

# Roberto R. Aramayo

# The Chimera of the Philosopher King

Around the Kantian Distinction between Moral Politician and Political Moralist: The Dilemmas of Power, or the Frustrated Love Affair between Ethics and Politics





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Traducción de Damián Bravo Zamora

# Índice

| PREAMBLE11   | Ĺ  |
|--|----|
| I. THE GYGES SYNDROME17  | 7  |
| II. PLATO'S PANACEA: THE PHILOSOPHER-KING23  | 3  |
| III. MACHIAVELLI AS THE NOTARY PUBLIC OF<br>THE DIVORCE BETWEEN ETHICS AND POLITICS 33                             | 3  |
| 3.1. The Chess Metaphor4   | 1  |
| 3.2. The Politician Facing Fortune's Advances46  | 5  |
| 3.3. On Vice as a Key to Politics  | 1  |
| IV. THE DILEMMAS OF POWER IN FREDERICK THE GREAT,<br>OR VOLTAIRE'S DREAM AND DIDEROT'S NIGHTMARE.59                | )  |
| 4.1. The Moral Troubles of «the Sans Souci Philosopher» 64   | 1  |
| 4.2. The Coauthors of the Anti-Machiavelli   | 3  |
| 4.3. Voltaire's Short-lived Dream  | 7  |
| 4.4. Diderot's Nightmare 85  | 5  |
| V. «MORAL POLITICIAN»/«POLITICAL MORALIST».  KANT AND HIS SECRET ARTICLE ON THE CHIMERA  OF THE PHILOSOPHER-KING93 | 3  |
| VI. ON WEBER'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN CONVICTION AND RESPONSABILITY10   | )7 |
| VII. EPILOGUE: KAUTILYA'S «ARTHASASTRA», AN<br>ANCESTOR OF MACHIAVELLI IN MILLENARY INDIA 11                       | 19 |
| BY WAY OF A COLOPHON   | 37 |

For Javier Muguerza, Antonio Pérez Quintana and my few closest friends.

«When our politicians say that politics has no guts, they are right, to some extent, in what they say and in what they mean. Gutless politics is, in effect, the empty politics that evil-hearted people are used to doing. »

(Antonio Machado, Juan de Mairena)

### Preamble

Since the beginning of time, the politicians' profession has had a rather bad reputation, in spite of counting among its ranks some honorable exceptions. How is this phenomenon to be accounted for? Is this just another case in which envy begets slander against whoever stands out above the average? Or are the causes of this phenomenon to be found at a deeper level? Why has politics always had such a bad name? What are the reasons behind the fact that its proceedings have been identified, time after time, with treachery, evil acts, and deception? Is it really incompatible with the dictates of ethics?

Not so long ago, a renowned jurist and temporary minister tried to answer the question with a 'No', and he expressed his view at any time he had the chance to do so, even if, on account of his position, he was

responsible for some journalistic comments that made one doubt about the good judgment of such distinguished reflections. Minister Juan Alberto Belloch made the following declaration of principles in a preface to a Kantian text that was then celebrating its first two hundred years:

Against "the politics of cunning", as Kant calls unconditional pragmatism in political action, morals must have a restraining function. Doubtless, that is the evaluative judgment behind the idea that we have been insisting upon in this Ministry: "only what is ethical is political".

As it happens, I was assigned the task of writing an introduction to that Kantian work prefaced by Juan Alberto Belloch<sup>3</sup>, and I authored a small introductory study with this telling name: *On the incompatibility between the professions of philosopher and king, or on the primacy of morality over politics*.<sup>4</sup> This work was written in the midst of great political scandals. During those days the media delivered innumerable cases of corruption to our breakfast tables (misappropriation of funds, systematic imposition of illegal tariffs, criminal antiterrorist practices with alleged support by the government...) and the Kantian theses found in his essay on perpetual peace suddenly seemed to gain an unheard-of validity, especially when they were endorsed by the person in charge of regenerating our political

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind Manuel Vazquez Montalbán's editorial "El ascenso", published in *El País* on 7/8/1995.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Juan Alberto Belloch, Preface to Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace*, edited by the Ministry of Justice and Interior, 1994, p. VI.

<sup>3</sup> Eugenio Nasarre (head of the Publications Department of the Ministry of Justice) urgently needed a Kant specialist, and Professor Elías Díaz was kind enough to mention my name to this effect. I could only welcome the task happily, as I was working on the text in point during that time, as can be seen in a collective volume appeared a couple of years later: Roberto R. Aramayo, Javier Mugerza, and Concha Roldán, La paz y el ideal cosmopolita de la Ilustración (En el bicentenario de «Hacia la paz perpetua» de Kant), Tecnos, Madrid, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Manuel Kant, *Por la paz perpetua*, translated into Spanish by Rafael Montestruc, Madrid: Ediciones del Ministerio de Justicia e Interior, 1994 (pp. IX-XXXIV). Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Hacia la paz perpetua*. *Un diseño filosófico* (ed. by Roberto R. Aramayo) CTK E-Books / Editorial Alamanda, Madrid, 2018, pp. 13-66. <a href="https://ctkebooks.net/translatio/hacia-la-paz-perpetua-un-diseno-filosofico/">https://ctkebooks.net/translatio/hacia-la-paz-perpetua-un-diseno-filosofico/</a>

#### **PREAMBLE**

life. The politician—according to both Kant and the above-mentioned minister—should submit him or herself to the commandments of morality<sup>5</sup>, instead of resting content with utilizing a pseudo-ethical discourse as a mere means to attaining power.

The old Platonic dream of moralizing politics was once again in the spotlight; that was for Plato the panacea to all ills. In his view, if the moral philosopher became the ruler, or vice versa, all abuses of power would disappear as if by a magic spell. Nonetheless, it's been more than two millennia since his ideas were brought forward, and no one seems to have succeeded in putting them into practice in a fully satisfactory way. Hence, with the passing of time, Kant would deem as chimeric the Platonic proposal of the philosopher-king.

To put it briefly, the relationship between morals and politics presents a paradigmatic case of liaison dangereuse, since both parties end up seriously damaged by this love affair. A politician enamored with ethics becomes impotent, for in their flirtation with morality they make their political determination useless, while the moralist that succumbs to power's charms cannot escape being perverted by the latter, as their ethical discernment gets corrupted by all sorts of temptations. To tell the truth, the marriage between politics and morality has never enjoyed quite good health, as was made clear by Machiavelli, who was historically destined to act as the notary public to their divorce.<sup>6</sup> As soon as one enters into the bedchambers of politics and one is seduced by the secrecy of its charms, one seems doomed to disown all that one has thought so far, regardless of one's previous ethical condition. As the celebrated Florentine diplomat pointed out, our moral disposition appears to be inescapably different depending on whether we find ourselves in the plaza (piazza) or in the palace (palazzo).7

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. XXXIII-XXXIV and VI-VII.

<sup>6</sup> See my work «Maquiavelo: el político en estado puro», in Enrique Bonete (ed.), *La política desde la ética*. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Niccolò Miachiavelli, Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius. Book

I, Chapter 47. Translated by Chrsitian Edward Detmold and Robert M. Adams, in

This was experienced firsthand by Friedrich the Great, who wrote a kind of ethics handbook for rulers before coming to the throne but, as a monarch, never stopped contradicting all that he had written as a crown prince dedicated to philosophy. As soon as he had established himself in his palace, the so-called *Sans-Souci* philosopher forgot what he had defended outside of it. One is tempted to say that, when people come to power, they cross the waters of the mythical river Lethe and, after going through this Rubicon, each new Caesar's die is cast. Facing the dilemma between the *reason of state* and moral considerations, the politician often forgets to submit their actions to the condition of an ethical endorsement.

This book<sup>8</sup> is an attempt to analyze the relationship between ethics and political action, which is often presented as the story of a resounding sentimental failure. This relationship fails especially when it is boasted about, for it is then that we come across that small-time Don Juan which Kant called the *political moralist*. Such a character isn't as interested in consolidating the relationship as he is in bragging about it. His ethical discourse is nothing but a means to attain power or to preserve it. He utilizes his *partenaire* without taking her into account at all. However, such a relationship proves to be much less spurious when it is hidden and never comes to the fore. In this latter case, we find ourselves before a *moral politician*, someone who is determined—*malgré* Weber—to bring together such disparate interests as those that stem from his or her ethical

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Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated and edited by Robert M. Adams, New York and London: Norton & Company.

<sup>8</sup> Which has been gradually taking shape in previous publications, such as the Introductory Study to my Spanish translation of Friedrich II of Prussia's Anti-Machiavelli (originally edited by Voltaire in 1740): Federico II de Prusia, Antimaquiavelo (o Refutación del Príncipe de Maquiavelo), Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1995 (pp. IX-LVI); or the work entitled «Las liasons dangereuses entre la moral y lo político», which is part of the collective book Roberto R. Aramayo, José Luis Villacañas (eds), La herencia de Maquiavelo: Modernidad y Voluntad de Poder, and which stemmed from a homonymous lecture series hosted by the UIMP in Valencia, March 1996.

#### **PREAMBLE**

convictions and those that stem from the political responsibilities inherent to their position. If I am not mistaken, the moral commandment and the political imperative would be doomed to remain clandestine lovers, that is to say, to maintain a relationship that is impossible to institutionalize, inasmuch as making such a marriage official would be tantamount to bringing their mutual and beneficial passion to an end. There might not be room for a chimeric philosopher-king in a Platonic key, but there might still be room for a monarch who—more kantiano—flirts now and then with moral philosophy, or for an ethical thought which seduces the powerful from time to time and is able to turn things to its own advantage. But it won't be convenient to systematize their encounters, lest their rendezvous become routine; and they should remain free from the temptations inherent to the community property agreement. Perhaps only by keeping their relationship secret will they be able to dispel the likelihood of getting involved in a liaison dangereuse that ruins their respective lives.

The problem that serves as a guiding thread to this work was stated by Weber in his famous lecture *Politics as a Vocation*. His questions, far from simplifying the matter, help to bring all its complexity to the light:

Now, then, what relations do ethics and politics actually have? Have the two nothing whatever to do with one another, as has occasionally been said? O, is the reverse true: that the ethic of political conduct is identical with that of any other conduct? Occasionally an exclusive choice has been believed to exist between the two propositions—either the one or the other proposition must be correct. But is it true that any ethic of the world could establish commandments of identical content for erotic, business, familial, and official relations; for the relations to one's wife, to the greengrocer, the son, the competitor, the friend, the defendant? Should it really matter so little for the ethical demands on politics that politics operates with very special means, namely, power backed up by violence? <sup>9</sup>

I wish we could answer all these questions without hesitation. Since this is not the case, we may very well content ourselves with being able to reflect

<sup>9</sup> Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation", in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford

upon them, and with exploring what the history of ideas has been saying about such matters. That is the goal of the pages that follow: to provide a panoramic view of the rough affair which, according to the procuring circumstances, ethics and politics have maintained.

Although I'm not sure whether this is a moral imperative or a political obligation, I must acknowledge that, had there been no incentive for it, this book might have never been written. What I mean to say is that I have been lucky enough to receive one of the Ministry of Culture's Grants for Literary Creation (Essay).

University Press, 1946, p. 39.

## The Gyges Syndrome

According to Herodotus<sup>10</sup>, Gyges was the favorite bodyguard of the king of the Lydians, who was called Myrsilos by his Greek compatriots, but who would be historically known as Candaules, the name given to him by his Lydian people<sup>11</sup>. The monarch Candaules was deeply in love with his wife Nyssia, and thought that she was extraordinarily beautiful. He boasted about possessing the woman he loved, and felt very proud about her beauty. In order to convince his loyal bodyguard

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Herodotus, *The Histories*, I, 8-14, translated by Robert Waterfield, Oxford: University Press, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Candaules is a Lydian epithet also applied to Hermes, and it means «the hound-choker».

that he was not exaggerating, he decided that Gyges should see the queen while she was getting naked, thus being able to appreciate her incomparable beauty. In spite of Gyges initial reluctance, Candaules succeeded in making him hide in his bedroom, where Gyges indeed saw Nyssia completely naked. The queen, after having pretended not to notice what had happened, called Gyges the next day<sup>12</sup> and told him that someone had to pay for the humiliation, and that if he did not want to be the one who died, he had to kill the king, take his throne, and take her as wife. In the face of this dilemma, Gyges chose the second option and became the king of Lydia, thereby being forced to have recourse to treason and felony by Nyssia, who—in my view—symbolizes power in its broadest sense.

This tale has inspired diverse literary re-elaborations throughout the times. Already Plutarch utilizes this story in order to illustrate one of the many struggles for the Dynastical succession. Many centuries later, the German dramatist Friedrich Hebbel (1813-1863) would write a tragedy, entitled *Gyges and His Ring*, where the cultural clash represented by the different conceptions of nudity among the Greek and the Lydians comes to the fore, with a special attention to the psychological features of the characters. But Hebbel was not the only one interested in the tale. Works such as André Gide's *King Candaules* and T. Gauthier's *Nouvelles* also have echoes of Gyges's tale. In Spain, many authors, including Gullién de Castro and José Cañizares, constantly refer to the tale, such as Ramón J. Sender in *Donde crece la marihuana*, and Valle-Inclán towards the end of

<sup>12</sup> The fragment of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri published in 1949 by Lobel (Cf. «A Greek Historical Drama», *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 35) makes reference to Nyssia's thoughts during that never-ending, sleepless night; See José Alsina, *Literatura griega. Contenido, problemas y métodos*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1967, p. 110. Having ruled out the possibility of an attack against her husband, and having realized that her husband had offered the sight of her naked body to a stranger's eyes (something that did not fit well with the Lydian frame of mind, so different in this regard to the Greek one), Nyssia plots her vengeance, stopping short before deciding which one of the two men must die. One man must punish the other one, regardless of who's the victim and who's the executioner.

#### THE GYGES SYNDROME

La lámpara maravillosa (The Lamp of Marvels)<sup>13</sup>. The possible influence of Gyges's tale on Cervantes's *El curioso impertinente* is a matter of constant debate<sup>14</sup>. Catalan Jacinto Grau (1877-1958) decided to recreate the fable contained in Herodotus's report, and in a schematic theatrical piece he tells us about a king, Candaules, whose lineage is related to the Olympic gods, and who is eager to share his greatest treasure, his wife's beauty, with his guard-in-chief, Gyges, who is always ready to serve his monarch with a dog-like loyalty; Nyssia then makes Gyges see that her beauty cannot be shared (as it usually happens with power, too) and gives him the options of either committing suicide or betraying his master<sup>15</sup>; the story ends as we all know.

In Book II of Plato's *Republic*<sup>16</sup> we encounter a somewhat different version of Herodotus's tale, with an additional element that is of great relevance to the question at hand. According to Plato, Gyges was a simple shepherd toiling in the service of the king of Lydia, who seduced the queen and killed the king by means of a magic ring that made him invisible when he turned it in his finger<sup>17</sup>. By means of this legend, Socrates's smartest disciple wanted to illustrate an idea very well backed by empirical

<sup>13</sup> This small list is provided by Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos in the preface to his edition of *El anillo de Giges* by José de Cañizares, Madrid: CSIC, 1983, pp. 65 and ff. 14 Cf. e.g. Paul M. Arriola, «Varia fortuna de la historia del rey Candaules y El curioso impertinente», *Anales Cervantinos*, 10 (1971), pp. 33-50.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jacinto Grau «Las bodas de Camacho y el Rey Candaules» (edited and commented by Luciano García Lorenzo), *Anales Cervantinos*, 11 (1972), pp. 49-56.
16 Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 359d-369b, translated by Allan Bloom, Basic Books,

<sup>1968.</sup> 

<sup>17</sup> Ufology aficionados are likely to find in these Platonic pages a passage very suggestive for their enterprise. I mean the following one: «There came to pass a great thunderstorm and an earthquake; the earth cracked and a chasm opened at the place where he was pasturing. He saw it, wondered at it, and went down. He saw, along with other quite wonderful things about which they tell tales, a hollow bronze horse. It had windows; peeping in, he saw there was a corpse inside that looked larger than human size. It had nothing on except a golden ring in its hand», Republic, II, 359d. Emphasis added, having in mind, as already told, our modern-day ufologists.

evidence, namely, that people usually evade virtue as soon as they take themselves to be immune to punishment. Only the fear of punishment prevents us from procuring our advantage without reservations. Glaucon, the character in Plato's dialogue who tells us the story of Gyges, end his narration with the following pessimistic remarks:

> Now if there were two such rings, and the just man would put one on, and the unjust man the other, no one, as it would seem, would be so adamant as to stick by justice and bring himself to keep away from what belongs to others and not lay hold of it, although he had license to take what he wanted from the market without fear, and to go into houses and have intercourse with whomever he wanted, and to slay or release from bonds whomever he wanted, and to do other things as an equal to a god among humans. And in so doing, one would act no differently from the other, but both would go the same way.18

Undoubtedly, this fable as told by Plato has a moral, and it is thus worthy of attention from the moral point of view; but it may prove to be even more fruitful in the political realm, as those occupy the highest positions seem to have secured some sort of Gyges ring, which enables them to cover up their nonsense with an inscrutable opacity.

The cape of power tends to make invisible some of the acts of the powerful. And we need not go back to the times of absolutism in order to bear witness to such a phenomenon. We need only recall that a timely Law of Official Secrets can be used to hide, even before judiciary eyes, certain actions carried out by the rulers in a democratic system, even when there is evidence of illegal behavior. The statesman or stateswoman who, like Herodotus's Gyges, gets access to secrets hidden from others, seems to consider him or herself to be perfectly authorized to sacrifice the requisites of morality to those of the state, once he or she has been seduced by the ineffable charms of power. To this particular spell, which counts on secrecy as its staunchest ally, we will refer hereafter as the Gyges syndrome.

Having this evidence at hand, we may be tempted to say that it seems unlikely that moral commandments and political imperatives could have

<sup>18</sup> Republic, II, 360b.

#### THE GYGES SYNDROME

succeeded in their attempts to live together throughout history. Is this the story of an unavoidable sentimental failure? Is it appropriate to recall the 'neither with nor without' saying in the present case? I can't live with you because you kill me—could be the politician's words to ethics—; and I can't live without you, because I die—may moral philosophy reply to the active politician. Do we have two quite different logics at work here, whose motivations and interests are incapable of any reconciliation, whose convergence is absolutely unfeasible?

Plato wanted to refuse such a diagnostic, and he strove to consummate that difficult marriage between politics and morals. Let us now see how he did it, and examine the results of his theoretical and practical endeavors.

## II. Plato's Panacea: The Philosopher-King

«In the days of my youth—says Plato— my experience was the same as that of many others. I thought that as soon as I should become my own master, I would immediately enter into public life»<sup>19</sup>. However, as is well known, Plato never held a political position of any importance, and partly because of that he would become one of the great thinkers that define the history of ideas. Indeed, he did nothing but cultivate philosophy after he repeatedly saw his strong political vocation frustrated. And, in fact, it would be precisely this deep political vocation which, from the beginning,

<sup>19</sup> Letter VII, 325b. Translated by R.G. Bury. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 1966.

would drive all the theoretical endeavors of his philosophical system.<sup>20</sup> After the Peloponnesian War, Athens goes through deep political unrest, which will put an end to Plato's hope in political practice. First, there was the access to power of the Thirty Tyrants, some of which were friends and relatives of Plato, and invited him to collaborate with them. But, as Plato himself confesses, the new rulers soon made the people long for their predecessors. Among many other outrages, Plato stresses the fact that they wanted to utilize Socrates and blame him for all their excesses. Once the Thirty Tyrants were overthrown, those who had been sent into exile by them assumed power, and Plato once again felt the desire to dedicate his life to politics. However, the trial of his teacher, that very same Socrates who had refused to take part in crimes against those who were now condemning him, led Plato to definitely give up any such aspiration.

Once one realizes that there is nothing but madness in the political practice—we read in Book VI of the Republic—, the one who reflects upon it «keeps quiet and minds his own business—as a man in a storm, when dust and rain are blown about by the wind, stands aside under a little wall. Seeing others filled full of lawlessness, he is content if somehow he himself can live his life here pure of injustice and unholy deeds, and take its leave from it graciously and cheerfully with fair hope»<sup>21</sup>. W.K.C. Guthrie summarizes in the following way the influence of Plato's frustrated political vocation in his political thought: «Unwilling himself to enter politics, he felt yet ashamed of his reluctance, and so evolved the remarkable idea that a philosopher could not take part in the politics of any existing society, but only in an ideal one, and at the same time that the ideal one would never be realized until the philosopher agreed to take part in politics»<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> See the magnificent discussion by Carlos García Gual, author of the chapter dedicated to Plato in V. Camps (ed), *Historia de la Ética*, Barcelona: Crítica, 1988, vol. I, pp. 80-133 (*passim*).

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Book VI, 496d-e, translated by Allan Bloom, Basic Books, 1968.

<sup>22</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume IV, Cambridge: University Press, 1975, p. 502.

#### PLATO'S PANACEA: THE PHILOSOPHER-KING

Stated in these terms, Plato's verdict on the philosopher-king couldn't be more aporetic. The philosopher, who realizes that he is incapable of changing the established order, prefers to limit himself to keeping his own hands clean from the turmoil of political practice, and he is only willing to intervene in such matters once a series of changes, which can't occur without his intervention, had taken place. Just as Achilles won't ever take over the tortoise, as Zeno's famous aporia has it, likewise, the philosopher won't ever be able to function as a king, for to that effect he must have been a king before he was a philosopher, since only in that way he could get rid of all the scruples that prevent him from getting splashed by the mud of political decisions, but this absence of mud is precisely the condition of possibility for his acting as a ruler. These paradoxical considerations, however, couldn't make Plato give up his celebrated panacea. Although it is a widely known passage, it is indispensable to quote it here once again:

Unless [...] the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place, while the many natures now making their way to either apart from the other are by necessity excluded, there is no rest from ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for human kind [...]. <sup>23</sup>

Only the marriage between philosophy and power, i.e., between morals and politics, could change the deplorable established order. Profoundly disappointed by the political performances of his relatives and friends, and feeling incapable of participating himself in the game, Plato reasons that the only solution is to moralize politicians, or to bring into the political domain those who best know the ethical premises, that is to say, for philosophers to become kings or for kings to learn to philosophize. «When, therefore, I considered all this—he writes—, and the type of men who were administering the affairs of State, with their laws too and their customs, the more I considered them and the more I advanced in years

<sup>23</sup> Republic, Book V, 473d. Cf. *Ibid*, Book VI, 501e: « [...] before the philosophic class becomes master of a city, there will be no rest from ills either for city or citizens [...] ».

myself, the more difficult appeared to me the task of managing affairs of State rightly. For it was impossible to take action without friends and trusty companions; and these it was not easy to find ready to hand, since our State was no longer managed according to the principles and institutions of our forefathers; while to acquire other new friends with any facility was a thing impossible. Moreover, both the written laws and the customs were being corrupted, and that with surprising rapidity. Consequently, although at first I was filled with an ardent desire to engage in public affairs, when I considered all this and saw how things were shifting about anyhow in all directions, I finally became dizzy; and although I continued to consider by what means some betterment could be brought about not only in these matters but also in the government as a whole, yet as regards political action I kept constantly waiting for an opportune moment; until, finally, looking at all the States which now exist, I perceived that one and all they are badly governed; for the state of their laws is such as to be almost incurable without some marvelous overhauling and goodluck to boot. So in my praise of the right philosophy I was compelled to declare that by it one is enabled to discern all forms of justice both political and individual. Wherefore the classes of mankind (I said) will have no cessation from evils until either the class of those who are right and true philosophers attains political supremacy, or else the class of those who hold power in the States becomes, by some dispensation of Heaven, really philosophic»<sup>24</sup>.

In keeping with his teacher Socrates's legacy, Plato decides to elaborate a *paideia* that could reform *politeia*<sup>25</sup>. But this ethico-political pedagogy is not to be orally taught at the agora, as Socrates did, but by means of written texts, and in the forum of a pedagogical institution: the Academy—which Emilio Lledó has characterized as «the first European

<sup>24</sup> Letter VII, 325b-326a.

<sup>425 «</sup>His political ethics educates man by indoctrinating him and by clarifying his true ends. If the State was ruled by those who know, by philosophers, the sense of justice would become the highest political virtue». (Gerhard Ritter, *Vom sittlichen Problem der Macht*, Bern: A Francke A.G. Verlag, 1948).

#### PLATO'S PANACEA: THE PHILOSOPHER-KING

university». <sup>26</sup> Plato puts his feather to the service of preventing Socrates's teachings to be lost in oblivion. The Socratic colloquium would be immortalized by the dialogues written by Plato, whose work was guided by the attempt to moralize politics. Politics, in its turn, just as any other realm of human activity, needs the concurrence of specialists. In Plato's view, philosophers, i.e., experts in such matters as justice or virtuous action, should take hold of power and, if this is not possible, they ought to communicate their knowledge to the rulers, in order to instruct them appropriately. Accordingly, Plato will travel as many as three times to Sicily<sup>27</sup>, to act as a counselor in the court of Syracuse. The failure of Plato's first trip to Sicily, when he was reaching forty, couldn't be more devastating, as he almost got sold as a slave by the tyrant he was trying to educate. However, his friendship with Dion, whose sister was married to Dionysius I, would cause him to return twenty years later. When Dion's brother-in-law died, Dion would encourage Plato to educate his young nephew, Dionysius II, and to turn him into a philosopher king. But Plato was once again very far from achieving this, and he only caused Dion to be sent into exile. In spite of all that, Plato would go back to Syracuse when he was almost seventy years old.

With these repeated attempts —as Carlos García Gual reminds us—Plato meant to give «a courageous illustration of how the sage must sacrifice his own tranquility to the opportunity of indirectly taking part in politics by leading the others, just as the prisoner in the cave who has succeeded in getting out and seeing the light must return to darkness in order to share the truth with his fellow prisoners, even if this means giving up his own happiness». The philosopher, who dedicates their life to the study of justice, and regardless of any other ideal, would thus have the task of enlightening the darkness in which the cave prisoners are immersed; at

<sup>26</sup> See his «Introducción general» to the Spanish version of Plato's *Dialogues*: *Diálogos*, Madrid: Gredos, 1981, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. W.K.C. Guthrie, *Op. cit.*, pp. 17-32, and E. Lledó, *Op. cit.*, pp. 124-127.

<sup>28</sup> Carlos García Gual, *Op. cit.* pp. 86-87.

least, the philosopher must try to do this, particularly with those who hold positions of power, since their actions affect the rest of us.

In order to rectify the route of the state's ship and to lead it to a safe port, an expert pilot is needed, and this role couldn't be played by anyone else except the philosopher. In the Sixth Book of the Republic, Plato provides a splendid parable (in which a metaphor with a strong tradition in modern political science emerges). In this parable, the state is compared to a ship where the true captain—the people—is fooled by the crew, i.e., by the politicians. Each one of the members of the crew is determined to take the ship's steering wheel on their hands, even if they are ignorant as regards the art of navigation. They all harass the captain and demand to become the helmsperson, and, if anyone eventually gets away with it, the other members throw them by the board in order to keep fighting for the position. They manage to get the captain drunk and plunder the ship, and they designate as their first officer anyone who promises to support the mutiny and who allows them to continue sacking the ship's provisions. The true sailor, i.e., the one who knows that in order to set the navigation straight one must take the seasons, the winds, the sky and the heavenly bodies into account, will look like a good-for-nothing before the eyes of the ignorant crew, which is what happens to the true philosopher who engages in politics.29

Once he has pictured politics in this way, Plato concludes that we should «blame [the pilots'] uselessness on those who don't use them and not on the decent men. For it is not natural that a pilot begs sailors to be ruled by him nor that the wise go to the doors of the rich. The man who invented that subtlety lied. The truth naturally is that it is necessary for a man who is sick, whether rich or poor, to go to the doors of doctors, and every man who needs to be ruled to the doors of the man who is able to rule, not for the ruler who is truly of any use to beg the ruled to be ruled». This is the true meaning of Plato's genuine dream. His strongest wish was that the crew members in the state's ship would have recourse

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. Republic, VI, 488b-489a.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Republic, VI, 489b-c.

