

Articoli/3

The Role of Emotions, Desires and Passions in Politics

Machiavelli's Political Psychology of Motivation

Manuel Knoll

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This article shows that human emotions, desires, and passions play an important role in Machiavelli's analysis and theory of politics. The paper claims that Machiavelli developed a psychology of motivation that is political because it is mainly interested in the driving forces of political behaviors and actions. A political psychology of motivation allows a theorist to partly predict political events and actions and to give advice to politicians because the constant human passions and emotions such as ambition and greed, hatred and fear, will always have the same influence on political decisions.

1. Machiavelli's Worldview and Approach to Politics

Niccolò Machiavelli is a political theorist who understands politics not just as a matter of reasons and rational choices, but also of emotions, desires, and passions. According to Machiavelli, we are living in a contingent world in which there are severe limits to predicting the effects and consequences of political actions or plans. One of the central concepts of Machiavelli's worldview is «Fortuna» who he conceives of as an extremely powerful and moody Goddess. In Renaissance thought, since Petrarch, Fortune played an important role in expressing the contingency of the world. In chapter XXV of *The Prince*, Machiavelli declares that man possesses «free will» (*libero arbitrio*) and «that it might be true that fortune [*la fortuna*] is arbiter of half of our

actions, but also that she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern». ¹ A leading politician needs «virtue» (*virtù*) in order to maximize the chances that his actions will succeed. Fortuna «demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her». ² However, even a very virtuous politician such as Cesare Borgia can be brought down through the «extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune». ³ In his *Tercets on Fortune*, Machiavelli emphasizes Fortuna's unpredictable power and explains, «She times events as suits her; she raises us up, she puts us down without pity [*pietà*], without law [*legge*] or reason [*ragione*]». ⁴ Fortuna can easily destroy a politician or a state, but she can also supply a favorable «opportunity» (*occasione*) for political action. ⁵

Machiavelli is convinced that despite the whims of Fortune and the permanent changes in the flow of particular historical events there is a certain «necessity» (*necessità*) in history that allows us to compare political events and to learn from them. This necessity is mainly rooted in the constancy of human nature. This means, for Machiavelli, that all human beings are driven mainly by «ambition» (*ambizione*) and «greed» (*avarizia*). For Machiavelli, the constancy of human nature is the central premise that makes the scientific analysis of politics possible.

This article analyses the central role that the human passions «ambition» (*ambizione*) and «greed» (*avarizia*) play in Machiavelli's theory of politics. This analysis partly draws on a preceding paper that argues against the prevailing views that characterize Machiavelli's image of humanity as either *pessimistic* or *optimistic*, defending the thesis that the Florentine has a *realist* image of humanity. ⁶ However, this paper also examines the role emotions such as «love» (*amore*), «hate» (*odio*), «contempt» (*disprezzo*), and «fear» (*timore*) play in Machiavelli's theory of politics. The thesis of the article is that Machiavelli developed a political psychology of motivation. Usually, Darwin and Freud are credited as the pioneers of the psychology of motivation. ⁷ However, in the modern era, questions about the causes and goals of human behavior specific to this subbranch of psychology have been examined as early as Machiavelli. ⁸ His psychology of motivation is political because he is mainly interested in the

¹ N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. H. C. Mansfield, Sec. Edition, Chicago/London 1998, XXV, p. 98. All Italian words in the Greek and English translations are inserted by M. K.

² Ivi, XXV, p. 98.

³ Ivi, VII, p. 27.

⁴ N. Machiavelli, *Tercets on Fortune*, Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, trans. A. Gilbert, Vol. II, Durham/London 1989, p. 746. Trans. slightly modified by M. Knoll.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ M. Knoll, *Machiavellis realistisches Menschenbild und seine Rechtfertigung des Staats, Philosophy and Society (Filozofija i društvo)*, 2/2018, Vol. 29, pp. 182-201.

