The Influence of Machiavelli on Francis Bacon: A Critical Examination

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THE INFLUENCE OF MACHIAVELLI ON FRANCIS BACON:
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

by

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The association of the name of Francis Bacon with that of Niccolo Machiavelli is no novelty to the modern reader. But in most instances this association is brief and fleeting, possessed of a will-o' the-wisp character that is at once unsatisfying and challenging. The natural conclusion to which one is tempted to leap is that Bacon, since he is the more recent in point of time, was influenced by the great Florentine in matters of philosophy and style. A second possibility is that both men were influenced by similar conditions of political and cultural backgrounds. A still further consideration lies in the belief that certain ideas are "in the air", so to speak, and descend upon different minds in various times and places without implying any necessity of relationship.

It seems advisable to study the two men and their works in the light of these three possibilities. It is not the purpose of this thesis to assert the influence of Machiavelli upon Bacon's philosophy as a whole. This study is rather an attempt to bring together in comparative consideration the personalities and philosophies of two outstanding minds of their respective ages, and to draw such conclusions as seem logical. To this end I propose to examine the theories of Machiavelli set forth in The Prince and the Discourses on Livy, and from this background to view Bacon's philosophy relating to civil business as set forth in his Essays, especially "Of Truth," and "Of Great Place," and in the Advancement
of Learning.

I have here used the term, philosophy, to refer to the principles of human conduct by which Bacon's life was governed, rather than in a metaphysical sense.
CHAPTER II

INTIMATIONS OF INFLUENCE

Today the prevailing popular conception of Machiavelli is, to say the least, uncomplimentary. Whoever is interested has but to consult his dictionary to find the name of this Florentine statesman associated with the doctrine that "any means, however unscrupulous, may be justifiably employed by a ruler in order to maintain a strong central government."¹ When the student of Francis Bacon reads, therefore, that the great Elizabethan was "Machiavellian," he is seized with an impulse to investigate the accusation.

It takes but a moment's reflection, however, to realize that most men, as most theories, cannot readily be classified as totally evil nor wholly commendable. Even the casual reader of Bacon's essays cannot fail to recognize the author's repeated implications that the end justifies the means. Encountering such statements, the reader finds it a natural consequence to be reminded of Machiavelli, and he is not alone in making the association. The urge to investigate is intensified by the circumstance of finding repeatedly in present-day literature statements linking the names of the two men.

In presenting some of these references I shall divide them into two groups; namely, those that merely link the names or imply a connection,

and those that definitely state the influence of Machiavelli upon Bacon.

On opening a copy of a certain edition of The Prince,¹ the reader is struck by the fact that the frontispiece contains a quotation from Bacon:

Most current for that they come home to men's business and bosoms.

That it was considered suitable to use this description by Bacon of his own essays² as an introduction for The Prince can hardly be considered coincidental. The implication, though subtle, exists.

After even a casual perusal of some of the writings of Machiavelli and of Bacon, there is evident in the style of each an epigrammatic character. In a college textbook we find this resemblance put into words:

Bacon is impersonal and objective. In this respect he resembles the Italian Machiavelli, whose political realism shocked the age.³

Not only in style, however, but also in the nature of their thoughts we find the two authors compared. Lytton Strachey, the popular biographer, expressed it thus:

Bacon wished his patron [Essex] to behave with the Machiavellian calculation that was natural to his own mind.⁴

The inference here is not one of influence, but rather that both Bacon


²The quotation is from the letter of dedication which Bacon prefixed to the Essays.


and Machiavelli for some reason were led into the same channels of belief. A similar view is expressed by Richard Foster Jones:

... at times the author [Bacon] displays a Machiavellian realism, a regard for expediency, which is the counterpart of the utilitarian element in his conception of science.¹

More definite than the foregoing implications are the direct statements to be found in certain other instances. Discussing the political philosophy of Machiavelli, J. W. Allen makes this statement:

Living at the close of the century [sixteenth] we find writers who were more clearly and definitely influenced by Machiavelli. In England, Raleigh and Bacon are conspicuous examples.²

The author's failure to attempt a proof of this influence does not imply its lack of foundation.³ He is certainly not alone in the assertion, for Bacon's philosophy as interpreted by Will Durant is seen in a similar light:

The moral philosophy of the Essays smacks rather of Machiavelli than of the Christianity to which Bacon made so many astute obeisances.⁴

It is in Bacon's own admission, however, that the student finds the most stable foundation for the belief in such an influence. Jeffrey Pulver in his recent biography of Machiavelli said:

³The author explains this in a footnote: "Raleigh's writings, and Bacon's relevant writing belong to the seventeenth century, which is the inadequate reason why they are not dealt with in this book."
in Francis Bacon his memory found one of its earliest defenders.\textsuperscript{1}

The same author again gives evidence that Bacon was acquainted with the works of the Florentine in this passage:

Machiavelli may have been a very bad man for having had the courage to place on record, as Bacon said, "what men do, and not what they ought to do."\textsuperscript{2}

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that biographers of both men were moved to make the comparison, and the fact that the thought occurred alike to the followers of both camps is indeed significant.

Israel Levine, writing on Francis Bacon, had this to say:

The spirit of his [Machiavelli's] work is exactly that of the whole Renaissance movement: and Bacon, time and again, quotes Machiavelli with admiration.\textsuperscript{3}

Now just what are the implications involved in the foregoing quotations, and how may these statements be interpreted? It occurs to this writer that although isolated single instances cannot prove a point, the very variety of the sources of these similar ideas establishes a sort of validity. It must be admitted, at least, that they form justification for further investigation. The procedure of thought would begin with the realization that a reader of Machiavelli and Bacon forms an idea of relationship which may at first be unconscious. The idea then begins to crystallize into definite shape as certain details

\textsuperscript{1}Jeffrey Pulver, Machiavelli, the Man, His Works, and His Times; London: Herbert Joseph Ltd., 1937, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{3}Israel Levine, Francis Bacon; London: Leonard Parsons Ltd., 1925, p. 76.
of style and theory become obvious. The reader now starts to wonder how much of the similarity may be attributed to coincidence. It is not unusual, indeed, for great minds to reach similar conclusions on certain subjects independently of each other. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon is a part of the experience of numerous ordinary individuals. The likelihood that such coincidences may occur is increased if the individuals live in analogous times and under similar circumstances. But if one does not let his thought process become obstructed at this point, he may proceed to discover that Bacon had actually read Machiavelli. This being so, a clearer case can be made out, for it is obvious that influence cannot be exerted without some contact, direct or indirect.

