Dystopia and Political Realism
A Link Between Orwell’s Doublethink and Machiavelli’s Verità Effettuale

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to put into question political realism – particularly, Machiavelli’s political realism unveiled by his appeal to the supremacy of verità effettuale within political theory – by drawing a parallel with the concept of Doublethink present in Orwell’s dystopia Nineteen Eighty-Four. Furthermore, the purpose is to expose the way in which Orwell criticized the implementation of the concept put forth by Machiavelli into the stage of real politics. The underlying question is whether reality can be subdued to political power.

Machiavelli’s political realism can’t be defined only as a theory aiming to set up the specificity of political activity, and by having in mind the world as it is instead of as theorists would like it to be, as most realist thinkers would agree. In Machiavelli’s understanding of the matter, as it appears in The Prince, politics is fundamentally a dispute for sovereignty, by which is understood an absolute power over the state. The aim of this dissertation will be to elucidate how such an absolute power has not only epistemological but also metaphysical consequences that will be defined as a ‘realist paradox’.
Ágríp

Þessi ritgerð beinir sjónum sínum að raunsæisstefnu í stjórspeki. Helsta viðfangsefni hennar er það sem Machiavelli kallar *verità effettuale* og samanburður þess hugtaks við hið þekkta *Doublethink* sem Orwell kynnr til sögunnar í bók sinni *1984*. Sérstök áhersla er lögð á það hvernig Orwell varaði við að sá hugsunarháttur sem hugtökin lýsa yrði raungerður í stjórmálum. Spurningin sem vaknar óhjákvæmilega er hvort rauveruleiki sé kannski undirseldur valdahafanum þegar allt kemur til alls.

Hið raunsæa sjónahorn Machiavellis er oft skilgreint sem nokkurs konar leiðsögn fyrir stjórmálamanninn þar sem sjónum er fyrst og fremst beint að því hvernig veruleikanum er hátað í raun fremur en að lýsa hvernig hann ætti að vera. Þessi ritgerð leggur hins vegar áherslu á að *Furstinn* sé fyrst og fremst texti um hið óskoraða vald þess sem heldur í stjórnartaumana. Í henni er ljósi varpað á hvernig slitkur skilningar á valdi leiðir ekki einungis til þekkingarfræðilegra niðurstaðna heldur einniguafræðilegra afleiðinga sem best er lýst sem „þversógn raunsæisins“.
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Introduction

This dissertation emerges from my participation in the course Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in the Modern World which was taught by Professor Leonidas Donskis (1962 – 2016) at the University of Iceland in the winter of 2016. Donskis was well known for how he constantly drew on literary examples of philosophical concepts in his writings. In this sense, the course set out to discuss the loss of moral consciousness in modern societies through literary works viz. how writers provided, by means of their literature, a critique of contemporary societies. This dissertation will employ similar approach. Firstly, by bringing together two different texts, namely, George Orwell’s dystopia Nineteen Eighty-Four and Niccoló Machiavelli’s The Prince; secondly, by bringing the focus on specific concepts in each of them – doublethink and verità effettuale, respectively.

The way in which these two books shall be linked will be, on the one hand, by demonstrating the role played by Machiavelli’s The Prince – and, more specifically therein, the concept of verità effettuale – in the configuration of modern political thought, and how it has influenced the development of political theory from then on; and on the other hand, by exposing the way in which Orwell criticized the implementation of the concept put forth by Machiavelli into the stage of real politics.

The main venture of this dissertation will be to explore how these two writers, both belonging to a realist tradition, consider the role of political leaders. This task will be done by asking three main research questions. The first one is whether it is possible to imagine the rise of a political system in which Doublethink becomes a reality? The second research question of this dissertation concerns the philosophical target of Orwell’s critique: Can we affirm that Orwell’s critique was directed towards the Verità Effettuale? The third research question pertain to the consequences of the implementation of the concepts of Doublethink and Verità Effettuale: Can reality be subdued to political power?

According to Donskis, twentieth-century dystopian literature, of which Nineteen Eighty-Four is an example, foresees the arrival of a social and political catastrophe resulting from pushing the principles of modernity to their limits, as is particularly the
case with the obsession with unlimited power and unrestricted control. In this spirit, this dissertation will focus on Orwell’s critique of what he perceives to be the falling of objective truth within totalitarian as well as democratic governments, and the implicit long-term risk associated with such a phenomenon. The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to challenge and to put into question political realism – particularly, Machiavelli’s political realism unveiled by his appeal to the supremacy of verità effettuale within political theory – by drawing a parallel between the two books.

For Donskis, in line with Bauman and Arendt, modern times suffer from the bureaucratization of evil. That is to say that, contrary to those who believe that evil belongs to a different world, or to those who think that evil is reserved exclusively for evil people, cruelty for Donskis is not something we only witness at times of war or in totalitarian regimes. Instead, it is part of everyday life, and can be practiced by everyone, if the circumstances allow it:

The destruction of a stranger’s life without the slightest doubt that you are doing your duty and being a moral person – this is the new form of evil, the invisible shape of wickedness in liquid modernity, going along with a state that lends or surrenders itself completely to these evils, a state that fears only incompetence and falling behind its competitors but not doubting for a moment that people are nothing but statistical units.

In this sense, an analysis will be carried out of what the circumstances are that could facilitate such disruptive social behavior, placing particular emphasis on Machiavelli’s writings in The Prince, since the hypothesis of the present thesis is that, should Machiavelli’s verità effettuale become the ruling principle of elected leaders, it can possibly derive in a totalitarian government where every action could be justified for the sake of maintaining political and social stability. In this line, it is believed that in Nineteen Eighty-Four Orwell is precisely deploying the resources created by Machiavelli in The Prince, and showing their conceivable outcome.

Machiavelli’s famous work marks a dramatic break from with political doctrines

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based on moral and religious systems of thought. Unlike moralist or idealist thinkers, who pretend to arrange their political bearings from in terms of a transcendent or divine conception of justice and virtue, Machiavelli turned the political thought to the search of “what really happens”\(^5\) in politics.

Having said that, it seems to be obvious that one has to accept that Machiavelli was a realist political thinker. But Machiavelli’s political realism is not merely defined as a theory aiming to set up the specificity of political activity, and by having in mind the world as it is instead of as theorists would like it to be, as most realist thinkers would agree. In Machiavelli’s understanding of the matter, as it appears in *The Prince*, politics is fundamentally a dispute for sovereignty, by which is understood an absolute power over the state. The aim of this dissertation will be to prove that such an absolute power has not only epistemological but also metaphysical consequences.

**Methodological Strategy and Overview**

The strategy adopted in order to achieve the purpose of this dissertation will not follow the obvious path of chronological order. It will not start by studying the earlier author and then moving onwards to the latter, as a historical research would suggest. Instead, it will start by presenting a problem, a political problem in contemporary society, where the limits of political power are not well established, referring mainly to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but also to other works by Orwell, and then it will try to show the philosophical/historical roots of that problem in Machiavelli’s *The Prince*.

Therefore, the first chapter will focus on the concept of dystopia, with particular emphasis being placed on the writings of Sargent Lyman Tower. It will start by defining the notion of utopia and move on to establish the concept of *Utopianism* as not only utopian literature but also utopian practice and utopian social theory. Chapter I continues with an analysis of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, incorporating a study of the controversy regarding the meaning of the title and a brief exposition of different interpretations of More’s book. A final section under the title of *Utopia, Dystopia, and Philosophy* will deal with the role that utopian tradition has played in society and how it interacts with philosophy, specially, with political philosophy.

The second chapter will focus on George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and

will attempt to elucidate what it is that makes this book a dystopia by showing that, far from being a work of science fiction, far from merely introducing an invented world, it describes a situation that may be realized someday if power falls into the wrong hands. In other words, the world the book depicts is a realizable nightmare. Orwell’s novel is a critique of the relationship between the individuals and the state, and it is packed with concepts that come from real-world examples. This dissertation, as its title suggests, will focus on the concept of Doublethink, as the idea that connects two important aspects of Orwell’s political thought: that of language being a creator of reality, but at the same time, that of language as the subject of political power.

The third and fourth chapters are dedicated to the analysis of Machiavellian political theory from the perspective of his concept of verità effettuale. The concept will be analyzed from two different angles. In the third chapter, it will be examined as part of the humanist tradition, and therefore the analysis will take into consideration the role of verità effettuale in Machiavelli’s ethics, its relation to la virtù or virtue, and, lastly, its connection to Necessity.

Chapter IV analyses verità effettuale from an ontological perspective, revealing the role played by this concept in Machiavelli’s realism. From this perspective, the realism that Machiavelli is arguing for is far from being orthodox or conventional. Rather, it can be said that Machiavelli’s realism leads towards a paradox. The aim of this chapter is to prove that political realism is for Machiavelli not the knowledge of and adaptation to reality, but power-politics realism, in which case political power furnishes princes with the ability to modify reality – or at least people’s perception of it – according to the princes’ will.
Chapter I

Before we can begin to analyze the concept of Dystopia, the notion we have chosen to be the link between the two concepts introduced in the title, we must first visit the concept of Utopia. The etymological link between Utopia and Dystopia is inexorable; indeed, it seems to be rather self-evident. Almost everyone has a more or less accurate notion or idea of what a utopia is. If we asked a group of people to give a definition or a synonym of it, responses would fluctuate from impossible or non-existent, to naïve, and all the way up to ideal or perfect. But it is not just the general public that links the concept of Utopia to that of perfection – so do any scholars, like such as as Voigt, for whom utopias are “idealistic pictures of the worlds.” At the same time, the Oxford English Dictionary defines Utopia as: “An imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.”

Within the tradition of utopian studies, scholars offer many definitions of the notion of “utopia”. One of the most recognized definitions is Suvin’s, who defines it as:

The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationship are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.

The concept itself comes from the book by Thomas More, and was the origin of a tradition/genre that describes in some detail an imaginary society. But this is not the whole meaning of it. Utopianism, as Lyman Tower Sargent names it, incorporates not only utopian literature, but also utopian practice or communitarianism and utopian social theory, as a result of the human capacity to dream for a better life: “I define the broad, general phenomenon of utopianism as social dreaming – the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and

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which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live.” To clarify, Utopia as a genre in literature was conceived in Western societies in 1516, but Utopianism or social dreaming is probably as old and global as culture itself.

As Lyman Tower shows, utopian literature has its roots in what are commonly known as myths (golden ages, arcadies, earthly paradises, fortunate isles, isles of the blest). From the publication of Utopia onwards, this literary genre has assumed certain formal characteristics: Firstly, a utopia must be a society: “...a condition in which there is human (or some equivalent) interaction in a number of different forms and in which human beings (or their equivalent) express themselves in a variety of ways.” Secondly, utopias are mainly a type of prose fiction, which means that the society being described must be non-existent. Thirdly, these societies are normally located in time and space.

Concerning the second expression of utopianism, the utopian practice or intentional community, as Lyman Tower chooses to conceptualize it, is defined as: “...a group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed upon purpose.” Thus, the group needs to share a common project or goal, but what that goal is does not have to be specified. At the same time, it follows that this kind of group disposes of a limited extension of time: it starts with the decision of banding together, and it will necessarily dissolve with time, even if it is hard to determine the exact date. Hence, if utopianism is social dreaming, then, just as writers communicate their dreaming through utopian literature, the “communards” express their dreams by putting them into practice.

Finally, the third face of utopianism, that of utopian social theory, is rooted, according to the author, in “the idea of progress and the constant but generally unsystematic stream of thought that can be called anti-utopianism.” Both of these currents give much importance to the idea of perfection: the difference between them can be established by whether they believe such perfection can be reached or not. Those who think that a perfect society can’t be achieved are mainly influenced by the Christian

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10 Sargent, L., Ibid.
11 Sargent, L., Ibid.
12 Sargent, L., Ibid.
13 Sargent, L., Ibid.
idea of the “original sin” and therefore, for them, perfection is something to be achieved only after death. On the contrary, those who believe that progress and perfection can be fulfilled are led to activism. In Manheimm’s words:

the term utopian, as here used, may be applied to any process of thought which receives its impetus not from the direct source of reality but from concepts, such as symbols, fantasies, dreams, ideas and the like, which in the most comprehensive sense of that term are non-existent. Viewed from the stand point of sociology, such mental constructs may in general assume two forms: they are ‘ideological’ if they serve the purpose of glossing over or stabilizing the existing social reality; ‘utopian’ if they inspire collective activity which aims to change such reality to conform with their goals, which transcend reality.14

More’s Utopia

The word Utopia used by Thomas More as the title of his work has two possible meanings in the book.15 Thus, we cannot tell whether More’s utopia exists or not, whether it is “nowhere” u-topos (υ + τόπος), or “the best place” eu-topos (ευ + τόπος). The original edition was written in Latin and published in Louvain, Belgium in 1516 under the title of Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reip[ublicae] satu, deq[ue] noua Insula Vtopia (Concerning the Best State of a Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia. A truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining). The first English edition appeared in the year 1551.16

The Latin edition was divided in two parts, the second of which describes the place (υτόπος “Nowhere”). More’s original intention was to name the book “Nusquama,” a nominalization of the adjective “Nusquam” or “nowhere”, but as the title itself suggests, it is a book concerning the best state.17 Also, it is possible to find instances in the text where the word “utopia” takes the superlative mode eutopia, which means “the best place”:

16 The first English translation was published as A Fruteful and Pleasaunt Worke of the Beste State of a Publyque weale, and of the newe yle called Vtopia, translated by Ralphe Robyson (London: Ptd. by Abraham Vele, 1551). See Utopian Literature in English: An Annotated Bibliography From 1516 to the Present by Lyman Tower Sargent: https://openpublishing.psu.edu/utopia. doi:10.18113/P8WC77
Vtopia priscis dicta ob infrequentiam,  
Nune ciutatis aemula Platonicae,  
Fortasse uictrix, (nam quod illa literis  
Deliniauit, hoc ego una praestis,  
Viris it opibus, optimisque legibus)  
Eutopia merito sum uocanda nomine.