#### PLATO'S PANACEA: THE PHILOSOPHER-KING

to the philosopher, acclaim the philosopher as a pilot, finally recognizing that only the philosopher has the necessary knowledge for playing the pilot's role. His Academy was conceived as a source of future rulers, who, after dedicating their whole lives to philosophy, would throw upon their shoulders the (for them) unpleasant weight of politics, having in view the common good.<sup>31</sup> The undoubted advantage of his proposal is that, far from taking this task as a privilege, the pilots would lead the state's ship out of a strict sense of duty, being able to combine the knowledge of good government with the indifference towards the alleged benefits of power.<sup>32</sup>

What Plato would never agree to willingly are half-baked proposals; the philosopher who decides to participate in politics must be ready to do it assuming each and every one of its consequences. Plato attacks in the *Euthydemus* those that would now be called «advisors» or «organic intellectuals», i.e., those who, for example, write discourses for public speakers, or those who act as small-time shysters.<sup>33</sup>

Those who put themselves in the space between philosophy and politics deserve only a strong rejection from Plato's part, for they end up being neither philosophers nor politicians. Such characters «think that they are the wisest of all men [...]. This opinion which they entertain of their own wisdom is very natural; for they have a certain amount of philosophy, and a certain amount of political wisdom; there is reason in what they say, for they argue that they have just enough of both, and so they keep out of the way of risks and conflicts and reap the fruits of their wisdom». Placing themselves in the border-ground between politics and ethics, they think they have found a good way to «have their cake and eat it too», as one would say; their goal is to have an influence on the political decisions being made, but to be free from any responsibilities inherent to their proposals. «The truth is—Plato has Socrates say—, that these philosophers-politicians who aim at both fall short of both in the

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Republic, VII, 540d.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Republic, VII, 540d. See also K.W.C. Guthrie, Op. cit., p. 499.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Euthydemus, 289d. Translated by B. Jowett. Oxford: University Press, 1892.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ibid. 305d-e.

attainment of their respective ends, and are really third, although they would like to stand first. There is no need, however, to be angry at this ambition—which may be forgiven».<sup>35</sup> These ideas are interesting because they shed light on Plato's definition of a philosopher-king as someone who must entirely engage in politics when the occasion is at hand, even though they must preserve their condition as moral philosophers.

As regards the historical fate of Plato's attempt to create philosopher-kings, there are a wide variety of views. Guthrie's account, for example, is highly positive. Guthrie reminds us that, according to Plutarch, Plato sent many of his disciples to reform several constitutions, and they did this successfully; Plato himself apparently was asked by the Thebans to write the constitution of Megalopolis. <sup>36</sup> By contrast, the verdict given by Sir Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* couldn't be more devastating. After going into the detail about some of the atrocities committed by some of his collaborators, Popper concludes that «these and a few other experiences of Plato's—who could boast of at least nine tyrants among his one-time pupils and associates—throw light on the peculiar difficulties connected with the selection of men who are to be invested with absolute power. It is hard to find a man whose character will not be corrupted by it. As Lord Acton says—all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely». <sup>37</sup>

Popper does not rest content with providing this devastating account of the results of Plato's idea, however, and goes one step further in order to demonstrate at a theoretical level that the Platonic attempt to moralize politics is a complete failure. Right at the beginning of the chapter which he titled *The Philosopher King*<sup>38</sup>, Popper points at a particular passage that is sufficient to make of Plato a pioneer defender of the Reason of

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 306b-c. We've been led to such a curious text by G.M.A. Grube's *Plato's Thought* (London: Methuen, originally published in 1935).

<sup>36</sup> K.W.C. Guthrie, *Op. cit.*, pp. 33-4. See also I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, London: Routledge and Kegan, 1962.

<sup>37</sup> Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013 (originally published in 1945), p. 129.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ibid, p. 130.

#### PLATO'S PANACEA: THE PHILOSOPHER-KING

State, since in that passage we are told that lying is the privilege of the statesman. The text in question is the following:

> Then, it is appropriate for the rulers, if for anyone at all, to lie for the benefit of the city in cases involving enemies or citizens, while all the rest must not put their hands to anything of that sort.<sup>39</sup>

If we bring this Popperian account together with the failure of Plato's own trips to Syracuse, we gradually get the impression that his attempts to marry the philosopher and the politician, morals and politics, were by no means successful.

Cf. Republic, III, 389b. 39

### III. Machiavelli as the Notary Public of the Divorce between Ethics and Politics

This Platonic attempt to marry ethics and politics was called into question a couple of millennia later, when Machiavelli broke into the philosophical history. To Machiavelli's mind, such a marriage was based on the hypocrisy of trying to keep the appearances, and that's why he proceeds to write the certificate of what he deems an unbridgeable divorce, bearing in mind that both parties' antagonistic characters make their coexistence impossible. This testimony will be endorsed by a myriad of readers, who would join Benedetto Croce in seeing Machiavelli's greatest contribution in the fact that he claimed for politics an autonomous normative realm, which locates it «beyond, or rather below, moral good and evil, since it has laws which it is useless to resist, nor can they be exorcized with holy water». 40

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Benedetto Croce, Elemento di politica, Bari, 1925, p. 60.

Machiavelli—adds Croce elsewhere—confronted the antinomy between ethics and politics when this antinomy became more acute, after the decline of the power that the doctrine of the Catholic church held throughout the centuries, and which saw politics as a part of morality, describing it as wrong whenever it deviated from its precepts. He defended with courageous boldness that politics is neither morality nor the negation of morality—which is evilness—, but instead has its own being, positive and distinct as a vital force, a force that no other force can take down and that no judgment can cancel out, just as that which is necessary cannot be taken down or canceled out.<sup>41</sup>

Some, like Isaiah Berlin, pretend to oppose the divorce, but they would argue instead for a marriage annulment, declaring that the union had a more or less incestuous nature, since—so the argument goes—the parties belong to two different generations of the same family, and in-between these generations there is an abysmal generational gap. «It is commonly said, especially by those who follow Croce, that Machiavelli divided politics from morals—that he recommended as politically necessary courses which common opinion morally condemns [...]. What Machiavelli distinguishes is not specifically moral from specifically political values; what he achieves is not the emancipation of politics from ethics or religion, [... but] a differentiation between two incompatible ideals of life, and therefore two moralities. One is the morality of the pagan world. [...] [The other is] Christian morality». 42

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Benedetto Croce, «Una questione che forse non si chuderà mai. La questione di Machiavelli», in *Quaderni della «Critica»*, 14 (July 1949), p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Isaiah Berlin, «The Originality of Machiavelli», in *Against the Current*, pp. 44-45. In the first part of this work, Berlin provides a splendid panoramic view of the different interpretations motivated by Machiavelli (cf. pp. 25-39). At one point he summarizes those interpretations and tells us that Machiavelli has been represented «as a cynical and therefore ultimately shallow defender of power politics, or as a diabolist, or as a patriot prescribing for particularly desperate situations which seldom arise, or as a mere time-server, or as an embittered political failure, or as mere mouthpiece of truths we have always known but did not like to utter, or again as the enlightened translator of universally accepted ancient social principles into empirical terms, or as a crypto-republican satirist (a descendant of Juvenal, a forerunner of Orwell); or

In my opinion, Berlin and his followers widen the gap already pointed at by Benedetto Croce, Federico Chabod<sup>43</sup>, and their likes. If Berlin thinks that political imperatives cannot get divorced from the moral guidelines, that is because he does not admit that a marriage occurred at all, such a marriage being inconceivable for him. Politics in Berlin's view is a kind of social morality which is absolutely incompatible with individual ethics, their union being as possible as that of water and oil. It makes no sense to separate what has never been brought together in the first place.

«There are two worlds—insists Berlin—, that of personal morality and that of public organization. There are two ethical codes, both ultimate; not two 'autonomous' regions, one of 'ethics', another of 'politics', but two (for him) exhaustive alternatives between two conflicting system of values». 44 But, even if we accept this redefinition of politics as a public morality (which some have called the *ethics of the state* 45) proposed by Berlin, the thesis defended by Croce and his followers is by no means invalidated. Machiavelli's great contribution is to have split those two spheres of evaluation which both Plato and Christianity were determined, although for very diverse reasons, to merge. Machiavelli himself thought that he was a pioneer whose curiosity had led him to unexplored lands,

as a cold scientist, a mere political technologist free from moral implications; or as a typical Renaissance publicist practicing a now obsolete genre [...]». (pp. 70-71).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Federico Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, trans. David Moore, London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Isaiah Berlin, Op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. «In the first decades of the XVI century, Machiavelli's ethics constitute a novelty. Christian ethics has as its center the human soul and its salvation [...]. Machiavelli's ethics does not occupy itself with the individual and his destiny: it only asks from him that he serves. [...] The state, whether republican or royal, exerts its power over the individual, beyond good and evil, and even beyond death. As soon as it is a matter of serving the state, the center of the moral debate gets displaced; the imperative of the moral law loses its absolute character and it is reduced to the duty to obey; the ethical problem is posed only for the one who commands in the name of the state. There is no other ethics than that of government». Cf. Agustin Renaudet, *Machiavel. Étude d'histoire des doctrines politques*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Paris: Galimard, 1942, pp. 296-297. It may be worth recalling that this book was published in the Spring of 1942, when Renaudet's country—France—was occupied by the Germans.

and at the beginning of his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* he declares he has decided to «open a new route, which has not yet been followed by anyone»<sup>46</sup>. To use Leo Strauss's words, Machiavelli's intention was to present himself «as another Columbus, as the discoverer of a hitherto unexpected moral continent, as a man who has found new modes and orders»<sup>47</sup>.

Gerhard Ritter, too, in The Ethical Problem of Power, reminds us that Machiavelli was a pioneer in its fullest sense, «the first one to show to the world that, under certain circumstances, and for power's sake, a good prince has to have the courage not only to be good, but also to be radically evil, perfidious, cruel, treacherous<sup>48</sup>. Machiavelli points at something extraordinarily obvious, which is that ethics can become an obstacle in the realm of politics. Morality's axiological universe and political standards are absolutely incompatible, in view of the fact that their coexistence tends to ruin their respective interests. The social context in which Machiavelli lived was appropriate for this view, since it was during that time that the monarchies lost the mystical aura that surrounded them throughout the Middle Ages. «On XVI century Italy's soil, a country abandoned by the Emperor and by the Pope, new states multiply themselves in ferocious anarchy, most of them completely distanced from their traditions, and founded by mercenaries and tyrants, who impose themselves upon one another by means of relentless struggles for power full of horrifying acts of cruelty. In these political struggles, full of bloody acts of violence, unwavering ambition and indomitable activism, the moral theory of the state definitely floundered. Here, for the first time, the problem of the relations between politics and

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*. Introduction to Book I. Translated by Chrsitian Edward Detmold and Robert M. Adams, in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated and edited by Robert M. Adams, New York and London: Norton & Company, p. 90.

<sup>47</sup> Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. G. Ritter, Vom sittlichen Problem der Macht, Op. cit., p. 29.

ethics was stated in its modern form».<sup>49</sup> Of course, Machiavelli wasn't pointing at anything new as regards a political practice, whose dynamics haven't changed a bit since the beginning of time. The novelty lies in making its rules explicit and in philosophizing about them, so that they acquire a theoretical status.

His ideas weren't particularly original from the point of view of their content, which is as old as human existence; however, daring to express those old ideas and trying to insert them in a complex philosophical systematization was indeed quite a novelty.<sup>50</sup> This has been pointed out by Friedrich Meinecke, for whom Machiavelli's political way of thought «is nothing but a continual process of thinking about raison d'état»<sup>51</sup>, which is why he dedicates to Machiavelli Book One of his work The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History. But, as it is only natural, Friedrich Meinecke is by no means the only one of Machiavelli's commentators who understands him in this way. Luis Arocena provides a similar presentation of Machiavelli: «The state, as a political body, reclaims for itself an unheard-of realm; its needs appear as vigorous and pressing ends, before which the ethical and religious ends decline their primacy. To say it once again in a repetitive but significant way, Machiavelli was in his time the first exponent of the raison d'état»<sup>52</sup>. Many passages in the works of the Florentine secretary would show that such a presentation of his views is barely controvertible, but few of them are as conclusive as the following lines from the Discourses, where Machiavelli wrote the following reflection:

[...] where the entire safety of the country is to be decided, there ought not to exist any consideration of what is just or unjust, nor what is

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 27-8. These lectures were dictated in Berlin in 1943 and were later sent to student of the University of Freiburg who were fighting in the front.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism. The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, Op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. L. A. Arocena, *El maquiavelismo de Maquiavelo*, Madrid: Seminarios y Ediciones, 1975, p. 39, and cf. pp. 56-57.

merciful or cruel, nor what is praiseworthy or ignominious; rather, ahead of every other consideration, that proceeding ought to be followed which will save the life of the country and maintain its liberty<sup>53</sup>.

That in the political game as a matter of fact any moral law gets violated is one thing; that such violations are justified by virtue of being done for the sake of an unavoidable necessity is quite a different thing.<sup>54</sup> This does not mean, however, that Machiavelli attempts to cancel out the moral values through the preeminence of the political ones.<sup>55</sup> As Miguel Ángel Granada correctly points out, Machiavelli does not establish any «hierarchical relation between ethics and politics which turns evil and crime into something good, or which establishes a sort of provisional suspension of morals for the sake of the goodness of the proposed goal; evil and crime are what they are, and in fact there is no possible mystification. Machiavelli points, therefore, to an irreducible gap between politics (the rule of force) and the demands of morality»<sup>56</sup>.

Now, even though Machiavelli does not establish a priority of politics over morality, it is evident that he advocates for their mutual emancipation. «For—as Leo Strauss explains in his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*—if virtue presupposes political society, political society is preceded by pre-moral or sub-moral men and indeed founded by such men. There cannot be a moral law of unconditional validity; the moral law cannot possibly find listeners and hence addressees before men have become members of civil society, or have become civilized. Morality is possible only after its condition has been created, and this condition cannot be created morally: morality rests on what to moral men must appear to be immorality»<sup>57</sup>. Thus, when expounding Machiavelli's doctrines, some scholars have

<sup>53</sup> Machiavelli, Discourses, Op. cit. Book III, chapter 41.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, Op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. L. A. Arocena, *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Miguel Ángel Granada, «La filosofía política en el Renacimiento: Maquiavelo y las utopías», in Victoria Camps (ed.) *Historia de la ética. I De los griegos al Renacimiento*, vol. I, p. 554.

<sup>57</sup> Leo Strauss, *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

affirmed politics and morality constitute two different moments, and hence will never coincide in one same instant.

Be that as it may, for Machiavelli these were two different continents, separated by the ocean of antagonism. Any reading which does not capture this profound gap, pointed at by Miguel Ángel Granada a few lines before, would distort the authentic meaning of the words of Machiavelli, whose greatest undertaking was to show that the goals of politics do not at all coincide with any moral command, keeping in mind that ethics cannot achieve but the frustration of political success. Prominent interpreters such as Spinoza and Rousseau<sup>58</sup> wanted to see in Machiavelli a surreptitious moralist whose writings had to be read in a «Machiavellian» key, since they disguised their true purpose: to instruct the people about the intricacies of power, so that they know how to better confront their rulers. Along the same lines, and implicitly or explicitly developing Berlin's interpretation, we find a detailed study whose author, José Manuel Bermudo, sees Machiavelli as a determined moralist trying to put forward an ethics of urgency that is only valid for circumstances whose exceptional character may put the dictates of conventional morality in parentheses.<sup>59</sup> According to Bermudo, «Machiavelli realized, perhaps intuitively, that exceptional situations constitute the true challenge of politics; that it is in such situations of absolute emergency that loyalty and the limits of respect for lawfulness and morality are on trial»<sup>60</sup>.

Now, it is certainly true—and hardly deniable—that conflicts and dilemmatic crossroads represent the greatest challenge to any moral or

Cf. Benedict de Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise, V, §7; and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, III, § 6, n.

Cf. Maquiavelo, consejero de príncipes, Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1994, p. 95. «We subscribe Berlin's analyses with the sole observation—although it is an important one—that they have to be circumscribed to exceptional situations; during politically normal times, the conflict is resolved, and common morality is enough». (Cf. ibid, p. 97).

Cf. J.M. Bermudo, Op. cit., p. 20. Cf. passim, e.g.: pp. 19, 56-57, 130, 168, 203 and 229. There are alternative readings of Machiavelli: «The Prince's recipes are indeed strong medicine, but they aren't heroic remedies for irremediably critical situations. They are, in sum, the incarnation and the substance of Machiavellian

political theory, whose efficacy can only be tested against these crucial experiences at the margins of everyday life; but it is just as true, of course, that it is not this trifling realization what makes Machiavelli an indispensable figure in moral and political philosophy, but rather the fact that he dared to trace in theoretical terms a divisive line between two different logics, incapable of being brought together: morals and politics. This, and no other, constitutes Machiavelli's main contribution. Machiavelli's expertise as a diplomatic envoy, together with his attentive reading of the Latin classics, provide him with a deep knowledge of human nature in general, and of the political class in particular, in other words, of political normality.61

Machiavelli was, first and foremost, an observer whose proverbial curiosity led him to take note of everything that he saw, and who limited himself to expounding with all sincerity what the surrounding reality dictated to him. Now, Machiavelli's writings, just as those of any other classic, are characterized by the ability to elevate the merely anecdotal into a category, drawing from particular examples, those provided by history and by his contemporaries, a universal picture, so that the profile of the homus politicus gets represented sub specie aeternitatis and it is therefore far from merely responding to a particular, more or less exceptional, circumstance—as suggested by Bermudo in the above-mentioned study. Machiavelli carries out a full portrait of the professional politician, collecting all the traits which have characterized him throughout history. But in carrying out this faithful portrait he nowhere finds morality as the politician's consort. Hence his playing the role of the notary public of the divorce of ethics and politics, which only existed in dreams, such as the Platonic one.

wisdom, for the awareness of a crisis is essentially foreign to the mind of the great Florentine». (Cf. Javier Conde, El saber político de Maquiavelo, Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1977, p. 65).

<sup>«</sup>He just wants to define the most useful and certain rules of the art of politics. Machiavelli takes into account neither the goodness for human beings nor their rights, but the most certain means to impose order and authority upon them» (Cf. A. Renaudet, Op. cit., p. 122).

[...] Machiavelli's problem—says Schopenhauer—was the solution to the question how the prince should *unconditionally* keep himself on the throne, in spite of internal and external enemies. Thus his problem was by no means the ethical one whether a prince, as a man, should want to do so or not, but purely the practical problem how to carry it out, *if* he wants to. He gives the solution to this, just as a person writes instructions for playing chess, in which it would be foolish to regret the failure to answer the question whether it is morally advisable to play chess at all. To reproach Machiavelli with the immorality of his work is just as much out of place as it would be to reproach a fencing master with not opening his instruction with a moral lecture against murder and manslaughter.

Ernst Cassirer elaborates on this Schopenhauer an comparison with chess. «Machiavelli looked at political combats as if they were a game of chess. He had studied the rules of the game very thoroughly. But he had not the slightest intention of changing or criticizing these rules. His political experience had taught him that the political game never had been played without fraud, deception, treachery, and felony. He neither blamed nor recommended these things. His only concern was to find the best move—the move that wins the game. When a chess champion engages in a bold combination, or when he tries to deceive his partner by all sorts of ruses and stratagems, we are delighted and admire his skill. This was exactly Machiavelli's attitude when he looked upon the shifting scenes of the great political drama that was played before his eyes. He was not only deeply interested: he was fascinated. He could not help giving his opinion. Sometimes he shook his head at a bad move; sometimes he burst out with admiration and applause»<sup>62</sup>.

#### 3.1. THE CHESS METAPHOR

That is exactly what, according to this chess metaphor, Savonarola and Cesare Borgia got from Machiavelli: a contemptuous shaking of head and an eager admiration, respectively. Why did both characters make such a

<sup>62</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946, p. 143.

diverging impression on Machiavelli's mind? Well, that they represented two different paradigmatic styles of playing politics. Hence his particular interest in both of them. To Machiavelli's eyes, Savonarola<sup>63</sup> was a mere «unarmed prophet» who tried to change things and to impose political reforms through mere persuasion, and that's why he was doomed to the most resounding failure, since «he had no mode for holding firm those who had believed nor for making unbelievers believe»<sup>64</sup>. The celebrated Florentine friar<sup>65</sup> thus points at a good example of what ought not to be done in the chess board which is politics, in which it is impossible to achieve anything without the help of weapons, that is to say, without the use of violence, inasmuch as rhetoric and moral reprimands are but a very limited resource for those who want to hold power.

By contrast, Cesare Borgia's strategy was exemplary through and through, to the point of making Machiavelli say: «I do not know what better teaching I could give to a new prince than the example of his actions»<sup>66</sup>. Machiavelli couldn't care less about the perversity of Cesare Borgia's ethical *curriculum*. From a moral perspective, Cesare Borgia may appear as the summit of treachery. But the fact that he had incestuous relationships with his sister Lucrecia, or that he had both his

In his correspondence Machiavelli refers a couple of times to Savonarola as someone who «keeps on working with the times and making his lies plausible» (Cf. the letter to Ricardo Becchi dated March 9th, 1498, in *The Letters of Machiavelli. A Selection*, trans. Allan Gilbert, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 88), and calls him an «astute Girolamo friar» (*ibid*). However, in the *Discourses* he claims that «one ought not to talk of so great a man except with reverence» (*Op. cit.*, Book I, Chapter 11), since his «writings show the doctrine, prudence and virtue of his spirit» (Book I, Chapter 45); he also compares him to Piero Sonderini, Gonfalonier of Florence, in as much as both were «moved by nothing else other than envy» (Book III, Chapter 30).

<sup>64</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988, Chap. VI., p. 24.

<sup>«</sup>Machiavelli authorizes, without hesitation, the man of genius to deceit peoples for their own good; but he must deceive skillfully, and the deed must justify the means. Savonarola enacted, through a weak lie, a deed of weak virtue» (Agustin Renaudet, *Op. cit.*, p. 44).

<sup>66</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., VII, p. 27.

older brother and his brother-in-law killed, to mention only his closest relatives<sup>67</sup>, couldn't tarnish his political record<sup>68</sup>, which Machiavelli saw as absolutely brilliant and as undoubtedly deserving the special prize.<sup>69</sup> From a strictly political perspective, his strategy appeared faultless to Machiavelli's eyes. The moves developed by Cesare Borgia in the chessboard of politics—to continue with the metaphor used by Schopenhauer and Cassirer—couldn't be more accurate, according to the one who was determined to study the rules of the «political chess».

The fact that Cesare Borgia had his loyal friend Remirro de Orco executed, the same person whom he had entrusted with the task of pacifying the Romagna territories at all costs, was seen by Machiavelli as a master move, very much like scarifying the queen while playing chess. He did not hesitate before scarifying his best man in order to win the game; «and because he knew—explains Machiavelli in *The Prince*—that past rigors had generated some hatred for Remirro, to purge the spirits of

<sup>67</sup> This inventory of felonies could be increased easily. One only needs to see Friedrich II of Prussia's listing in chapter VII of his *Refutation of Machiavelli's Prince, Or Anti-Machiavel* (originally edited by Voltaire in 1740), translated by Paul Sonnino, Ohio: University Press, 1981.

<sup>68 «</sup>Machiavelli absolves him of all his crimes. The only thing that matters in politics is the end, and the utility for the state. [...] It is of little importance, then, that Cesare Borgia made use of violence, and that he never hesitated before committing a useful crime». (Augustin Renaudet, *Op. cit.*, p. 225).

<sup>«</sup>When Machiavelli wrote chapter VII of his book, six years had passed since Cesare had obscurely died during the siege of a small Plaza in Navarre. However, the Florentine secretary wanted to glorify the prince in him, the owner of men and events, who was willing to realize, beyond good and evil, nothing but the superhuman ideal of tragic greatness. This transfiguration enables us to reaffirm the two spheres in which Machiavelli's thought is developed, that of the positive politician, and that of the poet-visionary. The politician lives in the realm of facts, takes note of them with cold blood, examines and judges them regardless of any moral or juridical concern. [...] The poet, however, evades reality and his imagination welcomes myth and legend. In Machiavelli's thought, the Dantesque myth of the redeemer who will arrive one day to save Italy merges with the Roman myth of the genius dictator who saves his people from disaster. Ripped from weaknesses and miseries by the passing of time, the image of Cesare Borgia gradually embellishes before the eyes of eternity [...] ». (Augustin Renaudet, *Op. cit.*, pp. 240-241).

that people and to gain them entirely to himself, he wished to show that if any cruelty had been committed, this had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister. And having seized this opportunity, he had him placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied»<sup>70</sup>. He thereby produced the same, unsettling reaction that the gambit of a queen produces in chess. On the other hand, when the Duke Valentino—as Machiavelli likes to call Cesare Borgia—suspected that his once-loyal lieutenants may turn their backs on him and ally themselves to his enemies, he decided to act in advance and to have recourse to deceit, in order to make them fall into a trap and exterminate them<sup>71</sup>, instead of letting his enemies crown a well-placed peasant. As every chess player would know, any trick that keeps our king safe from check is a valuable one.

Cesare Borgia's style of play, however, fits only those who, so to speak, have the white pieces in this chess of politics; that is to say, those who access power through the favor of *fortune*. Those who have to play with the black pieces, or who play on the defensive, have to emulate other strategies, such as that of Francesco Sforza, who—according to Machiavelli—became the duke of Milan thanks to his own *virtù*, «and that which he had acquired with a thousand pains he maintained with little trouble»<sup>72</sup>. Along the same lines, Rafael del Águila proposes to

<sup>70</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., VII, p. 30.

Cesare Borgia «knew so well how to dissimulate his intent that the Orsini themselves, through Signor Paolo, became reconciled with him. The duke did not fail to fulfil every kind of duty to secure Signor Paolo, giving him money, garments, and horses, so that their simplicity brought them into the duke's hands at Sinigaglia. So, when these heads had been eliminated, and their partisans had been turned into his friends, the duke had laid very good foundations for his power, since he had all Romagna with the duchy of Urbino». Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, VII, p. 29. Machiavelli wrote a detailed chronicle of this feat which was published with the first edition of *The Prince*, and which contributed to the creation of the legend of «Machiavellism» as the art of an immoral politics based in treachery. (Cf. Miguel Ángel Granada, *Antologia de Maquiavelo*, Barcelona: Península, 1987, p. 116 n.)

reexamine the figure of Lucius Junius Brutus (with whom Machiavelli deals in the *Discourses*<sup>73</sup>), and puts forward the thesis that it is rather this historical figure, and not Cesare Borgia, who most appropriately incarnates the ideals of the Machiavellian political theory. Herutus—let us recall—passed himself off as an idiot<sup>75</sup>, in order to avoid having the same destiny as his brother, who was murdered by his uncle Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. The son of this monarch would become king by means of a violation which Shakespeare immortalizes in *The Rape of Lucrece*. The victim commits suicide after narrating to her husband the ignominious distress to which she had been subjected, and Brutus used this great scandal to send the whole Tarquinius family into exile, and to establish the Republic. Later on, Brutus executes his own children, who were determined to restore the Tarquinius dynasty.

