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Gramsci and *The Prince*: Taking Machiavelli outside the realist courtyard?

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Abstract

In the field of political theory, few authors have spurred intellectual tirades and triggered collective fantasy as much as the sixteenth-century Florentine Secretary Niccoló Machiavelli. Despite all controversies, in the discipline of International Relations (IR) Machiavelli and his *The Prince* have been almost exclusively associated with classical realism. This largely unchallenged association contributed to the edification of the myth of *The Prince* as the ruthless symbol of *raison d'état*, carrying transcendental lessons about the nature of politics and a set of prescriptions on how helmsmen should behave to seize, maintain, and reinforce their power. The realist hijacking of Machiavelli is at the core of the foundation of classical realism as an IR theory and its location at the very epicentre of IR as a discipline. This appropriation has, in turn, obscured alternative myths of *The Prince,* which depart from Machiavelli's reflections on the *Principati nuovi* to read *The Prince* as a radical manifesto for political change. The opening of the semantic space in the field of IR – spurred by the so-called interpretive turn – offers an opportunity to break this monochromatic reading. This article delves into two competing myths of *The Prince*: the classical realist myth and Gramsci's 'progressive' one to demonstrate its contested nature.

Keywords

Niccoló Machiavelli; Antonio Gramsci; Hans J. Morgenthau; Edward H. Carr; *The Prince*

Introduction: *The Prince* and the limits of IR's political imagination

Pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli[1]

Political science scholarship has consistently offered an inherently diverse portrait of Niccoló Machiavelli's intellectual legacy. This is perhaps most eloquently illustrated by Isaiah Berlin's reference to *The Prince* as having flared up a 'violent disparity of judgments'[2] on whether Machiavelli should be considered 'the most extraordinary lover of liberty' or the diabolical 'counsellor of despots'.[3] Machiavelli has been thus attacked and embraced from different

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[1] 'The fortune of a book depends upon the capacity of its readers', Terentianus Maurus, *De Litteris, Syllabis et Metris*, v. 1286, as reported in Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961 [orig. pub. 1946]), p. 116.

[2] Isaiah Berlin, 'A special supplement: the question of Machiavelli', *New York Review of Books*, 17:7 (1971), p. 36.

[3] Hans Baron, 'Machiavelli: the Republican citizen and the author of *The Prince*', *The English Historical Review*, 75:CCXCIX (1965), pp. 217–53.

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quarters – having been given different labels such as 'irreligious and immoral', a 'preceptor of Barabbas',[4] or 'a passionate idealist', the 'spiritual father of the revolution', and an 'unaware Vico', whose awareness of the historical 'intrinsic necessity' makes for disguise.[5] In this light, Benedetto Croce alluded to a Machiavelli puzzle 'that will perhaps never be solved'[6] and Louis Althusser synthesised this puzzle as follows:

> Machiavelli 'marches in the opposite direction to that in which he fires', or fires in the opposite direction from that in which one wishes to make him march; or, even worse … we do not even know where he is firing: he always fires elsewhere.[7]

Beyond *The Prince*'s 'textual and theoretical ambiguity',[8] this 'labyrinth of contradictory interpretations'[9] also descends from Machiavelli's ability to resonate with and enhance different political purposes. It could be further argued that the historical context from which we look at him and prevailing discourses about the nature of *the political* at any given time make the pendulum swing. Invariantly, Machiavelli is *creatively* used 'for the description of a type of thought',[10] in which his interpretation crucially depends on both the intention and analytical prisms of the reader.

In contrast to political science, in International Relations (IR) literature, the work of Niccoló Machiavelli is largely associated with classical realism. Drawing on his 'revolt against utopianism', the Florentine Secretary has been widely regarded as the first political realist for three reasons: his alleged determinism, whereby history is seen as a chain of causes and effects orchestrated by power; his pragmatic conception of political theorising, which requires the social scientist to infer general laws from the actual behaviour of policymakers, and his apparent understanding of politics as separate, even divorced from ethics.[11] However, the linking of Machiavelli to classical realism via his insistence on the focus on power, the commitment to the real truth (*verità effettuale*) and an ethic of responsibility only accounts for a segment of his intellectual heritage. To begin with, these tenets have no monopoly on the realist tradition and can rather 'be read in ways that undermine any single claim to a tradition'.[12]

The unchallenged association between early modern theorists and realism – squeezed into a single paradigm from Waltz to Morgenthau – has not only obscured the understanding of such authors in the IR literature, but it has also established a monopoly over such sources

[4] Respectively, H Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1955); and Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe IL: Free Press, 1958), p. 10.

[5] Garrett Mattingly, 'Machiavelli's Prince: Political science or political satire?', *American Scholar*, 27:4 (1958), p. 488; Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 37; Benedetto Croce, 'Sulla Storia della Filosofia Politica', *La Critica. Rivista di Letteratura, Storia e Filosofia*, 22 (1924), pp. 194–6.

[6] Benedetto Croce, 'Una questione che forse non si chiuderà mai: la questione del Machiavelli', *Quaderni di Critica*, V:14 (1949), pp. 1–9.

[7] Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 5.

[8] Peter Breiner, 'Machiavelli's "new Prince" and the primordial moment of acquisition', *Political Theory*, 36:1 (2008), pp. 66–92 (p. 67).

[9] Joseph V. Femia, *Machiavelli Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 10.

[10] Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, p. 118.

[11] Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), pp. 63–5.

[12] Robert B. J. Walker, 'The Prince and "the Pauper": Tradition, modernity, and practice in the theory of International Relations', in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (New York: Lexington Books, 1989), pp. 49–68 (p. 50).

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and their interpretations.[13] As is the case with all myths, the effectiveness of their narrative does not require validation and does not fear potential falsification, for their strength lies in their ability to sediment emotional truths.

Indeed, myths are parsimonious and simple articulations of wider systems of thoughts and traditions. They help spread a message and gain influence. Myths use a filtered version of the past as a tool to influence the present. In this perspective, myths are connected to the making of academic traditions as in a Russian doll: by establishing its classical references, a given theoretical tradition substantiates its own existence. Recourse to the past, hence, helps 'invented traditions' to establish and spread.[14] In this sense, the crafting of theoretical traditions – mostly as a tool to legitimise contemporary ideas – results in 'an unreflective orthodox regulative ideal for research and teaching'[15] and serves to provide a flawed theoretical platform from which the sources are approached.

In turn, on the ground of their very parsimony, myths flatten the theoretical tradition that appropriates them: myths make things clearer, but undoubtedly simpler. In this light, the understanding of IR classical realists – such as Carr and Morgenthau – has been largely reduced to a meagre caricature of their real bearing.[16] Hence, the myth of Machiavelli came to characterise classical realism as the doctrine of the ruthless pursuit of the *raison d'état*, with no regard to what this is supposed to be.

Classical realism's hijacking of Machiavelli was made possible by its hegemony in IR.[17] This hegemony contributed to the creation of an IR myth of Machiavelli inflected in singular terms, studded with a scientific aura that few have bothered to challenge.[18] The erosion of such hegemony opened the semantic field to a contest between ideas that continues to this day. Charlotte Epstein has commented that this signalled 'the end of a *telos*, of a single, linear, direction to theory-building' and that today we have 'a multiplication of theoretical starting points … where to theorise *from*'.[19]

[13] Charlotte Epstein, 'Theorising agency in Hobbes' wake: the rational actor, the self or the speaking subject?', *International Organization*, 67:2 (2013), pp. 287–316; Steven Forde, 'International realism and the science of politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli and neorealism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 39:2 (1995), pp. 141–60; Robert B. J. Walker, 'The Prince and "the Pauper", pp. 49–68.

[14] An 'invented tradition' is a set of 'practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of nature, which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1.

[15] Brian Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 24.

[16] Hartmut Behr and Amelia Heath, 'Misreading in IR theory and ideology critique: Hans Morgenthau, Waltz and neo-realism', *Review of International Studies*, 35:2 (2009), pp. 327–49; Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); A. J. H. Murray, 'The moral politics of Hans Morgenthau', *The Review of Politics*, 58:1 (1996), pp. 81–107; Michael C. Williams, *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[17] Epstein, 'Theorising agency in Hobbes' wake'.

[18] Also see Stephen Gill, 'The post-modern Prince? The battle in Seattle as a moment in the new politics of globalisation', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29:1 (2000), pp. 131–40; Adam Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007); Walker, 'The Prince and "the Pauper"; Owen Worth, *Resistance in the Age of Austerity: Nationalism, the Failure of the Left and the Return of God* (London: Zed Book Ltd, 2013).

[19] Charlotte Epstein, 'Constructivism or the eternal return of universals in International Relations: Why returning to language is vital to prolonging the owl's flight', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:3 (2013), pp. 499–519 (p. 500).

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With the opening of the semantic field, scholars are driven to challenge myths within the study of IR and to revisit both classical realism and its putative founding fathers.

This article makes a journey into competing myths of Machiavelli and his *Prince* and focuses in particular on the Edward H. Carr, Hans J. Morgenthau, and Antonio Gramsci myths of *The Prince*.[20] The focus on different interpretations sheds light on two contiguous aspects of myth-making: the question of the function assigned to a specific myth and the question of its referents. In analysing IR competing myths of Machiavelli and his *Prince*, one needs to acknowledge that their unit of measure is not truth (that is, determining the degree to which something can be considered true or false) but rather the specific symbolical order that they wish to instate. Which functions are assigned to *The Prince*'s different mythological representations? And who are the final referents of these representations?

It is argued here that the realist myth drew on the assumption that Machiavelli established a new *way of knowing* in social science: history, rather than some sort of divine order, was seen as the lynchpin from which political theorisation and action should emanate. The referents of classical realists were more polemical than programmatic. On the one hand, they used Machiavelli to distance themselves from the so called 'idealist tradition'. On the other, they sought to reach out to policymakers, in a plea to consider history and power, rather than moral predicaments, as a framework for political action. By contrast, Gramsci's reading opened the door to another myth of Machiavelli, one that emphasises a 'determination to act'[21] in the political sphere and specifically addresses civil society.

The article proceeds as follows: Section I introduces the concept of myth and highlights two distinctive functions that the myth of Machiavelli performed in the making of the discipline of IR. These relate to the way of *knowing* and *acting* in the international system. Section II critically reviews the reasons why Machiavelli so strongly appealed to political realism. Section III analyses the ways in which IR classical realists have used some instances of Machiavelli's thoughts, such as the anchoring of history to power dynamics and marginalised some others, notably his spring of action. Section IV connects Machiavelli's teaching to the historical aim of Italian unification. Drawing on this narrative, Section V illustrates Gramsci's myth of the *Modern Prince*. The conclusion compares and contrasts the two mythologies and shows how the two traditions converge and diverge in their symbolical interpretation of *The Prince*.

I. The many myths of Machiavelli

While generally associated with fiction and fantasy, myths *per se* are neither true nor false. A myth reflects 'a reality to which it can never measure up, and which it can never adequately portray'.[22] A myth is, hence, 'neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflection', a type of speech.[23] As with

[20] Where not specified otherwise, all references to Gramsci's Prisons Notebooks are taken from Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere,* in Valentino Gerratana (ed.), Volumes I–IV [hereafter **Q19**] (Turin: Einaudi, 1975). Most references to the Notebook XIII are taken from Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno 13: Noterelle sulla Politica Del Machiavelli', in Carmine Donzelli (ed.), *Il Moderno Principe, Il Partito e La Lotta per l'Egemonia* [hereafter **QC13**] (Turin: Einaudi, 2012). In both cases the abbreviation QC applies and the author translates selected excerpts.

[21] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Illinois: Glencoe, 1950), p. 57.

[22] Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1953), p. 6.

[23] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Hill and Wang: New York, 1984), p. 10.

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all symbolical constructions, myths are *forces,* which produce 'a world of [their] own'.[24] Therefore, they invariantly deviate from objectivity.

As types of speech, myths belong to a level located somewhat between *langue* (a structural and social component, whose essence is independent of individuals) and *parole* (the individual and accidental component) of language.[25] As with language, in both myths and their analyses, two different linguistic temporal registers conflate. On the one hand, the *narration* of historical facts relates to the past, on the other, the analytical *discourse* on such facts actualises them. Myths, therefore, tend to locate historical facts in the context of cleavages and discussions that have to do with the present. As such, they have a double structure: they are 'historical' and 'anhistorical'; they display an 'operative value' that cuts across the past, present, and future.[26] Myths avail of language to account for a reality and yet, create a 'second-order semiological system', which aims not so much to reproduce an existing reality, but to naturalise its own reality.[27]

Political and scientific myths abandon the aim of narrating to become teachings.[28] Historical and mythological representations share, therefore, the same aspiration to validation and truth. Scientific myths tend to conceal their subjective, hermeneutical origin to claim a pedigree of objectivity. Their alleged universality is both their symbolical code and the semantic field that they curb out for themselves. In this sense, science too proceeds by edifying its own mythologies, for example, 'arbitrary schemes – airy fabrics of the mind, which express not the nature of things, but the nature of mind'.[29]

Ironically, myths and historical knowledge share the 'curse of mediacy',[30] the medium of language and the need of hermeneutics.[31] When analysing myths and history, the boundary between narration and description is difficult to find. Different interpretations of the same historical facts arise, as readers produce their own frameworks of historical causality based on their situational standpoints. Such interpretations frame the signification of historical facts and provide a platform from which present and future events can be decoded.

Those who participate in the production of historical knowledge need, therefore, to recognise the perennial incompleteness and partiality of such knowledge. The focus on 'conceptual history' – undertaken by scholars such as Quentin Skinner and John G. A. Pocock – cast a hermeneutical turn in historical studies. The constructivist and interpretive turn in IR during the 1990s offered an opening for such endeavours. Throughout the so-called epistemological debate, a variety of critical IR schools contested the face value of scientific truths, by targeting both the idea of neutrality of science and the objective nature of the social world. Both reality and science reflect dynamic power relations.

[24] Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, p. 7.
[25] Ferdinand De Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Generale*, Critical edition of Tullio Mauro (Paris: Grand Bibliotheque Payot, 1995), p. 30.
[26] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The structural study of the myth', *The American Political Science Review*, 68:270 (1955), pp. 428–44 (p. 430).
[27] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 10.
[28] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 5.
[29] Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, p. 7.
[30] Ibid., p. 8.
[31] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (2nd rev. edn, London: Continuum, 2004).

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Concepts exist within a frame of reference, which is both historically pre-established and ideologically connoted. In analysing social facts, we engage in an act of *interpretation*: instead of producing a complete picture, we 'take a slice of a complex reality and highlight some features over others'.[32]

If we go back to the various hermeneutical vicissitudes of Machiavelli, his characterisation as 'Old Nick' – the devil himself in Elizabethan literature – reflects the beliefs and expectations of the Anglo-Saxon Golden Age, one of unprecedented political centralisation and economic growth for England. Similarly, Jean Bodin's harsh verdict on Machiavelli could be read through the prisms of the exigencies of sixteenth-century France: the consolidation of consensus, rather than the making of a unitary nation-state.[33] The emphasis on Machiavelli's fervent patriotism was the nodal point around which Georg Hegel articulated his reflections on national unification, from the perspective of a nineteenth-century German. Reflecting on these different uses of Machiavelli, Gramsci noted that, depending on the intention of the reader, the book could be interpreted as a platform for either revolution or conservation. What swings the pendulum is the political 'momentum' to which Machiavelli's precepts are to be related, whether pertaining to the stage of hegemony or 'high politics' (for example, 'foundation of new States, conservation and defense of given organic socio-economic structures; questions of state dictatorship and hegemony') or one of consensus or 'low politics'.[34]

The operation of retracing the myth of *The Prince* is complicated by its extraordinary ambivalence. Its rhetorical construction makes for open-ended interpretations. *The Prince* is a eulogy as much as a historical compendium; it is a book of political theory as much as an action-driven booklet; its intent is prescriptive as much as it is 'scientific'. Differing emphasis on different rhetorical strategies present in the text therefore feeds different mythological accounts of *The Prince*.

In what follows, it will be argued that, not without ambivalence, realists have emphasised the epistemological heritage of Machiavelli, by stating the importance of treating power as the engine of history and analysing politics as detached from ethics or motives. On the contrary, Gramsci connected Machiavelli to a mythology of determination to act in the social world. In this sense, the myth of Machiavelli served at least two competing functions: one is connected to the act of *knowing* and portrays Machiavelli as a scientist; the other is connected to the moment of *acting*, and portrays Machiavelli as a militant intellectual.

II. Realism and the myth of Machiavelli in IR

> The scientism of Machiavelli and Hobbes is, in the history of mankind, merely an accident without consequences, a lightning illuminating in a sudden flash the dark landscape of man's hidden motives, but kindling no Promethean fire for a grateful posterity.[35]

[32] Karin Fierke, 'Links across the abyss: Language and logic in International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 46 (2002), pp. 331–54 (p. 349).
[33] Gramsci, QC13.
[34] Gramsci, QC13, pp. 107–8.
[35] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The evil of politics and the ethics of evil', *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political and Legal Philosophy*, LVI:1 (1945), pp. 1–18 (p. 1).

