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The Anti-Machiavellians of the Spanish Baroque: A Reassessment

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Abstract
Beginning with Pedro de Ribadeneyra, whose treatise on the *Christian Prince* was first published in 1595, Spanish counterreformation intellectuals attacked Machiavelli by characterizing him as an evil man whose "doctrine" originated from the Devil himself. I argue, however, that this characterization of Machiavelli is in reality a gross misrepresentation by late 16th and 17th century political authors that today's scholars of the Spanish Baroque have tended to accept without inquiry. Although Spanish political writers of the seventeenth century damned Machiavelli rhetorically, in their own practical counsel to the king they adopted the same vocabulary the Florentine had employed to discuss political contingency in *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. Thus, even while these intellectuals selectively criticized specific passages taken out of context from Machiavelli's writing, overall Machiavelli's thought controls their broader political discourse. Ultimately, we should reassess our uncritical use of the terms *Machiavellian* and *anti-Machiavellian*.

Keywords
Niccolò Machiavelli, Reception, Spain, Seventeenth Century, Pedro de Ribadeneyra, Juan de Santa María, Fernando Alvia de Castro, Anti-Machiavellians, Machiavellian, Reason of State / *Razón de Estado*, *Políticos,* Necessity

Thanks to research carried out by Helena Puigdoménech Forcada, we know that Niccolò Machiavelli's political treatises circulated in Spain from at least the middle of the sixteenth century, both in the original Italian as well as in Spanish translation (Puigdomenech

Forcada 81-188). Nevertheless, the question of what exactly Spaniards took away from their reading of Machiavelli remains unanswered. On the one hand, since the mid-twentieth century, José Antonio Maravall has argued that Spanish Baroque political writers, even those who attack specific maxims taken out of context from the *The Prince* or *Discourses on Livy*, in general accept Machiavelli's practical treatment of politics (*Teoría* 365-387; "Maquiavelo," *passim*). Recently, Maravall's definition of Machiavellism has been criticized as too broad, so that he runs the risk of over-generalizing the Florentine's influence (Forte and López Álvarez 22). On the other hand, historians J. A. Fernández-Santamaría and Robert Bireley have argued that the so-called anti-Machiavellians' perspective on politics was diametrically opposed to Machiavelli's, suggesting that Machiavelli's influence was very limited in Spain (Fernández-Santamaría, *Razón*, *passim*; Fernández-Santamaría, *Natural Law* 2:21-159; Bireley, *passim*). In contrast to Maravall, these historians risk overlooking ways in which Machiavelli's influence may be observed, even in the same anti-Machiavellians.

As an alternative to these two extremes, I offer a new method for determining the extent to which early-modern Spanish political writers should be considered Machiavellian, based on the observable appropriation of Machiavelli's vocabulary and theoretical framework used to deal with the unpredictable, the contingent in political life. Accordingly, my view is that those writers who appropriated Machiavelli's vocabulary of contingency should be considered Machiavellian, regardless of whether or not they characterized themselves as anti-Machiavellian. This self-fashioning on the part of the anti-Machiavellians is problematic because by the time they were writing, Machiavelli's name had

become a polemical catchword during the French wars of religion.[1] For this reason, Spanish counterreformation writers could not admit that they were appropriating anything from Machiavelli. I argue in fact that these writers consciously misrepresented Machiavelli in order to define themselves by opposition. This allowed them to incorporate into their own political considerations whatever they considered useful in their own reading of Machiavelli, adapting it to their own ideological perspective, but in such a way that none of their readers would notice that they were doing so. One of the most important Machiavellian concepts, whose key term is *necessity*, was consistently adopted by these Spanish writers: the idea that in some situations, necessity obligates political leaders to be morally flexible. In other words, like for Machiavelli before them, for these Spanish writers traditional morality became contingent on necessity: depending on the necessity of any given situation, morality may or may not be considered when forming a plan of action.