In fact, no one could deny Brutus's great ability to move around the chess-board of politics. In a brief account of his strategy, one should conclude that Brutus was able to castle at the right time, to profit from the failures of his opponents, and was ready to sacrifice some of his favorite pieces as long as he could thereby win a game, which he indeed won in spite of having a disadvantaged point of departure. After all, Rafael del Águila might be right, and we should consider Lucius Junius Brutus, in view of his virtues as a political chess player, as Machiavelli's true hero.

<sup>73</sup> *Discourses*, *Op. cit.*, Book III, Chaps. 2 and 3. Pietro Sonderini had failed as a Gonfalonier «by not knowing how to imitate Brutus» (Chap. 3).

<sup>«</sup>Cesare Borgia is usually thought to be his favorite historical figure for the exemplification of the concept of political practice. Nonetheless, according to what we have expounded, we would say that that place should be occupied by Lucius Junius Brutus instead... In this historical example, as well as in Machiavelli's positive judgment on it, all three images of politics [the fox, the founder, and the citizen] are clearly revealed, and it is Burtus, not Cesare Borgia, who most adequately exemplifies the tension produced between them in our author's political theory». (Cf. Rafael del Águila, «Maquiavelo y la teoría política renacentista», in Fernando Vallespín (ed.), Historia de la Teoría Política.— 2. Estado y teoría política modernos, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990, vol. II, p. 114.

<sup>75 «</sup>Brutus» in Latin, hence the nickname given to him and to his descendants, among which there was his famous godson Julius Caesar.

Notwithstanding, the author of *The Prince* is clearly fascinated by Cesare Borgia, and this fascination eclipses any other. Why is this so?

Perhaps because, apart from the fact that they had had personal contact<sup>76</sup>, Cesare Borgia was an impulsive character, and also because he had known how to successfully challenge fortune in quite complicated circumstances. As is well known, having to choose between prudence and courageousness, Machiavelli opts for the latter, heeding the old Latin adagio *audentes fortuna iuvat*: fortune assists the brave; «it is better—we read toward the end of the second-to-last chapter of *The Prince*—to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down»<sup>77</sup>. Cesare Borgia's service record as the prototype of the *principe nuovo* is flawless and Machiavelli doesn't even reproach him his final defeat, for «if his orders did not bring profit to him, it was not his fault, because this arose from an extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune»<sup>78</sup>. That capricious and unpredictable damsel!

## 3.2. THE POLITICIAN FACING FORTUNE'S ADVANCES

According to Machiavelli, only a set of unpredictable and highly adverse circumstances could dismantle the cautionary measures Cesare Borgia had taken before the death of his father, Pope Alexander VI, whose protection was essential to promoting his shining career. Pius III, a Pope he could have influenced in whichever way he wanted, died a month after he was elected, and, on the other hand, being himself struck by illness, he was

Machiavelli coincides with Cesare Borgia in three key moments of his political career: at his summit, once he had become the duke of Romagna (June 1502); at his apotheosis, when he gets rid of his lieutenants in order to establish himself in power (beginnings of 1503); and at his fall (by the end of the same year), caused by the appointment of Julius II as the new Pope. In this regard, it is useful to consult the documents relating to these encounters included in Miguel Ángel Granada's brilliant anthology (Cf. Chap. 2.2, «Auge y caída de un *príncipe nuevo*: la experiencia de César Borgia», in *Antología de Maquiavelo*, *Op. cit*, pp. 60-133).

<sup>77</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XXV, p. 101.

<sup>78</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, VII, p. 27.

unable to avoid the election of Julius II, one of his fiercest adversaries. «And he told me—recounts Machiavelli—, on the day that Julius II was created, that he had thought about what might happen when his father was dying, and had found a remedy for everything, except that he never thought that at his death he himself would also be in the point of dying»<sup>79</sup>. An unexpected disease had weakened that bold virtù possessed by Cesare Borgia, which allowed him to dominate the whimsical fortune. That ill-fated and unforeseen circumstance prevented him from raising the dikes and dams which could contain those torrential waters in which fortune tends to transmute itself, according to a metaphor often used by Machiavelli. Thus, in *The Prince*, fortune is likened to a torrential river «which demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her» 80; and in the so-called Chapter of Fortune (Capitolo di Fortuna) Machiavelli dedicates the following verses to fortune: «Like a rapid and superb torrent / to its highest point, all that destroys / which stands on its way, / and one part of it grows and the other decreases / changes the shores, changes the riverbed and the base / and it makes the earth tremble wherever it goes / thus Fortune, with its furious impetus, many times here and there changes the things of the world»<sup>81</sup>.

Having all this in mind, the global assessment of the duke Valentino's life is a highly positive one, and Machiavelli dedicates to him these words of praise: «Thus, if I summed up all the actions of the duke, I would not know how to reproach him. On the contrary, it seems to me he should be put forward, as I have done, to be imitated by all those who have risen to empire through fortune and by the arms of others»<sup>82</sup>. Like it or not,

<sup>79</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., VII, p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., XXV, p. 98.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Verses 151-9. In Antología de Maquiavelo, Op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>82</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, Op. cit.*, VII, p. 32. «These are, therefore, the rules of political art which the example of Cesare Borgia can teach to the founders of any new state: to reduce one's enemies at one's own discretion; to procure oneself a body of followers; never to hesitate in the selection of means; overcome by force or by fraud; become popular and, in any case, feared; procure oneself a military force which is used to passive obedience and, to that effect, get rid of all those troops which are not absolutely loyal; annihilate all foreseen opposition, from the moment one

Cesare Borgia is the example of a *virtuous* politician—in a Machiavellian sense—, whose courage enables him to benefit as much as possible from the more or less favorable occasions which present themselves to him, thereby revealing himself capable of domesticating fortune. «This unstable creature [Fortune] / frequently opposes most forcefully / where she sees nature at its strongest. / Her natural power grasps us all / her rule is always violent / if no superior virtue tames her»<sup>83</sup>. Indeed, «Machiavelli's hope rests on his assumption that human prudence can conquer Fortuna»<sup>84</sup>.

Quentin Skinner has insisted upon this point too: « [...] a truly *virtuoso* prince will be characterized by an unerring sense of when to acknowledge the dictates of justice and when to ignore them. He will be guided, in short, by necessity rather than by justice. [...] A prince of true virtue will [...] be someone who, in the proverbial sense, makes virtue of necessity»<sup>85</sup>. Knowing when to change our own plans depending on the vicissitudes of fortune: that's the key to success in political terms. The thorough politician, says Machiavelli, «needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds

takes notice of it; renovate and remodel the state's constitution; show oneself as an inflexible justice provider, but one who is ready to compensate any service received; give the impression of being an open-minded chief, who knows how to spend and to be generous; to carefully lead foreign affairs, keeping and cultivating good friendships, so that the stranger understands the utility of favoring the new state, and thinks twice before attacking». (Cf. Augustin Renaudet, *Op. cit.*, pp. 225).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Capitolo di Fortuna, verses 10-15 in Antología de Maquiavelo, Op. Cit., p. 194. « [...] for where men have little virtu, fortune greatly shows her power [...] » (Cf. Discourses, op. cit. Book II, Chap. 30).

<sup>84</sup> Leo Strauss, *Op. cit.*, p. 173. The passage continues «Classical political philosophy had taught that the salvation of the cities depends on the coincidence of philosophy and political power, which is really a coincidence, for which one can wish or hope but which one cannot bring about. Machiavelli is the first philosopher who believes that the coincidence of philosophy and political power can be brought about by propaganda which wins over ever larger multitudes to the new modes and orders and thus transforms the thought of one or a few into the opinion of the public and therewith into public power». There is a more recent work, which analyzes this perspective on Machiavelli's thought: Manuel Santaella López, *Opinión pública e imagen política en Maquiavelo*, Madrid: Alianza Universidad, 1990.

<sup>85</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: University Press, p. 147.

of fortune and variations of things command him, and as I said above, not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity»<sup>86</sup>. Moreover, following the dictates of virtue often leads to ruin, when what is usually catalogued as vice would procure salvation<sup>87</sup>. That is the profile of politics, according to Machiavelli. The author of the *History of Florence* was very clear about this:

[...] small crimes are chastised, but great and serious ones rewarded.
[...] If you only notice human proceedings, you may observe that all who attain great power and riches, make use of either force or fraud. [...] Those who either from imprudence or want of sagacity avoid doing so, are always overwhelmed with servitude and poverty; for faithful servants are always servants, and honest men are always poor; nor do any ever escape from servitude but the bold and faithless, or from poverty, but the rapacious and fraudulent<sup>88</sup>.

Whether he liked or regretted it, through this «discovery» Machiavelli came to realize that within the universe of politics the rules that are valid are different from the ethical guidelines and any rule governing the moral world. The logic of power answers only to the imperative of efficaciousness, and to its eyes not recognizing this fact appears highly hypocritical. Thus, the more chameleonic the politician's mood, the greater their skill to adapt to changing circumstances, the better results they will have in a game where diplomacy and simulation (supported by coercion) prove themselves to be the best weapons, if not the only ones. Machiavelli is convinced that «if [the cautious man] would change his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change»<sup>89</sup>. This is, however, practically impossible. «Nor may a man be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to this, whether because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to or also because, when

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XVIII, p. 70.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XV, p. 62.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *History of Florence*, trans. Christian E. Detmold,

Book III, Chap. III. Cf. Leo Strauss's commentary in Op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XXV, p. 100. Cf. *Discourses*, *Op. cit.*, Book III, Chap. 9.

one has always flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it. And so the cautious man, when it is time to come to impetuosity, does not know how to do it, hence comes to ruin [...] »90. When it comes to the management of our destiny, fortune seems to control more than fifty percent of the shares of this enterprise91, since our character is unable to adapt to fortune's dramatic changes of mood. « [...] men can second fortune, but not oppose her, they can develop her designs but not defeat them»—he declares in the *Discourses*92.

In the so-called *Fantasies for Soderini*, Machiavelli takes this reflection on fortune one step further: «Inasmuch as times and affairs frequently change both in general and in particular, but men do not change their fantasies or their ways of behaving, it so happens that one for some time has good fortune and for other times bad fortune. Someone wise enough to know the times and orders of things, knowing how to adapt to them, would always have good fortune or would keep himself from bad fortune, and it would thus be true that the wise man dominates both stars and fates. However, since there are no such wise men, because men can't govern their own nature, it follows from this that fortune changes and governs men, subjects them under her yoke»<sup>93</sup>.

Just as one cannot jump upon one's own shadow, one likewise cannot change one's mood and habits according to the rhythm imposed by the swerves of fortune, «for the moods that move you to action / —depending on whether they accord with her [i.e. with fortune] or not— / cause you

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., XXV, p. 100.

<sup>91 « [...]</sup> so that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our actions, but also that she leaves the other half, *or close to it*, for us to govern». Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XXV, p. 98. Emphasis added.

<sup>92</sup> Op. Cit. Book II, Chap. 29.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Chap. 2.6.3 of *Antologia de Maquiavelo, Op. Cit.* (p. 192). A few lines before, he had written the following: «I believe that, just as nature has given man a diverse face, she has given him also diverse ingenuity and diverse fantasy. And since, on the other hand, the times change and the order of affairs is diverse, the one who harmonizes his procedure to the times prospers and his desires become true, and, on the contrary, he who deviates in his actions from the order of things is unhappy».

harm or good / you cannot, however, trust her / nor think you have avoided her fierce bite [...] / for while you are pulled by the back / of the wheel, temporarily good and happy / it changes in the middle of its race / and since you are unable to change your person / or to leave the order that Heaven has given to you / it abandons you in the middle of the road» <sup>94</sup>. The emblematic wheel of fortune turns capriciously, while our mood is unable to accommodate to such fluctuations, for it is impossible for us to predict her fickle designs.

#### 3.3. ON VICE AS A KEY TO POLITICS

However, if we look closely enough, we may find some room for conjecturing to some predictions based on experience and statistics; for, as far as one can see, the goddess Fortune not only enjoys rewarding those who display a great amount of shrewdness, but she also seems quite often to favor dishonest people in detriment of honest people. That's at least what the author of *Capitolo di Fortuna* thinks. Fortune—we are told in that poem—«frequently has good people under her feet / acclaims dishonest people, and if she ever promises you / anything, she never keeps her promise» 95.

These are but three lines taken out of a poem, but one gets the impression of having a magnificent summary of the Machiavellian way of thinking before one's eyes. One is tempted to say that, apart from trying to master fortune through their marvelous  $virt\dot{u}^{96}$  (trying to benefit as much as possible from the opportunities afforded by chance), the Machiavellian

<sup>94</sup> Capitolo di Fortuna, Op. cit. verses 103-114.

<sup>95</sup> Verses 28-30.

<sup>96</sup> On the different meanings of the concept of *virtue* in Machiavelli, one may profit from consulting Angelo Papacchini's article «Virtud y Fortuna en Maquiavelo», in *A propósito de Maquiavelo y su obra*, Barcelona: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1993, 35-76, *passim*. Lelio Fernández's work in that same collection, «Maquiavelo y *El Príncipe*» may likewise be read and profited from. Cf. also Alberto Saoner «Virtud y *virtù* en Maquiavelo», in the Proceedings of the "V Semana de Ética": José María González y Carlos Thiebaut (eds.), *Convicciones políticas, responsabilidades éticas*, Madrid: Anthropos, 1990, pp. 21-40.

politician is likewise called to emulate fortune, and therefore to go on and deceit honest people, acclaim the rabble, and, to be sure, barely keep any promise made. Such were, at least, some of his most celebrated recipes, a set of instructions which would help creating the black legend of Machiavellism, and which would turn his name into a synonym of the most refined treachery or extreme immorality. According to Machiavelli, the core of politics would be simulation. From this core, the other guidelines for action would follow, such as breaking promises. Cesare Borgia was a master in the arts of simulation, and that's exactly why he also dominated the game of politics.

In chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, we are told very clearly that it is useful «to appear merciful, faithful, humane, honest, and religious, and to be so; but to remain with a spirit built so that, if you need not to be those things, you are able to know how to change to the contrary»<sup>97</sup>. Being able to adopt those qualities or moral virtues in the same way that an actor does with their characters, i.e., by using them in the way masks were used in Greek tragedies, gives us great versatility and allows us to adapt to the variable circumstances dictated by whimsical fortune. By contrast, fully identifying oneself with them may result in our political ruin. In fact as Machiavelli insists—«by having [these virtues] and always observing them, they are harmful; and by appearing to have them, they are useful». It is therefore convenient to appear to be faithful, as far as it is just makebelieve, since a prudent politician «cannot observe faith, nor should he, when such observance turns against him, and the causes that made him promise have been eliminated. [...] Nor does a prince ever lack legitimate causes to color his failure to observe faith»98.

Keeping himself at the margin of any strictly moral consideration, Machiavelli limited himself to functioning as a mere notary public bearing witness to political reality, writing the certificate of what had been sanctioned by the historical development. «How praiseworthy is it for a prince to keep his faith, and to live with honesty and not by astuteness,

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XVIII, p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XVIII, p. 69.

everyone understands. Nonetheless, one sees by experience in our times that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men's brains with their astuteness; and in the end they have overcome those who have founded themselves on loyalty»<sup>99</sup>.

Mockery and unfaithfulness are precisely the two core themes in *The* Mandrake, a comedy in which its main character, Callimaco, manages to obtain the favors of a married woman, thanks to the services afforded to him by Friar Timoteo, who's always ready to deceive the husband, as long as he gets a certain sum of money that allows him to be charitable staring, of course, with being charitable to himself. In allegorical terms, Lucrezia would represent power, and her suitor would be any politician trying to get hold on power by deceiving the people, here represented by the husband, with the help of religion, here incarnated by a clergyman that does not hesitate in playing the game as long as he gets some benefit from it. In view of the parallels, brought to live by an intelligent allegory, we may say that Machiavelli continues with his constant political meditation, even when he is writing an apparent theatrical divertimento. At least, this has been suggested e.g. by Leo Strauss, amongst many others: «The case of Lucrezia's lover is strictly parallel to that of the tyrant. The triumph of forbidden love which is celebrated in the Mandragola is strictly parallel to the triumph of the forbidden desire to oppress or to rule. In both cases it is an intense pleasure divorced from its natural end (procreation or the common good respectively) which is desired. In both cases, it is necessity which makes men "operate well", i.e., to acquire by prudence and strength of will that for which they long». 100

Both history and the present provided Machiavelli certain statistical

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XVIII, pp. 68-69.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Le Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli, Op. cit.*, p. 285. In this context, I should like to recommend a curious novel, W. Somerset Maugham's *Now and Then* (first published in 1946). Maugham's imagination skillfully makes use of Machiavelli's own writings in order to create an entertaining story where his two greatest passions, namely his study of the hidden details of power and his weakness for women, nicely come together. According to this fable, Machiavelli attempted to court the wife of

data which he simply collected and put on the table. Naivety and candidness will be of little use to those who undertake to walk the thorny roads of the world of politics. This is what Machiavelli learned in his diplomatic missions, and this is what he wanted to teach to those who long for power. Taking for granted that it would be preferable to behave honestly and to be faithful to the word one has given, he merely testifies that nobody who is embedded in the game of political negotiation would be ready to sacrifice their convenience for the sake of a moral positioning, which is subordinated to efficaciousness and to the success of their goals and interests. At the bottom of his theses, what we find is a radical anthropological pessimism. Men, at least in the sphere of politics, will never be trustable. 101 Whence the reality-check aspect of his counsels, a cure against all naivety. Whoever longs for power must have Chiron the centaur as their standard, and must «know how to use the beast and the man» within themselves 102, combining astuteness and fierceness as it proves appropriate. Their «prudence consists in knowing how to recognize the qualities of inconveniences, and in picking the less bad as good»<sup>103</sup>. «The prince should [...] make himself feared in such a mode that if he does not acquire love, he escapes hatred, because being feared and not being hated can go together very well»<sup>104</sup>. To that effect, just as Cesare Borgia did with Remirro de Orco, princes should delegate the most unrewarding tasks, «should have anything blamable administered by others, favors by themselves»<sup>105</sup>.

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his host in one of his diplomatic sojourns. But, unlike the hero of his own theater play, in this historical fiction Machiavelli did not have much success in his attempts, himself deceived by his servant, who takes his place on the desired bed, while poor Machiavelli gets kept by Cesare Borgia, a character that impresses him as much as his beloved. As a catharsis of his failure, he sets about writing *The Mandrake*.

<sup>101 «</sup>And if all men were good, this teaching would not be good; but because they are wicked and do not observe faith with you, you also do not have to observe it with them» (Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, Op. cit.*, XVIII, p. 69).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XVIII, pp. 68-69.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., XXI, pp. 91.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., XVII, pp. 67.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XIX, pp. 75.

At times, Machiavelli gets pithy and expounds his observations in such a concise manner that he reminds us of the aphoristic style of La Rochefoucauld<sup>106</sup>. Let us see a few examples of such aphorisms: «So one needs—we read in chapter XVIII of *The Prince*—to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to threaten the wolves»<sup>107</sup>. « [...] there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there must be good laws [...] »—he wrote in chapter XII.<sup>108</sup> Chapter VII, in its turn, closes with these words: «And whoever believes that among great personages new benefits will make old injuries be forgotten deceives himself»<sup>109</sup>. « [...] men—says chapter III—should either be caressed or eliminated, because they avenge themselves for slight offenses but cannot do so for grave ones; so the offense one does to a man should be such that one does not fear revenge for it»<sup>110</sup>.

All these advises, as any other statement of Machiavelli's in this same regard, have one sole purpose, which is to train those who want to play in the political arena, and to vaccinate them against candidness. His message couldn't be more resounding. Men, at least when they are seduced by power and caught in the peculiar game of politics, are not to be trusted, since their drive to win the game turns them hypocritical, unfaithful, liars and wickedly perverse. Nothing and no one could make them deviate from this road. In view of such state of affairs, it is obvious that whoever pretends to introduce new behavioral guidelines, such as moral rules or ethical imperatives, has nothing to do in this game. That is why, according to Machiavelli, it is better to pay attention to what in fact happens, and to keep a good record of it:

But since my intent 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 than to the imagination of it. And many have imagined

<sup>106</sup> We must therefore celebrate the initiative of Francesc Miravitlles, editor of *Maquiavelo. Pensamientos y Sentencias*, Barcelona: Península, 1995.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., XVIII, p. 69.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., XII, p. 48.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., VII, p. 33.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Op. cit., III, pp. 10-11.

republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; *for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live* that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation. For a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity<sup>111</sup>.

Naturally, Machiavelli never intended to replace ethics with the art of diplomatic simulation, to lever up all trickeries proper to political struggle. But to his mind it would be foolish to start anywhere else than by acknowledging what's evident: that moral considerations are not the basic premises of the political game, and, moreover, that they tend to be pernicious for political efficaciousness, since observing ethical norms locates us in a disadvantaged position in relation to our opponents, who are always ready to avoid or subvert those norms whenever they have the slightest chance to do it. It is therefore necessary to know all those trickeries designed to avoid ethical norms, and to avail oneself of them if need there be. «If one wanted to lend probity and common sense to the muddled thoughts of Machiavelli—says Friedrich of Prussia—, here is the most you can make of them. The world is in part like a play, where there are honest players but also the cheating ones who cheat, so a prince, who must play the part he has been assigned, should not be misled when there: he needs to know how to spot cheating during the play [...], to be alerted when it is his turn to be gulled»<sup>112</sup>.

One must know how cheaters proceed if one is to avoid being cheated by them. Even the author of the *Anti-Machiavel* agrees that one must know the trickeries in order to effectively get around them, and even use them when it is necessary—as he would later demonstrate through his own behavior. One must know how not to be good, in case one needs not to be good. That is all Machiavelli says, but it is not a minor statement,

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *Op. cit.*, XV, p. 61. Once again, emphasis has been added.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Anti-Machiavelli, Op. cit., Chap. XVIII, pp. 41-42.

since with it a new science opens up: political science. His in-depth analysis of the logic of power, his separation of the realms of politics and ethics as two autonomous and independent spheres, is what makes him a classic and what elevates the anecdotes contained in his writings into theoretical categories. «Machiavelli's great achievement is not that he solved the dilemma of the relationship between politics and morals, but that he formulated this problem in such a way that it has never since been avoided or forgotten»<sup>113</sup>.

All this seems quite clear and there is no need to insist upon it. We are, however, interested in bringing to bear an observation by Friedrich Meinecke which leads us directly into the next chapter of this work. «It would throughout have been perfectly in keeping with his [Machiavelli's] purposes and with the main line of his thought, to demand from the prince himself a certain inner moral restraint, even if it were united with the power to take upon himself, in a case on necessity of State, the entire conflict between State-interest and individual morality, and thus make a tragic sacrifice. But perhaps this kind of solution to the problem (one which Frederick the Great was to give later on) was still entirely alien to the intellectual climate of the period and to Machiavelli's own way of thought. The ability to think in terms of inner conflicts, violations and tragic problems, presupposes a more modern and sophisticated mentality, which perhaps only began with Shakespeare»<sup>114</sup>.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Georges Mounin, *Machiavel*, Paris: PUF, 1964, p. 38. *Apud*. Manuel Formoso, «Perinnidad de Maquiavelo», *Revista de Filosofia* (Costa Rica), vol. XXIII, no. 58 (1985), p. 166.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, Op. cit., p. 40.

# IV. The Dilemmas of Power in Frederick The Great, or Voltaire's Dream and Diderot's nightmare

Frederick the Great suffered in a paradigmatic way, and through his own personal experience, these internal conflicts of the modern mind. Of course, he used to break his treaties according to his own convenience, just as anybody else did, but he had a guilty conscience about that, which caused his compulsive need to justify his actions before himself and—perhaps more importantly still—before posterity. When he evaluated his own actions he had to split his personality, so that one side could compensate the other one; his philosophical vocation was used to wipe away the mistakes (and horrors) due to the political facet. In the first preface to his *Histoire de mon temps*, which he sent to Voltaire toward the end of May 1743, Frederick II of Prussia expresses his desire that future generations distinguish between these two aspects and do not conflate the

moralist philosopher, whose heart he wants to keep pure and unstained, with the politician, obliged to commit a great many atrocities depending on the circumstances. Facing the dilemma between not respecting his own pledges and ruining the people's interests, the politician was forced—malgré lui—to choose the lesser of two evils:

«I am confident that posterity will be able to tell the philosopher form the prince within me, the honest man from the politician. I must confess that it is hard to keep a candid and honest frame of mind when one is trapped in the great European political whirlwind. When one is constantly exposed to the possibility of being betrayed by one's allies, of being devastated by jealousy and envy, one is finally compelled to choose between the terrible resolution of sacrificing one's people or one's word»<sup>115</sup>.

The Prussian monarch has encountered in the political chessboard rules that he cannot change and which all political practice must obey, starting from the fundamental premise that determines an inversely proportional relationship between virtue and efficacy. «One could say—he will begrudgingly confess—that such an art is diametrically opposed in many fronts to the morality of particular subjects, but not to that of princes, who, on the grounds of a tacit mutual agreement, give one another the privilege of promoting their own ambition at all costs, even though that may imply favoring all that their interest dictates and imposing it by means of blood and fire, if not by means of intrigues and trickeries in negotiations, even failing to scrupulously comply with treaties, which, to be honest, are but oaths consecrated to fraud and treachery»<sup>116</sup>.

This philosopher, who, when he got access to the throne of Prussia, seemed to be destined to incarnate Plato's dream of a philosopher-king, now decides to adopt a further task and become a historian, in order to appease his bad conscience. Considering himself, correctly, a privileged witness of his own time, he wants to give a well-documented and objective

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Nachträge zu dem Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Grossen* (hrsg. von Hans Droyssen, Fernand und Gustav Berthold Volz), Leipzig, 1917, p. 85.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, «1743 Preface to L'Histoire de mon temps», Op. cit., p. 85.

account of his reign, without «hiding anything relating to his own person», in order to prove (himself) that, in spite of having obeyed those «reasons which oblige all princes and make them adopt such practices as authorize cheating and the abuse of power», his heart is far from having been corrupted by this, in view of the generosity which he displayed toward his neighbors. This kind of auto-psychoanalytic katharsis will be utilized in all the new Introductions that Frederick will write for his memoirs. Both in the Preface written three years later, in 1746, and in the one written in 1775, this self-exonerating intention, toward himself and toward his own time, will be the protagonist throughout the pages.

«It is for posterity—he writes in 1746—to judge us after our death, and for us to judge ourselves while we are alive. For that, it is enough that our intentions had been pure, and that we had loved virtue, since that prevents our heart from being an accomplice of the mistakes committed by our spirit»<sup>118</sup>. After this proviso, he warns his readers that they might be surprised by some of the data they will find, such as that he couldn't comply with some treaties. As an exculpation, he makes a bid for a contextualist ethics, and holds that «it's the circumstances of an action. that is to say, all that surrounds it and all that derives from it, which must make us judge whether it is good or bad»<sup>119</sup>. It is noteworthy, however, that, having invoked—more kantiano—a will that is good in itself as the touchstone by means of which we should test our moral worth, he abandons that ethical formalism so radically, and he appeals to the success of an action as a corroboration of that evaluative criterion. The contradiction is too spectacular to go unnoticed, and that is why he distinguishes between two very diverse standards: the one of private morality and the one of the statesman or public servant, elaborating on the idea that being honest according to one's moral convictions is something forbidden for the politician; whence his obsession, already explicit in 1743, that posterity

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 86 and 84.