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Some political theorists have referred to Machiavelli as the first early modern political scientist, setting up the basis for 'a new science of man'.[36] Within the limits of his being a man of the sixteenth century, Machiavelli sketched what Gaetano Mosca defined as a scientific 'proto-method' in the field of politics.[37] This method drew on *inductively* acquired principles of descriptive investigations and inferred general laws from historical instances of actual behaviour, rather than a *deductive* teleological approach to the actions of men. Politics was, henceforth, defined as the realm of power struggles, to be studied through systematic collection of historical facts drawing on actual political behaviour.

Classical realists, such as Morgenthau, were both attracted and repelled by Machiavelli's 'scientism'. This ambivalence bore no contradiction. On the one hand, they distrusted 'dogmatic realism' for its failure to understand 'the nature of man; the nature of the world, especially of the social world; and, finally, the nature of reason itself'.[38] On the other, they espoused Machiavelli's emphasis on power as an engine of history, his commitment to the *verità effettuale*, and his reflections on the autonomy of the political sphere from ethics. Hence, Machiavelli offered the platform from which an assault could be launched on two distinctive 'theologies': idealism and behaviouralism, the so-called 'new scholasticism' with its positivist overtones.[39] Realists thus referred to Machiavelli to corroborate their plea against idealist and rationalistic approaches to politics.

In the turbulent Renaissance context, Machiavelli's polemical target was the scholastic philosophical tradition, which prescribed the reverence of philosophy to Christian conceptions of common good. With a stroke of the pen, Machiavelli stated his intention to 'represent things as they are in actual truth' to reach out to the 'knowledge of the things of the world' as distinguished from the other-worldly.[40] To be sure, Machiavelli's insistence on the *verità* developed in continuity with the humanist tradition, which relied on a conception of science as *imitation* and assumed 'a connection between politics and history and between history and nature'.[41] However, while most humanists conceived of history as responding to some superior orderly principles, Machiavelli's historical approach was overtly detached from heavenly things.[42] If the things of this world do not descend from a divine *quinta essenza*, history is the domain of human action, setting the options and limits of the political.

[36] Leonardo Olschki, *Machiavelli the Scientist* (Berkeley: Gillick Press, 1945); Leslie J. Walker, *The Discourses of Niccoló Machiavelli* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1950).

[37] Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (1896) as quoted in Gennaro M. Barbuto, *Machiavelli e i Totalitarismi* (Naples: Alfredo Guida Editore, 2005). The credential of Machiavelli as a scientist has been severely contested. For a review, see Eric W. Cochrane, 'Machiavelli: 1940–1960', *The Journal of Modern History*, 33 (1996), pp. 113–36.

[38] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 10, 225.

[39] Barrington Jr Moore, 'The new scholasticism and the study of politics', *World Politics*, 6:1 (1953), pp. 122–38; Edward H. Carr, *Nationalism and After* (London: Macmillan, 1946).

[40] Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Penguin Classic, 1981), ch. XV, p. 90.

[41] Luigi Zanzi, *Dalla Storia all'Epistemologia: Lo Storicismo Scientifico: Principi di Teoria della Storicizzazione* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1991), p. 69, author's translation.

[42] This distinction *per se* represented a breach of both co-eval notions of truth and the cosmological principle of emanation. For one thing, Machiavelli detached the moment of *acting* from the ones of *being* and *knowing*. Hence, he broke with 'the Ciceronian and humanist equation between *honestas* and *utilitas*' and allegedly turned prudence into 'the amoral skill of *versutia*, or mere cleverness'. Victoria Kahn, 'Virtù and the example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*', *Representations*, 13 (1986), pp. 63–83 (p. 63).

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As was the case for Machiavelli in the sixteenth century, political realism in the twentieth century launched its assault on the interwar liberal 'utopian edifice', defining it as a 'hollow' one because 'the element of wish or purpose is overwhelmingly strong, and the inclination to analyse facts and means weak or non-existent'.[43] Hence, realists attributed to idealists the flaws stemming from an 'explanatory deficit' and an 'anti-political bias'.[44] These flaws paired off with liberals' incapacity to account for the fallaciousness of human rationality; their deceitful belief in the fit between abstract reasoning and practical needs; their neglect of the problems of collective action and their rejection of the autonomy of the political sphere. In this light, realists blamed idealists for a deductive and a scientific posture, which led them to issue desirable precepts without ever asking whether these 'actually determine the actions of men'.[45] Morgenthau deplored the tendency to 'obliterate the gap by superimposing a defective brand of political intelligence upon a reluctant political reality'.[46]

By setting the idealist tradition in IR as their polemical target,[47] realists embraced Machiavelli's plea to take the world as it is, not as it ought to be. Hence, their theorisation was widely interpreted as a response to the tragedies of the twentieth century and the incapacity of the liberal world to *foresee* and prevent them.[48] Arguably, the making of the 'idealist tradition' was itself a 'pedagogical device' and a 'realist category of abuse' for 'discrediting a whole range of things [Carr] happened to disagree with'.[49] Such objection – articulated around the detachment of historical readings from power dynamics – was vaguely framed and rarely revolved around the critique of specific authors.[50] In turn and despite its vagueness, this articulation enabled the realist discourse to establish the realm of 'morality, conscience [and] goodwill' as utopia and the realm of 'power, coercion [and] enmity' as real.[51] The myth of Machiavelli was, hence, functional to convey a clear message: 'the doctrine that progress never has occurred and never can in international relations, and that the application of reason, except in a … narrowly instrumental … sense is pointless'.[52]

In parallel with their critique of liberal ethics, realists saw that the application of hard science techniques to social science was altogether overstretching and impoverishing the practice of social inquiry. For one thing, by detaching social enquiry from values, social scientists would turn themselves into 'mere technicians selling their skills to any unscrupulous power-seekers'.[53] For another, behaviouralists were guilty of divorcing 'methodology from empirical investigation' and obscuring 'the understanding of much of the subject matter of political science'.[54]

[43] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 5.
[44] Glenn Newey, *After Politics: The Rejection of Politics in Contemporary Liberal Philosophy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 7.
[45] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The twilight of international morality', *Ethics*, 58:2 (1948a), pp. 79–99.
[46] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The political science of Edward Carr', *World Politics*, 1:1 (1948b), pp. 127–34 (p. 127).
[47] Cameron Thies, 'Progress, history and identity in International Relations theory: the case of the idealist-realist debate', *European Journal of International Relations*, 8:2 (2002), pp. 147–85 (p. 154).
[48] Ian Hall, 'The triumph of anti-liberalism? Reconciling radicalism to realism in International Relations theory', *Political Studies Review*, 9:1 (2011), pp. 42–52 (p. 50).
[49] Peter Wilson, 'The myth of the 'First Great Debate', *Review of International Studies*, 24:5 (1998), pp. 1–16 (p. 1).
[50] Andreas Osiander, 'Rereading early twentieth-century IR theory: Idealism revised', *International Studies Quarterly*, 42 (1998), pp. 409–32 (p. 411).
[51] Wilson, 'The myth of the 'First Great Debate', p. 5.
[52] Ibid., p. 10.
[53] Moore, 'The new scholasticism and the study of politics', pp. 124–5.
[54] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The commitments of political science', in Hans J Morgenthau (ed.), *Politics in the Twentieth Century Volume I*, 'The Decline of Democratic Politics' (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962b), pp. 26–7.

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Accordingly, Morgenthau conceived Machiavelli as 'no more an empiricist in politics than Raphael and Michelangelo are naturalists in art'.[55] In contrast to behaviouralists, his purposeful political framework reconciled a political philosophy resting upon the pillars of *fortuna* and *virtù* with empirical verification. In contrast to neorealism, classical realists pledged thus the need to *interpret* social phenomena in an 'essentially hermeneutic rather than "scientific" manner' through the lens of history, sociology, and philosophy.[56] The appeal of Machiavelli thus derived from his reconciliation of a philosophical framework drawing on concrete reality and a refusal of rationalistic attitudes to manufacture ideal precepts to impose over politics.

