Machiavelli and Hume as Forerunners of Modern Political Thought

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I N D E X

Introduction

The writings of Machiavelli and Hume are separated by two and a quarter centuries. There is no doubt that the intellectual climates of Renaissance and Enlightenment, the political problems of Italy and England, and the social positions of Machiavelli and Hume were important elements in the formation of their respective philosophies. It is undeniable that certain aspects of their thought can be better understood in terms of the historical context in which they lived. There is the danger, however, of becoming so involved in the details of time and place as to lose sight of the universal quality of their contribution to the history of ideas. Macaulay, commenting on "the peculiar morality which has rendered the Prince unpopular", suggests "We have attempted to show that it belonged rather to the age than to the man . . . . . ." [1] Our main concern in this study will be with what belongs to the man and to all ages. The greatness of great men consists not in their being carried along by the current of history but in the force and scope of their impact on the flow of ideas and events.

Both Machiavelli and Hume lived during periods of ferment in the modes of seeking knowledge and each made his contribution to the new methods of thinking that emerged from this ferment. Machiavelli, according to Bacon, was the philosopher "who had broken away from all scholastic methods and tried to study politics according to empirical methods". [2]

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1. T. B. Macaulay, Essays, Everyman's Library, (London, 1909), Vol. II, p. 30.
2. E. Cassirer, The Myth of the State, (New Haven, 1946), p. 119.

In doing this he was a forerunner of the historical revolt against the unbridled rationalism of the philosophy of the later middle ages, a revolt which abandoned the idea that truth could be attained by a metaphysical analysis of the nature of things and sought rather to study empirical facts in their causal relations.

Machiavelli was not unaware of the new paths he was treading. In his introduction to the first book of the Discourses he speaks of the "introduction of (any) new principles and systems as dangerous almost as the exploration of new seas and continents . . . ." and " . . . . I have resolved to open a new route, which has not yet been followed by anyone, ..."[3] He recognizes that his access to historical facts is limited and does not claim infallibility in his judgments, but, he declares, "I shall at least have shown the way to others, who will carry out my views with greater ability . ."[4] In his letter to Vettori of December 10th, 1513, he writes about the composition of the Prince and indicates what kind of questions are occupying his reflections. ". . . debating what a principate is, what the species are, how they are gained, how they are kept, and why they are lost."[5] To answer these questions, Machiavelli refers to human experience and to history which is the record of this experience.

Hume, too, thought of himself as an innovator. He had been impressed by the successes of the experimental method in the physical

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3. Discourses, Bk. I, Introduction, p. 103.(See Bibliographical note)

4. Ibid., Bk. I, Introduction, p. 103.

5. N. Machiavelli, The Prince and Other Works, edited and translated by A. H. Gilbert, (Chicago, 1941), Familiar Letters, p. 242.

sciences and wondered whether and how it could be employed to gain greater insight into the working of the human mind as it expressed itself in complex social relationships. Hume reacted against the easy rationalism of the enlightenment philosophers whose "Principles taken upon trust, consequences lamely deduced from them, want of coherence in the parts, and of evidence in the whole . . . . seem to have drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself".[6] There was a need to re-establish philosophy on a sound logical foundation and this Hume undertook to do in his Treatise. The very title - A TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE: being an ATTEMPT to introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects - indicates his approach to this problem. Indeed, he set himself no mean task; for what he was aiming at was a science of the sciences. "'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; . . . . In pretending, therefore, to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a complete system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security . . . the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation."[7] It must be observed that politics was for Hume one of the sciences whose relation to human nature is "greater".

The above paragraphs suggest the direction and scope of our study. Both Machiavelli and Hume claimed innovation in their methods of enquiry. We shall attempt to evaluate these methods, consider points of

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6. Treatise, Vol. I, p. 305.

7. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 307.

similarity between them and estimate their influence on the growth of modern political thought. We shall investigate, too, their conclusions about the nature of man and of political society; and whether these conclusions follow from the rigid application of their methods. And, finally, we shall consider the practical (moral) implications of their doctrines and their meaningfulness today.

Chapter I

The Science of Politics

When Machiavelli is spoken of as a founder of the science of politics the allusion is primarily to his way of looking at political events. This involves both his method of analysis and his interest in what Croce has termed "pure politics", something "beyond or, rather, below moral good and evil".[1] In this chapter we shall consider methodology and leave the problem of politics and ethics for a later one.

Machiavelli does not give us a systematic exposition of his method and we must attempt to distil it from the context of his writings. Here, too, there is a problem of logical organization. J. W. Allen asserts that

> "Machiavelli was not a systematic thinker . . . . Failure to co-ordinate his observations is conspicuous throughout the Discorsi and the Principe and shows itself in the confusion of their structures."[2]

This seems to be a rather unjust criticism of the Prince, for we can discern in its plan the answers to the questions which Machiavelli posed for himself in the order in which he asked them.[3] The Discourses do, however, seem to lack logical coherence. Machiavelli is committed to the structure of Livy's History of Rome and uses precepts drawn from it as the starting point for his various reflections on the nature of politics. No effort is made to

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1. B. Croce, Politics and Morals, (New York, 1945), p. 59.
2. J. W. Allen, Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century, (London, 1928), p. 452.
3. "...what a principate is, what the species are, how they are gained, how they are kept, and why they are lost." - Letter to Vettori, (Supra, p. 2).

establish a logical connection between the many topics that are discussed there. We see, for example, this strange succession of chapters in Book III of the Discourses. Chapter 22 deals with the reasons for Camillus' banishment from Rome; Chapter 23 discusses the fatal effects of prolonged military commands; Chapter 24 comments on the virtue of poverty in citizens; and Chapter 25 brings an example of how states may be ruined "on account of women". But despite this discontinuity in structure there is an underlying unity in the subject matter. All these topics are related to what, for Machiavelli, is the fundamental problem in politics - what are the causes of strength and weakness in states. Machiavelli's concern with causes is most significant for our investigation of his method.

Machiavelli developed his thinking against the background of scholasticism.[4] The schoolmen had taken over the Aristotelian cosmology and had transformed it in keeping with Christian dogma. In this cosmology it was the end alone that was important.

> "Nature was differentiated so as to provide its proper end for each thing . . . . For it was the end that was illuminating, so why bother about the beginning?"[5]

Aristotle conceived of man as a social animal whose telos was in the state. Aquinas took man's telos out of this world and placed it in the kingdom of heaven. The state in medieval Christian thought thus became a subordinate

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4. The material in the next two paragraphs is based on Cassirer's analysis in The Myth of the State, Ch. XI.

5. A. N. Whitehead, Science in the Modern World, (Op. Cit.), Pelican Library, (Harmondsworth, England, 1938), pp. 18 - 19.

level in a hierarchy of ends. The schoolmen were not concerned with how things happened but rather with why they happened; and their philosophical outlook led them to seek explanations in terms of final causes. Whitehead indicates that the sixteenth-century reaction to medieval thought was characterized by an "appeal to efficient causes as against final causes".[6] Machiavelli belongs to this intellectual movement of revolt.

The system of hierarchy which expressed itself in medieval feudal relations lent some plausibility to the hierarchical cosmology of the Divines. The dissolution of feudalism, however, was already well under way in fourteenth-century Italy. The new independent principalities that emerged did not fit into the old pattern of subordination. Here was a new political phenomenon - the independent secular state whose origin seemed anything but divine. The new state, as Machiavelli saw it, was the creature of "force and cunning", and

> "To think that the power of these new principalities was of God was not only absurd, it was even blasphemous."[7]

Machiavelli, as a political functionary, was personally involved in the intricate play of forces and was fascinated by it. He wished to understand this phenomenon and asked himself some pertinent questions about it. The form in which these questions were cast and the method of seeking answers to them marked a radical innovation in political thought.

We have already noted the frame of reference that Machiavelli set up for his composition of the Prince. He was seeking to discover the

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6. A. N. Whitehead, (Op. Cit.), p. 19.

7. E. Cassirer, (Op. Cit.), p. 136.

real causes for the rise and fall of principalities. If we take the Prince together with the Discourses we see that his search goes beyond the temporary manifestation of the Italian principality and aims at the discovery of general laws of political development. But his interest in general laws is not theoretical and abstract. He is interested in principles that can be applied in real situations and whose correct application would lead to foreseeable consequences. How can he be sure that these principles are practical? Only by referring to concrete situations in which they can be clearly seen to have been operating. One cannot arrive at these laws by metaphysical reasoning from final causes. In the dedication of the Prince to Lorenzo de Medici, Machiavelli sets forth his qualifications for the task which he was undertaking:

> "I have been unable to find among my possessions anything which I hold so dear or esteem so highly as that knowledge of the deeds of great men which I have acquired through a long experience of modern events and a constant study of the past."[8]

History, for Machiavelli, is not mere description. Having taken human affairs out of a supernatural hierarchy, he can insist that these affairs be subject to the intelligible laws which seem to operate in the world of experience. These laws are mechanistic. They express relationships of cause and effect. We see an interesting and rather subtle example of this in his consideration of the causes for Hannibal's great military successes. He attributes these to an army which, though enormous, was very highly disciplined. The discipline and lack of dissension

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8. Prince, p. 3.

> "could not be due to anything but his inhuman cruelty, which together with his infinite other virtues, made him always venerated and terrible in the sight of his soldiers, and without it his other virtues would not have sufficed to produce that effect. Thoughtless writers admire on the one hand his actions, and on the other blame the principal cause of them".[9]

We might digress at this point to consider Machiavelli's concept of "fortune". This term, it would appear, introduces a non-causal element into the scheme of his thought. The idea of fortune is usually associated in our minds with the idea of caprice, the idea of something unforeseeable. But there is a difference between the viewpoint that an event is unforeseeable because of the limited capacity of the human subject to comprehend all causal relationships and the view that certain events occur outside of a causal context - are self-generating. Fortune, in Machiavelli's writings, is a technical term which has several shades of meaning. It may refer to a juncture of two or more streams of quite intelligible events, a juncture, however, which could hardly have been foreseen. Thus if Cesare Borgia was not finally successful in his measures "it was through no fault of his own but only by the most extraordinary malignity of fortune".[10] This "malignity of fortune" being the coincidence of Borgia's fatal illness with a particularly difficult military situation. When Machiavelli compares fortune with an impetuous river that might run wild

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9. Prince, Ch. XVII, p. 62. (my italics).

10. Ibid., Ch. VII, p. 24.

at any moment, he does not imply the operation of supernatural forces. This is a force which human ingenuity might anticipate and with great effort manage to control. You cannot foresee what will actually happen but you can attempt to anticipate what might happen. The idea of fortune also includes the relationship of man with the forces at work in his total environment.

> "I also believe that he is happy whose mode of procedure accords with the needs of the times, and similarly he is unfortunate whose mode of procedure is opposed to the times."[11]

What makes fortune such a difficult thing to manage is not that the forces involved are unitelligible, but that man is restricted by nature in his capacity to adapt himself to them.

> "I conclude then that fortune varying and men remaining fixed in their ways, they are successful so long as these ways conform to circumstances, but when they are opposed then they are unsuccessful."[12]

Strangely enough, after making this statement which implies the relentlessness of fortune, Machiavelli suggests that it may be opposed and even overcome.

> "I certainly think that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if you wish to master her, to conquer her by force; and it can be seen that she lets herself be overcome by the bold rather than by those who proceed coldly."[13]

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11. Prince, Ch. XXV, p. 92.

12. Ibid., Ch. XXV, p. 94.

13. Ibid., Ch. XXV, p. 94.

To develop this theme would require the consideration of Machiavelli's concept of Virtu which we have reserved for a later chapter. It seems clear, however, that fortune is not a supernatural force for Machiavelli. It is his designation for the (passive) objective conditions within which political success can be attained because (a) there is a natural harmony between the character of the successful individual and the "needs of the time" or (b) the individual can actively attune himself to these needs.

The idea that history is intelligible is necessary but not sufficient for Machiavelli's purpose. He is concerned also with seeking out general rules that are workable in concrete situations. If one knows the factors that have caused a given situation in the past it should be possible to reproduce a similar state of affairs by bringing these factors into play again. History and experience are evidence of what is possible in human affairs, and politics, for Machiavelli, is always the art of the possible.

Machiavelli's generalizations drawn from his study of history and from his personal experience imply the existence of elements common to both. Indeed, any generalization must assume that certain factors are common in the cases to which it applies. Machiavelli's method postulates the constancy of human nature. He scoffs at those who would never think

> "of imitating the noble actions, deeming that not only difficult, but impossible; as though heaven, the sun, the elements, and men had changed the order of the motions and power, and were different from what they were in ancient times."[14]

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14. Discourses, Bk. I, Introduction, pp. 104 - 5.

History and experience reveal the operation of constant tendencies in human nature. If the human situation has its ups and downs it is because different objective conditions (fortune) prevail. These conditions may be natural or they may be brought about through the intervention of politically creative (or destructive) individuals. Machiavelli addresses himself to those who would be founders of states, and offers them rules for the construction of strong communities.

> "Let no one, then, fear not to be able to accomplish what others have done, for all men (as we have said in our preface) are born and live and die in the same way, and therefore resemble each other."[15]

Machiavelli's view of this unchanging nature of man will be considered in the next chapter.

We may, at this point, attempt to evaluate Machiavelli's method in the light of some present day views on the scope and method of social enquiry. There is the temptation to exaggerate the "scientific" nature of his approach. Thus Leonardo Olschki in a short essay entitled Machiavelli the Scientist, seeks and finds abundant evidence of a rigid scientific method.

> "The axiom that human nature is constant has its exact scientific counterpart in Galileo's fundamental assumption that 'matter is unalterable' . . . . . ."[16]

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15. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. XI, p. 149.

16. Leonardo Olschki, Machiavelli the Scientist (Berkeley, California, 1945), p. 31.

and again

> "Antiquity is in Machiavelli's mind the experimental ground for the verification of phenomena observed in his own environment."[17]

We see that Olschki is impressed by analogies from physical science and its inductive methods. But historical reference cannot be called experimental method in the natural-science sense of the work. The essence of the experimental method is that all the factors that enter into the experiment can be either rigidly controlled and manipulated or at least accounted for. Then again, the experiment must be repeatable if it is to be accepted by others as the proof of some hypothesis. M. R. Cohen points out

> "that social facts are essentially unrepeatable just to the extent that they are merely historical. The past fact cannot be directly observed. Its existence is established by probabilities".[18]

We are not taking issue with Machiavelli's use of the historical method but rather with Olschki's interpretation of it as inductive. History may lend credence to an hypothesis, but it cannot prove it in the strict experimental sense. The chief difficulty with Olschki's views is not in his emphasis on the scientific spirit evidenced in Machiavelli's work, but in his efforts to show that the method used there conforms to the canons of an inductive physical science.