⁷ H.-D. Schmalt, *Motivationspsychologie*, Stuttgart 1986, pp. 12, 18-24.

⁸ In Book V of the *Politics*, from which Machiavelli drew heavily, Aristotle examines the causes and goals of uprisings and revolutions. Among them are fear, contempt, and the desire for profit and honor (*Pol. V 2*). Book V can be interpreted as one of the first studies of the political role of emotions, desires, and passions. However, also in Plato one finds important insights on this topic.

motives of political behavior on the side of both the rulers and the ruled. As a political analyst, Machiavelli studies the emotions, desires, and passions that motivate political actions and events such as conflicts, upheavals, conspiracies, conquests, and wars. Based on his analyses he claims to be able to partly predict political events and actions and give advice to politicians.

2. The Central Role Of Ambition and Greed in Machiavelli's Anthropology and Psychology

For Machiavelli, the behavior of human beings is a constant factor in history. He compares human nature with the sky, the sun, and the natural elements. All of these phenomena have been the same in antiquity as they are today (*Discourses* Preface). Machiavelli explains,

Prudent men are accustomed to say, and not by chance or without good reasons, that whoever wishes to foresee the future should reflect on the past, for everything that happens in the world at any time has its proper counterpart [*riscontro*] in ancient times. This is due to the fact that these events are the work of men who have, and always have had, the same passions [*sempre le medesime passioni*] which must of necessity result in the same effects (*Discourses* III 43, trans. M.K.; cf. *Discourses* I 39).

Machiavelli's idea that history's necessity is based on the constancy of human nature is already found in Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which the Florentine knew well (I 22, III 82). This constancy allows political theorists and politicians who study history to learn from it. Using an inductive and comparative method, Machiavelli aims at gaining «general rules» (*regole generali*) that can guide political action.⁹ The Florentine's view of the constancy of human nature does not mean, however, that all people in all times and places possessed the same virtues. While the ancient Romans were extremely virtuous, the opposite is true for Machiavelli's Italian contemporaries (*Discourses* II Preface). Such differences depend mainly on the differences in religion and education (*Discourses* II 2). At the heart of Machiavelli's view of the constancy of human nature is his conviction that human capacities and passions are always the same and drive history.

Machiavelli developed many theses and views about the emotions, desires, and passions that drive human beings. His works contain generalizations about peoples such as the Germans and the French who are «full of avarice, pride, ferocity, and faithlessness» (*pieni di avarizia, di superbia, di ferocità e*

⁹ For Machiavelli's scientific approach and his method see H. Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli*, London 1955; M. Knoll, *Wissenschaft und Methode bei Machiavelli. Die Neubegründung der empirischen Politikwissenschaft nach Aristoteles*, M. Knoll/S. Saracino (eds.): *Niccolò Machiavelli – Die Geburt des modernen Staates* (Staatsdiskurse 11), Stuttgart 2010, pp. 91–119.

d'infidelità) (*Discourses* III 43).¹⁰ Machiavelli's works also contain generalizations about human beings per se: «For one can say this generally of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain» (*ingrati, volubili, simulatori e dissimulatore, fuggitori de' pericoli, cupidi di guadagno*).¹¹ Among the natural and common desires of human beings are the «desire to acquire» (*desiderare di acquistare*), the «wish to seek to command others» (*comandare altrui*) and «the appetite for reigning» (*appetito del regnare*).¹² For Machiavelli, «men are driven by two principle things, either by love or by fear».¹³ His most general but also most indefinite statements are that «men are wicked» and there are many «who are not good».¹⁴ Machiavelli is a psychological egoist who conceives of man as a being whose actions are motivated by his drives, appetites, and passions, which lead him often to immoral behavior.¹⁵