III. The myth of Machiavelli as a *purposeful* 'scientist'

> Little do [nationalistic masses] meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed.[57]

Carr acknowledges that Machiavelli grasps that morality is a product of power.[58] However, while Machiavelli inspired realist epistemological strategies, he was not endorsed for his allegedly amoral theory of political agency. Attributing to Machiavelli a 'might is right' equation, Morgenthau highlighted that 'the very threat of a world where power reigns not only supreme, but without rivals, engenders the revolt against power … what is actually aspiration for power, then, appears to be something … that is in harmony with the demands of reasons, morality and justice'.[59] Morgenthau made this point even clearer when he stated: 'whoever holds seeming superiority of power becomes of necessity the repository of superior morality as well' and '[i]t is a disastrous thing to be a Machiavelli without virtù.'[60]

Despite their differences, classical realists applied to politics an Augustinian conception of imperfect morality, one that acknowledges that utopia and reality travel along two different planes and seldom meet.[61] The moral choice that realists undertake is, hence, one of deriving their principles from political reality, rather than 'one set of principles divorced from political reality'.[62]

These considerations have spurred the rediscovery of realism as 'an ethical theory of International Relations'.[63] Classical realists paired off their moral approach with a criticism of the neutral character of social science.[64] In an interesting analogy with Robert Cox's *celebre maxim*, Carr

[55] Ibid., p. 29.

[56] Sean Molloy, 'Truth, power, theory: Hans Morgenthau's formulation of realism', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 15:1 (2004), pp. 1–34 (p. 6).

[57] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (2nd edn, New York: Knopf, 1978), p. 196.

[58] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 80.

[59] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 225.

[60] Morgenthau, 'The political science of Edward Carr', p. 134.

[61] Murray, 'The moral politics of Hans Morgenthau', p. 87.

[62] Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: University Press of America, 1951), p. 34.

[63] Robert Cox, 'E. H. Carr and the crisis of twentieth-century liberalism: Reflections and lessons', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 38:3 (2010), pp. 1–11; Benjamin Wong, 'Hans Morgenthau's anti-Machiavellian Machiavellianism', *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 29:2 (2000), pp. 389–409; Michael C. Williams, *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Duncan Bell, 'Political realism and the limits of ethics', in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Ethics and World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 94–111.

[64] Morgenthau, 'The commitments of political science', p. 36.

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contested objectivity in history and historiography thus: 'knowledge is knowledge for some purpose. The validity of the knowledge depends on the validity of the purpose.'[65] The realist ethical theory hence developed in a constant dialogue and yet alterity with the critical tradition.

Although departing from a similar critique, Morgenthau dismissed critical theory as a form of 'ideology'; 'an intellectual refuge from the 'metaphysical shock' of the collapse of the grand narratives of Enlightenment rationality' and the 'rationalised, abstract thought' of man who faces 'the existential crisis of his own absurdity'.[66] Critical theorists writ large were blamed for their naïve project to unmask strategies of control to favour the elaboration of counter-hegemonic strategies on the part of the exploited. In this direction, a crucial element that sets apart classical realists from both the critical and Machiavellian frameworks is the 'change-resistant' structure of the realist theoretical apparatus.

These overtones, more evident in Morgenthau than in Carr, explain the tragic component of classical realist theorisation. History invariantly poses an 'existential' 'moral dilemma', which can 'be mitigated but not resolved'.[67] Morgenthau's pessimistic view of human nature and politics 'rendered his formal ethic so transcendent that it could not easily function as a vital force directing man's creative energies in an imperfect world'.[68] In this perspective, the realist theoretical apparatus saw international relations as 'the realm of recurrence and repetition' as orchestrated by power.[69] Carr's considerations on the perils of determinism associated with realism underscores the tragic assumption that realists have come to chant immoral realities without even contemplating the possibility of changing them.[70] In this light, no consistent realism could exist based on the premises that it 'excludes four things which appear to be essential ingredients of all effective political thinking: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action'.[71]

Although forcing Carr or Morgenthau into an ideological camp has spurred long-standing quarrels,[72] these four missing links explain some interpretation of Morgenthau's realism as characterised by a 'status quo bias'.[73] In the light of its prudential approach to social and political change, Duncan S. Bell highlights that classical realism considers the attempt to pursue change at the global level utopian and risky on the ground of two considerations. Firstly a 'utopianism as a distraction' argument suggests that limited reforms are easier to secure in the light of both global uncertainty and limited resources. Second, a 'utopianism as danger' argument further warns against

[65] Edward H. Carr, *What is History* (London: Vintage Book, 1961), p. 27.
[66] Molloy, 'Truth, power, theory', p. 9.
[67] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The intellectual and moral dilemma of politics', in Morgenthau (ed.), *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. I, 'The Decline of Democratic Politics' (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962a), p. 14.
[68] Greg Russell, *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of Statecraft* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 169–70.
[69] Martin Wight, 'Why is there no international theory?', in H. Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 17–34 (p. 26).
[70] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 11.
[71] Ibid., p. 89.
[72] Stanley Hoffmann, 'Notes on the limits of realism', *Social Research*, 48:4 (1981), pp. 653–95; Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of the International* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Piki Ish-Shalom, 'The triptych of realism, elitism and conservatism', *International Studies Review*, 8:3 (2006), pp. 441–68.
[73] Martin Wight, 'Review of *Dilemmas of Politics* by Hans J. Morgenthau', *International Affairs*, 35 (1959), pp. 199–200; Bell, 'Political realism and the limits of ethics'.

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the perils of jeopardising consolidated norms and system stability to chase after the illusion of transforming the system.[74]

By locating power as arbiter of historical and political facts, both Carr and Morgenthau recognised that the centrality of states as international actors was a product of history.[75] As such, their state-centrism was neither an eternal nor an unchangeable premise of their realism.[76] Drawing on this epistemological conception, the state was not elected 'champion' of political action, but simply acknowledged as the key international actor. *The Prince*, in this sense, was both an epistemological guide in understanding politics and a summation of pragmatic warnings in a context of structural constraints, not a programmatic manifesto.[77]

This interpretation, however, coexists with yet another facet of Machiavelli's theorisation. Carr concedes that the inconsistency of Machiavelli's realism rests in his *Exhortation to free Italy from the Barbarians*, 'a goal whose necessity could be deduced from no realist premise' and thus opens the door for 'utopianism to penetrate the citadel of realism'.[78] In another ambivalent passage, Machiavelli declares:

> I am not unaware that many have held and hold the opinion that events are controlled by fortune and by God in such a way that the prudence of men cannot modify them … Nonetheless, so as not to rule out our free will, I believe that it is probably true that fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves.[79]

This opening suggests that Machiavelli's approach to adverse fortune is not one of demise. For one thing, his theory is one of political action. Politics is indeed a field of action, which requires its own technical tools, which Machiavelli studied in depth, not just with the purpose of *understanding*, but also of strategically *steering* political outcomes. For another, it is a theory of *mutation* and political change.[80] Machiavelli, indeed, reversed the view – from Plato to Aristotle – that social conflict was a degeneration of political life, whereby the seeds for a functioning and healthy society were to be found in harmony. Rather, he envisaged that conflict has the possibility of tempering societal and

[74] Bell, 'Political realism and the limits of ethics', p. 103. The concept of balance of power pledges this interpretation on the ground of its endorsement of the *status quo* as 'an essential stabilising factor in a society of sovereign nations' and its connection to the preservation of 'the multiplicity of elements' composing the system. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 174–89. Although *status quo* powers are not seen as 'morally superior', the balance of power, as imperfect as it may be, is the product of an international *society*: 'And whenever a nation might tend to forget that indispensable precondition of independence and stability, the consensus of all other nations will not.' Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 233, 239. Hence, even if – compared to defensive neorealists – the theoretical framework provided by classical realists was more nuanced and articulated, it would still resonate with a *status quo* bias. Randall L. Schweller, 'Neorealism's status quo bias: What security dilemma?', *Security Studies*, 15:3 (1996), pp. 90–121.

[75] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 10; Carr, *Nationalism and After*.

[76] For a critical investigation of the alleged monolithic conception of statecentrism in Carr and Morgenthau, see Sean Molloy, 'Realism: a problematic paradigm', *Security Dialogue*, 34 (2003), pp. 71–85.

[77] These postures elaborate on the prudential component of Machiavelli's theorisation: 'Prudence consists in being able to assess the nature of a particular threat and in accepting the lesser evil'. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XXI, p. 123.

[78] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 90.

[79] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XXV, p. 130.

[80] Arendt, *On Revolution*; Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1999).

