents, in order to unmask the personal ambition of power of the ruler. Machiavelli is not only a rhetorical and ironic writer. His operation starts even one step before: the way in which he simply enumerates the sequence of actions of each case is already meaningful.

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Instead of repeating the narrative descriptions of the ancient writers, he usually starts by showing the example's hided ambition of power and how they, through a more or less strategic disposition, succeeded or failed in their attempt of acquiring power. This represents a manipulation of the historical examples, and, at the same time, a disarticulation of their *virtù*ous deeds, since at it will be shown through the evolution of this thesis, one of the most fundamental attributes that a prince must exercise, which is not usually explained in direct terms by Machiavelli, but still shown in his descriptions and in his own example in *The Prince*'s writing, is to hide the personal ambition of power. Therefore, each time Machiavelli describes an historical example, he is displaying an authoritative storytelling and indirectly presenting himself not only as a prince, as Leo Strauss argued, but even above the princes. Machiavelli stands as *the* prince of princes — the philosopher king.

Chapter 3
Reading Agathocles

The main purpose of this reading is to observe how Machiavelli articulates two types of political teachings: an instrumental one, concerned to the efficient means for acquiring and maintaining power; and a moral one, which appears to simultaneously condemn Agathocles's deeds despite their success. The reading will be conducted by a close examination of the sentences and the interconnection of arguments performed by Machiavelli in his rhetoric. Harvey Mansfield's *Prince* translation from 1998 will be the main source, and different words from the italian edition of Luigi Firpo (1961) will appear in brackets. Furthermore, different arguments and descriptions from Machiavelli about Agathocles, in case of suspected irony, omissions, or any other rhetorical strategy, will be contrasted with the Book XXII of Justin's *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, since scholars who have previously taken an account on Agathocles prove that it is likely that Machiavelli read Justin (Skinner, 1988:30, Khan, 2013:559).

The enigma of Agathocles is constructed by the articulation of three different moments in chapter 8. In order to conduct a reading and propose a possible solution for this puzzle, it is necessary to understand how Machiavelli *performs* this enigma, by analyzing in detail its three parts: first of all, the opening paragraph of the chapter; second, the body of text that relates the story of Agathocles until Machiavelli begins narrating about Liverotto da Fermo; third, the closing paragraphs of the chapter.

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3.1 The first paragraph, the first play

Chapter VIII begins with a first introductory paragraph where Machiavelli seems to clarify to the reader the explanatory logic that will guide his discourse. Similar to the different typifications that he has been applying since the beginning of chapter 1, Machiavelli explains that there are still two ways to acquire power that cannot be understood under the dichotomy fortune-*virtù*, and with the aim of clarifying one of these ways, he will provide two examples.

Since this first part is constituted by a single paragraph, it will be entirely quoted in order to observe the whole rhetorical performance of Machiavelli:

> But, because one becomes prince from the private individual also by two modes which cannot be altogether attributed either to fortune or to *virtù*e, I do not think they should be left out, although one of them can be reasoned about more amply where republics are treated. These are when one ascends to a principality by some criminal and nefarious [*scellerata e nefaria*] path or when a private citizen becomes prince of his fatherland by support of his fellow citizens. And, to speak of the first mode, it will be shown with two examples, one ancient, the other modern, without entering otherwise into the merits of this issue [*sanza intrare altrimenti ne' meriti di questa parte*], because I judge it sufficient, for whoever would find it necessary, to imitate them [*perché io iudico che basti, a chi fussi necessitato, imitargli*]. (34)

Even though Machiavelli seems to be applying a transparent language, a few important observations can be pointed. Machiavelli's argument contradicts the certainty established from the beginning of the book, when he declared that rulers acquire power through a combination of fortune and *virtù*, and he did not clarify the possibility of finding examples outside this dichotomy. Just to point one important example, he reaffirmed this

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idea before introducing the notorious cases of the founders, Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, in chapter 6:

> (...) the result of becoming a prince from private individual presupposes either *virtù*e or fortune. (22)

The main topic of chapter 8, therefore, results unexpected for the reader. If one gives attention to the specific use of language, there are many elements in the first paragraph that invite for a second reading. First, Machiavelli opens the chapter with a negation or a contraposition, by using the word 'but'. However, it is not clear towards which previous statement does the term 'but' apply. Instead of advancing the course of the explanation into a new level and closing the previous one, Machiavelli seems to be opening a situation or moment of 'exceptionality' in the progress of his discourse. The strategy of opening the sentences with a negation of the previous statement will be a constant characteristic in the following narration.

A second element to be pointed on the paragraph is the way in which Machiavelli evaluates the topic of chapter 8 from the beginning. In the title, he anticipated that the chapter would deal with 'crimes', with a moral tone unseen in the *Prince*. Not being enough, in this opening paragraph he repeats the formulation by adding a second adjective, calling them 'criminal and nefarious'. It is interesting to point that this moral judgement appears before the examples are introduced.

A third element can be observed. Before the story of Agathocles begins, Machiavelli introduces a comment that, again, calls for the attention of the reader. After stating the organization of the chapter by expressing the use of both an ancient and a

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modern example, Machiavelli argues that he will conduct his discourse without entering into the 'merits [*meriti*] of this issue', because, he judges it sufficient, 'for whoever would find it necessary [*necessitato*], to imitate them'. The words from Mansfield's translation coincide with the Italian edition of Luigi Firpo. The word 'merit' [*meriti*], in both languages, have a positive meaning. Also, Benner includes it as an 'understated praise' coded word for *virtù* (2013:liv), and Plamenatz (1972:157) shows that *virtù*, in some English translations, may appear as 'merit', which shows that, even though Machiavelli himself writes '*meriti*', the two words may sometimes be connected in different moments of his work, where Machiavelli by using *virtù* may be implying a sort of merit. The meaning of this final statement is not clear. In a literal interpretation, Machiavelli could be defending himself from a moral reader who might not entirely agree upon discussing on 'evil means'. In a sequence of two sentences, Machiavelli has introduced a first tension: from the title and especially the first sentence, he provided the reader a moral statement towards the topic that will be discussed in the chapter, yet immediately observes that, although morally objectionable, the examples have their merits.

The striking element goes beyond: Machiavelli is implying that the examples he is about to show might have higher merits than the ones he will 'explicitly' show to the reader. This is a further element of uncertainty. In this sense, the first part of the statement appears to be anticipating that the writer will adopt a careful and planned position towards the objects of his discourse. Machiavelli is, at least, warning the reader that the following explanation will be polemic from a moral point of view, although it has its merits, which he will not explicitly address. While acting like he would be just introducing a chapter, Machiavelli is actually starting his rhetorical performance by exposing this three-steps argumentative move.

But Machiavelli's play is completed with a final strike. In the second part of the third sentence, he justifies his decision of not 'considering explicitly the merits' by arguing that the discourse he will present to the reader will be enough 'for anyone who needs [*necessitato*] it'. Considering the relevance of the concept of 'necessity' in Machiavelli's account, a close reading of this final statement turns the alarm on. If one adopts the position of a careful reader who is afraid of being corrupted by the author, and therefore adopts a prudent attitude, this statement raises some serious doubts. The reader still does not know which are going to be the specific ancient and modern examples, but even before that, Machiavelli has already sent several ambiguous warnings which are finally closed with a recognition on the necessity of the topic. In this sense, the invocation of necessity at the end of the paragraph is a way to legitimate his rhetorical play in itself, and at the same times, it 'mirrors' Machiavelli, the reader, and the examples in a sort of 'triangulation': as the ancient and modern examples faced the necessity to apply crimes, the same may happen to the reader, and therefore, Machiavelli as a writer falls into the necessity to introduce them in his discourse.

