

# FIDEL CASTRO: A MACHIAVELLIAN PRINCE?<sup>1</sup>

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## *1. Introduction: Machiavelli and Castro*

This is an exploratory essay on whether Fidel Castro qualifies as a Machiavellian prince. Much of *The Prince* deals with the problem of how a man can raise himself from private fortune or even obscure and abject origins to a position of undisputed political primacy as conqueror or founder of a new state or regime. Clearly, Fidel Castro accomplished that feat. The questions that concern us here are the following: Can Castro's success be credited to Machiavellian methods in all or most important respects? Did he violate any of Machiavelli's maxims? Since, as we shall see, although abiding by most precepts, he disregarded several, and scorned one particularly important admonition, what does that tell us about Machiavellism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the kind of "prince" Fidel Castro is?

Machiavelli and Castro make a good match. Fidel Castro's spectacular rise from relatively obscure origins in Cuba's most remote province to absolute ruler of the Island and, moreover, someone to be reckoned with or at least paid significant attention to by the great powers of the world, an achievement out of all proportion to the country's size or wealth, is one of the most remarkable political stories in the history of Latin America, a tale inspiring admiration in some quarters and indignation in others. For his part, Niccolò Machiavelli, a man of modest family background who managed to wield but a limited amount of power in an appointive position in the Florentine Republic before his forced retirement after the Medicis regained control of the city in 1512, a most bitter change of fortune for a man who wanted more than anything else to be entrusted with public responsibilities, consoled himself with writing what is at once the most famous and the most infamous book on politics ever written (Mansfield 1998, vii; Crocker 1963, ix). Both having risen from obscurity to fame and infamy alike, each a revolutionary in his own right, one as a practitioner and the other as a theoretician of a politics of maximum leadership, Castro and Machiavelli complement one another. Suggestively, among the works kept in Castro's small hut at his guerrilla camp in the *Sierra Maestra* in 1958 was a copy of *The Prince* (Quirk 1993, 71).<sup>1</sup>

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This paper surveys Machiavelli's treatise with interpretive and empirical ends in mind. That is, Machiavelli's model is used as an aid to understanding how Fidel Castro became Cuba's "revolutionary prince" (Geyer 1991). The analysis concentrates on the period encompassing the road to power and its early consolidation because, as we shall see, Machiavelli argues that self-made princes "acquire their principality with difficulty but hold it with ease" (Mansfield, 23). Reciprocally, Castro's *modus operandi* is scanned for information helpful for empirically assessing several of Machiavelli's most important generalizations about what a ruler must do in order to make himself master of a state. These generalizations are gleaned primarily from *The Prince*<sup>2</sup> although a few correlative observations are extracted from two other works: *The Discourses* and *The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca* (henceforth *Castruccio*). On Fidel Castro I have relied for the most part on Robert Quirk's biography (1993), although other sources are also cited.

I reiterate that this is an exploratory study. Throughout the paper, *lacunae* of uncertainty or doubt regarding the most appropriate interpretation of or the actual facts of the case are identified, if nothing else to lay down markers around areas worthy of future investigation. It is hoped that those who know a lot more about either Machiavelli or Fidel Castro, and their number is no doubt embarrassingly large, will fill these gaps and correct all errors or, better still, do greater justice to the topic by taking it up themselves.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. *A Profile of the Machiavellian Prince*

No single interpretation or simple summary of Machiavelli's notorious tract is likely to satisfy all readers. The one offered here is admittedly selective. It abstracts from *The Prince* what is essential to my purpose, occasionally supplementing it with related passages found in *The Discourses* and *Castruccio*. This section begins with the qualities of the man who would be prince, and proceeds successively to examine the opportunities that enable him to seize control of a state and the methods required for achieving mastery over it.

Machiavelli dedicated *The Prince*, which he completed in 1513, to "His Magnificence Lorenzo de' Medici" (Skinner and Price 1988, 3; henceforth S & P). A member of an influential family of bankers, princes, and popes, Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, was at the time absentee ruler of Florence. By proffering his "small volume" to one of the Medicis, Machiavelli was currying favor with the very family responsible for quashing the liberty of his homeland and forcing his retirement (not to mention his arrest and torture)<sup>4</sup> in the hope that they would restore him to a position of public service. He did not succeed.

That Machiavelli made a "gift" of *The Prince* to a duke and sought the good graces of a noble family in a failed bid to return to public life should not hide the fact that he did not think that an aristocratic origin is necessary to a would-be prince. An obscure or even shameful origin is no impediment, provided the man "have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline," for mastery of this craft

“enables men of private fortune to rise” to princely rank (Mansfield, 58). He offers several examples, including Agathocles the Sicilian, a former porter; Hiero of Syracuse, illegitimate son of a nobleman, who pursued a military career; and Francesco Sforza, a former mercenary, who made himself Duke of Milan. Also, in the opening lines of *Castruccio*, Machiavelli makes the following observation.

Those who think about it . . . are amazed to find that all men, or the majority of them, who have accomplished great deeds in this world, and who have been outstanding among the men of their day, have both in their origins and their birth been humble and obscure, or have been afflicted by Fortune in an extraordinary manner. Because all of them have either been exposed to wild beasts or have had such base parents that, being ashamed of them, they have made themselves sons of Jupiter or some other god. . . .  
(Bondanella and Musa 1979, 519-520--henceforth B&M)

Not a noble birth, then, but a certain nobility of spirit, aided by the goddess of fate, enables a man to achieve extraordinary things.