Since others have found in Bacon's writings mention and approval of Machiavelli, the obligation to turn to Bacon himself for evidence becomes clear. The search is rewarded in numerous instances in the _Advancement of Learning_, where Bacon quotes freely from both _The Prince_ and the _Discourses_. The quotations selected by Bacon give evidence of his interest in Machiavelli's views concerning the nature of princes and their relationships with their subjects. He commends Machiavelli's historical and illustrative method of treating politics; he is interested in the Florentine's comments on war and soldiery; he condemns the immoral artifices which the Italian writer suggests.

In the _Essays_, also, Bacon refers to Machiavelli's ideas on a variety of subjects, including custom, the Christian religion, the authority of princes, and the nature of men. Here again Bacon makes use

1_Vide post, Chapter VI._
of Machiavelli's historical illustrations.

It remains, then to study Bacon's exact references to Machiavelli in order to see the nature of such influence as may exist. It is logical, however, before making such a comparative study, to consider the backgrounds of the two men.
CHAPTER III

A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE OF MACHIAVELLI

Granting to environment its proper significance, let us look into the era which produced Niccolo Machiavelli. Florence in the fifteenth century was a merchant republic, flourishing economically and culturally, but waver ing in political stability. Then came the Medici, that family of mercantile wizards who took over the government and established themselves as untitled princes. Foremost among them was Lorenzo the Magnificent, intelligent in his role of statesman, gifted in the art of poetry, and a patron of philosophy and the arts in general. Following the ethically questionable methods of his forebears, he succeeded in maintaining the republican tradition while remaining in control of the state. Florence intermittently wrested itself from the control of the Medici by taking advantage of the general confusion brought about by invaders of the Italian peninsula.

Additional agitations were alive in the republic. There was, for example, the effort of the Dominican friar, Savonarola, to raise the moral level of the people and rid the church of the evils with which it was infested at the time. His attempts were finally subdued by the ill-famed Borgia pope, Alexander VI. There were also the interventions of Spain and France, with the Florentine leaders and potential leaders

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1Chief source for this historical background is Ferdinand Schevill's A History of Europe from the Reformation to the Present Day; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938.
casting their lots with whichever side seemed to be in the ascendency.

Into this struggle of a republic to maintain its existence Niccolo Machiavelli was born in 1469. No intimate picture of his early life is available, but we do know that his family was of the Tuscan nobility, and we surmise that Niccolo, one of four children, must have led in Florence the average life of the well-born boy of his times. Although the family was not wealthy, young Machiavelli was educated in literature and law, and he read and wrote Latin.

Whatever his formal schooling or lack of it, we look rather to his experiences in the school of his political life as especially significant for our purposes here. The fact that his father was a jurist may have had some bearing on Niccolo's entrance into public life. At any rate, he began in 1494 as a clerk in the second chancery of the commune, and four years later become second chancellor and secretary of the republic. The fourteen years during which he held this position were turbulent ones for the republic which Florence was striving so desperately to maintain. These years provided a full background for the man who was later to prove such an acute observer and keen thinker as to base a political theory on his observations and experiences.

Machiavelli's work as secretary included a number of diplomatic missions, not only to the lesser courts of Italy, but also into France, and, of course, to Rome. These visits gave him valuable training in diplomacy and first-hand knowledge of the nature of men. His work obliged him also to study the conditions regarding military service in Italy. Contemporary observations contrasted with a study of Livy led
him to the determination to establish a national militia in Florence.

When in 1512 the government under which Machiavelli was working fell, the Medici again took over, and Machiavelli was exiled from Florence. To these circumstances it may be that we are indebted for his writings, for it was during his retirement that he began the writing that was to make his influence felt in farther places and later times. While he wrote, he waited for an opportunity to return to his official position. In 1521 he was employed in a diplomatic capacity, but before he could gain sufficient favor with the Medici to be completely reinstated, he died in 1527. A wife, whom he had married in 1502, and several children survived him.

During the years of his official life Machiavelli did not win the plaudits of his fellows. L. A. Burd, writing in the Cambridge Modern History says, "For about fourteen years he was employed by the Florentine Government in a subordinate official capacity, and even his intimate friends hardly recognized that he was a really great man." He was not a political leader of his time; his genius lay rather in the keen insight which led him to draw far-reaching conclusions from the situation which surrounded him. Burd attributes the extent of his fame to the fact that "although the area which he was able to observe was small, the horizon which he guessed was vast; he was able to overstep the narrow limits of Central Italy and Lombardy, to think upon a large scale, and to reach some real elevation of view."  


2 Ibid., 200.
It is evident that as a statesman Machiavelli was aware of the import of the events through which he was living. He saw the unification of Italy as desirable and sought through the observation of the defects which prevented it, to draw up certain principles for the establishment of the desired state. Of the Discourses he said: "I have endeavored to embody in it all that long experience and assiduous research have taught me of the affairs of the world."\(^1\) This consciousness of his mission accentuates the significance of environment as an important influence in his political thought. But we must not overlook the fact that he saw a necessity to supplement his critical observations with "assiduous research". William Archibald Dunning, the historian, has observed that "with all the influence of contemporary political conditions, Machiavelli's philosophy was to an even greater extent the product of that admiration for pagan antiquity which was the hallmark of the Renaissance."\(^2\) Machiavelli was well-acquainted with the literature of antiquity, and as Dunning further states,

It was under the stimulus of the spirit embodied in this literature that his naturally acute intelligence attacked the problems of politics and propounded solutions which, in both methods and results, were as distinct from those of the preceding twelve centuries as if those centuries had never existed.\(^3\)

Machiavelli's reactions to the political events of his age form, then, what some may choose to call his political philosophy. It seems

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\(^3\)Ibid., p. 290.
to have been developed not only from observation of the spectacle around him, but from the desire for a strong Florentine government and from historical study. Let us try to examine briefly the conclusions he reached.