3.2 Machiavelli the storyteller

After raising an intended speculation on the reader, Machiavelli moves into his account on Agathocles. While introducing the case, the first sentence already calls for the attention of the reader. Although Machiavelli promised not to 'explicitly' consider the merits of the criminal practice, he introduces the example as follows:

> Agathocles the Sicilian became king of Syracuse not only from private fortune but from a mean and abject one. Born of a potter, (...). (34)

This might be a casual description for a reader who ignores the ancient tradition. However, if one reads to Justin's *Book XXII*, a remarkable coincidence with an elegant but powerful irony from Machiavelli can be observed:

> Agathocles, tyrant of Sicily, who attained greatness equal to that of the elder Dionysius, rose to royal dignity from the lowest and the meanest origin. He was born in Sicily, his father being a potter, (...). (Book XXII, section 1)[1]

With the very first sentence on Agathocles's life, the Machiavellian performance has begun, and the reader who directly believed in Machiavelli's opening words became a victim of his rhetorical dissimulation. Here starts a series of 'winks' or, in terms of Erica Benner, 'understated praise' from Machiavelli to Agathocles and, therefore, simultaneously to the reader, that will continue across the chapter. By the specific choice of words and the way the discourse is structured and organized, the reader will find in Machiavelli's statements an indirect or hided praise of Agathocles's merits. In this specific case, without omitting any detail, Machiavelli practically copies Justin's presentation of Agathocles, but, for the surprise of the reader, he replaces the word 'tyrant' with its Aristotelian opposite, 'king'. This single movement is definitely meaningful: first, Machiavelli is immediately entering in contradiction with his own word in the previous paragraph, namely, 'without entering otherwise into the merits of this

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[1] Due to the impossibility to quote Justin, and later Cassius Dio, by page number, since they belong to an online source, the quotes will include the specific book and the specific section.

issue', since he is giving Agathocles a wink; second, as Benner (2013:xxx) suggest in her reading guide, Machiavelli appears to be ironizing with the ancient writers, in this case Justin, by inverting their judgement. This rhetorical move from 'tyrant' to 'king' cannot be dissociated, at the same time, from the idea of the whole *Prince* as a different set of innovative discourses compared to traditional 'mirrors for princes', in which Machiavelli 'seems to dispense with the opposition' between good monarchy and bad tyranny (Benner, 2013:xxx). From a classical interpretation of Machiavelli as the founder of modern political thought, or, in terms of Leo Strauss, the character of the 'first wave of modernity' (Strauss, 1989:81), here the reader can observe how the author 'inverts' the teaching from the 'Tradition'.

Having spoken about Agathocles' origin, Machiavelli performs a narrative operation that, if compared with Justin's account, it can be seen as a critical one. In a highly synthesized sequence of sentences, Machiavelli describes the attributes of Agathocles and reveals his ambition of power to the reader. He says:

> (...) he always kept to a life of crime at every rank of his career; nonetheless, his crimes were accompanied with such *virtù*e of spirit and body [*virtù di animo e di corpo*] that when he turned to the military, he rose through its ranks to become praetor of Syracuse. (34)

If the reader did not grasp Machiavelli's irony by describing Agathocles as a 'king' and also missed his indirect sympathy by expressing the abject origin of the Sicilian, at this time it results difficult not to judge that the writer is clearly showing himself, on a first read, highly inconsistent. How is it possible that Agathocles had 'such *virtù*e', when Machiavelli clearly and transparently expressed in the first sentence of the

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chapter that this case was not a *virtù*ous one? Hardly any reader could not argue that Agathocles, by this initial moment in the narration, is becoming an enigmatic and confusing figure read through Machiavelli's ironic rhetoric. By no doubts, from now on Machiavelli's rhetorical play will increasingly demand from the reader an active judgement on the standards and possibilities of *virtù*.

The only elements that provide aid for a tentative interpretation are the words that Machiavelli adds to the concept of *virtù*. Before chapter 8, *virtù* was never defined as '*virtù*e of spirit and body'. These two words could imply a 'type' of *virtù* that is oriented to the physical strength and resilience of its holder. This tentative interpretation can be reinforced if one considers that the Italian word *animo* is a powerful concept with a meaning that goes beyond 'spirit'. In his study on the concept of *virtù*, Harvey Mansfield explains that *animo* is the 'raw material of *virtù*' necessary for actions like conspiracies, and that is Machiavelli's version of the Greek *thymos*, the spirit of self-defense that 'paradoxically can lead to the risking of one's life for the sake of saving one's life', (Mansfield, 1996:40). Therefore, '*virtù*e of spirit and body' points to the reader the figure of Agathocles as a bodily skilled one, whose *virtù* was the key of his success in ascending through the military ranks until becoming the praetor of Syracuse. *Virtù* of 'spirit and body' is presented as an instrumental ability that, combined with his criminal deeds, helped Agathocles acquire his initial goal. The reader starts to observe in Agathocles a clear combination of evil elements and physical and military ability praised as *virtù*. And this combination becomes an instrument for success.

It may be relevant to point that Machiavelli, once again, uses a negation to introduce his teaching. In this case, the reader observes that Agathocles was a criminal, 'nonetheless', his criminality was mixed with a virtù of spirit and body, and the overall

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outcome was his success in acquiring the highest military rank. Therefore, if this statement could be reduced into a minimum expression, one is able to suggest that criminal deeds and virtù can be equalized, at least, to military success.

That being said, Machiavelli continues his explanation, and again, in a synthetic strategy, tells the reader how Agathocles became ruler of Syracuse, including the previously anticipated 'criminal' means. It may result optimal, in this case, to quote the body of sentences that include the full feat of Agathocles:

> After he established in that rank, he decided to become prince [*avendo deliberato diventare principe*] and to hold with violence and without obligation to anyone else that which had been conceded to him by agreement. Having given intelligence of his plan to Hamilcar the Carthaginian, who was with his armies fighting Sicily, one morning he assembled the people and Senate of Syracuse as if he had to decide things pertinent to the republic. At a signal he had ordered, he had all the senators and the richest of the people killed by his soldiers. Once they were dead, he seized and held the principality of that city without any civil controversy [*sanza alcuna controversia civile*]. (34, 35)

Here Machiavelli reveals to the reader that Agathocles's criminal means to power consisted in killing 'all' the senators and the richest citizens of Syracuse. Yet, similar to the shift between 'tyrant' and 'king', understood as a 'modern' element in Machiavelli, the Florentine is now narrating a morally condemnable event in a visibly neutral language. As any reader can judge, the label of 'criminal' was accurate, since Agathocles committed a massacre against the economic and political ruling class of Syracuse. In addition, as Benner (2013:112) points, the 'criminal means' cannot be only reduced to the killing, since Agathocles, by planning his coup with Hamilcar, committed an 'unpatriotic act of treason, though Machiavelli refrains from saying so'. Again one can see how Machiavelli,

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through a careful use of non-evaluative language, forgives several actions committed by the Sicilian that could demand, at least, a severe judgement.