As mentioned above, Machiavelli holds that the human being possesses «free will» (*libero arbitrio*). However, man's freedom of choice is limited by his «nature» (*natura*) and no one is able to «deviate from what nature inclines him».¹⁶ This is especially relevant to Machiavelli's conviction that men have essentially one of two temperaments; one proceeds «with caution, the other with impetuosity» (*l'uno con rispetto, l'uno con impeto*).¹⁷ When Machiavelli talks about the nature of man he uses «nature» in the sense of «essence». This can be observed in many of his uses of the term, for example when he claims that «the nature of man is ambitious and suspicious» (*la natura degli uomini è ambiziosa e sospettosa*).¹⁸

Machiavelli conceives of man's nature as a multitude of dispositions, drives, passions, desires, and emotions. Among these he understands the passions «ambition» (*ambizione*) and «greed» (*avarizia*) as the most fundamental drives. In his poem *The [Golden] Ass* he explains, «Nature gave you hands and speech, and with them she gave you also ambition and avarice».¹⁹ In *The Prince*, he states that both the cautious and the impetuous temperaments have the same goal: «glories and riches» (*gloria e ricchezza*).²⁰ While ambition aims at «glory» (*gloria*) and «honor» or «recognition» (*onore*), greed is geared toward wealth and material goods. The importance of glory and honor for Machiavelli's political

¹⁰ N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. H. C. Mansfield, N. Tarcov, Chicago/London 1996, p. 302.

¹¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVII, p. 66.

¹² Ivi, III, p. 14; Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I 1, p. 8; III 4, p. 216.

¹³ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, III 21, p. 263.

¹⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XV, p. 61; XVII, p. 66f.

¹⁵ Cf. G. Giorgini, *Machiavelli on Good and Evil: The Problem of Dirty Hands Revisited*, D. Johnston, N. Urbinati, C. Vergara (eds.), *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, Chicago 2017, pp. 58–86.

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXV, p. 100.

¹⁷ Ivi, XXV, p. 99. Cf. *Discourses on Livy*, III 9.

¹⁸ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I 29, p. 65.

¹⁹ N. Machiavelli, *The [Golden] Ass*, chap. 8, Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, Vol. II, p. 772.

²⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXV, p. 99.

thought has already been demonstrated in the literature.²¹ How much people are driven by greed is shown by the fact that «men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony».²² From this insight into human nature, Machiavelli derives the political advice to a prince that «above all, he must abstain from the property of others».²³

Machiavelli elucidates the outstanding significance of ambition and greed in his *Tercets on Ambition*. He starts this poem by prompting his addressee Luigi Guicciardini to look at the world in a truly realistic way, which takes into account the «mortal cravings» (*l'umano appetito*).²⁴ According to the central statement of the poem, ambition and greed, the two pivotal cravings, are «evil's cause» (*la cagion del male*), by which is meant the cause of wars and discord, and of harm and suffering.²⁵ For good reasons, Machiavelli's poem has been interpreted as an intentional dissociation of the Christian explanation of evil.²⁶ In the poem, he conceives of evil chiefly as a political phenomenon and not as the consequence of the Fall of Man. The primary cause of evil is a hostile and «hidden power which sustains itself in the heaven» sending man the «two Furies» ambition and greed, which «deprive us of peace» and «set us at war, to take away from us all quiet and all good».²⁷ The two Furies «bear in their hands a bottomless urn» to «show their limitless desire [*voglia infinita*]»: «Envy, Sloth, and Hatred are their companions, and with their pestilence they fill the world, and with them go Cruelty, Pride, and Deceit».²⁸ This quotation elucidates the central role that ambition and greed play in Machiavelli's image of humanity because it suggests that all of these vices and unpleasant emotions are the result of these passions. Ambition and greed lead to an unequal distribution of the desired goods, which causes envy and hatred among those who lost out, and sloth and pride among the successful. Hatred leads to cruelty and the insatiable greed to get more leads to deceitful actions and generally to immoral behaviors. For Machiavelli, human beings are wicked because they act in selfish and reprehensible ways due to their ambition, greed, and other cravings.

