Republic from foreign political establishments civil order and national security. By such duplicity, Borgia, promoted consolidated his own power without legal restraint. In modern terms, the notion of *realpolitik* refers to the use of any means to achieve the end of preserving supreme personal power without any normative natural law restraint. In modern terms, the notion of *realpolitik* is captured in the expression “the end justifies the means.”

**Machiavelli’s Depiction of Virtu:** Machiavelli provides an approving illustration of the amoral use of *realpolitik* in the political expediency of one Cesare Borgia, the ruler of the principality of Romagna on the outskirts of Florence. Seeing the prospect of civil discord as a threat to his own rule, Borgia instructed his head of police, Remirro de Orco, to carry out a brutal suppression of all insurgent leaders. Then, Borgia subsequently had de Orco himself summarily executed in the public square for excessive cruelty. By such duplicity, Borgia, promoted consolidated his own power. Therefore, Machiavelli provides an approving illustration of the amoral use of *realpolitik* in the political expediency of one Cesare Borgia, the ruler of the principality of Romagna on the outskirts of Florence. Seeing the prospect of civil discord as a threat to his own rule, Borgia instructed his head of police, Remirro de Orco, to carry out a brutal suppression of all insurgent leaders. Then, Borgia subsequently had de Orco himself summarily executed in the public square for excessive cruelty. By such duplicity, Borgia, promoted consolidated his own power without any normative natural law restraint. In modern terms, the notion of *realpolitik* is captured in the expression “the end justifies the means.”

**Politic Point of Departure:** Both of Machiavelli’s works are devoted to the theme of maintaining civil order, the loss of which in Florence and many other Italian city-states had caused so much civil strife. And in addressing the political goal of maintaining civil order, Machiavelli started from the premise that an empirical observation of political life showed that civil government was not based on the mutuality of a political community seeking the common good in sharing the practice of the moral virtue of justice, but rather only that of the quest for exercise of self-satisfying political power.

As such, Machiavelli’s approach to government addressed the single theme of maintaining civil order through the positive law of the state, later more popularly known as *raison d’état*. In his approach to government to seek the public interest only from the standpoint of maintaining civil order and national security, Machiavelli follows in the naturalist tradition of Augustine and Marsiglio of Padua rather than the normative tradition of moral virtue of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas.

**The Prince**

The *Prince* was written ostensibly as political advice to Lorenzo Medici but with the idea that his political advice to Medici would also serve as general handbook on how to exercise supreme personal power to establish civil order and national security. And it was to this end that Machiavelli advanced the notion of *virtu* (not to be confused with virtue) as the use of any form of skillful statecraft to maintain a regime of personal power which alone could establish civil order and national security. Like Marsiglio of Padua, Machiavelli, in turn, upholds the positive law of the state as the only true reality over natural law.

Within the context of *virtu*, Machiavelli addresses the naturalistic necessity of providing for civil order and national security as the *raison d’état* as holding the highest claim to human authority and justifying *realpolitik* to achieve its goals. *Realpolitik* refers to the use of any means to achieve the end of preserving supreme personal power without any normative natural law restraint. In modern terms, the notion of *realpolitik* is captured in the expression “the end justifies the means.”

**Introduction**

**Biography:** Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) lived in the **Italian city-state of Florence** in north central Italy in what is today the area of Tuscany. Florence was one of the foremost Italian city-states of the Renaissance from the 14th through the 16th century. The **Medici family** had been the chief force in Florentine political rule throughout the Renaissance, especially during the political rule of **Lorenzo Medici** (1469-1492). But Florence suffered from civil unrest when France and Spain intervened in Florentine politics in the late 15th century, with each trying to impose its political dominance on the Florentine city-state. For a brief period, the Medici were deposed under a regime of **Piero Soderini**, which lasted from 1498 to 1512 as a “republic” in an effort to free Florence from foreign political influence. But the Medici again asserted its political rule in 1512.

During the period of the interim republic of Soderini rule, Machiavelli, a well-educated official of considerable family wealth, served in the **Florentine foreign office** but was discharged with the return of Medici rule. Machiavelli spent the rest of his life on his estate on the outskirts of Florence, where he wrote his two famous works: **Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius** and **The Prince**. Only in 1526 was Machiavelli brought back into public office to refashion the military defenses of the Florentine city-state, just shortly before his death in 1527.

**The Concept of Virtu:** Machiavelli wrote The Prince ostensibly as political advice to Lorenzo Medici but with the idea that his political advice to Medici would also serve as general handbook on how to exercise supreme personal power to establish civil order and national security. And it was to this end that Machiavelli advanced the notion of *virtu* (not to be confused with virtue) as the use of any form of skillful statecraft to maintain a regime of personal power which alone could establish civil order and national security. Like Marsiglio of Padua, Machiavelli, in turn, upholds the positive law of the state as the only true reality over natural law.

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political power by extreme cruelty while representing himself to the public as a beneficent ruler opposed to such cruelty.

**Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius**

**Checks and Balances:** Machiavelli’s first work, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* extolled what the Roman historian Titus Livius (59 BC-17 AD) cited as the key to the stability of government rule as a “republic” before the quest for total individual power in the struggle of Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.) against Pompey and Crassus. By “republic” (*res publica* as a “thing of the public”) Livius meant a form of government in which the popular masses had effective input into political policy-making. The effective input of the popular masses into political policy-making was established by two organs of government, a Senate and Tribunate, representing the juxtaposed interests of a “patrician class” as a political elite with a disposition to hold oligarchical political power against a “plebian class” as the popular masses with a disposition to prevent an oligarchical oppression of the freedom of their daily lives.