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17. L. Olschki, (Op. Cit.), p. 34.

18. M. R. Cohen, Reason and Nature, (New York, 1931), p. 351.

> "The question is not whether the subject matter of human relations is or can ever become a science in the sense in which physics is now a science, but whether it is such as to permit of the development of methods which, as far as they go, satisfy the logical conditions that have to be satisfied in other branches of inquiry."[19]

The aim of a science is to arrive at true knowledge. The method used must be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in arriving at the truth that is being sought. The process of enquiry must itself be subject to agreed upon logical conditions and its conclusions must be capable of verification.

> "It is this process which gives order and coherence to scientific progress; controversy is confined to new evidence, whose interpretation admits of some doubt."[20]

The actual methods used must be adapted to the material which is being investigated. The science of astronomy is based on the observation of phenomena that are completely beyond the observer's control. Accurate description has been made possible by developing intricate instruments of measurement and by expressing the regularities of the phenomena observed in mathematical terms. The ideal in chemical and physical science is to set up experiments in which all the factors can be controlled by the observer and be manipulated at his pleasure. The ideal of a closed system (absolute control) has as yet not been attained even in the physical sciences. The nearest approach to such a closed system is available in the abstract logic of mathematics and here absolute manipulation is possible because

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19. John Dewey, Logic, The Theory of Inquiry, (New York, 1938), p. 487.

20. C. J. Friedrich, Constitutional Government and Democracy, (Boston, 1941), p. 568.

the symbols which are manipulated have been "created" by man himself.[21] It is obvious that the data of social relationships is infinitely more complex than the data of the natural sciences. On the one hand, human behaviour, at least from the vantage point of the participating human being, has not revealed the mathematical regularity of heavenly bodies. On the other hand, it has as yet proved unfeasible to put man into as rigid an experimental situation as the fruit fly. The claims of the natural scientists that their methods are the only valid ones can perhaps be satisfied by simplifying the data of social science - by simplifying man himself. (Oh brave new world!) Whether this ought to be done is a value judgment which is beyond the scope of this paper.

J. S. Mill showed an acute appreciation of the problem faced by those sciences

> "which relate to man himself, the most complex and most difficult subject of study on which the human mind can be engaged . . . it is still a controversy whether they are capable of becoming subjects of science in the strict sense of the term; . . . . ."[22]

He concedes that some sciences are more exact than others, but

> "Any facts are fitted, in themselves, to be a subject of science, which follow one another according to constant laws."[23]

Human nature operates in the stream of causality. The difficulty arises

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21. "We demonstrate mathematics, because we create their truth", Vico quoted in B. Croce, Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, (New York, 1913), p. 9.

22. J. S. Mill, A System of Logic, (London, 1900), p. 546.

23. Ibid., p. 552.

from the fact that we cannot comprehend the whole web of circumstances in which an individual will be placed. The problem becomes infinitely more complex when we try to consider a community of interacting individuals. It is nevertheless possible to make approximate generalizations about individual behaviour.

> ". . . . an approximate generalization is, in social inquiries, for most practical purposes equivalent to an exact one; that which is only probable when asserted of individual human beings indiscriminately selected, being certain when affirmed of the character and collective conduct of masses . . . But in order to give a genuinely scientific character to the study, it is indispensable that these approximate generalizations . . . should be connected deductively with the laws of nature from which they result . . . In other words, the science of Human Nature may be said to exist in proportion as the approximate truths which compose a practical knowledge of mankind can be exhibited as corollaries from the universal laws of human nature on which they rest, whereby the proper limits of those approximate truths would be shown, and we should be able to deduce others for any new state of circumstances, in anticipation of specific experience."[24]

This is the essence of Mill's inverse deductive method. It points out that history and experience provide material for generalization; but the generalizations, to be valid, must correspond with the "universal laws" of human nature.[25] This broad conception of method in social science is

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24. J. S. Mill, (Op. Cit.), p. 555.

25. "It is true that Mill was still beset with the belief in universal laws which haunted the scientists of his age; it is not very difficult to adapt his ideas to the conceptions of a more critical age. The decisive point is that he rightly perceived that verification in all fields concerned with man and society means linking an empirical generalization or hypothesis with the simple facts of human nature as they are known to us either through common human sympathy or through the more elaborate findings of psychology." Friedrich, (Op. Cit.), p. 573.

generally acceptable today. To be sure, there have been tremendous advances in the techniques of gathering and critically evaluating facts from which generalizations may be drawn. There has also been remarkable progress in our knowledge of individual psychology. But the basic condition, that the generalizations be in harmony with the findings of psychology, remains as valid today as when Mill enunciated it.

We return to our consideration of Machiavelli's method. As was suggested earlier, Machiavelli was conscious of embarking upon a new method of enquiry without giving it any kind of systematic expression. It is our contention that Machiavelli showed an intuitive appreciation of the inverse deductive method. His application of it was inexact and inadequate by present day standards and his conclusions are questionable, but the pattern of enquiry is discernible throughout his work. A few examples will illustrate this. In Chapter 3 of the Prince Machiavelli makes the empirical generalization that the best way to consolidate the conquest of new provinces is to establish colonies there. He refers to Roman experience to support this hypothesis and then tries to account for its success. He indicates that only those few whose lands and houses are given to the colonists are injured by the process of colonization while the rest of the people are, on the one hand, quite thankful not to have been affected personally, and

> "on the other, are fearful of offending lest they should be treated like those who have been dispossessed."[26]

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26. Prince, Ch. III, p. 9

Then follows the fact of human nature which seems to clinch the argument:

> "for it must be noted, that men must be caressed or else annihilated; they will revenge themselves for small injuries, but cannot do so for great ones; the injury therefore that we do to a man must be such that we need not fear his vengeance."[27]

A little later in the same chapter, and in support of his general argument, he expresses one of his basic axioms about human nature -

> "The desire to acquire possessions is a very natural and ordinary thing."[28]

When Machiavelli considers whether it is better for a prince to be loved or feared he refers to historical examples of successful princes. he indicates that a major factor in the success of Hannibal and Cesare Borgia was their cruelty. He explains the effectiveness of cruelty by pointing out that since it is difficult for a prince to be both loved and feared at the same time

> "It is much safer to be feared than loved . . . For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger and covetous of gain; . . . for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails."[29]

It is not difficult to multiply examples of Machiavelli's conscious use of this method. Another short quotation will suffice for our present purpose.

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27. Prince, Ch. III, p. 9.

28. Ibid., Ch. III, p. 13.

29. Ibid., Ch. XVII, p. 61.

> "All those who have written upon civil institutions demonstrate (and history is full of examples to support them) that whoever desires to found a state and give it laws, must start with assuming that all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature, whenever they may find occasion for it."[30]

It was suggested earlier that there is a strong temptation to exaggerate the significance of Machiavelli's method. Machiavelli himself recognizes some of the limitations of his analysis when he observes that history is not always a dependable guide since

> "we never know the whole truth about the past, and very frequently writers conceal such events as would reflect disgrace upon their century . . . ."[31]

Many critics have remarked, however, that Machiavelli failed to make adequate use of the historical material that was available to him; that he himself committed those faults which he criticized in others. If his conception of the historical method was valid, his application of it left much to be desired. J. W. Allen asserts

> "It is significant rather than strange that so critical and sceptical a thinker as Machiavelli should have used his authorities so uncritically as he did use them. He went to Livy expecting what he would find there, duly found what he wanted and asked no questions."[32]

Significant, too, is his conception of Roman history as a key to all future history. The history of republican Rome is (for him) more than just

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30. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. III, p. 117. (my italics).

31. Ibid., Bk. II, Introduction, p. 271.

32. J. W. Allen, (Op. Cit.), p. 486.

empirical evidence of political behaviour and development. It is the prototype of the effective state and stands as an example that ought to be imitated by all states and state-founders. Machiavelli's idolization of the Roman republic introduces a normative element into his thought and its implications will be considered in a later chapter.

Machiavelli's treatment of the empirical situation in which he himself lived was also quite inadequate. Renaudet[33] observes that Machiavelli limited himself to the bare facts of the politics of his time. He did not, for example, go into the material factors behind the political conflicts which he witnessed. The sixteenth century was a period of tremendous commercial development, but Machiavelli disdained commerce. The Medici were the first great bankers of Europe, but in the Prince, which was dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici, Machiavelli shows no appreciation of the availability of the new commercial techniques for the purposes of state-building. Hume, who was a great admirer of Machiavelli, was well aware of these limitations.

> "Machiavel was certainly a great genius; but having confin'd his study to the furious and tyrannical governments of ancient times, or to the little disorderly principalities of Italy, his reasonings especially upon monarchical government, have been found extremely defective; and there scarcely is a maxim in his Prince which subsequent experience has not entirely refuted . . . . I mention this, among many instances of error of that politician, proceeding in a great measure, from his having lived in too early an age of the world, to be a good judge of political truth."[34]

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33. A. Renaudet, Machiavel, (Paris, 1942).

34. Essays, Vol. I, pp. 156 - 57, (Of Civil Liberty).

We may recognize these shortcomings of Machiavelli and, therefore, be wary of accepting his conclusions uncritically. His intuitive grasp of the inverse deductive method, however, and his emphasis upon the empirical investigation of political behaviour represent a lasting contribution to the methodology of political science.

II

Machiavelli had realized that a proper understanding of politics required an extensive knowledge of human nature. His conclusions about the nature of man, however, were in the form of broad empirical generalizations which were not subjected to a searching critical analysis. Hume, on the other hand, made the science of human nature the central point of his enquiries. In the introduction to the Treatise - Hume's first work and, by general agreement among his commentators, his definitive work - he indicates his line of approach.

> "'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under the cognizance of man, and are judged of by their powers and faculties . . . . If therefore the sciences of Mathematics, Natural Philosophy and Natural Religion, have such a dependence on the knowledge of man, what may be expected in the other sciences, whose connexion with human nature is more close and intimate?"[35]

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35. Treatise, Vol. I, pp. 306 - 7.

Hume classifies the sciences which have the greater relation to human nature as logic, morals, criticism and politics. When he refers to "Moral Subjects" in the sub-title of the Treatise, it is these sciences that he has in mind. We may note, too, that he uses the term moral philosophy to denote what we should today call social science as opposed to natural philosophy in the sense of natural science. He sets himself the task of seeking more certain knowledge about moral subjects by undertaking a systematic investigation of human nature.

The problem that immediately confronted Hume was that of method. He rejects the abstract reasoning from unproved assumptions (e.g. natural law, social contract) which characterized the thought of many eighteenth century moral philosophers. He refers to their method as

> "The other scientific method, where abstract principle is first established, and is afterwards branched out into a variety of inferences and conclusions . . . a common source of illusion and mistake in this as well as in other subjects."[36]

Hume was impressed by the progress made in the physical sciences by the use of experimental methods. He considered Newton

> "the greatest and rarest genius that ever rose for the ornament and instruction of the species. Cautious in admitting no principles but such as were founded on experiment; . . ."[37]

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36. Enquiry, p. 174.

37. D. Hume, History of England, (Boston, 1854), Vol. VI, p. 329.

Several English philosophers had already begun the process of putting "the science of man on a new footing"[38] and Hume was going to add his contribution by "An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects". He was going to show the limitations of human reason in that it could not demonstrate a matter of fact or real existence and could only discover truth or falsehood by the comparison of ideas (in Hume's sense of the word). It is for this reason that the abstract philosophical method

> "may be more perfect in itself, but suits less the imperfection of human nature."[39]

Human reason can only approach true knowledge, therefore,

> "by following the experimental method and deducing general maxims for a comparison of particular instances."[40]

This emphasis on experimental method demands clarification and, as we shall see, some qualification, too. The difficulty of applying the methods of physical science to the analysis of social relations ("moral subjects") has already been discussed. Hume recognized this difficulty but did not submit to its full implications. He gives us a neat, if oversimplified, statement of what the inductive method is in the introduction to the Treatise.

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38. Hume mentions in a footnote the names of Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutchinson, Butler, etc., Treatise, Vol. I, p. 308 footnote.

39. Enquiry, p. 174.

40. Ibid., p. 174.

> "When I am at a loss to know the effects of one body upon another in any situation I need only put them in that situation, and observe what results from it."[41]

The essence of the method is that the experimenter can control or account for every factor that enters into the situation and vary some of these factors at will. He then compares his observations and is led to certain general conclusions which are themselves capable of further experimental verification. Now, Hume points out that

> "Moral philosophy has, indeed, this peculiar disadvantage, which is not found in natural, that in collecting its experiments, it cannot make them purposely, with premeditation, and after such a manner as to satisfy itself concerning every particular difficulty which may arise."[42]

Hume can only resolve this difficulty by straining the meaning of the term 'experimental' to include what we should call 'empirical'."

> "We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures."[43]

This is, indeed, a far cry from the kind of experiment that Hume considers to be valid in the field of natural science.

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41. Treatise, Vol. I, p. 309, (my italics)

42. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 309.

43. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 310.

Professor Kemp-Smith argues that the term 'experimental' as it is used by Hume is stronger than our usual understanding of the term 'empirical' in that it carries with it

> "the suggestion of a deliberate collecting of observations, sufficient in number and more especially in variety, to serve as a reliable basis for generalization."[44]

He also observes that although Hume fails to stress the importance of hypothesis in determining the line of observation which would yield the most profitable results, it is implicit in his method. In any case, we should be grateful that Hume made this "retreat" into empiricism in the introduction to his Treatise, and so was able to embark on his enquiries unencumbered by a rigid methodology which would have been inappropriate to the subject matter of his investigation. Yalden-Thomson remarks that "had Hume adhered solely to induction he could scarcely have written at all".[45] The same writer suggests the interesting hypothesis that Hume used the term 'experimental' also in a polemical sense, as an indication of his opposition to the abstract rationalism of his time.[46]

We have seen how Machiavelli set up a series of questions about principates which demanded the kind of answers that could only be found by referring to experience and observation rather than by metaphysical reasoning. Hume, too, approached the problem of the origin of morals by

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44. N. Kemp-Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, (London, 1941), p. 62.

