Niccolò Machiavelli wrote his political masterpieces within closed chambers and while in exile. He made a commitment to examine “the material things that are available to the human senses.” He determined not to follow the rationalizations of classical Western philosophers who affirmed that truth derived from “reason and/or revelation.” Machiavelli, then, refused to live in a Neoplatonic cave because he desired to figure the concrete truth of the matter; after him, the papal and secular courts had to digest and reckon with his separation of the exemplary from the necessary. As Sebastian de Grazia states so brilliantly, Machiavelli uncovered new territories; he was an explorer of the human psyche and followed “a path not yet tread by anyone, seeking new ordering principles, ‘to find new modes and orders.’” Today, his thoughts live out in the public sphere and clearly illuminate social and political conduct in the Western World. Machiavelli’s ideas about human interactions are ever present in our society. Political struggles that take place either in the international community or in the domestic realm unambiguously demonstrate the cunning acts of the generality of men in which only “a few will judge with their hands.” Individuals, then, enact, on a macro and micro social stage, Machiavelli’s observations about human nature. Hence, his ideas have immediacy and appear contemporaneous.

2 Ibid.
5 De Grazia points to the fact that Machiavelli refers to men’s bad ways in general and not in particular. The critic observes: “The context of the passage about ‘ungrateful, shifty’ men makes a distinction in time of circumstance,” 105–106.
The reflections we find in Machiavelli are those of a humanist steeped in classical Western tradition. His work teaches us that our free will allows us to control at least half of our human affairs; the other half belongs to Lady Fortuna. If we follow his advice, we must “remain flexible and intellectually alert to rapid political and social change.” We must act like the fox and the lion; with the cunning of the fox and the strength of the lion, we must seek to beat adversity. We must use virtù (strength, prowess, etc.), a concept deeply rooted in classical tradition, to be prepared to react accordingly when Lady Fortuna is ready to strike. We must not be afraid, for she favors vigor in an individual; we must act physically young at heart; we should never let our guard down, for the world is in continuous strife and, to win over fate, one has to be ready to act.

Machiavelli has been called a philosopher, the founder of political science in the Western world, a republican, reactionary, proto-Marxist, devil worshipper, etc., to name just a few of the different ways in which individuals have reacted to or (mis)interpreted him. For Maurizio Viroli, however, Machiavelli was not a political scientist but a rescuer of the Romans’ civil wisdom, a magnificent rhetorician who could ascertain “political reality by uncovering meanings that were not immediately visible but which could be identified.” His texts, then, must be uncovered by the very few individuals who can see through what really transpires in the course of human behavior and events. In order to accomplish that task, humans must use shrewd tactics and, in following the path of the great, be innovators.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, there is a tendency to differentiate and find the “real” Machiavelli in The Discourses, which antecedes “modern Western democracies.” One thing is for certain: his writings have affected political, philosophical, and literary ideas positively or negatively. No

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6 See Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). Skinner states that “Machiavelli’s most graphic image for this sense of man as the master of his fate is again classical in inspiration. He stresses that ‘Fortune is a woman’ and is in consequence readily allured by many qualities. So he sees a genuine possibility of making oneself the ally of Fortune, of learning to act in harmony with her powers, neutralizing her varying nature and thus remaining successful in all one’s affairs,” 28.