Called once “No-place” because I stood apart.  
Now I compete with Plato’s state, perhaps  
Surpass it; what he only wrote about  
I have alone in fact become: the best  
In people, wealth, in laws by far the best.  
“Good-place” by right I should be called.¹⁸

Therefore, Utopia refers to two opposite things: on the one hand, it can be  
Eutopia, the good-place; a place where excellence has been or can be achieved,  
however distant or impossible it may appear. On the other hand, the concept can refer to  
Vtopia:¹⁹ the no-place; a point or situation which does not exist and will never be reached. It is possible to further divide the latter meaning in two, by distinguishing, on  
the one hand, those who think that utopia works as a final cause, meaning that it does not exist in act but is something to aim at, even if it will never be attained; and on the other hand, those who believe this notion implies the absolute impossibility of its being conceptualized.

More’s book is structured in two books: a first, negative book, which is a critique to the kingdom of Henry VII of England and the Tudor society. And a second, positive book, in which More describes and illustrates the socio-political, economic, and moral features of Utopia.²⁰ The society portrayed by the explorer Hythloday seems very attractive in some ways, but at the same time, disagreeable in others. Life in Utopia as presented in the book was very different from England at the time, having more in common with a Greek polis like Sparta than with any community of the English


¹⁹ We are using here the term in Latin to refer only the “negative” sense.

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Kingdom in the 16th century. More himself compares the society to a family.\textsuperscript{21}

The political organization of Utopia is an oligarchical society ruled by old and wise men. This community has very strict laws with severe punishment but is based on extended equality. This egalitarian characteristic is taken to the extreme, where personal freedom is restricted. Everything is controlled by the authorities:

So you see that nowhere is there any chance to loaf or any pretext for evading work; there are no wine-bars, or ale-houses, or brothels; no chance for corruption; no hiding places; no spots for secret meetings. Because they live in the full view of all, they are bound to be either working at their usual trades or enjoying their leisure in a respectable way. Such customs must necessarily result in plenty of life’s good things, and since they share everything equally, it follows that no one can ever be reduced to poverty or forced to beg.\textsuperscript{22}

There are many interpretations of the economic formulations presented by More in \textit{Utopia}. For some, there is no complete system, only “messages”, while others believe that the economy is merely subordinated to the political system. But at the same time, More has been placed under many different economic traditions: Christian communism, medieval, mercantilism, modern socialism, and communism as well as capitalism. Notwithstanding that, one could agree with James W. Park that the economy presented by More is a critique of the economic problems of 16th-century England: unemployment, oligopoly, valuation of money, and a very unequal distribution of income and wealth.\textsuperscript{23} For Park, the economy in \textit{Utopia} is More’s answer to such problems, and it is organized according to the principles of reciprocity, redistribution, and administered trade that are specific to primitive and archaic economies. The economic system is agricultural-based where there is no private property and neither free enterprise. People is assigned positions to fill the necessities of the economic plan.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} For some scholars, this idea was taken from Plutarch and his recount of Lycurgus’ journey: “And it is said that on returning from a journey some time afterwards, as he traversed the land just after the harvest, and saw the heaps of grain standing parallel and equal to one another, he smiled, and said to them that were by: ‘All Laconia looks like a family estate newly divided among many brothers’.” in Plutarch, \textit{Lives}, translated by Bernadotte Perrin, Vol: I (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 229.

\textsuperscript{22} More, Th., \textit{Utopia}, 62.


There have been many interpretations of Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Some scholars agree that, in accordance with the catholic faith of the writer, it is possible to read it as a moral allegory. On the other hand, others believe that *Utopia* is a political manifesto in which the prevalent attribute is to be privileged. One could agree with Vita Fortunati for whom, rather than a plan to implement or to emulate, *Utopia* is a method for criticize reality: “Utopia then is not to be seen as a model on which to reconstruct the political and social world, but as a text that stimulates the discovery and the heuristic analysis of truth.”

What is important to realize is that, even though the people of the island of *Utopia* seem to be better than any other at the time, they are not better by nature but, as Sargent correctly affirms, because of their institutions. And the moral implication of this fact is that people are untrustworthy, and that they behave well because of the constant threat of punishment and the limited freedom of choice:

the senate decree a specific punishment for each misdeed, as it is considered atrocious or venial. Husbands chastise their wives and parents their children, unless the offense is so serious that public punishment is called for. Generally, the gravest crimes are punished with slavery, for they think this deters offenders just as much as getting rid of them by immediate capital punishment, and convict labor is more beneficial to the commonwealth. Salves, moreover, contribute more by their labor than by their death, and they are permanent and visible reminders that crime does not pay.

**Utopia, Dystopia, and Philosophy**

What makes the utopian genre a subject of philosophical analysis is, as Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash correctly affirm in the Introduction to the book *Utopia/Dystopia*, that utopian visions are never without foundation: “They [utopias] always draw on the resources present in the ambient culture and develop them with


specific ends in mind that are heavily structured by the present." Therefore, as Donskis affirms, utopianism emerged as the first culturally legitimized and conventionally accepted form of social criticism. Fiction gave writers the possibility to keep writing their critique and avoid getting into trouble with the law. More’s *Utopia* is, therefore, one of the first works in the history of Western thought to occupy itself with the criticism of modernity and the intimate relationship between science and society.

As Gregory Claeys and Lyman Sargent state, utopias and all the changes they manifest are reflections of the paradigm shifts in the way a culture views itself: “Sometimes it is possible to identify fairly precisely the role of a utopia or a group of utopias in this process, but all such shifts take place unevenly, and, therefore, different utopias in any time and place may reflect different stages in the paradigm shift, including reactions against it.”

Accordingly, Claeys and Lyman identify four historical stages in the evolution of the utopian tradition following Thomas More’s book. The first one, set in the 16th and 17th centuries, was created by a religious radicalism which placed great importance on communal property and egalitarian ideas based on Spartan ideals and Christian monasticism. The second main stage also starts in the 16th century and encompasses the discovery expeditions as well as the discussions regarding aboriginal peoples and their relationship with Europe and Christianity. These discussions were mainly about the moral status of such communities. In the third place we have the scientific and technological revolutions of the 17th century and their promise of the unlimited progress of human beings towards better health, a longer life, and the domination of nature in the interests of humankind. Finally, the utopian tradition was enhanced by the revolutionary movements of the late 18th century in North America and France, in which the utopian promise of a society of greater virtue, equality, and social justice was now projected onto a national scale.

Having said that, the next step will be to clarify some other concepts within the utopian genre. The antithesis of utopia, the *anti-utopia* is, therefore, a place which is diametrically opposed to a utopia. It is a place, a situation, or even a human condition.

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33 Claeys, G and Sargent L., Ibid.
which, under normal circumstances, is disagreeable, and it is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately brutal and repulsive. According to Gregory Claeys and Lyman Sargent, an anti-utopia is a utopia that the author intended for a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.\textsuperscript{34} Likewise, George Woodcock holds that one of the main characteristics of anti-utopias is that they attack the collectivist idea rather than its concrete manifestation. Under this category we can situate, for instance, the book \textit{Erewhon} by Samuel Butler which was written as a direct critique of More’s \textit{Utopia}.\textsuperscript{35}

Finally, the word “dystopia” (or “distopia”) is derived from the Greek \textit{dus} (deficient, faulty, difficult, unfavorable, or bad) + \textit{topos} (place), meaning a bad or imperfect place.\textsuperscript{36} Following Helga Nowotny, we can observe that Dystopias can also be read as the dysfunctional version of a science and technology having fallen victim to the surplus of order and control that we have seen as inherent to Utopian thought.\textsuperscript{37}

In line with Nowotny, according to Gregory Claeys the genre of Dystopia emerges from the same set of problems as Utopias: “how to control industrialization, widespread poverty, the concentration of wealth, and an increasing tendency towards collectivist solutions to these issues.”\textsuperscript{38} But as we have said, some of the characteristics of Utopian scenarios seem to be more a part of the problem than of the solution. For instance, militarized societies, homogeneous and uniform societies, transparency and mutual supervision, abstinence from luxury and sexual instincts, the suppression of dissent and privacy, and the intolerance of heresy that characterized many of the early modern utopias were conceived as the price to be paid for the promise of avoiding Hades.\textsuperscript{40}

The adjective “dystopian” implies a frightening future ruled by chaos, corruption, and the degradation of life. Just as it happens with utopia and the human quest for a better life, throughout history humanity has been afraid of apocalypse as

\textsuperscript{34}Claeys, G. and Sargent L., Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} At least, it was written connoting More’s \textit{Utopia}. “Erewhon” is “nowhere”(utopia) misspelled backwards. See: Butler, S., \textit{Erewhon}, edited by Peter Mudford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).


\textsuperscript{38} Claeys, G., \textit{Dystopia: A natural History}, 274.

\textsuperscript{40} Claeys, G., Ibid.
According to Norman Cohn, one of the oldest versions of a menace of universal destruction can be traced back to 1000 BC, when the Egyptians anticipated the triumph of chaos over order in the Prophecies of Nefertiti and the Admonitions of Ipuwer. The Prophecies of Nefertiti prognosticate a civil war that will destroy the nation, and its eventual redemption through the rise of a great king:

Lo, the great no longer rule the land
[...]
All happiness has vanished,
The land is bowed down in distress
[...]
Re will withdraw from mankind:
Though he will rise at his hour,
One will not know when noon has come;
No one will discern his shadow.

For their part, the Admonitions of Ipuwer intend to show the consequences of the failure of a king in the exercise of the authority that is rightly his:

Lo, the face is pale
What the ancestors foretold has happened.
The land is full of gangs,
A man goes to plow with his shield.
[...]
See now, the land is deprived of kingship
By a few people who ignore custom.
See now, men rebel against the Serpent,
[Stolen] is the crown of Re, who pacifies the Two Lands.

There is no consent regarding the origin of the word “dystopia”. In an article published in 2006, Sargent Lyman Tower acknowledges that recent investigations attribute the first use of the word “dystopia” as such to a book by Lewis Henry Younge: Utopia: or Apollo’s Golden Days. In this book, according to Lyman Tower, the author makes use of the word dustopia as a negative contrast to utopia. Since the 20th century, the word dystopia has been associated with the “failed utopia” and therefore, the word

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utopia has included both eutopia and dystopia. It is true, like Gregory Claeys asserts, that utopias and dystopias have more in common than what we would normally like to accept. But this does not mean that we can assume that every utopia is, in reality, a dystopia. There are many successful intentional communities in which a cooperative ethos predominates and where harmony is maintained without coercion. Focusing on our approach, one could say together with Gordin, Tilley, and Trakash that a dystopia is a utopia that fails, where the main objectives were not achieved (at least not for everyone).

In Nineteen Eighty-Four, for example, society is presented as harmonious for those who live in it – only we, the readers, and the main character together with what is called the Brotherhood (the resistance to the Party) realize it is extremely oppressive. It is possible for readers of the novel to think that characters, just like all people living in Oceania, truly believe that they are living in the best possible world without realizing that things are terribly wrong. But what emerges, as we move forward in the text, is that the society depicted in the novel is ruled by a paradoxical element that Orwell calls doublethink, which is the faculty to affirm two contradictory principles and having them be simultaneously legitimate. This paradoxical characteristic is what makes Orwell’s work a dystopia. This is the point of the novel which is more closely related to real life. People in Nineteen Eighty-Four choose not to see. They choose to believe in the Party and its lies, they choose to believe the official history, which can be changed daily. In this element dwells Orwell’s most sharp-pointed critique of Western society.

As Donskis states in his book Power and Imagination, three of the greatest authors of the last century, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell, have showed us through their dystopias the prophesy of a social and political catastrophe brought about as a result of pushing some of the principles of modern political theory to the limits. Zamiatin, for example, himself an engineer, knew very well the implications of a world where statistics and mathematics became the dominant forces in shaping rulers and societies.

