

Comments on Daniela Coli's 'Hobbes's Rome: Between Tacitus and Machiavelli'

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1. Between Machiavelli and Hobbes

The history of western political thought that originated in ancient Greece and Rome was significantly altered by two renowned authors, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. As studies by Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt show, Machiavelli and Hobbes have been frequently identified as the founders of political science and modern state theory. On the other hand, numerous interpretations emphasize the crucial differences between them. For example, in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), Hobbes's contemporary, James Harrington, regarded Machiavelli as only a politician who had tried to revisit ancient prudence and the empire of laws, and he criticized Hobbes as a scholar of the empire of men according to modern prudence.¹⁾ Others see Machiavelli and Hobbes as the turning points from classical politics to modern political science. Therefore, understanding the relationship between them is one of the most important elements for a thorough study of western political thought.

Daniela Coli's recent work, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli: nell'Inghilterra degli Stuart*, focuses on Hobbes's *Three Discourses*²⁾ (originally included in *Horae Subsecivae*³⁾ that was published anonymously in 1620) and brilliantly provides a new perspective of Hobbes. According to Coli, *Three Discourses*, which was recently confirmed as the work of a young Hobbes, reveals 'the

1) James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, in his *Political Works of James Harrington*, (ed.), J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 161.

2) Thomas Hobbes, *Three Discourses: A Critical Modern Edition of Newly Identified Work of the Young Hobbes*, (eds.), N. B. Reynolds and A. W. Saxonhouse (The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

3) Anon, *Horae Subsecivae. Observations and Discourses* (London, 1620).

dialogue of the philosopher of Malmesbury with Machiavelli' and 'the reflection on ancient Rome.'⁴⁾ Although there are clear differences between Machiavelli and Hobbes, Coli points out that they had shared anti-Catholicism, the reason of state, and admiration for ancient Rome. In the Chapter 8, discussion of 'A Discourse upon the beginning of Tacitus' and Hobbes's reflections on ancient Rome, Coli argues that Hobbes was even 'more Machiavellian than Machiavelli' (più machiavelliano di machiavelli).⁵⁾

If Hobbes's political thoughts were to be understood as such, then the meaning of 'Machiavellian' must be questioned. Coli considers, on one hand, the resemblance of Hobbes's theories to Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. According to Coli, in such a Hobbesian warlike condition of 'everyone versus everyone' in which dissimulation is also required, even the most cunning fox and the strongest lion are to be beaten by the conspiracy of the weakest.⁶⁾ On the other hand, Coli mentions the religious problem discussed in *Discorsi*. Separating the theory of state from theology, an area where both Machiavelli and Rousseau were actively engaged, Hobbes proposed 'a new political culture' in parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan* wherein religion's role was to serve the state.⁷⁾ Again, if Hobbes's political thoughts would be construed as Machiavellianism, a new but often repeated question arises. As in Harrington's judgment, what crucial differences are there between Hobbes and Machiavelli, or in other words, what was the Hobbes's revolution?⁸⁾ As will be discussed later, this question may be related to the difference between Livy, on whom Machiavelli depended in *Discorsi*, and Tacitus, whose work was relied upon by Hobbes.

2. Republicanism and Hobbes

This question also relates to recent studies of republicanism represented by J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. It is widely known that Pocock studied the traditions of republicanism from Machiavelli to Harrington and to the founders of America in *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975). He also separated, in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (1985), this Machiavellian discourse of republican virtue from Hobbesian rights and laws.⁹⁾ On the other hand, in *The Foundations of Modern Political*

4) Daniela Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli nell'Inghilterra degli Stuart* (Le Lettere, 2009), p. 5.

5) Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli*, pp. 7, 148.

6) Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli*, p. 148.

7) Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli*, pp. 7, 149–150.

8) Cf. Coli, 'Hobbes's Revolution,' in Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano and Daniel Coli (eds.), *Politics and the Passions, 1500–1850* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 75–92. 'What Machiavelli identifies with politics constitutes for Hobbes a sickness of the state, since what makes a people prosperous, in a monarchy or in a democracy, is the citizen's capacity to obey the sovereign they have created through the contract' (p. 92).

9) J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition, with a New Afterword by the Author* (Princeton University Press, 2003); *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), ch. 2.