As scholars such as Felix Gilbert, Mario Santoro, and J. G. A. Pocock have shown, Machiavelli reorganized Renaissance humanist discourses into a new vocabulary of contingency which could take into account the unpredictable in political life. For Machiavelli, the common good is the ultimate goal; thus, in order to achieve this goal, at times political leaders find that it is necessary to sacrifice a traditional moral code based on personal virtue. In other words, Machiavelli demonstrated through historical and contemporary examples that the behavior necessary to bring about the common good of a given society did not always coincide with the moral precepts established by a long tradition of medieval Christian thinkers (Gilbert *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* 153-200; Gilbert *Niccolò Machiavelli* 47-58; Santoro 179-231; Pocock 156-158). Just to give

[1] For more on Machiavelli's reception during these French conflicts, see Kelley's "Murd'rous Machiavel" and Beame's "Use and Abuse."

one example from *Il Principe*, Machiavelli points out that in many cases it is necessary to act in a way traditionally considered cruel to a few if the result is beneficial to the many: "Era tenuto Cesare Borgia crudele: nondimanco quella sua crudeltà aveva racconcia la Romagna, unitola, ridottola in pace e in fede. Il che se si considera bene, si vendrà quello essere stato molto piú piatoso che il populo fiorentino, il quale, per fuggire il nome di crudele, lasciò distruggere Pistoia" ["Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; nevertheless his cruelty repaired, united and reduced la Romagna in peace and faith. Such that if one considers the matter well, one will see that Borgia was much more merciful than the Florentines, who, in order to avoid being called cruel, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed"] (Machiavelli 108-109).[2] If the common good is the principal end in statecraft, then Borgia's cruelty to a few prominent men, which brought peace to the lands under his control, should be preferred to the Florentine method of controlling Pistoia by allowing its aristocrats to continually struggle with each other, to the detriment of its citizens as a whole.

The first and most important Spanish anti-Machiavellian was the Jesuit, Pedro de Ribadeneyra, whose *Tratado de la Religion y Virtudes que deue tener el Principe Christiano* was first published in 1595. In it he follows the model set by Giovanni Botero, who in the prologue to his *Della ragione di stato*, first published in 1589 and translated into Spanish by Antonio Herrera in 1592, sets up a contrast between the secular and godless reason of state of Machiavelli and Tacitus, on the one hand, and divine and natural law, on the other (Botero *Della ragion di stato libri dieci*, "All'Illustrissimo, e Reverendis. Sig. Mio Osservandis. il Sig. Volfango Teodorico, Arcivescovo, e Prencipe di Salczburg. &c." [n. pag.]; Botero *Diez libros de la razon de estado*, "Al Rey Nuestro

[2] All translations are mine.

Señor" [n. pag.]). However, while Botero makes this contrast in a rather matter-of-fact and anecdotal way, Ribadeneyra turns this contrast into the basis for his main argument: that there are two reasons of state, "vna falsa y aparente, otra solida y verdadera; vna engañosa y diabolica, otra cierta y diuina: vna que del estado haze Religion, otra que de la Religion haze estado" ["one false and apparent, the other solid and true; one misleading and diabolical, the other certain and divine; one that turns the state into a religion, the other that makes a state out of religion"] (Ribadeneyra "Al Christiano y piadoso Lector" [n. pag.]). As this passage reveals, Ribadeneyra's method for establishing the division between two reasons of state is to create a rhetorical opposition between the two, polarizing them by presenting a progressive series of semantic antitheses: false and true; apparent and solid; deceptive and certain; diabolic and divine. The climax of this series is a chiasmus that changes the meaning of the verb *hacer*: "one that turns the state into a religion, the other that makes a state out of religion." The contrast that Ribadeneyra sets up here is rhetorical and ideological in nature: it is meant to lead his readers to reject the notion of a secular reason of state as diabolical. He wants to advise his readers, the Christian prince and his ministers, to embrace the subordination of the state to the church and to suggest that not to do so would be to damn their own souls.