That political policy-making depended upon the consent of both the Senate and Tribunate meant that a countervailing system of what today we call “checks and balances” would block the predominance of either body in political policy-making, forcing a policy-making consensus in the public interest, and insuring civil order. In this, Machiavelli referenced Cicero’s depiction of mixed government and foreshadowed James Harrington’s later presentation of mixed government.

**Machiavelli’s End Game**

**The Return to a Republic:** Despite the very different themes of absolute single-person rule and mixed government of aristocratic and democratic rule, themes of The Prince and The Discourses are not at odds with one another in Machiavelli’s end-game of thought. This was because absolute single-person rule under *realpolitik* to establish civil order was seen by Machiavelli as being a precondition to stable popular rule in a republic under mixed government.

And it was a republic under mixed government that Machiavelli looked to providing for the best long-term basis of civil order and national security. However necessary at the outset, absolute single-person rule, either by *miscalculation of tyrannical power or simply ultimate popular resistance* to the very principle of tyrannical rule, ultimately runs the risk of popular rebellion and a return to civil disorder. Whereas, mixed government holds the greatest guarantee of satisfying the consensual public interest by recourse to mixed government rule of both a political elite and the popular masses.

**The Appeal of a Founding Father:** The question naturally arises of the nature of transition from tyrannical absolute single-person rule to a republic of mixed government rule. Here Machiavelli suggests that such a transition might be willingly accepted by both sides in appealing to the *vanity of the prince*. The Prince himself could be convinced to release his single-person authoritarian rule to a republic of mixed government by recognizing that he would historically be known as the “father of a nation” in being seen as bringing national unity over political chaos. As pointed out by Livius, the prince would be seen as a mythological spiritual force like *Romulus* of ancient Rome (cf. George Washington)

In this context, Machiavelli also encouraged the Prince to aggressively engage *foreign wars* under a *universal draft*. Such a universal draft would engender national cohesion between the political elite and the popular masses in military comradeship and also engender the same national cohesion between the Prince and his subjects.

**Machiavelli’s Political Legacy**

**Instrumental Naturalism:** Machiavelli’s entire political thought is based on the study of *political power* in the name of establishing a *civil order*; not on political authority in the name of justice to realize moral virtue in the common good of the practice of human excellence. As such, Machiavelli’s *realpolitik* and *virtu* not only runs directly counter to the proposition of *Cicero* and *Aquinas* that human rights are a given of human nature as a product of divine reason, but also that the end-goal of the political state is to promote *human moral virtue* in the excellence of human behavior in accordance with divine reason.
For Machiavelli, the positive law of the state reigns independently supreme without any reference to divine law or natural law. The positive law of the state is strictly concerned with the naturalist consideration of maintaining public law and order. In this, Machiavelli not only followed the political thought of Nicholas of Padua in upholding the independent and supreme civil authority of the state expressed in positive law but moved beyond Nicholas of Padua in also dismissing any identity of positive law with natural law insofar as the later was identified with normative moral virtue.

In this, Machiavellian thought already adumbrates the later Hobbesian naturalist basis of natural law. And full-fledged Machiavellian thought would have a difficult time in standing up for the United Nations Convention on Human Rights and condemnation of the atrocities of Abu Ghraib.

Modern Political Behavioralism

Premises of Modern Political Behavioralism: The psychology behind Machiavellian thought underpins the modern behaviorist school of political science which, as already noted, was spawned at the University of Chicago under Harold Lasswell who went on to become a professor of political science at Yale University. The psychology behind Machiavellian thought treats human action as governed by the same laws of sub-rational necessity under the heading of “psychic behavioral drives” as the laws of the deterministic necessity of natural science. As such, the modern school behavioral political science takes as its point of departure Thucydides reference to gratification of the “three greatest things” of wealth, power, and glory as generating the human laws of motion in the same fashion as mass and energy in the physical sciences.

Arguing that all human action is founded on such sub-rational behavioral determinism, the postwar behavioralist school of political science believes that it can turn the study of politics into the same manageable and predictable outcomes of the exact physical sciences in the study of the laws of motion of attraction and repulsion. Specifically, the behavioral school of political science believes that by establishing a broad application of mixed government as a polyarchy (as addressed by Robert Dahl, also of Yale University in his work Preface to Democratic Theory, 1956), that calls for countervailing representation of not just a political elite and the popular masses but of some 10,000 separative interest groups of civil society, a regime of stable political order as the naturalistic quest of Machiavellian political though can be effectively realized. As we shall see later, this was already the intention of the framers of the American constitution.

Since of behavior political science does not claim to seek the common good in the normative sense of moral virtue in the public political discourse it only calls for the realization of the “public interest” as the lowest common denominator of the gratification of such deterministic sub-rational psychic drives. Critics of modern behavioral political science do not deny necessity of such a goal-value; but taken alone they argue that such a goal-value does rise above the instinctive self-preservation of the animal kingdom. And as such, the critics argue they do not do the study of politics justice in jettisoning any study of normative natural law.

Questions for Reflection

1. What was the prevailing state of political affairs in the city-state of Florence that prompted Machiavelli to write Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius and The Prince?
2. What did Machiavelli see as the genius of political rule in Rome as a republic until the rise of Julius Caesar?
3. What did Machiavelli’s advice in The Prince to Lorenzo Medici to restore his political power under the heading of virtu and realpolitik?
4. What does modern political behaviorism following Machiavelli see as the public interest as the goal of political theory as distinguished from that of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas?