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The American Historical Review, Vol. 69, No. 4. (Jul., 1964), pp. 945-968.

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The
AMERICAN
HISTORICAL
REVIEW

VOLUME LXIX, NUMBER 4

JULY 1964

The Loom of Language and the Fabric of Imperatives:
The Case of *Il Principe* and *Utopia*

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THIS essay concerns the way two men, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas More, in two books, *Il Principe* and *Utopia*, used a few words. It argues in effect that the peculiar ways in which these men worked at the loom of language indicates that they stood in a peculiar relation to the fabric of imperatives of their own time.

The loom of language provides men with the words and word patterns by means of which they communicate with one another. By processes so complex as to require a separate branch of the science of linguistics for their explication, words and patterns of words undergo a great variety of changes under a wide variety of circumstances with the passage of time. By glacially slow modifications of an ancient tongue whole new language families evolve. Words come to point to things they did not formerly designate, or cease to point to things they did designate. New words are created

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to designate new-found things, or old ones are put to new uses in the process of discovery. And, massively, words and word sequences drop out of use and become archaic or obsolete, which is to say unintelligible or nearly so. The changes even in a language relatively as stable as English during the past four hundred years have been such that in teaching Shakespeare or expounding Scripture from the King James Version, the expositor finds himself becoming more and more the translator in the technical sense—the person engaged in finding equivalents of the words of his text that will be intelligible to his audience.

This essay proposes to deal with a small sample of a particular kind of change in language, and that kind itself amounts to only a tiny fraction of the changes that language constantly undergoes. The few changes to be investigated here, however, may have a particular interest for historians, especially for historians of ideas, of moral sentiments, of political institutions, and of social structures, which means for a great many historians today. They may have this interest because of the peculiar circumstances in which they took place. For one thing they did not emerge anonymously from the folk; they were the work of readily identifiable individuals—More and Machiavelli—each of whom made a strong and indelible mark on the history of his times. In the second place the changes were not casual word coinages. The words that will concern us concerned More and Machiavelli; in effect they are not words merely *dropped* by their authors but words *placed* (or in one instance not placed) by them. Finally when Machiavelli and More tampered with the sense of the words that will concern us, they cared not at all or not solely for the aesthetic impact or the logical efficiency of what they were doing. They were concerned with the relation of those words and their meanings to the men and communities of men that they knew best. They were in effect concerned with the product of the loom of language in the area where it weaves the fabric of imperatives.

In contrast to the region of “I want,” the fabric of imperatives occupies the whole region of “Thou shalt,” of “You ought,” of “I ought.”¹ Between these two regions there is for each of us a greater or lesser measure of congru-

¹ To pile yet one more metaphorical phrase on an area already blanketed by “patterns of culture” and “webs of values” may seem a contribution only to a confusion of tongues already quite sufficient. But although what the phrase “fabric of imperatives” refers to in this essay certainly lies in the blanketed area, the part it covers, while overlapping the parts covered by the other phrases, is not identical with either of them. “Patterns of culture” refers to the things the people of a culture normally do. Thus in the adolescent male American subculture of my day, boasting—sometimes quite remarkable in its inaccuracy—about one’s amorous achievements was a standard pattern. It was not, however, part of the fabric of imperatives; there was no explicit rule to the effect that wholesome American boys ought to lie like Ananias about their priapic exploits. The notion of “web of values” will not do because the term “value” appears to have become highly ambiguous, and in the process of aggravated bifurcation it has left uncovered

ence, but whatever the correspondence may be, the regions are functionally distinct. The one concerns the satisfaction of human desires, the other the rules of human conduct. The function of any fabric of imperatives is so to regulate the satisfaction of human desires as to make the living together of men at least possible, and at most to make it good. The fabric of imperatives regulates the satisfaction of human desires by sanctions ranging from the overtly coercive ones of law enforced by public power, through the pressure of community opinion working by means of gossip and social acceptance or rejection, to the still small voice within.

Because the fabric of imperatives determines the ordinary day-to-day expectations of men with respect to the actions of their fellows, it is resistant to drastic and sudden change. It is also of varying density at a given time and over spans of time. Thus in the Middle Ages it lay relatively thick with respect to matters of male attire and relatively thin with respect to acts of physical violence, whereas today it lies thin with respect to the former and thick with respect to the latter. And this is as much as to say that despite its resistance to alteration, the fabric has in fact undergone alteration. Thirdly, it is subject to stress from a variety of sources: changes in technology, in the range and depth of human understanding, in the direction of human aspirations and desires, in the forms of social and political institutions, in the relative power and the demands of interest groups, in the character of men's faith and hope. Finally, to cope with the tensions generated by such changes, and to prevent them from fatally rending the fabric of imperatives, all but very primitive societies support a specialized maintenance force to keep it in repair. In most societies we find among these specialists the doom deemers or law givers, the judges, the priests or holy men, and the pedagogues. Moreover, in particular ages and particular cultures the maintenance work is undertaken by different kinds of men—in ancient Greece, for example, successively by epic poets, lyric poets, dramatists, and philosophers; in the West by theologians, humanists, philosophes, and today by sociologists, psychoanalysts, novelists, and editorial writers. What these men have in common is an expertise at the loom of language that enables them to produce

an important area lying between its two segments. In one sense it seems to mean the highest goals that individuals and communities set for themselves; in the other sense it means whatever men and groups of men want, as revealed by their actual choices and stated preferences. It has long been used in approximately this sense in economics and is occasionally so used in sociology, e.g., in Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (Glencoe, Ill., 1952). The notion of a "fabric of imperatives" covers but also extends far beyond the web of values in the first sense, and it occupies a different cultural region altogether from the web of values in the second sense.

the material they deem necessary to reinforce or patch or rebuild or modify the fabric of imperatives in accord with their often varying estimate of the need.

Most specialists at the loom of language are satisfied most of the time to work to preserve the fabric of imperatives pretty much as they find it. This is why what they produce is often insufferably monotonous and repetitive. But all the specialists are not always satisfied. Most of the subversive initial and direct onslaughts on the fabric of imperatives have been delivered by men who come out of the milieu of the maintenance specialists. Their divine or daemonic discontent is not a rarity to wonder at; it is a common and repeated fact of history.

Since the work of registering or initiating the transformation of imperatives falls to maintenance specialists who are word weavers, in the course of drastic changes, attempted or achieved, in the fabric of imperatives, something odd usually happens at the loom of language. This fact may provide us with a useful tactical resource for the investigation of the history of ideas at a point where, to borrow the title of a very poor book, "ideas have consequences." A careful study of activity at the loom of language may render possible the close identification of points of stress in the fabric of imperatives at a particular moment.

The stress or breakdown in the fabric of imperatives does not always register in the sort of change at the loom of language that so sharply calls attention to itself when one word wholly replaces another in an area of human discourse. Sometimes the change is not a change *of* words but a change *in* words, an alteration of meaning that leaves the verbal shell intact. When such a change takes place in words widely current prior to the change and still widely current today, he who attempts to understand the fabric of imperatives by studying the loom of language needs to proceed with considerable caution. In the first place it is easy to miss such a change altogether. Having descried the change, however, the investigator may unwarily assume that the word has shifted all the way from its previous sense to its present range of connotation. This is by no means always the case.

The above monition about changes in words is necessary because the examination of several such changes will be our concern in what follows. The changes occur in two works on politics written in the years just prior to the Reformation: Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1513) and More's *Utopia* (1515-16). From the time they reached the public to the present those two slim books have exercised a powerful and continuous fascination over men's minds, a

fascination more powerful than that of any works contemporary with them. Yet, is it useful to attempt to understand what More and Machiavelli were doing to the fabric of imperatives by an investigation of the language of *Utopia* and *Il Principe* only? To do so raises serious and difficult questions. Is the More of *Utopia* the *real* More? Did More *really* believe what what he wrote in *Utopia*? Did Machiavelli *really* believe what he wrote in *Il Principe*? Is the Machiavelli of *Il Principe*, that hasty chance tract, the *real* Machiavelli? Is not the real Machiavelli rather the author of the *Discorsi*, the work that represents the meditation of a lifetime? ²

If by the real Machiavelli one means that aspect of the man which expressed itself in his most durable concerns, convictions, habits of thought, and patterns of action, then probably the *Discorsi* better than *Il Principe* reflects the real Machiavelli. But this identification of the real Machiavelli is a dangerous game; it has led to the dubious inference that only those elements in *Il Principe* duplicated in or reconcilable with the *Discorsi* represent the real Machiavelli, and that what is left over is to be disregarded or explained away. Yet so to treat *Il Principe* is to miss perhaps the most important point about it. What gives *Il Principe* its remarkable power and its perennial liveliness is that in it Machiavelli's imagination takes wings and his vision soars above his ordinary perceptions and conceptions to a new height.

And so it is with Thomas More in *Utopia*. If the Machiavelli of the *Discorsi* rather than of *Il Principe* is the real Machiavelli, the More of the letter to Martin Dorp in defense of Erasmus and Christian humanism,³ the More of the *Dialogue concerning Heresies* supporting Christian unity against its enemies,⁴ rather than the author of *Utopia*, is the real More. The unique heights they attain above their own times put *Il Principe* and *Utopia* beyond the ordinary reach of the contemporaries of Machiavelli and More—beyond the reach of *all* their contemporaries, and therefore beyond the reach of More and Machiavelli, too. For it is not necessary to believe that almost two

² This issue is frequently raised with respect to both these books and a considerable number of other great books, Plato's *Republic*, for example. It was raised, in fact, by one of the readers to whom the editor of the *AHR* sent this study. The following section first written to meet the issue with respect to *Utopia* alone as part of the introduction to *Utopia* (New Haven, Conn., 1964), Volume IV of the Yale edition of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, is included here in slight paraphrase at the suggestion of the editor of the *AHR* and with the kind permission of the executive editor of the Yale edition, Professor Richard Sylvester.

³ Thomas More, *Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E. F. Rogers (Princeton, N. J., 1947-), no. 15; Thomas More, *Selected Letters*, ed. E. F. Rogers (New Haven, Conn., 1961), no. 4.

⁴ Thomas More, *A Dialogue concerning heresy and matters of religion*, in *Works of Sir Thomas More, Knyght, sometyme Lorde Chancellor of England, wrytten by him in the Englysh tonge* (London, 1557), cols. 103-104, pp. 105-288.

decades or even two years later Machiavelli and More saw all things precisely as they saw them in the moments of acute perception that possessed them when they wrote *Il Principe* and *Utopia*. Sustained imaginative vision is indeed like being possessed; it is not necessarily progressive or cumulative or even readily preserved intact. It is a dizzy height that a very few men scale once or twice in a lifetime and fewer still attain more often. When such vision is turned on the ways men live together, it may bring some facets of human affairs into focus with a fierce brilliance, but in so doing it is almost bound to throw whole spans of men's experience, the visionary's as well as others', into the shadow. The greatness of a book that does this lies not in its harmony but in its intensity. And after he has attained this height the writer of such a book may seem not to advance from it but to recede from it. In regaining his balance he loses some of his impetus. This happened to Machiavelli after he wrote *Il Principe*; it happened to More after he wrote *Utopia*. In both cases the convictions the books express are not so much repudiated as drawn back into the setting from which something like poetic inspiration had momentarily freed them. They are not consciously rejected but integrated with their writer's previous habit of thought and thereby transmuted and toned down.

Although in *Utopia* and *Il Principe* More and Machiavelli rise above their milieus, it is their own milieus they rise above and therefore have in view as they write. This much relation at least each man's book bears to his own time and place, and although the times of More and Machiavelli were closely contemporaneous, their places were different in ways most significant for what they wrote in their great little books.

The place of Machiavelli was Italy; the rest of Europe and the rest of the world he saw only with fragmented, unfocused, peripheral vision.⁵ To him as to his contemporary fellow Florentine and fellow student of the past, Francesco Guicciardini, the Italy of his day was the scene of massive and utterly appalling political disarray, of *calamità*, following with catastrophic suddenness an era of order, prosperity, and peace.⁶ This view is at odds with that of a number of historians who have seen and see the entire age of the Renaissance in Italy as one of political confusion, violence, and decay. It is nevertheless confirmed by a reasonable consideration of the evi-

⁵ This is evident enough even in Machiavelli's descriptions of France and Germany written after he had been engaged in legations to both those lands. (Niccolò Machiavelli, "Ritratto delle cose di Francia," in Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*, ed. Francesco Flora and Carlo Cordiè [2 vols., n.p., 1949], I, 677-90; "Ritratto delle cose della Magna," *ibid.*, 697-702.)

⁶ Francesco Guicciardini, *Opere*, ed. Vittorio de Caprariis (La Letterature Italiana, Storia e Testi, XXX [Milan, n.d.], 373).

dence. From the death of Giangalleazzo Visconti in 1403 to the incursion of Charles VIII of France in 1494 Italy enjoyed a level of tranquillity among its centers of political power and even within its political units that to contemporary Frenchmen, Englishmen, Spaniards, and Germans could only have seemed Elysian. If everything was not well—and of course during those ninety years everything was not always well anywhere in Italy and was about as bad as ever in Naples—still it was better than the hideous turmoil that plagued the transmontane monarchies for decades on end.⁷

Machiavelli had lived out his youth in the last golden days of a near century of political stability. In that happy autumn of illusion the brutal interventions of barbarians from across the mountains were but a memory of dark days past. In his young manhood Machiavelli saw the bitter end of Italy's autumnal dream. The barbarians came again. In 1494 the French host of Charles VIII swept, irresistible as a winter storm, from the Alps to Naples. That storm of armed force left the old political lines of order among the Italian powers and of rule within them in blasted disarray. And this was but the beginning of a series of political disasters for the Italians that reached a climax but did not end in Machiavelli's lifetime. He not only lived in the midst of these disasters; in his most active years he wholly gave himself to an attempt to stave them off or temper their effects in his native Florence.⁸ In this he failed wretchedly and utterly, and his failure captured him. He spent the rest of his life in an almost obsessed contemplation of the apparatus—the levers and gears—of political power.

With the passion of the failure who seeks his own justification, Machiavelli tried to find in political action some sort of meaning not canceled by each random gesture of that fickle bitch Fortuna. Never was Machiavelli more fully obsessed by politics than in 1513, the year when with an aimless hand Chance swept away at once his means of livelihood and his way of life. With the Medicis in tow, a Spanish force had thrust aside as if it were not there the Florentine militia on which Machiavelli had lavished his pains, effortlessly turning into a nightmare joke the fifteen years he had given to the work of maintaining the political viability of the republic. The restored Medici deprived Machiavelli of his office, tortured him on suspicion of complicity in a plot against them, and exiled him from the city.⁹ The fate of Italy and his own fate had become inextricably intermeshed, and he

⁷ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, 1955), 83–100, has pointed out how precarious and imperfect the order of Italy was from 1403 to 1494. The contrast between Italy and the great transmontane realms remains nonetheless remarkable.

⁸ Roberto Ridolfi, *Vita di Niccolò Machiavelli* (Rome, 1954), 22–197; John Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* (London, 1961), 31–131.

⁹ Ridolfi, *Vita di Machiavelli*, 197–214; Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy*, 131–41.

needed above all to know how it had come about that in his day Italy was "overrun by Charles, sacked by Louis, outraged by Ferdinand, and disgraced by the Swiss,"¹⁰ while he had to spin out his life on a wretched farm in the hills of Tuscany. And so in 1513 he channeled but scarcely controlled his passion for politics, pouring his frustrated urge for deeds into a spate of words, somehow compounded of ice and fire, which became *Il Principe*.

Others might talk sensibly about silks and woolens, about profit and loss, but, he wrote, "for me it is fitting to talk sensibly about *lo stato*, and I must do so or take the vow of silence."¹¹ Machiavelli took no such vow. Whether sensibly or not, during the next few months in *Il Principe* he talked much about *stato*,¹² and readers of that work have long recognized that Machiavelli had done something to *stato* that wrenched it out of its medieval matrix of connotation.¹³ The men who made this discovery were themselves heavily committed to political nationalism. The consequence was almost inevitable: they took Machiavelli's *stato* and decked it out in all the finery of the modern national state, passionately and romantically conceived as the politically unitary expression of the will of the nation's people.¹⁴ For a number of reasons this view of the matter just will not do. The most obvious difficulty is that in Chapter xxvi of *Il Principe*, where somewhat belatedly Machiavelli assumes the stance of an Italian patriot (belatedly since Chapter xxvi is also the last), the word *stato* does not appear at all, although it occurs in all but three preceding chapters;¹⁵ in effect where Machiavelli starts talking about Italian patriotism is where he stops talking about *lo stato*.

The problem then comes to this: in *Il Principe* Machiavelli imparts a peculiar twist to the term *stato* which might indicate that when he wrote the book he was doing something odd to the current fabric of imperatives. But what is the peculiar twist? And precisely what, if anything, does it do to the fabric of imperatives? In the first place *stato* appears in *Il Principe* only rarely in the senses in which it appeared very frequently in medieval political writing and in the writing of such a contemporary of Machiavelli's as Claude Seyssel. Machiavelli scarcely ever used it to mean "condition in general" as in "solid state," "state of war," "state of mind." Nor did he use *stato* much more often in the sense of "social condition" or "order of society," as the "estate of the nobility" or "estates of the realm." The word occurs 115 times

¹⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Chap. xi.

¹¹ *Id.*, *Lettere* (2 vols., Lanciano, 1915), I, 127. The letter is dated April 1513.

¹² His letter to Francesco Vettori of December 10, 1513, suggested that he had nearly finished *Il Principe*. (*Ibid.*, II, 24-27.)

¹³ For a full elaboration of most of what follows about *stato*, see my "*Il principe and lo stato*," *Studies in the Renaissance*, IV (1957), 113-38.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Francesco Ercole, *La Politica di Machiavelli* (Rome, 1925), 65-196.

¹⁵ All except Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Chaps. xiii, xvi, xxv.

in *Il Principe*. In 110 times it does not have either of the common medieval denotations just described. All those 110 times it denotes something that we would call political, not something we would call either social or general.

But what exactly does it denote those 110 times? To this question the embarrassing answer is, "We cannot say," or more justly, "*Il Principe* does not tell." One Italian student of linguistics, Fredi Chiapelli, thought it did tell,¹⁶ and proceeded to classify the denotations of *stato* he believed he had found in the book. He came up with 75 per cent of the occurrences denoting "state in its full maturity with its fundamental political, territorial, and national implications," and a scatter of other occurrences with four or five other denotations.¹⁷ Unfortunately Chiapelli's method vitiated his own argument. He started by substituting "state in its full maturity" wherever *stato* occurred. Where it happened to fit, he accepted it as the denotation Machiavelli intended; he did not try any of his other denotations of *stato* to see if they fit. Then he divided the *stati* he had left over, the ones that "state in its full maturity" did not fit, among those other denotations. The trouble is that in almost every case where "state in its full maturity" fits in the immediate context, one or more of the other untried denotations of *stato* also fit quite as well, because the context is just not full enough to provide an univocal denotation.¹⁸

The failure of an examination of denotation of *stato* in *Il Principe* to reveal what Machiavelli was doing to the word suggests that we next search syntax for a clue. In effect there are about seven occurrences of *stato* as the subject of an active verb in *Il Principe*. Eleven times as often as this—about 70 per cent of all its appearances in a political context—it is either the object of an active verb or the subject of a passive one. Syntactically, therefore, *stato* is not up to much in *Il Principe*. If *lo stato* is not doing much, what is being done to it? It is not being worked for, or helped, or served, or revered, or admired, or feared, or loved, as Chiapelli's *stato* "in its full maturity" would be worked for, helped, served, revered, admired, feared, and loved in the twentieth century—not once, not ever. Time after time it is being added to, assaulted, disarmed, won, injured, occupied, possessed, conceded, seized, taken, regained, had, and most often of all acquired, held, kept, lost, and taken away. Indeed, *lo stato* never acquires, holds, keeps, loses, or takes anything from anyone, but on a reasonable rather than a strictly grammatical construction of its situation, in about half its occurrences someone is acquir-

¹⁶ Fredi Chiapelli, *Studi sul linguaggio del Machiavelli* (Florence, 1952). For a fuller discussion of Chiapelli's method, see Hexter, "*Il principe*," 135-37.

¹⁷ Chiapelli, *Studi*, 59-73, esp. 68.

¹⁸ See examples in Hexter, "*Il principe*," 137.

ing, holding, keeping, and losing *lo stato* or having it taken away from him. If we go further and examine the occurrences of *stato* where it is in less immediate syntactical relation to a verb, nothing happens to alter the impression left by the peculiar verbs with which it ordinarily keeps company and the peculiar way in which that company is kept. Whatever Machiavelli meant to denote by *stato* (on this point the evidence is most ambiguous), in *Il Principe*, *lo stato* is what is politically up for grabs. And it is nothing more than what is up for grabs. It therefore lacks at least one important dimension of what Chiapelli calls "the state in its full maturity with its fundamental political, territorial, and national implications." *Lo stato* is no body politic; it is not the people politically organized, the political expression of their nature and character and aspirations, their virtues and their defects. Rather it is an inert lump, and whatever vicarious vitality it displays is infused into it not by the people, but by the prince who gets it, holds it, keeps it, and aims not to lose it or have it taken away. Our investigation has led us to a curious conclusion. In *Il Principe* Machiavelli has not stretched *stato*; he has shrunk it. He has drained away most of its medieval social meanings and has not given it its modern political amplitude.

What implications this devitalization of *stato* has for the fabric of imperatives we will try to discern shortly. At the moment we want to explore another linguistic corridor: what might be called motif-word magnetism. Common sense suggests that when a sense shift like the one in *stato* occurs it ought to pull the sense of other words with it. In the case of *Il Principe* the word that immediately recommends itself for a test of *lo stato*'s magnetism is *virtù*. Machiavelli's use of the term *virtù* exercised a kind of fascination for a considerable number of persons in the twentieth century interested in politics as idea or act. Before the First World War a number of Germans wrote extensively about Machiavelli's concept *virtù*,¹⁹ and between the wars Italians whose stomachs or whose eyes to the main chance were stronger than their political prescience saw the modern embodiment of Machiavelli's *virtù* in the posturing lantern-jawed bully and charlatan who unfortunately for them ended dangling head down from the end of a rope in Milan.²⁰

Nevertheless *virtù* is not what *Il Principe* is mainly about. As the alternative titles, *Il Principe* and *De Principatibus*, *De Principati* or *De Principe*,²¹ that he gave his little book indicate, Machiavelli thought it was about princes

¹⁹ Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism*, tr. Douglas Scott (New Haven, Conn., 1957), 31-44; E. W. Mayer, *Machiavellis Geschichtsauffassung und sein Begriff "Virtù"* (Munich, 1912).

²⁰ Ercole, *La Politica*, 5-64.

²¹ Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, Bk. II, Chap. 1: reference to *nostro trattato de principati*; Bk. II, Chap. XLII: reference to *nostro trattato de Principe*.

and *principati*. And a *principato* is a species of *stato*; about *stato* we already know something. On a gross count *virtù* occurs about two-thirds as often as *stato* in *Il Principe*.²² And while *stato* or *principato* fail to show up in only one chapter of *Il Principe*,²³ on the other hand *virtù* is missing from over a quarter of the chapters.²⁴ More than this, *virtù* is not always necessary to a prince for getting or even keeping a *stato*, while qualities intentionally distinguished from *virtù*—*industria*, *prudenzia*, *astuzia*, *scelleratezza*; industry, prudence, craft, even orneriness²⁵—also come in handy. And when one subjects the denotations of *virtù* and its derivatives in *Il Principe* to the dreary rigors of linguistic analysis, they turn out to be as perplexing as the denotations of *stato*, but in a different way. In most cases they are not particularly ambiguous or hard to ascertain. But they are rich in variety and very poor in novelty. Machiavelli does not use the term with any signification different from those of *virtus* in classical Latin. More than this, in the half century before Machiavelli wrote *Il Principe* the English used their cognate term “virtue,” and the French used theirs, *virtu*, with every denotation *virtù* has in *Il Principe*.²⁶ This does not mean that there is nothing especially worthy of note about the way Machiavelli used the term. It does mean that once again the mere listing of denotation is a dead end.

The first useful thing to note about *virtù* in *Il Principe* is that it tends to occur in thick clots: of its seventy occurrences, forty-five (a little short of two-thirds) appear in less than one-fourth of the chapters of the book. Moreover, the chapters in which *virtù* shows up with high frequency themselves form a couple of clusters: Chapters vi–viii, Chapters xii and xiii, and off alone at the very end, Chapter xxvi. We start with that last chapter and its famous appeal for union among Italians to end the barbarian domination, which “stinks in the nostrils of every man.” In that chapter half the time *virtù* is not the *virtù* of the prince but that of the Italian soldiers. It refers unmistakably to their fighting quality, their valor. The whole point of the chapter is that all Italy needs is a military leader as valiant—with as much *virtù*—as its soldiery, and that the time is propitious for such a leader to come forward. The next cluster to consider is the ten occurrences in Chapters xii and xiii. But those chapters deal with military problems specifically and exclusively. Probably

²² *Stato* appears 115 times, *virtù* and its adjectival and adverbial forms 70. The discrepancy is the more marked since, for Machiavelli, *stato* had no adjectival or adverbial forms.

²³ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Chap. xxv.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Chaps. ii, v, x, xviii, xx, xxii, xxiii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Chaps. ii, iii (*industria*), Chap. iii (*prudenzia*), Chap. ix (*astuzia*), Chap. viii (*scelleratezza*).

²⁶ For Latin, see Forcellini's *Lexicon* and Du Cange's *Glossarium*; for English, the *Oxford English Dictionary*; for French, the dictionaries of Godefroy and La Curne de St. Palaye.

in all ten occurrences, certainly in nine out of ten, *virtù* refers to soldierly qualities, sometimes of kinds of soldiers (auxiliaries), sometimes of peoples (the Venetians, the Romans, the Goths), and sometimes of military commanders.

And now as to the largest cluster of all: nearly two-fifths of the *virtùs* in *Il Principe* show up in Chapters VI–VIII,²⁷ that is, in about one-eighth of the chapters and one-sixth of the book. It is this section above all that has provided the material for the more elaborate fantasies that have enveloped *Il Principe*. To put these chapters in perspective, they treat of new principalities, one of the five types into which Machiavelli divides *principati*: hereditary, mixed, new, ecclesiastical, civil. To get hold of *lo stato*, of what was politically up for grabs in a country, a new prince had to have an army of his own or someone else's, or craft, or villainy, or luck (*fortuna*), or *virtù*, or some combination of these. But once having acquired a *stato* the only secure way to keep it was with an army of one's own and with *virtù*, that is the capacities and qualities, the valor or prowess, needed to keep the *stato* and command the army. If a prince had "lucked" into rule or got there by using someone else's army, then he had particular need of *virtù* to hack through the difficulties of holding onto a *stato* so acquired. Thus with Savonarola in mind, who had the *stato* of Florence in hand but for lack of prowess and an army lost it, Machiavelli says contemptuously "profeti disarmati ruinorno" (prophets without arms go down in ruin).²⁸ This seems to be about the residue of the *mystique* of *virtù* so dear to the heart of Machiavelli worshipers of a later day. *Virtù* usually refers to that cluster of qualities which makes a military commander successful, whether on the offensive—taking—or on the defensive—keeping. This is not, however, quite all that needs to be said about *virtù* in *Il Principe*.

Whatever else it may be, *Il Principe* is a book written early in the sixteenth century about ruling. In that age men who wrote such books always instructed the ruler on the *virtus* or *virtutes*, or the *vertu* or *vertus*, or the virtue or virtues, or the *virtù* he ought to have. In these treatises there is no disharmony between the significances of *virtù*. In a military or political context *virtù* is still suffused with the aura of moral qualities or goodness, and it recurs again and again in a clearly moral sense in the wearisome lists of virtues that the prince is admonished to possess himself of. In *Il Principe*, however, *virtù* appears unmistakably and unambiguously in the sense of the moral qualities and personal goodness of the ruler only thrice,²⁹ that is, once

²⁷ Twenty-seven occurrences equaling 38 per cent.

²⁸ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Chap. vii.

²⁹ Once *ibid.*, Chap. xv, twice *ibid.*, Chap. xvi.

out of every twenty-three times that Machiavelli uses the term. The disjunction of *virtù* in the sense of moral qualities from *virtù* in its other senses is sharp and decisive; there is no continuity or overlay between the former sense and the others. The way in which Machiavelli marks the disjunction is especially significant. In effect when he talks of the *virtù* that a prince needs if he is to hold onto a *stato*, or get more of it, or not lose it, he is never talking about moral virtues or goodness. And this is evident from the fact that on each of *virtù*'s rare appearances in this very common sense of moral qualities, it is accompanied by an admonition to the prince that for his own good he had better avoid it or by the observation that only a lucky prince can get away with it, while without *virtù* in the other sense a prince cannot hold a new *stato*, no matter how he acquires it. In thus driving a wedge between the *virtù* the prince could not get along without and the *virtù* he could not get along with, Machiavelli did more than strain the contemporary fabric of political imperatives; he contemptuously swept much of it aside as useless for the guidance of human action.

And now we can answer our question about the magnetic pull of *lo stato*. In *Il Principe*, Machiavelli's preoccupation with how to acquire *lo stato*, how to keep it, hold it, and avoid losing it has violently modified the accustomed orbit of *virtù* in the political universe. Not only has half that orbit disappeared, but it is the half that then lay and still lies in the realm of universal ethical imperatives. The impulses to which *virtù* responds in *Il Principe* emanate from *lo stato* and the military and political means necessary to its appropriation and exploitation.

Of all value-bearing modifiers the most general and all-encompassing are the family, good-well, bad-ill, or in Italian, *buono-bene, malo-male*. One would expect the sort of magnetic force that *stato* exercised on *virtù* also to affect this wide-span group of words in *Il Principe*. Again a mere listing of denotation proves useless. The whole gamut of denotations is there from the neutral emphatic function of denoting "really" or "indeed"³⁰ to the notion of a universal good, *bene alla università delle uomini*.³¹ It is when we try to find out who the good in *Il Principe* is good for and who the ill is ill for that we note a replication of that somewhat terrifying shift in the object of words of ethical specification which we have already found in *virtù*. The good refers to the common good or general welfare twice and to what we might call civic goodness or merit five times. In contrast forty-three times what is good or bad is simply good or bad for the prince, to his advantage

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Chap. xvi.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Chap. xxvi.

or to his disadvantage. What was to his advantage and therefore good was to be able to acquire a *stato*, or more *stato* (*più stato*), to build it, to keep it, to defend it, to occupy it, possess it, seize it, take it. What was disadvantageous and therefore bad was to lose *stato*, have it taken away. In these instances to ask whether what the prince did was good or bad for anyone else—the people, say, or even the state in its present-day sense—is a mere irrelevance. When Machiavelli capitulated to his own need to *ragionare dello stato* in *Il Principe*, he was not concerned to “talk sensibly” about what was good or bad for anyone but the prince.

Buono-bene-malo-male also appear in the sense of “morally right” or “morally wrong” in *Il Principe*. And here their verbal orbit is precisely symmetrical with that of *virtù*. In almost every instance they appear in this sense only when Machiavelli is taking pains to point out that to get *stato* and keep or increase it a prince must look as good as he can and be as bad as he needs. By its magnetic force *stato* has here altered the orbit of the most ordinary of all words used for discriminating between right and wrong.

In the light of the foregoing examination of some of the operations Machiavelli performed on the loom of language in *Il Principe*, it seems to me that the conclusion I arrived at some years ago when I merely considered *lo stato* holds up fairly well. “In *Il Principe* there is no justification for the relation of the prince to *lo stato*. There can be none because *lo stato* is not a matrix of values, a body politic; it is an instrument of exploitation, the mechanism the prince uses to get what he wants. . . . If the prince exploits *lo stato* with astuteness he will keep his grip on *lo stato* and even tighten it, and will be glorified as a man of honor and praised by everyone, for, as Machiavelli says in the climactic sentences of *Il Principe*, the mob is always gulled by appearances and by the way things work out, and the mob is all there is in the world. So *si guarda al fino*, take heed of the result. The result is political success or failure. It is not right to succeed, it is not wrong to fail. It is merely success to succeed, and failure to fail. Right is not might, might is not right; might is might, and that is what *Il Principe* is about. As to right—any kind of right of the individual or of the state—that is not really what *Il Principe* is about.”³²

The relation of *Il Principe* to the fabric of political imperatives of Machiavelli’s own day should by now be evident enough: it makes a shambles of it.

In England, shortly after Machiavelli wrote *Il Principe*, another worker

³² Hexter, “*Il principe*,” 134.

at the loom of language, Thomas More, dealt in a very peculiar way with the fabric of imperatives of his day in his greatest book, *Utopia*. His native land, which stood at the focus of More's vision and experience when he wrote *Utopia*, was one of those *stati hereditari*³³ that did not evoke Machiavelli's interest because by a rapid but inaccurate reading of the past in the light of the present he had concluded that they were easy to hold. Since in about 1514 he was getting ready to write his history of the reign of Richard III,³⁴ and since like most of his contemporaries in his native land he saw his own times against the background of the bloody chronicle of English kings in the fifteenth century, More knew better than that. Nevertheless he wrote *Utopia* with his mind fixed on his own land in his own time, and in the second decade of the sixteenth century England was not disturbed by the sort of political upheaval that was the milieu of *Il Principe* and that confirmed and strengthened Machiavelli's obsession with *lo stato*. What concerned More was not *lo stato* but, as the full title of *Utopia* indicated, the *status reipublicae*.³⁵ Between Machiavelli's *stato* and More's *status* the connection is wholly etymological. More was impelled to write *Utopia* by "the state of the nation," as we might say, or perhaps better, by the "condition of the commonweal" of England and Christendom. When he wrote of the traits that in the minds of ordinary men constituted the true worth of commonweals, he produced curious effects on the loom of language. He did so again by his way of using some of the terms ordinarily used to designate the masters of the commonwealth of England and of Christendom. Indeed because of an oddity of language, which reflects an oddity of contemporary thought, those latter terms are not, as we shall see, readily separable from the then current common notion of true worth.

These traces in words of the relation between *Utopia* and the fabric of imperatives in More's milieu when he wrote his work are easier to make out than those which Machiavelli left in the language of *Il Principe*. More did not cut away a large part of the range that a motif word had in his own day and then omit to extend that word to the range which it has today, as Machiavelli did with *lo stato*. What he did was take a cluster of words that gave a particular character to an important sector of the fabric of imperatives in his day and reverse the signs on them. From pluses he turned them into minuses; from honorific terms he transformed them into pejorative

³³ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Chap. II.

³⁴ *The History of King Richard III* (New Haven, Conn., 1963), Volume II of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Sylvester, lxiii-lxv.

³⁵ Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. J. H. Lupton (Oxford, Eng., 1895), facing page lxxvi, *De Optimo Reip. Statu deque nova insula Utopia libellus vero aureus*

ones. Thus, there is no more honorable (*magis honorificum*) source of profit to the king, according to More, than penalties for disobeying laws long unenforced and forgotten "since they have the look of justice about them."³⁶ When it is offended, the brightest manifestation of earthly power, majesty (*majestas*), even the majesty of the highest temporal dignitary, the Holy Roman Emperor, can be salved with gold.³⁷ Elegance and splendor are disgraceful, the vain show of a set of foolish popinjays.³⁸ *Gloria* is *ostentatio*, ostentation.³⁹ At worst, when it is the satisfaction a ruler derives from acquiring and holding a land other than his own, it is *gloriola*,⁴⁰ petty self-satisfaction. Majesty, splendor, glory, honor—these are attributes of God or what men owe Him. But in *Utopia* they are what men with power and riches seek and demand for themselves merely as their due for possessing power and riches. They are the things of God that a host of petty Caesars claim and force men to render unto them. And in demanding such things the rulers of the earth subvert their meaning, making them literally preposterous.

More striking than the foregoing is the treatment *nobilis* and *generosus* received in *Utopia*. These two words were tightly keyed into the whole image of the cosmos by means of which for centuries most men who thought about such matters at all arrayed and ordered vast tracts of their experience and provided them with ostensibly rational meaning. That image had two dimensions. The first dimension was the "great chain of being," the conception that in His outflow of creative love God left uncreated no kind of thing from the insensate gross earth at the bottom to the highest rational spirits, the angels, at the top.⁴¹ The cosmos then was scaled from top to bottom, from highest to lowest, from best to least good; it was shot through with a conception of graded worth. The other dimension was the conception of correspondences.⁴² The best-known correspondences perhaps are those among the human body, the body of the family, the body politic, and the body, so to speak, of the cosmos itself, with the head, the father, the king, and the sun paramount in each. Parallels ran horizontally between corresponding levels of each genus of entities. The effect, it would seem, of this mode of perception would be to diminish precision and clarity of specific observation, at once to enrich and becloud the imagination, and to impart

³⁶ *Ibid.* (References hereafter are to Lupton's edition. Except when otherwise indicated, however, translations are modified in the light of the forthcoming Yale edition of *Utopia* referred to above.)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 196, 178-79.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴¹ Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), esp. 45-51, 67-80.

⁴² E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, 1952), 77-93.

to certain words a massiveness of connotation and of implication of worth or merit that we can only with difficulty grasp.

Nobilis, *generosus*, and their equivalents in the various languages of Europe were words possessing this massive quality in a pre-eminent degree. They were indicators of high status in a world where status was a fundamental assumption rather than a recent discovery of sociologists. They were also symbols of merit, and through the process of correspondences the notion of merit was firmly fixed to the notion of status. There were noble men and base men as there were noble metals and base metals. Scarcely a half year before Thomas More began to write *Utopia*, a French contemporary gave perfect and naïve expression to this cultural stereotype, expression the more notable because the author was not otherwise a particularly naïve man. In *La Monarchie de France* Claude Seyssel discusses the favor the crown owed to the noblesse over the other orders of society. Other things being equal or perhaps just a trifle less than equal, Seyssel justifies that favor because the nobility is more *digne*, more worthy than the well-to-do or the common people and because "ils sont de meilleur étoffe" (they are made of better stuff).⁴³ This, he says, is as reason would have it. Obviously he identifies reason with the whole climate of opinion or spiritual syndrome created by the juncture of the great chain of being with the parallel ladders of correspondence. Under such circumstances to change the signs on *generosus* and *nobilis* implies more than a downgrading of a segment of the social hierarchy; it means the displacement of a whole sector of the fabric of imperatives.

Men who were charged with or had assumed responsibility for the care of the fabric of imperatives in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance made much of the noble and the gentle in their word spinning. The older tradition excoriated the lives lived by nobles and gentlemen in the degenerate days of the current excoriator. This denunciation was a prelude to an appeal to the noble and gentle to return to the ancient or original or natural virtues of their order, forgotten or abandoned in the present degenerate age. The more recent literary ploy, a favorite of the humanist, was to raise the question of what constituted true nobility. With a degree of consensus unusual among them the humanists tended to agree that being noble was not a matter of long lineage, wealth, or great ancestry; it was rather a matter of being a man of true excellence. On examination it turns out, not too surprisingly, that the humanists' man of true excellence bears a marked likeness to the humanist ego ideal. If More had used *nobilis* or *generosus* in either of these

⁴³ Claude Seyssel, *La Monarchie de France*, ed. Jacques Poujol (Paris, 1961), 122-23.

ways in *Utopia*, he would have fallen into one of two well-known literary stereotypes: that of the “defections of the estates,”⁴⁴ standard in medieval social polemics, or that of the “debate on true nobility,”⁴⁵ standard in the self-serving effusions of humanists.

In fact he did neither. In the first place *generosus* and *nobilis* never appear in a favorable context when More is referring to the cosmopolitan military elite, the aristocracy of his own day. They occur seventeen times with pejorative overtones, thrice with doubtful connotation, and just once with honorific implications.⁴⁶ And that once, *generosus* is used to describe the stoutheartedness of the citizen militia of Utopia in language that would have given joy to Machiavelli.⁴⁷

What More was up to is clear from his speech; it is yet clearer from his silence, especially his silence in the second part of *Utopia* where he describes the best ordering of a commonweal or civil society. For in that society there are no “true” nobles or “true” gentlemen; there are no *nobiles* or *generosi* at all; there are only citizens. This is curious enough, most eccentric indeed with respect to that large sector of the current fabric of imperatives which assimilated excellence to status by blanketing both with the terms *nobilis* and *generosus*. Yet the language of Part II of *Utopia* is even more revealing and more curious if one looks at it from the vantage point provided by the English translation of the book that Ralph Robinson made in the 1550’s.

Robinson lightly sprinkled Part II of that translation with the adjectives “gentle” and its cognates used in an honorific sense comports with the contemporary fabric of imperatives. When one looks at the identical places in More’s Latin original for the equivalent word *generosus* and its cognates, however, one does not find them. More had used entirely different words to designate the qualities he was praising. Thus Robinson says that King Utopus brought his new subjects to “humanity and civil gentleness,” where

⁴⁴ Ruth Mohl, *The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (New York, 1933), 341–66.

⁴⁵ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named the Governour*, ed. H. H. S. Crofts (2 vols., London, 1880), II, 26–38, and references in footnotes there.

⁴⁶ More, *Utopia*, ed. Lupton, *passim*.

	<i>Nobilis</i>	<i>Generosus</i>
honorific		page 258
doubtful	pages 178, 181	page 37
pejorative	pages 45, 52, 56, 146, 196, 197 (2), 251, 308	pages 47 (2), 50 (2), 52, 56, 146, 302
neutral		page 300

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

More had written *cultus humanitatisque perduxit*.⁴⁸ He described clemency as "the gentlest affection of our nature," but More had called it *humanissimum naturae nostrae affectum*.⁴⁹ Where Robinson translates, "Nature biddeth thee to be good and gentle to other[s but] she commandeth thee not to be cruel and ungentle to thyself," we find *bonus* and *inclementem* in More's Latin, but we find no equivalent at all for "gentle" and "ungentle."⁵⁰ A little later Robinson simply put "gently" where More put *clementer*,⁵¹ and then wrote "gently and favorably" where More only had *indulgenter*.⁵² Again where More writes of a *humanitatis ac benignitatis officium*, Robinson translates "a point of humanity and gentleness."⁵³ Thus one way or another Robinson equated gentility with humanity, goodness, clemency, kindliness, and benignity. More, however, had done nothing of the sort. There were abundant humanity, goodness, clemency, kindliness, and benignity in the utopian commonwealth, but More never linked any of these traits with gentility or nobility, with gentlemen or noblemen. The ascription of these qualities to ordinary men who worked with their hands in town and country ran counter to one of the most persistent of all linguistic phenomena of the English language, the movement of terms from the point where they simply designated low status or mere youth to the point where they designated some sort of moral depravity or viciousness. The carl, or "ordinary guy," became a churl, while unpleasant conduct became "churlish"; the knave, started as a young boy (a *knabe*), became a servant, and thence a rascal; the boor began as a farmer and became a gross lout; the villain came to a worse ending still, just because he stayed down on the farm working for the owner of the villa.

In one place Robinson took action the reverse of that which we have caught him in above. More had charged *nobilis*, *aurifex*, and *foenerator*, who did nothing or did ill to the commonwealth, with the injustice of living idly while the true supporters of society—laborers, carters, carpenters, and farmers—worked like beasts of burden. Robinson carries the charge home to the "rich goldsmith" and the "usurer," but he leaves the nobleman out.⁵⁴ The asynchronous silence of More's Latin and Robinson's English in these instances is perhaps even more significant than the tone of contempt with which the words *nobilis* and *generosus* so often ring when they do appear in

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 193. For further examples, see pages 168, 212, 220.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 301. There is another possible instance of the same thing, only involving *generosus* on page 47.

the Latin original. A view of the world that rejected the assimilation of the good to the noble and the gentle was alien to Robinson, as it was to most articulate men in the sixteenth century. He translated Part II of *Utopia*, but the idea behind it did not fully penetrate his consciousness. In his translation, quite unconsciously one suspects, he set the loom of language to work to repair the holes More had torn into the current fabric of imperatives. What was the import of that rending?

When I consider . . . the condition of all commonwealths flourishing anywhere in the world today so help me God, I can see nothing but a kind of conspiracy of the rich aiming at their own interests under the name of the commonwealth. They devise every available way first to keep without fear whatever they have amassed . . . and second to buy as cheap as possible and exploit the labor of the poor. These become law just as soon as the rich have decreed their observance in the name of the public—that is in the name of the poor, too!⁵⁵

In the eyes of Thomas More, who had envisaged, he believed, the conditions for the right ordering of a commonwealth the very structure of the princely commonwealths of Europe is an enormous fraud perpetrated by the rich and powerful on the poor and weak. In saying this in *Utopia*, More was impelled to set on some quite common words values opposite to those they bore among most of his contemporaries.

The immediate implication of our examination of the loom of language as it appeared in Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and More's *Utopia* is that in the years just before the Reformation Machiavelli in *Il Principe* and More in *Utopia* did indeed wreak strange havoc on the fabric of imperatives. Moreover, although they were men whose temperaments and convictions stood far apart, they wrought a similar sort of havoc in overlapping though not identical areas of the fabric. In effect they treated the language of politics each in a different way, yet each in such a way as to make clear their view that the current imperatives of politics were an exploitative swindle by means of which the possessors of power grabbed chunks of it from one another and withheld it and its advantages from those who did not possess it. No more for the English writer than for the Italian was the existing order of the human community a true *vinculum juris*, a bond of rightful law, and as long as that order remained what it was, talk about political obligation, which has been described as the central problem of politics,⁵⁶ could have very little meaning.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 303–304.

⁵⁶ Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves, *Medieval Contributions to Political Thought* (Oxford, Eng., 1939), 3.

Our detailed inquiry into the way Machiavelli and More used a few words in *Il Principe* and *Utopia* may permit the following tentative and general conclusions about the possibilities latent in this kind of investigation.

A careful examination of the loom of language can provide solid evidence about shifts in the fabric of imperatives at least in the minds of particular writers at certain points in their lives.

The changes in words that provide this evidence vary in kind. They may be grossly conspicuous word substitutions. They may be curtailments in the current senses of a word or reversals in its value. Or they may show themselves in a word's syntactical posture and in the company it keeps with other words.

This is a monitory point, and one only hinted at in the preceding paper. The kind of probing here illustrated should not lead to indulgence in precipitate statements about changes in the entire climate of opinion of a society, statements made in haste to be repented at leisure. The relation between the sort of language shifts we have described and changes in the climate of opinion are the appropriate subject not for assumption but for painstaking investigation.⁵⁷

Most historians tend to be impatient, perhaps too quickly impatient, with discussions of the general methodological implications and possibilities of a mode of historical investigation. They prefer to hear in detail what follows in a particular case. What follows in the particular case of the foregoing study of the language of *Il Principe* and *Utopia*? In relation to the fabric of imperatives both Machiavelli and More were of the group of men we have described as maintenance specialists. The effect of their books, however, was

⁵⁷ How these very tentative remarks will strike investigators working in relevant and related areas of the linguistic sciences and how this investigation relates to those conducted in those sciences, I do not know. I was warned by the reader of an early draft of this paper that it would appear naïve if it made no reference to parallel studies by students of historical linguistics. Because, however, I had read no such works, nor indeed any work at all on linguistics, when I wrote the paper, the warning has not been heeded. Since then, I have studied the subject a bit, but a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, especially dangerous to him who is rash enough to display it before those who possess a great deal of it; thus my recently acquired dim light will remain judiciously hidden under a bushel. One particular point about method, however, may appropriately be made. The metaphor of the loom of language and the fabric of imperatives is strictly *ad hoc*, for the particular task to which this paper addresses itself, and it is not fully elaborated. It may or may not be worth such elaboration, and it may overlap or even duplicate kinds of concepts or imagery already used in linguistics. In the various areas of human inquiry there are times for conceptual rigor and times for a certain imaginative looseness, times when premature precision may reduce a whole area to sterility. My little reading has persuaded me that the area of linguistics on which this paper touches is of the latter kind. An undue zeal for scientific rigor in hypothesizing in that area at this point might seriously hamper investigation, as the attempt to subject them to the rigor of Galilean mechanics hampered the life sciences in the seventeenth century. This of course in no way should license any but the most meticulous accuracy in the testing and use of *historical* data.

not to reinforce, to mend, or to adjust that part of the fabric which was their immediate concern; it was to destroy it. In very different ways the language of *Il Principe* and that of *Utopia* express a common sense of the condition of things and a common spiritual malaise. They express alienation. This alienation is of course in some measure personal to Machiavelli and More, but in their view their personal alienation was but an image of alienation, cleavage, disjunction in the world they lived in. For Machiavelli that disjunction lay between the fabric of political imperatives and the conditions of effective political action. For fools who took them seriously such imperatives lit the way to death or defeat. For the shrewd and bold, who used them to gull the mob, they were means to get, hold, or increase *stato*—whatever prizes were about for the taking in the region of politics.⁵⁸ They certainly did not provide a viable set of rules to give legitimate order to and guide men in their doings in that region. In sum they were a swindle; the language of *Il Principe* makes it clear enough that Machiavelli considered them a swindle. In the same way the language of *Utopia* makes it clear that More regarded the imperatives supposed to legitimate the position of those who dominated the social order in his world a swindle. It might be argued that the language of More and Machiavelli betrays an alienation from the areas of the contemporary fabric of imperatives to which it relates more radical than that of Luther to the religious imperatives of the same age.

A year after the publication of *Utopia*, however, Luther's alienation set in train the events that shortly wrought a violent, long, and shattering upheaval—a great revolution—in the Western world. What did the alienations of Machiavelli and More wreak? What followed directly from their onslaughts on the fabric of imperatives? Nothing or almost nothing. And for this there was good reason. To believe *Il Principe*, men must believe that the repository of the ultimate earthly power to which they are subject is merely the passive prize of a game in which they may take part or not as they will. They must also believe that unless they are willing to carry a frightful handicap they can only play the game by cutting clear away from the fabric of imperatives. Such a view was too radical, the alienation it embodied too absolute to be acceptable to Machiavelli's contemporaries; indeed as is evident in certain chapters of the *Discorsi*, it was too radical for Machiavelli himself.⁵⁹ More's alienation as expressed and discussed in *Utopia* was even larger in its scope than Machiavelli's, involving a greater area of the fabric of imperatives, encompassing the whole *status reipublicae*, or, as we would say, the entire

⁵⁸ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Chap. xviii.

⁵⁹ Esp. *id.*, *Discorsi*, Bk. I, Chaps. ix, x.

political, economic, and social order. Nor was More ready to let it go at that, and like Machiavelli simply to investigate the qualities and stratagems useful for the exploitation of the chances for aggrandizement which that order and its fraudulent fabric of imperatives made available. Instead More presented an alternative fabric of imperatives, an *optimus status reipublicae*, in which the means of alienation in his own society—money, private property, inequality, and the fabric of imperatives that support them and that they support—would not exist. In such a commonweal his own alienation—he calls it a prison⁶⁰—would end, and so would the alienation—he calls it worse than bondage⁶¹—of almost all humankind. But how are men to pass from this world of alienation and bondage to that world of reconciliation and freedom? To this question More gives no answer, but only tells a tale of Utopus, a king who never was, who seventeen hundred years ago brought this blessed consummation to Utopia, a land that never was. *Utopia* is literally nowhere.⁶²

For more than three hundred years *Il Principe* and *Utopia*, two of the most radical repudiations and two of the most drastic onslaughts on the fabric of imperatives of Western men, two of the most powerful images of the alienation which that fabric engendered, stood isolated and separated at the threshold of the modern age. Separated because no imagination emerged powerful enough to bind together and reduce to a mutual coherence the nightmare of the Florentine official and the daydream of the English humanist.

Only in the 1830's and 1840's did some Europeans, new prophets of a new age, grasp the possibilities latent in the visions of Machiavelli and More. Property was theft; the state was the supreme instrument of exploitation. Together they brought about that alienation of man from his true nature which was the sum of human history. But if the state was merely a means of exploitation, a weapon in the warfare which those who had forever waged against those who had not, then it was for the exploited and alienated to seize the weapon and destroy it or use it to destroy the means of their alienation: private ownership and the system of buying and selling for money which maintained it. By means appropriate to that totally alienated man, Machiavelli's prince, the totally alienated class, the exploited and dispossessed, were to grasp *lo stato*, and through the exploitation of the exploiter, uproot alienation itself, thereby clearing the way for the restoration of men to the

⁶⁰ Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. P. A. Allen et al. (12 vols., Oxford, Eng., 1906-58), II, no. 499, line 60.

⁶¹ More, *Utopia*, ed. Lupton, 141.

⁶² "Nowhere" (Lat. *Nusquam*) is, of course, the meaning of the Greek name for the island—Utopia.

family of man, the classless society, utopia. The link between the Machiavelian actuality and the utopian dream was not a mythical King Utopus; it was class war, seizure of power, revolution.⁶³ But in the second decade of the sixteenth century, the secular *kairos*, the ripeness of time, which was to bring into the arena of action the alienation for which Machiavelli and More in their divergent ways found words, was hundreds of years off. In the meantime *Il Principe* and *Utopia* retained a high level of intellectual visibility; people did not forget them. But men have ways of dealing with inconvenient, wide-eyed, small boys who shout in the street, "The Emperor is wearing no clothes!" They called *Il Principe* wicked and *Utopia* a mere fantasy. And this may have been as sensible a way of dealing with them as any. At least, since men a hundred-odd years ago discovered means of fusing the visions these little books contained, nothing has happened that demands that we believe otherwise.

⁶³ This potpourri of conceptions, intentionally not sorted out or made precise here, was concocted in the milieu of Paris between 1840, the publication date of Pierre Proudhon's *What Is Property?* and 1848, that of the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For brief but excellent accounts, see Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx* (London, 1939), 80-120, and Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge, Eng., 1961), 95-161.