45. D. C. Yalden-Thomson, Hume's Moral Philosophy in the Treatise, (unpublished Thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1948), p. 134.

46. Ibid., (Op. Cit.), p. 132.

formulating a question in such a way as to require an empirical solution.[47]

The first book of the Treatise is devoted to an exhaustive epistemological analysis which defines the limits of human reason and clears the ground for Hume's investigation of the motives of human behaviour. The second book considers the passions in general and concludes that they are the influencing motives of the will, that

> "reason is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection."[48]

Book III begins by considering the sense of vice and virtue and argues that moral distinctions, insofar as they are practical motivations, cannot be derived from reason but are sentiments which are "perceptions in the mind",[49] perceptions which give rise to impressions of agreeableness and uneasiness.

> ". . . . the distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains and pleasures; . . . . . ."[50]

Having reached this point, Hume is ready to formulate the question which is basic to his "experimental" consideration of "moral subjects".

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47. In dealing with Hume's method, we shall generally limit ourselves to Book III of the Treatise, The Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, and the political essays. These are most clearly related to the aspects of political theory which are within the scope of this paper.

48. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 235.

49. "Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind." Treatise, Vol. II, p. 245.

50. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 247, (Hume's Italics).

> "This decision [that virtue is distinguished by pleasure, and vice by pain] is very commodious; because it reduces us to this simple question, Why any action or sentiment upon the general view or survey, gives a certain satisfaction or uneasiness, in order to show its moral rectitude or depravity, . . . I flatter myself I have executed a great part of my present design by a statement of the question, which appears to me so free of ambiguity and obscurity."[51]

The question, if unambiguous, is certainly not simple. Hume cannot be asking for an analysis of the psychological mechanism of approval or disapproval, for this would involve him in a quest for knowledge about matters of fact which he considers unattainable. Human knowledge cannot go beyond the conclusions derived from the comparison of ideas. The answer to his question must therefore be sought by comparing the actions which evoke moral sentiments and then generalizing from their common characteristics. It is interesting to note that Hume cannot avoid making some assumptions about psychological mechanism. Referring to the pain or pleasure which is at the root of our distinctions between virtue and vice, he asks:

> "From what principles is it derived, and whence does it arise in the human mind?"[52]

It would be simple if one could say that every impulse had its origin in some specific structural (or instinctual) function of the human organism. Hume might infer from his impressions or ideas of matters of fact

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51. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 251, (Hume's Italics).

52. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 249.

> "that these sentiments are produc'd by an original quality and primary constitution."[53]

But this would be too simple an explanation for the complex and differentiated morality that exists.

> "For as the number of our duties is, in a manner, infinite, 'tis impossible that our original instincts should extend to each of them, and from our very first infancy impress on the human mind all that multitude of precepts, which are contain'd in the compleatest system of ethics."[54]

Hume will not deny that the primary impulses derived from the primary passions of pride, humility, love and hatred are fundamental, but he feels that some other general principles must be sought to account for all our notions of morals.

It is here that Hume makes his original distinction between the natural and artificial virtues which leads him into an empirical analysis of the origin and development of those virtues

> "that produce pleasure and approbation by means of an artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessity of mankind."[55]

The artificial virtues, then, are not directly inherent in the nature of man but develop historically as a result of man's experience in his relationships with others. Since this development occurs in history it is possible to study it empirically. Another implication of primary importance

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53. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 249, (Hume's Italics).

54. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 249.

55. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 252.

that follows from this analysis is that morality is immanent in history. This concept becomes the key to Hume's political conservatism and will be dealt with later.

The examination of the origin of justice leads to the question of motivation; and motive, as Hume has shown, must be rooted in a passion. Speaking of other-regarding actions and feelings which we designate as ethical, he says,

> "In general, it may be affirm'd, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services or of relation to ourself."[56]

If we respond to our perception of misery in others it is merely due to the function of a faculty of sympathy which is implanted in human nature. The intensity of our response is related to the contiguity of the object and the liveliness of our impression. We respond more intensely to the mutilation of a dog before our eyes than to the death by starvation of a thousand Chinese several thousand miles away. If the general love of mankind cannot be regarded the original motive for justice, common experience teaches that "private benevolence" must be even less so regarded. For how can one explain the motive to repay a debt to one's enemies? Why should not a "profligate debauchee" be deprived of his possessions? Hume concludes

> "that we have no real or universal motive for observing the laws of equity, but the very equity and merit of that observance."[57]

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56. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 255.

57. Ibid., p. 257.

This, however, involves him in a serious logical difficulty since he insists that there must be a virtuous motive for a just action other than the regard for the virtue of the action. He can only resolve this dilemma by allowing

> "that the sense of justice and injustice is not derived from nature, but arises artificially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions."[58]

We have made this detour into Hume's philosophical reasoning in order to show how he is led by the force of his logic to seek an explanation for conventional morality by resorting to empirical observation. There is a very important sense, however, in which Hume's empirical method in the Treatise differs from that of Machiavelli. Machiavelli refers to events which have either been described by historians or experienced by himself and he generalizes from these on the basis of his own understanding of human nature. Hume, on the other hand, refers to events which his logic, experience and profound psychological insight tell him must have taken place in history even though we have no written records to confirm this. Hume does not go so far as to accept the historicity of a state of nature although he might justify the use of the concept as a convenient logical fiction. He cannot conceive of isolated individuals since the very fact of their birth and survival depends upon the pre-existence of a social framework.[59] Given the inevitability of society, the understanding

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58. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 257.

59. "The first and original principle of human society . . . is not other than that natural appetite betwixt the sexes, which unites them together, and preserves their union, till a new tye takes place in their concern for their common offspring. This new concern becomes also a principle of union betwixt the parents and offspring, and forms a more numerous society . . . " Treatise, Vol. II, p. 259.

of human motivation derived from "experimental" observation, and the present facts of conventional morality seen as the product of historical development, Hume seems to be on secure ground when he attempts to deduce the origins of the artificial virtues. But he cannot allow these deductions to range too far and must turn to recorded history as soon as it is available to substantiate his generalizations.

Hume's specific contribution to the method of political (and social) enquiry may be considered under two headings: 1. the inverse deductive method, 2. the distinction between the normative and the empirical.

The inverse deductive method

The method of linking empirical descriptions with generalizations about human nature was given its first impetus by Machiavelli and was subsequently employed by a number of political thinkers. Hume helped to refine this method, first by subjecting human nature to a profound psychological and epistemological analysis in order to discover the principles of motivation, and secondly, by demanding a more critical evaluation of empirical material.[60] Where Machiavelli generalizes about human nature rather shrewdly but superficially from a limited number of examples, Hume probes below the surface and seeks to determine the "springs of action". Hume was not alone in this kind of psychological probing, but he was one of the first to attempt a synthesis of psychological and empirical observations into a theory of morals and politics. He sees morality developing

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60. Hume makes several references to Machiavelli's inaccuracies in the Essays.

artificially but inevitably as a result of human nature operating in a social context under conditions of relative material scarcity. Politics accounts for the development of the useful institutional forms that help to standardize and solidify the artificial morality already attained without inhibiting its further historical growth. This is the foundation of Hume's strange mixture of rationalism and conservatism. His immanentist conception of morality naturally led to his great interest in history.

J. S. Mill points out in his discussion of the historical method that

> "While it is an imperative rule never to introduce any generalization from history into the social science unless sufficient grounds can be pointed out for it in human nature, ... "[61]

you cannot determine the a priori order of human development from the principles of human nature. To a certain extent, Hume attempted to do just that in order to account for the origin of justice, property and government. It seems, however, that he had no alternative, since, on the one hand, there were no recorded historical data available, and on the other, the techniques and findings of anthropology were as yet quite undeveloped. Yet, in his chapter "Of the Source of Allegiance" in the Treatise, he did attempt to find evidence for the hypothesis that the monarchical form of government was the first type, by referring to the experience of the primitive American Indian tribes.[62] We may well question the accuracy of his facts and the validity of his interpretation, but he does indicate an appreciation of the possibilities of anthropological investigation.

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61. J. S. Mill, (Op. Cit), p. 597.

62. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 305.

We find that as Hume's examination progresses and as he begins to treat of topics that can be referred to historical experience he does not fail to do so. When he considers "The Objects of Allegiance" his chapter is full of references to historical material from the earliest Roman times to the England of his day. There is an interesting passage in this chapter which strikes a pragmatic note that has a distinct Machiavellian ring. Hume discusses the significance of legalistic and philosophical arguments on questions of political controversy. These

> " . . . . are virtues that hold less of reason than of bigotry and superstition. In this particular, the study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy which, showing us the original qualities of human nature, teaches us to regard the controversies in politics as incapable of any decision in most cases, and as entirely subordinate to the interests of peace and liberty."[63]

The political essays are mainly empirical studies in which Hume tests the validity of his philosophy and presents arguments for his own political conservatism. His essay That Politics may be reduced to a Science is somewhat disappointing in that it does not give an adequate exposition of his method. He treats politics in this essay in the rather narrow sense of the forms of government and their dynamics. He states the hypothesis:

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63. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 324.

> "So great is the force of laws and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences, almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them as any which the mathematical sciences afford us."[64]

Yet when Hume begins to verify his hypothesis by referring to historical examples we find that his deductions require some very specific assumptions about the "humours and tempers of men". Thus if he is able to predict what should happen to a "democracy without a representative" it is because he observes about human nature in general that, given the opportunity, people tend towards licentiousness. When he considers that the advantages of a hereditary monarchy over an elective one "are founded on causes and principles eternal and immutable" we find that these are principles of human nature such as animosity, friendship, envy, and intrigue. To find a way out of this difficulty we must turn to the first paragraph of the essay where Hume declares

> "I should be sorry to think that human affairs admit of no greater stability than what they receive from the <u>casual</u> humours and characters of <u>particular</u> men."[65]

We must assume that Hume is referring to particular human nature (caprice) when he minimizes its influence on the development of the various forms of government. The concept of a "law" of human nature as it is understood in the inverse deductive method is a statistical one. The laws do not

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64. <u>Essays</u>, Vol. I, p. 99.

65. <u>Ibid.</u>, Vol. I, p. 98, (my italics)

apply to indiscriminately selected individuals but to "the character and collective conduct of masses."[66]

Distinction between the normative and the empirical

Hume's logical analysis of the distinction between moral values and empirical facts in their relationship to knowledge was his original contribution to the methodology of social enquiry. He challenged the long established rationalistic tradition in ethics which was first expressed in the Platonic formula that virtue is knowledge and which was later modified by the various doctrines of natural law. His conclusions follow from his general epistemological position. We might briefly summarize his main arguments before considering their implications.

Hume attacks the view that moral values are rationally determined on two counts. First, morals are normally classified as a branch of practical philosophy. This means

> "'tis supposed to influence our passions and actions, and to go beyond the calm and indolent judgments of the understanding."[67]

Hume had already shown that reason alone was an inert principle that could have no influence on our behaviour. It followed that judgments of value, in so far as they produced or prevented actions, could not be conclusions of reason. Secondly, and this is the more important argument for our present purpose, morality is not susceptible of rational demonstration.[68]

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66. J. S. Mill, (Op. Cit.), p. 555.

67. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 235.

68. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 240ff.

Vice and virtue cannot be demonstrated as matters of fact nor do they consist of special relations which can be proved with any degree of certainty. The only relations that lend themselves to rational (scientific) demonstration are those of "resemblance, contrariety, degree in quality, and proportions in quantity and number". But these relations apply as well to irrational and inanimate objects as to rational and animate - objects to which we would never ascribe a moral content.

> "Reason or science is nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations; and if the same relations have different characters, it must evidently follow, that those characters are not discover'd merely by reason."[69]

The specific character of vice or virtue cannot be discovered in these demonstrable relations, and so it follows that moral values cannot be the object of scientific investigation.

Hume observes that the difference between a normative and an empirical judgment is recognized in everyday speech. The empirical deals with what is, and is capable of scientific verification; the normative expresses what ought to be, and this involves a new relationship which can neither be deduced from the empirical facts nor demonstrated by the process of reasoning. Hume would not deny the existence of norms as facts of experience. He does indicate, however, that the inherent quality of goodness which the norm implies cannot be demonstrated by reason.

Ernst Cassirer observes that Hume's skeptical empiricism did not represent a mere phase in the development of English empiricism but marked the beginning of a new departure.

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69. Treatise, p. 243.

> " . . . . his characteristic and specific question derives from another source, namely, from the continuity and linear progression of scientific thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."[70]

Newtonian science was based on the axiom of the uniformity of nature. Without this axiom there could be no foundation for conclusions about the future based on past experience. But the axiom itself was no more than an assumption. How could it be proved? Cassirer points out that the usual solution before Hume's time was a religious one. God in his goodness could not have intended that man should have such a powerful belief in causality and the uniformity of nature without it actually being so. The fundamental problem of experimental method thus became a problem of theodicy. Hume accepts the conclusion that the uniformity of nature rests only on a sort of belief

> "but he robs the belief of its metaphysical disguise and removes all its transcendent elements . . . it springs from a purely immanent necessity of human nature."[71]

This scepticism of transcendental elements in thought and belief is a characteristic feature of Hume's philosophy. It finds expression in the subordination of reason to the passions as the source of motivation. It excludes the idea of higher and lower faculties of the mind and attempts to reduce all knowledge to sensation. It is at the basis of his "Natural History of Religion" which rejects innate ideas and intuitive certainties

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70. E. Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, (Princeton, 1951), p. 60.

71. Ibid., p. 62.

and seeks the deepest roots of religion in human nature.

This sceptical empiricism also underlies Hume's moral theory. His first task in Book III of the Treatise was to prove that moral distinctions are not derived from reason. He denies the transcendental implications of natural law and demends an account of the origin and growth of morality that does not go beyond experience. In his analysis of the difference between the normative (in the transcendental sense) and empirical approaches to the study of human relationships, Hume cleared the way for the development of modern social science. He maintained that science was a function of cognition and it followed that since the quality of moral good or evil cannot be known, qualitative judgments of this kind must fall outside the scope of scientific investigation. There is a rational sense of goodness or fitness which may refer to the appropriateness of specific means to a given end. Hume recognizes that reason may inform the passions. But the inherent moral quality of a final end can never be known.