We have already noted Machiavelli's belief that a national militia is necessary for the maintenance of an independent government. His political bravery and originality in advocating this system is implied by Jeffrey Pulver, a modern writer on Machiavelli, who says: "He decided, revolutionary as the thought may have appeared at the time, that mercenary troops and the whole system of the paid condotta were both valueless in defence and unreliable in attack."\(^1\)

However, a national militia is only a cog in the wheel, and we find Machiavelli advocating a political strong man as the agent to bring order out of chaos. As Schevill puts it, "Machiavelli recognized that the day of republics was, at least for the time being, over, and that the present and the immediate future of Europe belonged to the absolute monarch for the convincing reason that only under him could the state be solidified and the contentious social classes be brought under a common law."\(^2\)

It is evident, however, that Machiavelli saw danger in the too long continued rule of such a monarch. Although he realized that the republic of Florence was fast falling into ruin, he still saw the republic as the ideal form of government. Dunning corroborates this point of view:

\(^1\)Pulver, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 96.

\(^2\)Schevill, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 80.
As between the princely and the popular form Machiavelli is far from being the thorough-going advocate of despotism that an unfortunate reputation has tended to make him. . . . For a community in which a general economic equality prevails, Machiavelli holds that the commonwealth is the best and, indeed, the only possible form of government.¹

Perhaps it was environment, too, and association with some of the diplomats and others with whom he came in contact that helped to develop Machiavelli's philosophy regarding the nature of men. His idea that people are essentially evil is stated in both The Prince and the Discourses. In the former he said: "If men were entirely good this precept would not hold, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are not bound to observe it with them."² In the Discourses he gives voice to the same philosophy: "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."³

These, then, are four aspects of Machiavelli's political theory, and these we may expect to find mirrored in the ideas of any whom he may be believed to have influenced. In a subsequent chapter we shall examine these thoughts in greater detail, setting them against Bacon's philosophy of civil business. As a further preliminary it is necessary to review the background of Francis Bacon in search for any similarity of circumstances which might throw light on a comparison of the philosophies of the two men.

¹Dunning, op. cit., p. 507.
³Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 117.
CHAPTER IV

THE CAREER OF FRANCIS BACON

Francis Bacon was born among great events, and brought up among the persons who had to deal with them.---Spedding

Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne for two years when Francis Bacon was born in 1561. To her glorious reign has been attributed the firm establishment of Protestantism in England, the defeat of Spain, and the ensuing national exuberance which gave rise to the material and literary achievements for which the Elizabethan Age became noted. England was indeed enjoying the fruits of the Renaissance, and we shall see that this environment was, in the words of Israel Levine, "one of the dominant features of Bacon's intellectual background".

The philosophy which Bacon reveals in his writings owes something, however, to his political background which it seems suitable to discuss at this point. Bacon's political career is, of course, closely associated with the ruling monarchs of his time. His noble birth placed him in such a position as to make this association a matter of course. As a boy he was on occasion in the presence of the Queen, and found favor in her sight because of his ready wit and attractive personality.

Sir Nicholas Bacon, Elizabeth's Keeper of the Great Seal, was

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2Levine, op. cit., p. 76.

3For factual details of Bacon's career I have used the Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th edition.
aware of his youngest son's intelligence and wished to prepare him for statesmanship. After a few months at Gray's Inn, Bacon was sent to Paris with the English ambassador. Upon the death of his father, Bacon decided to study law as a means of advancement and also in order to support himself. Although the Queen named him her counsel extraordinary, Bacon soon unfortunately incurred her disfavor as well as that of his uncle, Lord Burghley, the Queen's Minister. He was therefore forced to seek advancement elsewhere, and it was to the Earl of Essex, Elizabeth's favorite, that he turned. Of this friendship with Essex, Spedding says, "It was easy for Bacon to see that here was a man capable by nature of entering heartily into all his largest speculations for the good of the world, and placed by accident in a position to realize, or help realize, them".  

In this association, however, Bacon was again unfortunate. In his advice to the young favorite he has been accused of showing Machiavellian tendencies. According to Sidney Lee, "Bacon bade him [Essex] retain the Queen's favor by affecting submission to her will ... But Essex could not assimilate prudential maxims." In view of the fact that the first publication of the Essays occurred seven years after the beginning of Bacon's friendship with Essex, one is led to assume that these maxims were now taking shape in Bacon's mind. Perhaps Essex would have agreed with later critics that, to put it kindly, the thoughts were

1Spedding, op. cit., p. 53.

more practical than ethical. However, the young Earl did all he could to advance Bacon and favored him with several generous acts of friendship. In the light of this generosity, Bacon's part in the well-known trial and execution of Essex seems more than regrettable.

After the death of Elizabeth, Bacon, through his services to Buckingham, found favor with King James, who knighted him in 1603. The following year Bacon wrote an apology regarding Essex. In the service of the King, Bacon seemed to have felt obliged to follow a line of conduct which brought him no end of criticism and eventually led to his ruin. According to Church,

He cringed to such a man as Buckingham. He sold himself to the corrupt and ignominious Government of James I. . . . With his eyes open he gave himself up without resistance to a system unworthy of him; he would not see what was evil in it, and chose to call its evil good; and he was its first and most signal victim.¹

Convicted of bribery, in which the King and others were even more involved than he, Bacon was fined, sentenced to the Tower, and banished from Parliament. Although he did not serve the Tower sentence, his political career was now dead. He retired to write and study, producing a history of Henry VII, his New Atlantis, and a third edition of the Essays. In 1626, a year after the death of his sovereign, Bacon died.