Many of the personal qualities that Machiavelli prizes in a would-be prince are subsumed under the multi-purpose term *virtú*, which depending on context is variously translated to mean such things as ability, competence, ingenuity, or skill; audacity, boldness, courage, impetuosity, temerity, or valor; and drive, energy, ferocity, spiritedness, or strength. The other, indispensable quality is *prudenzia* which, again depending on context, is translated as cleverness, far-sightedness, intelligence, judgement, sagacity, shrewdness, or wisdom.<sup>5</sup> A would-be prince displays these qualities from an early age, but they are cultivated and refined by the study and practice of military matters and the reading of history. A prince should diligently train for war, learning all he can about geography and terrain and tempering his men with hunting and field exercises. Also, he should study the biographies of great leaders in order “to imitate some eminent man, who himself set out to imitate some predecessor of his who was considered worthy of praise and glory, always taking his deeds and actions as a model for himself, as it is said that Alexander the Great imitated Achilles, Caesar imitated Alexander, and Scipio imitated Cyrus” (S&P, 53).

What relation there is in Machiavelli’s mind between *virtú* and *prudenzia*, on the one hand, and, on the other, the classic or Christian understanding of ethics, morality, and the virtues is a contested question. The term Machiavellian was coined by those who interpret the main message of *The Prince* to be that there is no necessary relation between the two, that the former may or should exist independently of the latter, or even transcend it.<sup>6</sup>

Be that as it may, without the attributes designated by *virtú* and *prudenzia* no man can become prince or, if he receives a state as a legacy or gift, preserve it for any period of time. But, although necessary conditions, these qualities are not sufficient for princely success. As intimated above, a man needs, in addition, to be favored or at least not rejected by what the Florentine calls *fortuna*. Machiavelli meant several things by this term, but the ones that most

concern us here are the following: “a force or agent which intervenes in human affairs” and luck, whether good or bad, i.e., “events or actions (especially those that are unforeseen) that affect us, either favourably or unfavourably, but which are often beyond our control.” Natural forces, such as the weather, may randomly work for or against the prince’s plans. Similarly, other people “may (knowingly or unwittingly) promote or thwart our plans; they may oppose or attack us, show us favour, help us militarily or in other ways. Such ‘interventions’ are often unexpected or unpredictable, and they may or may not continue. Enemies may be won over; friends or allies may either cease to favour us or become unable to help us” (S&P, 105).

Machiavelli anthropomorphizes *fortuna* as “a woman,” partial to the young and the impetuous, who “is arbiter of half our actions” (S&P, 87, 85). Without her in his corner, a man of sterling *virtú* and impeccable *prudenzia* will see his indefatigable efforts come to naught. This was the fate of Cesare Borgia, the Duke of Valentino, whose actions more than anyone else’s Machiavelli held up as an example worthy of emulation by any “new prince.” Although the Duke “had laid for himself great foundations for future power,” “his orders did not bring profit to him,” but “it was not his fault, because this arose from an extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune” (Mansfield, 27).

But, however important the role played by *fortuna* in the affairs of the world, Machiavelli was scornful of those who would let themselves “be governed by fate” (S&P, 84). For one thing, it was his contention that *fortuna* was sovereign over only half of our actions, the rest remaining under the control of men’s free will. Striving to owe as little as possible to luck, a would-be prince trusts only in his own *virtú* and resources. Like an engineer building dykes and dams to control a flood-prone river, a would-be prince takes every precaution against the vagaries of fortune. Neither does he count on the favors of others: his objectives are tailored to what he can accomplish with his own capabilities and no one else’s.

If one considers the careers of the most outstanding examples of self-made princes, namely “Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus and others of that stamp,” “it will be seen that they owed nothing to luck except the opportunity to shape the material into the form that seemed best to them. If they had lacked the opportunity, the strength of their spirit would have been sapped; if they had lacked ability, the opportunity would have been wasted” (S&P, 20). What these exemplars have in common is that they were outstanding innovators, conquerors or founders of new states or regimes, whether biblical, mythological, or legendary. It was their exceptional *virtú* that prompted them to seize the opportunities that luck presented to them in order to introduce a new political order. Moses found his people enslaved in Egypt; Romulus was exposed at Alba; Theseus found the Athenians dispersed; and Cyrus discerned that the Persians were unhappy under Median rule and that the Medes themselves had been rendered weak by a long peace. “These opportunities, then, permitted these men to be successful, and their surpassing abilities enabled them to recognise and grasp these opportunities; the outcome was that their own countries were ennobled and flourished greatly” (S&P, 20).

But they had to take those opportunities by force.<sup>7</sup> This is because “taking the initiative in introducing a new form of government is very difficult and dangerous, and unlikely to

succeed.” Persuasion will accomplish nothing, because those who “profit from the old order” will attack the innovator while potential beneficiaries of the incipient regime will lend him only lukewarm support, partly from skepticism about the feasibility of innovations and partly from fear of reprisals from reactionary factions. However, if founders have “sufficient forces to take the initiative, they rarely find themselves in difficulties. Consequently, all armed prophets succeed, whereas unarmed ones fail. This happens because, apart from the factors already mentioned, the people are fickle; it is easy to persuade them about something, but difficult to keep them persuaded. Hence, when they no longer believe in you and your schemes, you must be able to force them to believe.” But having braved danger, overcome difficulties, defeated enemies, and “extinguished those envious of their success,” great innovators have no difficulty holding on to their principalities, remaining “powerful, secure, honoured and successful” (S&P, 20-21).

Although “a less important example than the eminent ones already discussed,” Hiero of Syracuse is “worthy of mention in this context.” He, too, rose from private station to become ruler of his country. Apart from the opportunity, “his success owed nothing to luck. For when the Syracusans were in desperate straits, they chose him as their general; afterwards he was deservedly made their ruler. . . . He disbanded the old army and raised a new one; he abandoned the old alliances and formed new ones; and as soon as he possessed his own troops and had reliable allies he could build any edifice he wanted upon this foundation. Thus, it was very difficult for him to attain power, but not to keep it” (S&P, 22).