Which is the intended outcome of narrating evil and criminal deeds in a neutral language? Machiavelli seems to be increasingly showing to the reader the use of crime as a mean to power devoid of any moral lens. Borrowing the famous concept that will later appear in chapter 15, Machiavelli is providing to the reader a view on evil in its effective truth [*vertià effettuale*], as an instrument for political success: Agathocles killed his opponents and acquired power, and that is all to be said. And if one compares the evolution of the chapters, especially chapters 3 and 6, where the use of force is justified and then the case of the successful founders is explained because of their use of force, it is possible to observe that Machiavelli has been slowly preparing his reader for this teaching on chapter 8, where Agathocles is not just using force, but extending the use of criminal violence into a permanent state of affairs. In this sense, the neutral language applied to Agathocles's case can be interpreted as a new stage in Machiavelli's education on his reader in the use of force, in this case, extreme.

Returning to the reading, there is another important point to be made here. In this paragraph, the reader starts to confront a further element present, in particular, in Machiavelli's account on Agathocles, and in general, in all *The Prince*. To his ironies and dissimulated sympathies towards the Sicilian, and his contradiction between what he manifested he would do and what he seems to be doing, now Machiavelli -if compared, once again, with Justin's Book XXII- shows a simultaneous mastery as a reader of ancient history and as, what we could call for the purpose of the present thesis, a 'storyteller'. By this term I do not imply that Machiavelli is writing a fiction. What Machiavelli does, and not only with Agathocles but with many other examples in *The Prince*, is to read the

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ancient sources, interpret its content, and re-organize the narrative structure of the case in order to transform it into a educational example that complement his teachings, chapter by chapter. This operation is visible here with Agathocles. By comparing the ancient sources with *The Prince*, one can observe Machiavelli thinking, working, and taking decisions that are, simultaneously, linguistic and political, or in Victoria Kahn's words, 'rhetorical'.

In order to carefully observe the sequence of this operation, one needs to go back to Justin and read how are the events of Agathocles ordered. A first difference between the Roman historian and Machiavelli is that the first narrates more in detail the life of Agathocles, where he includes infamous events related to robbery, audacity, and a tormented marital life with a woman who was criminally connected with him. Once Agathocles became the praetor of Syracuse, Justin expresses the following statement:

> And, not content that from being poor he was suddenly made rich, he engaged in piracy against his own country. He was saved from death by his companions, who, when apprehended and put to torture, denied his guilt. Twice he attempted to make himself sovereign of Syracuse; and twice he was driven into exile. (XXII, section 1)

Instead of relating the events in the way Justin does, Machiavelli analytically points directly to the key elements on Agathocles life: which were his attributes -virtù of spirit and body-, which was his ambition -become ruler-, and how he achieved it -killing senators and richest people-. The reader can observe a first striking difference between Justin and Machiavelli. Justin is condemning, or at least judging, the fact that Agathocles felt 'not content' from being rich, and decided to go for more. This decision, however, is

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introduced by Machiavelli in absolutely neutral terms: as it was previously quoted, the Florentine explains, through a powerful and synthetic phrase, that Agathocles 'decided to become prince'.

A more important distinction can be indicated. Why did Machiavelli hide the fact that Agathocles failed twice in his attempts of acquiring power? As it was shown, Justin describes that Agathocles was twice driven into exile. This omission in Machiavelli must be meaningful. In the context of *The Prince*, the fact of failing in the attempt to obtain power should be a critical element in the biography of any historical example. Although Machiavelli does not directly say that Agathocles acquired power just by one try -so one cannot blame the Florentine-, the direct and immediate secuenciality with which he describes, in a few sentences, the raising of the Sicilian severely contrasts with Agathocles' double failure. As Kahn (2013:560) states, 'Machiavelli conspicuously omits details' on regards of Agathocles's life.

Returning to Justin's description, after mentioning the exiles, the Roman historian continues a detailed narration on the exile of Agathocles with the Murgantines, the war he fought for them and how he took control of the city of the Leontines, and later proceeded to besiege Syracuse. At this point, Justin describes Agathocles's attack against Syracuse with a statement that plays with opposites terms, a stylistic strategy that Machiavelli perfectly learned and improved in his rhetoric:

> Thus, at one and the same time, Syracuse was both defended by an enemy with the love of a citizen, and attacked by a citizen with the hatred of an enemy. (XXII, section 2)

In this exemplary statement, Justin plays with two sets of contrasts interrelated in between: citizen-enemy, and love-hatred. But the important thing of this statement is that it allows the reader to grasp how was Agathocles seen by the ancient writers: a 'hated enemy' driven by the irrepressible ambition for seizing power. As it has been argued since the beginning of this chapter, Machiavelli presents a far more neutral Agathocles that the one that ancient history recalls, a decision that cannot be understood but as an critical irony towards the tradition.

Moving back to chapter 8, after having expressed Agathocles's success, Machiavelli advances into a sort of reaffirmation of the previously mentioned 'virtue of spirit [*animo*] and body', structured in a two-level argumentation. Machiavelli will insist that Agathocles had this remarkable ability by providing to the reader further historical events and a preliminary thought on the Sicilian. First, he shows how Agathocles was able to resist future obstacles after he acquired power:

> And although he was defeated twice by the Carthaginians and in the end besieged, not only was he able to defend his city but also, leaving part of his men for defense against the siege, he attacked Africa with the others. In a short time he freed Syracuse from the siege and brought the Carthaginians to dire necessity [estrema necessità]; they were compelled of necessity to come to an agreement with him, to be content with the possession of Africa, and to leave Sicily to Agathocles. (35)

This is a first level of argumentation by providing further historical facts. As Machiavelli has been explaining from chapter 3, and will keep doing after chapter 8, every new principality, once acquired, generates new obstacles for the novel prince. In this case, the reader can observe that Agathocles suffered a double defeat by the Carthaginians, yet,

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again, he was able to win the battle due to his military skills. If one reads Justin's version of these events, it seems that Agathocles had a hard time against the Carthaginians:

> (...) and being deserted, moreover, by his allies, who were disgusted at his cruelties, (Agathocles) resolved to transfer the war into Africa; a resolution formed with wonderful audacity. (XXII, section 4)

It is important to observe, one more time, the way in which 'his allies' conceived Agathocles: they were 'disgusted at his cruelties'. Machiavelli does not explicitly mention this in chapter 8, although he does not say that Agathocles was praised or had a high reputation. The only words that Machiavelli used when addressing the relation of the subjects towards Agathocles, as it was previously mentioned, were that he held Syracuse 'without any civil controversy'. This way of describing Agathocles's rule implies a sense of minimum achievement, of minimal military stability: in a more direct language, one could say that Agathocles seized power and had no plots against him. Although the reader could ask why Machiavelli does not go deeper into the citizen's consideration on Agathocles, one has to remember that at this moment in *The Prince*, Machiavelli is not devoted to the relationship between the ruler and his subjects, a topic that will be dominant from chapters 15 to 19.

Going back to Justin, although the Roman historian seems to praise the idea of moving to Africa as a 'wonderful audacity', he later shows that Agathocles lied to his soldiers and made them travel to Africa without knowing where were they actually going:

> (...) he (Agathocles) directed his course towards Africa, not one of his men knowing whither he was sailing; but while they all supposed that they were going to Italy or Sardinia for lunder, he landed his army on the coast of Africa, and then for the first time made known his intentions to them all. (XXII, section 5)

This way of proceeding of Agathocles with his soldiers is also problematic. Overall, combining Justin's account on his relation with his subjects and his army, it is possible to see in Agathocles the clear figure of a tyrant, of a ruler who deceives, manipulates and uses violence to impose his most personal ambition of power over the people and over his soldiers.