His biographers have not justified the actions attendant upon Bacon's political career, but they have pointed to the fact that his conduct was inconsistent with his greatness of mind and loftiness of thought. This conflict is thus ably pointed out by Church:

¹R. W. Church, Bacon (English Men of Letters series); New York: Harper and Bros., 1884, 2.
It is difficult to imagine a grander and more magnificent career; and his name ranks among the few chosen examples of human achievement. And yet it was not only an unhappy life; it was a poor life. We expect that such an overwhelming weight of glory should be borne up by a character corresponding to it in strength and nobleness. But that is not what we find. No one ever had a greater idea of what he was made for or was fired with a greater desire to devote himself to it.

He was all this. And yet being all this, sensing deep into man's worth, his capacities, his greatness, his weakness, his sins, he was not true to what he knew.¹

What he knew was in a measure due to his birth and upbringing as well as to his temperament. His mother, Ann Cooke, was known to be a learned woman, religious, and a fervent Non-conformist. Spedding says, "the first breath of Bacon's public life was drawn in a very contagious atmosphere of loyalty and anti-popery."² Such surroundings, coupled with the boy's natural yearning for knowledge, must have done much to develop in Bacon the character which was so greatly at variance with the philosophy of civil business that influenced his political life.

However, the life of a statesman was not Bacon's primary object. His own statement, "I found that I was fitted for nothing as well as for the study of Truth,"³ gives a clue to his foremost ambition. The celebrated remark in his letter to Lord Burghley (1592), "I have taken all knowledge to be my province", shows the vast extent of this ambition. This desire for knowledge was the inspiration for his Great Instauration. It was Bacon's belief that through this work he could render the greatest service to mankind. With such a background, we may believe, if we wish,

¹Church, op. cit., p. 2.
²Spedding, op. cit., p. 16.
³Bacon, De Interpretatione Naturae Proaemium.
that Bacon's service to the state was not entirely a matter of personal aggrandizement, no matter how black the picture of it may look. We may view it as one of the three causes which, according to Spedding, were the ruling forces of Bacon's life—"the cause of reformed religion, of his native country, of the human race through all their generations."¹

It is natural to seek a reason for the failure of these noble ambitions to work out in practical application in the civil life of Bacon. This is the explanation given by one writer:

This greatness of design was characteristic of the mind of the period as well as of Bacon personally. But it was accompanied by inadequate preparation in the methods and principles of the exact sciences as understood at the time, and often by an imperfect grasp of details. If the latter defect may be traced in his intellectual work, it is still more apparent in his practical activity. It is not fanciful to connect with this characteristic some of the actions for which he has been most censured.²

That Bacon's political errors were an unfortunate step in the attempt to fulfill a nobler ambition is also the view of Church:

He strove hard to be a great man and a rich man. But it was that he might have his hands free and strong and well furnished to carry forward the double task of overthrowing ignorance and building up the new and solid knowledge on which his heart was set—that immense conquest of nature on which he believed himself to have the key.³

Since it has been said that Bacon "takes with a lordly hand",⁴ it may well be that his borrowings from Machiavelli in matters of political philosophy helped lead him into critical channels. In our inquiry

¹Spedding, op. cit., p. 6.
³Church, op. cit., p. 19.
⁴Durant, op. cit., p. 151.
into the nature of Machiavelli's influence, then, to offset the objection of those who would say they see no likeness, it is only fair to keep in mind the fact that Bacon's views on civil business form only a part of the whole of his philosophy. We should not expect to see that the natures of the two men were such as to lead one to suspect an influence of Machiavelli on the entire character of Bacon, and it is only his views on civil business for which we are claiming a relationship with Machiavelli.
CHAPTER V

MACHIAVELLI AND BACON: "THE MEN"

"In appearance Niccolo Machiavelli was, in Villari's words, 'of middle height, slender figure, with sparkling eyes, dark hair, rather a small head, a slightly aquiline nose, a tightly closed mouth'."¹ This word picture which Mrs. Muir quotes might give the impression of shrewdness to those who share the belief that character may be read in the face. And even if the belief is unfounded, there is no denying the fact that the average person is in some degree impressed by appearance. Fortunately, however, we have other records of Machiavelli's personality and character.

Machiavelli's biographers agree that the man was possessed of a rare intellect and a keen power of observation. His interest lay in the field of politics, and it was to this realm that he directed his gifted mind. "He tells us himself in one of his letters", says Mrs. Muir, "that he knew nothing of trade or business, he did not care for art or poetry, but he did care intensely for the study of politics, and especially for its underlying study of human behaviour."² His contemporaries recognized and used this man's abilities. In this regard Max Lerner, in his introduction to The Prince and The Discourses, refers to him as "idea--man


²Ibid., p. 52.
for some of the stuffed shirt Florentine politicians.\footnote{New York: The Modern Library, 1940, p. xxv.}

Of his family life there is little to be said. He was married and the father of several children, but he seems to have led the rather loose life that was acceptable in his time. According to Mrs. Muir, his wife was evidently in no sense his intellectual equal, and for this reason his letters give no record of their association. He did, however, show great concern for the welfare of his family after his loss of position. That he cannot be visualized entirely as a cold and unfeeling politician is suggested in this quotation:

"I hope, and hoping increases my torment; I weep, and weeping feeds my tired heart; I burn, and my burning is hidden beneath the surface".\footnote{*\textit{Io spero, e lo sperar cresce il tormento.} \n\textit{Io piango, e' l piangar ciba il lasso core.} \n\textit{Io ardo, e l'arsion non par di fuore.} (Capitoli)} Thus Machiavelli wrote when he looked back and summed up the experiences of his life.\footnote{Muir, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 15.}

This emotion, however, was not strong enough to provide for Machiavelli an abiding interest in ethical attitudes. His belief that a sense of values need not be a part of politics narrowed his views to a point below the limits of a philosophy. Perhaps it was this failing which deprived him of moral strength which he so desperately needed after his dismissal from office. Mrs. Muir expresses a similar view:

\ldots he had not the moral courage to accept his disgrace and fall from office. He obviously considered that he could still serve his country in a public capacity, and he convinced himself that it was right for him to accept the restoration of the Medici. Perhaps here we have proof that the lack of a moral standard which cannot be explained away from "the Prince" was part of Machiavelli's
In the personality of Francis Bacon may be found certain resemblances to qualities found in Machiavelli. Both men were characterized by an intellectual bent, although Bacon's inquiry into knowledge covers the wider scope. The man who had taken all knowledge to be his province has, however, been referred to as "a cold star lighting the way to intellectual progress." It is possible, then, to read into his personality a certain lack of warmth which we also associate with Machiavelli. Bacon's interest in politics was, in contrast to Machiavelli's, however, secondary to his pursuit of truth. He saw in his career as a statesman an opportunity to advance the primary object of his life.

Bacon's reluctance to voice a disbelief in the necessity of morals and ideals is a point in contrast to Machiavelli's open declaration on the subject. But his inferences along this line are unmistakable, and his corresponding actions led to the severest criticism. For example, Skemp says, "... in moral sense he is an average Elizabethan, keener indeed in apprehending the intellectual element in morality, correspondingly more contemptuous of the useful, unreflecting traditions of honourable actions." The same author offers an explanation of this attitude which is made to apply alike to Machiavelli and Bacon. The position of Bacon is one "stimulated by the intellectual and moral atmosphere of his age."

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1Muir, op. cit., p. 105.
3Ibid., p. 13.
The justification of the means by the end was not the doctrine of the Jesuits only. Statesmen caught up the same idea. Machiavelli's *Prince*, one of the most influential books of the Renaissance, argued with very great power and subtlety for a statecraft based on exploitation of the weaknesses of men, turning them to account for government.¹

In the England of Bacon's day as in Machiavelli's Florence religion was a question of interest and importance. The reaction of each man toward this question deserves consideration. In this regard, Machiavelli's reaction to Savonarola may be considered typical of his religious attitude. In his youth Machiavelli joined the crowds that came to hear Savonarola's sermons in San Marco. Mrs. Muir reports his attitude in this way:

To these sermons Machiavelli came, but he came as a scoffer, and as a scoffer he went away. To his cold clear mind, the preacher's eloquence did not appeal, and the involved, long drawn out arguments failed to convince.²

Machiavelli did respond, however, to Savonarola's interest in the reform of the constitution and to the preacher's efforts to make the people realize that political power carried with it a sacred responsibility. His attitude is mirrored in this statement:

In general, the chief lesson Machiavelli drew from these reforms was that anyone desiring to make reforms permanent must have the power to enforce them. He believed that Savonarola failed because he was 'unarmed'--"his new institutions came to nothing, since he had not the means to keep his followers steadfast." (Il Principe, 6)³

Bacon, on the other hand, could not find it in himself to scoff at religion. He does write upon the subject, although, as Skemp says,

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¹Ibid., 14.
³Ibid., 40.
he "writes of religion like a politician, though with the loftiest purposes and fine ethical feeling."\(^1\) Here again we find the conflict which we have already noted in Bacon standing in contrast to the single purpose in Machiavelli. Perhaps the conflict may be attributed partly to the type of religious atmosphere which surrounded Bacon as a boy. It may be that something of his mother’s fervor found its way into the boy and grew up in him. He was indeed religious, but only to a certain degree, as this commentary testifies: "Bacon, though a religious man, was essentially not a moralist."\(^2\)

Because Bacon’s religious background was impressive, his educational background far-reaching, and his intellectual ambitions all-inclusive, he was not impressionable enough to be completely influenced by any one man such as Machiavelli. But there was enough of the practical in Bacon to cause him to seek a method of accomplishing his aims. The era in which he lived bore sufficient similarity to Machiavelli’s milieu to enable him to make observations similar to those noted by the Florentine statesman. His keen mind was able to see certain accuracies, as he thought, in the conclusions drawn by Machiavelli and ready to apply them to one phase of his own activity.

\(^1\) Skemp, op. cit., p. 19.

\(^2\) Mary Augusta Scott (ed.), The Essays of Francis Bacon; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908, lxxxi.
CHAPTER VI

BACON IN THE LIGHT OF MACHIAVELLI

"To pass from theological and philosophical truth to the truth of civil business", says Francis Bacon, "it will be acknowledged, even by those that practise it not, that clear and round dealing is the honour of man's nature, and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it."\(^1\) This statement is one of the clearest forms of expression which Bacon gives to his conflicting feelings. The key to his entire attitude toward his career may be said to rest in this one sentence. Here he shows that he finds it necessary to separate civil business from philosophy. He acknowledges truth as an ideal, but does not find it practical. He was aware that his practical methods embased the metal of his life, but believed that if the metal will "work the better", the end justifies the means. This belief is the link that binds him to Machiavelli. It is true that the means he chose owes something to Machiavellian principles, but it is evident that the two men did not have the same ends in mind.

It is obviously a part of Bacon's method, as Rawley says, to "light his torch at every man's candle". For this he needs no defense. But in this connection an observation by Will Durant seems a propos:

"Every man has his sources, as every organism has its food; what is his

\(^1\)Bacon, "Of Truth", op. cit., p. 6.
is the way in which he digests them and turns them into flesh and blood.  

For insight into what Bacon makes of Machiavelli, another good point of departure is the Advancement of Learning. This work, planned by Bacon as a part of his Great Instauration, is too expansive to consider in its entirety here. The second chapter, however, is particularly adaptable to the purpose of this study. In it Bacon discusses what he calls the art of negotiation. This he divides into conduct in particular emergencies and the science of rising in life. He considers the knowledge of various occasions one of the essentials of the sciences in general, and bases his discussion of it upon various aphorisms of Solomon. In explaining these proverbs, Bacon takes occasion to refer to the sources with which his wide reading and study have brought him in contact, and among these sources is Machiavelli.

A case in point is Aphorism XVIII — "He who brings up his servant delicately, shall find him stubborn in the end." Bacon's exposition of this aphorism goes as follows:

Princes and masters are, by the advice of Solomon, to observe moderation in conferring grace and favor upon their servants. This moderation consists in three things. 1. In promoting them gradually, not by sudden starts. 2. In accustoming them sometimes to denial. And 3, as is well observed by Machiavel, in letting them always have something further to hope for. And unless these particulars be observed, princes, in the end, will doubtless find from their servants disrespect and obstinacy, instead of gratitude and duty. For from sudden promotion arises insolence; from a perpetual obtaining one's desires, impatience of denial; and if there be nothing further to wish, there's an end of alacrity and industry.  