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political instability: as in Galileo's physics, the key for social accomplishment lays in motion, rather than rest.[81] When linked to generative purposes, conflict is not to be feared, but to be embraced.[82]

Hence, and despite his cyclical vision of history, radical change was conceived as imperative in times of political corruption and degeneration. In this perspective, Machiavelli's revolt against utopianism was precisely a pledge to consider the facticity of political action and question history in search for patterns of behaviour that could subvert the *status quo*. Tension within political action and historical contingency becomes an indispensable prism through which one may grasp alternative myths of Machiavelli. Machiavelli undertook political enquiry to concur with the making of the real world. Thus, radical political thought finds in his pragmatic, action-oriented posture the seeds to establish a new myth: that of the innovator.

IV. Making history 'without embankments and without dykes':[83] Machiavelli as an innovator

> Because a necessary war is a just war and where there is hope only in arms, those arms are holy.[84]

The analysis of Machiavelli's historical context constitutes the first step for deconstructing old mythologies and edifying new ones. Contrary to conservative readings – which derive from his view on human nature some transcendental rules that statesmen should apply to maintain the *status quo* – progressive readings edified the myth of the '*new Prince*', symbolising political innovation and redemption.[85] The combined reading of the *Discorsi*[86] and Chapter XXVI 'Exhortation to liberate Italy from the Barbarians' casts *The Prince* in a progressive light. This move spurred an extraordinary array of progressive and radical interpretations.[87] *The Prince* could be read as a treatise on

[81] Neal Wood, 'Some reflections on Sorel and Machiavelli', *Political Science Quarterly*, 83:1 (1968), pp. 76–91 (pp. 85–8).

[82] Naturally, not all conflict is to be praised. Machiavelli fiercely inveighed against sectarianism – a degeneration of political life associated with personal greed and the erosion of the political fibre – while praising social conflict – as 'vital to the development of good laws and the continuity of … political founding principles'. Kent E. Brudney, 'Machiavelli on social class and class conflict', *Political Theory*, 12:4 (1984), pp. 507–19 (p. 514). See, extensively, Machiavelli in Rinaldo Rinaldi (ed.), *Discorsi Sopra la Prima Decade di Tito Livio, L'Arte della Guerra e Altre Opere*, Book 1, IV (Turin: Utet, 2006), pp. 445–50.

[83] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XXV, pp. 130–1.

[84] Ibid., ch. XXVI, p. 135.

[85] Not dissimilarly from Plato's philosopher-king, Machiavelli's *The Prince* could be thus conceived as a tale of a mythological hero, challenging adverse fortunes. Eric Voegelin, 'Machiavelli's *Prince*: Background and formation', *The Review of Politics*, 13:2 (1951), pp. 142–68 (164).

[86] Machiavelli in Rinaldi (ed.), *Discorsi Sopra la Prima Decade di Tito Livio*, Book 1, LVIII.

[87] These range from the myth of Machiavelli as a 'republican', 'participatory democrat', 'innovator', 'patriot', and 'revolutionary' symbol. See Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Quentin Skinner, 'Machiavelli and the maintenance of freedom', *Politics*, 18:3 (1983), pp. 3–15; John P. McCormick, 'Machiavelli against republicanism: On the Cambridge School's "Guicciardinian Moments"', *Political Theory*, 31:5 (2003), pp. 615–43; John G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Voegelin, 'Machiavelli's *Prince*'; Croce, 'Una questione che forse non si chiuderà mai'; Georg W. F. Hegel, *The German Constitution*, in Laurence Dickey and H. Barry Nisbet (eds), *Political Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 6–102; Gramsci, QC13.

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sovereignty, rather than on the *art of government*.[88] More diffusely, as Etienne Balibar's interpretation of Althusser's Machiavelli reads,

> Machiavelli's discourse of 'political science' is not *theoretical* in the universalist sense …: because it is neither 'without a subject' nor 'without addressee'. Machiavelli writes *from within* a conflictual situation …, in order to influence or change it, i.e. *produce an effect* (or 'be effective').[89]

Departing from historical analysis and his stated political purposes, Machiavelli could be described as the emblem of a 'driven intellectual' confronting three parallel orders of problems: (1) how to overcome fights within the Florentine Republic; (2) how to achieve an inter-Italian balance of power and overcome both the influence of the Pope and municipal and feudal remnants; and (3) how to unite Italian states and position them in European fights for hegemony. The interference of the Church, the lack of protestant reformation, the inability of the 'economic-corporative' class to act as a vector of change, and the mainly non-industrialised character of the 'cities of silence' contributed to the failure of organising a 'national-popular collective will' and made an 'artichoke' of Italy, to be gobbled leaf by leaf in the Renaissance and beyond.[90]

In this regard, the historical problems through which Machiavelli navigated in the sixteenth century pointed precisely to the difficulties of the emergence of a unitary political agent out of a stormy international and domestic landscape.[91] In addition to the swinging system of alliance among Italian city states, and the expansionistic policies pursued by German Princes, the French and the Hapsburgs, the Italian political landscape was dominated by deep internal cleavages, whereby a plethora of actors – from urban governments to guilds, from ecclesiastic associations to powerful bankers – gave rise to a polycentric order characterised by ever-changing alliances and allegiances. As with this inherently blurred border, the Renaissance, and premodern environments were widely marked by mixed political and economic developmental patterns.

In this framework, the Italian 'miniature state system' fatigued developing into either the absolutist state or an accomplished capitalist system.[92] While intellectuals served as a vector of change in France, Italian intellectuals remained confined in a feudal and cosmopolitan framework.[93] In the French experience of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Third State exercised hegemony

[88] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 138–40.

[89] Etienne Balibar 'Essere principe, essere populare: the principle of antagonism in Machiavelli's epistemology', in Fabio Frosini, Filippo Del Lucchese, and Vittorio Morfino (eds), *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy, and Language* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 351.

[90] Gramsci, respectively QC13, p. 125; Q19, p. 207.

[91] The international system was undergoing epochal changes, due to the disarray of the *Respublica Christiana* – in which the idea of a common destiny united together the Latin West against Asian threats – and the establishment of new 'national' legal jurisdictions in France (1469), England (1485), and Spain (1492). Internally, Italy witnessed a volatile and unstable balance of power, characterised by an oscillating system of alliance among the four main city-states: the kingdom of Naples in the south; the aristocratic republic of Venice in the northeast; the duchy of Milan in the northwest; and Florence and the Papal States in the centre. Gregg Russell, 'Machiavelli's science of statecraft', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 16:2 (2005), pp. 227–50; Adam Watson, *The Evolution of the International System: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (2nd edn, London: Routledge 2009), pp. 116–40.

[92] Justin Rosenberg, 'Secret origins of the state: the structural basis of *raison d'état*', *Review of International Studies*, 18:2 (1992), pp. 131–59 (p. 132).

[93] Gramsci, QC13, pp. 126–9.

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through the Monarch. Its strength and self-consciousness served to indirectly clamp down on both the absolutism and the reactionary feudal forces. Conversely, the Italian economy got trapped in the embryonic stage of mercantilism and did not find support from a unified state that was able to embody and systematise burghers' entreaties into a functional political and economic system.[94]

Based on a competitive social hierarchy at the domestic level, city-states struggled internally to monopolise 'questions of facts and ethics'.[95] A centralised source of political authority was further contested on the grounds of a staggering internal political legitimacy. The fragile and dispersed social formations remained in disunity and untied to their government. In this context, many Italian city-states were unable to create a functioning system of protection for their citizens or create an ethos unifying the people in the name of some sort of general interest.

In this light, *The Prince* could be regarded as a tale of a vacuum of political agency, and a treatise on how to overcome the disjunction between the government and the polity. The emphasis on the new principalities throughout his book thus pairs off with the centrality of the foundational moment of state genealogy. Machiavelli's reference to 'just war' relates therefore to the seizure of power, a situation of war, not of ordinary exercise of power:[96] 'we are brought back to that primordial moment in which a prince – defined as "whoever understands" Machiavelli's advice – seizes *lo stato*'.[97]

The innovator (that is, the agent that intends to establish a new legal system over a pre-existing one) operates with the intent of creating a legal suspension in the extant order: the constitutive moment could not but be a disruptive one, operating according to logics of exceptionality, derogation, and justification in the name of the future order.[98] Machiavelli, as Norberto Bobbio puts in, reflected precisely on how to make the transition from 'the government of men' to the 'government of laws'.[99] Hence, government was the aspiration, not yet the object of his inquiry.

Machiavelli hints therefore at the moral requirements to be held in the contingency of a standstill — when fuelling, rather than stifling, political and social contradictions help achieve political goals. Machiavelli warns that innovation entails a far more pronounced *virtù* to shape *fortuna* if compared to conservation.[100] In turbulent times, political considerations and propositions are based on 'expediency', as opposed to morality[101] and require 'the necessary step to be undertaken when you

[94] Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1974), pp. 150–1.