In order to demonstrate that Machiavelli was the diabolical teacher of this evil, the false reason of state, Ribadeneyra translates a long passage from chapter 18 of *The Prince*, in which Machiavelli suggests that, although a prince should always appear to be virtuous, it is sometimes necessary for him not to be virtuous in order to conserve his state: "es menester que de tal manera disponga su animo que este aparejado à mudar las velas segun los vientos, y la variedad de la fortuna, y como dixe arriba, no partirse del bien pudiendo, mas saber entrar en el mal, quando lo pidiere la necessidad" ["it is necessary for him to prepare his mind to act

according to however the winds of Fortune and the variation of the times demand and, as I said before, not to deviate from good whenever possible, but to know when to enter into evil when necessary"] (Ribadeneyra 268). Here we may observe a part of Machiavelli's vocabulary of contingency: the idea that necessity justifies moral flexibility, that traditional morality is contingent on necessity. In his commentary on this passage, Ribadeneyra attacks Machiavelli for teaching that a prince should practice hypocrisy, suggesting that the goal of a hypocritical prince is not so much to conserve his state as to cover up his vices. At the end of the quote, Ribadeneyra emphasizes his characterization of Machiavelli as a teacher of evil: "Todas estas son palabras de Machiauelo salidas del infierno, para destruyr la religion, y arrancar del pecho del Principe Christiano de vn golpe todas las verdaderas virtudes" ["These are all Machiavelli's words, drawn from Hell in order to destroy religion and rip out all of the true virtues from the Christian prince's heart in one stroke"] (268). Clearly, Ribadeneyra's characterization of Machiavelli was meant to persuade his readers that they should never consider politics without religion. Ostensibly he argues that traditional moral values do have a place in politics. Nevertheless, this rhetorical strategy does not prevent Ribadeneyra from appropriating Machiavelli's own vocabulary of political contingency.

If we ignore for one moment Ribadeneyra's rhetorical and ideological gloss, we may note that his translation accurately transmits Machiavelli's message to rulers that they should be good when they can, but that they must also know when to be bad when necessity demands it. This is the key to Machiavelli's view of politics: personal morality is contingent on necessity in the realm of public affairs. If it is possible to be moral and bring about the common good, then the prince may do so. However, if the prince must chose between the two, the common good must be considered more important. Elsewhere in his treatise, Ribadeneyra

uses this same vocabulary of necessity to give his Christian prince a very similar moral flexibility, depending on the necessity of any given situation. For example, on the question of mendacity, he takes an apparently traditional point of view: the king must never lie "porque la palabra del Principe deue ser como vna palabra de Dios" ["because the word of the prince should be like a word spoken by God"] (287). However, he follows this statement with a list of actions and utterances which strictly speaking should not be considered lying. For example, "no es mentira (quando la necessidad ò vtilidad grande lo pide) dezir algunas palabras verdaderas en vn sentido, aunque crea el que las dize, que el que las oye por ser equiuocas las podra tomar en diferente sentido" ["it is not lying (when necessity or a great utility demands it) to say some words which are true in one sense, although the speaker might believe that the listener understands them in another sense because of ambiguity"] (289). Here Ribadeneyra repeats Machiavelli's vocabulary of necessity to indicate when his rather loose definition of lying may be applied. But at the end of his discussion, Ribadeneyra urges the Christian prince to be very careful "para no dexarse lleuar de la doctrina pestifera de Machiauelo, y quebrantar la ley de Dios, y su religion" ["in order not to let himself be carried away by the pestiferous doctrine of Machiavelli and break God's law and his religion"] (290). Even while Ribadeneyra uses Machiavelli's vocabulary of necessity, he gives his Christian prince permission to be morally flexible as long as the prince does not follow what he calls Machiavelli's diabolical doctrine. Ribadeneyra has reconstructed Machiavelli's thought for his own purposes, turning it into a doctrine which simply represents the exact opposite of his own message. This allows Ribadeneyra to incorporate Machiavelli's vocabulary of necessity into his own advice. Ribadeneyra's Christian prince will thus remain confident that he has not strayed from Christianity, even while his morals are sufficiently flexible so that he may adapt himself to the volatile world of European politics which Machiavelli had described so

well.

