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Angelo Codevilla: Introduction to His Translation of Machiavelli's The Prince Study Guide, 2014

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**ANGELO CODEVILLA: INTRODUCTION TO HIS
TRANSLATION OF MACHIAVELLI'S *THE PRINCE*
STUDY GUIDE, 2014
Steven Alan Samson**

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Outline

- A. FOUNTAINHEAD OF MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT (vii-viii)
 - 1. Published in 1532
 - a. It was already dated five years after Machiavelli's death in 1527
 - 2. Levels of *The Prince*
 - a. Various ways of organizing governments
 - b. Teaching the art of government
 - 1) *Realpolitik*
 - 2) **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** called it the handbook of antimonarchists
 - c. Nature of our concepts of right and wrong
 - 1) Thrasymachus equals justice is the interest of the stronger
 - 2) Machiavelli as a teacher of evil
 - 3) His use as a compass
 - 3. Modern Government Amoralism Can Only Be Explained In Terms of Machiavelli's Ideas
- B. MACHIAVELLI'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT (viii-x)
 - 1. Invasion of Charles VIII, 1494
 - 2. Medieval Autonomy of Italian Cities
 - a. Canon lawyers and traders
 - 3. Use of Spain and France
 - a. Imperial struggle
 - 1) Venice
 - 2) Milan and Florence
 - 3) Rome
 - 4. Florentine Republic
 - a. **Girolamo Savonarola**
 - b. **Piero Soderini**
 - 4. Machiavelli's fourteen-year career as a servant
 - a. France's professional military
 - b. **Cesare Borgia**
 - c. Machiavelli's *Ordinanza*
 - d. *La Mandragola*
 - 5. Policy Prescriptions in *The Prince*
 - a. Native Armed Forces
 - b. Power is the only thing
 - 6. **Francesco Guicciardini**
 - a. Romagna
- C. PROBLEMS OF POLITICAL LIFE EQUALS WHAT MEN DO (x-xiii)
 - 1. Guidebook to Success
 - a. Defense against conspiracies
 - b. Advice to conspirators
 - c. Contradictory advice
 - 2. Henry IV and Stalin
 - 3. Founders of Regimes
 - a. Earlier works sought to improve character.

- b. Machiavelli's maxims are not so directed
 - c. He pointed readers to a new kind of government
 - 4. This Kind of Government Had Begun to Take Shape under Ferdinand and Isabella
 - a. But legal-constitutional thought was still medieval
 - 1) In theory, the primary political unit was still Christendom: Every element had its place
 - 2) Only God is sovereign
 - b. But if Machiavelli was correct, the Spanish and French Kings had not gone far enough in subduing the Church
 - 5. Machiavelli's Intellectual Influence
 - a. **Jean Bodin**: Concept of sovereignty
 - b. **Thomas Hobbes**: Why non-princes would want to live as subjects of the modern sovereign state
 - c. **Hugo Grotius**: Theory of relations between sovereign regimes
 - 6. Mitigating the Power of Absolute Rulers
 - a. Most constitutional thinkers of "the new political science" worked on the problem from Machiavelli's premise about "what men do"
 - 1) John Locke
 - 2) Montesquieu
 - b. "The artfully arranged **clash of interests**, making up for the defect of better motives, might yield pleasant living."
 - 7. Objectives, Glory, and Empire
 - a. Real rulers – those of "the family of the lion or the tribe of the eagle" (Lincoln) – cannot be constrained by anything
 - b. Nothing can constrain corrupt or vicious men
 - 8. Men's Habits May Unfit Them for Self-Government
 - a. Stephen Douglas's popular sovereignty
 - b. **Abraham Lincoln**
 - 1) The original sin of politics: "You work, I'll eat" [cf. Bastiat's legal plunder, Tulloch's rent-seeking]
 - 2) The habit of disposing of innocent human lives for convenience's sake makes men unfit to govern themselves
- D. REVOLUTIONARY INFLUENCE (xii-xv)
- 1. Heart of the matter is chapter 15
 - a. Machiavelli creates his own set of rules
 - 2. Question of truth
 - a. Socrates
 - b. Jesus
 - c. Pontius Pilate
 - d. Thrasymachus
 - 3. Subversive Idea That Something Can Be True and Right Even When It Contradicts a Nation's Laws or Jeopardizes Its Safety
 - a. Athens put Socrates to death
 - b. Rome resisted both Socratic philosophy and Christianity because their affirmation of truths that transcended power challenged its authority
 - c. Christianity and Socratic philosophy became dominant forces for 1000 years after Augustine
 - 1) Only nominalism challenged the notion that right and power are unrelated
 - 4. Machiavelli's Intellectual Rebellion [or Reaction] against the Present Religion
 - a. Values are opinions
 - b. **Effective truth of the matter** vs. imagination
 - 1) Deepest contradiction in his thought
 - 5. His Claim to Scientific Accuracy: Those Who Spurn His Counsel Must Come To Ruin
 - a. Thus he does not depart from the Christian-classical tradition in basing moral guidance on a nature that exists whether anyone likes it or not