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47 Claeys, G., Dystopia: A natural History.
I shall attempt nothing more than to note down what I see, what I think – or, to be more exact, what we think (that’s right: we; and let this WE be the title of these records). But this, surely, will be a derivative of our life, of the mathematically perfect life of OneState […]\[51\]

The world of WE is separated in two: on one side there is the One State or Glass World where the rule is the application of rationality to human relationships, and beyond the wall enclosing this man-made Glass World exists the natural Green World ruled by sensation and emotion. In the One State, all human conduct is virtually controlled and scientifically determined; even the moral system was “based on subtraction, addition, division, and multiplication.”\[52\] On the contrary, social life in the Green World is clearly anarchic and disorderly.

In Zamyatin’s dystopia, paradox also plays an important role, since the society it depicts – an extremely oppressed and controlled society, where the will for freedom is synonymous with criminal instinct – is ruled by a dictator called the Benefactor: “The Benefactor, the Machine, the Cube, the Gas Bell, the Guardians: All those things represent good, all that is sublime, splendid, noble, elevated, crystal pure. Because that is what protects our nonfreedom, which is to say, our happiness.”\[53\] The oppressive mechanism is paradoxically taken as good – not even as a necessary evil, simply good.

For his part Orwell, who worked as a journalist for the BBC, knew very well the power of propaganda in the constitution of power. Propaganda is defined by Lasswell as:

> the control of opinion by significant symbols, or to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication. Propaganda is concerned with the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism.\[54\]

As presented in the novel, this feature of propaganda, together with its inextricable counterpart, which is Newspeak, are meant to exist for the sake of preserving the welfare state built by the Party. As Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, the

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51 Zamyatin, Y., *We*, 4.
deceit of modern society is based on the transformation of means into an end in itself.\textsuperscript{55} Because, the more complex and reified social an organization becomes, the more difficult is it to recognize means as such, for they adopt the appearance of autonomous entities.

It is not our intention to enter into a deep discussion of modern political thought. In our context, we understand it as the period that started around the year 1450 with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks, the bastion of Christianity that had kept Muslims away from Western Europe (1453), and the time of the Protestant Reformation (1517), which marked the crowning of the fragmentation of the Christian Church. From the chaos and atomization of these political circumstances, the idea of the modern state as a political entity that wields absolute power within its own territory – with a monopoly on violence – emerged.\textsuperscript{56} Thomas Hobbes inaugurates the second part of his book \textit{Leviathan} by saying that the main purpose of men is to live a more harmonious life and “getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war.”\textsuperscript{57} In this sense, a sovereign’s intention is peace and the defense of everyone.

To summarize, we can attribute the emergence of the modern concept of State to four preconditions following Skinner.\textsuperscript{58} The first one is that the sphere of politics or political philosophy should be considered as a discipline separated from ethics. This new sphere of science, involved in the art of government, included authors as diverse as Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Hobbes, among others. Of course, we do not presume to say that these authors agree in everything; they actually have many disagreements. But we want to focus in what they have in common, which is not the content but rather a certain way of approaching or tackling the study of ethics and politics – in a word, the method.\textsuperscript{59} This method attempts to find a secular answer to ethical and political problems; it aims at the construction of a system, ultimately separated from theology and capable of guaranteeing the universality of the principles of human behavior. The

\textsuperscript{55} Horkheimer, M., and Adorno, Th., \textit{Dialectic of enlightenment} (New York: Continuum, 1998).
second precondition, according to Skinner, is that every *regnum* or *civitas* should be considered as independent from any external power. Together with this second requirement comes the third which is that, within each independent *regnum*, the authority must have no rival in matters of legislation and execution: States need a supreme authority. Finally, the modern idea of State presupposes that every community or political society is meant to exist for the only purpose of maintaining peace, leaving aside the duty of upholding any particular faith.

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Chapter II

George Orwell was one of the most important literary figures of his time. Although he is first and foremost known for his novels, he considered himself a political writer who sought to turn political writing into an art:

Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows.61

What scared Orwell the most about totalitarianism “is not that it commits ‘atrocities’ but that it attacks the concept of objective truth; it claims to control the past as well as the future.”62 The fact that Orwell uses the concept “objective truth” implies the adoption of a particular metaphysical stance: he is adding the adjective “objective” to the noun “truth,” which means that the veracity or the falsity of our statements does not depend on any psychological state of our own. As philosopher Peter van Inwagen has pointed out: “The words objective truth are a reminder that the truth of a belief or statement is entirely a matter of how things are with its object, and has nothing to do with the state of its subject – the person who has the belief or makes the statement.”63 Orwell was a realist thinker, and he did not liked the idea that any political power could modify reality according to their will.64

As will be seen, Orwell was an intellectual committed to his time. We cannot therefore separate his texts from the social context of the place and time in which he was writing.65 This chapter will focus mainly on his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

65 This is precisely the view held by Bernard Crick, for whom this characteristic makes Nineteen Eighty-
Nineteen Eighty-Four in Context

Written between 1946 and 1948, Orwell’s magnum opus was not published until 1949. It deals, as Rossi and Rodden suggest, with the following question: Can the individual survive in the face of the collective power of the modern state? However, in the context of this chapter, there are many other questions we must answer in order to understand the notion of truth in Orwell’s novel. In particular, our focus is on the role of Doublethink within the political reality of the story.

In this novel, Orwell makes a very serious criticism of the tendency of political rulers to employ the most wicked features to maintain stability and power within their State. But Orwell’s remark on this feature of modern rulers was not invented by him – as was proven in the previous chapter – and it did not make its appearance for the first time in this novel. Rather, it is probably linked to the experience of the Trotskyist trials of 1937 in the USSR. In 1938, Orwell wrote a review of the book Assignment in Utopia by Eugene Lyons where he denounces:

> The GPU are everywhere, everyone lives in constant terror of denunciation, freedom of speech and of the press are obliterated to an extent we can hardly imagine. There are periodical waves of terror, sometimes the “liquidation” of kulaks or Nepmen, sometimes some monstrous state trial at which people who have been in prison for months or years are suddenly dragged forth to make incredible confessions, while their children publish articles in the newspapers saying “I repudiate my father as a Trotskyist serpent.”

Coincidently, in his 1940 essay Inside the Whale Orwell reveals that: “Every Communist is in fact liable at any moment to have to alter his most fundamental convictions, or leave the party. The unquestionable dogma of Monday may become the damnable heresy of Tuesday, and so on.” Even further, in 1942 he recalled that the propaganda of Spanish fascism “… often gives me the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. After all, the chances are that those lies, or at

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68 Orwell, G., “Inside the Whale” in An Age like this: 1920-1940, 513.
any rate similar lies, will pass into history.”

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the slogan of the Party reads as follows: “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” This means that having political power allows the Party to control not only the present, but also the predictions made about the future – in other words, the possibility of modifying the predictions afterwards if they did not come true and force them to fit “reality” (and consequently make them accurate). At the same time, following Erika Gottlieb, it is possible to affirm that “whoever ‘controls’ the future – that is, whoever has the power to enforce belief in the predicted end – will also have power to interpret and falsify, that is, to ‘control’ the past.”

This is precisely what Hannah Arendt denounces in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

> [When] Stalin decided to rewrite the history of the Russian revolution, the propaganda of his new version consisted in destroying, together with the older books and documents, their authors and readers: the publication in 1938 of a *new official history* of the Communist Party was the signal that the super purge which had decimated a whole generation of Soviet intellectuals had come to an end.

Orwell himself knew this quite well, and had charged against this tendency of modern societies (particularly in the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century) some years before Arendt. And this is precisely what makes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a very important critical study and a corollary of his fight against not just totalitarianism or fascism, but the menace they pose in every modern state.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines “propaganda” as the diffusion of information – facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies – to influence public opinion:

> Propaganda is the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people’s beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth).

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70 Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 182.
73 Britannica Academic, s.v., *Propaganda*, accessed February 22, 2018,
In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, propaganda was not only a way of making public pronounces, but the way in which the structure of power was conceived. Every public institution was conceived in terms of propaganda, every single aspect of public and private life was permeated by propaganda. It touched everything.

Let us remember that Orwell’s world in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is divided among three authoritarian superpowers: Oceania, East Asia, and Eurasia. All three super states are constantly at war with each other; at the time of the events in the book, Oceania is at war with East Asia, and Eurasia is the ally. But it is not a real war, it is actually for the sake of public amusement, it is a virtual war, a propagandistic war, as it is shown by one of the IngSoc party’s maxim: “War is Peace and Peace is War,” where the limits between these antithetical concepts become blurry.

In the novel, war was used by the Party just for the sake of structuring information, structuring the narrative. Nothing could be done about public opinion without war, without a story; the Party needed to show that they were under threat, besieged:

> it is necessary that he should have the mentality appropriate to a state of war. It does not matter whether the war is actually happening, and, since no decisive victory is possible, it does not matter whether the war is going well or badly. All that is needed is that a state of war should exist.\(^\text{74}\)

As a journalist, Orwell knew quite well how important it was to have a story if you wanted to be believed, and he also knew how easy it would be for one to manufacture reality: “Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”\(^\text{75}\)

This almost grotesque situation of alliances and treason between the superpowers in the novel is intimately linked to the real-world events that were taking place between the Russian Revolution, Germany, and the Allied Forces. In 1924, after the death of Lenin, Stalin promotes the revolution of the proletariat in the entire world and thus rejects the interaction between the USSR and capitalist countries until 1933.

\(^{74}\) http://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/propaganda/109443.

\(^{75}\) Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 182.

Between 1933 and 1939, with the advent of Hitler in Germany and his declared imperialist objective against the whole of Europe, Stalin intends to forge an alliance with the other European countries against the Nazis, counter to his own words. But in 1939, Stalin and Hitler sign a Non-Aggression Pact and become allies again, despite their earlier position. However, this new state of affairs does not last long: in 1941, Hitler attacks Russia and Stalin once again becomes an ally of the Allied Forces against Hitler and remains so until 1945. After the war, with the enemy defeated, the USSR and the Allied Forces enter into what is known as the Cold War.

The importance that this twist of alliances holds for us is not in terms of international relationships or global policy, but lies instead in how changes in propaganda took place on both sides – how Hitler and fascism were considered either “evil” or a minor issue depending on the needs of the Communist Party in Russia. The same thing happened in Western democracies and their judgement towards Russia and the communists. Russia, who was part of the Popular Front and an ally against fascism until 1939, was suddenly the worst enemy during its alliance with Hitler. Then in 1941, Roosevelt and Churchill once again forge an alliance with Stalin and sustain it until the end of the war. Once the enemy is defeated, the allies turn against each other and the Cold War begins:

As Hitler’s three targets of attack were, to all appearances, Great Britain, France and the USSR, the three countries were forced into a sort of uneasy rapprochement. This meant that the English or French Communist was obliged to become a good patriot and imperialist – that is, to defend the very things he had been attacking for the past fifteen years. The Comintern slogans suddenly faded from red to pink. “World revolution” and “Social-Fascism” gave way to “Defence of democracy” and “Stop Hitler!”76

What troubles Orwell is not the changes in foreign policy (they are actually expectable), but their denial, the concealment of the changes. In Russia, for example, every decision, every change, was considered a step in the one and only way towards socialism, not a shift in policy. Another example pointed out by Orwell was the trial against Mussolini. In his text Who Are the Criminals, he denounces: “there is not one

scoundrelism committed by Mussolini between 1922 and 1940 that has not been lauded to the skies by the very people who are now promising to bring him to trial.”

In this sense, the concept of doublethink, coined in Orwell’s last novel, comes to crown his idea of language as a creator of reality, on the one side, and of language as subject to political power on the other. In Part II, chapter IX of the novel, Orwell defined doublethink as “the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.” Therefore, doublethink allows party members to fight against the enemy, Eastasia, and be allies with Eurasia until facts change and the enemy becomes the ally and vice-versa. What is more, doublethink allows party members to believe and proclaim that their new enemy has been the enemy all along, and to switch back if necessary without any concern. Doublethink is the possibility of rearranging reality according to necessity, but with the firm conviction that things were always the same way, in order to avoid contradictions.

Many scholars suggest that Orwell was publicly criticizing Russian and German totalitarian governments; but in this context, it is possible to affirm together with Erica Gottlieb that with doublethink Orwell was not only offering a parody of those particular regimes, but “even more significantly, of the corrupted consciousness in the Western world that condoned or justified the emerging totalitarian systems in their coming to power and maintaining themselves in power.”

There is an interesting characteristic of this process, namely that of its psychological sphere. For Orwell, the use of the term “doublethink” implies doublethink, implies the telling of deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them. And this is the most important and subtle aspect of it, to apply this process to the inner process itself: “consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed.” Maybe at this point, Orwell was trying to say that everyone in Oceania (every party member, the proles did not count) knew what was going on, and “decided” to act as if they did not:

– ‘It exists!’ he cried.
– ‘No,’ said O’Brien.
He stepped across the room. There was a memory hole in the opposite wall. O’Brien lifted the grating. Unseen, the frail slip of paper was

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77 Orwell, G., “Who Are the War Criminals?” in My Country Right or Left 1940-1943, 319.
78 Orwell, G., Nineteen Eighty-Four, 203.
79 Gottlieb, E., The Orwell Conundrum, 117.
80 Orwell, G., Nineteen Eighty-Four, 34.
whirling away on the current of warm air; it was vanishing in a flash of flame. O’Brien turned away from the wall.