The importance of Pedro de Ribadeneyra's treatise is easily perceived when we note that it becomes a model, a source, and an authority for the subsequent political writers of the first half of the seventeenth century. His strategy of misrepresenting Machiavelli is adopted throughout the anti-Machiavellian tradition, frequently accompanied by Machiavelli's own vocabulary of contingency. In these Spanish treatises, Machiavelli and his supposed followers, variously called "políticos" ["politicians"], "ateístas" ["atheists"], "estadistas" ["statesmen"], and "ateopolíticos" ["atheist politicians"], become a construct which represents the diametrical opposition to themselves. Nevertheless, Machiavellian discourse continues to appear even in writers who do not demonstrate direct evidence of having reading Machiavelli's works, as the following two examples will show.

Juan de Santa María, the Franciscan royal chaplain for Phillip III and one of the leading opponents to the Duke of Lerma, published his *Tratado de republica y policia christiana* in 1615. Like Ribadeneyra he writes that the king must always tell the truth. Santa María quickly sets up the *políticos* as the opposition against whom he is arguing:

> contra el presupuesto de los Hereges, que esta edad llama Politicos, que para justificar su
>
> policia, y gouierno tyranico, afirman que puede el Rey por razon de estado, si le estuuiere bien para conseruarle, simular, engañar, quebrar la palabra, y darla sin animo de cumplirla, siendo como es la fraude, simulacion, y engaño contra la verdad, que deue el hombre a su proximo, de qualquiera

> condicion que sea, y contra el derecho natural, que en todo lo que se trata pide verdad, y contra el diuino, que condena al que no la dize, y anda con engaños.
>
> (386-387)

> [against the supposition of the heretics that are now called *políticos*, who, in order to justify their tyrannical politics and government, claim that, for reasons of state, if it helps him conserve his position, the king may simulate, trick, break his word and give it without thinking of keeping it, as fraud, simulation and trickery go against the truth which man owes his fellow, whatever his condition, and against natural law, which always demands truth, and against divine law, which condemns him who does not tell the truth and walks around with trickery.]

Santa María follows Ribadeneyra's model of presenting the thinking of Machiavelli's followers as the diabolical, tyrannical, even unnatural opposite of his own position. Nevertheless, like Ribadeneyra, Santa María follows this rhetorical and ideological introduction with a statement about an exception to this rule: "Puede empero el Christiano Rey, o su ministro callar, encubrir, no darse por entendido, de las cosas, y disimular con astucia lo que entendiere dellas, todo el tiempo que le pareciere necessario el secreto para la buena expedicion de lo que trata" ["Nevertheless the Christian king or his minister may keep quiet, cover up or fail to acknowledge things and dissimulate with cunning whatever he

knows about them for however long he thinks the secret is necessary to carry out his plans"] (388). Perhaps unknowingly, Santa María uses Machiavelli's vocabulary of necessity to justify some moral flexibility so that the Christian king and his ministers may accomplish his goals in any particular situation. On the other hand, much like Ribadeneyra before him, Santa María concludes this discussion by differentiating his view from that of the *políticos*: "Con esto quedan aduertidos los Reyes, y ministros Christianos, de como podran vsar de dissimulacion, hasta donde, y en que tiempo, sin echar por la vereda de la propria vtilidad, por donde los Politicos los pretenden guiar" ["With that Christian kings and ministers are advised as to how they may use dissimulation, to what extent, at what time, without going down the path of self-interest, where the *políticos* mean to guide them"] (388). Thus, just as in the case of Ribadeneyra, Santa María gives permission to his Christian prince to be flexible with his morals, as long as he does not become an egotistical, opportunistic *político*, a follower of Machiavelli.