There are several currents of social enquiry that show the influence of Hume's epistemological critique. Popular positivism (as Dewey calls it) rules out any concept that can neither be confirmed by experience nor tested experimentally. In social science this view insists that all value judgments be excluded both from the objects of enquiry and from the mind of the investigator; the scientist qua scientist must be led by the facts alone. Another viewpoint, while accepting the epistemological distinction between value and fact, reaches widely different conclusions. It points out that the assumption of values by men is a universal fact of experience. We cannot rid our minds of all preconceptions and these

inevitably influence the direction of research, the formulation of hypotheses, and the selection and interpretation of available facts. The problem for the social scientist is to become aware of his own value assumptions and those of his social environment and to test these for logical coherence and plausibility. This does not imply a disdain for empirical study but it indicates an awareness of its limitations. As M. R. Cohen points out -

> "We cannot disregard all questions of what is socially desirable without missing the significance of many social facts; . . . . "[72]

Hume himself did not avoid making value judgments and unprovable assumptions in his attempt to apply experimental methods to the study of moral subjects. We shall consider these in a later chapter.

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72. M. R. Cohen, (Op. Cit.), p. 343.

in an ordered social framework. Political society which offers the possibility of security is not a creature of reason but of an uneasy and forced compromise of conflicting passions. On the negative side, the selfish will is always straining towards chaos and confusion.

> ". . . . all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature, whenever they may find occasion for it. If their evil disposition remains concealed for a time, it must be attributed to some unknown reason; and we must assume that it lacked occasion to show itself; but time which is said to be the father of all truth, does not fail to bring it to light."[3]

The negative aspect of human nature is always the more powerful one. Hence Machiavelli's view of a cycle of government in which the optimum conditions prevail at the beginning of the cycle as the consequence of a single politically creative act (Sparta), or a series of acts coupled with a beneficent fortune (Rome); these are followed by an inevitable process of breakdown.

The fundamental problem facing the statesman is that of controlling or at least inhibiting man's behaviour. Machiavelli conceives of politics as the art of gaining and maintaining political power. Power, in a strict political sense, means a relationship of command with respect to a given community. But the first condition of ruling men must be to understand them. The successful politician is a technician who knows how to manipulate his material because he is aware of its nature and limitations. Since the politician aims to influence man's actions he must be able to affect the "influencing motives" of man's will. If man is not motivated

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3. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. iii, p. 117.

by reason, it would be useless to try to influence his behaviour by rational argument. We find implicit in Machiavelli what later becomes explicit in Hume - that the impulse to action is rooted in passion, and that

> "Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion but a contrary impulse; . . . . "[4]

Machiavelli's practical maxims are never concerned with appeals to reason. If the prince or statesman desire a certain response from those whom they rule or wish to rule they must know how to influence their feelings. Thus man's innate greed and selfishness may be countered by instilling a dread of harsh punishment. Cruelty and clemency are legitimate techniques whose use must be determined by their effectiveness in a specific situation. Fear is more reliable than love as a means of securing the obedience of people. The attachment of men to their property is so powerful that any threat to deprive them of it would arouse passions that could hardly be countered.

> " . . . for men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony."[5]

The religious sentiments of untutored and superstitious people lend themselves to easy exploitation by shrewd legislators. The significance of a religion is not in its truth but in its effectiveness as a means of controlling the subjects of a state. Many more examples may be found of Machiavelli's recognition that men's actions can only be influenced by the manipulation of their passions.

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4. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 194.

5. Prince, Ch. XVII, p. 62.

It has already been suggested that Machiavelli and Hume do not employ the concept of passion as a contrary to reason. It cannot be said that Machiavelli's man is irrational because his actions are governed by the passions. The passions are non-rational. We can only define Machiavelli's view of the nature of man in terms of his description of the dominant passions. Before we do this, however, it might be useful to enquire whether he recognizes a rational principle at all.

One must search very carefully to find the term "reason", in the sense of rational, used in Machiavelli's writings. It would seem that he studiously avoids the use of this word because he wishes to evade its traditional ethical connotation. There is an example of his use of the word "reason" (ragione) in the accepted meaning of his time, but only to support his claim that it cannot cause an action. Speaking of the eternal state of flux in human affairs, he says -

> " . . . . states naturally either rise or decline, and necessity compels them to many acts to which reason will not influence them."[6]

Now, Machiavelli considers the concept of necessity here, not in an absolute but in a hypothetical sense. Given the desire of the prince or statesman to preserve himself and/or the state, certain courses of action are necessary in a given situation. Necessity is a relationship of subjective impulse and objective conditions. It is the desire of the prince and the nature of the surrounding circumstances and not the benign influence of reason which compels the form of the action. Although Machiavelli shies away from the

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6. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. vi, p. 129.

use of the word "reason" he is nevertheless compelled to employ the terms 'prudence', 'wisdom','sagacity' and so on. If we examine his connotation of these terms we find that it comes close to Hume's definition of the rational as an auxiliary to the passions.

Prudent or wise action on the part of the statesman means action which is appropriate to the ends that he wishes to attain and to the circumstances of the time. Prudence may require that a prince be cruel at one time and merciful at another time; that he use force or fraud; act swiftly or temporize in a given situation. Wisdom teaches that it is quite rational to exploit the non-rational passions in order to persuade men to submit to the state or its rulers -

> " . . . therefore do wise men, ... resort to divine authority."[7]

Cassirer suggests that Machiavelli approaches the political struggle as though it were a game of chess in which all the moves must be calculated to achieve victory in the least possible time. He describes and analyses the game but does not attach praise or blame except in terms of technique.

> "What he thinks to be objectionable and unpardonable in a politician are not his crimes but his mistakes."[8]

Thus when he does find occasion to criticize Cesare Borgia, it is not for his character - his coldness, harshness and faithlessness, but for his mistake in allowing Julius II, his sworn enemy, to succeed Alexander VI to the papacy. If Machiavelli finds irrationality to be blameworthy it is not because it is a source of evil but because it is a source of error.

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7. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xi, p. 147.

8. E. Cassirer, The Myth of the State, (New Haven, 1946), p. 146.

Cassirer illustrates this point with an anecdote about Tallyrand who, upon hearing that the Duke of Enghien had been ordered executed by Napoleon Bonaparte, exclaimed "C'est plus qu'un crime, c'est une faute!"[9]

Machiavelli, however, does not always achieve a clean break with the ethico-rational position. He is haunted by the traditional dichotomy of reason and passion and cannot escape its pervasive influence. In the notorious eighteenth chapter of the Prince he seems to be considering the relationship of the rational and non-rational principles in man's nature.

> "You must know, then, that there are two methods of fighting, the one by law, the other by force: the first method is that of men, the second of beasts; but as the first method is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the second. It is therefore necessary for a prince to know well how to use both the beast and the man."[10]

We may readily assume that Machiavelli values man above the beasts and it follows that he considers law superior to force in a normative sense. One has the strong impression that he is making a normative distinction between the animal and human natures of man in terms of passion and reason. But if Machiavelli seems to yield to the traditional terminology he does not succumb to its spirit. The prince must be a combination of man and beast. He "must know how to use both natures and (that) the one without the other is not durable".[11] There is no question of a struggle between the higher and lower natures of man. They must simply complement each other. Indeed, the relationship between the two is not even a reciprocal one. It appears that the function of reason is to make the animal nature more effective.

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9. E. Cassirer, Op. Cit., p. 146.

10. Prince, Ch. XVIII, p. 64.

11. Ibid., Ch. XVIII, p. 64.

Reason is truly passion's slave in this context.[12] We shall also argue a little later that Machiavelli does not think of law as a rational principle in the sense that it is observed because it appeals to reason, but deals with it rather as an aspect of force.

If it has been established that Machiavelli's man is dominated by passion, we may return to an earlier question - What is the nature of the passions? How does Machiavelli describe and classify them? Machiavelli, as a student of the empirical, sets out to deal with things as they are and not as they ought to be. His maxims are hypothetical imperatives and his judgment of means is in terms of their success in bringing about desired results. Human passions are facts of experience. They are things to be manipulated. It is the skill and intention of the manipulator which determine the shape of the results. One would therefore expect Machiavelli's description of the passions to be made in non-normative terms. This, however, is not the case. Where it is quite consistent for Machiavelli to speak of the passions of greed, envy, ambition, hatred, fear, and so on, it becomes somewhat confusing when he refers to men and actions that are motivated by these passions as good and bad, vicious and virtuous, right and wrong. This difficulty may be resolved in two ways. There is either an underlying moral assumption in Machiavelli's thought or his use of the terms good and bad has a special technical connotation. Both of these explanations do, in

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12. This point is developed by C.N.R. McCoy in an article in the American Political Science Review (August 1943) called Machiavelli in the History of Political Thought. "Man acts like a beast by virtue of his animal nature. But to know how to act like a beast requires more than mere animal nature; it requires intelligence, it demands the exercise of the rational principle in behalf of animal nature....This is why Machiavelli's prince can have the qualities of several beasts at once: he can be lion and fox precisely because he is a man. Thus if it is by virtue of man's animal nature that he acts like a beast, he acts like a man by virtue of his capacity - thanks to the rational principle - for making prudent use of the conduct of animals.....What is Machiavelli's fox but the "virtue" of prudence put in the service of the lion?"

fact, apply. Because he has an ethical viewpoint he can make the empirical observation that men are dominated by passion, and yet conclude that the passions are evil. On the other hand, he may refer to actions as good or bad in terms of their appropriateness to a given end. Thus his precept that the Prince ought to play the lion and the fox is a good one because men are bad - "If men were all good, this precept would not be a good one; . . ."[13] When he speaks of cruelty being exploited either well or badly he adds in parenthesis "(if it is permissible to use the word well of evil)".

The theme of human depravity is a central one in Machiavelli's thought.

> ". . . . men act right only on compulsion; but from the moment that they have the option and liberty to commit wrong with impunity, then they never fail to carry confusion and disorder every where."[14]

The tragedy of Machiavelli's man is that he has no possibility of self redemption. T. S. Eliot observes -

> "What Machiavelli did not see about human nature is the myth of human goodness which for liberal thought replaces the belief in Divine Grace."[15]

We might add that Machiavelli did not even allow that reason could compensate somewhat for the absence of innate goodness. It is interesting to note how this point is sometimes missed by those who would like to discover a glimmer of optimism in Machiavelli's view of man. Professor L. J. Walker, in the introduction to his translation of the Discourses points out that Machiavelli

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13. Prince, Ch. XVIII, p. 64.

14. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. iii, p. 118.

15. Quoted from T. H. Whitfield, Machiavelli, (Oxford, 1947), p. 15.

> "does not maintain that in general all men are corrupt, but merely that 'men are easily corrupted.' The root cause of this corruption is the sway which man's passions exercise over his mind. Take, for instance, ambition, 'So powerful is the sway that ambition exercises over the human heart', says Machiavelli in D. I, 37, i, 'that men never relinquish it, no matter how high they have risen'."[16]

Professor Walker's substitution of the word "mind" for "heart" is rather significant. In the traditional terminology the mind is regarded as the seat of reason and the heart as the seat of the passions. Professor Walker would accept Machiavelli's contention that the passions are evil, but he softens its implications by attributing an active, motivating function to reason. The passions are powerful, but there must be some hope for man as long as his reason may give battle to them. Machiavelli, however, is careful to avoid leaving the impression that reason can inhibit the passions. We must presume that his use of the word "heart" in the above quotation is deliberate since he rejects the traditional dichotomy of reason and passion.

It is generally agreed that Machiavelli's picture of man in the Prince is painted in the darkest colours. The question is frequently raised, however, whether his approach to human nature in the Discourses is a radically different one. One treats of a situation of total corruption in which human depravity is everywhere apparent. The other tells of a situation which seems to approach the ideal. It would be difficult to accuse Machiavelli of such an obvious inconsistency as changing his views on human nature, especially since the Prince was written at a time when the writing of the Discourses was well under way.[17] In addition, the under-

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16. N. Machiavelli, The Discourses, (Translated by L.J. Walker) (London, 1950), p. 130. (my italics).

17. "I will not here speak of republics, having already treated of them fully in another place",(Prince, Ch. II, p. 5.).

lying principles of his method is the axiom that

> "Whoever considers the past and the present will readily observe that all cities and all peoples are and ever have been animated by the same desires and the same passions, ..."[18]

If we concede that Machiavelli's conception of human nature is a consistent one, our problem is to account for the differences in the distribution of virtue in republican Rome and Renaissance Italy. Two possibilities suggest themselves. The first is that Machiavelli sees both positive and negative elements in human nature and that at certain stages in a people's development one or the other predominates. The second is that human behaviour is not autonomous but interacts with external factors and the total situation is a product of this interaction.

The first position presents some difficulties since it implies that there are certain innate qualities in human nature which might express themselves spontaneously. To be sure, Machiavelli may say that men are neither wholly good nor bad, or that good and evil always exist and balance each other though their distribution among men and peoples may change, or that there were many more virtuous men in republican Rome than in his Italy. But this does not mean that the two periods differed because more of the good in man's nature expressed itself in one period and more of the evil in the other. We will not anticipate our later discussion of the ethical significance of the term 'virtue' as used by Machiavelli except to point out that the virtue of an action for Machiavelli lies not in its intention but in its consequences. Virtuous actions are those which conduce to the strength of the state and they are not the result of inherent

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18. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xxxix, p. 216.

tendencies of human nature. If Machiavelli speaks of a distribution of vice and virtue it is not in terms of innateness but rather of potentiality. One cannot say that a beautiful statue is inherent in the marble but that under certain conditions the marble may become a beautiful statue. One may draw the analogy out farther and say that the potentiality of marble to become a good statue is greater than that of mud. In any case, what the marble or the mud will finally become depends upon a complex arrangement of external factors ranging from the location of the material in space and time to the existence of a sculptor and the degree of his skill. There is considerably more evidence in Machiavelli's writing pointing to the second position. Given the essential and constant quality of the human material (selfishness, fear, ambition, greed, etc.) the explicit form of behaviour is the product of its interaction with countless external factors.

At the very beginning of the Discourses Machiavelli gives us a theory of challenge and response. He observes

> "that virtue has more sway where labour is the result of necessity rather than of choice . . "[19]

and it might therefore be better

> "to select for the establishment of a city a sterile region, where the people, compelled by necessity to be industrious, and therefore less given to idleness, would be more united, and less exposed by the poverty of the country to occasions for discord; . . . ."[19]

Machiavelli realizes, however, that men are never satisfied with what they possess and that a fertile region affords a city the means of becoming more powerful. He therefore recommends that

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19. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. i, p. 107.