— ‘Ashes,’ he said. ‘Not even identifiable ashes. Dust. It does not exist. It never existed.’

— ‘But it did exist! It does exist! It exists in memory. I remember it. You remember it.’

— ‘I do not remember it,’ said O’Brien.

Winston’s heart sank. That was doublethink. 81

Together with doublethink, Orwell introduces other concepts or notions that help understand the situation he is denouncing. The first one is crimestop, that is, the “faculty of stopping short”: it is a kind of survival instinct that allows people to avoid any dangerous thoughts. It was defined by Orwell as protective stupidity, as playing dumb, but it actually requires a tremendous intellectual capacity in order to detect, at its very origin, a risky idea. It demands full control over any mental process. The other key word is blackwhite, which means not only the habit of claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the facts, but also the ability to believe so if the Party demands it. In the dialogue quoted above, O’Brien clearly lays out how blackwhite operates.

Orwell was evidently disappointed by the way intellectuals, journalists, and politicians manipulated information for political reasons during the Civil War in Spain:

I have little direct evidence about the atrocities in the Spanish Civil War. I know that some were committed by the Republicans, and far more (they are still continuing) by the Fascists. But what impressed me then, and has impressed me ever since, is that atrocities are believed in or disbelieved in solely on grounds of political predilection. Everyone believes in the atrocities of the enemy and disbelieves in those of his own side, without ever bothering to examine the evidence. Recently I drew up a table of atrocities during the period between 1918 and the present; there was never a year when atrocities were not occurring somewhere or other, and there was hardly a single case when the Left and the Right believed in the same stories simultaneously. And stranger yet, at any moment the situation can suddenly reverse itself and yesterday’s proved-to-the-hilt atrocity story can become a ridiculous lie, merely because the political landscape has changed. 82

This protective stupidity was also denounced by other writers as something performed by many leftist intellectuals in order to preserve their ideology. Jean Paul

81 Orwell, G., Nineteen Eighty-Four, 236.
Sartre, for example, affirmed that “To keep hope alive one must, in spite of all mistakes, horrors and crimes, recognize the obvious superiority of the socialist [i.e. Soviet] camp.”

Without going so far as to naturalize suffering and crime, we must now ask ourselves what the things are to which we have resigned in order to maintain our trust in modern societies. Which are our concessions to maintain our status? For example, the Tories (the English conservatives) denounced Orwell, and they turned a blind eye towards Hitler because they expected him to protect them from the communist threat.

Fear and Security

In our times, modern liquid times, as Zygmunt Bauman would put it, fear is what keeps people under political power. In his book *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman refers to the situation inaugurated by *The Communist Manifesto* where the intention of the book was to melt the solids. In this context, melting the solids means a “profaning of the sacred”: “for disavowing and dethroning the past, and first and foremost ‘tradition’ to wit, the sediment and residue of the past in the present; it thereby called for the smashing of the protective armour forged of the beliefs and loyalties which allowed the solids to resist the ‘liquefaction’.”

To build a new “(truly solid!) order,” it was necessary to abandon the old structures. But instead of the emergence of new solid structures, what really happened was that this resigning of the old structures facilitated the invasion and supremacy of what Webber would call instrumental rationality:

The solids whose turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot and which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity, are the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions— the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and political actions of human collectivities on the other.

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86 As an example of this solid structures of modernity we can mention René Descartes and his Meditations: “Hence I saw that at some stage in my life the whole structure would have to be utterly demolished, and that I should have to begin again from the bottom up if I wished to construct something lasting and unshakable in the sciences ”, in Descartes, R., *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Michael Moriarty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

According to Bauman, it is much easier to modify the outline of the liquids than to keep them in shape. As opposed to what happens with solids, which are set once and for all, to keep fluids in shape requires constant observance. In the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the system of control over society applied by Big Brother is based on this permanent vigilance. Applying the concept of “Panopticon” (all-seeing) introduced by Jeremy Bentham in 1791, Orwell imagines a society where people are being watched at any time through a double-way screen (*telescreen*) that at the same time can show images and observe what is going on on the other side: “Big Brother is Watching You,” read the Party posters that were all over the city.\(^{88}\)

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is possible to see how the theory of security of modern societies is turned upside down. What the Party does in Orwell’s dystopia is to constantly threat the people. The “2 minutes of hate” procedure reveals how Big Brother, the State, seeks to instill fear and horror of Emanuel Goldstein, public enemy number one, with the purpose of political stability, instead of offering a life of safety. If people are not pleased with their life, if people feel trapped, they can channel their anger through the yelling and blaming Goldstein for everything that is not right, then feel happy as soon as Big Brother appears on screen.

Aldous Huxley shares this idea that fear is at the roots of modernity:

> And fear, my good friends, fear is the very basis and foundation of modern life. Fear of the much touted technology which, while it raises out standard of living, increases the probability of our violently dying. Fear of the science which takes away the one hand even more than what it so profusely gives with the other. Fear of the demonstrably fatal institutions for while, in our suicidal loyalty, we are ready to kill and die. Fear of the Great Men whom we have raised, and by popular acclaim, to a power which they use, inevitably, to murder and enslave us. Fear of the war we don’t want yet do everything we can to bring about.\(^{89}\)

Orwell also knew this: nobody in their right mind would oppose the government and let the enemies take their chance to destroy us all: “And at the same time the consciousness of being at war, and therefore in danger, makes the handing-over of all power to a small caste seem the natural, unavoidable condition of survival.”\(^{90}\) This is what Ioannis Evrigenis calls *Negative Association*:

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Differentiation from outsiders shapes the identities of political groups and their members in fundamental ways and thus forms their bottom lines. In time of crisis, when the identities of these groups are challenged and the individual interest of their members interfere with their ability to act in unison, appeals to this bottom line may be the only means of forestalling their dissolution. Among motives for negative association, fear provides the strongest link because it speaks to another bottom line, the fundamental concern with self-preservation. When this concern is frightened, and treats to survival and security loom large, individuals and small social groups find a bond in their common fear that enables them to set their differences aside and unite in the pursuit of goals that are otherwise unattainable.91

As we have said, the war was not a real war. In fact, it was a mechanism to maintain the structure of society intact. War was no longer a conflict between states or countries, but something perpetrated by the Party against its own countrymen:

In Nineteen Eighty-Four the means have become an end. War is simply an “imposture”. The mechanism of shifting allowances and betrayals is an artifice fabricated and kept in motion deliberately to confuse, distract, and make the population collaborate in its own enslavement. What may have started as a trend, as a means to be justified, has become an end in itself.92

What is even more, the meaning of the word war was erased: “The very word ‘war,’ therefore, has become misleading. It would probably be accurate to say that by becoming continuous, war has ceased to exist.”93 It was now under the dominion of Newspeak.

Newspeak
It is not enough to keep people scared: the Party must also avoid any chance of counterthought, therefore they need to control language as well. In this novel, Orwell introduces the concept of “Newspeak” as the official language of Oceania, which had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism, as we can read in the appendix of the book:

92 Gottlieb, E., The Orwell Conundrum, 263.
93 Orwell, G., Nineteen Eighty-Four, 189.
The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever.  

“Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt” said Wittgenstein in his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, and Orwell understood this quite well. The main purpose of this Newspeak was not only to delete the heretical words, or change their meaning. Neither was it to make language something logically perfect, as many philosophers of the 20th century, like Wittgenstein, were trying to achieve. The ultimate aim of Newspeak was to reduce the vocabulary as a whole and thus shrink the range of thought. For example, it was possible to say the sentence all men are equal, but its meaning was completely different from what we would suppose. It was grammatically correct but it expressed a clear untruth: because the concept of political equality no longer existed, it was erased from the possible meanings of the word equal.

Nineteen Eighty-Four might have been the first time that Orwell used the word “Newspeak,” but it was definitely something he had developed over many years. It is possible to track the roots of the concept to Orwell’s first book Burmese Days, originally published in 1934, and considered to be a “scathing portrait of the imperious attitudes of the British.” Even though it is fiction, we can clearly see Orwell’s thoughts on totalitarianism in its pages:

94 Orwell, G. Ibid., 286.
96 It is not our intention to enter into a discussion on this subject, we just want to note a philosophical controversy that Orwell was probably aware of.
It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy the back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahib’s code.\(^98\)

**Consequences of Doublethink**

Beneath this idea of controlling language through *Newspeak* hides another issue, a metaphysical discussion about existence and truth: “Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality, was tacitly denied by their philosophy.”\(^99\) The Ministry of Truth – or “minitrue” in *Newspeak* – is in reality the ministry of propaganda whose main enterprise is to maintain the illusion about reality: “Those who control the present, control the past and those who control the past control the future.” Everything is censored and controlled by this ministry, where Winston Smith is employed and his job is to constantly rewrite history. In this society, even keeping a diary is a crime, because it is against the need of the Party to control the past. Nobody can keep a memory from the past without the approval of Big Brother.

Having control over the whole of information allows Big Brother to control the responses of citizens. Through the two-way screens in every living space, the Thought Police observes all citizens and verifies that they are responding in a desirable manner, namely, to hate enemies and love Big Brother. This control over reality, or *Doublethink* in *Newspeak*, means the victory of the Party over our memory: “Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth.”\(^100\)

If attempting to perform a correct analysis of the situation in Oceania, it is impossible to affirm that crime exists, since there are no laws – no written laws. There are of course rules, which are rigidly policed and the transgression of which is considered a crime, but there is no content in the rules. The only “clue” is *don’t do*

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\(^{99}\) Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 76.

\(^{100}\) Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 71.
anything against the party, one must believe and follow the orthodoxy. It is not enough to act according to the rule: one must also believe it. Not to believe is considered a thoughtcrime. As we said above, the process of doublethink implies doublethink, which means that the act of believing has to be done fully and unconsciously, without any kind of intellectual process.

**Corollary**
We are now nearing the end of this chapter. If there are no laws which can be applied to judge the actions of citizens, that same situation can easily be transferred to all spheres of human life, including science. How could a discipline like philosophy, for example, presume to speak about Existence, or about Truth, if every limit runs the risk of being wiped off the map, if there is no possibility of setting forth any kind of axiom, if even mathematical principles can be doubted should they be against the needs of the Party?:

O’Brien held up his left hand, its back towards Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended.
- ‘How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?’
- ‘Four.’
- ‘And if the party says that it is not four but five – then how many?’
- ‘Four.’
The word ended in a gasp of pain. The needle of the dial had shot up to fifty-five.
[...]
- ‘Five! Five! Five!’
- ‘No, Winston, that is no use. You are lying. You still think there are four. How many fingers, please?’
- ‘Four! Five! Four! Anything you like. Only stop it, stop the pain!’
 Abruptly he was sitting up with O’Brien’s arm round his shoulders. He had perhaps lost consciousness for a few seconds.
- You are a slow learner, Winston,’ said O’Brien gently.
- ‘How can I help it?’ he blubbered. ‘How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four.’
- ‘Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane.’

This dialogue, used by Orwell as a hyperbole of the consequences of political control over the truth, is something that seems an exaggeration for even the most brutal and pernicious totalitarian regimes in Europe. However, this was something that

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actually happened in Argentina during the last dictatorship (1976–1983). In the province of Cordoba, the military government tried to remove group theory from school programs on the grounds that it was dangerous to group different things, it was considered subversive.102

It seems clear that if we give people the chance of holding absolute power, if we let them decide what is better, or if we allow the existence of a fundamental issue that can overrule any other, we are at risk of entering into a totalitarian regime. We know the consequences of such regimes. The question we must raise is whether totalitarian regimes or dictatorships are the only forms of government that are capable of leading a society in the direction of a dystopia like the one denounced by Orwell. In our view, what makes this novel a dystopia is precisely the fact that the days before the revolution described by Orwell in the novel are considerably similar to our own contemporary days.

The upcoming pages will intend to demonstrate that the corruption of society that Orwell was denouncing throughout his work was not the product of evil tendencies among certain political rulers. On the contrary, the totalitarian regimes that tormented the world in the first half of the 20th century were the consequence of certain political principles that can be traced back to early modern society. More specifically, it will be shown that one of the characteristics of modern political thought that Orwell was criticizing was the concept of verità effettuale coined by Machiavelli in The Prince.

Both Machiavelli and Orwell can be considered to belong to the realist tradition. Both believed in the existence of the external world, and for both the world can be known. Both of them would also agree that reality could be modified by political leaders under certain conditions. The difference between them is then that, for Orwell, that is the greatest danger for a society. On the contrary, for Machiavelli it is the lesser evil.