Thought (1977), *Liberty before Liberalism* (1998), and *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (2008), Skinner expressed the intellectual context of republican liberty in contrast with Hobbesian civil science.

How does Coli interpret and critique these studies on classical republicanism of Machiavelli and the political science of Hobbes? In *De Cive*, *Leviathan*, and *Behemoth*, Hobbes himself repeatedly argued against the readings of classical works, including those of Aristotle and Cicero, as one of the principal causes of the civil war and the resistance theory. Coli suggests that it is well known that Hobbes secretly criticized *Il Principe* and *Discorsi* because of his criticism of their effeminate depiction of the nature of a republic.¹⁰⁾ If that is the case, Hobbes would severely criticize Machiavellians who were cultivated by reading classical texts in ‘ancient courts of ancient men.’¹¹⁾ In any case, if we are to interpret Hobbes as a Machiavellian, it would be necessary to rethink and revise previous interpretations of ‘the English face of Machiavelli’ and ‘the Machiavellian moment.’

3. Humanism and Hobbes

However, it is repeatedly stated by Strauss and Skinner, among others, that the young Hobbes had been strongly influenced by the tradition of Renaissance humanism.¹²⁾ In addition to *Three Discourses*, Hobbes published a translation of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1629) and assisted in the translation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1637).¹³⁾ This indicates that Hobbes was thinking within the wider context of Renaissance humanism and not limited only to Machiavelli or republicanism. The concept of ‘humanism’ used here relates to the intellectual tradition in which historical models are mainly ancient Greek and Roman, and the fundamental disciplines consisted of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy (*studia humanitatis*). Therefore, it is not a particular ideology, rather, it more broadly included civic humanism, republicanism, Christian humanism, courtly humanism, and so on.

In another example illustrating the relationship between Hobbes and humanism, Hobbes admitted in *History of the Peloponnesian War* that ‘Homer in poesy, Aristotle in philosophy, Demosthenes in eloquence, and other ancients in other knowledge still maintain their primacy.’

10) Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli*, p. 132.

11) Machiavelli, *Lettere a Francesco Vettori e a Francesco Guicciardini*, a cura di Giorgio Inglese (Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1989), p. 195.

12) Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (1936; The University of Chicago Press, 1952). Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3: Hobbes and Civil Science (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

13) Hobbes, *Hobbes’s Thucydides*, (ed.), Richard Schlatter (Rutgers University Press, 1975). Hobbes and Bernard Lamy, *The Rhetorics of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Lamy*, (ed.), J. T. Harwood (Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).

Also, according to Hobbes, ‘the principal and proper work of history’ is ‘to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future.’ By reproducing such a typical humanistic idea of history, he clearly admired Thucydides as an ideal historian while quoting Justus Lipsius’ commendation from *Six Books of Politics* (1589).¹⁴⁾

Regarding Renaissance humanism, as studies by Peter Burke, Richard Tuck, and Markku Peltonen have explored,¹⁵⁾ there are many additional topics, for example, the reception of Tacitus and other ancient historians, the growing popularity of Neostoicism and the political prudence represented by Lipsius, the roles of rhetoric and eloquence in the gentleman’s education, and so forth. Among them, one of the most significant links connecting Machiavelli with Hobbes may be the civil knowledge of Francis Bacon. Hobbes is said to have helped translate Bacon’s *Essays* (1597,1612,1625) into Latin. Bacon said in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) that ‘we are much beholden to Machiavelli and others that write what men do and not what they ought to do.’ In a letter of advice to Fulke Greville recommending that he read historical works, including those of Thucydides and Livy, Bacon proclaimed that Tacitus was ‘simply the best’ of ‘all stories.’¹⁶⁾ Widening our scope to this intellectual context of Renaissance humanism, we gain a historical understanding of the foundations of Hobbes’s political thought.

4. From prudence to science?: ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus’

Focusing on *Three Discourses* in the context of Renaissance humanism, what might we find? For example, by reading it together with twelve other observations and essays—including ‘Of Arrogance,’ ‘Of Ambition,’ and ‘Of Country Life,’ and a discourse denouncing flattery in *Horae Subsecivae* which resembled, in both form and content, Bacon’s *Essays*—we can understand the intellectual and political milieu surrounding Hobbes and his patron, William Cavendish. On the other hand, considering ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus,’ we may ask why Hobbes took up Tacitus’ *Annals* that was widely read among the European court society. Also, why did

14) Hobbes, *Hobbes’s Thucydides*, pp. 6, 27. Justus Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, (ed.), Jan Waszink (Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), p. 732.