> "the laws should compel men to labour where the sterility of the soil does not do it; . . . ."[20]

This is one of the key ideas in Machiavelli's thought. Human nature will express itself in virtuous activity only under external compulsion. The external force may be exerted by natural environmental factors or it may proceed from human intervention, or both. The direct and powerful influence of natural factors is rather obvious and need not occupy us here. The role of laws, institutions and customs in compelling behaviour, however, is of great interest and importance.

It has already been suggested that Machiavelli regards law as an aspect of force. In Chapter 18 of the Prince he speaks of law as a method of fighting. There is a section in the Discourses which expresses this viewpoint in clear-cut terms. After asserting that "men act right only upon compulsion", Machiavelli declares:

> " . . that poverty and hunger make men industrious, and that the law makes men good; and if fortunate circumstances cause good to be done without constraint, the law may be dispensed with. But when such happy influence is lacking, then the law immediately becomes necessary."[21]

It should be noted that when men are good without being constrained by law it is not because of their innate qualities but because "fortunate circumstances cause good to be done". Not all laws, however, necessarily compel men to do good deeds. Machiavelli is referring to laws which are directed to what he considers to be good ends; that is, laws which serve to preserve and strengthen the state and are adapted to the specific situation in which they are operative. He remarks that "the same form cannot suit two subjects

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20. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. i, p. 108.

21. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. iii, p. 118.

that are essentially different"[22] and points out that laws which are effective in one context may be completely ineffective in another. A determining factor is the rate and level of corruption of the people involved. This is the criterion for the distinction in their character and capacity for virtue between the Italians of his day and the ancient Romans.

When Machiavelli speaks of the corruption of a people he means, in fact, the breakdown of the various effective restraints on the natural and ever-present egotism of man. The Romans of the Discourses were no less motivated by selfish passion than were the Renaissance Italians. But they were riding the crest of the cycle of government, at a time when the laws and institutions were effective in compelling virtuous action.

It should be observed that laws produce good results not only because of their inherent qualities but because they operate in a balanced institutional framework. Machiavelli borrows a leaf from Polybius when he attributes the success of the Roman republic to its mixed constitution. He recognizes that laws are obeyed and are therefore factors of stability when they serve or appear to serve the general interest and do not arouse sharp antagonisms between the different sections of the community. A good constitution is one which gives "to the king, the nobles, and the people each their portion of authority and duties".[23] This distribution of power will remain in balance and will lead to the promulgation of good laws only if the three main divisions of the community will have sufficient power to "watch and keep each other reciprocally in check".[23]

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22. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xviii, p. 170.

23. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. ii, p. 115.

One important problem remains to be considered. Granted that the mass of men is vulgar and dominated by passion and moved to virtue only by the external pressure of laws and institutions - whence arises the virtue of the legislator? Is the state founder a unique being who does not share the common human foibles and is therefore capable of original and unconditioned virtue? Friedrich Meinecke[24] suggests that Machiavelli distinguishes virtue into original and derivative forms. The virtue of the masses, when it exists, is derived only from the creative intervention of great men. The role of the great man is very clear in the Prince. Machiavelli's hope for the rebirth of Italian greatness rests entirely on the coming to power of a prince who possesses a tremendous concentration of virtù. But even the foundation or reformation of a republic depends upon the intervention of a single individual.

> "For if a state or city in decadence, in consequence of the corruption of the mass of its people, is ever raised up again, it must be through the virtue of some one man living, and not by the people; . . ."[25]

Meinecke also observes that this concept of a singular and highly creative virtue provides an inner bridge between the monarchical and republican tendencies implied in the Prince and the Discourses. The problem of the legislator's character, however, remains. If all men are motivated by self-interest it would be quite inconsistent to except the legislator.

Machiavelli does not specifically deal with the motives of great men. There is a mystical quality about them. In the last chapter of the Prince, he hopes "that some individual might be appointed by God" to redeem

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24. F. Meinecke, Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte, (München and Berlin, 1925).

25. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xvii, p. 166.

Italy. One has the impression that the successful statesman is fulfilling a purpose which is not entirely his own and one wonders about the relationship between conscious motive and divine plan. Indeed, the great historical figures which Machiavelli holds up as examples of outstanding political virtue are men of strong, ambitious nature pursuing their personal drives for power. It is in the course of attaining and consolidating power for themselves that they also create states which are strong and "lebensfähig". Meinecke observes that the interaction between personal power drives and the needs of the state is the essence of "Staatsräson". To retain his power, the prince must act in accordance with the needs of the state. Machiavelli continually stresses the interdependence between great personal virtue and the situation in which it unfolds.

> "And if, as I said, it was necessary in order that the power of Moses should be displayed that the people of Israel should be slaves in Egypt, and to give scope for the greatness and courage of Cyrus that the Persians should be oppressed by the Medes, and to illustrate the pre-eminence of Theseus that the Athenians should be dispersed, so at the present time, in order that the might of an Italian genius might be recognized, it was necessary that Italy should be reduced to her present condition, ..."[26]

There is a strong resemblance between Machiavelli's hero and Hegel's world historical figures.

> "Such individuals had no consciousness of the general idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs; on the contrary they were practical, political men . . . . who had an insight into the requirements of the time . . . This may be called the <u>cunning of reason</u>, - that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss.[27]

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26. <u>Prince</u>, Ch. XXVI, p. 95.

27. F. Hegel, <u>Selections</u> (From <u>"Philosophy of History"</u>), (Scribner's, New York, 1929), pp. 378-80.

Chapter III

Politics and Ethics

The phrase "politics and ethics" possesses a rather ambiguous connotation in modern political thought. In the ancient Greek classification of philosophy ethics was regarded as a branch of politics and both were thought to be aiming at some good. Aristotle, in setting up his hierarchy of ends, defined the political community as that which aims at the highest good. He called man a political animal whose telos is in the political state, and saw the state as providing the framework within which man's ethical development could take place - the better the state, the greater were the possibilities for moral growth. Political science was directed at the greatest good.

> "In all sciences and arts the end is a good, and the greatest good and in the highest degree a good in the most authorative of all - this is the political science of which the good, is justice, in other words, the common interest."[1]

The development of Stoic and early Christian thought brought about a change in the conceived relationship of politics and ethics. The conception of a Natural Law which was independent of human society, and of a telos which was beyond the political community did not destroy the connection between politics and ethics, but it did suggest a change in their relative status. Insofar as politics referred to human actions it was thought that it ought to conform to the absolute standards of a rational law of nature and of revealed religion. Politics was seen as a field of activity subordinate to the imperatives of higher laws.

The position of Machiavelli and Hume on this question will be examined in some detail later. However, their emphasis on empirical investi-

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1. Aristotle, Politics, (Modern Library, New York, 1943), p. 149.

gation, and especially Hume's distinction between the normative and empirical spheres as objects of knowledge, set the tone for the modern ambiguity noted above. For the term "politics and ethics" suggests two problems in modern political thought. One is a normative problem of the value of politics and ethics and of their relationship to each other in a scale of values. The other is a problem of methodology in which politics is seen as a realm of empirical behaviour and therefore susceptible of scientific study, while ethics is seen as a problem of philosophical speculation and beyond the scope of certain knowledge. Thus a recent symposium in The American Political Science Review entitled Politics and Ethics[2] deals primarily with the methodological aspect of this topic. The main question that is discussed there, is whether it is desirable or even possible for the political scientist to study political behaviour and political institutions objectively and without any regard to ends. It is significant that those who insist upon a non-normative objectivity on the part of the political scientist point to Machiavelli as an outstanding exponent of this approach. It is this which qualifies him as the first political scientist in their eyes. We shall attempt, in this chapter, to examine Machiavelli's and Hume's approaches to the problem of politics and ethics under both of its aspects.

The moral problem in Machiavelli's writings is at once the most difficult and the most intriguing one. No man, with the possible exception of Marx, - and his case is too recent to be evaluated - has given his name to a way of looking at politics to the extent that Machiavelli has done. the terms Platonism, Aritotelianism, Hegelianism, and so on, have meaning

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2. The American Political Science Review: August 1943; August 1944, March 1946. Articles by W. F. Whyte; J. H. Hallowell; G. A. Almond; L. A. Dexter.

only for the initiated, but "Machiavellism" has been incorporated into our everyday language and conveys, if not a specific, at least a general meaning to the layman. To the western mind it is a term of disapprobation. Its moral connotation is a negative one. Cassirer observes that Machiavelli himself could not have been aware of all the implications and consequences of his political theory and that, in this regard, a sharp distinction might be drawn between Machiavelli and Machiavellism. He believes, nevertheless, that Machiavellism follows logically and inexorably from Machiavelli's thinking as it is developed in the Prince. It seems to the writer, however, that to the extent that Machiavellism follows from the maxims of the Prince alone it cannot be taken as the logical unfolding of Machiavelli's thought. Modern scholarship is quite insistent upon the need to take Machiavelli's work as a whole in order to have a proper basis for the evaluation of his political theory. There is an inner consistency between the Prince and Machiavelli's other writings which is entirely lacking in the relationship between the popular conception of Machiavellism and the actual meaning of Machiavelli's writing taken as a whole.

Cassirer remarks that

> "The Prince is neither a moral or an immoral book: it is simply a technical book. In a technical book we do not seek for rules of ethical conduct, of good and evil. It is enough if we are told what is useful or useless."[3]

This may be true as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. For we may well ask - useful or useless for what? Was Machiavelli indifferent to the ends that might be served by his practical precepts? Was his attitude

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3. E. Cassirer, The Myth of the State, (New Haven, 1946), p. 153.

to the state, for the creation and preservation of which he had formulated his maxims, an objective and value-free one? To see Machiavelli merely as a political technician is to miss his essential meaning. It must be remembered that the Prince was written when the composition of the Discourses was well under way. In the light of the Discourses the Prince appears to be a practical exercise in formulating rules for revitalizing a corrupt people by drastic measures of political organization. In order to understand the significance of Machiavelli it is not enough to examine the empirical basis of his generalizations about politics and the technical validity of his advice; it is also of primary importance to grasp the normative framework within which his empirical observations become meaningful.

Brief mention has already been made of the effects of the rise of Christianity on the ancient harmonization of politics and ethics in the Greek idea of the city-state. Ethics and state ethics were considered as one and there was no conflict between them. There was no universal religion to inhibit the free sway of the state's powers. The rise of Christianity, however, spelled the end of the moral autonomy of the political community. A universal religion attempted to set up a universal moral command and the individual was theoretically freed from the moral supremacy of the state and was referred to other-worldly ends. The changed status of secular society was expressed institutionally in its relations with a powerful church which transcended political frontiers. It was given ideological expression in the medieval principle of hierarchy. Both Meinecke and Cassirer emphasize, however, that the ideological rationalization of ethico-religious supremacy long outlived the actual power relationship of church and state. In the

long contest between the temporal and ecclesiastical powers, both the new secular states and the religious principalities developed techniques of struggle and administration which were quite uninhibited by the principles of divine and natural law to which both sides paid lip service. Machiavelli observed the emergence of the new autonomous earthly state. He was fascinated by the techniques of the intense political struggles. But he was also deeply worried by the possibilities and implications of complete political breakdown. His interest in the new states was not a detached and dispassionate one. He not only described the play of forces and the absence of the accepted moral restraints on the behaviour of those engaged in the process of state building; he implied very strongly that the creation of a well-ordered state was an act of supreme moral value. There had been a general awareness that the secular state was rapidly breaking away from the moral constraint exerted by the principle of hierarchy, and this had raised fears of a conflict between politics and morals. Machiavelli, however, did not share these qualms. He applauded the growing moral autonomy of the state and implied that there was an ethical justification for it.

The conception of the ethical, as used here, requires some elaboration. In its broadest sense "ethical" implies a reference to an ultimate good. It is generally conceded that what constitutes an ultimate value involves a normative judgment and cannot be known with certainty. There may be good reasons why one should prefer one value to another, but the final choice between values cannot be justified on epistemological grounds. The ethical problem posed by Machiavelli is thus a two-fold one. In the first place we must ask whether he presupposes some ultimate good as an end.

If he does, the question arises whether his exposition is consistent with his value assumptions - whether his analysis is a correct one and whether his maxims will indeed lead to the ends that he values. If he assumes an ultimate good and deliberately gives advice that runs counter to it, we may, in a technical sense, label him as immoral. If he does not assume any final values (norms) and merely describes and classifies certain political facts, providing that such objective description is realy possible, we may say that his approach is an amoral one. In the second place, if we conclude that Machiavelli does assume an ultimate good and determine what this is, we may evaluate it philosophically and empirically in terms of our own or our society's basic norms. From this second viewpoint it may be quite reasonable to conclude that Machiavelli's teaching is moral or immoral in a normative sense. Cassirer seems to overlook this double aspect to some extent. He remarks that

> "The sharp knife of Machiavelli's thought has cut off all the threads by which in former generations the state was fastened to the organic whole of human existence. The political world has lost its connection not only with religion or metaphysics but also with all the other forms of man's ethical and cultural life. It stands alone - in an empty space."[4]

While this view may be justified from the standpoint of Cassirer's own value assumptions it does not take into account Machiavelli's new-old normative framework. Machiavelli does not believe that he is isolating the political world from "man's ethical and cultural life", but that the political world in fact comprehends man's ethical and cultural life. Machiavelli does not so much take the state out of the medieval hierarchy,

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4. E. Cassirer, Op. Cit. p. 140.

as Cassirer contends, but cuts off the apex of this hierarchy leaving the state as the new summit. Meinecke recognizes that Machiavelli's moral assumptions follow from his rejection of the Cristian dualism of heaven and earth. He suggests that it was an historical necessity that the man whose name is associated with the origin of thinking in accordance with Staatrason should have been a heathen who did not believe in the terrors and rewards of an other-worldly existence. It is correct to say that by removing the state from all references to transcendental criteria Machiavelli proclaimed the moral autonomy of the state. However, from the standpoint of Machiavelli's premises, one can no more assert that the state is morally isolated than one can say, from the viewpoint of the scholastic divines, that the kingdom of heaven is morally isolated.

The difficulty of discovering the ethical basis of Machiavelli's doctrine arises from the fact that he did not consciously set out to expound a systematic philosophical theory of the state. But if he intended primarily to give us an empirical study of political behaviour and political techniques, his work is nevertheless permeated with a philosophical spirit which gives it unity and a universal quality which makes it interesting and meaningful for all time.