<sup>118</sup> Cf Frederick II of Prussia, «1746 Preface to *L'Histoire de mon temps*», in *Oeuvres de Fréderic le Grand* (J.D.E. Preuss—editeur—) chez Rodolphe Decker, Berlin, 1846 and ff. Vol. II, p. XVI.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Op. cit., p. XVII.

should not conflate the philosopher and the prince. Even within one and the same person, these two characters will behave in a thoroughly different manner as far as keeping promises goes:

As a particular, a man who gives another man his word must keep it, much as that promise might have damaged him when he unreflectively made it, for honor lies underneath interest; a prince, however, would thereby expose his states to enormous misfortunes<sup>120</sup>.

The statesman's situation is compared to that of a doctor whose scruples impede him to cut a gangrenous arm, arguing that cutting any part from a human being's body is morally condemnable. Years later, in 1775, he recasts this argument, in order to reinforce his ideas. In a display that reminds us, to the Prussian monarch's chagrin, of Machiavellian frankness, Frederick assures us that he is taking the liberty of saying aloud what everybody else thinks within themselves but does not dare to say. Immediately afterwards, he establishes a number of principles that support his stance, intending to show that a sovereign's behavior is governed by the state's interest, and that princes are but slaves of this law.

Trapped in his own discourse, Frederick II of Prussia lists the causes that could lead a sovereign to break his treaties. Out of four he enumerates, two are indeed unobjectionable, namely, that the allies do not comply, and that one lacks the resources to comply with one's commitments. The remaining two plunge him into a slippery and arbitrary casuistry, in which everything ends up being a useful excuse for breaking a promise. From simply suspecting that we will be betrayed to a force majeure. In the end, he literally says: «Is it more important that the people die or that a prince breaks a treaty? Who would be so stupid as to hesitate before such a question? ». 122 His argumentation ends up justifying the *state secret*, the keeping of which is presented as an absolutely heroic act. Since revealing it could benefit the enemy, «prudence dictates that one should let the public

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Ibid., pp. XVI-XVII.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, «1775 Introduction to *L'Historie de mon temps*», *Op. cit.*, pp. XXV and XXVI.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Op. cit., p. XVII.

make all sorts of hasty judgments, and that, being unable to justify himself without compromising the state's interest, [the sovereign] must content himself with being judged before the disinterested eyes of posterity»<sup>123</sup>.

In his Report on the Prussian Government, Frederick claims that, in his view, «secrecy is a virtue as essential to politics as consubstantial to the art of war» 124. Both the game of politics and the military conflict would need its service in order to be successful. The Prussian monarch hereby succumbs to what we called at the beginning of this work the Gyges syndrome. We must realize, however, that he is forced to say in all sincerity that hypocrisy and pretense constitute the fundamental traits of the politician, whose actions must be judged according to standards which are quite different from the moral standards of the particular subject, bearing their contextualization in mind, and judged, in fact, by the only impartial judge there is, a judge who, free from envious biases, is immune to interested satires and panegyrics: history. 125 This tribunal is in charge of administering glory, nothing less than that, a value everyone seems to share, since «even the most austere philosophers write their names in works whose content is about the vainglory of human matters»<sup>126</sup>. Keeping in mind that absolute power can easily yield to the temptations of excess and debauchery, up to the point where one's whims become laws, Frederick tries to appease himself declaring that the appetite for glory is the best limitation to the abuses of power.<sup>127</sup> Very much in spite of himself, Frederick must eventually admit that politics or «the science of government represents a different issue» from all the rest, and that it may not be judged by an uninformed philosopher. 128

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. XVIII.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Exposé du guvernement prussien, des principes sur lesquels il roule, avec quelques réflexions politiques (1775/1776), in Ouvres de Fréderic Le Grand, Op. cit., vol. IX, p. 188.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Discours sur les satiriques (1762), in Ouvres de Fréderic Le Grand, Op. cit., vol. IX, p. 50.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Examen de l'Essai sur les préjugés (1770), in Ouvres de Fréderic Le Grand, Op. cit., vol. IX, p. 141.

# 41. THE MORAL TROUBLES OF «THE SANS-SOUCI PHILOSOPHER»

For someone who, in spite of having played a relevant political role, declared in his testament that he «had lived like a philosopher»<sup>129</sup>, it certainly wasn't easy to acknowledge the split between government and philosophy, the antagonism between politics and morals that he witnessed in the dilemmas of power. Throughout his writings, Frederick constantly speaks about his fondness for philosophy, which he characterizes as «a passion that faithfully accompanies all my steps»<sup>130</sup>. In his view, the philosopher, in their turn, should be accompanied by a series of qualities like «moderation, humanity, justice, and tolerance»<sup>131</sup>. Moreover, philosophy is at times represented as simply a synonym of morals, since its main interest lies, of course, in ethics and not in metaphysical speculations.<sup>132</sup> That's why he expresses his desire «that philosophers, who are less inclined to outlandish and sterile investigations, could use their talents above all in moral matters, and that their lives could serve as an example to their disciples».<sup>133</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Testament du roi*, in *Oeuvres de Frédéric Le Grand, Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 215.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Dissertation sur l'innocence des erreurs de l'esprit* (1738), in *Oeuvres de Frédéric Le Grand, Op. cit.*, vol. VIII, p. 33.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Examen de l'Essai sur les préjugés, Op. cit., p. 137.

When I talk about philosophy, I do not have geometry or metaphysics in mind. The former, in spite of its sublime nature, is not conceived of in order to favor human relations; I leave it for an imaginative Englishman, so that he can govern heavens as he likes it, while I hold onto the planet I inhabit. As regards metaphysics, you are right in describing it as a ball full of air. When one does nothing but to travel in that country, one erratically wanders between chasms and abysses; and I am convinced that nature hasn't prepared us, in any way, in order to divine her secrets, but in order to cooperate in the plan that she is carrying out. Let us profit form life as much as we can, and not worry about the question of whether it is superior causes or our own freedom which leads our actions». (Cf. Letter from Frederick to Voltaire dated 13 February 1749; in *Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Grossen mit Voltaire*—hrsg. von Reinhold Koser und Hans Droysen—, Hirzel Verlag, Leipzig, 1908/1911, 3 vols., vol. II, p. 245).

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Essai sur l'amour prope, envisage comme principe de morale (1790), in Oeuvres de Frédéric Le Grand, Op. cit., vol. IX, p. 98.

Philosophy and ethics become one and the same in the mind of someone who used to publish his writings under the title of *The Works of the Sans-Souci Philosopher*<sup>134</sup> (a reference to the name he had given to his Potsdam palace: «no worries»). Indeed, some of his most philosophical works deal precisely with ethical issues. I have in mind, for example, his *Essay on self-love, considered as a moral principle*, in which he analyses the usefulness of virtue as a foundation for society.

Without virtue, men would behave like unbearable monsters, incurring in all sorts of atrocities; in order to soften their barbaric customs, legislators promulgate laws and some philosophers teach virtue. 135 Now, since only great geniuses can keep their minds while they explore the depths of metaphysics or religious abstractions<sup>136</sup>, if men are to become virtuous, it is necessary that they be able to apply a general and simple principle; «this powerful spring—says Frederick—is self-love, that guardian of our conservation, that artisan of our happiness, that inexhaustible source of our vices and virtues, that hidden principle of all human actions»<sup>137</sup>. A sufficiently skilled philosopher may use this principle in order to counter passions with the only thing that can restrain them: other passions, passions of a different kind. The great reward for virtuous behavior would thus be the happiness achieved by a mind which is calm and content with itself, since it has nothing to reproach itself. This highest happiness is attained when one manages to silence that relentless, secret voice of conscience which condemns vice and devours our souls through remorse. 138

There is another writing, called *A Moral Dialogue, for the use of the young nobility*, where he approaches these same topics. At one point, one of the two characters of the dialogue, the one who systematically interrogates the other, poses the following question: «It is true that laws punish public

<sup>134</sup> These editions, which grew with time, collected his many writings under this name: *Oeuvres du Philosophe de Sans-Souci. Au donjon du château. Avec privilége d'Apollon.* 

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Op. cit. p. 87.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Ibid. p. 89.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Ibid. p. 91.

crimes; but how many bad actions, which are concealed in darkness, remain hidden for the penetrating look of Themis [justice]? Why couldn't you be one of those happy guilty, which enjoy their mischiefs under the shade of impunity? »<sup>139</sup>. The reply is that nothing remains so hidden that it does not come up to the surface sooner or later, and that the passing of time becomes unbearable when one harbors the fear of being discovered at any time. As if this was not enough, while our crime remains hidden, we are tormented by remorse. «Could I stifle the voice of conscience, and of avenging remorse? Conscience is as a mirror; when our passions are calm, it represents all our [moral] deformities»<sup>140</sup>. The way to keep this remarkable mirror clean would be to avoid doing to others what we do not want for ourselves; for example, avoid stripping anyone of their possessions, or coveting the neighbor's partner, scrupulously keep one's promises, refrain from making slanderous utterances, showing gratitude to those who have rendered services to us.<sup>141</sup>

In his role as a moral philosopher, Frederick supports an ethics grounded in self-love, which he defines as being satisfied with oneself, and whose main mission would be to avoid the reproaches of a moral conscience so scrupulous as the one described a little later in the context of Kant's ethical formalism.<sup>142</sup>

None of these reflections are valid, however, as soon as Frederick assumes the role of the politician. As we have already seen, his grave governmental responsibilities gradually taught him that political obligations do not fit well with moral imperatives. Granted, honor is

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Dialogue de moral à l'usage de la jeune noblesse*, (1770), in *Ouvres de Fréderic Le Grand, Op. cit.*, vol. IX, p. 105. Cf. *The Posthumous Works of Frederic II King of Prussia, Vol. XIII. Correspondence*, translated from the French by Thomas Holcroft. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1739, p. 469.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Op. cit*, p. 106; English translation, p. 471.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Op. cit, p. 104; English translation, pp. 467-468.

<sup>142</sup> For Kant, as is well known, being content with oneself (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) is the formal condition to all sorts of happiness. (Cf. R. Rodríguez Aramayo, *Crítica de la razón ucrónica. En torno a las aporías morales de Kant*, prólogo de Javier Muguerza, Madrid: Tecnos, 1992, pp. 356-360; and Roberto R. Aramayo, *Kant: Entre la ética y la política*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2018, *passim*).

above interest for the common mortal beings, and this obliges them to keep their promises, even those made carelessly, no matter how damaging this may turn out to be; things are quite different for the statesman, however, who follows a principle that ranks above morality, namely, the state's interest. The reason of state prevails over individual morality. Secrecy and the conceal of one's own true intentions are much more valuable in this political context than truth or sincerity. Political decisions are not to be justified before an inflexible moral conscience, where there is no room for any sort of relativism, but instead before a posterity which must carefully bear in mind the precise context in which they were made, so that their evaluation highly depends on those circumstances. Realizing this primacy of politics over moral considerations, certain things, which were forbidden by ethics, become inexorable precepts. Even promises signed in a treaty must be broken if the state's interest requires us to do so, and the same goes for any commitment regarding property, at least as long as one thinks one has rights over the neighboring territories, as Fredrick was keen to demonstrate he thought he had.

Still, Frederick never fully identified with his political *Mr. Hyde*, and the moral conscience of his inner *Dr. Jekyll* didn't abandon him for a single moment, always pushing him to differentiate his two schizophrenic professions. In his correspondence with Voltaire, to give but one example, he entreats him to distinguish «the statesman from the philosopher», claiming that «one can be a politician by duty, and a philosopher by inclination»<sup>143</sup>, as in his own case.

Running ahead of posterity, Rousseau wanted to immortalize the disquisition in a famous phrase that he wrote at the bottom of a diptych where the Prussian monarch was portrayed; the lines written by the Genevan thinker, however, were completely opposed to the monarch's desires, since they emphasized the primacy of politics over philosophical

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter from 13th of February 1749, in *Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Grossen mit Voltaire*, Op. cit., vol. II, p. 245.

reflection in him: «His glory and his profit, that's his God, his Law / For he thinks like a philosopher and he behaves like a King»<sup>144</sup>.

Remarkably enough, Voltaire himself had replied beforehand to this request made by the monarch, for almost a year before the request, he had sent these verses to his royal correspondent, by then already a king: «When you had a father, and in this father you had a unique master, / you were a philosopher and you lived according to your own laws. / Today, having the rank of a King / and deserving to be so-called more than any other / you serve, however, twenty masters at the same time. » <sup>145</sup> Out of that score of masters to which Frederick must now serve, Voltaire refers in the first place to glory, that tyrant which usually makes us choose between our own interest and faithfully keeping our promises and commitments. <sup>146</sup> By this time, Voltaire had already realized that Frederick wished, above all, «to occupy a little space in the temple of glory» <sup>147</sup>, under the excuse of serving to his homeland. As is well known, a short time after he came to power, Fredrick II of Prussia decided to go on and attend his appointment with glory: he invaded Silesia. <sup>148</sup>

### 4.2. THE CO-AUTHORS OF THE ANTI-MACHIAVELLI

Before crossing that Rubicon which led him to glory and made him wholeheartedly endorse the primacy of politics over morality, however, Frederick's access to power had generated high expectations among some of the greatest European thinkers, convinced as they were that history could still see the realization of the old Platonic dream of a philosopher-king. To

<sup>44 «</sup>Sa gloire et son profit, voilà son Dieu, sa Loi / Il pense en philosophe et se conduit en Roi».

<sup>145 «</sup>Quand vous aviez un père, et dasns ce père un maître; / Vous etiez philosophe, et viviez sous vos lois, / Aujourd'hui, mis au rang des rois / Et plus qu'eux tout digne de l'être, / Vous servez cependent vignt maîtres à la fois». (Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick from 15th May 1742, Op. cit., vol. II, p. 124.)

<sup>146</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 125.

<sup>147</sup> Frederick II of Prussia, Dialogue de moral, Op. cit., Vol. IX, p. 112.

<sup>148</sup> Cf, e.g. W.F. Reddaway, *Frederick the Great and the Rise of Prussia*, Revised Edition, London: Putnam, 1925, p. 89 and ff.

a considerable extent, it was precisely Voltaire who was responsible for such expectations, particularly because of his insistence in the publication, eventually against the author's own will, of that essay that Frederick had written when he was but a crown prince of the Prussian throne. This work, whose title was *Anti-Machiavelli*, had an enormous repercussion at the time, since, even though it was anonymously published, its authorship was very much of an open secret. Everyone knew that the author was the fabulous king of Prussia, who had just been crowned when the book started to circulate all over Europe. It was certainly a matter of speculation how much of it was due to Voltaire's pen<sup>149</sup>, and, in fact, not too long ago, Voltaire was still presented by some commentators as the essay's true author. <sup>150</sup> In any case, it is hard to exaggerate the extent of Voltaire's leading role in that enterprise.

The fluctuations that characterized the *Anti-Machiavelli*'s slow production process are well-captured by the correspondence between Frederick and Voltaire during that time.<sup>151</sup> There we find Frederick

<sup>149</sup> The *Refutation of Machiavelli*, i.e., Frederick's own handwritten manuscript, wasn't published until 1848 (in the first volume of the *Ouvres philosophiques de Fréderic II, roi de Prusse*, and which constitute the eighth volume of the *Ouvres de Fréderic le Grand*, which is the edition consulted for the present text). Thus, at the time of the *Anti-Machiavelli*'s publication, it wasn't possible to discern what was contributed to it by Voltaire and what by Frederick. My own Spanish edition of the *Anti-Machiavelli*—already referred to above—allows the reader to clearly visualize the additions, amendments, and corrections by Voltaire, as well as the different versions of a couple of chapters.

<sup>150 «</sup>In keeping with his disguised habit of attributing his political and religious works to dead or imagined people, Voltaire did not hesitate in attributing Frederick II a book he had not written, and he unabashedly affirmed that the book was the prince's authorship, and that he had limited his contributions to making corrections, writing notes, and editing it. In fact, Voltaire did much more than merely polishing the manuscript». Cf. Edmundo González Blanco, Introductory Study to his Spanish version of Machiavelli's *The Prince, commented by Napoleon Bonaparte*, Madrid: Ediciones Ibéricas S.A., 1933, p. 226).

<sup>151</sup> My Introductory Study to my Spanish version of the *Anti-Machiavelli* contains a detailed account of such fluctuations (Cf. Federico II de Prussia, *Antimaquiavelo* (*o Refutación de Maquiavelo*), Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1995 pp. XVIII and ff.), and thus I'll simply give a summary in the present work.

completely captivated by *The Century of Louis XIV*, and only making a small reproach to its author: having counted Machiavelli as one of that century's greatest men.<sup>152</sup> Voltaire does not hesitate in pleasing his egregious correspondent, and crosses out Machiavelli's name from such a list. A year later, in March 1739, Frederick tells Voltaire of his project of refuting Machiavelli's theses. Two months later, Frederick gets down to business and states his intended goals: «It is Machiavelli who keeps me busy at the moment. I work on notes on his *Prince*, and I have already started a book which will completely refute his maxims, both as regards his rejection of virtue and as regards the genuine interests of the princes. It is not enough to show virtue to men, one must also activate the springs of interest, without which there will only be very few who are inclined to obey their righteous reason». <sup>153</sup>

«It is for you—replies an enthusiastic Voltaire—to destroy that infamous politician who turned crime into a virtue. The word *politician* means, in its original sense, *a citizen*, whereas today, owing to our perversity, it means so much as *a deceiver of citizens*. Give back to that work, my dear lord, its authentic meaning. Make men know and love virtue». 154

In one way or another, this incitement runs through each and every one of the letters that Voltaire wrote to Frederick during those months. He even takes the liberty of recommending a few readings to whom he calls «the new Marcus Aurelius» (a nickname the Prussian monarch highly appreciates). Frederick, in his turn, corresponds to all these nice words by telling Voltaire that he is only trying to follow his teachings: «My meditation on Machiavellism is strictly speaking a continuation of *La Henriade*. The greatness displayed by Henry IV is the workshop where I forge the ray that will annihilate Cesare Borgia». <sup>155</sup>

Travels and other occupations proper to his position cause a delay in the work, but Frederick promises Voltaire not only that he will be

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 31st March 1738, in *Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Grossen mit Voltaire*, *Op. cit.*, vol. I., p. 169.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 16th May 1739, Op. cit., Vol. I., p. 271.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated 25th April 1739, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 269.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 26th June 1739, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 278.

the first to read it, but that the work won't see the light without his approval. Voltaire takes good note on this, and he re-reads Machiavelli in the Italian original in order to trace some guidelines, while he keeps encouraging Frederick to elaborate what ought to become «the kings' catechism». 156 At the beginning of November 1739 Fredrick sends already a few chapters, so that Voltaire can read them and suggest all those corrections he deems appropriate. When he sends the second round of chapters, he entrusts Voltaire with their revision and makes these remarks: «It is necessary that you function as the putative father of this child, and that you add to its education whatever the purity of the French language requires, so that it can be presented to the public». 157 Involved in such a high degree in the project, Voltaire takes one step further, and asks the honor of writing a Preface to the work, as well as that of being its literary editor. As of that moment, he had already conceived the name that would make it famous: Anti-Machiavelli (Frederick had called it Refutation of Machiavelli's The Prince). These requests are surrounded by a whole series of bombastic praises:

My dear lord, it is necessary, for the world's sake, that this work should see the light; it is necessary to have an antidote presented by a royal hand. It is remarkable that princes had not use their quills to write with this intention. For it was their duty, and their silence as regards Machiavelli was tantamount to a tacit acceptance of his doctrines. It is, undoubtedly, a book worthy of a prince, and I have no doubts that an edition of Machiavelli, with this counter-poison at the end of each chapter, may become one of the most precious monuments of literature. 158

All these compliments, however, are an attempt to introduce his criticisms to what he has read so far. To put it briefly, he finds the writing too long. It couldn't be otherwise for a mind like his, so fond of aphorisms and epigrams, of lapidary phrases that completely annihilate the opponent's arguments. He doesn't deem it appropriate for the Refutation's chapters to

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated 18th October 1739, Op. cit., Vol. I., p. 307.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 4th December 1739, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 313.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated 18th December 1739, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 316.

be longer that those of the commented text, and he announces the trimming he is about to do if he is allowed to. But he is not entirely sure how to express this, lest his distinguished friend becomes discouraged; he even brings to bear external opinions in order to express his own: «Allow me, my lord, to tell you that, according to Madame Châtelet's observations, in agreement on this count with my own, there are a few branches in this beautiful tree that may be pruned without damaging it. The desire to counter the precepts of usurpers and tyrants has devoured your generous spirit, and at times it has overwhelmed it. If that is a defect, it looks much more like a virtue. It is usually said that God, who is infinitely benevolent, hates vice with as much infinitude; reviling Machiavelli in all honesty is not incompatible, however, with the careful attention to reasons. What I propose you is pretty easy, and I submit it to your judgement. I will wait for my lord's precise instructions and I will keep the manuscript until you allow me to prepare it». 159

Frederick is now only concerned about securing that the text will be published anonymously, as he wants to avoid any gratuitous confrontation with other European monarchs. In February 1740 he sends Voltaire the remaining materials, not like someone who has proudly accomplished a work with great effort, but rather in the mood of someone who is finally ridding himself of a burden. Having an agonizing father, and finding himself just about to occupy Prussia's throne, Frederick increasingly distances himself from the essay. Voltaire's attachment to the work, by contrast, has only increased; far from limiting himself to merely making a

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*.

do an Machiavelli. I send you the remaining parts, and I entreat you to let me know your criticism. I am ready to revise and correct, putting my self-love in parentheses, all that you find unworthy to be presented to the public. I talk too freely about all the great princes, and so I cannot consent that the *Anti-Machiavelli* appears with my signature. That's why I have decided to have it published, after all the corrections have been made, as the work of an anonymous author. Put your hands on it, therefore: remove all the attacks you find superfluous, and do not tolerate any fault against the purity of language». (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 3th February 1740, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 326.

formal revision of the text, he finds that Frederick has omitted a few good arguments, and in his attempt to remedy the failure, he far exceeds what has been asked from him. Frederick, however, is completely absorbed by his imminent access to power, as Voltaire gets impatient about not getting any comment in this regard:

«I am still waiting—Voltaire complains—your final instructions regarding the *Anti-Machiavelli*. Particularly now, *that you are about to refute Machiavelli with your conduct*; that's why I wait for your permission to send to the press this antidote, written by your hand». <sup>161</sup>

After a great delay, a heartbroken Frederick will confess that he has no time to correct the definitive version of the text, arguing that he would rather, indeed, «consider refuting Machiavelli with my conduct instead of with my writings». <sup>162</sup>

The coronation ceremony looming in the horizon, the prince who is already a monarch in pectore washes his hands of the project, whereas Voltaire's attitude is the exact opposite. Even before getting Frederick's permission for it, he engages in negotiations to have the work printed in the Netherlands. On the other hand, his arguments change in tone, and he writes several times to Frederick in order to make him see that his text can only have a positive influence on his relations to other European powers. Embracing the principle that silence implies consent, Voltaire first sends the text to the presses and later communicates this to the author, letting him know, moreover, that an unstoppable process is well underway. He thereby manages to get an answer, although not precisely the one that he was waiting for. The Prussian monarch commands him to buy all the copies before the work gets distributed. Somewhat alarmed by the ukase, Voltaire commutes to Amsterdam and devises a whole literary tale to appease his friend. He tells him that he has tried to sabotage the printer by manipulating the galley proofs, but that he has been unable to stop the presses. Accordingly, he proposes the monarch to publish as soon

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated  $10^{\rm th}$  March 1740,  $\it{Op.~cit.}$ , Vol. I., p. 332. Emphasis added.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 18th March 1740, Op. cit., Vol. I., p. 334.

as possible another work that discredits the original one. The stratagem yields the desired results, and thus the text appears in two editions instead of one; in a brief time, it gets re-printed several times and translated into several languages. But Frederick is not happy about the text, and he writes the following to Voltaire: «I have read the *Machiavelli* from cover to cover; but, to tell the truth, I am not happy at all about it, and I have decided to change what I dislike about it, and to work on a new edition, under my supervision, in Berlin. To that effect, I have written an article for the newspapers, in which the *Essay*'s author unauthorizes both previous editions. I hope you can forgive me, but I couldn't act otherwise, since there is so much that is alien to me in your edition, that it is no longer my work; recasting the work will be one of my main occupations this coming Winter». <sup>163</sup>

Of course, Frederick never got his hands back on the essay—he was too busy invading Silesia. Voltaire, too, in spite of all the illusions and efforts he had dedicated to the work, soon became disappointed, although for quite different reasons. On July 18th 1741 he writes the following to César de Missy: «As a world-citizen, I took much interest in the maxims of the Anti-Machiavelli; but they are so little attended, and I find practice in such discordance with the theory, that I have completely abandoned this work. I published it with the vain hope that it would bring about something good; however, it has brought about nothing but profit to the booksellers». 164 Voltaire's disappointment was proportional to the expectations he had had on Frederick. As late as the 18th October 1740, the Prussian ambassador to The Hague received these lines from a plethoric Voltaire: «I have abundant reasons to believe that the king's behavior will thoroughly justify the prince's Anti-Machiavelli» 165, adding that the admiration he felt for the latter work was greater than the one he felt for Marcus Aurelius's Meditations. That same day he wrote the lord of Cideville, describing

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 7th November 1740, *Op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 62.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Voltaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*—ed. Moland—, Paris, 1880; vol. XXXVI, p. 83.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres de Voltaire* (avec préfaces, avertissements, notes..., par M. Beuchot), Paris, 1831; vol. LIV, p. 225.

«that Northern Marcus Aurelius» as «a man who thinks like a philosopher, and a king that behaves like a man». <sup>166</sup> In his *Memoirs*, however, which he allows to go public only posthumously, we get a very different portrait of the monarch:

Some time before the death of his father, the King of Prussia thought proper to write against the principles of Machiavel. Had Machiavel had a prince for a pupil, the very first thing he would have advised to him to do would have been so to write. The Prince Royal, however, was no master of such finesse.<sup>167</sup>

It used to be believed that these memoirs were written by Voltaire mainly in order to avenge himself, due to the trenchancy with which these pages speak of the Prussian monarch, even though at times he still lets an ounce of sympathy for his old friend emerge.<sup>168</sup> Whereas Frederick wrote a *Praise of Voltaire*<sup>169</sup> when he died, Voltaire, by contrast, dedicated Frederick the literary caricature to be found in his *Memoirs*.<sup>170</sup> This trenchant portrait, which according to Voltaire's wishes should only be published after his own death, stands in sharp contrast to the praises he kept dedicating to the king, not only in their correspondence (where by the middle of the decade of the 50's he is still calling him «the Salomon

<sup>166</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 235-236.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Memoirs of the Life of Voltaire. Written by Himself. Translated from the French, London: G. Robinson, 1784, p. 45-46.

<sup>168</sup> Frederick gets portrayed as someone who declared wars on the most frivolous grounds and who, on top of that, won those wars only after he had left the battlefield. (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 48-51). On the other hand, his personal life is treated with the utmost cruelty, through all sorts of references to his alleged homosexuality and impotence (ff.)