As early as Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, greed and ambition have been identified as an essential feature of human nature. After describing the horrible consequences of the civil war in Corcyra during the

²¹ In the last part of his investigation on tyranny in Machiavelli, Stefano Saracino gives a «thymotic interpretation» of Machiavelli's political thought. One central basis of this interpretation is the psychology Plato develops in Book IV of his *Republic* and in particular the «spirited part of the soul» (*thymoides*) that aims at glory and honor (S. Saracino, *Tyrannis und Tyrannenmord bei Machiavelli. Zur Genese einer antitraditionellen Auffassung politischer Gewalt, politischer Ordnung und Herrschaftsmoral* (Humanistische Bibliothek), München 2012, pp. 407–434).

²² Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVII, p. 67.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ N. Machiavelli, *Tercets on Ambition*, Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, Vol. II, p. 735.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 736.

²⁶ A. Buck, *Machiavelli* (Erträge der Forschung 226), Darmstadt 1985, p. 39; W. Kersting, *Niccolò Machiavelli* (Becksche Reihe Denker), 3rd edition (original 1988), München 2006, p. 40.

²⁷ Machiavelli, *Tercets on Ambition*, p. 735f.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 736.

Peloponnesian War, Thucydides explains that, «The cause of all these evils was the desire to rule which greed [*pleonexia*] and ambition [*philotimia*] inspire» (III 82).²⁹ For Plato, «greed» or the «desire to get more and more» (*pleonexia*) is the origin of war (*Phaedo* 66c; *Republic* II 373d–374a). In line with Thucydides and Plato, Aristotle holds that human beings generally strive for material gain and «recognition» or «honor» (*timê*). About the relation of these goals he explains, «for the mass of mankind are more covetous of gain than of honour» (*Pol.* VI 4, 1318b16f.; cf. *Pol.* V 2, 1302a31–1302b2).³⁰ For Aristotle, it is not simply that the striving for material gain and honor is an essential feature of human nature. The same is true for an extreme striving for these goals called greed and ambition. Similar to Thucydides and Plato, he conceptualizes such a striving with the term *pleonexia*. For Aristotle, *pleonexia* is a morally reprehensible drive to get more than one deserves with particular regard to external goods such as political power, honour and gain. He holds *pleonexia* to be a vice so prevalent and significant that he identifies it with particular injustice which he opposes to «justice as a part of virtue».³¹

Usually Machiavelli distinguishes between the terms «ambition» (*ambizione*) and «greed» (*avarizia*). While greed aims at material goods, ambition is geared toward glory and honor. In an important passage in the *Discourses*, however, he abandons this distinction and subsumes the instinctive goals of greed under those of ambition:

For whenever engaging in combat through necessity is taken from men they engage in combat through ambition, which is so powerful in human breasts that it never abandons them at whatever rank they rise to. The cause is that nature has created men so that they are able to desire [*desiderare*] everything and unable to attain everything. So, since the desire [*desiderio*] is always greater than the power of acquiring, the result is discontent with what one possesses and a lack of satisfaction with it. From this arises the variability of their fortune, for since some men desire to have more [*desiderando ... di avere più*], and some fear to lose what has been acquired, they come to enmities and war, from which arise the ruin of one province and the exaltation of another.³²

In this passage, Machiavelli uses «ambition» in the sense of *pleonexia* because he relates the desires of this urge indiscriminately to all kinds of goods. Ambition is an incessant drive of man's behavior that also determines the course of history and the rise and fall of states. This drive is beyond all

²⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II, Books III and IV, trans. C. F. Smith, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge 1958 (original 1920), p. 146f.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes, XXI, Cambridge, Mass. 1977, p. 498f.

³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* V 2 1129b1–10, V 3–4, 1130a15–1130b4; cf. M. Knoll, *Aristokratische oder demokratische Gerechtigkeit? Die politische Philosophie des Aristoteles und Martha Nussbaums egalitaristische Rezeption*, München/Paderborn 2009, pp. 65–68.

³² Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I 37, p. 78. The title of Machiavelli's *Tercets on Ambition*, in which he talks about ambition and greed, suggests that he holds «ambition» to be a generic term.

measure, unlimited, insatiable, and can't be brought to satisfaction. It can never be satisfied because the goods at which it aims are scarce and cannot be attained exhaustively: «Besides this, human appetites are insatiable, for since from nature they have the ability and wish to desire all things and from fortune the ability to achieve few of them».³³ Like in his *Tercets on Ambition*, and like Thucydides and Plato, Machiavelli conceives of *pleonexia* as a mover of history and cause of war.

3. The Role of Anthropological and Psychological Knowledge for Machiavelli's Theory of Politics

Machiavelli's «anthropological» studies and his psychology of motivation are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are means to the analysis of politics, and serve to predict political actions and to give advice to politicians. Ambition, greed, and other passions are historically constant anthropological principles and well-known causes that allow a political analyst to draw conclusions about their effects in different political situations. This is what Machiavelli has in mind when he says that the same passions «must of necessity result in the same effects». Simply put, a political analyst or politician can make calculations knowing that human behavior is motivated by ambition, greed, and other passions. Armed with such knowledge it is much easier to find the appropriate means to reach one's political goals. Knowledge of human motivation allows a politician to choose the right alternative for political action. Machiavelli's approach to analyzing politics based on anthropological principles and psychological motivations is very similar to that of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes also maintains that human beings are driven by their passions like the «Desire of Power, of Riches, of Knowledge, and of Honour».³⁴ Hobbes also begins his political analysis with certain anthropological axioms such as the human fear of death and the common desire for pleasure. The first part of Hobbes's *Leviathan* is titled «Of Man», the second «Of Commonwealth».

Knowledge of Machiavelli's anthropology and psychology is an important prerequisite to understand his theory of the state. For him, the founder of a new political order or a legislator has to take the human passions into account. As mentioned above, these passions often lead human beings to immoral behaviors. For Machiavelli,

it is necessary to whoever disposes a republic and orders laws in it to presuppose that all men are bad, and that they always have to use the malignity of their spirit whenever they have a free opportunity for it. [...] Such a thing is testimony for what I said above, that men never work any good unless through necessity, but where choice abounds and one can make use of license, at once everything is full of confusion and

³³ Ivi, II Preface, p. 125.

³⁴ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction by K.R. Minogue, London/Melbourne 1973, chap. 8, p. 35.

disorder. Therefore it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious and the laws make them good.³⁵

This quotation demonstrates that Machiavelli holds the state and its laws to be necessary institutions. They are remedies that allow for containing the human passions and their bad consequences. Through criminal law, police, military and security forces the state is able to subdue the human appetites and to establish law and order. This legitimizes the state and its coercive measures. Although human beings are never able to free themselves from their natural drives to gain material goods and recognition, a good political order is at least able to contain their greed and ambition³⁶. It can weaken the egoistic desires of its citizens and redirect their actions in a way that serves the well-being of the political community³⁷.

For Machiavelli, the state has not only the task of establishing law and order, but of transforming human nature and of improving its citizens. A central purpose of its laws is to educate citizens toward virtue. As Machiavelli remarks upon the commendable Roman Republic and its «many examples of virtues»: «for good examples arise from good education, good education from good laws».³⁸ In his *Tercets on Ambition*, Machiavelli makes a remarkable statement about how he understands the way human nature and education are related. The historical background of this statement is the disparity between the extraordinary virtue and success of the ancient Romans and the miserable state of contemporary Italy:

And when someone blames Nature if in Italy, so much afflicted and worn, men are not born so vigorous and hardy, I say that this does not excuse and justify our lack of worth, for discipline can make up where Nature is lacking [*può supplire l'educazione dove natura manca*]. This in times gone by made Italy flourish, and for conquering the world from end to end, stern discipline [*fiera educazion*] gave her daring³⁹.