> "Sans désespérer et sans espérance, Machivael s'est mis à enseigner, non ce qu'est l'Etat, mais comment on le fonde et le défend - dans ses Discours, qui traitent dans leurs trois livres de la politique intérieure, de la préparation et de la conduite de la guerre, du rôle des particuliers et des factions, dans ce Prince qui n'est qu'un chapitre détaché des Discours, plutôt un appendice, analysant les moyens d'acquerir et de garder une principaute . . . . Ce n'est qu'en passant qu'il mentionne l'Etat tel qu'il doit être, plus exactement, tel qu'il est dans son concept véritable. Mais nous ne connaissons pas d'endroit de ses écrits où, pour un seul instant, il l'ait perdu de vue."5

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5. E. Weil, Machiavel Aujourd'hui (Critique, Paris, Mars, 1951), p. 251.

Two contrapuntal themes are harmonized in Machiavelli's underlying conception of the political community as an ultimate value. The first is that a condition of peace and security is universally desired by man and is therefore a good. The second is that the nature of man is essentially selfish and that man is ever inclined to disrupt any state of peace and security if he thinks that he can gain some personal advantage by doing this. Machiavelli's resolution of this dichotomy follows from his empirical generalization "that men act right only upon compulsion". His task is to find a form of compulsion which, while constraining men from the arbitrary expression of their selfish wills, will nevertheless make possible the peace and security that they desire above all. This ideal form of compulsion is the well-ordered state. We have already examined Machiavelli's view of human nature in some detail. It is rather more difficult to find concrete evidence for the proposition that security is universally desired and therefore constitutes an ultimate good.

In the first chapter of the Discourses Machiavelli discusses rather briefly and superficially his view of the origin of cities in general. He imagines primitive men roaming about in small bands and subject to the constant danger of attack by a stronger enemy resolving

> ". . . of their own accord, or by the advice of someone who had most authority amongst them, to live together in some place of their selection that might offer them greater conveniences and greater facility of defence."[6]

The political community thus emerges as a response to the desire for greater security. Two factors must immediately be taken into account if the political community is to preserve itself. It must develop techniques for

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6. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. i, p. 106.

governing the relations between its members - this leads to laws. It must also become militarily powerful in order to be able to withstand the attacks of a potential external enemy. The political community, however, does not remain static. It follows a recurrent developmental pattern of corruption and resurgence. Thus the insecurity of the state of anarchy gives way to government. Government is first revered, but this reverance soon breaks down because each individual tends to consult only his own passions. This finally leads to a new state of anarchy which creates the necessity for the reformation of government - and the cycle begins again.

As suggested in the quotation from E. Weil, Machiavelli does not develop the abstract problem of the purpose and status of the state. His main interest seems to be empirical and technical. That the desire for security in life and possessions is a universal one seems to him to be an empirical fact. Some men may desire great power and wealth, but all men desire security. However, the universal desire for security can only be satisfied within the framework of an organization which can control the equally universal propensity of men to encroach on each other's lives and property. J. W. Allen points out that Machiavelli's implication that the state is a moral end rests on the normative assumption that the satisfaction of human desires is a good.

> "So we come back to the essential proposition that 'good' action is that which tends to the satisfaction of universal desires and that, apart from these desires of men, there is no good or evil."[7]

This interpretation appears to come rather close to Hume's contention, albeit in much simpler form, that the sense of pain or pleasure following

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7. J. W. Allen, Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1928), p. 476

upon the satisfaction or frustration of basic human impulses is at the root of our moral sentiments. There is an interesting passage in the second chapter of the first book of the Discourses which is very predicative of Hume's account of the origin of justice.

> "As the human race increased, the necessity for uniting themselves for defence made itself felt; the better to attain this object, they chose the strongest and most courageous from among themselves and placed him at their head, promising to obey him. Thence they began to know the good and the honest, and to distinguish them from the bad and the vicious for seeing a man injure his benefactor aroused at once two sentiments in every heart, hatred against the ingrate and love for the benefactor. They blamed the first, and on the contrary honored those the more who showed themselves grateful, for each felt that he in turn might be subject to a like wrong; and to prevent similar evils, they set to work to make laws, and to institute punishments for those that contravened them. Such was the origin of justice."[8]

Machiavelli thus regards the state which enforces laws and maintains an adequate army for defence as an ultimate utility. Without it security is impossible. For Machiavelli there is no other way to attain the good (i.e. the universally desirable). The true function of politics is to create and maintain that ultimate utility which is the state. Without the state there is no law, no justice, no morality. From the normative point of view, therefore, politics, which involves the forces that bring the state into being, does not come into conflict with ethics. But this seems to beg the question. For Machiavelli's apparent concern in the Prince and the Discourses is with the concrete technical problems of politics, and it is difficult to conceive how the use of force and fraud, the breaking of faith, and the advice to "learn how to be not good",

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8. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. ii, p. 112.

can be brought into harmony with the ethics of law and justice which the state produces. Weil suggests an interesting approach to this problem. He stresses that Machiavelli's purpose is to give practical advice for the founding and maintenance of the state. There is a tendency to project onto the same plane two concepts that are essentially different - that of the founder and that of legal and moral authority.

> "Le fondateur n'est pas tenu par aucune loi: simplement parce que, avant lui, il n'y a pas de loi. Il n'est guidé par aucune religion, parce que, avant lui, il n'y a pas de religion. Morale et religion appartiennent à un peuple constitué en Etat sous des lois, par des lois, mieux encore: dans des lois."[9]

One may reason quite logically from this proposition that pure politics ("which is beyond or, rather, below moral good and evil")[10] ought to operate only in those areas where the norm creating function of the state is either absent or deficient; areas in which moral standards do not as yet exist effectively. The moral standards come into being only after politics has successfully done its work. It is in this way that Machiavelli may proclaim the necessity and autonomy of politics; a technical politics which is subject to its own rules.

It is interesting to note that the scope of this autonomous political activity bears a direct relationship to the situation in which it is operative. In the lawlessness, corruption and political collapse of early Renaissance Italy it seemed to Machiavelli that there were very few effective moral standards that could be violated. The prince who would reform and revitalize the Italian state could not be restrained by standards

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9. E. Weil, Op. Cit., p. 250.

10. B. Croce, Supra, p. 5.

which did not exist. The only criterion by which his actions might be judged was the pragmatic one: did they in fact add to the strength and being of the state? Machiavelli can praise Cesare Borgia for his deeds because he considers them to have been necessary and effective measures for uniting Italy and restoring her to greatness. On the other hand, while he admires the technical skill of Agathocles and his capacity for swift and decisive action, he finds that he cannot praise him nor name him "among the most famous men". For Agathocles did not in fact increase the effectiveness (utility) of the city-state of Syracuse. Indeed, he undermined the constitution when, after rising to the status of praetor, he

> "decided to become a prince, and to hold with violence and without the support of others that which had been constitutionally granted him; . . ." [11]

We find a general sense of limitation of the scope of pure politics in the Discourses. This is because Machiavelli is dealing with a successful republic in which a substantial moral development was readily apparent. This moral development finds its concrete expression in laws and institutions. One cannot condone as politically necessary any activity which would undermine them. Corruption sets in when the established norms are contravened with impunity, particularly by those who possess status in the community.

> ". . . no well-ordered republic should ever cancel the crimes of its citizens by their merits; . . . . For if a citizen who has rendered some eminent service to the state should add to the reputation and influence which he has thereby acquired the confident audacity of being able to commit any wrong without fear of punishment, he will in a little while become so insolent and overbearing as to put an end to all power of the law." [12]

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11. Prince, Ch. VIII, p. 31.

12. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xxiv, p. 181.

There is, however, a logical difficulty in this kind of reasoning. Laws, institutions and standards of behaviour are good only as long as they are effective. And the obligation of the politically creative individual to abide by the laws is a function of their effectiveness. This kind of circular argument seems to arise inevitably from the absence of a transcendental criterion. Because no state ever achieves perfection in the form and application of its laws there is always an area for the free play of politics in accordance with its own rules. These rules are purely technical and cannot be inhibited by normative standards which are not real in the sense of not being truly effective. This leaves the rather serious problem of drawing the line between standards which are obligatory and those that are not obligatory because they are not in fact effective. If the only test is a pragmatic one, then the natural inclination of evil, ambitious and selfish men will be to see how much they can flout the restrictive norms of their community in order to advance their selfish interests. This will lead to a process of corrosion at the margins which will always tend to enlarge the area of lawlessness. Machiavelli acknowledges this tendency and this is the basis of his pessimism.

> " . . . men act right only upon compulsion; but from the moment that they have the option and liberty to commit wrong with impunity, then they never fail to carry confusion and disorder everywhere."[13]

The state achieves its optimum effectiveness during the lifetime of its founder (or reformer). After his death there is an inevitable process of disintegration which is due to the natural depravity of human nature. Political breakdown is followed by spiritual renewal when a new legislator

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13. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. iii, p. 118.

possessed of great virtù appears on the scene and the cycle begins again. It will be argued later that Machiavelli's need to introduce the mystical, charismatic figure of the state founder represents a major weakness in his theory.

We have seen that Machiavelli's general idea of the state as an end involves a normative assumption and suggests an intimate interaction between politics and ethics. The state which is the source of ethics is at the same time the product of the political creativity of the state founder. Machiavelli also recognizes that power is the essence of the state, for without it the state could not fulfil its useful purpose which is to provide for the maximum security of its members. The state is primarily an instrument for restraining the predatory instincts of men. The positive manifestations of ethical and cultural life occur only within the framework of security which the state makes possible. But the head of the state, be it an individual or a body of men, must possess power in order to be able to command the observance of laws and the application of sanctions. The process of maintaining the state must include the struggle for power among individuals and factions. This brings us to the second aspect of Machiavelli's thought which deals with the purely technical problem of acquiring and preserving power within the state - any state.

Machiavelli seems to be particularly fascinated by this problem. His empirical researches and his own observations of human nature had convinced him that men can be easily manipulated. He was intrigued by the idea of drawing up rules which could teach men of the proper character and temperament how to become powerful. From this viewpoint it may be said that he views the political struggle as a game of skill in which his maxims

are simple hypothetical imperatives and his judgments are in terms of the rules of the game. The technical aspect of the Prince and the Discourses is readily seen even in the headings of many of the chapters. For example: "HOW A PRINCE MUST ACT IN ORDER TO GAIN REPUTATION;" "HOW THE ROMANS AVAILED OF RELIGION TO PRESERVE ORDER IN THEIR CITY. . .;" "HOW IN A CORRUPT STATE A FREE GOVERNMENT MAY BE MAINTAINED. . " Machiavelli frequently discusses points

> ". . . many of which are well worthy of reflection by those who wish to maintain the liberty of a republic, as well as those who desire to suppress it."[14]

In the Third book of the Discourses he devotes a lengthy chapter to an analysis of conspiracies, which, while offered as a warning to a prince so that he may guard himself against them, is also full of excellent advice for would-be conspirators. There is a remarkable section in the Discourses where he uses the symbolism of the sons of Brutus in order to illustrate an axiom which he considers valid for any change of government regardless of its purpose.

> "Every student of ancient history well knows that any change of government, be it from a republic to a tyranny, or from a tyranny to a republic, must necessarily be followed by some terrible punishment of the enemies of the existing state of things. And whoever makes himself tyrant of a state and does not kill Brutus, or whoever restores liberty to a state and does not immolate his sons, will not maintain himself in his position long."[15]

We need not consider Machiavelli's technical precepts in any detail. There is no dearth of examples to demonstrate his interest in the pure techniques of gaining power in any kind of situation. Indeed, they are at the root of his popular reputation as an amoral or immoral political thinker. But

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14. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xl, p. 218.

15. Ibid., Bk. III, Ch. iii, p. 405.

if Machiavelli achieves a certain detachment in his description of political behaviour he is, nevertheless, not indifferent to its effects on the well-being of the state as an end. He abhors the barbarous cruelty of Agathocles because it served no positive purpose. He praises Moses, Cyrus, Theseus and Lycurgus because their technical political skill led to the founding of durable states. There is an important point, however, which Machiavelli seems to grasp although he does not develop it. This is the close interaction between the personal success of politically ambitious individuals and the needs and desires of the state and its people. He recognizes it as an empirical fact that the most successful techniques for individual political success are also those that accord best with the needs of the state as an end. He realizes the importance of widespread popular enthusiasm for a political leader and devotes a large part of his work to the problem of influencing public opinion. To be sure, the mass of men is not always consciously aware of how its interests may best be served, and is frequently taken in by appearances. The art of dissimulation is a primary requisite for the prince. But in the long-run, political stability and power accrue where men are satisfied with their condition because they enjoy a relative security. Such men are less susceptible to the seductive promises of ambitious men who seek power for themselves at the expense of the general interest.

> ". . . . because men change masters willingly, hoping to better themselves; and this belief makes them take arms against their rulers, in which they are deceived, as experience later proves that they have gone from bad to worse."[16]

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16. Prince, Ch. III, p. 6.

Speaking of a prince who, for the sake of his own position, wishes to obtain the good will of a people that is hostile to him, Machiavelli says that he

> "should first of all ascertain what the people really desire and he will always find that they want two things: one, to revenge themselves on those who have been the cause of their enslavement, and the other, to recover their liberty . . . an immense majority, desire liberty so as to be able to live in greater security . . . are easily satisfied by institutions and laws that confirm at the same time the general security of the people and the power of the prince."[17]

Meinecke suggests that this interaction between the personal power drive and the needs of the state tends to limit the arbitrary use of political power. This forges another link in the relationship of politics and ethics as conceived by Machiavelli.

Machiavelli's use of the term 'liberty' raises another interesting point. The word possesses both a technical and a normative connotation. 'Liberty' is never directly defined. Machiavelli does not deal with the term abstractly. It is generally used to describe a concrete situation - that of the Roman Republic, for example. It is usually applied to a form of government in which there is a widespread participation of citizens in the administration of public affairs. Renaudet suggests that Machiavelli defines liberty indirectly by its effects, the most important of which is security. On the basis of his empirical studies he concludes that the citizens of a free state enjoy greater security than do those of a monarchy. Given his assumption that security is a value it follows that liberty is a value too. There are, however, distinct phases in the life of a state, and Machiavelli who is ever practical recognizes the futility of prescribing

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17. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. xvi, pp. 162 - 3.

a single form of state organization. The political situation is a dynamic one and "institutions and forms should be adapted to the subject." A condition of general corruption calls for the creative intervention of a single individual. But once the creative act has been completed the preservation of the state is more secure where the people have a share in the government.