Here Bacon applies a principle in general terms. His book was not, as was Machiavelli's Prince, a "mirror for princes" only. Bacon kept always

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in mind his ambitious aim of contributing to the knowledge of mankind. He looked wherever he could for bits of wisdom, and in more than one instance he found himself agreeing with Machiavelli's political advice.

Aphorism XXI deals with the parable of a small city besieged by a mighty king. A poor wise man who dwelt within the city was able by his wisdom to deliver it, but he was soon forgotten after the danger passed. Bacon uses this parable to illustrate the evil nature and ingratitude of men. In his comment he again quotes Machiavelli:

Machiavel had reason to put the question, "Which is the more ungrateful toward the well-deserving, the prince or the people?" though he accuses both of ingratitude. The thing does not proceed wholly from the ingratitude either of princes or people, but it is generally attended with the envy of the nobility, who secretly re-pine at the event, though happy and prosperous, because it was not procured by themselves. Whence they lessen the merit of the author and bear him down.

Having discussed a number of the proverbs of Solomon in the manner indicated, Bacon pauses to justify his having dwelt so long upon them. His use of the parables may be excused, he says, because of "the dignity of both author and subject". But he goes on to extol the method of writing used by Machiavelli:

But the method of writing best suited to so various and intricate a subject as the different occasions of civil business, is that which Machiavel chose for treating politics; viz, by observation or discourse upon histories and examples.

In treating the second part of the doctrine of business which

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1Eccles. ix, 14.
2Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, Bk. I, Ch. xxix.
3Bacon, op. cit., p. 354.
4Ibid., p. 360.
concerns the science of rising in life, Bacon mentions the desirability of having a pliable mind. In his opinion, "grave solemn, and unchangeable natures generally meet with more respect than felicity."¹ He goes on to show that while some men are stiff and unbending by nature, others acquire the custom of never changing a method of acting which once they found satisfactory. As an example of this second class he cites one of Machiavelli's illustrations:

Thus Machiavel prudently observes of Fabius Maximus, "That he would obstinately retain his old inveterate custom of delaying and protracting the war, when now the nature was changed and required brisker measures".²

Bacon proceeds to enumerate some of the precepts for rising in life. First among them is the notion that a man must improve the "true mathematics of his mind" by training it to estimate the value of things as they contribute to his own particular advantage. In doing this it is necessary to arrange certain principles in the order of their importance in the promotion of one's own fortune. In suggesting the most desirable arrangement, Bacon gives first place to what he calls "the emendation of the mind". Second place goes to the acquisition of wealth, and in defense of this sequence Bacon again calls on Machiavelli:

And in the second place, we set down riches, where to most, perhaps, would have assigned the first, as their use is so extensive. But we condemn this opinion for a reason like that of Machiavel in a similar case; for though it was an established notion, that "Money is the sinews of war", he said, more justly, that "War had no sinews but those of good soldiers".³ In the same manner, it may be truly

¹Ibid., p. 376.
²Ibid., p. 377.
³Machiavelli, op. cit., Bk. II, Ch. x.
affirmed that the sinews of fortune are not money, but rather the powers of the mind, address, courage, resolution, intrepidity, perseverance, moderation, industry, etc.¹

Bacon did not always agree with the man whom he quoted so liberally and whose political craftsmanship he seemed so greatly to respect. Referring to the rules which he himself has established for the self politician Bacon says:

It must be observed that the precepts we have laid down upon this subject are all of them lawful, and not such immoral artifices as Machiavel speaks of, who directs men to have little regard for virtue itself, but only for the show and public reputation of it: "Because", says he, "the credit and opinion of virtue are a help to a man, but virtue itself a hindrance".² He also directs his politician to ground all his prudence on this supposition, that men cannot be truly and safely worked to his purpose but by fear, and therefore advises him to endeavor, by all possible means, to subject them to dangers and difficulties. Whence his politician may seem to be what the Italians call a sower of thorns.³

The foregoing passage may cause the reader to wonder that Bacon condemns Machiavelli's "immoral artifices" when in various places he has artifices of his own to suggest. It may be said, perhaps, that Bacon had a conscience, and that his cultural background and lofty purposes would not allow him to go all the way with Machiavelli. There is a possibility also, that he lacked the moral courage to voice complete agreement with the sentiments of the Italian writer whose name had become in Elizabethan England synonymous with treachery and deviltry. Any view on this point remains, of course, a matter of conjecture. What is clear, however, is the fact that Bacon viewed certain artifices as a necessary alloy in the

¹Bacon, op. cit., 378.
²Machiavelli, The Prince.
³Bacon, op. cit., p. 382.
coin of life.

That Bacon did have some admiration for Machiavelli's tenets and for his courage in expressing them becomes increasingly obvious as we continue to note the references of the former to the writings of the latter. In the essay Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature, Bacon says:

The Italians have an ungracious proverb, Tanto buon che val niente: So good that he is good for nothing. And one of the doctors of Italy, Nicholas Machiavel, had the confidence to put in writing, almost in plain terms, that the Christian faith had given up good men in prey to those who are tyrannical and unjust. Which he spake because, indeed, there was never law, or sect, or opinion did so much magnify goodness as the Christian religion doth.¹

In the essay Of Seditious and Troubles Bacon again cites with approval Machiavelli's illustrative method:

Also, as Machiavel noteth well, when princes, that ought to be common parents, make themselves as a party and lean to a side, that is, as a boat that is overthrown by an uneven weight on the one side: as was well seen in the time of Henri III. of France; for, first himself entered League for the extirpation of the Protestants, and presently after, the same League was turned upon himself. For when the authority of princes is made but an accessory to a cause, and that there be other bands that tie faster than the band of soverignty, kings begin to be put almost out of possession.²

In another essay Bacon speaks of "custom and education". Here he sets forth the idea that no matter what the nature of men's thoughts and discourse (which may be affected by inclination or learning), their deeds will always be affected by custom. He again illustrates from Machiavelli:

And therefore, as Machiavel well noteth, though in an ill-favoured instance, there is no trusting to the force of nature,

¹The Essays of Francis Bacon, (ed. Scott) pp. 54, 55.
²Ibid., p. 62.
nor to the bravery of words, except it be corroborate by custom.
His instance is, that for the achieving of a desperate conspiracy,
a man should not rest upon the fierceness of any man's nature, or
his resolute undertakings, but take such a one as both had his hands
formerly in blood. But Machiavel knew not of a friar Clement, nor a
Ravaillas, nor a Baltazar Gerard. Yet his rule holdeth still, that
nature, nor the engagement of words, are not so forcible as custom.1

The foregoing excerpts from the Essays show no serious dependence
upon Machiavelli as a source. They are interesting examples which indi-
cate that Bacon was acquainted with The Prince and the Discourses and
that he happened to agree with some of the principles he found expressed
in them, because of their relationship to his idea that the conduct of
civil business required a practical technique. There is an essay, how-
ever, which some believe to have been inspired by Machiavelli. I refer
to the essay Of Vicissitude of Things. Of it, Mary Augusta Scott says,
"The last essay, Of Vicissitude of Things, was clearly suggested by Book
II, Chapter 5, of Machiavelli's work, Discourses which is on the sub-
ject 'That Deluges, Pestilences, the change of Religion and Languages,
and other accidents, in a manner extinguish the memory of things.'"2
This editor, incidentally, sees influence in the direction toward which
this study attempts to point. She goes on to say:

Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy was facile princeps the history
that made Bacon wise. From abstract principles in the sphere of
government, Machiavelli appealed to experience; for authority as the
test of truth, he substituted scientific facts. This practical
method of writing history Bacon approved of highly.3

In Book II, Chapter 5 of the Discourses, Machiavelli discusses

1Ibid., p. 181.
2Scott, op. cit., pp. lxxix, lxxx.
3Ibid., p. lxxx.
the destruction of evidences of the antiquity of the world. "The records of time", he says, "are destroyed by various causes, some being the acts of men and some of Heaven." The changes of religion and of language are, he feels, the acts of men primarily responsible for the annihilation of records of the past, "for when a new sect springs up, that is to say a new religion, the first effort is (by way of asserting itself and gaining influence) to destroy the old or existing one, and when it happens that the founders of the new religion speak a different language, then the destruction of the old religion is easily effected."¹ He cites as an example the proceedings of the Christians against the heathen religion in general, and as a particular illustration he refers to St. Gregory. "Whoever reads the proceedings of St. Gregory, and of the other heads of the Christian religion," he says, "will see with what obstinacy they persecuted all ancient memorials, burning the works of the historians and of the poets, destroying the statues and images and despoiling everything else that gave but an indication of antiquity."²

In the essay Of Vicissitude of Things Bacon discusses the same subject which Machiavelli had expounded. He too divides his subject into the changes due to nature and those due to men, and in the latter group he points first to religion. "But to leave these points of nature, and to come to men, the greatest vicissitude of things amongst men is the vicissitude of sects and religions".³ He comments on Machiavelli's

¹Machiavelli, Discourses, p. 296.
²Bacon, op. cit., p. 265.
³Ibid., pp. 263, 264.
observation as follows:

As for the observation that Machiavel hath, that the jealousy of sects doth much extinguish the memory of things, traducing Gregory the Great, that he did what in him lay to extinguish all heathen antiquities, I do not find that those zeal do any great effects, not last long; as it appeared in the succession of Sabinian, who did revive the former antiquities.¹

In a further discussion of the subject he gives his own view:

Surely there is no better way to stop the rising of new sects and schisms, than to reform abuses; to compound the smaller differences; to proceed mildly, and not with sanguinary persecutions; and rather to take off the principal authors by winning and advancing them, than to enrage them by violence and bitterness.¹

By Bacon's own testimony, then, his indebtedness to Machiavelli is acknowledged. In addition, it is also possible to detect subtle influences throughout a number of the essays. It may be true that some of the notions common to both men were original to the one no more than to the other. But if the ideas were generally in the air, Machiavelli was assuredly one of those who helped to put them there and keep them there. It is not difficult to sense this tenuous strain of influence, for example, in the essay Of Cunning in which Bacon describes numerous methods of practising craftiness in public life. The reader is reminded of Book II, Chapter 13 of the Discourses in which Machiavelli observes that "cunning and deceit will serve a man better than force, to rise from a base condition to a great fortune." Bacon is careful, of course, to point out the inferiority of cunning to wisdom, whereas in contrast Machiavelli openly recommends the practice of fraud where necessary and cites an illustration from Roman history.

Into many others of the thoughts expressed in Bacon's essays it

¹Ibid., p. 267.
is possible to read Machiavellian ideas. Bacon's conception of the man in great place invites comparison with Machiavelli's prince, for Bacon suggests that the servant of the state must sometimes use questionable methods in order to acquire necessary power. He says: "The rising unto place is laborious; and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base; and by indignities men come to dignities."\(^1\) As a parallel to this, it may be noted that Machiavelli, in Chapter VIII of The Prince, speaks of "those who have attained the position of prince by villainy."

Bacon gives further sanction to unethical methods in his essay, Of Simulation and Dissimulation, where he remarks:

> The best composition and temperature is to have openness in fame and opinion; secrecy in habit; dissimulation in seasonable use; and a power to feign, if there be no remedy.\(^2\)

This statement may be compared with a similar one from Machiavelli:

> But it is necessary to be able to disguise this character well, and to be a great feigner and dissembler; and men are so simple and so ready to obey present necessities, that one who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived.\(^3\)

In the essay Of Fortune Bacon's proposal of what a man may achieve in the construction of his own fortune is again suggestive of Machiavelli who states: "I think it may be true that fortune is the ruler of half our actions, but that she allows the other half or thereabouts to be ruled by us."\(^4\) And in the total thesis of the essay Of Truth, as has

\(^1\)Bacon, "Of Great Place," op. cit., pp. 45, 46.