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Éloge de Voltaire*, in *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, Op. cit., vol. II, p. 50 and ff. The text was read at an extraordinary meeting of the Berlin Royal Academy of Sciences on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1778.

<sup>170</sup> Frederick had anticipated this to some extent, when he wrote Voltaire that, due to his longevity, he would live after him: «You will get the chance to write a malicious epitaph on my tomb, but I won't get upset by that, and I already forgive you». (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 12<sup>th</sup> May 1760, *Op. cit.*, Vol. III., p. 105.)

of the North»<sup>171</sup>, «Marcus Aurelius»<sup>172</sup> and «philosopher-king»<sup>173</sup>), but in some of his later writings as well, such as *The Prize of Justice and Humanity*, form 1777, where he describes the king of Prussia as «the hero of the century».<sup>174</sup>

An aficionado of the psychological accounts of behavior might try to explain this malice towards such a royal correspondent by referring to some of Voltaire's own frustrations; Voltaire, indeed, cherished the hope of getting an important position, owing to his friendship with Frederick. Under this presupposition, his likely resentment at not seeing his wish to lead the Berlin Academy of Sciences fulfilled,<sup>175</sup> or his possible disappointment at not having been invested as the Prussian monarch's Prime Minister, a rumor that spread like powder to all the European chancelleries at the time<sup>176</sup> (even though Frederick never even hinted at such a possibility<sup>177</sup>), would lead us further in this direction. To tell the

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Voltaire's 1756 letter to Frederick, Op. cit., Vol. III., p. 21.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letters to Frederick dated 27th April 1740 (Vol. III, p. 174) and 28th March 1775 (Vol. III, p. 336). On February 1775, Voltaire ends with these words one of his letters to Frederick: «I'll spend the rest of my life reading Frederick-Marcus Aurelius, the hero of war and of philosophy». (cf. Vol. III, p. 322).

<sup>473 «</sup>It is a great consolation for me that, as I abandon this life, a philosopher-king like yourself remains in this Earth». (Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick from September 1757, *Op. cit.*, Vol. III., p. 27).

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Voltaire, *Le Prix de la Justice et de l'humanité* (1777), article 24, in *Politique de Voltaire* (Textes choisis et presentés par rené Pomeau), Paris: Armand Colin, 1963, p. 168.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Christiane Mervaud, *Voltaire et Fréderic II: une dramaturgie des lumières 1736-1778*, Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1985, p. 105.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 106 n. 7. Voltaire might have gotten an idea by reading these lines: «Such a vast genius, such a sublime spirit, such a hard-working man as Voltaire is, could have procured for himself, if he had wished to abandon the sphere of the sciences he cultivates, the most distinguished jobs». (Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, «Preface to Voltaire's *Henriade*» (1739), in *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 50).

<sup>177</sup> Curiously enough, the one time that Frederick talked to Voltaire about the position of Prime Minister, he did it sarcastically, and many years later, in order to express his outrage at Voltaire's viciousness towards Maupertius (who, by the way, was the president of the Berlin Academy; in other words, he had the other position that

truth, such likely motives could only add to the satiric character of the imputations; it remains an indisputable fact that the monarch's behavior blatantly belied the good wishes he himself had expressed in his famous work *Anti-Machiavelli*:

«It was presently evident—Voltaire concluded—, that Frederick [the II], King of Prussia, was no so great an enemy to Machiavel as the Prince Royal appeared to have been»<sup>178</sup>.

## 4.3. VOLTAIRE'S SHORT-LIVED DREAM

This profound disappointment made Voltaire wake up from a beautiful dream. As the prince that had honored him with his friendship and kept a copious correspondence with him got to power, Voltaire dared to dream that his century would see a philosopher-king<sup>179</sup>, a monarch that would promote the arts and sciences, a sovereign that would use—not abuse—power according to moral commandments. A letter from Voltaire to Frederick, from April 1740, bears witness to this dream: «Others dream of their lovers, I dream of my prince»<sup>180</sup>. In his oneiric phantasy he has seen Frederick getting to the throne with sadness rather than joy, bringing with him all the weapons necessary to create academies. The same letter ends with the following verses: «No, it's not a lie / which deceives my

Voltaire wanted): «You complain before everybody that Maupertius wants to kill you. You may agree with me that it would have perfectly suited you to be Cesare Borgia's Prime Minister! And Machiavelli would have enjoyed such a stratagem so greatly! » (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1753, *Op. cit.* Vol. III, p. 3). — As is well known, this incident caused Frederick and Voltaire to fall apart, and the latter talks about that in full detail in his *Memoirs*, *Op. cit.*, p. 57 ff.

<sup>178</sup> Memoirs, Op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>179</sup> See the ode that Voltaire dedicated to Frederick as the latter got to power in *Briefwechsel Friederichs des Grossen mit Voltaire* Berlin, hrsg. von R. Koser u. H. Droysen, 1909, vol. II, p. 3.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *Nachträge zu dem Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Grossen mit Maupertius und Voltaire*, Leipzig: hrsg. von Hans Droysen, Fernand Caussy und Gustav Berthold Volz, 1917, p. 47.

enchanted heart, / with all other kings my dream would be a vain illusion / with you, my dream is the truth». 181

In fact, the Prussian prince's biography supported that dream. Frederick used to write poems, to compose musical pieces, and to love philosophy, in spite of the dishonest efforts of his father—the so-called 'soldier king'—to make him abandon such activities. As if this was not enough, he seemed to be devoted to ethics, as was shown by his desire to anathematize Machiavelli's theses, as we are told in the *Anti-Machiavelli*: «that horrendous [Machiavellian] politics should be exterminated once and for all, for it is unable to obey the maxims dictated by sane and purified morality»<sup>182</sup>.

Abbot Saint-Pierre had the same dream as Voltaire, and he rushed to write a commentary to the *Anti-Machiavelli* hoping to get the shining Prussian monarch's support for his project of a perpetual peace in Europe. Thoroughly disappointed by the fact that one of the first actions of the Prussian monarch was to start a war against the Austrian Empire, invading Silesia, Saint-Pierre soon manifested his frustration in another essay, *The Political Enigma*. He there starts by enthusiastically praising what Frederick had written in his book, only to immediately regret the abyss between his praiseworthy ethical stances and their denials by his own political practice. Frederick the Great responded with another writing, which he had written to that precise effect, and which he called *Anti-Saint Pierre*, or *Refutation of Abbot Saint-Pierre's Political Enigma*. Saint-Pierre thereby received the same treatment by the king of Prussia as Machiavelli had received when the king was only a crown prince.

«He who aspires to establish a perpetual peace—says Frederick in his *Examination of the Essay on Prejudices*—must locate himself in an ideal world, where there is no distinction between what is yours and what is mine, a world in which princes, ministers, and their subjects

<sup>181 «</sup>Non, non, ce n'est point un mensonge / Qui trompa mon Coeur enchanté, Chez tous les autres rois mon rêve est un vain songe, / Chez vous mon rêve est verité». (Cf. Ibid, p. 49).

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Anti-Machiavelli, Op. cit., p. 69.

all lack passions, and where reason is universally endorsed; or else he will associate himself to the projects of the late Abbot Saint-Pierre»<sup>183</sup>. Frederick complains about philosophers who praise Marcus Aurelius, who was often forced to go to the battlefields too, but who nonetheless viciously censure the modern rulers that try to emulate him by defending their homeland's interests; those philosophers do not understand that, in the absence of a high tribunal that advocates for their causes, a sovereign can only appeal to the use of force and «maintain by means of weapons the equilibrium between the European powers».<sup>184</sup>

Bearing these thoughts in his mind, it is no surprise that he talks about Saint-Pierre<sup>185</sup> in the following terms: «his proposal—he says to Voltaire—for re-establishing peace in Europe and preserving it perpetually seems to me to be thoroughly feasible; to see it crowned with success, one only needs the consent of the whole of Europe and some other trifle thing of that same sort»<sup>186</sup>. In a likewise sarcastic tone, Voltaire replied: «I assume that Your Majesty sees the things only guessed by Saint-Pierre, and that the philosopher-king knows perfectly well how much the philosopher who is not a king pretends to guess in vain».<sup>187</sup>

As we know, Frederick was completely aware of the schizophrenia to which his double vocation led him, and he always expressed that he envied

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Examen de l'Essai sur les préjugés (1770), in Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand, Op. cit., vol. IX, pp. 143-144.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>185</sup> For a deeper treatment of this author, see the works by Concha Roldán, «Los "prolegómenos" del ensayo kantiano sobre la paz perpetua» (in Roberto R. Aramayo, Javier Muguerza and Concha Roldán, *La paz y el ideal cosmopolita de la Ilustración. A propósito del bicentenario de «Hacia la paz perpetua» de Kant,* Madrid: Tecnos, 1996) and «Las raíces del multiculturalismo en Leibniz» (in *Conciencia y saber. Homenaje al Prof. Otto Saame*, Granada: Comares, 1995, pp. 369-394).

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1742, *Op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 123; and see Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 29<sup>th</sup> February 1773, vol. III, p. 262.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1742, *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 125. The same causticity, however, was used by Voltaire against Rousseau, in a pretty different line which no doubt would have pleased the Prussian monarch; Cf. Voltaire, *Rescrit de l'empereur de la Chine à l'ocassion du projet de paix perpétuelle*. Rousseau's attempts to disseminate Abbot Saint-Pierre's proposal are summarily collected in the

philosophers such as Voltaire, whose works only follow the dictates of their own taste and genius, quite unlike what happens with the obligations of a «laborer of politics» like himself, whose enterprise is thoroughly determined by an inexorable necessity». 188

Now, even though it is certainly true that Frederick was torn between his double condition of ruler and moralist, it is also true that one should not draw such a sharp distinction between those of his texts written before, and those written after, he got to the throne. A careful study of the former already shows that the crown prince defended the same principles which were later put into practice by the monarch. If this is so, the dream so vociferously proclaimed by Voltaire and also endorsed by Saint-Pierre, was from the start groundless, and thus the only justified complaint they could have had was a complaint against themselves, for their lack of attention, the sole responsible for nourishing their fantasies about the qualities of the Prussian monarch as the incarnation of the Platonic figure of the philosopher-king, their political panacea.

Undoubtedly, Frederick went through serious internal conflicts when he assumed his double condition of a moralist embedded in politics, confronting all sorts of dilemmas proper to the exercise of power. What is not so clear, however, is the further claim that he radically changed his views on the duties and obligations of rulers as soon as he accessed the throne. The question I wish to clarify is thus the following one: To what extent did the Prussian monarch contradict the crown prince? Did he have to abandon his philosophical convictions in order to fulfil his duties as a king? Or is it rather the case that he always, both before and after he got hold on power, tried to make these two professions compatible?

first part of my work «La version kaintiana de la "mano invisible" (y otros alias del destino) »; Cf. *La paz y el ideal cosmopolita de la Ilustración*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 100 ff.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1742, *Op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 117. «I must confess—he writes Voltaire—that the life of a man who only lives for thinking, and for himself, seems to me to be much better than the life of a man whose only occupation consists in procuring the joy of others» (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 12<sup>th</sup> June 1740, *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 4).

The passions of princes—wrote the king in 1743—know of no constraint other than the consumption of their forces; so much is determined by the permanent laws of European politics, and thus it is necessary that every politician obeys them; if a prince looks after his own interests less carefully than his neighbors, the latter would increasingly gain power, whereas the former would become weaker the more virtuous he remains.<sup>189</sup>

When he wrote this Preface, Voltaire reproached him that he «was making it rather clear that he disregarded the spirit of morality, for the sake of the spirit of conquest». 190 However, the crown prince had already defended that same thesis five years earlier, in his Considerations on the current state of the body politic in Europe, where we find the following lines: «The permanent principle ruling princes is to grow as much as their power allows; and even though this growth may be dependent on an infinite series of variables, such as the situations of the states, the strength of their neighbors, or whether the circumstances are favorable, that does not make the principle any less invariable, and the princes never give that enterprise up, for their glory depends on that; in one word, they have to do as much as possible to grow». 191 There is one thing to bear in mind, however. This small essay was published only after Frederick's death<sup>192</sup>; almost no one could perceive this continuity in his thinking, which brings together the prince and the monarch, the philosopher and the king. This does not apply, however, to Voltaire: Frederick had handed down the text to him in 1738, and he knew it perfectly well. What motivated Voltaire's reproachful comment, then?

There might be a small space for the possibility of a gap between the two personalities. The small opuscule on Europe, which was historical

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, 1743 Preface to «L'Histoire de mon temps», in Nachträge zu dem Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Grossen mit Maupertius und Voltaire, Op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick from June 1743, Op. cit., vol. II, p. 172.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Considerations sur l'état present du corps politique de l'Europe (1739), in Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand, Op. cit., vol. I, p. 15.

<sup>192</sup> In Ouvres posthumes de Frédéric, roy de Prusse, Berlin 1788, and Paris 1789.

in character, is not the most representative sample if we want to argue for the possibility of that gap. In effect, while he was gauging the events of his time, Frederick was describing a situation instead of evaluating it. This is why the question whether there was an axiological continuum in Frederick's thought must be assessed taking a philosophical, not a historical, work into account: the *Anti-Machiavelli*.

This famous essay, corrected and supervised by Voltaire, may help us confirm the mismatch between the moral convictions of the prince and the political principles of the monarch. Only the exercise of power could have caused the transition from an uncompromising moralist to a realist politician who worships pragmatism alone. Only by going through the access to the throne could Frederick slowly understand the Florentine thinker's reasons, even to the point of changing his mind about him, as his *Political Testament* bears witness:

Machiavelli—we read in his *Political Reveries*—says that a disinterested power placed in between two ambitious powers will end up being swallowed by the latter. I am sorry to have to admit this, but Machiavelli was right. Princes must necessarily be ambitious.<sup>193</sup>

According to this hypothesis, the Prussian monarch modified his assessment of Machiavelli only after he had known what it was to make use of power. The clever politician might have come to realize that Machiavelli's observations weren't as nonsensical as they had seemed to be, after all, even though the unexperienced prince with a philosophical vocation went as far as creating a moral antidote to neutralize Machiavelli's poisonous theories, writing the *Anti-Machiavelli*. 194

Is this account correct? Perhaps not completely. For already in the Refutation one may find one or two concessions to the author of *The* 

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Friedrich der Große, *Das Politische Testament von 1752* (aus dem Französischem übertragen von Friedrich von Oppeln-Bronikowski, mit einem Nachwort von Eckhard Most), Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987, pp. 80-81.

<sup>194 «</sup>Frederick—says F. Meinecke—found in Machiavelli a demoniac caricature of what he himself, with the passing of time, would put into practice, and this is precisely why the Florentine caused such a great fury in him, and made him feel the need to take the most powerful ethical weapons of his time against him». (Cf. *Op. cit.*, p. 298).

*Prince*, such as when he says that Machiavelli had «glimpsed at some of the screws of an extremely complex machinery»<sup>195</sup>: politics, that chessboard where efficaciousness and simulation hold sway.

This concession might have been made somewhat reluctantly, however, and it might not be all that significant. But there are other aspects which can't be neglected that easily, and which do point in the opposite direction to the hypothesis that we've been considering. In the *Anti-Machiavelli*, that text which Voltaire loved to present as the ethical catechism for rulers, we often come across with theses that smack of a notoriously «Machiavellian» lineage. Hence, it is rather surprising that Voltaire did not find them reprehensible, incompatible with an alleged morality handbook.

Examples abound, and they may be chosen at will. In one of its chapters, Frederick defines ambassadors as «distinguished spies in foreign courts»<sup>196</sup>, which must stand out «by their cleverness as much as by their flexibility»<sup>197</sup>, since, «when it comes to seducing neighbors by means of deceptive arguments or by using intrigue and oftentimes corruption, it is quite understandable that honesty isn't as required here as astuteness and ingenuity».<sup>198</sup>

As regards promises—a topic we dealt with at the beginning of the present chapter—the *Anti-Machiavelli*'s author understands that «there may be situations in which a prince can't avoid breaking promises and alliances»<sup>199</sup>; it is not advisable, however, to use those schemes too much,

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Anti-Machiavelli*, *Op. cit.*, Ch. IV. Spanish edition, p. 31

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Anti-Machiavelli*, *Op. cit.*, Ch. XXIV., Spanish edition, p. 178.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Anti-Machiavelli*, *Op. cit.*, Ch. XXII. Spanish edition, p. 158. This passage was indeed modified by Voltaire, and made somewhat softer.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, *Anti-Machiavelli*, *Op. cit.*, Ch. XXII. Spanish edition, p. 125. Of course, he recommends us to keep the good manners and announce the breaking of the promises to one's allies, something which may only happen under hopeless situations.

for «one may only trick once»<sup>200</sup>, if one is not to lose one's credit before everybody. Any further comment here is unnecessary.

In this alleged antidote against the poison of Machiavellian trickeries we are also told that attack is the best form of defense, and offensive wars whose sole purpose is to stop the strengthening of the enemy's potential are enthusiastically defended.<sup>201</sup> This repertoire of morally dubious claims can be easily increased, but we don't believe it is necessary to insist on it. Suffice it to say that these claims quite strongly confirm that, even when Frederick played the role of a moral philosopher, he never stopped playing that of the politician who is completely dedicated to pragmatism, just as the latter never completely forgot about the former. This is why, as we saw, he bitterly complains about philosophers who revere Marcus Aurelius (the emperor who, in spite of his philosophical vocation, led his armies when it came to widening the frontiers of the Roman Empire and impose the pax romana) but unflinchingly criticize those who try to emulate him by attempting to maintain the equilibrium amongst the European powers. This criticism, by those he considers his colleagues, looks quite unfair to him, and he thinks that it can only stem from a lack of expertise in a certain science: political science, which has its own rules.<sup>202</sup>

You—he tells to Voltaire—comfortably rant about those who defend their rights and claims with the weapons in their hands; I remember the time, however, when you would have used an army, if you had had it, against any of your rivals. As long as Saint-Pierre's Platonic refereeing does not take place, kings have no other means to settle their issues than by appealing to the facts, with the intention of taking from their adversaries what cannot be otherwise obtained.<sup>203</sup>

To Frederick's credit, it must be said that he not only knew how to be sarcastic about Abbot Saint-Pierre's theories (those same theories which his philosophical ego would have gladly put into practice); he knew how

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Anti-Machiavelli, Op. cit., Ch. XXVI and III.

<sup>202.</sup> Cf. the claim that leads to note 131.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 25th July 1742, Op. cit., vol. II, p. 138.

to be sarcastic about himself, and also about the extremely whimsical character of the appreciations of philosophers who are not immersed in politics and are therefore inexperienced in that matter. «If I told you—he writes Voltaire—that the peoples of two German regions left their estates and traveled great distances just to slit the throat of other peoples of which they did not even know their name, only because their ruler had a treaty with another ruler, you would undoubtedly think that these peoples are but furious lunatics, subjecting themselves in such a manner to their ruler's brutality. By contrast, if I informed you that the king of Prussia, as he took notice that the countries of his ally the Emperor were being attacked by the queen of Hungary, rushed to help him and joined his troops to those of the king of Poland, performing a distracting maneuver in Austria that helped his ally, you will surely describe these acts as an expression of heroism and generosity. However, my dear Voltaire, both pictures describe one and the same thing. It was the same woman who was represented, in the first picture, wearing her nightcap and deprived of all her seducing charms, and, in the following picture, with her makeup, her false teeth, and all dressed up».204

Brutality or heroism. So diverging were the interpretations a philosopher could give to the same facts, depending on how they were presented to him. This extremely whimsical character of the philosophical assessment, here satirically pointed at by Frederick, explains why he meant two quite different things to two egregious figures of the French Enlightenment. Frederick's access to the throne, indeed, meant both a dream to Voltaire and a nightmare to Diderot.

## 4.4. DIDEROT'S NIGHTMARE

Only about century ago, an unpublished manuscript by Diderot, in which he tried to reply to the Prussian monarch, saw the light. Although the published title is due to its editor, it was rightly called *Pages against a* 

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1742, *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 118-119.

*Tyrant*,<sup>205</sup> for this is exactly how its author catalogued Frederick. Diderot's little sympathy for Frederick is well represented in this work, whose last line is quite eloquent on this regard, for it ends with this exclamation: «God save us from a sovereign who looks like this philosopher of sorts!».

His contempt for the Prussian monarch made Diderot dedicate him yet another writing, called *Marginal Annotations on Tacitus, handwritten by a Sovereign*, even though this text is better known by its somewhat shorter subtitle, *Principles of Sovereign Politics*. Diderot's imaginary *mise en scène* was rather simple. The alleged marginal notes which—according to the fiction—Frederick had written on his copy of Tacitus's works would constitute a whole mosaic of absolutist maxims, which would serve to unmask his Machiavellism. Even though he does not get explicitly mentioned, Frederick is subtly referred to in one of the essay's

206 Cf. Op. cit., p. 148.

Cf. Denis Diderot, Pages inédites contre un tyran. Paris: Edition Venturi, 1937. The manuscript, written in 1771, was originally called Diderot's letter on the Examination on Prejudices, and it was included in the heritage of the National Library of Paris in 1888. Voltaire, however, had a very different opinion on that essay, in which Frederick commented on D'Holbach's text: «I had the Essay on Prejudices in my library, but I had never read it; I had tried to go through its pages, but it fell out of my hands due to its unsubstantial verbosity. You have made the honor of criticizing it; glory be to you for having walked on rough stone and turned it into diamonds! ». (Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated 8th June 1770, Op. cit., vol. III, p. 178). On Diderot, cf.. my papers Roberto R. Aramayo, "Diderot's Criticism of Colonialism: a Plea for Equality and Reciprocity among Peoples", Filosofija. Sociologija 30, 1 (2019) pp. 62-69; Roberto R. Aramayo, "Diderot, l'Encyclopédie et l'opinion publique", Revue Roumaine de Philosophie 59, 2 (2015) pp. 319-338; Roberto R. Aramayo: "Diderot's Virtuos Atheits as a Kantian Moral Hero", in Ricardo Gutiérrez Aguilar (ed.), The Philosophy of Kant, Nova science publischer, New York, 2018 pp. 149-163; Roberto R. Aramayo, "Is Diderot Perhaps an Unknown Newton of Politics for Kant?", in Falduto, Antonio und Klemme, Heiner F. (Hrsg.), Kant und seiner Kritiker, Georg Olms, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, 2018, pp. 171-180; Roberto R. Aramayo "Radical and Moderate Enligthtenment? The Case of Diderot and Kant", in Concha Roldán, Daniel Brauer, Johannes Rohbeck (eds.), Philosophy of Globalisation, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2018, pp. 315-326.

last paragraphs, when it is said that the sovereign in question, i.e. the annotations' author, is fond of playing the flute.<sup>207</sup>

Diderot puts in the mind of this flutist some maxims which may well represent the Prussian monarch's thought, but he also puts other maxims which are too caricature-like to be a minimally truthful portrait of Frederick. In the former category, we may find maxims like these: «To foreign countries one shall send not ministers, but spies»; «Within one's country one need not ministers either, but errand-boys»; or «One must be his own army's first soldier»<sup>208</sup>. All these maxims represent Frederick's convictions, as we have seen. There is, however, a second group of maxims which do not match Frederick's convictions at all, such as the following one: «A sovereign who gives the least credit to those treaties signed with all much solemnity would be exactly like an idiot who, not knowing our customs, believed in those empty declarations of humility with which we end our letters». 209 We are by now too familiar with the moral tribulations of the Sans-Souci philosopher as regards treaties and promises to accept Diderot's excesses when trying to create the caricature of a despotic tyrant, availing himself of the figure of Frederick; the latter, as we know, escapes this frame in which Diderot and his histrionic mise en scène would like to circumscribe him.

Not quite satisfied with this exaggerated caricature, Diderot uses again Frederick as a background figure when he writes the seventh chapter—called *On the Morality of Kings*—of his *Conversations with Catherine II*. Curiously enough, while trying to justify or partially legitimize Catherine's attempts to discredit her Prussian opponent, Diderot, initially acting as an attorney who presents the arguments against Frederick, ends up playing the role of the lawyer of both monarchs, and for a moment even defends the theses of the one who he wanted to portray as a despicable tyrant:

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Denis Diderot, «Principes de politique des souverains», in *Oeuvres politiques* (textes établis avec introductions, bibliographies et notes par Paul Vernière), Paris: Garnier, 1963, maxim CCXXV, pp. 206 and 153.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. maxims XCVII, XCVIII, and CI, in Op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. maxim CC, in Op. cit., p. 199.

I doubt—says Diderot—that the monarchs' justice, and hence their morality, could be identified with that of particulars, for a particular's morality depends only upon himself, whereas a sovereign's morality usually depends on some other sovereign's morality». (It is in my view impossible—he adds—that the justice, and hence the morality, of the public and that of the private man could be identical; and that law of peoples, of which it is spoken so much, is and will always be nothing but a chimera; the cry of the weak, which he would cause in his neighbor if he were stronger, is just one of philosophy's most charming topics.

According to Diderot, indeed, the defense of the weak will never be anything else apart from a commonplace among philosophers, at least until some entity endowed with divine powers puts these matters in order. The skillful playwright within Diderot ends his apparent defense of despotism with a subtle, prophetic threat. Things will be the same until the one entity who truly has power, i.e., the people, finally decides to exercise it. In the meantime, «the philosopher awaits the fiftieth good king who will be able to profit from his works. While he waits, he enlightens men about their inalienable rights. He moderates religious fanatism. He tells the peoples that they are the strongest ones, and, if they go to slaughters, that is only because they allow themselves to get carried away. He prepares the revolutions, which always arrive when misfortune is so great that it compensates for the bloodshed».

Let us leave to one side Diderot's political philosophy and those duties he ironically attributes to philosophers, however, and go back to the concrete theme of our study. Diderot has been invited to give an address here, after all, because we are interested in examining his opinion on Frederick:

The king of Prussia—we read in My very own Reverie, by Denis the Philosopher—deserves our most distinguished hatred; philosophers

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Denis Diderot, «Entretiens avec Catherine II (1773)», in *Oeuvres politiques*, *Op. cit.*, p., 316.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Op. cit., p. 318.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 320.

hate him because they consider him an ambitious, faithless politician, for whom there is nothing sacred; a prince who does not hesitate in sacrificing everything, including his subjects' happiness, to his current power; Europe's eternal linstock.<sup>213</sup>

What is most striking is that, after this series of insults against the Prussian monarch, Diderot dedicates a string of dithyrambs to Catherine the Great. A question naturally arises: What are the traits that so radically distinguish one monarch from the other? What is the infallible criterion that allows Diderot to discern so accurately between an abominable tyrant and an enlightened despot comme il faut? These questions allow for only one kind of answer. In the first place, it appears to be the case that both Voltaire and Diderot are able to get enthusiastic about only that ruler which they are trying to turn into a philosopher. Voltaire dreams of Frederick while they are co-authoring a moral treaty for princes. Diderot traveled 1,500 miles to Saint Petersburg in order to educate the Russian empress. His Memoirs for Catherine II deal with a great number or very different topics<sup>214</sup>, intended to reinforce her alleged liberal convictions. But Catherine, in spite of her readings of Montesquieu and Beccaria, is a despot nonetheless.<sup>215</sup> What differentiated her from the Prussian monarch in Diderot's eyes? Why did he revile the latter while showing certain signs of respect for the empress? What justifies treating these cases as being so different from one another?