[95] Charles Tilly, 'War making and state making as organised crime', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169–91 (p. 174).

[96] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), p. 84.

[97] Breiner, 'Machiavelli's "new Prince"', p. 70.

[98] The wide use of concessive clauses and his tendency to move from the exception to the rule in Machiavelli's writing confirm this logic of exceptionality. See Fredi Chiappelli, *Nuovi studi sul linguaggio del Machiavelli* (Firenze, Le Monnier, *1969); Carlo Ginsburg, 'Machiavelli, l'Eccezione e la Regola: Linee di una Ricerca in Corso', Quaderni Storici, 112:1 (2003).*

[99] Norberto Bobbio, 'Governo degli Uomini o Governo delle Leggi?', in Norberto Bobbio (ed.), *Il futuro della democrazia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1984), pp. 169–79.

[100] Extensively, Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. VI.

[101] Terence Ball, 'The picaresque Prince: Reflections on Machiavelli and moral change', *Political Theory*, 12:4 (1984), pp. 521–36 (p. 524). In this regard, Machiavelli's oft-quoted passage in Chapter XV – 'a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much

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are not crafting a utopia for "a ready-made state"'.[102] Successful political actions are products of two forces, one structural and one agentic. *Fortuna* refers to all contingencies that fall beyond the control of men. *Virtù* is the ability to mold *fortuna*. By this token, Machiavelli refers to *virtù* as '*aretè*', as 'technique' and 'role-related specific excellence'.[103] Brutality and deception are thus not the ultimate goal of political action, but rather a means to be surgically applied only when *necessità* so requires.[104]

In both *The Prince* and in the *Discorsi* (edited by Rinaldo Rinaldi), Machiavelli's idea of political action combines a reflection on how to achieve power *by coercion* and *by consent*.[105] Conditions for success, neither naked force – the Lion – nor treachery – the Fox – are conducive of good government. Indeed, in both *The Prince* and the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli distinguishes between *imperio* (power) and *gloria* (glory) surrounding political action. He is of the view that while stratagems or treachery may be necessary to attain power, this is not so for glory.[106] Glory, honour, fame, praise, esteem, and reputation – attributes that Machiavelli often pairs off with *bene comune* (common good), *sommo bene* (greatest good), *rispetto delle leggi* (respect of law), *giudicio* (discernment) – come with a stable, prudent *vivere libero* (free community).[107]

In the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli elaborates on the ideational springs that cement a free community (*uno vivere libero)* of educated, armed free men. These virtues are both military and moral. The moral compass, is constituted by the devotion to one's a free community, as secured by good laws and nourished through culture and imitation of the great examples of the past.[108]

Hence, both Machiavelli's reference to *The Prince* and the uselessness of a *sine capite multitudo* (a multitude without a head) could be interpreted as pointing not to a real man, but to a metaphorical one, a civil symbol nurtured by love for freedom, moral and physical strength, and adhesion to the common good.[109] In this direction, Gramsci interprets *The Prince* as addressing the people, the body politics:

> Machiavelli merges with the people, becomes the people, not, however, some generic people, but the people whom he, Machiavelli, has convinced by the preceding argument, the people

that is evil' – is unsurprisingly similar to Weber's considerations: 'What is here done with good intentions but unwisely and hence with disastrous results is morally defective'. Respectively, Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XV, p. 91; and Max Weber, 'Politics as a vocation', in Hans H. Gerth and Charles W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 119–26.

[102] Gramsci, QC13, p. 128.

[103] Ball, 'The picaresque Prince', p. 526.

[104] *Necessità* can be defined as 'the point in the life of the state at which *fortuna* threatens to overcome *virtù*.' David Sullivan, 'Machiavelli's balance of power theory', *Social Science Quarterly*, 54:2 (1997), pp. 258–70 (p. 261). Pursuing a cruel behaviour may be better than indulging in 'being too compassionate, [and] allow [ing] disorders which lead to murder and rapine'. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XVII, p. 95.

[105] Hence, Worth comments, the Prince should forge 'a civic bond' with the 'common people if he is to run a successful principality'. Worth, *Resistance in the Age of Austerity*, p. 4.

[106] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. VIII, p. 63; and in Rinaldi (ed.), *Discorsi Sopra la Prima Decade di Tito Livio*, Book 3, XL, pp. 1170–1.

[107] See diffusely Machiavelli in Rinaldi (ed.), *Discorsi Sopra la Prima Decade di Tito Livio*, Book 1, LVIII and Book 2, LVII, pp. 742–3.

[108] Ibid., Book 1, LVIII, p. 709.

[109] 'Una Moltitudine sanza Capo' is the title of Book 1, XLIV, p. 643. The reference is to Titus Livy, *Ad Urbe Condita*, III, p. 51.

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whose consciousness and whose expression he becomes and feels himself to be, with whom he feels identified.[110]

On the ground of these reflections, Gramsci insisted that, although in an 'aphoristic and unsystematic' manner, Machiavelli sensed the necessity to avail of a vital momentum to destroy existing 'moral and legal relationships'.[111] Notably, Machiavelli inveighed against Italy's wounded process of state- and nation-building. In Gramsci's view, the state and the market – that is, unifying the state and tying up economically the countryside and urban centres – were both preconditions to accomplish a more advanced societal model. The economic reflection was necessary to cut the Gordian knot of whether cultural reform could overlook a change in economic and social power relations. Thus, Gramsci manufactured the myth of Machiavelli as the unappreciated precursor of the nascent *bourgeoisie*, an economic thinker combining mercantilism with physiocracy.[112]

With these adjustments, Machiavelli can be revaluated for having crafted the 'philosophy of praxis', that 'does not recognise transcendental or immanent [in the metaphysical sense] elements, but instead is based entirely on the concrete action of man, who out of historical necessity works and transforms reality'. In this light, Machiavelli 'theorised a practice' and offered 'the concrete vision of the organisational physiognomy of the revolutionary process'.[113] The very definition of hegemony provided by Gramsci largely drew on Machiavelli's intuitions on political action.[114] In this respect, and notwithstanding the various progressive readings, Gramsci has eminently and systematically connected two 'discourse-call for action' books, *The Prince* and the *Manifesto*.[115]

V. From history to mythology: Crafting the myth of the *Modern Prince*

The aim of dictatorship is to destroy itself.[116]

As this overview shows, Gramsci's re-examination of Marxism had in common with political realism a rejection of transcendence, a commitment to a scientific historical method, a conception of politics as a realm of power struggles, and a pragmatic vision of politics and society. Like Morgenthau, Gramsci largely drew on a scientific conception that merged interpretivism and materialism. Gramsci's commitment to a 'scientific' method was derailed from both positivism and 'mechanical economistic causation'.[117] Similarly, Gramsci nestled his scientific apparatus into a general philosophy and advocated an ethic of responsibility as a foundation for political action.

[110] Gramsci, QC13, p. 88.
[111] Ibid., p. 9.
[112] Ibid., p. 104.
[113] Respectively, Gramsci, QC13, p. 104; and Leonardo Paggi, 'Machiavelli e Gramsci', *Studi Storici*, 10:4 (1969), pp. 833–76 (p. 843).
[114] In this direction, see Robert Cox, 'Multilateralism and world order', *Review of International Studies*, 18:2 (1992), pp. 161–80. On the relevance of Machiavelli in Gramsci's theorisation, see also Peter D. Thomas, 'Gramsci's Machiavellian metaphor: Restaging *The Prince*', in Fabio Frosini, Filippo Del Lucchese, and Vittorio Morfino (eds), *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy, and Language* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 440–56.
[115] In the words of Lefort, 'Gramsci speaks of the one and the other and of what in the discourse of the one introduces us to the discourse of the other'. Claude Lefort, *Le Travail de l'Oeuvre Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 248–50, author's translation.
[116] Gramsci, 'The commitments of political science', p. 12, in Paggi, 'Machiavelli e Gramsci', p. 868.
[117] Gramsci, QC 19, p. 34.

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However, the point of contact between Gramsci and the political realism of a scholar such as Morgenthau ends here. Gramsci allied realism to 'a practical vision of change', one that is 'willing to adopt ruthless measures in the pursuit of a transformative agenda, provided that the desired changes ("a new balance of forces") are sanctioned by empirical reality'.[118] His philosophy of praxis operates a boundary-spanning connection between both ideational and material components, and knowledge and action. In Gramsci's philosophical framework, ideas and ideologies are social forces, to be deployed strategically to allow change to unfold. The ideational component is thus a vital building block of social action, forging and consolidating material power.