Chapter III

‘The question is,’ said Alice,
‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’
‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty,
‘which is to be master, that’s all.’
Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power.
George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Of all the books on political thought, *The Prince*, written by Machiavelli in the year 1513, must definitely be cataloged amidst the most famous, most studied, as well as most ambiguous of them all. This section will focus its analysis on the book’s celebrated chapter XV, in which Machiavelli coins the term *verità effettuale*. Furthermore, it will attempt to establish the connection between this notion and the previous chapters of this dissertation.

*Verità Effettuale*

To begin with, we will transcribe, both in Italian and in English, the whole paragraph where the concept of *verità effettuale* is introduced, with the purpose of showing its context:

Resta ora a vedere quali debbano essere e’ modi e governi di uno principe co’ sudditi o con li amici. E perché io so che molti di questo hanno scritto, dubito, scrivendone ancora io, non essere tenuto prosuntuoso, partendomi massime nel disputare questa materia dalli ordini delli altri; ma, sendo l’intento mio, scrivere cosa utile a chi la intende, mi è parso più conveniente andare drieto alla verità effettuale della cosa che alla immaginazione di essa. E molti si sono immaginati repubbliche e principati, che non si sono mai visti né conosciuti essere in vero, perché elli è tanto discosto da come si vive a come si doverrebbe vivere, che colui che lascia quello che si fa per quello che

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103 Because of the difficulty to translate such a concept, we will hereafter use it in Italian with the intention of keeping its original acceptation.
It remains now to consider in what ways a ruler should act with regard to his subjects and allies. And since I am well aware that many people have written about this subject I fear that I may be thought presumptuous, for what I have to say differs from the precepts offered by others, especially on this matter. But because I want to write what will be useful to anyone who understands, it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations. For many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist. However, how men live is so different from how they should live that a ruler who does not do what is generally done, but persist in doing what ought to be done, will undermine his power rather than maintain it. If a ruler who wants always to act honorably is surrounded by many unscrupulous men his downfall is inevitable. Therefore, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to act immorally when this becomes necessary.105

This concept of verità effettuale was used by Machiavelli for the first and only time in The Prince. Never again does it appear in his books, nor even in his letters. Neither was its meaning explained by him anywhere. He simply uses the notion as if everybody knew what he was talking about. In order to understand its meaning, it is necessary to elucidate also the significance of three other concepts or ideas used by Machiavelli in the same paragraph: firstly, it is necessary to understand what Machiavelli means by the “ways a ruler should act” or the “rules of conduct” of a prince; secondly, we must clarify what he refers to when he speaks of “useful”; and finally, what he means when he speaks of “necessity”. Verità effettuale has been translated in different ways, and from all of them we can extract interesting considerations. Harvey Mansfield chooses to translate this concept as “effectual truth,”106 James B. Atkinson prefers “actual truth,”107 and Allan Gilbert translates it as “practical truth.”108

104 Machiavelli, N., Tutte Le Opere, edited by Mario Martelli (Firenze: Bompiani, 2018), 859. (The underlining is ours).
In the translation transcribed above, the translators use an interesting resource: they avoid using the word *truth* and chose to translate the term as “what really happens,” which shows that the sense they want to emphasize is its consequentialism. For the translators, Machiavelli dispenses with taking into consideration the causes or reasons for any behavior, and focusing on the outcome.

If we take *effectual truth*, for example, the adjective “effectual” is defined as follows in the Cambridge Dictionary: “successful in producing the intended results.”

So for Mansfield, the truth Machiavelli is speaking about is very much related to the action, just as it very similarly is for Gilbert. In the translation proposed by Atkinson, on contrary, the term chosen by him reflects his position on one of the most important debates in Machiavellian studies – namely, that of Machiavelli’s ontology. The adjective “actual” is related to *real*, so in this sense Atkinson is suggesting that Machiavelli is referring to the *real truth* and this implies regarding Machiavelli as a realistic thinker. It must be made clear that all translations are correct; the point of this comment is not to criticize them, but to clarify their existence.

At the same time, for Quentin Skinner and also for Victoria Kahn, in this first paragraph of the chapter XV of *The Prince*, Machiavelli is positioning himself within the humanist tradition, albeit with one difference. The Florentine is going to adopt an extremely pragmatic perspective with regards to political theory: his concern is on how rulers should act to achieve power, and the consequences of those acts.

In this sense, Neal Wood is correct when he affirms that “Machiavelli is an impassioned theorist of political action, not the dispassionate scientific observer of political phenomena. Action in this sense suggest self-conscious and purposeful motion, self-directed doing for the accomplishment of the goals upon which the actor has deliberated.”

Rules of conduct or political methods are, then, the main concern in Machiavelli’s political theory, and over this knowledge of the political procedure is applied the concept of *verità effettuale*.

Secondly, we have the concept of *Useful*, opposed here to the christian

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conception of ethics or what we now would call deontological theories of ethics which consider the moral as “ought to be.” Machiavelli differentiates himself from those theories that presume to analyze political actions in terms of universal maxims. For Machiavelli, if we expect to build states that exist in reality and not only in our imagination we must focus our analysis of political actions towards this direction.

Machiavelli’s adoption of the humanist tradition also implies analyzing political theory in terms of its efficacy for action. According to Skinner, humanists criticized Scholastic philosophy in two different ways. On the one hand, they rejected the focus on frivolous and worthless enquiries in favor of focusing on how people must act; philosophy, for humanists, must have a practical use for life in a community. Secondly, humanists believed that even when Aristotelian scholars did involve themselves with social problems, they lacked the capacity to solve them, since instead of acquiring political virtues they spent their time merely analyzing them. In this sense, we can affirm that political knowledge is reliable for Machiavelli only if it results in strategies for efficient political actions. Therefore, political theory is no longer a part of the vita contemplativa and becomes knowledge of and for political action. Chapter IV will focus on this feature as part of Machiavelli’s realism.

The third concept is that of necessity, which in this context is related to the political circumstances and context in which the prince must act. For Machiavelli, circumstances are the ensemble of political agents (individuals, families, political groups, parties, states), actions, mediums (institutions, laws, armies), purposes (intentions, interest), and even geographical conditions. The relationships that organize these elements in a specific time-space point make up the circumstances. Necessity is not necessarily obvious; hence the prince is required to make an interpretation of the context in order to find out what these circumstances are. Let us now examine these three concepts – rules of conduct, usefulness, and necessity – one by one.

Machiavelli’s Humanist Ethics as Rules of Conduct

As we have stated above, the first part of the cited text is about adopting the humanistic tradition, by which is understood the specific curriculum of Renaissance schools which

included grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. As Skinner points out, the main goal of schools during the Renaissance was to teach “an ideal of persuasive writing and speech,” and in this sense the study of rhetoric was something very important at that time. Kahn holds that Machiavelli takes from previous humanists the reflection on the pragmatic nature of truth and moves on to a conception of truth as power, in which the pragmatic humanist version of truth itself becomes a device among others in the prince’s strategic arsenal for maintaining power.

This is the reason why Machiavelli did not make the effort to explain the concept of verità effettuale. It was something that was broadly understood at the time, as it was part of rhetorical instruction, the latter being understood, together with Virginia Cox, as “a comprehensive practice of persuasion, embracing the conceptual as well as the verbal, and as an art with a particular political vocation.” Rhetoric was, for Machiavelli, the political discipline par excellence where the orator’s mission was to forge his listeners’ responses and try to modify their will. And so it was for Aristotle, as we can see in the following quote from his famous work The Art of Rhetoric:

Thus it appears that Rhetoric is as it were an offshoot of Dialectic and of the science of Ethics, which may be reasonably called Politics. That is why Rhetoric assumes the character of Politics, and those who claim to possess it, partly from ignorance, partly from boastfulness, and partly from other human weaknesses, do the same. For, as we said at the outset, Rhetoric is a sort of division or likeness of Dialectic, since neither of them is a science that deals with the nature of any definite subject, but they are merely faculties of furnishing arguments.

Another important writer of the humanist tradition, Thucydides, states in his famous passage of The Peloponnesian War:

So then civil war spread among the cities, and those who came to it later took lessons, it seems, from the precedents and progressed to new and far greater extremes in the ingenuity of their machinations and the

115 Cox, V., Ibid.
atrocity of their reprisals. They reversed the usual evaluative force of words to suit their own assessment of actions. Thus reckless daring was considered bravery for the cause; far-sighted caution was simply a plausible face of cowardice; restraint was a cover for lack of courage; an intelligent view of the general whole was inertia in all specifics; and impulsive haste was enlisted among the manly virtues, while full consideration in the light of possible dangers was a specious excuse for backsliding.117

Thucydides exposes the conduct of those struggling for power in the Hellenic world. In this sense, he shows that as long as someone has the power, he can take control over the meanings of words and give them new ones if necessary. At the end of the same chapter, Thucydides affirms that the only purpose of such behavior was to attain power, or, as Machiavelli would say, maintaining the State. The similitude between both writers is clear on this point:

The cause of all this was the pursuit of power driven by greed and ambition, leading in turn to the passions of the party rivalries thus established. The dominant men on each side in the various cities employed fine-sounding terms, claiming espousal either of democratic rights for all or of a conservative aristocracy, but the public whose interests they professed to serve were in fact their ultimate prize, and in this out-and-out contest for supremacy they committed the most appalling atrocities and took their acts of vengeance yet further, imposing punishments beyond anything required by justice or civic interest, and limited only by their supporters’ appetite at the time: to satisfy immediate party fervour they were equally prepared to suborn convictions in the courts or to use force in their quest for power. So neither side observed any religious constraint, and those who could put a euphemistic gloss on a distasteful action had their reputations enhanced. The citizens who had remained neutral fell victim to both parties: they were destroyed for failing to join the cause, or out of resentment at their survival.118

As Skinner shows, Machiavelli must also have been very well acquainted with Cicero’s work De Officiis, or On duties, another classical rhetorical work.119 In this book, Cicero presents the four main humanist virtues – Wisdom, Social Virtue,
Greatness of Spirit, and Seemliness – but from the perspective of the man of action. The first one, Wisdom or Prudence, is presented as the ability to learn from truth. The second one is the so-called Social Virtue, which Cicero further splits in two: Justice and Liberality. The basic requirement of Justice is that we must ensure to each his due, and that we must also do no harm to anyone. Regarding Liberality, we must as well avoid doing harm with our kindness, either by giving more than our capacity allows or by giving to someone more than they deserve. Then comes Greatness of Spirit, also known as Fortitude and defined as “the virtue which fights on behalf of fairness.” Lastly, there is Seemliness or Temperance, which can be matched with honorability: “for what is seemly is honourable, and what is honourable is seemly.”

However, as we have said, it is not Cicero’s intention to establish fixed rules of action for every man in this book – he is not introducing a rigid system of ethics. Rather, his intention is to teach how to analyze different courses of action in order to achieve one’s goal in public life. This can be read in the following paragraph:

But, one ought when bestowing all these dutiful services to look at what each person most greatly needs, and what each would or would not be able to secure without our help. Thus the degrees of ties of relationship will not be the same as those of circumstance. Some duties are owed to one group of people rather than to another. [...] In every case of duty, therefore, considerations such as these ought to be examined, and we should adopt this habit and should practice so that we can become good calculators of our duties, and can see by adding and subtracting what is the sum that remains; from this you can understand how much is owed to each person.

Therefore, in consonance with Neal Wood we can attribute to Machiavelli’s humanism three main characteristics: two of them are shared with the humanist tradition, while the third is what makes Machiavelli’s humanism exceptional. In the first place, we have the cultural dimension, related to the Latin word humanista, which

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designates the students and professors of the Humanities. These studies were focused on bringing the human back to the center of the scene (occupied then by God), and to create a new civic order based on the advancement of classical antiquity. At the same time, Wood mentions another aspect of Machiavelli’s humanism which he shared with the tradition, namely its *laicism* or *secularism*, based on the separation of politics from theology. For Machiavelli, politics can, and should, be autonomous from other activities, specially religion.