To be sure, Diderot wouldn't agree with the answer that comes to my mind, inasmuch as it is based on a biographical anecdote. According to this hypothesis, Diderot wanted to show his gratitude towards the person who saved him from misery and gave his daughter a good dowry. Catherine the Great, indeed, not only bought Diderot's library and allowed him to keep it until his death; she paid him for taking care of it, thus

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Denis Diderot, *Escritos Políticos*, Spanish translation Antinio Hermosa Andújar, Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1989, p. 117.

<sup>214</sup> Denis Diderot, *Memoirs pour Catherine II* (Texte établi d'après l'autographe de Moscou, avec introduction, bibliographie et notes par Paul Vernière), Paris: Granier, 1966. The many vicissitudes of the manuscript, which was lost for more than a century, are told by the editor in the Introduction (pp. IV and ff.).

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Op. cit., p. XV.

making him the librarian of the Russian court.<sup>216</sup> In short, Catherine was to Diderot what Fredrick meant for Voltaire before they broke up: a splendid sponsor<sup>217</sup>, someone towards whom it was rather convenient to show some condescendence. In this context, it is quite remarkable that Diderot puts this thought in Frederick's, i.e., in the Potsdam flutist's, mind: «Being praised is rather easy, for bribing men of letters costs little; it is enough to behave nicely, to be prodigal with flatteries, and to be ready to use a modest sum of money».<sup>218</sup> Perhaps these lines enlighten us more about Diderot than they do about Frederick (who, by the way, extremely disliked the gratuitous flatteries of the professional sweet-talker).<sup>219</sup>

To what extent was Diderot uncomfortable with this economic dependence on a despot like Catherine? How did this fact affect his public evaluative judgment on the Russian empress? Is this fact relevant to his view on the different sorts of tyrants, given that this distinction was created having two very concrete cases in mind? May we, by appealing to their respective sponsors, explain why Frederick meant a dream to Voltaire and a nightmare to the one who was financed by the Prussian monarch's

<sup>216</sup> Cf. P.N. Furbank, *Diderot: A Critical Biography*, New York: 1992. Voltaire himself was ironical in this regard, qualifying Diderot's position as a «bribery». «The Russian empress may now go to war without any worry, since she has now been excused by Diderot, in return for a good sum, so that the Russian can now combat the Turkish». (Cf. Voltaire's letter to Frederick dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 1770, *Op. cit.*, vol. III p. 176). In the same vein, Frederick jokes about another philosopher, Grimm, whom Catherine named her armies' colonel: «Grimm arrived here, from Saint Petersburg. We talked about the all-powerful empress, about her laws, and about the actions she will undertake in order to civilize her nation. Grimm has been named colonel; do not forget this title, which turned a philosopher into a soldier». (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 24<sup>th</sup> September 1777, *Op. cit.*, vol. III pp. 414-415).

<sup>217 «</sup>The appointment as a Gentleman of Bedchamber, a wage consisting of twenty thousand pounds a year, a house, carriages, and an Order of Merit recognition, were some of the gifts by the king of Prussia to his friend Voltaire, when he was by his side...». (Cf. Antonio Espina, *Voltaire y el siglo XVIII*, Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1974, pp. 91 and ff).

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Denis Diderot, *Principes de politique des souverains*, op. cit., maxim LXXXVII, p. 91 and ff.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Anti-Machiavelli, Op. cit., Chapter XXIII.

political rival? Is the frontier that separates one philosophical verdict from its opposite so subtle (to put it mildly) that it can turn a dream into a nightmare?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, we may profit from hearing a third opinion, one that is not so dependent on the respective sponsorships. Nine years after the death of the Prussian monarch, in the first definitive article of his essay Toward Perpetual Peace, Kant praises Fredrick the Great, whom he sees as someone capable of implementing those reforms that may exorcize the revolution that according to Diderot would happen when the situation gets unbearable. More precisely, Kant praises the definition that Fredrick gives of himself as a servant of the state. «The sovereign—wrote the author of the Anti-Machiavelli—, far from being the absolute owner of the peoples at his command, is nothing but their first servant». 220 According to the explanation Frederick gave in his Essay on the Forms of Government and on the Duties of Sovereigns, while he was exploring the origins of the social contract<sup>221</sup>, the sovereign was appointed as such in order to act as a guardian of the laws. This idea had already been developed in some detail, forty-one years earlier, in the first chapter of the Anti-Machiavelli.

«The peoples—he reasoned then—, finding it necessary, for the sake of their tranquility and preservation, to have judges who are capable of solving their differences, guardians who can keep their goods safe from their enemies, sovereigns who can channel everybody's distinct interests into one common interest, chose amongst themselves those they found to be the most prudent, the fairest, the most disinterested, the most human and courageous, so that they could rule over them [and carry upon their shoulders the responsibility for everybody's affairs] »<sup>222</sup>. This last line

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Anti-Machiavelli, Op. cit., Chapter I, p. 16.

<sup>221 «</sup>That great truth: "to act towards others as one would have others acting towards oneself", is hereby turned into the principle of laws and of social agreement, the origin of the love for one's fatherland, by which we mean the home of our happiness» (Cf. Fredrick II of Prussia, «Essais sur les formes de gouvernement, et sur les devoirs des souverains» [1781], in *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand, Op. cit.*, vol. IX, p. 196).

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, Anti-Machiavelli, Op. cit., Chapter I, p. 16.

(the one in square brackets) was erased by Voltaire from the definitive published text. It was not, however, a mere rhetorical excess, for Fredrick did experience all those responsibilities proper to rulers as a heavy load, and did, as we saw, envy the tranquil life of a philosopher who is entirely dedicated to their studies. That's why his ideal sovereign corresponds to the archetype of a stoic sage, which Marcus Aurelius so closely approximated.<sup>223</sup> In Fredrick's view, his position brought more loads than privileges with it,<sup>224</sup> since his responsibility entailed serious moral troubles.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Cf. Frederick II of Prussia, «Essais sur les formes de gouvernement, et sur les devoirs des souverains» (1781), in *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand, Op. cit.*, vol. IX, p. 210. In his correspondence with Voltaire, Fredrick makes reference to the old Platonic dream that Rabelais had mentioned in Chapter 45 of his *Gargantua*: «According to an ancient thinker, no people will be happy unless their sages become kings» (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 13<sup>th</sup> August 1775. *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 354).

<sup>«</sup>Kings have not been endowed with supreme authority so that they can plunge into sloth and luxury; they are not educated more than their subjects and citizens so that they can proudly show off and contemptuously insult the simplicity of customs, poverty, and misery; they haven't been put in the leading position of the state so that they can keep close to their relatives a bunch of lazy people whose idleness and uselessness are the mothers of all vices». (Cf. *Ibid*, p. 199). Moreover, the sovereign's dedication to his tasks must be absolute, and he is not allowed to delegate work to ministers, or to have favorite lovers that might end up governing him. (Cf. *Ibid*).

<sup>225</sup> Let's look at an example of such troubles: «In civic matters, it is always better to follow the maxim of saving a possibly guilty person, before punishing a possibly innocent one. After all, if we are uncertain as regards their innocence, isn't it better to make them prisoners than to go on and kill them? » (Cf. Frederick's letter to Voltaire dated 11<sup>th</sup> October 1777, *Op. cit.*, vol. III p. 416).

# V. «Moral Politician»/«Political Moralist». Kant and his Secret Article on the Chimera of the Philosopher-King<sup>226</sup>

The prince is nothing else—writes Fredrick in his essay on the duties of a sovereign—but *the state's first servant*, thereby being obliged to behave with all honesty, prudence, and disinterestedness, *as if* he had to account for his administration at any time before the citizens.<sup>227</sup>

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Roberto R. Aramayo, "El compromiso político de Kant con la causa republicana conforme a los principios de libertad, igualdad e independencia como derechos de la humanidad", estudio preliminar a Immanuel Kant, *Hacia la paz perpetua. Un diseño filosófico*, CTK E-Books / Editorial Alamanda, Madrid, 2018, pp. 13-66. <a href="https://ctkebooks.net/translatio/hacia-la-paz-perpetua-un-diseno-filosofico/">https://ctkebooks.net/translatio/hacia-la-paz-perpetua-un-diseno-filosofico/</a>

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Fredrick II of Prussia, «Essais sur les forms de gouvernement, et sur les devoirs des souverains» (1781), *Op. cit.*, vol. IX, p. 208. Emphasis added.

Of course, this statement was bound to please Kant, and we may speculate that Kant even knew it and was surreptitiously inspired by it. As is well known, Kant reformulated Rousseau's theory of the social contract and turned it into a heuristic fiction, according to his *as if* philosophy. For Kant, the social contract is «only an idea of reason which, however, has its undoubted practical reality, namely to bind every legislator to give his laws in such a way that they could have arisen from the united will of a whole people and to regard each subject, insofar as he wants to be a citizen, as if he has joined in voting for such a will. For this is the touchstone of any public law's conformity with right». May we express the Kantian reformulation of Rousseau's social contract theory using Fredrick's terms, namely, as the injunction to rule as if one had to account for one's actions at any time before the citizens?

In the words of Alexis Philonenko, Kant interprets the social contract as some sort of «fourth formula» of the categorical imperative, characterized mainly by having one unique user, the sovereign.<sup>229</sup> Philonenko does not explain this fourth formulation further, but it could be expressed along these lines: «Sovereign! While you rule, you ought to think of citizens as ends in themselves and you shall never use them as mere instrumental means for the attainment of your own particular goals; thus, your norms ought to be universalizable, so that they can be agreed to by all those who must act under them, and they ought to be impartial too, as if they had been autonomously given by that general will of the people, which you merely represent». This could be one of the many ways in which we may enunciate Kant's version of the social contract, as long as we bear in mind that this formula of the categorical imperative has no meaning outside the strictly political realm, and functions as a complement to the three formulations provided by Kant for his ethical formalism. But this peculiar politico-moral imperative fits very well with the brief formula proposed

<sup>228</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory but Is of no Use in Practice*, hereafter *Theory and Practice*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor, in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: University Press, 1996. Ak. 8: 297.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Alexis Philonenko, *Théorie et praxis dans la pensée morale et politique de Kant et de Fichte en 1793*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1968., pp. 58 and ff.

by the Prussian monarch. Let us recall it once again: «Manage the state with absolute honesty, prudence, and disinterestedness, as if you should at any time justify your management before the citizens which conform that state». Could Kant approve of this formulation of Frederick's? Could he find it compatible with his own heuristic fiction of the social contract? Quite probably, yes. It is no mere accident that Frederick was a role model for Kant's political philosophy<sup>230</sup>, which decidedly advocated a series of gradual *reforms* that could improve the legislative corpus, thereby avoiding a traumatic *revolutionary* process.

In Kant's view, the greater the representativity, the easier it becomes to implement the desired reforms; distributing power can only lead to a troublesome and absolutely dysfunctional multiplication of sovereigns, or rather—to be more precise—of wannabe-sovereigns. The goal of attaining the best possible political constitution through continuous reforms is thus arguably much more likely to be achieved by a monarchy, being rather complicated for an aristocratic regime, and practically impossible for a democracy, unless the ungrateful expedient of a revolution is appealed to.<sup>231</sup> If I am not mistaken, in Kant's view, Fredrick had tried to put into practice the main obligation which Kant's own precepts imposed on all sovereigns (whether he was more or less successful in this attempt, is quite a different issue). What was this primordial mission? Nothing other than to comply with this imperative:

[...] it is provisionally a duty of the monarchs—we read in the second part of *The Conflict of the Faculties*—, if they rule as autocrats, to govern in a republican (not democratic) way, that is, to treat the people according to principles which are commensurate with the spirit of libertarian laws (as a nation with mature understanding would prescribe them for itself), although they would not be literally canvassed for their consent.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>230</sup> Some may see in this commendatory judgment by Kant a case to be explained entirely in terms of the sponsorship factor: Wasn't this honest servant of the Prussian state just showing his gratitude toward his former administrative boss?

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Toward Perpetual Peace, in Practical Philosophy, Op. cit., Ak. 8: 350.

Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Trans. Mary J. Gregor, New York: Abdaris Books, 1979, Ak. 7: 91.

The philosopher of Königsberg never shied away from aporias, and this case was not the exception, even though he was quite aware of the unpopularity of his views, and of how easy it was to misinterpret them.

Unpopular as it may be, in his sincere view, an autocrat is best suited for ruling in a republican spirit. He thought that one should draw this conclusion, at least as long as one is not in the business of invoking the violence inherent in a revolutionary process. Of course, Kant applauded the French Revolution, for he saw it as the symbol of the process of bringing the alienated rights back to the people, when their administrators had managed them disastrously; at the same time, however, in his view, it would have been better to bring about that situation by means of a series of timely constitutional reforms, to the effect of bringing to date the preservation of such rights.<sup>233</sup>

For the sake of efficaciousness, so that those reforms can be gradually introduced, Kant advocates for a concentration of powers in the sovereign,

Cf. the fifth section of my work «La version kantiano de "la mano invisible" (y otros alias del destino)», in La paz perpetua y el ideal cosmopolita de la Ilustración, Op. cit., pp. 111 and ff. Perhaps this Kantian figure of the autocrat, who governs in a republican fashion in order to prevent a revolution by means of his reforms, is an attempt to avoid that historic cycle which, according to Machiavelli's lucid exposition, different forms of government would have to go through, again and again. According to that circular evolution, every *monarchy* will lead sooner or later to a *tyranny*, which in its turn leads to an aristocratic government, and this, by turning into an oligarchic one, finally leaves its place to a *democracy*, which inevitably will restore the original monarchical regime, with which the whole historical journey once again inexorably starts: «[...] when [men] had to choose a prince, [they looked neither] to the strongest nor bravest, but to the wisest and most just. But when they began to make sovereignty hereditary and non-elective, the children quickly degenerated from their fathers; and, so far from trying to equal their virtues, they considered that a prince had nothing else to do than to excel all the rest in luxury, indulgence, and every other variety of pleasure. The prince consequently soon drew upon himself the general hatred. An object of hatred, he naturally felt fear; fear in turn dictated to him precautions and wrongs, and thus tyranny quickly developed itself. Such were the beginning and cause of disorders, conspiracies, and plots against the sovereigns, set on foot, not by the feeble and timid, but by those citizens who, surpassing the others in grandeur of soul, in wealth, and in courage, could not submit to the outrages and excesses of their princes. Under such powerful leaders the masses armed themselves against the tyrant,

who, when promulgating laws, would have a magnificent touchstone to test their legitimacy, which is the above-mentioned idea of a social contract. The sovereign may make mistakes while he adopts certain measures, but it is always possible for him to ask whether his law harmonizes with that principle, «for there he has that idea of the original contract at hand as an infallible standard, and indeed has it a priori (and need not, as with the principle of happiness, wait for experience that would first have to teach him whether his means are suitable). For, provided it is not self-

and, after having rid themselves of him, submitted to these chiefs as their liberators. These, abhorring the very name of prince, constituted themselves a new government; at first, bearing in mind the past tyranny, they governed in strict accordance with the laws which they had established themselves; preferring public interests to their own, and to administer and protect with greatest care both public and private affairs. The children succeeded their fathers, and ignorant of the changes of fortune, having never experienced its reverses, and indisposed to remain content with this civil equality, they in turn gave themselves up to cupidity, ambition, libertinage, and violence, and soon caused the aristocratic government to degenerate into an oligarchic tyranny, regardless of all civil rights. They soon, however, experienced the same fate as the first tyrant; the people, disgusted with their government, placed themselves at the command of whoever was willing to attack them, and this disposition soon produced an avenger, who was sufficiently well seconded to destroy them. The memory of the prince and the wrongs committed by him being still fresh in their minds, and having overthrown the oligarchy, the people were not willing to return to the government first looked up to with some degree of reverence, the popular state also maintained itself for a time, but not for long, lasting generally for about the lifetime of the generation that had established it; for it soon ran into that kind of license which inflicts injury upon public as well as private interests. Each individual only consulted his own passions, and a thousand acts of injustice were daily committed, so that, constrained by necessity, or directed by the counsels of some good man, or from the purpose of escaping from this anarchy, they returned anew to the government of a prince, and from this they generally lapsed again into anarchy, step by step, in the same manner and from the same causes as we have indicated. Such is the circle which all republics are destined to run through». (Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, Discourses, Op. cit., Book I, Ch. 2, pp. 93-94). Bearing in mind this circular theory, it is of little importance when did Machiavelli write the Discourses and The Prince, since they are two different moments of the same process, in spite of what Hans Baron affirms in his excellent work «Machiavelli: Republican Citizen and Author of The Prince» (in The English Historical Review, Vol. LXXVI, Issue CCXCIX, 1961, pp. 217-253).

contradictory that an entire people should agree to such a law, however bitter they might find it, the law is in conformity with right».<sup>234</sup>

Searching for one's own personal happiness is each person's business, a personal and non-transferrable task. Kant does not approve the state's eudaimonist paternalism. The person who administers the state should limit him or herself to procuring a sphere of co-liberty, a frame of coexistence where each one can pursuit his or her own happiness, respecting the rights of others.<sup>235</sup> Now, this Kantian republicanism which should be displayed by the autocrat in turn is undoubtedly Platonic in origin, as Kant himself explicitly admits: «The Idea of a constitution in harmony with the natural right of man, one namely in which the citizens obedient to the law, besides being united, ought also to be legislative, lies at the basis of all political forms; and the body politic which, conceived in conformity to it by virtue of pure concepts of reason, signifies a Platonic Ideal (*respublica noumenon*), is not an empty chimera, but rather the eternal norm for all civil organization in general [...].»<sup>236</sup>

The Platonic ideal of republicanism *is not a vain chimera*, according to Kant in this passage. Does this mean that Kant subscribes to all the political principles of Plato's, including his panacea of the philosopher-king? Nay, is Frederick the Great the incarnation of this philosopher-king before Kant's eyes, in view of the praises that he dedicates to him? This is not an idle question, for, as you might have noticed, answering it in the positive would force us to change the title of this book, and that would be rather inconvenient at this stage. Quite a mishap.

Fortunately, this is not the case. Kant's praises for the Prussian monarch, on account of the fact that the latter liked to call himself the state's first servant, shouldn't mislead us into thinking that these questions must have

<sup>234</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Theory and Practice*, Ak. 8: 299.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, Ak 8: 302. See also Roberto R. Aramayo, *Crítica de la razón ucrónica*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 172 and ff.; cf. Roberto R. Aramayo, *Kant: Entre la moral y la política*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2918, *passim*).

<sup>236</sup> Cf. The Conflict, Ak. 7: 90-91.

a positive answer. Frederick was, indeed, an enlightened autocrat who had the intention to govern in a republican spirit, and this meant for Kant that he represented a series of advantages (which we have already listed) when compared with other, less fortunate, alternatives. But he by no means was to be identified with the philosopher-king which Plato longed for. There was an unbridgeable gap between Frederick and the ideal, a gap which, on the other hand, it was better to leave open, according to Kant in his essay on perpetual peace, when he characterizes as chimeric Plato's panacea for all political evils:

That kings should philosophize or philosophers become kings—wrote Kant in his secret article in *Toward Perpetual Peace*—is not to be expected, but it is also not to be wished for, since possession of power unavoidably corrupts the free judgement of reason. But that kings or royal peoples (ruling themselves by laws of equality) should not let the class of philosophers disappear or be silent, but should let it speak publicly is indispensable to both, so that light may be thrown on their business [...]. 237

This Kantian statement could hardly be more devastating. Without any sort of scruple or reservation, it throws by the board, as if it was some sort of heavy and useless ballast, that chimeric dream of a philosopher turned into a king, which Plato longed for in his writings and during his whole life. This uncompromising Kantian diagnostic allows us to see with all clarity that, before his by no means naïve eyes, philosophizing and governing were two quite incompatible professions, as a result of which it is foolish to hope for an alternation between the two of them, since no one can play both roles at the same time. In fact, such an ideal is not only unthinkable and impossible to carry out in reality; it is also not so wise to even try to set it as an asymptotic goal, for it is a veritable *liason dangereuse* for both *patenaires* involved. To discern what is most pertinent from a moral point of view and to exert political power are two

<sup>237</sup> Cf. *Toward Perpetual Peace, Op. cit.*, Ak. 8: 369. Of course, as the perspicacious reader may have already guessed, this is the passage that not only inspired this book's title, but also served as a spur for its slow development.

activities which should never be mixed up, for the sake of both of them. According to Kant's view, their relationship is mutually dangerous, since it ruins their respective interests. Political power unavoidably perverts all moral consideration, since it compromises its freedom and stains its necessary objectivity, while, on the other hand (even though Kant does not say as much in this essay) ethics can only cause an inefficacious impotence in those who have to make political decisions. Thus, rather than trying to bridge the gap between politics and morality, it is better to leave each party on its own shore, although this does not mean that they ought to remain uncommunicated. Quite the contrary. For it is one thing to say that they cannot and should not be identified in one and the same subject, and quite a different thing to say that they do not need each other. Philosophers should not be silenced; one of their functions is, precisely, to orient, and even sometimes reprimand, the kings, so that light is shed on the rulers' tasks by means of the philosophers' publications. Philosophy would thereby be at the service of the monarch, of course, but not in order to step behind them and carry their cloak's tail, but in order to go before them and keep them from darkness by throwing light on the way with its ethical torch.

An ungrateful experience surrounded Kant while he defended this thesis: that of censorship,<sup>238</sup> for he had been admonished by Frederick's successor, and asked to refrain from publishing anything related to religion. As he recounts in his own Preface to *The Conflict between the Faculties*,<sup>239</sup> Kant promised not to write anything in this regard during the life of the monarch whose minister had censored him. By publishing *Toward Perpetual Peace*, however, Kant seemed to be willing to show that the former promise did not imply that he should remain silent about many other things.<sup>240</sup> The above-quoted lines did not appear in the first edition of Kant's essay on perpetual peace. Maybe it was the editorial success

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Roberto R. Aramayo, *Antología de Kant*, Barcelona: Península, 1991, pp. 15-16.

<sup>239</sup> The Conflict between the Faculties, 8: 5-11.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Allen Wood, «Kants Entwurf für einen ewigen Frieden», in "Zum ewigen Frieden". Grundlagen, Aktualität und Aussichten einer Idee von Immanuel Kant

of this small essay, which was immediately translated into French, what encouraged Kant to add those few lines to its second edition, as a «secret article» in that treatise. This Kantian opuscule has its fair share of irony, quite unusual for the author of the three Critiques, and one may note this in the very structure of the book, whose purpose is to parody the style of diplomatic protocols usually meant to seal an agreement on a momentary armistice. Those documents usually contained one or two secret codicils, and Kant decided to take his caricature to its last consequences with this last-minute addition. This secret article abolishes all Platonic aspirations that philosophers should become kings or vice versa, and declares philosophy to be an unneglectable consultative entity for political power. Political power ought therefore to collect a qualified spectator's opinion, and the latter shall not be compromised by the political game. That those who have governmental responsibilities look for advice from moralists is for Kant a better solution than Plato's wishful proposal of a philosopherking. In his view, anyone who has contact with power and gets trapped in its web of intrigues automatically loses his or her moral sensibility. The impulse to win that peculiar chess game will prevail over any other consideration. The state's interests will undoubtedly annihilate his or her ethical personality, just as it happened in the case of Fredrick the Great, as we have seen. Let's recall that Machiavelli portrayed very well this particular mutation, when he wrote that it seems inevitable to have one mind in the plaza and another in the palace,241 given the profound change in perspective produced by one or the other location. Thus, according to Kant, it is not helpful at all to visit the royal houses, as long as one wants to keep on wandering freely in the philosophical agora.<sup>242</sup>

Any statesman or stateswoman will go through what we have called *the Gyges syndrome* and, seduced by the charms of power, which on top

<sup>(</sup>hrsg. von Reinhard Merkel und Roland Wittmann), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996, p. 68.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, Discourses, Op. cit., Book I, Chapter 27.

<sup>242</sup> All things considered, Kant would be taking Machiavelli's reasoning in the Dedicatory Letter of *The Prince* to its ultimate consequences: « [...] just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of

of things protects us with a veil of impunity, leaves besides any sort of loyalty or whatever else may be sacrificed for the sake of impunity. On the contrary, the spectator who, like the moral philosopher, has not fallen under the power's spell, will remind the ruler, whenever it is necessary, «that the political game is not played with chessmen, but with real men, with human beings of flesh and blood; and the weal and woe of these beings is at stake».<sup>243</sup> This forgetfulness is what Cassirer reproaches to Machiavelli, who, being fascinated by certain strategies, had failed to note the dehumanization that his favorite winners had undergone.

In order to alleviate this forgetfulness in which the political class often incurs, Kant proposes a rather easy recipe, which is no other than to take away from the politicians' hands their inseparable Gyges ring, thus preventing their behavior from being invisible, declaring unjust any actions related to the rights of men that are incompatible with their own publication. Any political maxim that has to remain secret if its purpose is to be achieved is, for that reason alone, unjust. This touchstone, *publicity*, is indeed a negative criterion, which does not tell us what is just, but allows us to discriminate what is unjust, as Kant says in the last appendix of Toward Perpetual Peace, a section whose mission is to explore the possibilities of reaching an agreement between ethics and politics, one that harmonizes as much as possible their respective interests.<sup>244</sup>

In the above-mentioned secret article, Kant allows himself to joke about the emblem of the jurists, who are now portrayed as mere representatives

mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly [...]» (Op. cit., p. 4), the perspective of the monarch, enclosed within the towers of his palace, must be supplemented by those who live in the public plaza, i.e., by philosophers.

Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of the State, Op. cit., p. 143. 243

In this regard, the reader may consult José Gómez Caffarena's article «La 244 conexión de la política con la ética (¿Logrará la paloma guiar a la serpiente?)», collected in La paz y el ideal cosmopolita de la ilustración (A propósito del bicentenario de «Hacia la paz perpetua» de Kant, Op. cit., pp. 65 and ff. In his work, Caffarena stresses this statement of Kant's: « [...] although politics by itself is a difficult art, its union with morals is no art at all; for as soon as the two conflict with each other, morals cuts the knot that politics cannot untie» (Toward Perpetual Peace, Ak. 8: 380);

of the established power. That emblem includes a weighing scale which stands for the law, and a sword, which represents the inexorable justice. However, Kant says sarcastically, that sword is not only used to keep away any foreign element that may alter the balance of the scales; it is often used as a counterweight against the side of the scales that one would not have as the winner. This temptation to tip the scales to one's own advantage is what moral philosophers ought to criticize with their warnings and advices. The philosopher is thereby turned into a kind of referee, whose only mission is to look after the good development of the game, so that certain minimal ethical principles are respected by all parties, subjecting the actions of political power to public judgment:

True politics—declares Kant—can therefore not take a step without having already paid homage to morals [....]. The right of human beings must be held sacred, however great a sacrifice this may cost for the ruling power. One cannot compromise here and devise something intermediate, a pragmatically conditioned right (a cross between right and expediency); instead all politics must bend its knees before right [...].<sup>245</sup>

In this context, Kant distinguishes between the political moralist and the moral politician. While the former shape morality in a way that is advantageous for their purposes, the latter attempt to make their behavioral guidelines coexist with ethical commandments. Political moralists won't hesitate before invoking the *reason of state* in order to justify their immorality. By contrast, moral politicians aren't willing to dissolve their ethical identities in an entity that transcends their moral conscience, as *they prefer to step down from their political positions before abandoning or jeopardizing their moral convictions*. Of course, only the latter sort of politicians would search for the philosophers' advice, so that they can constantly remind them of their commitment to ethics.