Gramsci's realism thus was bifurcated: one track saw political necessity mediated by 'politics as it ought to be'[119] and the other track reflected a programmatic aim to gain hegemony and trigger change through social struggles. His reading of Machiavelli's political realism is related to Marx in two ways: through the notion of autonomy of the political sphere from morality and through the aim of analysing objectively society in order to change it.[120] Hence, in contrast to classical realism, his theorisation is in essence 'a discourse on the genesis and formation of the historical collective subject'.[121] From this standpoint, Gramsci criticised both political realists and liberals for having reduced *The Prince* to the abstract metaphor of a treacherous statesman, in such ways that nothing could be taken out of it but a caricature of the petty politics of backroom deals and plotting.

In order to cement a 'concrete fantasy that operates on a dispersed and pulverised people, to arouse and organise its collective will' the material moment needs to be supported by an ideational one, able to appeal to common visions of the past and future.[122] In this light, the *Modern Prince* offered a platform for a moral, economic and social revolution:

> As it develops the *Moderno Principe* subverts the entire system of intellectual and moral relationships. Its developing means precisely that any act can be conceived either as useful or damaging, as virtuous or heinous only insofar it has the *Moderno Principe* itself as point of reference … . In the consciences, the *Principe* takes the place, of the divinity or the categorical imperative; he becomes the basis of a modern laicism and of a complete laicisation of all social life and customary relations.[123]

From this renewed mythological strength, Gramsci was then ready to set up the basis of his own mythological *Prince,* a collective political agent able to confront the challenges of his times. Gramsci renders unto Machiavelli the merit of having reflected on how to cohesively celebrate the two souls of the nation: the intellectuals (*acculturate* and *xenophiles*) and the people, whose needs, rather than intellectual might, would eventually lead to a revolution.[124]

[118] Joseph V. Femia, 'Gramsci, Machiavelli and International Relations', *Political Quarterly*, 76:3 (2005), pp. 341–9 (p. 346).

[119] Politics as it ought to be, in Gramsci's understanding, should not indulge in moralism: 'we need to see whether the "ought to be" is an arbitrary or a necessary act; concrete willingness or velleity'. Gramsci, QC13, p. 135.

[120] Compare with Croce's reference to Marx as 'the Machiavelli of the proletariat' in Benedetto Croce, *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica* (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 1968), p. 112.

[121] Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power On the Relation between Machiavelli and Gramsci* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 1.

[122] Gramsci, QC13, p. 86.

[123] Ibid., p. 104.

[124] A revolution, in this perspective, would not stem either from the deterministic conflation of the contradictions of capitalism or from the rationalistic design of a class of enlightened intellectuals, as respectively Marx and

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The notorious excerpt attributed to Machiavelli 'the ends justify the means' helps not only grasp how much of an impact interpretation has on the reading of Machiavelli, but also to understand a central tenet of Gramsci's theorisation. Machiavelli actually said: 'In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court of appeal, one judges by the result.'[125] Machiavelli connects this maxim to the task of 'conquering and maintaining' the state and specifically refers to 'the common people' as being 'impressed by appearance and results'. Now, the 'common people' – translated by James B. Atkinson as 'the unintelligent people' – corresponds to the word '*vulgo*' ('faceless masses').[126] It was hence possible to hypothesise that Machiavelli was warning against the deceptive tendency to judge by appearance. This distinction dialogues with Gramsci's differentiation between '*Buonsenso*' as opposed to '*Senso Comune*' and his insistence on the role of organic intellectuals as the driving force leading the constitution of an antagonist historical bloc. In this sense, *The Prince* was a political manifesto: 'Machiavellianism as a science' could serve '"those who are not in the know", those who are not born into the tradition of statesmen'.[127]

In both Machiavelli's and Gramsci's theory of political action, the ability of the people to accomplish their historical mission is tied to their ability to raise their levels of awareness and political culture. For both authors knowledge – let alone a common language[128] – sits in a distinctive relationship to political action. It is knowledge that determines both the quality and the position of collective actors in the social system.[129] Popular education and realist thinking in both authors are the necessary steps allowing transiting from *popular* to *political* realism, that is, turn into act the potentiality of popular political agency.[130]

Elaborating from this spark, *The Prince* could be studied as a historical simplification of a myth, rejoicing (Georges) Sorelian conceptions of spontaneous political imaginary and Leninist conceptions of the political organisation of the masses. The spontaneous and the rational components of political action thus corresponded to the two natures of the Centaur Chiron, offering respectively short-term

Croce assumed. Departing from Cuoco's distinction between passive and active revolution, Gramsci suggests that a revolution takes steps from the capacity of the intellectuals to elaborate the rudimentary 'ideas of the people', who 'at times glimpse nearly instinctively, often follow with enthusiasm, but seldom are able to form by themselves'.

[125] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XVIII, p. 101.

[126] For a critical discussion of the word *vulgo*, see Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by James B. Atkinson (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1976), p. 284.

[127] Gramsci, QC13, p. 152.

[128] Beyond Marxism, Gramsci was greatly influenced by his linguistic background and attracted by the works of scholars such as Croce's Hegelian linguistic and Bartoli's connection between 'linguistic influence' and 'cultural power' (Bartoli as quoted in Peter R. Ives, 'Vernacular materialism: Antonio Gramsci and the theory of language' (unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York University Toronto, Ontario, May 2008), p. 54. Gramsci saw the study of language as an integral part of studies of cultural hegemony and the Italian nation. Indeed, in Italy the question of language was no mere academic disquisition. The use of dialects in a country that underwent different foreign dominations outlived the 1870 unification. The 'imposition' of Italian as the national language was urged by Mussolini in 1931–2. While Croce espoused the ideal of a national language as the cradle of the nation, Gramsci warned against the perils of an elite-imposed language and advocated a common language grounded on a unified national experience.

[129] For Machiavelli it is the spirit of laws, imitation of great examples, education and civic culture that make a united people strong. For Gramsci, the conditions for popular accomplishment is culture, defined as 'the organisation, discipline of one's inner self; a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's historical value, one's own function in life, one own rights and obligations'. Antonio Gramsci, 'Socialismo e Cultura', in David Forgacs (ed.), *The Gramsci Reader – Selected Writings 1916–1935* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 57.

[130] Lefort, *Le Travail de l'Oeuvre Machiavel*, p. 246.

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transitory tactics and long-term strategic goals. In the short-term, the Sorelian moment offered the *élan vital*, sparking a social upheaval.[131] A Sorelian myth – rejoicing narratives of present and past heroism – allowed Gramsci to reflect on instruments of mobilisation and thus offered the irrational catalyst for radical action.

Yet, a popular movement without a platform of action could easily fall victim to 'the organic flaws of utopia'.[132] The Leninist momentum offered thus the systematic platform for inlaying the Sorelian impetus into a programmatic political framework. The legitimation of dirigisme – which naturally extends to the endorsement of Machiavelli's overtones – is motivated as 'education and discipline of the not-yet-free man'.[133] The mass party was thus elected as the *Modern Prince*, a medium of people's emancipation. In difference from the Sorelian syndicate structure, the Gramscian party organically reflected the structure of society and joined together intellectuals, workers and peasants. Like Georges Sorel, Gramsci follows Bergson in acknowledging that a considerable amount both of indeterminacy and arbitrary and violent action are necessary instances of historical change. Yet, like in Machiavelli, the vital spark needs to be sided by rational programming and centralised coordination. Whereas spontaneous revolt destroys the *status quo*, the Prince-party builds up and systematises the new political order.

Gramsci thus breaks down Machiavelli's definition of *virtù* as '*aretê*' into a sequential platform of action. The connection between the collective 'popular lion' and the 'party fox' is sequential and yet not necessarily linear, as it needs to realistically acknowledge the degree of backwardness of the less advantaged Italian classes. Hence, the role of the party's tactic ought to be one of bringing the masses progressively to self-awareness. The Modern Prince-Party, in this sense, had to remain loyal to its strategic 'rallying cry' in the long-term, while readjusting it to the necessity of the moment of 'breaking through' the *status quo*. *The Prince* was thus a book to be read carefully by civil society, not to accept naked power, but to learn from it how to dismiss logics of ruthless behaviour once hegemony has been established. Hence, the myth of *The Prince* had to be established before being debunked.

As Claude Lefort puts it, Gramsci's *Moderno Principe* destroys three conceptual distinctions: between object and subject of knowledge, between theory and practice, and between identity and difference of times.[134] In the first place, both Machiavelli and Gramsci wrote to instigate a change. Machiavelli planned a 'theoretical utopia' disclosing a 'profound unity' in which the monarchy constitutes the foundation and the republic the duration of the same object: a national-popular state.[135] Gramsci advanced the idea of a revolutionary mass party able to single out an uprising in the mid-1930s fascist Italy: the ambition of aligning political and civil society through the constitution of a successful counter-hegemonic historical bloc.

Secondly, and relatedly, both tried to 'theorise a praxis'. Their writing is devolved to the creation of a theoretical framework that can lead to successful political action, that is, a theory of hegemony. In the case of Gramsci, the philosophy of praxis – one that Machiavelli anticipated – is 'concrete

[131] Henry Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911).
[132] Gramsci, *The Prince*, author's translation.
[133] F. Alderisio, 'La Politica del Machiavelli nella Rivalutazione dell'Hegel e del Fichte', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, XV:3–4 (1931), pp. 273–98, as quoted in Gramsci, QC13, p. 129.
[134] Lefort, *Le Travail de l'Oeuvre Machiavel*, pp. 248–51.
[135] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, pp. 65–6; Fabio Frosini, 'Luigi Russo e Georges Sorel: Sulla Genesi del "Moderno Principe" nei "Quaderni del carcere" di Antonio Gramsci', *Studi Storici*, 54:3 (2013), pp. 543–90.

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fantasy', a journey from pragmatism to utopia. Both Machiavelli and Gramsci specifically designed a political myth to trigger *grassroots change*. Politics is, hence, just about ends and means as much as it is also about what happens between them. In this sense, *The Prince* is a symbol speaking of both the writer and the reader of a political project.

Finally, both interrogate and connect the past in search of strategies of political change. In this regard, in Gramsci's eye, notwithstanding their difference, Machiavelli and Marx speak of the same political project, one able to establish a new political reality. The establishment of a 'an-historical' myth of *The Prince* as a symbol of social change – articulated in its different historical manifestations – can potentially lead 'from critique towards [the] constitution' of an organised hegemonic subject in the present times.[136] In this sense, the myth of *The Prince* gives back critical theory to pragmatic action. Despite criticisms,[137] the recent attempts to apply a version of Machiavelli, post-national Prince,[138] constitute a reflection on the forms and organisation of a new political project at the global stage, one that brings back the people at the core of the discipline.

Conclusions: *The Prince*, whose myth for IR?

> The velleities of a romantic wield the pen of a realist.[139]

Classical realism's early monopoly over IR may help explain why the discipline has long associated Machiavelli with realist tenets and ideas. Classical realism in IR has been the 'first comer' into authors like Thomas Hobbes and Niccoló Machiavelli – and for many years few authors have questioned the association between realism and those classical authors. That hegemony has long excluded alternative readings and amounted to a more simplistic and narrow understanding of an otherwise rich and even eclectic thought. More recently, however, the linguistic/interpretive turn in IR scholarship, and the proliferation of alternative, critical perspectives is spurring a revisitation and reinterpretation of such authors. The opening of IR as a semantic field has thus offered the opportunity to look at some of the classics reflexively, in ways that challenge the self-imposed cages of the 'Traditions Tradition'.[140] Epstein's 'Lacanian' reading of Hobbes bears testimony to this change.

As with all myths, the myth of Machiavelli's *The Prince* transcends a single interpretation: what inflects it is precisely its contingent use. The myth of *The Prince* flexibly serves and dignifies different purposes. Classical realists focused primarily on Machiavelli's epistemological commitment to 'represent things as they are in actual truth'. They saw him only as someone who wanted to *diagnose* politics as an exercise of power, a concept that they associate with statehood.[141] This myth fed a

[136] Peter D. Thomas, 'Hegemony, passive revolution and the Modern Prince', *Thesis Eleven*, 117:1 (2013), pp. 20–41 (p. 27).

[137] See, for example, the objections moved by Femia, 'Gramsci, Machiavelli and International Relations'; and Randall D. Germain and Michael Kenny, 'Engaging Gramsci: International Relations theory and the new Gramscians', *Review of International Studies*, 24:1 (1998), pp. 3–21.

[138] Gill, 'The post-modern Prince'; Owen, *Resistance in the Age of Austerity*.

[139] Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 299.

[140] Renee Jeffery, 'Tradition as invention: the Traditions Tradition and the history of ideas in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 34:1 (2005), pp. 57–84.

[141] Damon Coletta and Paul Carrese, 'America's Machiavelli problem: Restoring prudent leadership in US strategy', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter Edition (2015), p. 18.

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tragic vision of history, based on some general rules of behaviour applying to the conduct of domestic and foreign relations. Critical readings drew inspiration from his *writing from within* and his aim to *produce an effect* and pointed at the need to seize power, in further merging together the national and social part of the story. The realist and Gramscian myths of Machiavelli have, therefore, tapped into different elements of his intricate rhetorical framework, which each has sought to adapt to their own goals.

By contrasting the realist and Gramscian myths of *The Prince* we can grasp some of their commonalities and differences, and thus get a richer appreciation of the meaning of Machiavelli's work and legacy. Epistemologically, the classical realist and Gramscian schools share some important foundations.[142] Although neither classical realism nor Gramscianism entirely conflate with philosophical realism, these common features recall Andrew Sayer's eight-fold description of realism. These include: the existence of a mind-independent reality; the fallibility and partisan character of human knowledge, the discontinuous and unsteady development of human knowledge; the causal power of natural and social objects; the differentiated and stratified character of the things of the world; the concept-dependent nature of social phenomena; the interpretation of science as a social practice; and the necessarily critical character of social science.[143] In this narrow sense, Morgenthau, Carr, Gramsci, and Machiavelli can all be constructed as realists. According to this perspective, ethical behaviour is informed by a reality that is historically contingent. Thus, in analysing politics, both classical realists and critical theorists share a pragmatic and contextual definition of the sources of political normativity. In both cases, the logic of politics outlines the contours of possibility for ethics.

Classical realists and critical scholars agree on another important point, namely that truth is a 'semantical relation between language and reality'.[144] However, the critical attitude towards both international and scientific discourses does not encourage the same understanding on the final purpose of theorising. In a realist understanding, grounding political theorisation to political reality ensures that political behaviour does not force reality. However, the full detachment of the act of theorisation from a political platform fuels inaction and cynicism. In this sense, classical realism's critique 'does not tie it to any particular political project', but focuses 'on unmasking power relations, and exposing self-interest, hypocrisy, and folly, whether in domestic or international politics'.[145] Gramsci's mythological *Prince* combines the epistemological commitment to understand the 'real' with the programmatic plan to edify a future society.[146] Hence, he detached the precepts of *The Prince* from both the exercise of governmental power and the personification of such power. *The Prince* is not a man, or a male, or an individual, nor the gatekeeper of the control room, but a symbol of social change. By emphasising the trajectory of political action, Gramsci's reading opens the door to radical action and promises to empower those collective social actors who are not in power, that is, the dispossessed.

[142] See, for example, Milan Babíc, 'Realism as critical theory: the international thought of E. H. Carr', *International Studies Review*, 15:4 (2013), pp. 491–514; Robert Cox, 'E. H. Carr and the crisisof twentieth-century liberalism: Reflections and lessons', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 38:3 (2010), pp. 1–11.

[143] Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 5–6.

[144] Ilkka Niiniluoto, *Critical Scientific Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 42.

[145] Duncan S. Bell (ed.), *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[146] For an articulation of the theory of hegemony as a project, see Thomas, 'Hegemony, passive revolution and the Modern Prince', p. 27.

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The multi-fold faceting of Machiavelli's legacy draws onto 'the uneasy relationship between *knowledge* and *partisanship*', and the conflation this generates into 'specific debates between realism (or pragmatism, ...) or utopianism'.[147] It is somewhat obvious to suggest that there is a never-ending tension between ideas and pragmatism. And yet, the attempt to establish a clear-cut boundary between the two is precisely what Machiavelli so powerfully shakes. The relative silence of the myth of *The Prince* as harbinger of grassroots change is in this regard an 'inexplicable omission'[148] at the core of IR theorising, which has urged IR scholars to engage with progressive mythologies of *The Prince*.

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[147] Balibar, 'Essere principe, essere populare', p. 349.
[148] Richard Ashley, 'Untying the sovereign state: a double reading of the anarchy problematique', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 17:2 (1988), pp. 227–62.

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