Finally, closely related to the two aforementioned features, Wood acknowledges in Machiavelli’s humanism a main characteristic, which is its tendency towards action:

All such action is fraught with moral ambiguity, but given the necessity of preservation and security in a world of violence, *man must act*, and act fully aware of the moral implications of the courses of action open to him in a way which will minimize the immoral consequences and maximize the utilitarian results of the intersecting chains of actions and reactions set in motion.¹²⁹

In his most recent work, Quentin Skinner presents a new perspective of Machiavelli’s Ethics of Virtue and the relationship between moral virtues and the power through which a prince can reach his goals.¹³⁰ According to Skinner, in order to be able to achieve glory and fame, every ruler must first achieve a more common but also more necessary end: *mantenere lo stato*, which is not only to preserve the State, the institutions, but also to keep one’s position as a ruler, maintain *one’s state* as the prince.¹³¹ “The fundamental question is always what rulers should do ‘in order to conquer and maintain the state’.”¹³²

In this same line, Victoria Kahn maintains that Machiavelli adopts the humanist notion of prudential rhetoric while at the same time criticizing such rhetoric for its subordination to ethics, that is, for not being practical enough.¹³³ Machiavelli’s intention according to Kahn, was to build a new set of priorities for rulers, for anyone who

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wished to maintain himself as prince. In this sense, *Wisdom or Prudence* cannot be constrained by ethical norms:

in taking the generative possibilities of a practical conception of rhetoric more seriously than did the humanists themselves, Machiavelli paradoxically appeared to realize the humanists’ worst fears about a technical or instrumental conception of rhetoric: its ethical indeterminacy, its concern with success, its use for the purpose of force and fraud, violence and misrepresentation.\(^{134}\)

There are of course virtues that must be revered in the ideal way, but men of action, princes, must only regard them if and only if they are in line with the first goal of any ruler: that of maintaining the state: “It is, however, contrary to duty to be drawn by such a devotion away from practical achievements: all the praise that belongs to virtue lies in action.”\(^{135}\) Hence, asserts Skinner, Machiavelli presents a new definition of the concept of *Virtù* based mainly on this rhetorical tradition:

is only by exercising the qualities of a truly virtuoso ruler that a prince can maintain his state. But he no longer equates princely virtuosity with the practice of the moral virtues. A virtuoso ruler will follow the dictates of the virtues whenever possible, but he will chiefly be distinguished by his skill at judging when it may be more appropriate to ignore them. The term virtù thus comes to be used by Machiavelli to denote whatever range of attributes – moral or otherwise – actually enable a prince to maintain his state.\(^{136}\)

If it is correct to affirm along with Kahn and Wood this idea of Machiavelli’s humanism of action, it means that a leader’s ethics is subordinated to action, princes must rule, must make decisions, must *judge*. Therefore, when the prince acts upon maintaining peace, upon maintaining the State and his state, he transforms every action into a moral action, every action made by the prince in this direction becomes *necessary*, becomes a duty.\(^{137}\) Even the worst action, the most rejected behavior, can be justified by the prince’s ethics, and this is not a product of a denial of moral distinction, but of a reliance on the fact that the imperatives of politics refuse any other alternative.\(^{138}\)

\(^{137}\) Using the same concept as Cicero.
However, Skinner seems not to be on the right track when he claims that even though Machiavelli is presenting this argument in favor of this pragmatic virtue, he does it only due to rampant corruption:

Here his [Machiavelli’s] contention is not that, if you wish to maintain your state, you may need to act in defiance of what these virtues prescribe. As we have seen, what he argues is that you must stand ready to act in defiance of what, in our corrupt and degenerate world, these virtues are held or taken to prescribe. But this advice is coupled with the suggestion that, if you cultivate a proper understanding of these virtues, and if you follow what they genuinely require, you will find that they can help you to maintain your state.¹³⁹

For Skinner, what Machiavelli is suggesting is this: in a normal society, the four main virtues should always lead a ruler to successfully maintain the State. From our perspective, Skinner’s argument presents a contradiction with the core of chapter XV. Even though Machiavelli is adopting the humanist tradition, at the same time he is giving it another turn of the screw. He is taking the humanist argument to the extreme, for no ruler should ever lose sight of the main goal of every prince, which is that of maintaining the State. Therefore, for a ruler there is no possibility of being virtuous if he is not in power. Of course, it is good to know how to be praised or loved, because there might come a time when it can become necessary to act well. But then again, there might not. And the mere fact it exists implies the a denial of pure humanistic ethics. This here is the novel aspect of The Prince’s ethics.

**The Role of Virtú as Efficacy for Action**

In *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Skinner affirms that the mirror-for-prince theorists helped Machiavelli build his concept of Virtue.¹⁴⁰ According to Skinner, they shared with their humanist predecessors the definition of Virtue as the quality which enables a man to combat the power of fortune and attain the goals of honor, glory, and fame. In the fifteenth century, the mirror-for-prince theorists affirmed that the

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¹⁴⁰ Skinner, Q., *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Vol. I: The Renaissance*. The mirror-for-prince is a literary genre of advice-books written by philosophers or thinkers in general dedicated to help kings, princes and other political rulers. The most influential work was, according to Skinner, Baldesar Castigliones’s *The Book of the Courtier*. But he mentions other authors like: Francesco Patrizi with his *The kingdom and the Education of the King*; Diomede Carafa, who wrote *The perfect Courtier*; Giovanni Fontano and Bartolomeo Sacchi both named their advice-books *The Prince*, like Machiavelli.
essential business of government consists of maintaining the people not so much in a state of liberty as in one of security and peace. According to Skinner, this new sense of priorities can be observed most clearly in the last section of the Book of the Courtier by Castiglione: “since liberty has been given to us by God as a supreme gift” it is wrong that any man should have a larger portion of it than another, and that is why the office of a good ruler is to guarantee for his people “laws and ordinances that they may live in ease and peace.” In the same way, Machiavelli affirms that the main responsibility for the prince is to ensure not only his own safety and security but also that his subjects are “stabilized and made secure.” This ability is Virtue.

*The Prince*, according to Skinner, admits the existence of four different meanings of the concept of *Virtú*, all of them connected to each other. First, *Virtú* is what allows someone to reach his goal of becoming prince and is opposed to fortune. In this sense, a virtuous man should be able to become prince without any help from fortune:

I maintain, then, that in a completely new principality, where there is a new ruler, the difficulty he will have in maintaining it will depend on how much ability he possesses. And because for a private citizen to become ruler presupposes that he is either able or lucky, it might seem that one or other of these would, to some degree, mitigate many of the difficulties. Nevertheless, rulers maintain themselves better if they owe little to luck.

Next, the second meaning given by Machiavelli to the concept of *Virtú* is that of “occasion” (*occasione*): a virtuous political leader must have the capacity to seize opportunities. In this sense, the only thing that can be left up to luck is the opportunity itself. From then on, it all depends on the capacity of the ruler to seize that opportunity or not:

if their [truly virtuous men’s] deeds and careers are examined, it will be seen that they owed nothing to luck except the *opportunity* to shape the material into the form that seemed best to them. If they had lacked the opportunity, the strength of their spirit would have been sapped; if they had lacked ability, the opportunity would have been wasted.


The third connotation of Virtú is the ability to maintain or keep the state. This characteristic was mentioned earlier in this dissertation. Machiavelli proclaims that:

states that grow quickly cannot sufficiently develop their roots, trunks and branches, and will be destroyed by the first chill winds of adversity. This happens unless those who have the ability to profit by what luck or favor has placed in their laps, and know how to make provision very speedily to preserve their power, developing afterwards the foundations that others have laid before they become rulers.\textsuperscript{144}

The final meaning that Machiavelli gives to Virtú, according to Skinner, is the ability which enables one to gain glory. This means that besides obtaining power without the aid of fortune, besides being able to seize the opportunity to grasp power, and also, besides maintaining the state, without which everything else is nonsense, what every ruler should aim for, as the ultimate goal of his life, is Glory; that is the ultimate reason to be virtuous:

Therefore, a new ruler in a new principality cannot imitate the conduct of Marcus, nor again is it necessary to imitate that of Severus. Rather, he should imitate Severus in the courses of action that are necessary for establishing himself in power, and imitate Marcus in those that are necessary for maintaining power that is already established and secure, thus achieving glory.\textsuperscript{145}

Hence, the concept of Virtú in Machiavelli is also imbued with the humanist tradition we have described earlier. As Joseph Bien shows: “Virtue for the individual citizen involves civic duties which maintain a stable order; it involves a readiness to devote oneself to the ‘common good’, that is, to the continuance of the state.”\textsuperscript{146} For Bien, while Machiavelli suggests that private morality is concerned with an individual’s virtue, he reminds us that this is possible only in a state where the citizens keep in mind the importance of a stable sovereignty. By contrast, the ruler’s virtue is of a higher order, for it is he who is ultimately charged with preserving the security of the state. His furtherance of the common good requires that he maintain the state, and therefore requires a different set of moral rules.

This is what Paul Ricoeur calls “political alienation,” for every State needs a

\textsuperscript{144} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 23.
\textsuperscript{145} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 72.
government in order to survive, and therefore a repressive force to maintain its power, and consequently needs to differentiate between personal morality and the needs of political action towards the common good.\textsuperscript{147}

the phenomenon of political alienation traverses all regimes and is found within all constitutional forms. Political society involves this external contradiction between an ideal sphere of legal relation and a real sphere of communal relation - and this internal contradiction between sovereignty and the sovereign, between the constitution and power or, in the extreme, the police.\textsuperscript{148}

Therefore, what is important for this dissertation is not the correct (ideal) meaning of the humanistic virtues but their “everyday” meaning, their pragmatic significance, their consequences. Even though the concept of verità effettuale appears only once in The Prince, it would be correct to affirm that it permeates the whole book, therefore virtues must be analyzed from this perspective. Rulers must follow no other virtue than the one which allows them to preserve their state in a practical way, not in theory. The princely virtues developed by the humanistic tradition must be rendered if and only if they are helpful in maintaining the State. If they are not, then princes should be prepared to act immorally or, more precisely, to build a new set of virtues:

As Machiavelli saw it, the world in which the political actor performed and the theorist prescribed was one where ‘all human affairs are ever in a state of flux and cannot stand still, either there will be improvement or decline...’ Political action took place in a world without a permanent basis for action, without the comforting presence of some underlying norm of reality to which men could adjust or from which they could draw firm rules of conduct.\textsuperscript{149}

Machiavelli is not interested in the idea of virtue, as an absolute quality: for him, there is no such absolute quality that could help you in the world as it is. There is no action that could be praised in every occasion. It should always be judged towards this fundamental goal of princes: to maintain the state, which is the conditio sine qua non to become a glorious prince. This means that what a ruler always has to ask himself is if an action, whether clement, generous, just, fair or honorable, is going to help him maintain his state.


\textsuperscript{149} Wolin, S., Politics and Vision, 190.
Necessity and the Importance of Interpretation

Out of the three concepts we have stressed as important in order to understand our view of the meaning of verità effettuale, we are getting now to the most relevant, since, like Harvey Mansfield points out, necessity is the beginning of everything within the political system of Machiavelli’s The Prince.

It is not easy to explain what exactly Machiavelli means by this concept. Machiavelli himself does not give a definition of it, he just presents examples of actions that were necessarily done. In any case, we would like to reproduce here a definition set forth by Mansfield in his book Machiavelli’s Virtue:

“Necessity” refers to what is humanly necessary, as opposed to what is necessary to the fulfillment of human nature. Necessity thereby becomes an abstraction floating free from what man is and what he is for; it becomes an excuse for the acquisition of necessities regardless of morality. Necessity is what seems necessary to human survival, without much thought about what in humanity deserves to survive.150

Even though Mansfield is talking of necessity in a broad sense, we can use his definition for our purpose of understanding what necessity is within political activity. In this sense, we could affirm that necessity is what seems necessary for a prince to survive, it is everything a prince must do in order to keep himself in the ruling position.

The importance of this concept in the political philosophy of Machiavelli also comes from the rhetorical tradition, as we can read in the following passage from another very important writer of such tradition, the Roman theorist Quintilian:

In practice [in oratory], almost everything depends on causes, times, opportunity and necessity. Hence a particularly important capacity in an orator is a shrewd adaptability [consilium], since he is called upon to meet the most varied emergencies. What if you should instruct a general, every time he marshals his troop for battle, to draw up his front line, advance the two wings, and station his cavalry on the flanks? This may indeed be the best plan, if circumstances allow, but it may have to be modified owing to the nature of the ground...or again it may be modified by the character of the enemy or the nature of the immediate danger...So, too, with the rules of oratory.151

Circumstances change, just like the participants in an assembly, the power of your enemy’s army, and every other political factor. This “shrewd adaptability”

mentioned by Quintilian means nothing but to act according to necessity. The political ruler, in order to be successful, “must constantly rediscover his identity in the role cast for him by the changing times.”  

Given that conditions influence the results of human actions, by changing the conditions the results of any kind of political method change as well. In this sense, while in the Roman empire, for example, it was necessary to fulfill the army’s interest in order to keep the emperor’s power, in Machiavelli’s epoch such behavior would have led the prince to ruin:

Moreover, I believe that we are successful when our ways are suited to the times and circumstances, and unsuccessful when they are not. For one sees that, in the things that lead to the end which everyone aims at, this is glory and riches, men proceed in different ways […] Consequently, as I have said, two men, acting differently, may achieve the same results; and if two men act in the same way, one may succeed and the other fail. 

This lack of a fixed response to the problems of ethics, this neglect of traditional moral theory was heavily criticized as cynicism or simply as an amoral attitude. But as we have shown, we do not agree with this view. For Machiavelli, the role of the prince is to set up a new ethical frame for the ruler based on the fundamental goal of maintaining the state.