"The people are wiser and more constant than princes."[18]

We have attempted to show that although Machiavelli's reputation as an empirical thinker is justified, it should not obscure the significance of the philosophical framework within which his empirical enquiries take place. His thought tended in the direction of the political philosophy of the ancients. He asserted that the state, as an ultimate value, was the foundation of morality. He indicated that there could be no moral limitations on political activity which had as its purpose the creation or preservation of the state as such. Indeed, such activity, if it were truly political, would necessarily take place in a moral vacuum. Politics, in so far as it brings the effective state into being, is prior to ethics. While we must not underestimate the importance of Machiavelli's contribution to the methods of social enquiry, we should recognize that his enduring meaningfulness stems from his normative assumptions. For tremendous strides have been made in the methods of empirical verification; and modern psychology offers techniques of mass manipulation which stamp most of Machiavelli's maxims as anachronistic. But the problem of the moral status of the state remains as alive today as it ever was. Cassirer claims that:

> "Machiavellism showed its true face and its real danger when its principles were later applied to a larger scene and to entirely new political conditions. In this sense we may say that the consequences of Machiavelli's theory

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18. Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. lvii, p. 260.

> were not brought to light until our own age. Now we can, as it were, study Machiavellism in a magnifying glass."[19]

This study does not pretend to submit Machiavelli's ethical theory to a detailed critical examination. Its main intention is to show that Machiavelli had an ethical theory. Many important problems were necessarily omitted from our consideration. Before turning to Hume, however, we might take up very briefly one point which was touched upon before.

Machiavelli is generally regarded as one of the founders of the "realistic" school of political thought. His teaching is based on a conception of human nature which sees man as irrational, selfish, and driven only by necessity. He denies the influence of transcendental norms on human behaviour. He seeks to account for social phenomena in empirical terms. Here he encounters the same kind of dilemma which confronts many of the "realistic" thinkers who came after him. This is to explain the transition of depraved man from the elemental state of isolation into the state of society. One may say that man is driven by necessity to join with others for mutual security. But this can only account for an immediate necessity and implies a simple form of union. The bond would be dissolved as soon as the necessity has passed. In the absence of a rational foresight which could influence the will there can be neither the obligation nor incentive to retain the forms which were hastily devised to meet a specific situation. Hobbes tries to overcome this difficulty by postulating a social contract during a moment of universal light. This, of course, is quite unrealistic and remains an insoluble contradiction in Hobbes' con-

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19. E. Cassirer, Op. Cit., p. 141.

struction of the Leviathan. Machiavelli does not, perhaps, commit so large an error, but he is no more successful in avoiding the same logical fallacy. Machiavelli's primitive or corrupt men are quite consistent. They can only be driven to submit to social restraints by force, fraud or necessity. There is no momentary flash of insight during which they commit themselves for all time.[20] There is no law of nature which would make such a commitment binding if it did take place. The only way they might be brought into a stable and enduring union would be through the creative intervention of a Legislator who possesses a tremendous concentration of virtù. Even after the creative act of the Legislator there is a constant tendency to destroy the bonds of the political community and the process of disintegration sets in at once. The rate of disintegration is a function of the original skill of the state founder (virtù) and a combination of unpredictable factors (fortuna). But the question which we have already asked once before remains - whence arises the virtù of the legislator? Machiavelli can account for a stable political community only by postulating the decisive role of a mystical individual. Mystical in the sense that he is able to transcend the human nature which he shares with all other men, or, in the sense that he is the unconscious agent of some mysterious historical necessity. This remains a major unresolved problem which affects the logical consistency of Machiavelli's political theory.

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20. Some writers claim that there is a suggestion of a social contract theory at the beginning of the Discourses when Machiavelli speaks of early men uniting themselves for defence and choosing from amongst themselves the most courageous "and placed him at their head, promising to obey him". This seems to be rather flimsy evidence at best and certainly does not take into account the all important question of what gives their promises a binding character.

II

We have already noted that the hierarchical system which had prevailed throughout the medieval period was being rapidly undermined during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This was especially true in the political sphere. This system which emphasized the transcendental norms of a universal religion had been quite effective in restraining the arbitrary exercise of power by those who administered the secular sphere. Machiavelli's response to the breakdown of these restraints was a positive one. He saw the secular political state as the source of the highest moral values, and he justified any exercise of political power which contributed to the creation and preservation of an effective political community. This view, however, was not shared by most of the significant political thinkers who came after him. Machiavelli's hoped-for redeemer did not materialize. Western society seemed to be drifting towards complete moral anarchy. These thinkers deeply distrusted the concentration of absolute power in the hands of a secular authority. They did not share Machiavelli's faith in a charismatic leader who could act for the common interest without any sense of moral restraint. It seemed to them that the secular rulers had to be brought back under the influence of absolute ethical principles. But it was not possible to return to the old dualism of church and state which had been effective in the past. In the first place, the church had declined in power as an institution vis à vis the state, and was no longer able to exert a material counter pressure to the state's authority. In the second place, Christian theology had lost its universal quality under the impact of the reformation and the counter-reformation. What was needed was a secular doctrine which could be acceptable to all shades of religious

opinion and belief; one which would at the same time possess sufficient vitality to resist the claims of the secular rulers to unrestricted power and freedom of action. This need was met by the revival and restatement of the Stoic doctrine of Natural Law. Cassirer observes that the influence of Stoic thought had in fact remained continuous. It could be traced in Roman jurisprudence as well as in scholastic philosophy. But

> "The tremendous practical significance of this great stream of thought did not appear until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Henceforward the theory of the natural rights of man was no longer an abstract ethical doctrine but one of the mainsprings of political action."[21]

Essentially, this doctrine asserts that there are absolute standards of ethical behaviour which are discoverable by the processes of human reason. It presupposes the rational character of man both in the sense of his ability to grasp these principles and in the sense that his reason can and does influence his will. It implies the autonomy and self-dependence of reason. Here was a purely secular theory which could make Grotius exclaim in the prolegomena to his De Jure Belli ac Pacis:

> "What we have been saying would have a degree of validity even if we should concede that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness, that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him."[22]

It is readily seen that the theory of Natural Law involves a complete negation of Machiavelli's conception of the nature of man and of politics. It sets up transcendental ethical norms; it assumes that man's actions are decisively influenced by reason; it implies that the political sphere is subordinate to the purely rational. In the rationalistic atmosphere of the

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21. E. Cassirer, Op. Cit., p. 168.

22. H. Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, (Oxford, 1925, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Translation, Vol. II, Bk. i, p. 13.

seventeenth century the laws of nature provided a series of neat axioms from which it was possible to derive conclusions about specific social and political problems by a process of abstract deductive reasoning.

Hume attacked this concept of natural law vigorously. His attack, however, did not bring him around to Machiavelli's position on the question of politics and ethics. There is too great a divergence in their respective views on the nature of man to make such a rapprochement possible. Hume's rejection of the natural-law doctrine follows from his philosophical scepticism. We have already sketched the main outlines of his epistemological position. He argues that moral distinctions cannot be derived from reason since the function of reason is limited to the "comparing of ideas and the inferring of matter of fact". The specific character of good and evil cannot be discovered in the logical relations which are within the scope of logical demonstration. It follows that even if we assumed the existence of a priori moral laws they could not be discovered by human reason and hence could impose no a priori obligation for moral behaviour. The second point that Hume develops proceeds from his definition of reason as an inert principle. The purpose of morals is to influence men's behaviour. Reason can only inform men about the relations of ideas; it cannot cause them to act. Men's wills are moved only by the passions, and reason is always the "slave of the passions". This implies that even if ethical values could be reduced to demonstrable relations they would still not fulfil their necessary function of causing or obliging men to act morally. But if Hume rejects the rationalistic ethics of the natural-law school it does not mean that he regards ethics as a subject which is not fit for philosophical examination. It may not be possible to prove the existence of innate

qualities of good and evil, but norms do exist as facts of experience, and as such may be investigated empirically.

In an interesting essay introducing Hume's political theory Professor F. Watkins observes that Hume's attempt to derive the origin and development of norms empirically followed from his position as a clear-thinking conservative. Hume recognized the transcendent nature of the natural law theories current at that time and was well aware of their revolutionary potentiality as absolute standards by which the existing state of things could be seriously attacked.

> "As a conservative he wanted to show that pure reason is incapable of making normative demands on the world of historical experience . . . His sceptical attack on pure reason was not a denial of the need for normative judgments, but an attempt to shift the basis of normative judgment from the plane of pure reason to the plane of concrete historical experience."[23]

Professor Watkins suggests that Hume attempted to create a "normative political science". In order to justify his own normative position he found it necessary to reconstruct the theory of natural law. For Hume was not merely interested in proving that social norms are immanent in history; he believed that the norms of his England were universally valid and worth preserving for all time. This involves Hume in a serious logical difficulty from which he can extricate himself only by making a number of assumptions which he cannot prove.

There is an obvious inconsistency in the view which holds that there are universally valid norms while holding at the same time that these norms are the products of time and situation. On the one hand, a pure immanentist conception would imply a degree of ethical relativism. Social

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23. F. Watkins, Hume: Theory of Politics, (Edinburgh, 1950), Introduction, p. xiii.

values as the products of historical experience would tend to vary as a result of inevitable differences in temporal and physical environment. On the other hand, a consistent immanentist theory of morals must allow for continuous development (not necessarily progressive) as no experience can ever be regarded as ultimate. Hume is prepared to accept a relativistic position with respect to degrees of utility. On this basis he explains the different standards of behaviour expected from men and women with regard to chastity. He acknowledges different levels of justice in the relations between states. He enunciates the general maxim that "the moral obligation holds proportion with the usefulness".[24] But the criterion of usefulness itself Hume considers to be woven into the fabric of human nature and therefore common to all mankind.

> "If we can depend upon any principle which we learn from philosophy, this, I think, may be considered as certain and undoubted, that there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection."[25]

Hume can affirm the existence of universal norms within the framework of his immanentist conception because he assumes the basic uniformity of human nature in the first place, and the general universality of human experience in the second. The norms which he is prepared to designate as laws of nature - the stability of possession, its transference by consent, and the performance of promises - are universally valid because he believes that all men come to regard them as useful as a result of their own experience. There may be many kinds of historical experience, but the problem

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24. Enquiry, p. 206, (Hume's Italics).

25. Essays, Vol. I, p. 216, (The Sceptic).

of utility is faced in all of them and is solved in a way that is characteristic of man in general.[26] Hume, unfortunately, did not have access to the present-day anthropological and historical information which would have cast serious doubts on his fundamental assumptions. His conclusion that universal norms can be discovered empirically, based as it is on unproved assumptions, stamps him as a natural-law theorist; but a natural-law theorist with a difference. Professor Watkins points out that Hume differed from his predecessors

> " . . in insisting that the laws of nature, while natural in the sense of being implicit in the nature of man, are also artificial in the sense of being a product of social experience."[27]

Hume thus achieves the conservative position of justifying the established order without recourse to norms which have an existence independent of this order.

The problem of the relationship of politics and ethics is particularly interesting when we deal with an immanentist conception of ethics. Since the norms of ethical behaviour are seen as the product of historical experience and are recognized as such only after they have developed empirically, the question that arises is - what is the function of politics in the historical process? We have seen that Machiavelli assigns a primary role to politics. Politics, as Machiavelli sees it, brings the political community into being and provides for its maintenance. Machiavelli's man has absolutely no natural capacity for virtuous action. He is compelled to submit to the restraints of political society by the necessity to keep

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26. "Tho' the rules of justice be artificial, they are not arbitrary. Nor is the expression improper to call them Laws of Nature; If by natural we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is unseparable from the species." - Treatise, Vol. II, p. 258. (Hume's italics).

27. F. Watkins, Op. Cit., p. xiv.

himself alive and secure in his possessions; and that only so long as the community is able to compel his obedience through its agencies of coercion. We have noted that Machiavelli regards law as a form of force. The only valid norms are those produced by a viable political community. Hume, however, has a much more optimistic view of the nature of man. Hume's man has a sense of vice and virtue which is a function of his make-up as a man. Although he prefers himself to all others he has natural propensities to other-regarding actions. He has a natural inclination to the limited society of the family. He is fitted to get along with some of his fellow men, albeit to a limited extent, without the intervention of government. He discovers the benefits which society offers and this inclines him to enter into wider and more complex social relations. Hume stresses the fact that the discovery of social benefits is the product of experience rather than reflection.

> "But in order to form society, 'tis requisite not only that it be advantageous, but also that men be sensible of these advantages; . . . ."[28]

The chief advantage which society has to offer and the one which is universally desired, is, according to Hume, stability of possession. Two factors, however, tend to frustrate the natural realization of this good. They are the qualities of human nature which make men partial to themselves and to their near ones, and the natural scarcity of the external objects which men desire to possess. This, to use Hume's term, is an inconvenience; an inconvenience which proceeds

> "from the concurrence of certain <u>qualities</u> of the human mind with the <u>situation</u> of external objects."[29]

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28. <u>Treatise</u>, Vol. II, p. 259.

29. <u>Ibid</u>., Vol. II, p. 266.

Hume believes that inconveniences of this nature can be overcome by human conventions; the sense of justice which is the basis of social stability is such a convention. It is here that Hume makes a vital distinction:

> ". . . those impressions, which give rise to the sense of justice, are not natural to the mind of man, but arise from artifice and human convention."[30]

Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues provides a starting point for his political theory. The natural vices and virtues are implicit in the nature of man. The artificial virtues, while consistent with natural human propensities, are immanent in human experience. The sense of pleasure and pain which is at the root of our moral sentiments may be aroused in two ways.

> "Moral good and evil are certainly distinguish'd by our sentiments, not by reason: But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from reflections on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons."[31]

Our sense of pain or pleasure may be aroused quite naturally by the direct experience or contemplation of something which frustrates or satisfies an immediate passion. But our ability to reflect on the long range tendencies to happiness is limited by our natural inclination to prefer contiguous pleasures to remote ones - the violent passions to the calm ones. Hume comments rather sadly that "This great weakness is incurable in human nature".[32] In order to maximize our satisfactions the remote is more significant than the contiguous. It thus becomes necessary to find some artifice whereby the calm passions may be made to prevail. Hume believes that this way was

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30. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 268.

31. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 347, (Hume's Italics).

32. Essays, Vol. I, p. 114, (of the Origin of Government).

discovered empirically. Men learned by experience in their natural social relations that it was to their mutual advantage to enjoy security in their lives and property and they entered into a convention to make this security possible. Hume emphasizes that the convention is not in the form of a promise since promises themselves arise from human conventions.

> "It is only a general sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules."[33]

To achieve stability of possession in the face of "the selfishness and confined generosity" of man it was necessary to provide checks on the violent passions. Hume is quick to point out:

> "Nor is such a restraint contrary to these passions; for if so, it cou'd never be enter'd into nor maintain'd; but it is only contrary to their heedless and impetuous movement."[34]

From this convention to abstain from the possessions of others, and from the rules that necessarily develop to enforce it, arises the idea of justice and injustice. The moral approbation that attaches to justice is derived not from its immediate manifestation which may well take the form of prohibition or punishment, but from the sense of pleasure which is aroused by our sympathy with its long run utility.

> "Thus self-interest is the original motive to the <u>establishment</u> of justice: but a <u>sympathy</u> with public interest is the source of the <u>moral approbation</u>, which attends that virtue."[35]

Two key ideas may be gleaned from this very brief summary of Hume's theory of the origin of justice. The first is, that the normative conception of justice as a virtue is immanent in the social process. The second is, that

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33. <u>Treatise</u>, Vol. II, p. 263.

34. <u>Ibid</u>., Vol. II, p. 262.

35. <u>Ibid</u>., Vol. II, p. 271.

as the idea of justice emerges there arises also the technical problem of making it effective in practice. For the convention does not abrogate the incurable weakness of human nature. The opening paragraph of Hume's essay Of the Origin of Government establishes the relationship of politics and justice within the historical process.

> "Man, born in a family, is compelled to maintain society from necessity, from natural inclination, and from habit. The same creature, in his farther progress, is engaged to establish political society in order to administer justice; without which there can be no peace among them, ... We are, therefore, to look upon all the vast apparatus of our government as having ultimately no other object or purpose but the distribution of justice, or, in other words, the support of the twelve judges."[36]

Hume considers the function of political society to be primarily utilitarian. In its ideal sense politics helps to bring about the conditions for the speedy realization of justice. As a utility which pleases it possesses a definite moral value. But it does not possess that ultimate value which Machiavelli gives it. Machiavelli places politics and the state in juxtaposition to the natural inclinations of men. Without the compulsion of law or of direct coercion when law breaks down there can be no security. The people do not possess any original virtue. They may only derive it from the politically creative activity of the charismatic leader. This is not the case with Hume's man who has an original capacity for virtue. To be sure, there is a conflict of passions which tends to inhibit his moral development. But Hume believes that given enough time there would be a natural progress of the sentiments towards the idea of justice. The value of politics is not absolute. The political process performs an auxiliary function. It may "assist nature in the producing of those sentiments, which

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36. Essays, Vol. I, pp.113 - 4.

she suggests to us". [37] Hume defines the limits of politics when he asserts:

> "The utmost politicians can perform, is, to extend the natural sentiments beyond their original bounds; but still nature must furnish the materials, and give us some notion of moral distinctions."[38]

Politics as an agent in the process of the realization of virtue possesses very great value, but it cannot claim priority to the sense of justice. Machiavelli may defend the moral autonomy of politics by supposing that the situation in which the statefounder begins his creative work is completely devoid of morality. In the one instance where Machiavelli suggests an immanent view of the origin of justice its development takes place within the framework of an established political community. Hume, however, makes it clear that the sense of justice, evolving out of the convention to bestow stability of possession, arises before the artifices of politicians help to bring about its practical realization. But this does not mean that politics is subordinate to the "laws of nature" which give rise to the sense of justice. When he discusses the problem of allegiance Hume recognizes that some people might reason that the three fundamental laws of nature which are the outcome of the original convention are

> "antecedent to government, and are suppos'd to impose an obligation before the duty of allegiance to civil magistrates has once been thought of."[39]

Such a view would seriously undermine his conservative position. It implies a source of allegiance higher than that of the state; one that might, under given circumstances, release man from his obligations to the "magistracy". Hume first stresses that although he calls these fundamental conventions

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37. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 271.

38. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 272.

39. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 306.

laws of nature, he does not conceive them in the same way as do the natural-law philosophers. These laws arise in history by human convention; and the "more plainly artificial" duties of civil justice arise in a similar manner. Once this is realized,

> "we shall quickly perceive, how fruitless it is to resolve the one into the other, and seek in the laws of nature, a stronger foundation for our duties than interest, and human convention; . . ."[40]

Hume maintains that moral obligation is a function of the maximization of pleasure. Both natural and civil justice are

> "contriv'd to remedy like inconveniences, and acquire their moral sanction in the same manner, from their remedying those inconveniences."[41]

The sense of natural justice may be prior in time to the political processes which make civil justice effective, but both derive their value in terms of the same utilitarian criterion.

We return to the general problem of politics and ethics. It is evident that Hume does not isolate the political realm from the ethical. His main interest is directed at the central questions of a normative political philosophy. His concern is with the ends of the political process (government) and with the moral basis of political obligation. Although his epistemological reasoning informs him that it is impossible to discover the intrinsic nature of good and evil, he holds that it is possible to study norms as empirical facts and to trace their occurrence and growth to universal elements of human nature. Politics represents an integral part of the social

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40. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 307.

41. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 308.

process within which the ethical norms are immanent. The political state, to borrow a phrase from Croce, is a series of useful actions. And in Hume's philosophical scheme, the useful is continually being transformed into the ethical. Political obligation is a function of the usefulness of the political society in serving the common interest. Hume finds that he must draw the obvious logical conclusion.

> "As interest, therefore, is the immediate sanction of government, the one can have no longer being than the other; and whenever the civil magistrate carries his oppression so far as to render his authority perfectly intolerable, we are no longer bound to submit to it. The cause ceases; the effect must cease also."[42]

But Hume's deep conservative instinct rebels against the revolutionary implications of this deduction. He goes on to say that it might be justifiable "both in sound politics and morality" to resist the constituted supreme civil authority under certain conditions. But

> "it is certain that in the ordinary course of human affairs nothing can be more pernicious and criminal; and that besides the convulsions, which always attend revolutions, such practice tends directly to the subversion of all government, and the causing an universal anarchy and confusion among mankind."[43]

In order to bolster his opposition to the idea of justified resistance to established political authority, Hume seeks additional sources of political obligation and finds these, too, in human nature and experience. He turns to the role of custom and habit in human behaviour and reasons that while interest remains the original "instinct" for the formation of political society, allegiance to particular government is founded on custom. Time and habitual obedience are also valid grounds for political obligation.

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42. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 314.

43. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 317.

Hume invokes empirical evidence to give more weight to his argument.

> "'Tis certain, that if we remount to the first origin of every nation, we shall find, that there scarce is any race of kings, or form of a commonwealth, that is not primarily founded on usurpation and rebellion, and whose title is not at first worse than doubtful and uncertain. Time alone gives solidity to their right; and operating gradually on the minds of men, reconciles them to any authority, and makes it seem just and reasonable."[44]

It is a short step from here to Hume's conception of the function of political science. The study of political institutions and of their development as the result of psychological and historical factors is not an end in itself. Hume is concerned with the moral consequences of the political phenomena which he examines. Like Machiavelli he wants to learn what experience can teach about the political means of attaining the good. Although he believes that ethical norms are immanent in history he does not assume that they unfold in an inevitable progressive pattern. The political scientist may make a positive contribution to moral development with his knowledge of the possible consequences of specific institutional forms and particular courses of action. That certain consequences proceed logically from specific forms of government is the basis of Hume's contention "That Politics may be reduced to a Science".

> "So great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which the mathematical sciences afford us."[45]

Hume, however, was unable to escape his own conservative bias. As so often happens when one approaches the study of empirical data with strong normative presuppositions, there is a tendency to select and interpret the

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44. Treatise, Vol. II, p. 319.

45. Essays, Vol. I, p. 99.

data so that they confirm these presuppositions. This is especially true when dealing with social facts which are so numerous and so complex. Professor Watkins suggests that Hume actually believed that it was possible to create a normative political science. He regarded political science as a means of discovering and justifying the norms that were immanent in the historical process. But as M. R. Cohen points out

> ". . . all attempts to derive ethical values from history really assume the very values to be derived."46.

For one must either say that all historical facts are valuable, or, one must justify the selection of less than all the facts in terms of some normative principle. This principle can never be more than a presupposition. Hume's assumptions were rather narrowly based. The laws of nature which he purported to discover in history were in fact the norms of the propertied classes of eighteenth-century England. To justify these "empirically" he had to construct a hedonistic theory of morals grounded on the principles of associationist psychology, and, by assuming that stability of possession is universally desired, he inferred the "empirical" origin of justice and property as norms.

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46. M. R. Cohen, Reason and Nature, (New York, 1931), p. 378.

Conclusion

It has already been indicated at several points that this paper is not intended as a thorough study of Machiavelli's and Hume's political theory. Nor is it, in the full sense of the word, a comparative study of common elements in their approach to political problems. It deals primarily with certain common aspects of their work which have a bearing on some of the most important questions facing modern political thought.

The problem of a scientific methodology in the field of social enquiry is as yet far from being solved. The inverse deductive method which was understood and applied by Machiavelli and Hume is still generally valid. To be sure, tremendous advances have been made in the collection and classification of empirical social data. But the task of interpreting and generalizing from the myriad of facts presents a major difficulty. Spurred on by the great success of the physical sciences, many modern social scientists have attempted to give meaning to their empirical data by the use of intricate techniques of statistical and other kinds of quantitative analysis. But it seems that these methods are inadequate to describe phenomena which are not really quantifiable. Statistics may tell us something about overt political behaviour, but it can tell us very little about the motivation for such behaviour. The same overt response to a given political stimulus may be due to as many different motives as there are people making the response. Interview and questionnaire procedures which try to probe more deeply into the question of motivation do not elude the problem of interpretation. For both questions and answers are necessarily in the form of words and sentences which must be interpreted and are therefore subject to the usual semantic difficulties.

We may well question the validity of the empirical generalizations of Machiavelli and Hume; but we can only do so with a sense of our own limitations when we realize that modern political science has not yet found the way of drawing certain conclusions from complex empirical data.

We have seen that Machiavelli's and Hume's interpretations of social and historical facts was conditioned by their conceptions of the nature of man. It is an essential aspect of the inverse deductive method that empirical generalizations should accord with known principles of human nature. Machiavelli and Hume reached some radically different conclusions from their empirical researches because of the basic differences in their psychological theories. Modern psychology, despite its great achievements, has not as yet produced a universally acceptable hypothesis about the basic nature of man. Social scientists tend to interpret their data and to justify their conclusions in terms of a psychological hypothesis which can only be one of several put forward. It is to the credit of Machiavelli and Hume that they recognized the importance of harmonizing their political theories with the facts of human nature as they saw them. The need for an adequate psychological theory to account for political phenomena and as a basis for a philosophy of politics is generally recognized today.

The relationship to modern political thought of the question of politics and ethics as treated by Machiavelli and Hume is rather more obscure. There is a strong movement in modern political theory towards an extreme positivist position. This viewpoint insists that the political thinker qua scientist must put all questions of valuation aside and concern himself solely with the description and analysis of that aspect of behaviour which we designate as political. All questions of ethics and all normative judgments are thought to be matters for philosophical speculation and beyond

the scope of a genuine political science. Politics as an empirical realm is considered to be completely distinct from ethics which belongs to the normative realm. We expressed some doubts about the validity of this position in our first chapter and it is not our present purpose to discuss this problem in greater detail. It seemed, however, that Machiavelli and Hume offered an interesting object lesson that might be taken into account by the modern positivists, and this prompted the writing of a chapter on politics and ethics. Machiavelli is frequently described by members of the positivist school as a worthy example of an objective empirical thinker. Professors Lasswell and Kaplan, in a recent study,[1] have attempted to make a quantitative analysis of the ratio of normative to empirical thought in the writings of some outstanding political thinkers. Their researches thus yield a ratio of 25 to 75 in Aristotle's Politics; 45 to 55 in Rousseau's Social Contract; 20 to 80 in Laski's Grammar of Politics; and 0 to 100 in Machiavelli's Prince. We believe, however, that it has been shown that Machiavelli's thought is not purely empirical. It was set in a definite normative framework which makes it meaningful and worthy of being reckoned with in our modern situation. In Hume's case we have the first thinker to make the epistemological distinction between normative judgments and judgments of fact. In this regard he may be thought of as the father of positivism. Yet, we have seen that Hume did not try to avoid the normative sphere in his empirical investigations. While he argued that the intrinsic value of a norm may never be known, it was still possible to determine and understand norms as facts of experience. The central

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1. H. D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, Power and Society; A Framework for Political Inquiry, (New Haven, 1950), p. 118n.

purpose of the Treatise was to "Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects". Machiavelli and Hume did not isolate their empirical studies from all normative considerations; and the close connection between politics and ethics which is evident in their writing follows readily from their approach. To be sure, their own normative assumptions tended to influence the selection and interpretation of their empirical facts. This would seem to justify the positivist contention that a normative position seriously inhibits scientific objectivity. But a subjective bias of some sort is inevitable in an individual who exists in a complex social situation. Where the empirical material is massive and complex and not reducible to meaningful quantitative relations the investigator must necessarily select and interpret facts in terms of some conscious or unconscious conceptual framework. To the extent that he must do this his normative presuppositions play an important influencing role. The pure positivist position, which must assume that all empirical facts are of equal value, breaks down in the face of a situation where selection must inevitably take place. John Dewey points out that there must be an hypothesis which limits the empirical research to the relevant facts in all fields of enquiry. The hypothesis must have some relevance to an "existential problematic situation". Where this is a social situation it is impossible to avoid normative presuppositions in defining the ends which the enquiry aims to achieve. The important prerequisite, however, is that the end in view be regarded not as a dogma which may not be questioned, but as an hypothesis which is subject to rigorous empirical and logical criticism. The modern significance of Machiavelli and Hume is not founded on the ratio of value judgments to value-free observations in their work. It is derived from their attempt to discover empirical and psychological evidence in support of their normative hypothesis that politics fulfils a positive ethical function.

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