Having observed that, once again, Machiavelli's narration on Agathocles conspicuously lacks of a moral judgement like the one present in Justin's account, the Florentine moves into a further justification for Agathocles's bodily *virtù*:

> Thus, whoever might consider the actions and *virtù*e [*le azioni e virtù*] of this man will see nothing or little that can be attributed to fortune. For as was said above, not through anyone's support but through the ranks of the military, which he had gained for himself with a thousand hardships and dangers [*diagi e pericoli*], he came to the principate and afterwards he maintained it with many spirited and dangerous policies [*con tanti partiti animosi e pericolosi mantenessi*]. (35)

This paragraph could be an accurate conclusion on Agathocles's example in chapter 8. Machiavelli reaffirms the lack of fortune in Agathocles's example, not only through the acquisition of power, but also in the way he maintained it. According to Benner, the use of the word 'maintain' [*mantenessi*] seems to suggest 'a more reliable kind of upkeep than Machiavelli's often insecure, too forced, 'holding'' (2013:113). One

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more time, Machiavelli indirectly praises Agathocles, and at this point of his discourse, his initial warning in the first paragraph, regarding the fact that he would not consider explicitly the 'merits' can now be understood: Machiavelli has been indirectly and ironically esteeming Agathocles through the subtle change of words and the reordering of Justin's narration, with the specific omissions previously pointed. And by doing so, the reader can rightfully believe that the overall outcome of this rhetorical operation has been to suggest that, despite the terrible crimes committed, one is authorized to imitate Agathocles if the necessity orders so, the same necessity that apparently forced Machiavelli to write chapter 8.

But, once the reader has built this more or less stable certainty in the interpretation of Agathocles, Machiavelli destroys it with an unseen level of violence combined with mastery, formulating what is by the majority of Prince's commentators as one of the most surprising passages (Mansfield, 1996: 40, Benner, 2013:113, McCormick, 2015b: 28), which, in terms of Gennaro Sasso, is 'among the most tormented and dramatic in The Prince' (1977:211):

> Yet one cannot call it [*non si può ancora chiamare*] virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire empire [*imperio*], but not glory [*gloria*]. (35)

After all the signs and indications of 'understated praise', Machiavelli drastically condemns not only Agathocles in particular, but in general the use of crime as means to power. This sentence can be considered the core of Machiavelli's narration on Agathocles. It is interesting to observe that Machiavelli prefers to say 'you cannot call

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[*chiamare*]' instead of directly saying that it is not. In other terms, he is not saying that it is not virtù. Rather, and in relation with the first paragraph when we also said 'it cannot be attributed', he manifests that one cannot call it virtue. Machiavelli seems to be moving a bit away from his method on grasping things in 'effective truth', as he would later express in chapter 15. Instead, here he seems to be problematizing the fact that one cannot recognize Agathocles actions due to their immoral nature.

If it's observed from a point of view of its structure, one can see that is composed by four main elements that are important in Machiavelli's thought: *virtù*, immorality, power, glory. This fourth element, gloria, is a surprising addition: it was never mentioned before in the chapter, and it will not appear again. The sentence, observed as a whole, offers a hierarchical distribution between these elements. In contrast to previous appearances of 'glory' in *The Prince*, here the concept is not just a casual word. It is visible how Machiavelli locates gloria as a place or goal that is hierarchically higher than the acquisition of power, but does not provide to the reader any definition. One can infer that 'glory' is a stage or situation only acquirable if power and *virtú* -a *virtù* that respects Machiavelli's five moral elements, namely, citizens, friends, faith, mercy, and religion- are combined. Although it has been proved that this chapter is full of suspected ironies and unstated praise, there is a level of direct message here: '*virtù* is not the same as glory', (Kahn, 2013:570). This hierarchical impression is undeniable.

This statement potentiates the enigmatic and ambiguous atmosphere that surrounded Agathocles's narration, and definitely proves that Machiavelli is developing a rhetorical operation in chapter 8. This sentence creates an apparent breakdown, within the chapter, on the use of *virtù*: it is clear that the previously mentioned '*virtù* of spirit and body' differ drastically for this *virtù* that cannot be called virtù if the moral elements

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mentioned are not respected. In other words, Machiavelli is showing two clear levels or types of *virtù*. On the one hand, a lower and physically oriented *virtù*, the one that Agathocles without doubts posses, and which allowed him to be a successful general, to overcome fortune, and to succeed in becoming a ruler. However, from now on this *virtù* is presented as an incomplete one. On the other hand, his cruelty, which by having consulted Justin the reader has proved that it was a visible evil conduct towards citizens and soldiers, neglects the possibility to relate his figure with a higher and morally-oriented *virtù*. This distinction among two kinds of *virtù* is shared by the majority of the interpreters, regardless of their theoretical approach (Skinner, 1988:31, Mansfield, 1996:6-40, Benner, 2013:113), yet Kahn argues that the distinction between the two apparent types cannot be taken as a clear-cut and permanent one (1994:30).

It may be interesting to give attention also to the concept of 'glory'. I argue that, by locating glory as a new and unexplained end for princely action, which is higher than merely power, the reader is confronted to take a decision on whether or not to follow Machiavelli's new advice that there might be something higher and more beneficial for his own ambition than just acquiring power. And Machiavelli clearly wants the reader not to have a specific definition of gloria. It is notorious how this statement resembles, like the Biblical allegory commented by McCormick, the end of the Lord's Prayer, where 'power' and 'glory' are located together. Machiavelli seems not only to be judging Agathocles and those who believe that only force and violence are enough for maintaining *il stato*, but also exhorting the reader to imagine and visualize a stage beyond power, a stage only acquirable if the (moral) *virtù*, expressed under a chain of five links, is respected. Or, in more precise terms, it is only by not transgressing the moral foundations of society that the prince will receive the reputation and possibility to be called virtuous.

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Allocating gloria beyond power, in a context of an apparently highly instrumental discourse like The Prince, and connecting this glory with 'high road of virtù' (Benner, 2013:115), forces the interpreter to ask whether or not Machiavelli is arguing on the instrumental benefits of respecting the moral standards that govern society. Not because they might be good in itself, like the Tradition believed, but because a prince, and specially a new prince, needs to base his action in solid foundations beyond the use of force. The only clear certainty of this passage is that, in order to unlock the doors of gloria, the prince has to do more than just acquiring power.

Returning back to the reading, if one wonders what might be glory, the next statements that conclude the narration of Agathocles will not provide an answer. Machiavelli, after having performed his exemplary statement on virtue, power, and glory, continues with a new argument that strikes the reader:

> For, if one considers the virtue [*virtù*] of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit [*la grandezza dello animo*] in enduring and overcoming adversities, one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to any most excellent captain [*eccellentissimo capitano*]. (35)

Surprisingly, Machiavelli insists one more time on the *virtù* of Agathocles, after having just rejected it. At this point, McCormick's recent expression fits perfectly: 'Machiavelli at first condemns, (...) but then seems to condone', (2015a:125). The previously '*virtù* of spirit and body' is now dissociated into '*virtù* in entering into' and in 'escaping from dangers', in addition to a 'greatness of his spirit'. Clearly, this reaffirmation of *virtù* is related to the low physically-oriented virtù; and this statement

corroborates the assumption given in the chapter. As the reader can observe, Machiavelli, by performing his argument under the form of a conditional cause, accepts that there is no reason to deny that Agathocles is not an *eccellentissimo capitano*. Therefore, this statement returns to the previous assumption about Agathocles's mastery in defeating the winds of fortune.