These stanzas show in an impressive way how much power Machiavelli ascribes to education. Depending on the sort of education, a very different «end-product» can be formed from the same «raw material», «the Italian». These

³⁵ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I 3, p. 15.

³⁶ Cf. L. Huovinen, *Das Bild vom Menschen im politischen Denken Niccolò Machiavellis*, Helsinki 1951, p. 57, 70.

³⁷ In his *Tercets on Ambition*, Machiavelli compares victorious France with troubled and occupied Italy: «I say that if with Ambition are joined a valiant heart, a well-armed vigor [*virtute armata*], then for himself a man seldom fears evil. When through her own nature a country lives unbridled, and then, by accident, is organized and established under good laws, Ambition uses against foreign peoples that violence which neither the law nor the king permits her to use at home (wherefore home-born trouble almost always ceases); yet she is sure to keep disturbing the sheepfolds of others, wherever that violence of hers has planted its banner» (Machiavelli, *Tercets on Ambition*, p. 737).

³⁸ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I 4, p. 16. Cf. F. Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*. 3rd Edition, München/Berlin 1929, p. 43.

³⁹ Machiavelli, *Tercets on Ambition*, p. 737.

stanzas also demonstrate that the Florentine understands education toward virtue foremost as an education toward bravery and rigor, and thus toward military virtue⁴⁰. Machiavelli explains the difference between the excellent Roman education and the unsuccessful contemporary education primarily in term of the dissimilarity of the Roman and Christian religions: «For our religion [...] makes us esteem less the honor of this world, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming it very much and having placed the highest good in it, where more ferocious in their actions».⁴¹ Religion is an important means for education and determines its content to a large degree (cf. *Discourses* I 11). However, different religions lead to different educations and diverging educations yield diverging types of human beings. The «weakness of men at present» is mainly «caused by their weak education», for which Machiavelli holds Christianity to be responsible.⁴²

Machiavelli conceives of religion as an instrument for politics. Despite his criticism of Christianity, he holds religion to be a crucial means for allowing a political community and its leaders to educate and to improve its citizens. However, the prerequisite for achieving these goals is an existing state that promotes and controls the organized exercise of religion. Therefore, for Machiavelli, the state achieves its legitimacy not only by its power to subdue the human appetites, but through its ability to educate and improve its ambitious and greedy citizens. As fear is another central drive of human beings, a prudent politician can use their fear of a divine power to discipline them and to subdue their appetites and redirect them for the well-being of the state.

4. The Role of Love, Fear, Hate, and Contempt in Machiavelli's Theory of Politics

Machiavelli is well aware that several emotions such as love and fear have considerable political significance. A political leader has to aim at being loved and feared by his subjects, followers, and advisers because these emotions increase his power and authority and secure his status. For Machiavelli,

men are driven by two principle things, either by love or by fear; so whoever makes himself loved commands, as does he who makes himself feared. Indeed, most often who makes himself feared is more followed and more obeyed than whoever makes himself loved.⁴³

The Florentine devotes an entire chapter of *The Prince* to the question of «whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the contrary». In this chapter,

⁴⁰ Cf. Huovinen, *Das Bild vom Menschen im politischen Denken Niccolò Machiavellis*, p. 112, 115.

⁴¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II 2, p. 131.

⁴² Ivi, III 27, p. 275.

⁴³ Ivi, III 21, p. 263. This was written against Cicero who in his *De Officiis* II 23 had argued that love preserves statesmen whereas fear is conducive to hatred, which brings down even the most powerful statesman.

he gives largely the same answer as in the *Discourses*: «The response is that one would want to be both the one and the other; but because it is difficult to put them together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one has to lack one of the two»⁴⁴. A political leader and his status are better protected by being feared than by being loved because fear is «held by a dread of punishment that never forsakes you»⁴⁵. On the contrary, love lasts only as long as a political leader is able to provide benefactions to his subjects, followers, and advisers. Such benefactions create a bond of obligation between them and the political leader. However, «because men are wicked» this bond «is broken at every opportunity for their own utility»⁴⁶.