Fernando Alvia de Castro, Inspector General of the Spanish Royal Army and Naval Forces in Portugal, published his *Verdadera razon de estado* in Lisbon in 1616. He repeatedly refers to Ribadeneyra as his authority and encourages his readers to consult him directly if they are interested in learning more about the subject. Alvia de Castro cites Ribadeneyra after he draws from his characterization of "algunos malos Politicos, y en particular el peruerso impio e ignorante Machiauelo" ["some bad *políticos*, and in particular the perverse, impious and ignorant Machiavelli"] (Alvia de Castro 22):

> Dize pues, que de tal manera tenga el Principe Christiano las virtudes, que sepa y pueda mudarse, y hazer al contrario dellas; y que por conseruar su Reyno estará obligado a obrar contra la fee,

> caridad, humanidad, y religion, lo que le conuenga; como mas en particular refiere el Padre Ribadeneyra; y en substancia dispone y forja vn Principe hypocrita, falso, dissimulador, y fingido.
>
> (22)

> [He (Machiavelli) says that the Christian prince should have virtues in such a way that he knows how and is able to change and act in opposition to them, and that in order to conserve his kingdom he will be obligated to act against faith, charity, humanity and religion, whenever it is convenient to do so, as father Ribadeneyra expounds in more detail, and in substance he (Machiavelli) prescribes and forges a hypocritical, false, dissimulating and fake prince.]

Later on in his treatise, Alvia de Castro makes a distinction between simulation, to act like something is true when it is false, and dissimulation, to keep hidden something that is true, condemning the former and allowing the latter. In order to justify dissimulation, Alvia de Castro appropriates Machiavellian necessity, which he most likely borrowed from his authority, Ribadeneyra: "La dissimulacion, como diffini ariba, es callar, y encubrir aquello, que es, como sino fuesse: y digo, que si la simulacion en la forma, que la dexo significada, es impia y peligrosa: la dissimulaion vsada bien, es justa, prudente, y necessaria" ("Dissimulation, as I defined above, is to keep quiet and to cover up that which is as if it were not; and I say that if simulation as I have defined it is impious and dangerous, dissimulation, used well, is just, prudent and necessary")

(51). Nevertheless, Alvia de Castro immediately follows this justification with the familiar admonition to his readers to tread carefully in this matter: "pero aduierto y pido con particular afecto; se aduierta y entienda, que si el Principe dissimulare contra la religion y virtudes, injusto serà, mucho se arrimarà a impio o tyrano: y assi en ello hallarà su daño y castigo: Dios se le embiará" ["but I warn and ask with particular emotion that you understand that if the prince dissimulates against religion and virtue, it will be unjust and he will come very close to impious and tyrannical. And in this way he will find his own harm and punishment: God will send it to him"] (51). If the prince dissimulates in matters of religion, he will become an impious tyrant, similar to Ribadeneyra's characterization of Machiavelli and his followers, and God will punish him accordingly.

This new method of determining the extent to which political writers appropriated Machiavelli's vocabulary and conceptual framework for dealing with contingent politics hopefully will lead today's scholars of the early modern period toward a new, more rigorous and restrictive usage of the term "Machiavellian." We have accepted uncritically for far too long the anti-Machiavellians' descriptions of the so-called "doctrine" or "school" of Machiavelli and his supposed followers. As a result, we have also accepted the anti-Machiavellians' own self-characterization by contrast to this doctrine. As I have suggested, this diabolical "school," this "doctrine," does not really exist at all—the anti-Machiavellians have invented it in order to define themselves by opposition. Usually they do not engage with any specific writers; instead, they speak in generalities, or name any protestant thinker or prince as an example. Their goal is not to describe accurately the thought of these authors or the actions of these princes, but always to condemn the opposite of their own doctrine. This is a rhetorical operation, not a historiographical one. The problem is that historians such as Fernández-Santamaría and Bireley have adopted this rhetoric into their own histories, thereby historicizing it effectively for us, their readers. When we recognize the rhetorical and ideological nature of the anti-Machiavellians' characterization

of both Machiavelli and themselves, it is possible to notice that many of them incorporate Machiavelli's vocabulary of contingency into their own advice. This in turn will allow us to make historically valid judgments regarding the scope of Machiavelli's influence over the political discourse of the Baroque.

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