Immediately after, Machiavelli puts thread to a new argument in his discourse:

> Nonetheless, his savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes, do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men [*eccellentissimi uomini celebrato*]. (35)

If this statement and the previous one are contrasted, the main element of opposition is between 'excellent captain' and 'excellent men'. The first distinction between these two categories of men can be pointed in the fact that, in contrast to the captains, 'excellent men' are 'celebrated' [*celebrato*]. Since the impossibility of Agathocles to be one of these highly praised men resides in his amoral deeds, the reader can rightfully argue that these *eccellentissimi uomini* celebrato are those who managed to inhabit the still unknown *gloria*.

Finally, the story of Agathocles comes to an end under unexpected terms. The ambivalence between Agathocles's rapacious *virtù di animo e di corpo* and his reprehensible lack of (moral) so-called *virtù* is intentionally left unresolved by Machiavelli, who closes his storytelling on the tyrant-king of Syracuse with an apparently conclusive statement that returns to the very first sentence of the chapter, applying exactly the same vocabulary:

Thus, one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he achieved without either. (35)

Machiavelli's conclusion on Agathocles seems to be that, as he had previously introduced, the example does not belong to fortune nor *virtù*. This is a cunning conclusion, because it leaves unresolved the tension between power and glory. Judging the entire set of arguments presented by Machiavelli, a preliminary conclusion on Agathocles could be that, although he did acquire power, the way in which he did it, does not finally enjoy the positive judgement of Machiavelli. But is Machiavelli himself judging Agathocles, or showing to the reader the possible judgement that the tradition, the ancient writers, and the vulgate can put on him? In other words, although Agathocles seems to have used his type of '*virtù* of spirit and body' in such a way that allowed him to acquire power, the repetitive ambivalence of Machiavelli since the introduction makes it a suspicious case for imitation. The straightest interpretation could not ignore that Machiavelli is implying, at least, that although Agathocles succeeded until his death, there is still room for judging him severely, as Machiavelli himself does, by adopting an unseen censorious moral voice.

3.3 Machiavelli's final play: the well-used cruelty

This ambivalent conclusion is reinforced by the end of chapter 8, when Machiavelli surprises the reader for the last time in this chapter. After reviewing the deeds of Liverotto da Fermo, Machiavelli concludes by raising a general teaching which goes back to Agathocles and tries to extract from his deeds a possible advice for princes.

Showing that he is aware and in control of the reader's state of confusion, Machiavelli advances into his final thoughts:

> Someone could question how it happened that Agathocles and anyone like him, after infinite betrayals and cruelties, could life for a long time secure in his fatherland, defend himself against external enemies, and never be conspired against by his citizens, inasmuch as many others have not been able to maintain their states through cruelty even in peaceful times, not to mention uncertain times of war. (37)

The first thing that this statement proves is the careful attention that Machiavelli pays to the pedagogical purpose of his discourse. He understands that the reader has been struggling between several interpretations while reading his account on Agathocles, and now is time to use that state of confusion to introduce the proper general teaching of the chapter. However, Machiavelli seems to be addressing only one specific doubt among the many that he has infected in the reader. He is pointing the connection between criminal deeds and political success. The author continues:

> I believe that this comes from cruelties badly used or well used [*crudeltà male usate o bene usate*]. Those can be called well used (if it is permissible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself [*per necessità dello assicurarsi*], and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can. Those cruelties are badly used which, though few in the beginning, rather grow in time than are eliminated. (37, 38)

Machiavelli's final teaching resides in cruelties well used. It is necessary to use force, and it is necessary for founders of new states to use force, but from now on, both

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teachings are insufficient: the prince must know how to use it properly. And these well used cruelties are those that are done 'at a stroke'. The idea that Machiavelli's neutral language towards crime was a form of understated praise gains legitimization here: he ironically mentions of speaking 'well of evil' by closing the chapter, while that was specifically his strategy from the beginning. This implies a sense of foresight from the prince: he has to observe in advance the evil deeds that will be required for the maintenance of the stato, and to do it all together. Finally, Machiavelli concludes:

> Those who observe the first mode can have some remedy [*qualche remedio*] for their state with God and with men [*con Dio e con li uomini*], as had Agathocles; as for the others it is impossible for them to maintain themselves. (38)

The contribution of this conclusion for the reader may be to acknowledge that, even though Agathocles is a problematic example, Machiavelli is suggesting that there can be princes who cannot even imitate his deeds. This would be the example of those who used crimes badly. In addition, it may be important to point the specific words used by the author: those who apply this new teaching on well-used crimes can at least 'have some remedy'. This statement, that shows a sense of incompleteness, of having achieved the goals in a partial situation, is similar to the previously mentioned 'and held the principate of that city without any civil controversy' when speaking about Agathocles's control of Syracuse. In this sense, it seems to be implying that, although successful, Agathocles is not an exemplary case for wise imitation.

Observing that Machiavelli closes the story of Agathocles at this point, it may be important to go back to Justin and see how did Agathocles actually finished his days:

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As his life was despaired of, a contention arose between his son and grandson, each claiming the right of succession to his power as if he were already dead; and the grandson, after killing the son, got possession of the supreme dignity. (XXIII, section 2)

As one can read in *The Prince*, Machiavelli decides to omit this information and instead show to the reader a ruler who maintained power in presumably stable conditions until his death. The image of his grandson killing his son in a struggle for the succession would definitely force Machiavelli to modify, at least, some elements of his argument.

Chapter 4
Analyzing Agathocles

The present chapter consists in a three-steps analysis. First, the different points observed in the previous reading will be formalized in a coherent argument. Second, different teachings from the group of chapters 15 to 19 will be applied in order to re-interpret the case of Agathocles and to solve the ambiguity. Third, these teachings enable the possible comparison between the Sicilian and the case of Septimius Severus.

4.2 Formalizing the reading

By reviewing Machiavelli's account on Agathocles, the reader has seen that the author consciously performs several rhetorical operations, where the content of his teachings cannot be dissociated from its form. It may result a hard challenge to argue that the visible ambivalence in Machiavelli's opinion towards the Sicilian is an unintended outcome. As it has been shown, many of his operations consist in details carefully constructed and located in specific places across the text in order to challenge the reader to see beyond the apparent arguments. If the entire set of Machiavelli's rhetorical operations could be synthesized to their minimum logical state, I propose to observe his rhetorical chain of argumentation as follows:

Type of argument	Type of *virtù*	Final end
1° Initial moral judgement (part I): *'Criminal and nefarious path'.*	High-quality virtù *'Cannot be attributed (...) to virtùe'*	Unspecified
2° Instrumental narration of Agathocles's deeds (part II): *Unstated praise through neutral language, and use of specific words.*	Low-quality virtù *'Virtù of spirit and body'*	Power
3° Second moral judgement (part II): *'Yet, it cannot be called virtùe (...)'.*	High-quality virtù *'Cannot be called virtùe (..)'*	Glory
4° Final instrumental teaching (part III): *'Well-used cruelty'.*	Low-quality virtù *'Virtù of spirit and body'*	Power

This schematization may help the reader to observe that what was initially conceived as an ambivalence or contradiction, it is, actually, the constant articulation of two types of opposed arguments: an instrumental and a moral one. In addition, each of these teachings has been correlated by Machiavelli with a type of *virtù*. Moreover, except from the first judgement in the opening paragraph, each rhetorical argumentation of Machiavelli is followed by two types of political ends for princely action: the instrumental teachings lead to the political success of Agathocles in acquiring and maintaining power. In contrast, the second moral judgement introduces the notion of glory as a final stage beyond power.

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Therefore, Agathocles's case presents a dialogue between instrumentality and morality. Since *The Prince*'s previous chapters were visibly devoted to analyze the cases in a rather instrumental perspective, this dialogue can be understood as an innovation of chapter 8. By presenting a case like Agathocles, Machiavelli has taken into the extreme the instrumental idea of using force for political success. Agathocles not only uses force: he is widely recognized as a criminal, and instead of becoming an obstacle for his ambition, the most direct teaching of Machiavelli in chapter 8 is to show that this attribute, actually, was the cause of his political success. The omission of important information regarding Agathocles, especially his previous failures in conquering power and the situation generated at the end of his life between his son and his grandson, prove that Machiavelli is manipulating the historical example for his own educational purpose towards the reader. Agathocles was a 'new prince', but not a founder of a new *stato*. However, Machiavelli omits in his evaluation the topic of foundation (Benner, 2013:116), which can be interpreted as having the intention of presenting a case to the reader with two clear attributes, almost ideal ones: immorality and political success. The manipulation that Machiavelli performs through his storytelling somehow idealizes the dimension of efficiency and success of Agathocles, presenting him almost as the model of instrumental force.

While bringing an extreme case that makes it clear that doing morally wrong can produce instrumental positive political outcomes, Machiavelli simultaneously challenges his very own teaching with a new apparently moral one, absent in previous chapters, that appears to be located in a higher position. These two teachings are not only distinguished between each other due to their nature: while closing the first one, Machiavelli introduces the second one and leaves it open for the rest of the upcoming chapters. In other words,

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Agathocles brings into a clear end the discussion whether force and violence can be instrumentally effective, since it is visible that it actually does; however, Machiavelli simultaneously puts thread to a new apparently moral argumentation that challenges the fullness of Agathocles's instrumental performance. Agathocles is an incomplete prince whose political success does not satisfy Machiavelli's new judging standard.

This zig-zag between instrumental and moral arguments is mirrored in the opposition between '*virtù* of spirit and body' and 'so-called (moral) *virtù*'. The incompleteness of Agathocles as an exemplary case can be seen through different lens: it can be due to his lack of recognition of moral *virtù*, and at the same time, it can be understood as the distance that separates him from power to glory. As Benner proves, this distinction between types of *virtù* has it antecedent in chapter 6. While explaining the *virtù* and greatness of the founders, namely, Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus, Machiavelli tries out a diversification inside the concept of *virtù* by distinguishing these cases with the one of Hiero of Syracuse, a 'lesser example of great *virtù*' (Benner, 2013:84).

From this point of view, Machiavelli seems to be fabricating a new moral standard to guide political action, a standard that requires to respect the moral tradition not merely because of a goodness in itself, but because it may be beneficial for the stability of the prince. These findings locate the present thesis close to the different interpretative approaches that read in Machiavelli a moral writer. This tradition can be traced back to the 16th century, and it is usually related to a republican view on the Florentine. However, the republican and moral views on Machiavelli cannot be synthetized in one single approach or general perspective. Just to point one distinction, McCormick (2003) has criticized the 'Cambridge School' within the republican view on Machiavelli, arguing

that their ascent on common good and law neglects the importance of class conflict, one of the key elements worked by him.

But, is Machiavelli implying that a new moral value will guide the instrumental actions of the prince? The relation established between morality and instrumentality in chapter 8 is not simple or evident. The most elaborated observation about this tension can be found in Benner's reading. Loyal to her style of attacking Machiavelli's rhetorical dissimulation by launching direct questions as sword thrusts, Benner asks to herself and to her reader: 'does moral *virtù matter?*'. Her answer is that for Machiavelli 'it makes little difference whether one describes this lack of *virtù* as morally wrong or merely imprudent, since violating natural order is *both* immoral *and* dangerous for the violator' (2013:121). I agree with her interpretation, to which I draw the following observation: Machiavelli gives a different 'ascent', in terms of Leo Strauss (1958:12), when he distinguishes the two types of *virtù*. If attention is given to the language, one can observe that Machiavelli carefully distinguishes between the fact that Agathocles had a '*virtù* of spirit and body', yet it cannot be called (moral) *virtù*. In this sense, there is not only an opposition between two possible types of *virtù*, but also and more important, between some attributes effectively possessed and other attributes that cannot be recognized. The distinction between instrumentality and morality starts to blur, and evolves into a distinction between effectively 'possessing' and 'appearing to possess'.

4.2 Applying prospective teachings on Agathocles

4.2.1 Chapters 15 to 19: the prince and the subjects

The case of Agathocles and its implicit tension between instrumentality and morality can be interpreted with teachings that will appear in the section of chapters that goes from 15 to 19, which, as interpreters agree, are devoted to the relation between the prince and the subjects (Gilbert, 1977:163). At the beginning of chapter 15, in a statement usually understood as an attack against Plato's philosophy, Machiavelli famously argues:

> But since my intention is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing [*vertià effettuale della cosa*] than to the imagination of it. (61)

In this sense, when Machiavelli observes that Agathocles had '*virtù* of spirit and body', this observation is done in the 'effectual truth' of the phenomenon. However, Machiavelli later argues, at the end of chapter 18, that a prince must 'appear to have' the five moral qualities that he judges as necessary:

> A prince should thus take great care that nothing escapes his mouth that is not full of the above-mentioned five qualities [*cinque qualità*] and that, to see him and hear him, he should appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion. And nothing is more necessary to appear to have than this last quality. (70)

These *cinque qualità* are identical to the five elements that Agathocles transgressed and, therefore, made impossible to call him virtuous: 'kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, be without faith, without mercy, without religion' (35). This implies that the problem of Agathocles resided in the impossibility to give a moral reputation to his instrumental and successful action.

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From this point of view, Machiavelli would not be fabricating a new moral precept, but trying to conciliate as much as possible the instrumental actions of the prince with the moral foundations of society, by arguing on the instrumental benefit of not transgressing these set of norms. Interestingly, Machiavelli, by his own example, shows that morality cannot be addressed by his method of effective truth, and this proves Ernst Cassirer's observation that the Florentine's thought is already part of the disconnection between the higher cosmological order and the lower one (1974:140). There are no more transcendental truths, and Machiavelli deals with this by working with the representation of the moral truth, and encouraging the prince that, although this may not be a good in itself for his political ambition, a prudent prince has to avoid transgressing morality. Machiavelli is not telling the reader to be good, but to spell through his mouth a constant respect for the cinque qualità of morality. In this sense, the virtuous reputation appears as something acquirable through the use of discourse, and it resembles the idea that the skills of government are comparable to the skills of reading, and with the example of Machiavelli himself, also equal to writing. Benner

Another interesting omission in chapter 8 is that Machiavelli does not suggest what could have Agathocles done in practical terms in order to be called virtuous. Concerned that the main error of Agathocles was his lack of reputation, Victoria Kahn suggests that the instrumental mistake could have been the fact that Agathocles did not displaced the 'responsibility for his violent acts onto his subordinates', and because of this, 'he was himself blamed for his violent deeds, which others saw as criminal' (2013:569).

But how is it possible to achieve such reputation? An answer may be found in chapters 17 and 18, where Machiavelli delineates the 'duality' that princes must satisfy

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in order to conserve the state and gain high reputation. In chapter 17, Machiavelli explains

that the prince, especially the new prince, must incur in cruelties and has to be feared buy

his subjects but not hated.

> The prince should nonetheless make himself feared [*temere*] in such a
> mode that if he does not acquire love, he escapes hatred [*che fuga l'odio*],
> because being feared and not being hated can go together well. (67)

Therefore, fear but not hate is the most prudent link that the prince can establish

with the citizens. And immediately after, Machiavelli praises the example of Hannibal as

a 'dual' prince, who was able to be respected by all sort of subjects, including the large

army that he commanded, because of:

> (…) his inhuman cruelty, which, together with his infinite *virtù*es, always
> made him venerable and terrible [*venerando e terribile*] in the sigh of his
> soldiers; and without it, his other *virtù*es would not have sufficed to bring
> about his effect. (67)

From these passages, one can infer that cruelty, if pushed by necessity, may not

be a problem for the new prince if it's accompanied with this kind of attributes that,

simultaneously, show him virtuous at the eyes of the subjects. The well-known teachings

from chapter 18 complement this idea of duality. Machiavelli introduces a 'human

zoology' (Benner, 2009:197), by proposing two complementary beastly modes for

princes as 'means of self-defense' (Benner, 2013:217): the lion, who can defend itself

from wolves, and the fox, who can avoid snares. But behind the image of each animal,

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one can find a specific attribute that Machiavelli is encouraging the prince to exercise: the lion's force and the fox's craftiness. Nonetheless, the important point here is the subtle and usually forgotten distinction in terms of difficulty between the two modes. The art of imitation of the lion and the fox are not equally executable. If attention is given to Machiavelli's explanation, one can see that imitating the fox is clearly more challenging than applying the lion's mode. After introducing the two beasts, Machiavelli states what seems to be an attack on those who conceive force as the only weapon for political action:

> Those who stay simply [*stanno semplicemente*] with the lion do not understand this [*non se ne intendano*]. (71).

Applying the lion mode is 'simpler', and those who only stay in that mode, cannot 'understand' what Machiavelli is trying to introduce. The Florentine is showing that his teaching on the beasts is a novel education that goes against pre-conceived views. A few sentences later, he adds that:

> (…) and the one who has known best how to use the fox has come out best [*meglio capitato*]. (72)

This proves the difference in difficulty and mastery in applying both modes. One must admit that the idea is quite straightforward: it may result easier to apply direct force than to have the foxiness of being a 'great pretender and dissembler' (72), as Machiavelli defines it. And it is precisely through the art of imitating the fox that Machiavelli introduces the previously mentioned notion of 'appearing' to have the *cinque qualità*.

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If chapter 8 is reviewed from the perspective of chapter 18, the ambiguity on Agathocles between *effective* instrumentality and *apparent* morality, and his impossibility to attain glory, finds a credible answer. Agathocles was a 'unimodal' beastly prince: he governed as a ferocious lion using criminal force as his only instrument for political action. His pursued a political path supported by the same attributes that made him a remarkable general, namely, '*virtù* of spirit and body'. However, this attribute, reconsidered from chapter 18, seems to be only a 'lionly' quality. In other words, Agathocles governed as a ruler guided by his military conduct, and therefore, he represents a sort of minimization of political action. This allowed him to maintain his power through the exercise of violence, but neglected him the possibility to enjoy the reputation of a stateman. Being a new prince as he was, the final cost of this imprudent behavior can be seen in the fact that, despite his long and durable ruling stability, Agathocles failed to become the founder of a new order. This failure barely affected him in life, but it was translated into severe adversity for the entire community due to the political instability that was originated after his death.

4.2.2 Agathocles and Septimius Severus

Having observed that behind Agathocles's enigma resides a rhetorical play between effective instrumentality and the representation of morality, and having filled the Sicilian's incompleteness with the teachings from chapters 17 and 18, for further explanations I propose to contrast Agathocles with similar examples worked by Machiavelli. The criteria of selection consist in two attributes that make the cases comparable with Agathocles: they are both cruel and violent, but at the same time, astute foxes, what makes them probably the best examples of Machiavellian princes.

Contemporary interpreters tend to apply a comparative strategy in order to grasp hidden meaning from Machiavelli's account on Agathocles. While Kahn and Benner tend to compare Agathocles with Cesare Borgia, and McCormick with Scipio Africanus, I propose a comparison with Septimius Severus.

Chapter 19 invites the reader to join a different level of complexity in the analysis. Machiavelli will include the Roman soldiers as a third actor with whom the emperors will have to deal, together with the 'people' and the 'great'. Besides this point, there is a difference with the narrative strategy of chis chapter compared with chapter 8: in this case, Machiavelli has already been developing a sort of 'theoretical framework' from chapters 15 to 18, that will structure his judgement on each emperor. Instead of presenting a new case like he did with Agathocles and extracting a teaching from it, here Machiavelli dives into the history of the Roman empire in order to validate his teaching on the 'duality' of the prince. Among the emperors selected, Septimius Severus is the ultimate example of the Machiavellian prince:

> And because the actions of this man were great and notable in a new prince, I want to show briefly how well he knew how to use the persons of the fox and the lion, whose natures I say above are necessary for any prince to imitate. (78)

As the reader can see, Machiavelli is not being ironic while describing Severus. The author clearly praises the Roman for being the example that corroborates the several princely dualities that he has been formulating: being 'venerable and terrible' (67), to use the 'laws of man' and the 'force of beasts', and while being a beast, to move like 'the lion and the fox' (69). In order to proceed with the comparison, the first step is to observe

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which interpretative manipulation does Machiavelli conduct over the historical figure of Severus while narrating his deeds. An ancient source on Severus can be found in *Epitome of Book LXXIV* from Cassius Dio, who was both a Roman senator and a historian, and therefore, narrates Severus' rise from the perspective of a privileged witness.

In sections 16 and 17, Cassius Dio comments the rise of Severus, who is praised as 'the shrewdest' for being the only one among the three generals who foresaw that a war for succession was coming, and therefore, decided to move immediately to Rome. Cassius Dio offers a rich and detailed description on the effect that Severus' move towards Rome had inside the city: the everyday life collapsed. Julianus feared Severus and started to execute wrong decisions. He tried to fortified the city, for which he brought the soldiers inside, who started to attack and disturb the citizens. Not being enough, Julianus dived into desperation and decided to kill many kids as part of a magic rite in the search for protection. It is important to see how, in the witness eyes of Cassius Dio, Julianus' image degenerates and declines, even into the ridicule.

By the end of section 16, Cassius Dio comments that 'what caused greatest amusement was his fortifying of the palace, (…) Julianus believed that in case of defeat he would be able to shut himself up there and survive'. The emperor is so afraid of Severus, that the citizens start to feel insecure under his command. In opposition, Severus is observed from Rome as a committed and honorable general, who sends letters to the Pretorian Guard and convince them that his real purpose is to avenge the death of Pertinax. The contrast between the increasing reputation of Severus, who still has not arrived to Rome, and the madness of Julianus, concludes with a decision in hands of the Senate that is narrated by Cassius Dio as a reasonable outcome by the end of section 17: 'we thereupon sentenced Julianus to death, named Severus emperor, and bestowed divine

honors on Pertinax'. The senator quotes a desperate Julianus whose last words, before

being executed, were: 'But what evil have I done? Whom have I killed'.

Machiavelli's account on Severus respects each of these historical facts, but they

are re-ordered and re-interpreted. The author summarizes Severus' rise as follows:

> Since Severus knew of the indolence of Emperor Julianus, he persuaded
> his army (…), that it would be good to go to Rome and avenge the death
> of Pertinax (…). Under this pretext, without showing that he aspired to the
> empire, he moved his army against Rome (…). When he arrived at Rome,
> he was elected emperor by the Senate out of fear and Julianus put to death
> (78).

Instead of narrating the events from the point of view of Rome, Machiavelli

reveals and shares with the reader the ambition of power that Severus masterfully hides

to everyone, even to his own loyal soldiers, an element absent in Cassius Dio's account.

Machiavelli presents a strategic Severus who not only understands that a war is coming,

but also knows of the 'indolence of Emperor Julianus'. In this sense, Severus' move

towards Rome is a brilliant and perfect decision: only by moving his army and sending

letters to the Pretorian Guard ensuring -and deceiving- that his real intention is only to

avenge Pertinax, he foresees that Julianus will fear him and, therefore, will expose his

own indolence at the eyes of people, the soldiers, and the senators, who observes that,

finally, it is necessary to depose him and execute him. Thus, one can legitimately argue

that Severus acquired power just by transporting his army to Rome in the precise

occasion, without applying any violent action.

It is difficult to find a real difference between Agathocles and Severus: they both

acquired power through criminal means. But the enormous difference, is that Severus

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behaved like a fox when the occasion did not demand the use of violence, and he moved in such a way that the final outcome of his strategic action was the execution of his enemy in the hands of others.

Once power was acquired, Severus again moved strategically against his two challengers, Albinus and Niger:

> And because he judged it dangerous to disclose himself as an enemy to both, he decided to attack Niger and deceive Albinus (78).

In this second step towards his ambition of power, Severus becomes a model of Machiavellian princely duality: confronting two enemies at the same time, he applies the lion against Niger, and the fox against Albinus. Machiavelli concludes:

> Thus, whoever examines minutely the actions of this man will find him a very fierce lion and a very astute fox, will see that he was feared and revered by everyone, and not hated by his army, and will not marvel that he, a new man, could have held so much power (79).

As it was observed, even Cassius Dio in his narration does not see in Severus a political individual ambitioning power, but an honorable general who is committed with the idea of avenging Pertinax. Severus' foxiness is so high, that, as it was mentioned, he does not even need to kill Julianus with his army: instead, he foresees the occasion and strategically moves to Rome, a decision that creates the condition that produce the *legal* death of the emperor, in hands of the Senate.

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In contrast, Agathocles does not build an image on his actions and he was also hated. If we compare the way in which Justin and Cassius Dio observe each ancient ruler, the first one sees in Agathocles an abominable ambition of power from the beginning. Agathocles's personal intention of seizing power neglects the possibility to build a justifying representation of his deeds. He is seen as a cruel general whose appetite moves him to murder the Senate and the richest citizens of Syracuse. In this point, the comparison between Severus and Agathocles is striking: both have the Senate as an obstacle for their personal ambition, but while Agathocles reacts as a lion and kills all senators, Severus transforms the obstacle in an instrument for his goal. Cassius Dio is himself an example of Severus' *virtù*: if the Roman general would had acted as Agathocles, the senator would had been killed. Instead, not only he survived Severus' rise to power, but he was even enchanted by the image of *virtù* that the new emperor transmitted.

By overlapping Agathocles with Severus, the reader can now observe that, although Machiavelli elaborated the teaching on well-used cruelties from the Sicilian, his criminal mode was still imperfect. In terms of Sheldon Wolin, it is possible to argue that Severus showed a higher proficiency in his 'economy of violence'. Being as criminal as Agathocles, the Roman emperor only used force when the occasion made it absolutely necessary, and he was always aware of creating a solid justification for his deeds, not because they needed a legitimization in themselves, but because it is only through pretexts and dissimulation that he could always hide his real ambition of power from the eyes of his subjects. And if its carefully observed, the nature of the image that he builds is based on notions of common good, like the avenge of Pertinax. From this point of view, and in clear opposition with Agathocles, Severus constantly performed a rhetorical move

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between his real action and the representation that the subjects made of it. In this sense, Severus had the same *virtù* of spirit and body than Agathocles, and, *also*, it was possible to call him *virtùous*, as the Cassius Dio witnesses. By applying a constant rhetorical duality, Severus managed conciliate instrumental success and moral reputation.

A further point beyond the comparison with Agathocles can be done. As I previously argued that Agathocles, despite his success, represents a minimization of the political, since he only governed like an imperative lion, Severus, in contrast, shows a kind of maximization of the political realm. The quality of his *virtù* allowed him to acquire a level of success that is uncommon in political rulers: he managed to satisfy the contradictory humors of three different social actors, the soldiers, the people, and the Senate. In this way, with Severus Machiavelli proves that the ruler can be beyond the class struggle and, without being part of any of the factions in dispute, manage to govern all of them. In this sense, the case of Severus shows that the political realm can be a sphere of innovation and not necessarily take part inside the class dispute; an idea that, for example, Marx would criticize severely in the nineteenth century under the concept of 'Bonapartism'.

Conclusion

The present thesis has shown that behind Machiavelli's ambiguous approach on Agathocles in *The Prince*'s chapter 8 resided an intricate entanglement between instrumental and moral arguments. Through a review on Machiavelli's use of language, these arguments appear to be located in the different registers: the instrumental '*virtù* of spirit and body' can be possessed, while the moral *virtù* is attributed or called.

Contrary to a common and inaccurate assumption, Machiavelli tries to fabricate a dynamic principle for the action of the prince, where the instrumentality of his personal ambition may cohabit as much as possible with the moral foundations of his society or, in other terms, with the 'reasinable desires, drives and resistance of the people' he seeks to control (Benner, 2013:121). The Machiavellian cosmion is an attempt to control the unbeatable irony of a political world floating in a new meaningless space. Machiavelli's response to this new historical context is to teach the language of irony and constant dissimulation between dualities.

Agathocles failed to address these dualities. He used force as his only political weapon for maintaining the state, and in terms of chapter 18, he was a lionly prince. By showing the success of this strategy, but at the same time judging that it is not worth of princely imitation, Machiavelli indirectly expresses to the reader that the new prince will be obligated to use force in order to overcome the *necessary* obstacles that fortune will bring to him, but, at the same time, his actions cannot be reduced merely to the application of force. The unnecessary transgression of morality may carry practical consquences to the prince and the community, as it happened in Syracuse after the death of Agathocles. By reinterpreting Machiavelli's moral judgement on Agathocles, it is now possible to state that, by applying exclusively violence one can obtain power, but will not *found a*

new order. Contrary to Agathocles, Septimius Severus managed to combine the ferocity of the lion and criminal deeds when necessity forced him, but in all other occasions, he disarticulated his enemies and ruled among the different Roman classes by applying the mode of the fox. This allowed him to avoid being hated by his subjects and to found a lasting dynasty. The new prince must apply force but at the same time, he must aim for good reputation, which will move him to act through other means beyond force; and in the long-term, this contributes to the stability of the political order.

The example of Agathocles can contribute to the discussion in contemporary political theory. It can be understood as a 'consequentialist' view on politics, since every action of the prince may be positively judged if its final outcome is the preservation of the political order. At the same time, it is directly linked to the problem defined as 'dirty hands', which was elaborated by Michael Walzer. Although Walzer recognizes Machiavelli's 'commitment to the existence of moral standards', and points him as the very first intellectual who ever work on this issue (1973:175), the example of Agathocles clearly shows that the Florentine author is providing a clear moral constraint to ambition of the prince. The new prince must understand that necessity will force him to apply violence in different occasions; however, the unnecessary transgression of the moral foundations of society may have devasting consequences for the stability of the political unit.

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