The accomplishment of the task of maintaining the state requires to judge when doing something is right (if it helps you) and when it is not. If a certain situation requires you to follow the standards of humanistic virtues, then follow them; but if it does not, you should not follow them. Hence, this transforms every public affair into a matter of interpretation, every political action, every political truth, every public truth, becomes verità effettuale:

A ruler, then, need not actually possess all the above-mentioned qualities, but he must certainly seem to. Indeed, I shall be so bold as to say that having cultivating them is harmful, whereas seeming to have them is useful; for instance to seem merciful, trustworthy, humane, upright and devout, and also to be so. But if it becomes necessary to refrain, you must be prepared to act in the opposite way, and be capable of doing it. And it must be understood that a ruler, and

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152 Wolin, S., Politics and Vision, 201.
153 Machiavelli, N., The Prince, 86.
especially a new ruler, cannot always act in ways that are considered good because, in order to maintain his power, he is often forced to act treacherously, ruthlessly or inhumanely, and disregard the precepts of religion. Hence, he must be prepared to vary his conduct as the winds of fortune and changing circumstances constrain him and, as I said before, not deviate from right conduct if possible, but be capable of entering upon the path of wrongdoing when it becomes necessary.\textsuperscript{154}

\textbf{Corollary}

In the first chapter, we mentioned the four preconditions that led to the construction of the modern concept of State, and in this chapter we have seen that Machiavelli’s \textit{The Prince} meets all the requirements for him to be considered a Modern thinker. According to the first precondition, Machiavelli expects to separate the political realm from moral thought by assuming that the fundamental political objective for a prince must be to maintain his power without any ethical concern. As Victoria Kahn points out, Machiavelli’s defining truth pragmatically as \textit{verità effettuale}, rather than as \textit{Adaequatio rei et intellectus}, turns prudence into the amoral skill of \textit{versutia} or simply cleverness, which in practice is the ethically unrestrained use of force.\textsuperscript{155}

The second and third preconditions are precisely the objective of Machiavelli’s \textit{The Prince}, as we can read in the last chapter: “Exhortation to liberate Italy from the barbarian yoke”:

\begin{quote}
Italy es waiting for someone to heal her wounds, and put an end to the ravaging of lombardy, to the extortions in the Kingdom of Naples and Tuscany, and to cure the sores that have been festering for so long. Look how Italy beseeches God to send someone to rescue her from the cruel and arrogant domination of the foreigners.\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

Finally, according to the fourth precondition which states that every political society has a main purpose of maintaining peace, we can match this purpose with the fundamental goal of the ruler: \textit{to maintain the State}. To maintain the State means to keep the territory free from war, and to do that, a ruler must maintain his state as political leader of the country. Someone’s position as a ruler must be secure, no matter what. Peace, for Machiavelli, justifies every means.

The consequences of such conception of truth as power are, as we have quoted at

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{154} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Kahn, V., “\textit{Virtù} and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli’s Prince” in \textit{The Italian Renaissance}.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 88.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the epigraph of this chapter, that “the object of power is power.”

That is to say that the fact that rulers have such an imperative goal as that of obtaining and maintaining power wipes out any other concern in real politics. What was supposed to be only a means to achieving justice, glory, or any other political virtue becomes the only thing that really matters, and maintaining power becomes the only concern of political rulers. And rulers can – and must – judge a menace to their power as a menace to the State itself, even if the outcome is not just, or glorious, at all: “auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.”157


“They plunder, they butcher, they ravish, and call it by the lying name of ‘empire’. They make a desert and call it ‘peace’.” Tacitus. Agricola and Germany. Translated by Birley A. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. 22
Chapter IV

“In power politics there are no crimes, because there are no laws.”
George Orwell, *Who are the War Criminals?*

If Machiavelli assumes a pragmatic conception of truth instead of follow the theory of correspondence it is necessary to ask: Was Machiavelli actually a realist thinker? What does it mean to be a realist, a political realist, and what kind of realism was Machiavelli arguing for? We will try to clarify these questions in the following pages. Finally, we will share our approach to what we call the “realist paradox” within political theory.

**Realism**

The nuance between reality and appearance is as old as the history of philosophy. Almost every philosopher has a theory of what is to be considered as real, but not all of them can be recognized as realists. According to R. J. Hirst, throughout the history of philosophy the term “realism” has been used in many different ways, and in opposition to many different traditions.\(^\text{159}\) For example, in Medieval thought, against nominalism, “realism” was used to refer to the doctrine that believed that universals have real, objective existence. In modern philosophy, however, it is used for the view that objects have an external existence that is independent of our experience. Realism is, in this sense, opposed to idealism, according to which there are no external realities apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them. Likewise, realism can be opposed to phenomenalism, which holds that *esse est percipi*. In other words, phenomenalists deny that material objects exist except as groups or sequences of sensation, both actual and possible.

According to Mario Bunge, realism consists of seven main theses.\(^\text{160}\)

1. **Ontological realism**: According to realism, objects, physical objects, do exist. These objects have an existence which is independent of actual or possible experience.

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2. Epistemological realism: On the one hand, realism holds that the world can be known. At the same time, this knowledge of facts is incomplete and fallible, and much of it is indirect.

3. Semantic realism: For realists, some propositions are about facts, and some among such propositions are roughly true; ultimately, all approximations are, in principle, perfectible.

4. Methodological realism: Realism considers the scientific method as the best strategy for exploring the world (scientism). This includes the empirical test or the confrontation of a hypothesis against empirical data.

5. Axiological realism: Realism affirms the existence of objective values, such as health, knowledge, security, peace, environmental protection, and fairness, since they are rooted in biological or social needs.

6. Moral realism: Against ethical subjectivism and relativism, for realists there are moral facts and true moral principles. According to Bunge, every fact involving rights or duties, whether met or not, is a moral fact. And the norms and counter-norms linked to those facts are true because they match the maximal moral principle which states: “Enjoy life and help others live enjoyable lives.” Consequently, moral norms must be analyzed within the social context rather than in isolation, since they are to be used in real life.

7. Practical realism: Also known as praxiology, it seeks to determine the conditions for efficient action in spite of moral concerns. According to this strand of realism, our actions may affect others, therefore we should try to foresee their consequences and assume responsibility for them.

In order to be able to answer the first question raised at the beginning of the chapter, it is also necessary to acknowledge what it means to be a moralist. Bernard Williams, in *In the Beginning was the Deed*, establishes a differentiation between political moralism and political realism, where political moralism consists of those theories that consider the moral prior to the political. As a clear example of such school of thought we can mention Immanuel Kant, for whom morality, as part of the practical sphere, is the unconditional commanding law according to which we ought to act:

True politics can take no steps forward without first paying tribute to morality, and although politics in itself is a difficult art, the union of
politics and morality is no art at all. For morality cuts through the
Gordian knot that politics is unable to untie whenever the two come
into conflict with one another. – The rights of humankind must be held
sacred, whatever it may cost those in power. One cannot pursue a half
measure here and devise a hybrid, pragmatically conditioned right
(between right and utility). Instead all politics must bend its knee
before right but can hope to arrive at the point, however gradually,
where it can shine perpetually.161

Political realism, on the other hand, attempts to regard politics as a distinct
thought, separated from moral concerns. It is necessary to state that this does not mean
that politics are amoral, but rather, that politics “... must use distinctively political
concepts, such as power, and its normative relative, legitimation.”162

Political Realism
In an article entitled “Political realism and moral corruption,” Alison McQueen provides
a very taxonomic definition of political realism which reads as follows:

I take political realism to be a distinctive family of approaches to the
study, practice, and normative evaluation of politics that tend to (a)
affirm the autonomy (or, more minimally, the distinctiveness) and
contextual specificity of politics; (b) take disagreement, conflict, and
power to be ineradicable and constitutive features of politics; (c) reject
as ‘utopian’, ‘idealist’, or ‘moralist’ those approaches, practices, and
evaluation which seem to deny these facts; and (d) prioritize the
requirements of political order and stability over the demands of
justice (or, minimally, reject the absolute priority of justice over other
political values).163

(a) Realism in political theory attempts to throw light upon the specificities of
the political realm, understood as the field which deals with what politicians ought to do
and how they should accomplish their goals. In other words, realism investigate the
“arena” of politics. It deals with what politicians, rulers, men of state, princes, must do
in order to win their “battles,” but giving much importance to the context, the political
context of every situation. For realist thinkers, every situation is different and there is no

161 Kant, I., “On the disagreement between morality and politics with respect to perpetual peace” in
Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History, edited by Pauline
162 Williams, B., In the Beginning Was the Deed. Realism and Moralism in Political Argument
163 McQueen, A., “Political realism and moral corruption” in European Journal of Political Theory,
A straight correlation between the formulas suggested by any theory and what should be done in any particular case:

In making a judgment about what to do, the politicians has to consider a range of contingent and non-ideal forces that constrain his or her choice. What is to be done *here and now* must be a subset of what *can* be done, and what can be done depends on economic, political, social, cultural, and dispositional preconditions that have to be recognized, managed or negotiated by the agent.\(^\text{164}\)

(b) The second feature of political realism is the psychological aspect. Not all political realists agree on the tenor of this aspect, but in order to find a common ground, we can say that the political realist distinguishes a natural tendency towards power which can never be completely satisfied, and which leads to a necessary conflict between those who want to rule and those who do not want to be ruled. Hans Morgenthau, for example, recognizes two immutable human impulses: self-preservation, associated with the requirements of survival, and self-assertion, or lust for power:

The other root of conflict and concomitant evil stems from the *animus dominandi*, the desire for power. This lust for power manifests itself as the desire to maintain the range of one’s own person with regard to others, to increase it, or to demonstrate it […] Consequently, the selfishness of man has limits; his will to power has none. For while man’s vital needs are capable of satisfaction, his lust for power would be satisfied only if the last man became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him, that is, if he became like God.\(^\text{165}\)

(c) Contrary to moralists, who have always tried to answer the question of “what ought to be” in politics, or to idealists, who aspire to construct a world as they want it to be, political realists attempt mainly to build a political theory having in mind the world as it is. Therefore, even if there exist moral principles with universal validity, they cannot be applied in the political arena in their abstract universal formulation. Rather, they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place, as we saw in point (a).

(d) Finally, realists expect to separate individual ethics from political ethics, and


reject the maxim “Fiat justitia, pereat mundus” (“Let justice be done, even if the world perish”), because, while it may be correct for individuals, states – or more precisely, their rulers – have no right to say so in the name of those who are under their care.\textsuperscript{166} Realists, like Bernard Williams, “identify the ‘first’ political question […] as the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation.”\textsuperscript{167} This necessary condition of legitimacy, as William calls it, comes first because solving it is the condition to solve any other, but it does not come first in the sense that, once solved, it can be forgotten. Rather, it is an issue that needs to be kept on the agenda forever.

**Machiavelli’s Political Realism**

There is no aspect of Machiavelli’s political philosophy on which there is more agreement among scholars than that of his political realism. If we review the definition of political realism stated above, it is clear how Machiavelli fulfills each of its characteristics. At the same time, it is necessary to mention that, as there are very interesting and well-accomplished works on the idealist or moralist aspects of Machiavelli’s thought, the question one needs to answer would be: what kind of realism is he aiming for?

The fundamental premises that allow for the inclusion of Machiavelli within the realist tradition as was required by McQueen are:

1. Machiavelli does believe in the autonomy and contextual specificity of politics. To achieve both self-preservation and effective political action, a prince must be ready to act according to the situation, not following any other commandment but to maintain the State: “Hence, he [the prince] must be prepared to vary his conduct as the winds of fortune and changing circumstances constrain him.”\textsuperscript{172} Therefore, no ideal model can be used for this – reality cannot be forced to fit into any fixed category.

In addition, it is possible to affirm the existence of a anthropological pessimism in Machiavelli’s thoughts which compel princes to always keep on the alert, and never trust others:

\textsuperscript{172} Machiavelli, N., *The Prince*, 62.
For this may be said of men generally: they are ungrateful, fickle, feigners and dissemblers, avoiders of danger, eager for gain. While you benefit them they are all devoted to you: they would share their blood for you; they offer their possessions, their lives, and their sons, as I said before, when the need to do so is far off. But when you are hard pressed, they turn away.\textsuperscript{173}

2. On the basis of this pessimism, the psychological aspect of political realism appears in Machiavelli as the struggle between the ambition of the powerful and the desire of non-domination of the people: “... these two classes are found in every city. And this situation arises because the people do not want to be dominated or oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles want to dominate and oppress the people.”\textsuperscript{174} As mentioned above, political realists confer great importance to self-preservation. In this sense, Machiavelli suggests that every State must take as an enemy any other State that appears to pose a threat to its own safety, its people, or its assets.

3. The most important aspect of Machiavelli’s political realism is that, for Machiavelli, a correct discernment of the political reality is necessary for effective political action. To build a State requires neither the best model nor the most just, but the one which is realizable: “But prudence consist in knowing how to assess the dangers, and to choose the least bad course of action as being the right one to follow.”\textsuperscript{175} This affirmation has some implications: first, as was stated in the second point above, it entails the impossibility of avoiding conflict in politics; second, it implies that political action requires an interpretative effort from the ruler; third, it entails that a perfect society cannot be achieved.