As we pointed out in this work's preamble, the ethical commandment and the political imperative seem to be doomed to be unable to officialize

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and Miguel Giusti, "Zoologia ético-política. Notas sobre una metáfora de Kant en *Hacia la paz perpetua*, en *Ideas y Valores* LXII Supl. 1 (2013) pp. 37-47.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Toward Perpetual Peace, Ak. 8: 380.

their relationship, since their union often takes the form of a mere marriage of convenience, where morality loses its personality by being eclipsed by the strong character of political urgencies, as those who Kant calls political moralists know very well. By contrast, if their encounters are as coincidental as they are furtive, owing to those clandestine appointments promoted by a moral politician, allowing politics to search for advice among philosophers, we get a much more positive result: the conjugation of the considerations appertaining to moral conviction with the responsibilities assumed by political power.

It is perhaps this Kantian distinction between the political moralist and the moral politician, or a very similar distinction, that Antonio Machado had in mind when he put these words in the mouth of Juan de Mairena:

> When our politicians say that politics has no guts, they are right, to some extent, in what they say and in what they mean. Gutless politics is, in effect, the empty politics that evil-hearted people are used to doing.

Drawing a rough parallel between ontogenesis and phylogenesis, that is to say, if we wanted to compare, metaphorically, the evolutive stages of an individual with the periods of the history of humanity, then this proposed analogy, which attempts to interpret the history of ideas along the same lines as the process experienced by any particular biography, could go more or less as follows. Platonic naivety seems to us, by now, more appropriate to infancy than to anything else, something that belongs to a remote and almost forgotten stage where desires were mixed with reality, in spite of the fact that we often had to accept that they are not to be identified with one another. After that early age, plagued by dreams and chimeras, came an age of insolence, typical of adolescents, and this is why we encountered Machiavelli at the heart of the Renaissance rupture. Then, during our youth, when the first shoots of modernity were appearing, Kant allowed himself to dream again, and this renewed enthusiasm brought him hope that things could change for the better. Now, that childish naivety, that annoying insolence proper to the adolescent, and this youthful enthusiasm tend to be overcome by the realism of maturity. That's the law of life, as any old person would say. This is why it is time to pay a visit to our coetaneous Weber, so that afterwards we can end with a small outing to a past which is more ancient than the very infancy of our culture. Only then will we realize that our theme hasn't changed a great deal, form the time of humanity's primal babble to our own very days.

# VI. On Weber's Distinction between Conviction and Responsability

Throughout this essay, we have invoked a number of times Weber's celebrated distinction between conviction and responsibility, surreptitiously identifying them with moral innocence and political decisionism. Indeed, as Victoria Camps points out, «from Weber's time to our own, we keep making use of his lucid distinction whenever we approach the duality of ethics and politics. We thereby finally recognize that political action can't help but getting its hands dirty, whereas ethics remains impeccable and implacable, in its ivory tower, complying with its duty to judge, criticize, and forbid action. [...] Weber's theory is usually brought to the discussion in order to point at the inevitable divorce between politics and ethics: whoever wants to behave ethically, without giving up their principles, must run away from politics, which makes people forget about those

principles that oblige one to take the responsibilities for one's own actions. It is true that Weber says all this, but he says more than this. He says that the mature politician is the one which, facing a decision clearly against ethics, has the courage to step down and abandon politics, if necessary». <sup>246</sup> If this is so, Weber's *mature politician* wouldn't be so different from the *moral politician* recommended by Kant. <sup>247</sup> Weber's proposal is, in any case, much more complex.

Weber starts by defining politics as a wish to take part in power or to have some influence in the distribution of power within the state, <sup>248</sup> which in its turn is defined as a human community which successfully claims «the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical violence». <sup>249</sup> Under these premises, any politician has to make an agreement with the devil, just as Faust did<sup>250</sup>; the politician «lets himself in for the diabolic forces lurking in all violence». <sup>251</sup> « [...] he who lets himself in for politics—writes Weber—, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers [...]». <sup>252</sup> What does this mean? Something like losing one's virginal or childish worldview, according to which goodness can only come from good actions and evilness only from bad actions, and recognizing that frequently it is precisely the opposite that is the case. Whoever does not recognize this (which is, ultimately, the great problem of any theodicy) will behave as a child in political terms, according to

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Victoria Camps, *Ética, retórica y política*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998, pp. 11 and 105.

<sup>247 «</sup>I can indeed think of a *moral politician*, that is, one who takes the principles of political prudence in such a way that they can coexist with morals, but not of a *political moralist*, who frames a morals to suit the stateman's advantage». Cf. *Toward Perpetual Peace*, *Op. cit.*, Ak. 8:372. See also José Luis Colomer, *La teoría de la justicia en Immanuel Kant*, Madrid: centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1995, pp. 378 and ff.

<sup>248</sup> Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York: Routledge, 1948, p. 3.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, p. 4.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. José María González García, *Las huellas de Fausto. La herencia de Goethe en la sociología de Max Weber*, Madrid: Tecnos, 1992, pp. 143 and ff.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 43.

Weber. The ethics for the down-to-earth person, that is to say, the morality for the politician, cannot neglect this historically proven fact: « [...] the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of 'good' ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones—and facing the possibility or even the probability of evil ramifications».<sup>253</sup>

These ethical paradoxes<sup>254</sup> can't be neglected by the vocational politician,<sup>255</sup> whose responsibility for the future eclipses past guilts. Weber draws a curious parallel with love affairs. Someone who breaks their marriage in order to start a new relationship usually succumbs to the temptation of trying to justify themselves, blaming the other party for a number of reasons, instead of facing their destiny with the eyes set on the future, and assuming full responsibility without softening it by reference to someone's failure in the past; the person who has made the decision has to face the consequences and forget about any sterile legitimations, which from the political point of view are useless. <sup>256</sup> The ethics that Weber characterizes as absolute, the morals contained, e.g., in the Gospels, can't be arbitrarily invoked on some occasions only, in order to appease our conscience by legitimating any disorderly action, and then discarded without reservations in future occasions. «The same holds for this ethic as has been said of causality in science: it is not a cab, which one can have stopped at one's pleasure; it is all or nothing». 257 The commandments of the absolute ethics prevail unconditionally, for such an ethics does not allow itself to ask for the consequences; to tell the truth, says Weber, "its kingdom is not of this world". The Sermon on the Mount commands to

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 41.

Which popular sayings reflect so well: 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions', 'every cloud has a silver lining', etc.

<sup>255</sup> Weber distinguishes three kinds of politician: the *occasional* politician (which we all are, inasmuch as we vote or attend political acts), the *professional* politician who lives *off* politics, and the *vocational* politician, who lives *for* politics. (Cf. *Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9).

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 40.

turn the other cheek, i.e., not resisting evilness with force, but for the politician precisely the reverse proposition holds: «thou shalt resist evil by force, or else you are responsible for the evil winning out». <sup>258</sup>

> We must be clear about the fact—says Weber—that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an 'ethic of ultimate ends' or to an 'ethic of responsibility'. This is not to say that an ethic of ultimate ends is identical with irresponsibility, or that an ethic of responsibility is identical with unprincipled opportunism. However, there is an abysmal contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of ultimate ends—that is, in religious terms, 'The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord'—and conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's action. 259

In Weber's opinion, the first maxim would be too flexible, since the politician could always discharge his or her responsibilities on the clumsiness of others, or something of that sort, when in fact there is no justification for that, for the politician must always take into account both everyone's inevitable imperfections as well as the evilness that prevails in the world. The politician cannot simply appeal to the value of his or her good intentions and take refuge behind them, because part of his or her obligations is to make calculations, within the realm of what's possible, about the outcome of his or her actions. In sum, Weber wants to relive the Sultan from the figure of the Grand Vizier, <sup>260</sup> and invite the politician to take responsibility for his or her governmental actions, instead of discharging the responsibility for his or her failures and atrocities on any scapegoats. Having said that, however, Weber thinks that «one cannot prescribe to anyone whether he should follow an ethic of absolute ends or an ethic of responsibility, or when the one and when the other». <sup>261</sup> Precisely because this is a matter on which each single person, and no one else, has to make

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 46.

a decision. The political vocation obliges us to ration both maxims, the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility, and it obliges us also to conjugate such opposed qualities as *passion* and a sense of *proportion*, a combination which allows the politician to be committed to his or her cause without losing touch with reality.<sup>262</sup>

From an ethical point of view, this is the way that someone who aspires to «hold in one's hands a nerve fiber of historically important events»<sup>263</sup>, that is to say, someone who has the calling for politics, ought to be. In spite of their apparently incompatible character, Weber argues that «an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man—a man who can have the 'calling for politics'». 264 José María González García has insisted on the importance, in order not to misinterpret Weber's reasoning, of emphasizing this complementary character of the two ethics. According to González García, who knows Weber's thought quite well, «the political ethics defended by Weber attempts to synthesize responsibility and convictions. According to Weberian proposals-adds Pepe González-it is important that we avoid both the Scylla of an irresponsible politics that may be caused by a unilateral fixation on intentions, and the Charybdis of a politics entirely focused on responsibility, which tends to degenerate into sheer opportunism or into the search of power for power's sake. Only the combination of unshakable convictions and responsibility for (intended and unintended, direct and indirect) consequences of one's actions can be useful for the formation of the authentic politician». <sup>265</sup> The politician has to wander across the chess-board of politics combining passion and the sense of proportion (recall that Machiavelli recommended being at the same time daring and prudent), always taking the responsibility for the consequences generated by his or her convictions; the vocational

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. José María González García, *Las huellas de Fausto*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 173-174. By the same author, see also the article «Max Weber: responsabilidad y convicción», in Bonetes Perales (ed.) *La política desde la ética*, Proyecto A Ediciones, 1998.

politician has to bear in mind that, in order to achieve what is possible, one has to try time and again to reach out for what is impossible, never allowing one's hopes to crumble.266

Marianne Weber, in the magnificent biography of her husband, sums up his position in the following way: «The man that follows an ethic of convictions denies the ethical irrationality of the world, according to which evil things often come out of good ones, and good out of evil ones. The politician must bear with this irrationality. "Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble if the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he has to offer" ».267 Weber is profoundly moved by the politically mature man who, whatever his age (for maturity is not a matter of being literally younger or older) decides to put his convictions into practice in spite of everything (dennoch):

> [This mature politician] feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and reaches the point where he says: "Here I stand; I can do no other." <sup>268</sup>

I have added the emphasis, and this deserves a small comment. What Weber writes here is: «hier stehe ich», that is to say, «in this point I stand firmly», «I hold fast», «I ratify my stance» or, as José Abellán puts it, «here I am». Francisco Rubio Llorernte translates, however, as «here I stop». This translation has inspired interpretations such as that of Victoria Camps, which we referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Now, if I am correct, Weber is not saying, as Victoria Camps suggests, that convictions make the politician renounce his or her responsibilities when a conflict arises between them; on the contrary, the politician's maturity would allow them to persist, in spite of everything, in their position, in order to take responsibility for their conviction, thus assuming responsibility for the consequences derived from their actions.

Cf. Weber, Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 48. 266

Marianne Weber, Max Weber: A Biography, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: 267 Routledge, 2017.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Weber, Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 47.

This is the true synthesis of the two ethics propounded by Weber: *take* on the responsibility for one's convictions, and be responsible for their consequences. <sup>269</sup> Between the Gesinnungsethik defended by his religious mother and the Verantwortungsethik followed by that member of the parliament which was his father, Weber never stops admiring the former, but his bet is on the latter, since in his view only the latter has some place in politics. <sup>270</sup> Of course, an ethics based on conviction gives some weight to responsibility, and the latter, in its turn, cannot succeed without believing in its cause. It's a matter of emphasizing one or the other horn of the dilemma. <sup>271</sup> The fundamental issue is «whether only the intrinsic value of an ethical action—pure will or intention—must suffice for the justification of the action, or whether it is also necessary to take into account the responsibility for the consequences of the action, which may be foreseen as possible or likely, determined by the insertion of the action in an ethically irrational world». <sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Although, of course, this would be incompatible with the resignation from one's position. «The *public servant* has to sacrifice his own convictions to his duty of obedience. The leading *politician* has to publicly *reject* responsibility for the actions that do not accord with his convictions, and has to sacrifice his position to his convictions. But this has never happened among us», Max Weber, «Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany. A Contribution to the Political Critique of Officialdom and Party Politics», 1918, in *Economy and Society*, pp. 1381-1462. As is well known, Weber would have preferred that General Ludendorff resigned, in view of the political mistakes made by the Army (Cf. Marianne Weber, *Op. cit.*, pp. 623-689).

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage. An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber*, New York: Routledge, 2017, originally published in 1969.

<sup>271</sup> For a detailed analysis of the celebrated Weberian distinction, see Thomas Moller, Ethische relevante Äußerungen von Max Weber zu den von ihm geprägten Begriffen Gesinnungs- und Verantwortungsethik, Munich: Minerva, 1983. And, of course, I cannot neglect Wolfgang Schluchter's superb exposition in «Gessinungethik und Verantwortungsethik: Probleme einer Unterscheidung» in Religion und Lebensführung. Studien zu Max Webers Kultur und Werttheorie, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988, Chapter 3, pp. 165 and ff.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Max Weber, «The Meaning of "Ethical Neutrality" in Sociology and Economics», in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, edited by Edward A. Shills

The ethic of convictions can be useful in guiding our family, erotic, loving, or friendly relationships<sup>273</sup>; we may say it can guide our private, not our public life.<sup>274</sup> On the other hand, that same ethic can cause *indignity* in the political realm,<sup>275</sup> where priority must be given to the feeling of responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of a decision. Turning the other cheek may be valid for saints and their panmoralist cosmovision, not so for politicians, who are obliged to fight violence and evilness with their own medicine, if they do not want to become co-responsible for them. There is a parallel between this bipolar tension and the one experienced in Weber's own inner life, as he felt two intimate callings: for science and for politics. The first one was sufficiently taken care of, both in his accurate investigations and in his successful career as a university professor; the second vocation, however, was completely frustrated, since, in spite of having taken part in the advisory committee for the Weimar Constitution and having been elected for the Parliament by the Democratic Party, his expectations were directed at nothing else than the Reich's chancellery.<sup>276</sup> It has been suggested that Weber might have thought of himself as some sort of bourgeois Bismarck and that he would have willingly continued the enterprise that the Iron Chancellor had started.<sup>277</sup>

«While he never obtained political office—notes Anthony Giddens—, there was no point in his life at which political and academic interests

and Henry A. Finch, Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1949, pp. 1-49.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Weber, Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., passim.

ard, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations » Cf. Weber, *Science as a Vocation*, in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York: Routledge, 1948, pp. 129-156.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Marianne Weber, Op. cit. Spanish version, p. 489.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 480.

<sup>277 «</sup>Weber had come to identify the cohesion of the German nation with the cohesion of his own family, and himself with the man who would rescue this nation from the divisive self-interest and complacency of entrenched traditional interest groups—with in fact, a kind of bourgeois Bismarck, who would take over where the

did not intertwine in his personal experience. His youthful impressions of politics, filtered first through his father's circle and, as a young man, through the influence of his uncle, Herman Baumgarten, produced in Weber an ambivalent orientation towards the achievements of Bismarck which he never fully resolved, and which lies at the origin of the whole of his political writings».<sup>278</sup> One such ambivalence may be seen in the evolution undergone by his conception of the role to be assigned to the charismatic leader.<sup>279</sup> After criticizing Bismarck's Caesarism, Weber started to advocate for a plebiscitary presidency<sup>280</sup>, defending the figure of a leader who would be able to prevail over the Parliament and over partisan interests. Unlike the public servant, who must comply with its duties *sine ira et studio*, executing, as if they emanated out of their own convictions, the orders of their superiors, on which all responsibility is

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aristocratic Bismarck had left off when Wilhelm II dismissed him form office [...]». Cf. Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage, Op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>278</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Politics and Sociology in the Thought of Max Weber*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013 (Originally published 1972), p. 10.

<sup>279 «</sup>Weber's repeated criticisms of the Caesarism of the Bismarck government were directed at the fact that Bismarck had left behind himself "a nation without the least trace of a political will, a nation used to taking the existence of a statesman, who leads the nation's politics, for granted." The Weberian theory was an attempt to keep the advantages of a Caesarian leader, avoiding all the inconveniences presented by Bismarck». (Cf. David Beetham, *Max Weber y la teoría política moderna*, Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1979, p. 382.) Cf. Stefan Breuer, *Burocracia y carisma. La sociología política de Max Weber*, Valencia: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, 1989, pp. 196 and ff.

<sup>«</sup>Weber, the only advisor to Preuss [an author of a draft version of the Weimar constitution] that was not completely engaged in political or administrative affairs, had a profound disagreement with the other members of the advisory board as regards the presidential powers. All the others thought that the president's only duty was to replace the constitutional monarch, playing no active role in government. Weber, by contrast, thought that the task of national reconstruction required a president who held real power; to this effect, he should be elected by direct vote, so that the foundations of his power were located outside of the Parliament, and so that he could be a counterweight to the latter». (Cf. D. Beetham, *Op. cit.*, pp. 372-373). «Bismarck's example made Weber understand the lesson contained in Machiavelli's *Prince*». (Cf. J. Peter Mayer, *Max Weber y la política alemana*, Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1966, p. 43).

discharged, the political leader, by contrast, must *personally* assume this responsibility without discharging it on anyone else.<sup>281</sup>

Did Weber dream of incarnating this figure of the plebiscitarian leader, thus bringing the intellectual and the politician, his two vocations, together? In other words, to use a terminology which is already familiar to us: Did he want to be a conveniently updated "philosopher-king"? David Beetham finds Marianne Weber's claims in this regard exaggerated. In his view, «the academic values, so profoundly entrenched in Weber, obstructed any natural transition to the role of a politician»,282 and thus he had to rest content with the role of a political commentator and advisor. However, as he told Else Jaffé (who was his lover, by the way) right before he dictated the conference *Politics as a Voction*, when he decided to «take the position as a university professor, I had—admits Weber—, naturally, to pay the healthy price of overcoming all politics, since I could not do both things at the same time». 283 This is why the author of Science as a Vocation thinks that «there is no room for politics in the classroom»; if the professor «feels called upon to intervene in the struggles of worldviews and party opinions, he may do so outside, in the marketplace, in the press, in meetings, in associations, wherever he wishes».<sup>284</sup> The same goes, inversely, for he who considers himself «an intellectual, and not a politician; let him take an interest in eternal truths and stay with his books, but do not let him descend upon the battlefield of today's problems»<sup>285</sup>.

With the realism proper to maturity, Weber reminds us that «something can be true without being beautiful, nor sacred, nor good». What characterizes the task of the scientist is the attempt to discover those truths,

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Weber, Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. David Beetham, Op. cit., pp. 15-16.

<sup>283</sup> This is what Weber says to Mina Tobler; Cf. the letter quoted by Wolfgang Schluchter in his work «Handeln und Entsagen. Max Weber über Wissenschaft und Politik als Beruf» (Cf. *Unversöhnte Moderne*, op. cit., p. 30).

<sup>284</sup> Science as a Vocation, Op. cit., pp. 129-156.

<sup>285</sup> Max Weber, Escritos Políticos, Op. cit. p. 300

<sup>286</sup> Science as a Vocation, Op. cit., pp. 129-156.

and it is the scientist's best way to influence politicians.<sup>287</sup> But Weber wasn't too optimistic about his labour, either. Quoting Tolstoi, he admits that «science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?" » .<sup>288</sup> On the struggle between the different gods, that is to say, the diverse evaluative criteria, it is not for science, but for destiny, to decide:

[...] forces other than university chairs have their say in this matter. What man will take upon himself the attempt to "refute scientifically" the Sermon on the Mount? For instance, the sentence "resist no evil", or the image of turning the other cheek? And yet it is clear, in mundane perspective, that this is an ethic of undignified conduct; one has to choose between the religious dignity which this ethic confers and the dignity of manly conduct which preaches something quite different: "resist evil—lest you be co-responsible for an overpowering evil". According to our ultimate standpoint, the one is the devil and the other the God, and the individual has to decide which is God for him and which is the devil.<sup>289</sup>

Each one has to confront their own *daimon* and hold the reins of their own destiny. Whoever prefers not to get their hands dirty and subscribe an ethic of mere convictions may become guilty of indignity, being coresponsible for a prevailing evil that they did not dare to fight with their

<sup>287 «</sup>Although values cannot be derived from reality, political attitudes are subject to the influence of numerous empirical assumptions about society and human nature. Weber was aware of the fact that giving support to these assumptions or contributing to their falsehood could be a way of political persuasion as efficacious as the appeal to moral sentiments. In this sense, investigating certain aspects of social life, while leaving other aspects unattended, could have a political meaning. In these cases, the distinction between scientific and political activities was harder to establish». (Cf. D. Beetham, *Op. cit.*, p. 419).

<sup>288</sup> Science as a Vocation, Op. cit., pp. 129-156.

<sup>289</sup> Science as a Vocation, Op. cit., pp. 129-156. «The conflict between the demands of the Sermon on the Mount and the Machiavellian imperatives of the exclusive concern about the means to power in the context of violence, gets resolved through the invocation of the authentic political man, whose responsibility for the consequences of his action makes him persist on apparently unjustifiable options». (Cf. Pierre Bouretz, Les promesses du monde. Philosophie de Max Weber, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p. 527; Cf. pp. 411-417).

own weapons.<sup>290</sup> The authentic politician, the one who has a vocation for politics and who lives for politics (only accidentally lives off politics), is not searching power only in order to parade it, but in order to make that power serve a cause in which they passionately believe, but which does not make them lose touch with reality. On the other hand, the politician is aware of the fact that «the final result of political action often, no, even regularly, stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning».<sup>291</sup> Bearing witness to the great ethical paradox that in order to do what's good one often has to recur to morally dubious means, the politician decides to seal an agreement with those diabolic forces that lie in the violent surroundings of power, and he or she becomes responsible, not only for the convictions that motivate their political actions, but also for the foreseeable consequences that those actions will generate; the politician hereby engages their own soul, and is personally accountable for those actions. Only then is the politician entitled to intervene in history by means of their decisions, in which they will persevere, even when facing an ethically irrational world. In the words of one of Weber's most authoritative commentators, Wolfgang Mommsen: «Weber was essentially skeptical about the possibility of giving ethical touches to political action, and thought that the clear separation between these two spheres was the most honest solution». 292

<sup>290 «</sup>Extreme moralists, in general, tend to be those who, renouncing all direct political responsibility, not really taking part in the management of public matters, limit themselves to criticizing it form outside, failing to provide any solutions that are, at the same time, moral and constructive» (Cf. José Luis Aranguren, Ética y política, Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1996, p. 62).

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber: Sociedad, política e historia*, trad. Ernesto Garzón Valdés, Buenos Aires: Alfa, 1971, p. 162.

# VII. Epilogue: Kautilya's «Arthasastra», an Ancestor of Machiavelli in Millenary India

As we know, Weber preached by example on the separation of ethics and politics, limiting himself to exercising his intellectual vocation, only sporadically working as a political commentator or advisor. The mature realism of someone who belongs to our age, such as Weber, arrives, therefore, to the same conclusions as did Renaissance Machiavelli, only without de adolescent raucousness, and after a more complex analysis of ethico-political relationships.

It was Weber also who, apart from inspiring the last chapter, partly caused the Epilogue that closes this work, for he awoke my curiosity for an ancient Indian text: Kautilya's *Arthasastra*.<sup>293</sup> In his celebrated conference

Work in this text wouldn't have been possible were it not for the magnificent documentation team of the research center where I work: the Instituto de Filosofía del

on the vocation of politics (extensively quoted in the last chapter), and for a unique time in his whole work, Weber says the following about the text in question:

> A really radical "Machiavellism", in the popular sense of this word, is classically represented in the Indian literature, in the Kautilya Arthasastra (long before Christ, allegedly dating from Chandragupta's time). In contrast with this document Machiavelli's Principe is harmless.<sup>294</sup>

Weber may have got interested in this work through Hermann Jacobi's article «Kautilya, the Indian Bismarck»<sup>295</sup>; he may have even been aware of the second English edition of Jacobi's text, which came out in 1919, i.e., the same year in which he dictates *Politics as a Vocation*. Be that as it may, this ancient document was thoroughly unknown until the beginning of the XX century, when it was handed down to a librarian, R. Shamasastry, who decided to translate it into English and publish its chapters in different reviews from 1905.<sup>296</sup> However, the critical edition only appeared between 1960 and 1965, thanks to Professor R.P. Kangle, who published the original Sanskrit version along with his own English translation of it and a well-documented study of the work.<sup>297</sup> This old manuscript (which in spite

CSIC. In this particular case, it was Ana María Jiménez who provided me with the necessary bibliography to write the present epilogue. I should also like to thank here Francisco Lapuerta, for having provided me punctual information on topics which he has studied in depth; not for nothing he is the author of a work called Schopenhauer a la luz de las filosofías de Oriente (with which he obtained his PhD, under my supervision), Barcelona: CIMS, 1997.

Max Weber, Politics as a Vocation, Op. cit., p. 44. 294

This work appeared in 1912 in the Sitzungsberichte der Königlichen 295 preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

The first complete edition of the Arthasastra of Kautilya appeared in 1909, as volume 37 of the Bibliotheca Sanskrita. In 1942 appeared the third and in 1960 the fourth edition, under the name of Kautilyarthasastra of Sri Visnugupta, R. Shamasastri's English version being revised by N.S. Venkatanathacharya. In the meantime, a German edition by J.J. Meyer appeared: Das altindische Buch von Weltund Staatsleben: Das Arthaçastra des Kautilya, Hannover and Leipzig: 1925-1926 (6 vols).

Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, edited by R.P. Kangle, Bombay: University of Bombay, (1960 (vol. I: Original Sanskrit version) and 1963 (Vol. II: English

of its undoubted interest has been kindly ignored by political scientists in the Spanish language) proves that when Machiavelli caught sight of the lands of the political continent, this had long ago been colonized, even theoretically. In fact, Indian political wisdom had already been introduced in the West through fables in which their protagonists, characterized by all sorts of animals, lectured extensively on the arts of intrigue and defense. The best-known collection of these fables, the Pançatantra, entered Europe all throughout the XIII century in Arab and Hebrew translations, until La Fontaine immortalized them for us, although the celebrated Grimm brothers, as well, popularized them with their short stories.

A prominent Orientalist such as Heinrich Zimmer says the following about Kautilya's Arthasastra: «The caustic and sententious style, literary facility, and intellectual genius displayed do high credit to the master of political devices who composed this amazing treatise. Much of the material was quarried from older sources, the work being founded on a rich tradition of earlier political teachings, which it superseded, but which is still reflected through its quotations and aphorisms; and yet the study as a whole conveys the impression of being the production of a single, greatly superior mind. We know little—or perhaps nothing—of the author. The rise of C[h]andragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty, to paramount kingship over northern India in the third century B.C., and the important role of his dynasty during the following centuries, have contributed a practically impenetrable glow of legend to the fame of the fabled chancellor, Kautilya, whose art is supposed to have brought the whole historical period into being».<sup>298</sup>

According to a certain tradition, Kautilya was tutoring the Emperor Chandragupta around the same time that Aristotle was tutoring Alexander the Great,<sup>299</sup> whose expansionism served as an example for the flaming Maurya dynasty. Just as in Renaissance Italy, the fear of a foreign invasion

translation), and 1965 (Vol. III: study and coments by the literary editor).