15) Peter Burke, ‘A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450–1700,’ *History and Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1966), pp. 135–152; ‘Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State,’ in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 479–498. Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570–1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Rhetoric, Politics and Popularity in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

16) Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* in Michael Kiernan (ed.), *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. 4 (Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 144. Bacon, ‘Letter of Advice to Fulke Greville’ in Alan Stewart and Harriet Knight (eds.), *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. 1 (Clarendon Press, 2012), p. 210.

Hobbes limit the scope of his discourse to only the first four sections, after which the reign of Tiberius, a major section of *Annals*, began?

Above all, this may be one of the most important points of dispute regarding the influence of ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus’ on the eventual formation of Hobbesian civil philosophy in *De Cive* and *Leviathan*. This problem is unavoidable for correctly interpreting the change and evolution from the classical politics of Aristotle to scientific modern politics, specifically because Tacitus had been regarded as an exemplar of political prudence by both Lipsius and Bacon. Contrarily, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes regarded prudence, which consists of experience, as ‘no part of philosophy,’ and he clearly separated prudence from science attained by reasoning.¹⁷⁾ For Hobbes, who later claimed that civil philosophy was ‘no older than my book *De Cive*,’ did Tacitus provide a model for political prudence or for modern science?

5. On ancient Rome and Augustus

Returning to ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus,’ two main topics are (1) the transition from *res publica* to *imperium*, and (2) the evaluation of ‘new prince’ Augustus who made such a transformation possible. Compared to Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* that depended on Livy’s *History of Rome (Ab Urbe Condita)*—which primarily describes the Roman republic as being founded by liberty and virtue—Hobbes commented on the beginning of Tacitus’ *Annals* which tracked history from the destruction of the republic to the establishment of the empire and succession of the imperial crown. If *Discorsi* is considered a classic work of republicanism, in what tradition is ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus’? In this context, we cannot ignore the relevance of recent related studies of monarchism, royalism, court culture, and the intellectual origins of empire.¹⁸⁾ The centers of politics and civility in early modern Europe were the monarchs and the royal courts.¹⁹⁾ Does ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus’ represent another version of *The Machiavellian Moment* in the monarchy and court society, which is different not only from republicanism but also from the divine right theory of King James I and the patriarchalism of Robert Filmer?

On the other hand, Hobbes admired Augustus as ‘so learned a master in the art of government.’

17) Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (ed.), Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 36, 458.

18) D. L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for Settlement, c. 1640–1649* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). Cesare Cuttica and Glenn Burgess (eds.), *Monarchism and Absolutism in Early Modern Europe* (Pickering & Chatto, 2012). David Starkey et al., *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (Longman, 1987). L. L. Peck (ed.), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

19) Toshimichi Kimura, ‘Politics and Civility in the Early Modern England, 1531–1774,’ a paper delivered at the International Symposium (Political Theory in the Context of Globalization and Multiculturalism), held at Kyushu University, Japan, in 11 July 2006.
<http://catalog.lib.kyushu-u.ac.jp/handle/2324/13276/Politics%20and%20Civility%20in%20Early%20Modern%20England%201531-1774.pdf>

According to Hobbes, ‘the chief art of government’ is ‘the art of conforming to times, and places, and persons, and consists much in a temperate conversation, and ability upon just cause, to contain and dissemble his passions, and purposes.’ Augustus, by using this art, obtained the favor of both the people and soldiers, and succeeded in converting ‘a free state into a monarchy,’ not suddenly, but ‘by little and little’ through ‘action and continual managing of business.’ He then strived ‘to maintain the present State, and help to keep off the Civil wars.’²⁰⁾ Such discourse on the art of government, which sometimes admitted dissimulation and deception, had been frequently reintroduced not only by Machiavelli but also by humanists, such as Lipsius and Bacon (if so, how had Machiavelli himself interpreted Augustus?). Against this tradition, however, Hobbes merely referred to the art of government in *De Cive* and *Leviathan* primarily through his discussions of the theories of natural law and sovereignty. Would Hobbes’s early discourse on Augustus be rejected in his later works or secretly assimilated into his system of civil philosophy?

6. Hobbes and the British Empire

At least for the young Hobbes, ancient Rome was an empire that represented greatness, and Augustus developed ‘the absolute sovereignty of the whole empire.’²¹⁾ On one hand, as Coli mentions while looking back at Hobbes’s contemporary England, Hobbes had high praise for King James I as ‘our most wise King’ in chapter 19 of *Leviathan*. As Hobbes stated, James had sought to unite England and Scotland, not unlike the ancient Romans who had known ‘the true rules of Politiques.’ If he could have achieved his goal, it would have ‘in all likelihood prevented the Civil warres, which make both those Kingdomes, at this present, miserable.’²²⁾ In *Behemoth*, he also stated that ‘they were mistaken, both English and Scotch in calling one another Forraigners,’ while remembering that ‘the Romans were masters of many Nations.’²³⁾ *Behemoth* had already described the Civil wars as ‘the wars of the three kingdoms (England, Scotland, and Ireland).’

These discourses on James and the union indicate that we cannot simply understand Hobbes as a founder of the theory of the modern state. According to Coli, for Hobbes, who she described as ‘more Machiavellian than Machiavelli,’ Rome was ‘the model for England in a phase of expansion and animated by the dream of the empire.’²⁴⁾ Recent studies pioneered by Pocock’s search for ‘the new British history’ have made clear that early modern Britain was not a modern

20) Hobbes, *Three Discourses*, pp. 65, 57, 45, 47.

21) Hobbes, *Three Discourses*, pp. 71, 52.

22) Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 137–138.

23) Hobbes, *Behemoth* in Paul Seaward (ed.), *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 10 (Clarendon Press, 2010), pp. 152, 150.

24) Coli, *Hobbes, Roma e Machiavelli*, p. 7.

state consolidated by a unified power consisting of a homogeneous nation, rather a ‘composite’ and ‘multiple’ empire including not only England but also Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the overseas colonies.²⁵⁾ Hobbes’s concern with ancient Rome meant that he had also lived within the international world where not only individuals but also Leviathans and Behemoths struggled with one another.

In addition to Hobbes, Machiavelli’s political thought can also be interpreted in terms of an empire, not only as a modern state and republicanism.²⁶⁾ At the beginning of *Discorsi*, he said ‘those who read of the origin of the city of Rome... will not be surprised that in this city such great virtue was maintained for so many centuries, and that later there came into being the empire into which that republic developed.’²⁷⁾ Above all, we cannot overlook the importance of chapters 3–5 in *Il Principe* and book 2 of *Discorsi*. In the former, a case of mixed monarchies and methods of conquest are discussed. In the latter, Roman expansion, which was different than the preservation of Sparta and Venice, was explained.

Therefore, both Machiavelli and Hobbes could be interpreted as two persons who tackled these practical problems of empires and conquests, or composite and multiple states, rather than the theoretical problems of the modern state. For example, Hobbes insisted in ‘A Discourse upon the Beginning of Tacitus’ that ‘it is better for a province to be subject to one, though an evil master, than to a potent, if factious, republic.’ In chapter 24 of *Leviathan*, when explaining ‘the nutrition, and procreation of a Common-wealth,’ Hobbes regarded colonies as ‘children of a Common-wealth’ and said, ‘when a colony is settled, they are either a Common-wealth of themselves, discharged of their subjection to their Sovereign that sent them,’ or else ‘they remain united to their metropolis, as were the colonies of the people of Rome.’²⁸⁾

As Coli discusses elsewhere, Hobbes had travelled to Italy as a private tutor of Cavendish, and he had a relationship with the Virginia Company. These facts remind us that the world of Hobbes was not to be contained in a domestic country or an English Leviathan. By reading *Three Discourses*, we understand new perspectives of Hobbes as ‘more Machiavellian than Machiavelli’ and of the enduring tradition of Renaissance humanism cultivated by history and the classics of Greece and Rome. Therefore, Coli’s work, which includes an Italian translation of *Three Discourses*, provides a very important key to explore the link that connects ancient political prudence to modern political science which has been hidden between the two classics, *Discorsi* and *Leviathan*.

25) Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

26) Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

27) Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, (ed.), Bernard Crick (1970: Penguin Classics, 1983), p. 100.

28) Hobbes, *Three Discourses*, p. 48. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 175.

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