6. The Nature of Machiavelli's Revolution
 - a. He manufactures his precepts rather than discovering them in nature
 - b. First he lists traits that are "imagined" to be good or bad
 - c. Then in chapter 19 he draws up a new list of traits
 - d. Here he is more than a teacher of a list of evils
 - e. He leads modern man to grasp for the power [cf. Gen. 3:1-5] to make ["knowing" or determining for oneself] one's own good and evil for one's own sovereign convenience
7. Machiavelli's Successors
 - a. Francis Bacon: Machiavelli brought the stars down to humanity
 - 1) Myth of **Prometheus**, who stole fire from the gods
 - b. Modern system builders: Descartes, Newton, Hegel, Heidegger
 - 1) Typically, they begin by setting forth arbitrary premises that channel the entire system in the desired direction
 - c. **René Descartes**: He built a world he would know perfectly as its author
 - d. G. W. F. Hegel: Written from the perspective of the creator of the universe
 - e. **Ludwig Feuerbach**: Man projects his worthiest qualities onto a god of his own creation, thereby impoverishing himself [a bridge between Hegel's and Marx's ideas of alienation]
 - f. Karl Marx
 - g. Existentialist movement's heroic attempts to assert values on the basis of the assertion itself [voluntarism or will-ism]
- E. INFLUENCE OUR TIMES (xv-xvii)
 1. Ideas Have Lives of Their Own
 - a. Results have differed from Machiavelli's aims
 2. Ethical Relativism
 - a. **Max Weber**
 - 1) Value judgments are "demonic"
 - b. Inglorious and subhuman purposes
 3. Incompatibility of Human Interests
 - a. Machiavelli still accepted the need to adjust mutual wants and for solidarity
 - b. He wanted to see political communities
 - c. The idea of incompatibility of interests has been carried to destructive and ridiculous lengths
 - 1) **Karl Marx** assumed mutual exploitation
 - 2) Such disunity invites predators
 4. Nonjudgmentalist Relativism Is Almost Unchallenged
 - a. Natural law is considered subversive
 - 1) Only positive law (legislated) is accepted
 - 2) Law is seen as an act of the will (voluntarism)
 - b. Conformity to natural and divine law prevailed until the Second World War
 - c. Pusillanimity for petty ends prevails today
 5. Decadence: Less Warlike, More Bureaucratic
 - a. Welfare states have supplanted the family
 - 1) Inability to send armed forces in harm's way
 - b. States are made by strokes of the sword
 6. Importance of Constituting Armies and Keeping Them Faithful
 - a. Fidel Castro, *et al.*
 - b. Mikhail Gorbachev
 - c. **Rarity of military service** in the American political class
 7. Twentieth-Century Paradigms of Machiavelli's Founders
 - a. Adolf Hitler
 - b. Joseph Stalin
 - c. Mao Zedong
 8. Questions of Right and Wrong
 - a. Twentieth-century's inglorious carnage