Henrich Zimmer, Philosophies of India, edited by Joseph Campbell, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, p. 93.

Cf. M.V. Krishna Rao, Studies in Kautilya, 2nd Edition, Delhi: Munschi Ram Manohar Lal, 1958, pp. 3 and 19.

may have contributed to the consolidation their nationalist identity, and, to that extent, Kautilya's incentive for the discovery of the art of politics was the same as Machiavelli's.<sup>300</sup> According to Krishna Rao, in Kautilya's view ministers would have to have the same function as Plato attributed to philosopher-kings, i.e., to guide the destiny of the monarchs, wisely managing the state's activities.<sup>301</sup>

Indeed, Kuatilya may be identified with Plato's philosopher-king, but we would have to content ourselves with defining the philosopher-king as an intellectual who is ready to exercise power; for morality does not enter Kautilya's reasonings at all. As Marinette Dambuyant has pointed out, «Kautilya founds political science emphasizing its specificity, delimiting it as a profane realm, isolated from the theological and the moral one; as is the case with other theoreticians of the reason of state, he refrains from obscuring the facts by introducing moral themes that would be foreign to reality, and he finds it otiose to look for softer versions or excuses»<sup>302</sup> for his strictly political arguments. If this is so, we are undoubtedly before an Indian ancestor of Machiavelli. With the difference, of course, that Kautilya did not limit himself to writing a pioneering treatise on political science, as the Florentine thinker did, but was able to put his teachings into practice, overthrowing a dynasty and inaugurating another one. Chandragupta's grandson, Emperor Asoka, is remembered as the Anti-Kautilya, inasmuch as his conversion to Buddhism meant a moralization of politics, as his famous edicts, where he repudiates the massacres he committed as a conqueror, bear witness.<sup>303</sup> However, he certainly availed himself, in a "Machiavellian" manner (or perhaps it would be better, in this

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Op. cit., pp. 106 and 109.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>302</sup> Cf., L'Arthasastra. Le traité politique de l'Inde ancienne (Extraits choisis et publiés avec une introduction de Marinette Dambuyant), Paris: Éditions Marcel Rivière, 1971, pp. 59-60. It has been suggested that, on account of its precociousness, this secularization of political power would locate in India, rather than Rome, the invention of the state. (Cf. Louis Dumont, Homo hierarchicus, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, pp. 367-372).

<sup>303</sup> Cf. Jules Bloch, Les inscriptions d'Asoka, Les Belles Lettres, 1950.

context, to say "in a Kautilyan manner"), of religious propaganda in order to consolidate his power, once he had established this power by means of cruel military campaigns. In fact, in order to access the throne, he had to murder the eldest of his ninety -nine siblings, only then becoming the "legitimate" heir to the throne.<sup>304</sup>

The dark aspects of Kautilya's legend allow us to draw a parallel between Gyges and our Bismarck-like Indian chancellor, if we bear in mind that also Canakaya (Kautilya was merely a nickname of this historical figure) arrived to the power through the help of the overthrown king's consort—a prostitute who had become the king's favorite in the harem. This conspiracy eliminated the Nanda lineage, and brought to the throne a king who was still a child, and who could therefore only be, at that stage, a mere marionette in the hands of the chief minister. On the other hand, Kautilya was very good at going unnoticed, as if he had a ring like Gyges's that turned him invisible, for he always managed to stay in the background and much preferred to move the threads of the puppet which he had placed as the head of the crown. Around this long-lived Chaman, to whom the most fanciful secret powers are attributed, exist many other legendary tales. According to the most popular of these stories, Visnugupta or Canakaya (a patronymic which characterized him as the son of the sage Canaka) was born whit his full set of teeth, which was interpreted as a sign that he could eventually rule. In order to protect him from the death that such an omen implied, his father, apart from breaking his teeth, decides to make him study Brahmanism, thus turning him into an intellectual, destined to serve in the courts. There, his arrogance earned him being sent into exile, where he would plan a terrifying vengeance. After gathering a considerable amount of money, owing to his knowledge of alchemy, he recruits mercenary troops and makes an alliance with a foreign monarch, to whom he promises that they would co-rule the kingdom they are about to conquer. However, once they had succeeded in their enterprise, his ally was poisoned, and he governed as a minister of an infant, whose dynasty

<sup>304</sup> Cf. Marinette Dambuyant's introduction to her anthology *L'Arthasastra..., Op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

was of his own making.<sup>305</sup> These feats earned him the name of *Kautilya*, which means something like cautious, crafty, cunning, wily (in one word, "Machiavellian").

Scholars have widely debated whether the treatise at hand was the work of one person or rather a collective work. The text has been analyzed with the help of computer programs, in order to statistically record stylistic variations, and thus attempt to determine its authorship. According to the results of those studies, the Arthasastra is a sort of compilation (in this sense, not unlike other celebrated Indian treatises, like the Kamasutra or the Manusmriti) which may have been written by three or four persons. 306 All this is merely anecdotal. It is unimportant whether Kautilya wrote the treatise with his own very hand, or he dictated it to his scribes, or the text was later compiled by his disciples. Scholars have also complained that Megasthenes, the distinguished Greek ambassador in India, did not know about the text. But how could he have had access to a secret document in which the inner functioning of the state was described (at a time, moreover, in which there were no newspapers)? What is really important is the theses that are defended in the text—so much at odds with the stereotype of an India thoroughly devoted to metaphysical meditation. What we are interested in is the thoughts of an intellectual who was completely immersed in politics. Let's look at it.

What does Arthasastra exactly mean? The very title of the work brings to our mind a fundamental matter: the enormous difficulty of translating a language like Sanskrit into a Western language. Innumerous nuances get lost in the way. We can indeed translate the poems by Byron and Goethe into Euskera, but it is undoubtable that they would get so distorted as a Basque poet's stanzas would be if they were translated into German. These technical difficulties that beset any translation are considerably increased in the case at hand, and we should

Cf. Thomas R. Trautmann, Kautilya and the Arthasastra. A statistical 305 investigation of the authorship and evolution of the text (with a oreface of A.L. Basham), Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971, pp. 47 and 49.

Cf. Tomas R. Trautmann, Op. cit., p. 186; Cf. Chapter IV of Kangle's commentary, in his edition of the Arthasastra, vol. III, p. 59-115.

never lose sight of them. The term *sastra* means «science» or «treatise», and there are no significant problems in its translation. However, to our great surprise, we do not find the word *niti* («politics») in the title, but *artha*, which is the equivalent of concepts such as «sustenance», «wealth» or «benefit».

Thus, this political treatise defines itself as the science or art of obtaining some benefit. The economy, which es the main theme of this book's second treatise, is presented as the foundations of politics. This peculiarity, «its attention to this realm, to include a section on economics in a political treatise, is, of course, a unique mark in the ancient world, and it give the Arthasastra a "modern" aspect». 307 In fact, economicallyoriented reasonings play a leading role throughout the whole work. In a very prosaic way, the originary social contract is presented to us as some sort of labor-economic agreement. In order to avoid being overwhelmed by the «law of the fishes» (the state of nature), where the big fish devours the small fish, the figure of a king, i.e., a protector, needs to be established. In exchange for one-sixth of the grains, and one-tenth of the commodities and money earned in their professional activities (it wouldn't be a bad idea that such percentages were taken as an example in our modern states), the king—i.e., the state—commits to «bring about the well-being and security of the subjects». 308 This commitment is not exhausted with security, i.e., with keeping citizens safe from evildoers. There are also certain hints of what we would nowadays call «the welfare state», for among the duties of the monarch we find the duty to take care of children, elderly people, and all those who have been affected by a disgrace and have no one to appeal to. 309 As R.P. Kangle correctly points out, this duty is not motivated by any moral or pious ground, but by a prudential calculation, inasmuch as by

<sup>307</sup> Cf. M. Dambuyant, Introduction to her French anthology *L'Arthasastra*, *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra* (English Translation with critical notes by R.P. Kangle), Bombay: The University of Bombay, Book I, Chapter 13, verses 5-6, Vol. II, p. 28.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book II, Chapter 1, verse 26. vol II, p. 57.

securing the subject's wellbeing the administrator of the state-enterprise is looking after their own wellbeing.<sup>310</sup>

To my taste, this common sense as regards a welfare state may be interpreted as a good lesson, especially when compared with the furious neoliberalism that besets us. There are some matters whose negligence simply goes against the very maintenance of the system (what is the purpose of a society based on a market economy, in which the majority of consumers gradually lose their purchasing power?), and whose observance lies well beyond (or rather, much closer to home) than values such as justice and equality. Kautilya, at least, was very clear about this, and it never crosses his mind to invoke a good-hearted nature, a religious conviction or a moral principle as a ground of his ideas, but mere selfinterest. Whoever occupies a position of power is well-advised not to abuse of it, if they want to avoid a revolt that takes it away from them.<sup>311</sup> Nothing more and nothing less. The statesman—he declares— «should take from the kingdom, fruits as they are ripe, as from a garden, avoiding taking unripe fruits, for that will be self-destructive, and cause an uprising against him». 312 Excessive greed can wreck the sources of income; here we have a good reason not to overexploit the subjects. The state is conceived as a great enterprise, as a complex machinery that collects funds and fills the coffers of the monarch, who personifies the institution. All commercial transactions, all economic activities, are charged with a tax. One must pay all sorts of tariffs and rights of way. By way of indirect taxes, there are fines. Death penalty and any sort of mutilation are reserved for the most serious crimes. Not too much time is spent on the idea of incarcerating people. It is much more profitable that someone who cannot pay a debt serves as a slave for some time. Even war is treated as nothing more than a simple business.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra. A Study*, Bombay: The University of Bombay, 1965, vol. III, p. 118.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 120; cf. vol. III, p. 10 (1.4.7-15).

<sup>312</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book V, Chapter 2, verse 70, *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 301.

Before the ship of the state is the king. If fact, the king himself would be the state, according to a formulation, raja rajyam313, which reminds us of those famous words by Louis XIV: «L'État, c'est moi ». But who is really moi in this case? One gets the impression that Kautilya assigns an executive role, not a merely symbolic one, to the sovereign, inasmuch as only the sovereign can name the ministers, and remains in charge of supervising everything. Accordingly, the monarch is not merely a figurehead, but the commander-in-chief of this ship which is the state. We must not, however, dismiss the role assigned to the helmsperson, who is in charge of setting the route and advise the captain. The purohita or tutor to the prince («chaplain»), a public servant of apparently no hierarchical position in the chain of command, has the mission of guiding the state's destiny, for the king «should follow him as a pupil (does) his teacher, a son his father (or) a servant his master». 314 Far from important. According to these clauses, the supreme chief would be subordinated to his mentor, to whom he owes blind obedience. On the other hand, at other points the minister gets described as the one who truly is in charge the main administrative tasks of the state.<sup>315</sup> Moreover, this chancellor as R.P. Kangle points out—is in practice a «king-maker». 316 Let us now imagine the power assembled by someone who succeeds in occupying both positions simultaneously, a tutor who at the same time functions as an authority only subordinated to the king, a mentor to the prince and at the same time his prime minister. This is what the cautious Kautilya apparently wanted for himself: a position safe from mutiny.

The crafty Kautilya «conformed» himself with this, and showed no interest in becoming the king. In this apparently secondary position he was exempted, for example, from having to display the excellent qualities

<sup>313</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VIII, Chapter 2, verse 1, vol. II, p. 390.

<sup>314</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book I, Chapter 9, verse 10, vol. II, p. 18. 315 Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VIII, Chapter 1, verse 23, vol. II, p. 387.

<sup>316</sup> R.P. Kangle, *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 133. Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book V, Chapter 6, vol. II, pp. 309-310.

required for an ideal legislator.<sup>317</sup> It is no surprise, then, that he stayed away from the scepter and was happy to give it to one or other person. A certain Bharadvaja seems to have held the thesis that, on the face of it, no minister would resist the temptation of taking power in his own hands, if he had the chance. If the monarch dies, the minister could very well get rid of his heirs, instead of rejecting the throne; doing the opposite would be like dismissing the charms of a beautiful woman who invites us to enjoy them.<sup>318</sup> Kautilya does not think like that, however. Of course, it is not a matter of loyalty to the royal lineage or anything of that sort. His refusal is based, as are all his arguments, in purely pragmatic reasons. Occupying oneself a position of power, disregarding the line of succession, «yields an uncertain outcome and could incite the people's uprising». 319 Let us not forget that this is affirmed by someone who toppled a dynasty in order to put another one in its place. This is why he is satisfied with «investing the new king with its authority». 320 R.P. Kangle is right when he writes the following lines: «The requirement that the ruler should be trained in philosophy is, of course, not the same thing as Plato's plea that philosophers should be kings». 321 There is no need for that, according to Kautilya, who finds it much better to put and take away sovereigns at will, moving the threads of power from the shadows.

The state consists of seven elements, according to Kautilya: the sovereign (savamin), the minister (amatya), the territory and those who inhabit it (janapanda), the fortified cathedral (durga), the treasure (kosa), the army (danda), and the allies (mitra). We have already examined the first two. Let us look at the rest of them, respecting the order in which they have been listed. In the Arathastra we descend to an incredibly deep level

<sup>317</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VI, Chapter 1, verses 2-6, vol. II, p. 314.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book V, Chapter 6, verses 24-30, vol. II, p. 311.

<sup>319</sup> Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book V, Chapter 6, verse 32, vol. II, p. 312.

<sup>320</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, verse 30.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. R.P. Kangle, Op. cit., vol. III, p. 130.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book VI, Chapter 1, verse 1, vol. II, p. 314.

of concretion, to the point that things such as the workers' and servants' salary, the neighborhoods where people are supposed to live, the number of families that must conform a community, and even the distance that must be kept between those families, are established. The wages of those who are at the higher spheres of the government are extremely high and identical to one another, namely, forty-eight thousand silver coins for each one of them. This identity has its purpose: to avoid conspiracies, and to keep them safe from bribery. Society is very stratified, and this is reflected in the scale of retributions, which drop sharply until they reach the minimum wage of sixty silver coins. This stratification is due to the caste system, which is so deeply rooted in India and influences even the urbanistic design. Within cities, the northern parts are exclusively reserved for the leaders, the southern parts left for the populace. Remarkably, this segregation happens also in the crematoria, where the urban separation between north and south is reproduced. Although what's most noteworthy is the space left open for activities such as espionage. As the editor of the book comments, «an extraordinary characteristic of this treatise is the lack of inhibition with which the organization of a secret service destined to comply with the most diverse purposes is recommended to us». 323

The secret service agents can realize almost any task, and in order to furnish this wide network, which reaches each and every corner of the state apparatus, the best quarry is the set of orphans whose maintenance was left to the state, and which from the time since they were kids have been trained to acquire the techniques of espionage. Inside the country, these secret agents carry out propagandistic tasks, and gather information regarding which citizens are happy with the government's decisions, but their main function is to detect the likely cases of corruption by public servants, and to verify whether those public servants remain loyal to the ruling power.<sup>324</sup> Everybody, regardless of their position, is subject to this supervision of their honesty. Honesty is not taken for granted; quite on

<sup>323</sup> Cf. R.P. Kangle, *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 205; Cf., pp. 206-207.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, v.g. Book I, Chapter 10, verses 11, 12, and 13, vol. II, p. 18 and ff.

the contrary, it is conspicuous by its absence. These tasks aren't easy, and sometimes detecting corruption is as complicated as noticing when a fish drinks water,<sup>325</sup> and, the higher the position scrutinized, the harder it is to detect corruption in it. This feeling of mistrust, where no one is free from suspicion, is absolutely universal, and of course it affects the secret agents themselves. In this regard, there are certain security measures to be taken in order to cope with the possibility of «double agents» that provide information to the enemies; namely, to hold the secret agent's relatives as hostages in order to secure their loyalty, or, rather, as an obstruction to their insurrection.<sup>326</sup> Obviously, there is a counter-espionage office, as it is taken for granted that the foreign powers are trying to infiltrate their agents, and behave in the exact same way.

Those old masters, with whom Kautilya is in a permanent dialogue, held that an army can always acquire gold, and therefore that armed forces constitute a priority element of the state. Kautilya, however, thought that finances are at the foundation of everything, and that if the state's coffers are full then anything can be achieved, including, for example, avoiding betrayals and securing a solid «loyalty». «The army, indeed, is rooted in the treasury. In the absence of a treasury, the army goes over to the enemy or kills the king». <sup>327</sup> Hence the constant concern about the economy and the kingdom's finances. In this regard, military campaigns are seen from an economical perspective, as if it was any other business that may benefit the state.

For Kautilya, whether fortune endorses our plans is something absolutely unforeseeable, and hence it is left out of his treatise. This deals only with the foreseeable. Such is the art of politics, which is good if it brings wellbeing to us, and evil if it ruins our lives.<sup>328</sup> These are the two poles of politics: wellbeing and ruin, the only two categories that

<sup>325</sup> Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book II, Chapter 9, verse 33, vol. II, p. 91.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book I, Chapter 12, verse 19, vol. II, p. 26.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VIII, Chapter 1, verses 47-48, vol. II, p. 388.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VI, Chapter 2, verses 6-12, vol. II, p. 317.

determine the goodness (or evilness) of a political action. Under these presuppositions, conquest is an inexcusable duty for any good leader. Not only because conquests increase the state's wellbeing, but also because all other monarchs harbor the same intention, and it is therefore necessary to be well-prepared for their attacks, by being ready to attack before they do. The relations with the other states may thus fall under six procedures: the signing of peace treaties, starting wars, remaining indifferent or neutral, taking a breather before leaving the battle, subjecting oneself to someone else in order to get asylum, and the politics of «double-dealing».<sup>329</sup>

When making alliances and coalitions, this six-fold procedural formula must be applied according to the theory of mandala or, more precisely, of rajamandala, a «circle of kings or states». In this diagram of concentric circles which represent enemies and natural allies, the conqueror (vijigisu) takes his nearest neighbor, whose territories he wants to annex, as an enemy (ari); the kingdom besides the enemy's kingdom is a natural ally (mitra), and his neighbor, according to the same logic, is an ally of the enemy (arimitra). Later on will gradually appear the ally of our ally (mitramitra), the ally of the ally of our enemy (arimitramitra), the enemy located at the conqueror's rearguard (pasnigraha), his ally in the rearguard (akranda), the enemy's ally in the rearguard (parsnigrahasara), and the latter's ally in the rearguard (akrandasara). There is also talk about an intermediate king, whose territory borders with that of the conqueror and his ally, but which is stronger than the coalition (madhyama) of both, and about a neutral or indifferent king, whose power overwhelms that of the coalition conformed by the latter coalition, the conqueror, and his ally (udasina).<sup>330</sup> «Taken for granted as a universal social principle is the propensity of neighbors to be unfriendly, jealous, and aggressive, each biding his hour of surprise and treacherous assault».331

<sup>329</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VII, Chapter 1, verses 6-12, vol. II, p. 321.

<sup>330</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VI, Chapter 2, verses 13-22, vol. II, p. 318. Cf. R.P. Kangle, *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 248.

Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, *Op. cit.*, p. 115. «Each king is to regard his own realm as located at the center of a kind of target, surrounded by "rings"

Whether one starts a war or not depends only on a calculation that determines whether the war means a good business or a bad one. The statesman must carefully weigh his own forces, the alliances that he may be able to establish, and the particular situation of his enemy, as well as the alliances he might create; the final decision is made according to this complex analysis based on the mandala:

> He should make peace with the equal and the stronger; he should make war with the weaker. For, going to war with the stronger, he engages as it were in a fight on foot with an elephant. And (at war) with the equal he brings about loss on both sides, like an unbaked jar struck by an unbaked jar. (At war) with the weaker he attains absolute success like a stone with an earthen vessel.332

Of course, it is essential to use the calamities that beset and weaken the enemy to one's advantage, even if this is merely circumstantial.<sup>333</sup> One should not expect too much from this fortuitous kind of assistance, but it does no harm to keep them in mind, for it is always convenient to have one's allied enemies become estranged, telling each party that the other party conspires against them, thereby breaking their coalition.<sup>334</sup> One may

<sup>(</sup>mandalas) which represent, alternately, his natural enemies and his natural allies. The enemies are represented as the first surrounding ring; these are his immediate neighbors, all alert to pounce. The second ring then is that of his natural friends, i.e., the kings just to the rear of his neighbors, who threaten them in turn through the very fact of being neighbors. Then beyond is a ring of remoter danger, interesting primarily as supplying reinforcement to the enemies directly at hand. Furthermore, within each ring are subdivisions signifying mutual animosities; for since each kingdom has its own mandala, an exceedingly complicated set of stresses and crossstresses must be understood to exist. Such a plan of mutual encirclement is to be cast, carefully weighed, and then used as a basis for action. It delineates and brings into manifestation a certain balance and tension of natural powers, as well as touching off periodic, terrific outbursts of widely spreading conflict». (Cf. Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book VII, Chapter 3, verses 2-5, vol. 332 II, p. 327.

Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book VII, Chapter 4, verse 155, vol. II, 333 pp. 332-333.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit., Book VII, Chapter 2, verses 14-15, vol. II, p. 325-326.

also seal an agreement with an enemy one intends to attack, in order to create a deceiving sense of trust. It goes without saying, no scruples may be allowed to show up when it comes to breaking any sort of treaties, as long as failing to comply is useful for one's purposes.<sup>335</sup>

Kautilya's treatise presents a complex casuistry, which contemplates and infinitude of possibilities. However, as regards wars, these may be classified in the following three categories: 1) *open* war, i.e., the one that is solemnly declared; 2) *dirty* war, i.e., war through deceit and surprise, and 3) *silent* war, which are the intrigues created by the secret agent sent to a foreign country for that purpose.<sup>336</sup> In such a context, there is a fundamental principle, an inexorable duty whose omission comes at great costs, and brings an unavoidable failure with it: to be able to keep a secret. «The affairs of one, who cannot maintain secrecy, even if achieved with particular success, undoubtedly perish, like a broken boat in the ocean».<sup>337</sup>

This astonishing realism, which boastfully displays cynicism and never shows a sign of bad conscience, purports to adopt an unshakable logic which adapts any means to the chosen ends. Now, just as in Machiavelli, in the *Arthasastra* we find no attempt «to "justify" those means, whose moral value is completely beyond consideration. Kautilya talks about politics only as a politician».<sup>338</sup> In fact, the only noteworthy difference between Kautilya and Machiavelli is a methodological one; whereas the author of *The Prince* uses a historicist method, turning his view to the past in order to confirm the conclusions drawn from his observations as a diplomat, the *Arthasastra* neglects any historical illustration (even when it enters in dialogue with past masters) and

<sup>335</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VII, Chapter 6, verses 21 and ff, vol. II, p. 340.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VII, Chapter 6, verses 40-41, vol. II, p. 342.

<sup>337</sup> Cf. *The Kautilya Arthasastra, Op. cit.*, Book VII, Chapter 13, verse 44, vol. II, p. 366.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. M. Dambuyant, Op. cit., p. 58.

instead imagines an endless space of possibilities, pointing at the ways in which they should be dealt with.<sup>339</sup>

Rejecting these political recipes as immoral is tantamount to taking for granted that politics must be a function of ethics, and this presupposition, at least for the time being and for the past few millennia, is but an oneiric fantasy<sup>340</sup>, a beautiful dream from which we wake up each single day of our lives, when we bother to check our desire against the surrounding reality, thus confirming the eternal divorce between morals and politics. When we contrast the chimeric dream with the grim reality:

[...] the laws are seen again to be what they were in ages past. One feels inclined to bestow a new and deep respect on the genius who at that early period recognized and elucidated the basic forces and situations that were to remain perennial in the human political field. The same style of Indian thought that invented the game of chess grasped with profound insight the rules of this larger game of power.<sup>341</sup>

This thought-provoking metaphor, which likens the ups and downs of politics with situations and moves in the game of chess, has been invoked a number of times in the present work. Here I couldn't help but using it once again, for, in my view, it perfectly fits what we've been learning about the roles assigned by the *Arthasastra* to the king and to his powerful minister. The «king» in this board is represented by the *purohita*, i.e., the Brahman whose mission is to guide the sovereign's destiny, whereas the «queen» corresponds rather to the head of state, the *raja*. It is comparable—says Heinrich Zimmer, talking about a different issue—to the relationship between that detached, almighty Indian family priest and the king; this priest is obeyed by the king himself and by all the kingdom's officials, even when he remains inactive and indifferent.

«[...] the association—adds the same author— can be compared to that in the Hindi game of chess, where the role of purusa is represented by the "king", while the "king's" omnipresent "general" (*senapati*)—who is

<sup>339</sup> Cf. R.P. Kangle, *Op. cit.*, p. 273.

<sup>340</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>341</sup> Cf. H. Zimmer, Op. cit., p. 139. Emphasis added.

equivalent to our "queen" in our Western game—is in the powerful, serving yet commanding, position of the inner organ». However, in order to fully understand the amount of power accumulated by an intellectual like Kautilya, we would have to refer to that (much harder) version of the game of chess which uses nine columns, in which, apart from the traditional queen, there is a «minister» endowed with great power and versatility, since it may move like a knight, but also like a bishop and a rook. The «queen» would therefore be like the monarch in a Kautilyan state, a piece that may be replaced by crowning a peasant under certain circumstances, while the «king» (i.e., the monarch's tutor) also functions as the chess «minister», if we believe the legend of Visnugupta Canakaya, the fabulous Chaman which was the chancellor of Chandragupta and which is better known in the history of political thought as Kautilya, that is to say: *the master of caution*.

The question that I'd like to raise at this point is this one: To what extent may Kautilya be taken as a role model by an intellectual who wants to intervene in politics? In other words: Is this the true but unspeakable aspiration of every «philosopher», as the history of thought testifies? Is what the philosopher really prefers to control the threads of power from the shadows, safely staying in the background, behind the scenes, dictating moral convictions, whose consequences will be faced by politicians who are inspired by their reflections? Why can't the philosopher play the role assigned to the «queen», thereby becoming a «philosopher-king», without fear of going against his or her own moral frame of mind?

342 Cf. Ibid., p. 287.

# By Way of a Colophon

A very different historical route, one that focused on different and more numerous philosophical landmarks, could have been taken by our present investigation. The result, however, was bound to be the exact same, I think. This little philosophical excursion to the history of philosophical thought, which ends where it started, i.e., twenty-four centuries ago, has confirmed our early suspicion. This was that ethics and politics may indeed flirt from time to time, engage in small-time, sporadic affairs, but they cannot institutionalize their relationship, lest they lose or annihilate their respective identities. And this hybrid situation cannot satisfy either party involved. Definitely, marriage does not seem to be an option for them. But these furtive encounters, which allow for the conjugation of responsibilities and convictions, as those who hold positions of power

arrange secret appointments in their conscience, where ethics and politics meet, aren't a bad thing at all. All we can do is hope for an increase in their frequency. That would be enough. Don't you think?

Now, it is one thing for them to be unable to live under the same roof, and quite a different thing for them to ignore and end up turning their backs on one another; their mutual disdain leads us nowhere, or at least nowhere worth visiting. Ethics should not abandon its reflection on politics, and politics must pay attention to moral consideration whenever this is possible. Plato's dream was quite a chimera, not so Kant's proposal of a moral politician. Philosophers shouldn't turn into kings, lest they stop being philosophers. Nor is it necessary that monarchs philosophize, but only that those who hold positions of power allow themselves to be advised by moral philosophy, even if only every once in a while.

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