\(^2\)Bacon, op. cit., p. 29.

\(^3\)Machiavelli, The Prince, pp. 64, 65.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 91.
been previously noted, appears the blending of Bacon's moral idealism with the practicality for whose justification he apparently leans on the Florentine student of politics. In like manner, similar instances from other essays\(^1\) of Bacon give evidence of his relationship to Machiavelli in the realm of practical affairs. It is evident that in Machiavelli Bacon found a kindred spirit in the attitude that the ideal is not always the expedient.

It is interesting to note that Bacon often cites Machiavelli with reservations, quoting the sense but not necessarily the language, and placing the emphasis where he sees fit. It is also noticeable that Bacon's "Machiavellian" statements lack the open candor of his Italian forerunner. It is as if Bacon could not wholly abandon himself to the principles which he found useful in a practical way but which were the cause of the conflict between his high purposes and unfortunate actions.

That there is a similarity in the style of the two men has been suggested by some writers. It is true that both were masters of epigram. In Bacon this form of writing is particularly characteristic of the Essays. His use in the *Advancement of Learning* of the proverbs of Solomon is comparable to a similar use by Machiavelli in his *Discourses* of precepts drawn from Livy. An over-all picture of Bacon's writing, however, does not justify the belief that in the matter of style he owes any considerable debt to Machiavelli beyond the fact that every experience in a man's life may in some measure exert influence upon him.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this brief study of Bacon and Machiavelli has formed the basis for drawing some reasonably definite conclusions. Although it is admitted that direct influence on a man’s thought is a difficult matter to prove, the facts in this particular case point to certain significant judgments. It will not seem illogical to conclude that in Bacon’s philosophy of civil business the influence of Machiavelli may be seen, if the following points are borne in mind:

First, the comparison of Bacon with Machiavelli must be undertaken with an open mind. An acquaintance with Machiavelli’s life and writings frees him in our minds of much of the stigma which customarily attaches to his name. We see him in the moral setting of his own day, and recognize his works for what he intended them: observations on practical politics based on contemporary and historical events. We recognize also his intellectual ability, and perhaps admire with Bacon his candor. This view of Machiavelli is important in that it rids the mind of prejudices that might otherwise arise at the mere suggestion that a relationship of influence exists.

In the second place, we have seen that it is not at all unusual for scholars to associate the name of Bacon with Machiavelli. Quotations from popular writers as well as from more serious thinkers stand as testimony to this fact. That enough similarity exists to cause even a suspicion of influence is significant enough to form a point of departure for
further investigation.

A third consideration is the fact that Bacon found the stage on which he moved appropriately and inevitably set for the entrance of Machiavelli into his scheme of things. Both men were in a sense creatures of the Renaissance, and neither, in actions at least, transcended the moral standards of his era. Both were in the position to observe and become involved in political intrigue. Conditions made it natural, then, for Bacon to be susceptible to the influences of Machiavelli's teachings, and the ideas which Machiavelli advanced were easily adaptable to Bacon's purposes.

Fourthly, Bacon himself admits an indebtedness to Machiavelli by quoting him freely in the *Advancement of Learning* and in several of the *Essays*. Nor does the fact that Bacon quotes from numerous sources nullify the fact that Machiavelli is one of them. The psychological implication of one man's quoting another is significant. Bacon quotes Machiavelli not to disagree, but in admiration of principles relating to his own philosophy of civil business. From Bacon's allusions to Machiavelli which have been cited here, certain inferences may be drawn. The passages indicate that Bacon was familiar with Machiavelli's works. He shows his admiration for the Italian statesman's method of writing, especially for the use of illustration by historical allusion. This appreciation of method may have had some bearing on Bacon's own style where the subject matter was appropriate to its use, although Bacon was essentially a man of letters in his own right. He had respect, also, for the technique of statecraft which Machiavelli had advocated, and some of these methods he suggested in his own writings, although he tried to
remove from these procedures the taint of immorality. His essays are colored by Machiavelli's principles, for in them, as nowhere else, Bacon reflects on human conduct. Into this sphere of thought he was able to admit the practical principles which he believed necessary to a workable line of action.

Finally, it must be re-emphasized that it was Bacon's philosophy of civil business rather than his general philosophy which was affected by his acquaintance with Machiavelli. A recognition of Bacon's distinction between theological and philosophical truth and the truth of civil business is essential to an understanding of his beliefs. It was his conviction that ideals must necessarily be theoretical and that any practical line of conduct must be made workable by some baser principles. It is logical, then, to believe that Bacon was influenced by Machiavelli. Bacon sought a suitable alloy to make his metal work the better, and it was in Machiavelli that he found the object of his quest.
APPENDIX

The frequency with which the names of Bacon and Machiavelli have been mentioned together is an interesting revelation and is one of the circumstances suggesting the undertaking of this study. The notations that follow show that the association seems to have come naturally to the minds of a variety of writers. Further search could, no doubt, add appreciatively to the typical remarks listed here.

Allen, J. W. Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century. New York: The Dial Press Inc., 1928. "Living at the close of the century we find writers who were more clearly and definitely influenced by Machiavelli. In England, Raleigh and Bacon are conspicuous examples."


(a) "The moral philosophy of the Essays smacks rather of Machiavelli than of the Christianity to which Bacon made so many astute obeiances."
(b) "He shares with Machiavelli a point of view which one is at first inclined to attribute to the Renaissance."

Jones, Richard Foster (ed.). Francis Bacon: Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces. New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company. "... at times the author displays a Machiavellian realism, a regard for expediency, which is the counterpart of the utilitarian element in his conception of science."


Pulver, Jeffrey. Machiavelli, the Man, His Work, and His Times. London: Herbert Joseph Ltd., 1937. (a) "... in Francis Bacon his memory found one of its earliest defenders." (b) "Machiavelli may have been a very bad man for having had the courage to place on record, as Bacon said, 'what men do, and not what they ought to do'."

Skemp, A. R. Francis Bacon. London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, (no date). "... he has learnt from Machiavelli and from experience to see men's weaknesses, and he cannot trust the strength of simple goodness."

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