WORDS AND POWER

Outline

- A. TRANSLATOR, TRAITOR (xix-xxi)
 - 1. Linguistic Ambiguity and Puns
 - 2. Machiavelli's Ability to Change the Meaning of Words
 - 3. Epistle Dedicatory to Lorenzo de' Medici
 - 4. Machiavelli's (and His Language's) Shiftiness
 - 5. Machiavelli Regards Words as Plastic
 - a. He alters meaning by changing context [cf. Lewis Carroll's Humpty-Dumpty]
 - 6. Machiavelli's Larger Ends
 - a. Codevilla's sacrifice of elegance for the sake of faithfulness to the original
 - b. Machiavelli's artful manipulation of linguistic detail
- B. MACHIAVELLI ON LANGUAGE (xxi-xxv)
 - 1. **Language as the Ultimate Weapon**
 - 2. Purpose
 - a. Aristotle: Most characteristically human tool
 - b. Machiavelli's purpose is primacy: glory and power over others [cf. Robert Ringer's *Winning through Intimidation*]
 - 3. Waves of Barbarians
 - a. Substitution of **new names**
 - 1) How captured cities ought to be treated
 - 2) Political power depends on symbols of authority
 - b. Question of **how to deal with free cities**
 - 1) Alternative to destruction: Changing the terms in which people think
 - 4. New Names Preclude the Memory of Old Things
 - a. New religious language
 - b. Banishment of certain thoughts [Orwell's memory hole, secular confessionals]
 - 5. Florentine Audience
 - a. Courtly or curial language
 - b. **Dante's** language of reason
 - c. Machiavelli's accusation against Dante of speaking the language of a rival city
 - 6. Human Affairs Are about Winning and Losing
 - 7. **Barbarian Name Changes**
 - a. Sons named after Christian saints
 - 8. Deference to the Language of Lombardy
 - 9. Machiavelli Uses Dante as a Bad Example
 - a. For Dante, the function of language is to express the nature of things
 - b. Machiavelli: Languages are particular articulations of the universal struggle for primacy
 - 1) All speech is a form of rhetoric
 - 2) He makes his case by appealing to pride and *amor proprio*
 - 3) The main point is not to describe but gain support of one's audience
 - 10. The Best Language Is the One That Gives the Greatest Value
 - a. Its value is measured in terms of its success
 - b. Dante's missed opportunity for true greatness
 - 1) His doctrine is blamed
 - 11. Dante's Blindness to the Main Fact of Life: Struggle
 - a. Success is the use of others' material in building one's own edifice
 - 12. The Greatness of Rome
 - a. The Romans were the nerve of their own army
 - 1) They managed their own subject forces only as long as these were

- 1) He manipulated words to imply an “ought” that is cut to Machiavellian specifications [cf. *Through the Looking Glass*, chapter 6: “When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, `it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less.”]
- c. Bacon’s statement applies to latter-day **positivists** [scientific materialists] who look to the average
- d. Machiavelli described what he considered exemplary [cf. Girard on mimetic modeling]

Review

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
 Cesare Borgia
 Thomas Hobbes
 Abraham Lincoln
 René Descartes
 Karl Marx
 How to deal with free cities
 terms of political discourse
 Hiero of Syracuse
 Francis Bacon

Girolamo Savonarola
 Francesco Giucciardini
 Hugo Grotius
 effective truth of the matter
 Ludwig Feuerbach
 rarity of military service
 Dante
 lively reasons
 advertising
 positivists

Piero Soderini
 Jean Bodin
 clash of interests
 Prometheus
 Max Weber
 language as the ultimate weapon
 barbarian name changes
 polemical thoughts
 reorient political morality