The love and fear of subjects, followers and advisers are also politically significant because they protect a political leader from conspiracies. Conspiracies are an important topic in Machiavelli's political thought. This is demonstrated by the fact that chapter 6 of Book III of the *Discourses*, which discusses conspiracies, is by far the longest chapter of the whole work.⁴⁷ However, conspiracies are also a topic in chapter XIX of *The Prince*, «Of avoiding contempt and hatred». As the title suggests, Machiavelli argues in the chapter that a political leader has «to avoid those things that make him hateful and contemptible»⁴⁸. The main reason that a prince evokes hatred among his subjects consists in rapacious behavior such as taking away their property and their women⁴⁹. As mentioned above, the loss of property is hated so much because the human desire to possess material goods is extremely strong. The main reason that a prince evokes contempt among his subjects is based on his being «held variable, light, effeminate, pusillanimous, irresolute» (*vario, leggieri, effeminato, pusillanime, irresoluto*)⁵⁰.

Concerning foreign policy, a political leader should be afraid of foreign powers and the ambition and greed of their political leaders; regarding domestic policy, he should be troubled about conspiracies by his subjects and in particular of his entourage⁵¹. To a large extent a prince secures himself from a secret conspiracy «if he avoids being hated or despised and keeps the people satisfied with him»⁵². In chapter XIX of *The Prince*, Machiavelli substantiates this view by referring to the lives and qualities of many Roman emperors and by analyzing the reasons for their ruin. Among the two emotions «hatred» and «contempt» the former is more powerful in politics. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli explains that among the many causes for conspiracies the most important is

⁴⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVII, p. 66.

⁴⁵ Ivi, XVII, p. 67.

⁴⁶ Ivi, XVII, p. 66f.

⁴⁷ For an interpretation of the chapter see Saracino, *Tyrannis und Tyrannenmord bei Machiavelli*, pp. 379-405.

⁴⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIX, p. 71f.

⁴⁹ Ivi, XVII, XIX, pp. 67, 72.

⁵⁰ Ivi, XIX, p. 72.

⁵¹ Ivi, XIX, p. 72f.; Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, III 6, p. 221.

⁵² Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIX, p. 73.

being hated by the collectivity. For it is reasonable that the prince who has excited this universal hatred against himself has particular individuals who have been more offended by him and who desire to avenge themselves. This desire [*desiderio*] of theirs is increased by that universal bad disposition that they see to be excited against him⁵³.

Therefore, a political leader has to avoid being hated and having the public opinion against him. For Machiavelli, this goal does not contradict the aim of being feared. It is possible for a political leader to be feared without being hated. For this, it is most important that he «abstains from the property of his citizens and his subjects, and from their women»⁵⁴. Following this maxim is also the best way to prevent a secret conspiracy. However, Machiavelli teaches that many conspiracies have occurred in history but only a few have been successful⁵⁵.

5. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the emotions, desires, and passions that drive human beings play a central role in Machiavelli's political thought. His political theory is based both on anthropological and psychological theses and views. Knowledge about the goals and motivations of human behavior is crucial for an analysis of politics because political decisions are often caused by emotions, desires, and passions. A study of Machiavelli's political psychology of motivation is by no means only of interest for a historian of political ideas. On the contrary, an adequate understanding of the human drives is still highly relevant for an appropriate understanding of contemporary politics. If a politician or political analyst is aware of what motivates political leaders, the actions of their states and political events become partly predictable. Constantly recurring political phenomena such as wars, civil wars, and imperialist policies cannot be understood without considering the greed and ambition of both political leaders and the forces that hold the reins of power in their states.

Manuel Knoll, Istanbul Şehir University

✉ manuelknoll@sehir.edu.tr

⁵³ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, III 6, p. 219; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIX, p. 76.

⁵⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XVII, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIX, p. 73; Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, III 6, p. 218.