4. Derived from the aforementioned, Machiavelli recognizes the hierarchical aspect of power relations between rulers and the people, which implies some kind of political inequality, and most of all epistemological asymmetry.\textsuperscript{176} The purpose of the next section of this chapter is to expose another aspect of this inequality, which is the capacity of the ruler to create reality.

Many commentators argue that Machiavelli lacks consistency, since for them his constant references to examples from antiquity contradict this case. Francesco

\textsuperscript{173} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 59.
\textsuperscript{174} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 34.
\textsuperscript{175} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 79.
Guicciardini, Machiavelli’s friend, suggested that to interpret political reality through abstract models and examples taken from antiquity was a mistake because each situation is unique, and contingent. In defense of Machiavelli, we can say that the Florentine himself knew this, and his references to examples from history is not for them to be used as a model for possible courses of action but rather to see the consequences of decisions made by others. Knowledge of history becomes a reservoir of experience that can be shared with everyone.

In a letter that Machiavelli wrote to Guicciardini in 1526, the Florentine states that we should not be surprised if in crazy times the crazy in us comes out well: “it would be a worse sign to have carried through some good action than to have done a bad one.”\textsuperscript{177} It is clear how, for Machiavelli, any action carried out by the ruler while taking into account the political context becomes good if the outcome is what the ruler had expected. What it would be normally senseless to do can in fact become the right thing to do. At the same time, it is no longer possible to judge a ruler’s ruthless actions as disgraceful just for being so. Actions lose their absolute value, and become analyzed from a holistic stance, where all conditioning factors must be taken into consideration, and it must be always kept in mind that it is impossible to judge such actions without knowing their outcome, or result. The only value that should be used when examining any action is its contribution to maintaining the state. There are no \textit{a priori} values, only consequences: “With regard to all human actions, and especially those of rulers, who cannot be called to account, men pay attention to the outcome.”\textsuperscript{178}

\textbf{Necessitas non habet legem: A Realist Paradox}

As Maurizio Viroli shows, Machiavelli was not “the forerunner of the view that politics is knowledge of reality and adaptation to it,”\textsuperscript{179} because reality is not just a combination of facts, as there are no categories that are good enough to allow us to correctly interpret reality. Rather, drawing upon what Hobbes and, much later, Schmitt will call \textit{Sovereignty}, Machiavelli’s realism can be more related to exactly the opposite than to an orthodox realist view.

\textsuperscript{177} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Chief Works and Others}, translated by Allan Gilbert (New York: Hendricks House, 1946), 1002.
\textsuperscript{178} Machiavelli, N., \textit{The Prince}, 63.
In chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli states: “Everyone can see what you appear to be, whereas few have direct experience of what you really are; and those few will not dare to challenge the popular view, sustained as it is by the majesty of the ruler’s position.” This sentence implies that a popular view is not something that people develop on their own; rather, it is given by the prince. The prince is the one who addresses how reality is interpreted by the people, since the ruler has the power to change how things are seen. Ultimately, it is the majesty of the prince’s power which gives entity to things.

In this sense, it is possible to argue that Machiavelli stands for a very particular kind of realism, a *power-politics’s realism*, where having the power grants the prince sovereignty, understanding the latter as “*summa potestas*” or absolute power over the State. From this perspective, political realism in Machiavelli is actually a debate on “real politics”, i.e. a debate on the ultimate purpose of politics, which is to control reality. Political power gives princes the capacity to change how reality is seen, and therefore gives them power over reality, since no one can challenge what the prince holds to be true without becoming an enemy, a public enemy. The role of princes is not just to describe, but to interpret, to decide, to judge, to sentence, and ultimately to create reality.

*Summa potestas* or absolute power over the State means that within a political dominion, there is nothing out of the reach of the prince. A traditional political realism argues that politics and ethics are two separate dominions. The power-politics’s realism, instead, argues that ethics is subordinated to political power. As mentioned in chapter III, *verità effettuale* implies the creation of a new ethical frame for the prince, whose main goal is to maintain the State.

If situations require so, a prince must be ready to behave in a reckless manner. In the case of power-politics’s realism, if this action is something the prince *must* do in order to maintain the State, it becomes the *right* thing to do even if traditional morality repudiates such behavior. This particularity of Machiavelli’s realism has metaphysical implications.

Truth, for Machiavelli, becomes something subject to the realm of politics: there is nothing, not even the prince’s own words, that will keep its meaning if circumstances require otherwise: “Machiavelli assumes, more in the spirit of a modern utilitarian, that
the fundamental question to ask must be how to preserve the commonwealth itself. So he invariably takes his stances on the need for a prudent calculation of likely consequences.”

At first, one might think that this feature of Machiavelli’s realism is something that applies only in extreme situations, as Carl Schmitt suggests: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.” In the previous chapter we said that we shared with Skinner, up to a certain point, his view on the consequences of Machiavelli’s postulates in *The Prince*, since for Skinner, the humanism of action or ethics of rulers is only suitable for times in which corruption is what “impera.” Skinner holds that for Machiavelli, in normal times, the four humanistic virtues should always work. On the contrary, from the power-politics perspective, *what really happens* with the realm of private ethics is that it disappears. It becomes nonsense to speak of an ideal realm of ethics in a non-corrupt society, since experience shows that such ideal society has never existed.

The distinctiveness of Machiavelli’s position is that for him the exception is the rule. The essence of sovereignty is both to “decide what is an exception and to make the decisions appropriate to that exception, indeed that one without the other makes no sense at all.” If a prince wants to govern in a successful way, he must always act as a new prince: “If the above-mentioned measures are put into practice skillfully, they will make a new ruler seem very well established, and will quickly make his power more secure and stable than if he had always been a ruler.” Therefore, for Machiavelli, rulers who thought that their power was secure for having been in power for many years are to be blamed if they fail to keep it.

Machiavelli’s political realism is therefore based on the founding feature of power. The goal of *The Prince* is not to establish the origins of a prince’s power, but to show how power becomes the guarantor, the foundation of a prince’s legitimacy. Maintaining the State, maintaining his state as the political leader, staying in power becomes the basis, the foundations of a ruler’s legitimacy. As can be deduced from the

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words of Bernard Williams mentioned above, the necessary conditions for legitimacy dwell in keeping the power. Not because it is the ultimate goal a prince should aim for, but because it is the assurance for achieving any other goal. Without power, the prince is unable to prove his legitimacy. Without power, the prince will never obtain glory. Power is the *conditio sine qua non* for any other goal. In this sense, there is nothing out of the reach of power-politics. Every single aspect of political life, every single aspect of community life is within the realm of power.
Conclusion

If Orwell is right that control of the past allows control of the future, it is imperative that, for the sake of that future, that those who control the present are not allowed to manipulate the past in a fashion likely to render the future inhospitable to humanity and uninhabitable.

Bauman, Z., *Modernity and the Holocaust*

The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them... so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules.

Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*

On August 10th, 2016, the now President of the United States Donald Trump, a candidate at the time, called former President Obama the “founder of ISIS.”

Regardless of how far his statement was from real facts, for him and his most radical followers Obama was the founder of a terrorist organization. This may sound crazy, but there are other examples in the stage of international politics, past and current, that show how those in power try to shape people’s perception of reality.

To refer to a case already mentioned in this dissertation, we can point to the persecution of opponents carried out by Stalin in 1924 after Lenin’s death, especially of Trotsky. Even though in 1918 Stalin himself had recognized Trotsky as the organizer of the insurrection of the Military Revolutionary Committee, in November 1924, six years later, he denied not only the significance of Trotsky’s role, but even the fact that Trotsky had even participated in the uprising.

In a more recent case, Trump’s attorney Rudy Giuliani made a remarkable statement regarding the involvement of the American President in a case of collision with the Russian government. During an interview in the television show *Meet the Press*

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on August 19th, 2018, Giuliani said: “Truth isn’t truth”\(^{186}\) Aside from the contradiction, and the scandal that it represents, what Giuliani was probably arguing for is that truth in politics is not “adaequatio rei et intellectus.” He was saying out loud something that a ruler would never admit: that in politics there are no facts, truth is a matter of interpretation, and further, it is a matter of someone’s capacity to exert influence over other people’s interpretation.

In 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary had chosen the word *post-truth* as word of the year. The concept was defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”\(^{187}\) And the selection of the word was based mainly on the *EU referendum* in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States of America.

There is general agreement that we are living in a post-truth era, but what does that mean? Are we liars to a greater extent than our predecessors? Ralph Keyes, in his book *The Post-Truth Era*,\(^{188}\) affirms that there never was an ethical nirvana in America or anywhere else – it is not true that people in earlier times were reluctant to tell lies. For Keyes, there was only a time when it was harder to tell lies, and therefore, the consequences were greater if one got caught. But decades of official lies, he says, have left us morally numb: “Post-truthfulness exists in an ethical twilight zone. It allows us to dissemble without considering ourselves dishonest. When our behavior conflicts with our values, what we’re most likely to do is reconceive our values.”\(^{189}\)

It is important to note that the prefix *post* does not point to a time-lapse differentiation with reference to the truth, as in *post-war* or *post-traumatic*. Rather, it refers to an overcoming, an irrelevance, a cancellation of that to which the prefix is applied.\(^{190}\) In other words, living in a *post-truth era* means that in these times, the search for truth has become irrelevant. It no longer matters to find the truth about facts.

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\(^{189}\) Keyes, R., Ibid.

What this dissertation intended to elucidate was that in our modern societies, the menace of totalitarian regimes such as those denounced by Orwell in his writing (both fiction and non-fiction), where the truth about facts is completely under the domination of political powers, is more alive than most people are aware of. It has been proven in these lines that, far from being just a novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a dystopia, i.e. a literary work produced with the aim of criticizing modern society by pushing some of its main principles to the limits.

From the outset, to affirm that a extreme version of realism could lead to accept that reality can be modified according to the necessity of those in power seems nothing but a contradiction. But a paradox is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.”\(^{191}\) In this sense, this exposition pretended to prove that the paradoxical element present in Orwell’s literature – and specially in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – is the key element to understand Orwell’s critique towards modern society. This paradoxical characteristic of Orwell’s novel is what makes it more relatable to real life. *Doublethink* is, as we have seen, the possibility of rearranging reality according to necessity without contradictions. The more thoroughly we analyze this concept, the more contradictory and the more real it appears. This feature is what transform the novel into a dystopia, a realizable nightmare.

On the other side, the role of Machiavelli’s *verità effettuale*, as part of the humanist tradition, depended much on the necessity of the prince to remain the political leader of the State. Regarding Seneca, for instance, he wrote a treatise entitled *The Clementia*, where he deals with the proper behavior of a ruler as judge.\(^{193}\) As Robert A. Kaster shows, what the young emperor whom Seneca is advising will have to do will involve acting in his capacity as a judge of other men, indeed a judge to whom appeal is impossible.\(^{194}\) To wield power means, therefore, to be unquestionable.

But there is also a conflict between Machiavelli and the humanist tradition. In that same book, Seneca affirms that cultivating clemency is not only the right thing to do, but also convenient for human beings, because it is the most humane of virtues, and

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that it is no less convenient for the prince, because it brings honor and glory. Machiavelli, on his part, holds that it is obviously desirable to be virtuous in the humanistic conception of the word – meaning to be both loved and feared –, but that, if it is needed to be feared and not loved, then we should not hesitate. In the context of this dissertation, this choosing means that the prince must judge which option is better for achieving his fundamental goal, namely, to maintain the State.

To accomplish the task of maintaining their power over the State, princes are required to judge when doing something is right and when it is not. The princely virtues developed by the humanistic tradition are to be followed, according to Machiavelli, if and only if they help in maintaining power within the State. If not – if, by following the humanist virtues, princes put their positions at risk –, then they should be prepared to build a new set of virtues.

Indeed, if that reasoning is correct, the faculties that Machiavelli grants princes – judging capacity on the one side and indisputability on the other –, have metaphysical consequences, since if what used to be incorrect or bad becomes something to be praised or lauded, it acquires a new reality, it becomes something else.

This leads to what we have called the realist paradox. Princes, as was proven above, must wield unquestionable power. This means that princes are invested by Machiavelli with “summa potestas” or absolute power over the State. At the same time, the role of princes is to judge, according to the necessity of the State or more precisely according to the necessity of their own state, how reality should be in order for them to accomplish their purpose.

In keeping with this reading, there is no justice beyond the judge, so everything that the prince does becomes just. Let us consider, for example, a person who is condemned by the law to die at the stake: if the prince grants forgiveness, then it becomes justice. Therefore, clemency and generosity are beyond the law but not beyond justice, because justice depends exclusively on the judge – since, as was proven above, the prince holds unquestionable power.

By pushing to the limits this characteristic conferred by Machiavelli, it is possible to affirm that reality is also under the volition of princes. Reality is no longer a matter of facts but a matter of interpretation. Therefore, a political government ruled by verita effutuale implies that a prince with summa potestas possesses the devices to control reality.
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