The would-be prince need not wait for opportunity to call on him, however: he can cunningly conjure it up himself. Agathocles the Sicilian, having risen through the ranks to become commander of the army, usurped control of the state in a stunning massacre: “One morning he assembled the people and the Senate of Syracuse as if he had to decide things pertinent to the republic. At a signal he had ordered, he had all the senators and the richest of the people killed by his soldiers. Once they were dead, he seized and held the principate of that city without any civil controversy.” Although Agathocles’ “infinite crimes” “do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men,” a review of “the actions and virtue of this man”<sup>8</sup> will show that he left little or nothing to chance (Mansfield, 34-35).

For a would-be prince, then, force is the indispensable resource. But not any force will do: it must be the prince’s own. Mercenaries or soldiers for hire are useless, and auxiliary troops, those provided by an ally, are dangerous and unreliable. Cesare Borgia’s initial conquests were made with mercenary and auxiliary troops. A quick study, he immediately discerned their liabilities and as soon as possible replaced them with home-grown troops loyal only to himself. Similarly, Hiero of Syracuse, “eliminated the old military and organized a new one,” having had the mercenaries “all cut to pieces.” The Biblical David abided by this principle, declining to employ Saul’s weapons in slaying Goliath. “In fine, the arms of others either fall off your back or weigh you down or hold you tight” (Mansfield, 25, 55).

However, force alone is not enough: it has to be complemented by fraud. A successful prince is one who has the astuteness necessary “to get around men’s brains” (Mansfield, 69). This is particularly true of a new prince. As Machiavelli declares in *The Discourses*:

I esteem it to be a very true thing that it rarely or never happens that men of small fortune come to great ranks without force and without fraud, although the rank that another has attained may be given or left by inheritance to them. Nor do I believe that force alone is ever found to be enough, but fraud alone will be found to be quite enough; as he will clearly see who will read the life of Philip of Macedon, that of Agathocles the Sicilian, and those of many others like them who from obscure or base fortune attained a kingdom or very great empires. Xenophon in his life of Cyrus shows this necessity to deceive, considering that the first expedition that he has Cyrus make against the king of Armenia is full of fraud, and that he makes him seize his kingdom through deception and not through force. And he does not conclude otherwise from this action than that it is necessary for a prince who wishes to do great things to learn to deceive. Besides this, he makes him deceive Cyaxares, king of the Medes, his maternal uncle, in several modes; without which fraud he shows that Cyrus could not have attained the greatness he came to. Nor do I believe that anyone placed in base fortune is ever found to attain great empire through open force alone and ingeniously, but it is done quite well through fraud alone, as Giovan Galeazzo did in taking away the state and empire of Lombardy from his uncle, Messer Bernabo. (Mansfield and Tarcov 1996, 155--henceforth M&T)<sup>9</sup>

The ability to dissemble enables a new prince to dispose of rivals one at a time, as Lucius Septimius Severus did. In 193 AD, following the murder of the emperor Pertinax by the praetorian guard and the elevation of Julianus to the throne, Severus rushed his army from Illyria to Rome on the pretext of avenging Pertinax. Once there, “the intimidated senate elected him emperor, and had Julianus killed.” However, Severus had to contend with two rivals, Nigrinus and Albinus, commanders of the Asian and Western armies, respectively.

Since Severus thought it would be dangerous to reveal his hostility to both men, he decided to attack only Nigrinus and to trick Albinus. Accordingly, he wrote to Albinus, saying that the senate had chosen him emperor, and that he wanted to share the office. And he sent Albinus the title of Caesar, saying that by decision of the senate Albinus should join him as co-emperor. Albinus thought that this was true. But when Severus had defeated and killed Nigrinus, and the eastern part of the Empire was calm, he returned to Rome and complained to the Senate that Albinus, showing little gratitude for the benefits he had received, had treacherously attempted to kill him, and that it was necessary to go and punish his ingratitude. Then Severus attacked Albinus in France, where he deprived him at once of his position and his life. (S&P, 69)

Treachery enables the new prince to draw dangerous enemies and malcontents into deadly traps. This is how Cesare Borgia dealt with the Orsinis, one of the powerful Roman factions who had turned against him. Resorting to “trickery” he “so cleverly concealed his intentions that the

Orsini leaders, through the person of Signor Paolo, became reconciled with him. The Duke [i.e., Borgia] treated Paolo very courteously and generously, giving him money, fine clothes and horses, in order to reassure him. Their naivety was such that it brought them to Senigallia, and into the hands of the Duke” who had them strangled (S&P, 25).

An almost identical example is given in the *Castruccio*. The powerful Poggio family had originally supported *Castruccio*, but coming to the conclusion that “it had not been rewarded according to its merits,” they conspired with other families to stir up a rebellion and drive him out of Lucca. One day when he was in a military expedition elsewhere they fell upon “Castruccio’s lieutenant in charge of justice and killed him.” They were about to incite a general rebellion when Stefano di Poggio, “a peace-loving old man who had taken no part in the conspiracy,” used his authority to compel them “to lay down their arms, offering himself as mediator between them and Castruccio in order to obtain their goals.” Returning to Lucca, Castruccio

placed his armed supporters in all the strategic positions. Stefano di Poggio, believing that Castruccio was under an obligation to him, went to find him and begged him on behalf of his family (but not on his own account, thinking that he needed no such mercy) to make allowances for youth and to remember the old friendship and the obligation owed to their [sic] family. To this Castruccio replied graciously and told him not to worry, saying that he was happier to see the disturbances quelled than he was angry over their beginning; and he asked Stefano to bring them all to him, saying that he thanked God for the opportunity to demonstrate his clemency and good will. When they had all come forward, trusting in the word of both Stefano and Castruccio, they were imprisoned and, together with Stefano, executed. (B&M, 529-530)

The adroit combination of force and fraud is the art of imitating “the fox and the lion, because the lion does not defend itself from snares and the fox does not defend itself from wolves. So one needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten the wolves. Those who stay simply with the lion do not understand this. . . .” (Mansfield, 69).

A new prince wanting to impose a tyrannical regime cannot do so without employing harsh methods. As Machiavelli puts it in the *Discourses*,

he who wishes to make an absolute power, which is called tyranny by [ancient] authors, should renew everything . . . .

[T]hat is, to make in cities new governments with new names, new authorities, new men; to make the rich poor, the poor rich . . . ; besides this, to build new cities, to take down those built, to exchange the inhabitants from one place to another; and, in sum, not to leave anything untouched in that province, so that there is no rank, no order, no state, no wealth there that he who holds it does not know it as from [the prince] (M&T, 61).

The “shrewd ruler” of an absolutist regime “must try to insure that his citizens, whatever the situation may be, will always be dependent on the government and on him; and then they will always be loyal to him” (S&P, 37).

Any ruler, but “especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since he is often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion.” Although he should “not depart from good, when possible,” he also needs to “know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity” (Mansfield, 70).

However, to be effective, cruelties have to be “well used. Those can be called well used (if it is permissible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can. Those cruelties are badly used which, though few in the beginning, rather grow with time than are eliminated” (Mansfield, 38). Relatedly, while it is desirable for a prince to be both loved and feared, “it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved. . . . For love is sustained by a bond of gratitude which, because men are excessively self-interested, is broken whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves. But fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective.” However, should it become “necessary to execute anyone, this should be done only if there is a proper justification and obvious reason” (S&P, 59).

The trouble the Poggi family caused Castruccio is representative of what a new prince can expect from many of his original supporters once he has seized control of the state.

. . . Since this matter is important, I do not want to fail to remind any ruler who has recently gained power through being favoured by the inhabitants that he should be well aware of the reasons why those who helped him to gain power acted as they did. If it was not from natural affection for him, but only because they were discontented with the previous government, it will be very difficult and troublesome to keep them friendly, because he will not be able to satisfy them. Considering the reason for this (in the light of instances drawn from ancient and modern history), it is clear that it is much easier to win over men who are hostile to him because they were content under the previous regime than it is to keep attached to him those who became friendly towards him and helped him to become ruler because they were disaffected. (S&P, 74-75)

Ironically, then, new rulers “have often found that men whom they had regarded with suspicion in the early stages of their rule prove more reliable and useful than those whom they had trusted at first” (S&P, 74).

If a new prince acquires office with the backing of his fellow citizens, his position will be more or less secure depending on whether this support rests primarily on “the great” or on the people.

He who comes to the principality with the aid of the great maintains himself with more difficulty than one who becomes prince with the aid of the people, because the former finds himself prince with many around him who appear to be his equals, and because of this he can neither command them nor manage them to suit himself. But he who arrives in the principality with popular support finds himself alone there, and around him has no one or very few who are not ready to obey. . . . The worst that a prince can expect from a hostile people is to be abandoned by them; but from the great, when they are hostile, he must fear not only being abandoned but also that they may come against him, for since there is more foresight and more astuteness in the great, they always move in time to save themselves, and they seek rank from those they hope will win. (Mansfield, 39-40)

It being difficult to maintain the great loyal to him, a new prince should seek the support of the people even at the expense of the great, but not the other way around. Of necessity he has to live with the same people, but “he can well do without the same great persons, since he can make and unmake them every day, and take away and give them reputation at his convenience” (Mansfield, 40). However, even as one favors the people it is not impossible to avoid totally alienating the great, “and wise princes have thought out with all diligence how not to make the great desperate and how to satisfy the people and keep them content, because this is one of the most important matters than concern a prince” (Mansfield, 74). He “should esteem the great, but not make himself hated by the people” (Mansfield, 75).

Keeping the people content is relatively easy “since they want only not to be oppressed” (S&P, 36). All the prince need do is respect the women and refrain from taking the property of his subjects by keeping taxes low. “If the vast majority of men are not deprived of their property and honour, they will live contentedly, and one will have to deal only with the ambition of a few men, which can be easily restrained in various ways” (S&P, 64). Also, “he should encourage the citizens to follow quietly their ordinary occupations, both in trade and agriculture and every other kind, so that one man is not afraid to improve or increase his possessions for fear that they will be taken from him, and another does not hesitate to begin to trade for fear of the taxes that will be levied” (S&P, 79). For if men “find that their affairs are flourishing, they are content and do not seek changes. Indeed, they will do everything possible to defend a new ruler, as long as he is not deficient in other respects” (S&P, 83).

A prince must avoid hatred and contempt. If he is widely hated, he would have reason “to be afraid of everything and everyone” (S&P, 66). If he is despised, particularly by his soldiers, this will encourage conspiracies to overthrow or assassinate him. To avoid being hated by the people, he should keep taxes low, as was noted above. But this means that he should not care to acquire a reputation for generosity but, instead, to spend moderately. If, in a vain attempt to be thought of as liberal, he were to “spend lavishly and ostentatiously,” he would inevitably “be compelled to become rapacious, to tax the people very heavily, and to raise money by all possible means. Thus, he will begin to be hated by his subjects and, because he is impoverished, he will be held in little regard.” On the other hand, if a prince spends moderately, “he will be acting generously towards the vast majority, whose property he does not touch, and will be acting

meanly towards the few to whom he gives nothing” (S&P, 56). Parsimony, however, is good only with respect to what belongs to the prince or his subjects. When it comes to the property of others, a prince “should be as open-handed as possible.” In the field, especially, he should support his army “by looting, sacking, and extortions” (S&P, 57).

Other ways of avoiding hatred include esteeming or at least “not making the great desperate” (Mansfield, 74), taking care not to cause “grave injury to anyone of those whom he uses and has around him,” such as bodyguards (Mansfield, 79), and to “have anything blameable administered by others” while reserving to himself the granting of “favours” (Mansfield, 75). Also, “one should note that hatred is acquired through good deeds as well as bad ones . . . . For when that community of which you judge you have to maintain yourself is corrupt, whether they are the people or the soldiers or the great, you must follow their humor to satisfy them, and then good deeds are your enemy” (Mansfield, 77).

Just as it is important not to be hated, so it is not to be held in contempt. “What makes him contemptible is to be held variable, light, effeminate, pusillanimous, irresolute, from which a prince should guard himself as from a shoal. He should contrive that greatness, spiritedness, gravity, and strength are recognized in his actions, and he should insist that his judgments in the private concerns of his subjects be irrevocable. And he should maintain such an opinion of himself that no one thinks either of deceiving him or of getting around him” (Mansfield, 72). Poverty, too, renders a prince contemptible, which is another reason for practicing parsimony. So does being unarmed, for “there is no proportion between one who is armed and one who is unarmed, and it is not reasonable that whoever is armed obey willingly whoever is unarmed, and that someone unarmed be secure among armed servants. . . . And therefore a prince who does not understand the military, besides other unhappiness, cannot, as was said, be esteemed by his soldiers nor have trust in them” (Mansfield, 58).

Regarding his ministers, a prince must select them carefully because “the first conjecture that is to be made of the brain of a lord is to see the men he has around him; and when they are capable and faithful, he can always be reputed wise because he has known how to recognize them as capable and to maintain them as faithful. But if they are otherwise, one can always pass unfavorable judgment on him, because the first error he makes, he makes in this choice” (Mansfield, 92). Also, even as he shuns flatterers, a prince must lay down conditions under which certain people can speak truth to him. For if everyone can do so, he becomes contemptible. Instead, a prudent prince must pick wise counselors “and only to these should he give freedom to speak the truth to him, and of those things only that he asks about and nothing else. But he should ask them about everything and listen to their opinions; then he should decide by himself, in his own mode; and with these councils and with each member of them he should behave in such a mode that everyone knows that the more freely he speaks, the more he will be accepted. Aside from these, he should not want to hear anyone; he should move directly to the thing that was decided and be obstinate in his decisions” (Mansfield, 94).

To be esteemed, a prince should, like King Ferdinand of Aragón, execute “great enterprises” that “keep the minds of his subjects in suspense and admiration, and occupied with their outcome” (Mansfield, 88). It is important to emerge triumphant from trials or from a struggle with great enemies: “Without doubt princes become great when they overcome difficulties made for them and opposition made to them. So fortune, especially when she wants to make a new prince great—since he has a greater necessity to acquire reputation than a hereditary prince—makes enemies arise for him and makes them undertake enterprises against him, so that he has cause to overcome them and to climb higher on the ladder that his enemies have brought for him. Therefore many judge that a wise prince, when he has the opportunity for it, should astutely nourish some enmity so that when he has crushed it, his greatness emerges the more from it” (Mansfield, 85).

Also, a prince should act “like a true friend and a true enemy, that is,” committing himself “without hesitation” for “someone against another” (Mansfield, 89). Neutrality is neither always safe nor dignified. However, “a prince must beware never to associate with someone more powerful than himself so as to attack others, except when necessity presses” (Mansfield, 90).

Internally, the prince should select a singular punishment or reward for someone who does something extraordinarily bad or good, respectively, in civil life, “of which much will be said”; recognize “virtuous men” and “honor those who are excellent in an art”; encourage industry and enterprise; “at suitable times of the year keep the people occupied with festivals and spectacles”; periodically meet with the various guilds, clans, and communities that make up his state; and “make himself an example of humanity and munificence, always holding firm the majesty of his dignity” (Mansfield, 87, 89, 91).

In acquiring esteem, appearances are as important as deeds, if not more so. A prince should be very careful that everything he says is replete with the five above-named qualities: to those who see and hear him, he should seem to be exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout. And it is most necessary of all to seem devout. In these matters, most men judge more by their eyes than by their hands. For everyone is capable of seeing you, but few can touch you. Everyone can see what you appear to be, whereas few have direct experience of what you really are; and those few will not dare to challenge the popular view, sustained as it is by the majesty of the ruler’s position. (S&P, 62-63)

A prince must, above all, “contrive to achieve through all his actions the reputation of being a great man of outstanding intelligence” (S&P, 77).

In the final analysis, when all is said and done, what matters most is that the new prince be successful. This is the political “bottom line.” Regarding the actions of princes, “who cannot be called to account, men pay attention to the outcome. If a ruler, then, contrives to conquer, and to preserve the state, the means will always be judged to be honorable and be praised by everyone. For the common people are impressed by appearances and results. Everywhere the

common people are the vast majority, and the few are isolated when the majority and the government are one” (S&P, 63).

### 3. *Fidel Castro: A Machiavellian Sketch*

In this section, what seem to me to be the main events in Fidel Castro’s march through history are given a Machiavellian interpretation. That is, an attempt is made to place Castro’s activities within the Florentine’s theoretical framework, seeking to make sense of them in terms of the latter’s concepts and generalizations. First, the high points of Castro’s political career are traced through time, from his obscure origins and early display of *virtú*, through the struggle against Batista, the revolutionary victory, and so on down to the present. Next, the circumstances surrounding Castro’s conquest and quick consolidation of power are examined in greater detail through the Machiavellian prism presented in the previous section. Wherever his actions do not appear to fit the Machiavellian mold, the discrepancy is noted for subsequent discussion. Unless otherwise noted, all factual material is drawn from Robert Quirk’s *Fidel Castro* (Quirk 1995).

In keeping with Machiavelli’s observation about the undistinguished origins of most men who have accomplished great things, Fidel Castro’s antecedents are, if not humble, certainly obscure and, at least by the standards of the times when he was growing up, shameful. His father, Angel Castro, hailed from a poor family in a remote village in Galicia, Spain. Having little education, as a young man he worked as a day laborer. In 1898, he enlisted in the Army and was shipped to Cuba, then a Spanish colony going through the throes of a struggle for independence that culminated in the Spanish-American War. After Cuban independence was secured, Angel opted to stay, settling in Oriente province, the farthest from the capital city of Havana. This was the least civilized, most violent part of the Island, with the heaviest concentration of blacks. Starting as a day laborer for the United Fruit Company, by dint of hard work, shrewd investments, and harsh management (he packed a revolver when in the field supervising his workers, most of them black), Angel made himself a rich man without, however, shedding his rustic ways. His rambling country house was built on stilts, in the style of an army barracks, the ground underneath accommodating farm animals whose odors wafted to the living quarters above. The family’s one common meal a day was shared with the servants and farmhands, everyone standing up in the kitchen, dipping food out of a large pot on the stove, “a sharp knife being the sole eating utensil” (Quirk, 9-10).

Married to a schoolteacher who bore him several children, Angel subsequently took as mistress one of the servant girls, Lina Ruz. Fidel Castro was the third child born out of that illegitimate union while the wife still lived. After the latter died, Angel married Lina, but several years would go by before the children were baptized. This unconventional family background would haunt Fidel Castro for years to come, his classmates from high school through university regarding him as a parvenu, a boor, uncouth and unclean.

From an early age Castro gave evidence of exceptional *virtú*, and not a little *prudenzia*, exhibiting such qualities as audacity, spiritedness, tireless energy, and single-minded determination to impose his will on others, as well as shrewdness in recognizing opportunities

and astuteness in manipulating people. A born rebel,<sup>10</sup> even as a child he acted with surprising temerity. Sent to Santiago de Cuba, Oriente's largest city, to live in the home of the Haitian consul while attending school, he was threatened with enrollment as a boarder whenever he misbehaved. Wanting to escape the authority of his guardian, one day he rebelled and behaved so badly that the consul made good on his threat. But living at school did not stop him from quarreling with students and defying authority. One day he hit a priest with a piece of bread, an action which made him popular with his classmates. Another time, in retaliation for punishment meted out by one of his teachers, he overturned desks and incited his classmates to go on strike. Apprised that Fidel and his two brothers were the school's biggest bullies, Angel brought them home. But Fidel was sent back when he threatened to burn down his parents' house unless they did.

Castro hungered for recognition at every school he attended. An indifferent scholar, he sought leadership in sports, striving to become the leading athlete, the captain of the team. At Belén High School in Havana (where he moved with one of his sisters to live) he tried out for the basketball team but was turned down. Refusing to give up, for a whole year he practiced daily into the night, becoming so proficient that he not only made the team but was chosen as its head. At university, where politics, not sports, was the path to recognition, he "leaped precipitately" into the arena but "was defeated in his initial attempt and was never able to win an important office" (Quirk, 22). An alternative avenue was political gangsterism, and Castro took it. He joined one of the action groups, revolutionary organizations "ostensibly dedicated to social reforms" but in actuality "little more than coterie of 'gangsters' with no detectable ideology." Led by politicians dangling offers of government appointments, these bands employed terrorist methods against their rivals on and off campus (Quirk, 22-23). In time, Castro acquired his own small following of hangers-on. He carried a pistol, and twice was suspected of murdering members of a rival faction, but the cases were not pursued, supposedly for lack of evidence. In 1947, at age 20, Castro joined the *Cayo Confites* expedition to overthrow the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the neighboring Dominican Republic.<sup>11</sup> When the invasion boat was intercepted by the Cuban Navy, he jumped overboard, swimming ashore through shark-infested waters. The following year found him in Colombia's capital, where he participated in an attack on a police station during the days of mob violence known as the *Bogotazo*.

Graduating with a law degree, Castro threw himself into politics as a member of the reformist Ortodoxo Party, the leadership of which, however, would not accept him. Undeterred, in 1951-52 he campaigned tirelessly for the party's nomination for one of the congressional seats from Havana province, writing thousands of letters and making countless speeches seeking voter support. When the Ortodoxo Party's leader, Eduardo Chibás, died of a self-inflicted wound, Castro tried to convince José Pardo Llada, a leading member of the party who was in charge of the funeral, to exploit the outpouring of public grief in order to seize power by diverting the procession from the cemetery to the presidential palace and storming the building, whereupon Pardo Llada was to proclaim himself president and appoint Castro chief of the military.<sup>12</sup>

In March 1952, only a few months before the scheduled elections, former dictator-president turned presidential candidate Fulgencio Batista, seeing his come-back bid going

nowhere in the polls, staged a bloodless *coup d'etat*. Fidel Castro reacted almost immediately, publicly calling on the people to fight and filing suit against the usurper, demanding that he be tried and sentenced to a hundred years in prison. The following year he staged an ill-fated attack on the *Moncada* Barracks in Santiago de Cuba in which dozens of his followers died in battle or were summarily executed after capture. This was a macabre baptism in blood for his 26<sup>th</sup> of July organization, which he would name after the day of what turned out to be a massacre for many of his men. Taken prisoner and put on trial, he acted as his own defense counsel, using the occasion to launch a verbal attack against the dictatorship. Some time later he wrote a manifesto on his political goals, what in the mythology of the revolution became his “History Will Absolve Me Speech.” Whatever it was he actually said in court, he was found guilty and sentenced to 15 years behind bars. At the Isle of Pines prison, he organized his fellow *Moncada* inmates into study groups, with him assuming the task of political education. One day, when one of his men spotted Batista in the prison courtyard, Castro led the group in singing his organization’s revolutionary hymn, infuriating the president, who decreed stern punishment.

In 1955, Batista, newly inaugurated for a four-year term after holding an election the outcome of which was never in doubt, amnestied the *Moncada* prisoners. Upon release, Castro resumed his public campaign against the dictator, characterizing him as “‘conceited, vain, dishonest, and corrupt,’ and his language as ‘coarse, minacious, and vulgar’” (Quirk, 85).<sup>13</sup> But as the government, in retaliation, tightened the screws of censorship, and the Ortodoxo Party leaders continued to keep him at arm’s length, Castro left the country for Mexico. There he recruited men, raised money (making two trips to the U.S. for the purpose), purchased weapons, was briefly jailed when these were discovered, and bought a yacht, the *Granma*. Late the following year, he sailed for Cuba, squeezing 82 men, weapons, and munitions aboard the *Granma*, a vessel designed to carry twelve persons. The landing was a failure (most of the men were captured or killed and a few escaped, and almost all the weapons and equipment were lost), but Castro and a remnant of less than two dozen followers made their way to the rugged mountains of the *Sierra Maestra*, at the easternmost tip of the Island, from where he carried on the campaign against Batista.

The better part of two years were spent mostly in recruiting and training guerrillas, raising money and acquiring weapons, struggling to keep control of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July underground, resisting proposals to enter into unity pacts or coalitions of anti-Batista groups, condemning conspiracies to stage a pre-emptive *coup* against Batista that would bring to office a provisional government outside his control, staging hit and run attacks on small military outposts, and waging an international propaganda campaign that widely exaggerated the size of his forces and the scale of government attacks against him, all the while projecting a message of moderation and benevolence. The propaganda war began with an interview with *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews, who was taken in by Castro’s ruses and assurances. Matthews’ articles turned Castro into an international sensation, and many other journalists from around the world sought to visit him in the *Sierra*.

When the dictatorship collapsed following Batista’s New Year Eve’s flight in January 1959, Fidel Castro became the man of the hour, lionized by vast multitudes during his week-long

trek to and upon arrival in Havana. Denying that he had any political ambitions, he had appointed a provisional president, Manuel Urrutia, an obscure but honest judge, who in turn named him commander in chief of the Cuban armed forces. Like Hiero of Syracuse, Castro quickly dissolved the old army, executing many of its officers and men, and replaced it with a new one loyal to himself. Only he went much further. Within a year he had discarded the provisional president and cabinet, brought the communists aboard his regime, purged his own organization of anti-communists and democrats, and began to revolutionize the entire Island in his own image, ruthlessly repressing all dissent. Henceforth, even as with almost every passing year his subjects had less to eat, endured greater hardships, and enjoyed fewer amenities, Castro went on accumulating power and the titles to adorn it like no man in Cuba's history, and none but a handful, if that, in Latin America, had ever done.

Also like Hiero, Castro dumped the country's former allies in favor of new ones. Almost from the beginning he engaged the United States in a war of words. He defeated a U.S.-sponsored landing of Cuban exiles, boasting he had scored a great victory against imperialism. Audaciously thrusting Cuba into the thick of the Cold War, he embraced the Soviet Union and declared his undying allegiance to Marxism-Leninism, adroitly maneuvering a seemingly reluctant Moscow to commit itself to guarantee his survival, underwrite his regime with massive subsidies.<sup>14</sup> During the October Missile Crisis, he tried, in Khrushchev's own words, "to lasso" the Soviets into "a war with America," even advising them "to use nuclear weapons" (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 307, 314). When Khrushchev made a pact with President Kennedy to withdraw the missiles without consulting him, Castro flew into a rage, refusing to allow international inspection of the missile sites, as agreed upon by Moscow and Washington. He tried, unsuccessfully, to dissuade the Soviets from removing another strategic weapon, long-range bombers. In order to mollify him, the Kremlin gave him the red carpet treatment during a month-long visit to the USSR, coddling and showering him with honors and encomiums.

In the 1970s, in the wake of the sudden collapse of the Portuguese empire in Africa and the unrelated overthrow of Ethiopia's Emperor Selassie, Castro boldly leaped into the continent, intervening in the domestic and international politics of multiple countries. He shipped thousands of troops on Soviet planes to Angola to prop up the Marxist-Leninist MPLA regime when it came under siege from the combined forces of rival factions and South Africa. He tried to mediate between Ethiopia and Somalia, two newly-minted "socialist states" disputing control over the Ogaden, and when that failed he threw thousands of Cuban troops into the fight on behalf of Addis Ababa. Castro crisscrossed the continent, visiting countries from Angola to Tanzania and from Algiers to Mozambique, everywhere being greeted like a potentate, lavished with praise and decorations. On a visit to Libya, Muammar Qaddafi extolled him as an "obstinate adversary of American imperialism and one of the most ferocious enemies of imperialist expansion in the world." In Algiers, responding to reporters' questions about his impressions in southern Africa, Castro averred that "One could say that I discovered Africa, just as Christopher Columbus discovered America" (Quirk, 760, 766).

In the 1980s, as well as resisting Gorbachev's pressures to embark on the path of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, he publicly warned that such reforms were dangerous and violated socialist

principles. And in the face of a new rapprochement between Moscow and Washington, he criticized the Kremlin's flagging commitment to proletarian internationalism. As the empire that Stalin built began to come apart at the seams, Castro defiantly proclaimed "'Socialism or death! Marxism-Leninism or death!'" (Quirk, 827). His regime went on to weather the severe economic contraction caused by the end of subsidies and barter relations caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the shift toward markets in central and eastern Europe. In 1998, he apparently gambled that the international acceptance that would accrue from a visit by Pope John Paul II was worth the risk of any potential threat to his regime, and if that is the case subsequent events appear to have proven him right. As the century draws to a close, even as he resists repeated calls to democratize and defies criticisms of continued repression of dissent, Castro is invited to Ibero-American summits and will host one in Havana, at which the Spanish King is expected to attend, in October 1999. Having spent four consecutive decades in power, Fidel Castro, now in his early seventies, bids fair to break the world's record for the longest one-man dictatorship in modern history.

The foregoing hasty survey of what seem to me to be the highest points of Fidel Castro's career, in the course of which he emerged from provincial obscurity to become master of Cuba and play a part in international power politics, his voice heard and his bearded visage recognized around the world. In this narrative one discerns many of the manifestations of *virtú* and *prudenzia* that Machiavelli admired: audacity if not temerity, a spirited constitution, great stamina, strength in the face of adversity, and also shrewdness in manipulating people, even world figures, as well as sagacity in identifying opportunities and exploiting them to the full. Now I will retrace my steps, filling a few blanks in the chronicle, pausing to examine with greater care a number of critical junctures along the way to see how well Castro's methods match those of Machiavelli's prince.

As well as being well endowed with *virtú* and *prudenzia*, Fidel Castro has received many favors from *fortuna*. Living dangerously, more than once he escaped death through chance or the intervention of others, factors which also made a difference in other ways, as well. Take the Moncada attack. The mission was suicidal. Castro may very well have minimized the personal risk to himself, staying "well back" of the fray, not firing a shot, and withdrawing hastily from the scene (Quirk, 55). Nevertheless, his life was spared through the timely intervention of others. His neglected wife, Mirta Díaz Balart, a sister of one of Batista's officials, sought help from Havana's archbishop, who in turn telephoned his counterpart in Santiago, who asked the army commander in the region to spare the lives of any other attacker who surrendered or was captured. The commander grudgingly agreed. When a squad of soldiers came upon Castro "asleep on the floor of a peasant's hut," the lieutenant in charge, knowing very well what his fellow soldiers back in the barracks would do to Castro if he fell into their hands, whispered to him not to reveal his name and over his protests ordered his men to take him not to the *Moncada* but to police headquarters, an action that saved Castro's life (Quirk, 55-56).

The other dramatic escape occurred at the landing of the *Granma*. Having received intelligence that the *Granma* was on its way, some 1,000 of Batista's soldiers were in area, waiting for the yacht to reach shore. Upon landing, Castro chanced to run into a peasant who led

them away from the dragnet and into the *Sierra*, where he was taken in by Crescencio Pérez, something of an outlaw with contacts and influence in the region. “More than any other single individual he was responsible, in December 1956, for preventing the complete collapse of Fidel Castro’s July 26 movement” (Quirk, 126).

*Fortuna* smiled on Castro in other ways, too. Although sentenced to spend fifteen years behind bars at *La Cabaña*, an antiquated fortress crowded with prisoners and vermin, the Minister of the Interior sent him and his men to be confined in the hospital ward of the Model Prison in the Isle of Pines, instead. There (until he provoked Batista with the aforementioned singing of a revolutionary anthem, after which stunt he was confined in solitary) Castro enjoyed many amenities, including excellent food, fine cigars, plenty of books, and time to think, read, and write letters smuggled to his mistress and supporters on the outside. During his exile in Mexico, he met wealthy Cuban emigrants who helped him, introducing him to important personages in the country, including “former president Lázaro Cárdenas and the painters Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros” (Quirk, 88). What other doors these men opened for him can only be surmised. Also, during the struggle against Batista, *fortuna* conveniently cleared the field of would-be rivals, men who had distinguished themselves in the fight against the dictatorship, such as university leader José Antonio Echevarría and Frank País, the head of Castro’s 26<sup>th</sup> of July organization in Santiago, both killed by the Batista police. Also eliminated was Camilo Cienfuegos, a popular member of Castro’s revolutionary armed forces, who less than a year after the revolutionary victory vanished into thin air when the small plane he was flying in lost contact with the ground and was never heard from again.<sup>15</sup>

It seems, then, as if Castro was favored by fortune on his rise through the ranks to the pinnacle of power. From a strictly Machiavellian point of view, in fact, Castro may have trusted too much in luck. Both the *Moncada* attack and the *Granma* landing were poorly planned, botched operations, and they were not the last (in 1958, he placed all his hopes in a general strike which fizzled out). It seems as if he thought that such lightning strikes would spark a popular uprising that would bring down the dictatorship. Castro refused to take responsibility for the *Granma* fiasco, cursing his bad luck for having “landed ‘in a terrible place, in a real swamp’” (Quirk, 123). That showed a lack of gratitude, for as we have seen *fortuna* was partial to him. But then, he was young and exceptionally bold or downright impetuous, two qualities that, according to the Florentine, the goddess of fate finds attractive in would be princes.<sup>16</sup>

When discussing the biblical, mythological, and legendary exemplars of a new prince, Machiavelli noted that, while leaving little to chance, they had the sagacity to recognize the opportunities fortune offered them, and the energy and spiritedness to exploit them. Fortune’s greatest gift to Castro was that within the space of a year Eduardo Chibás killed himself and Batista staged a *coup*. The first event left the Ortodoxo party leaderless and the second dealt a mortal blow to Cuba’s fledgling, if flawed, democracy. Chibás’ death created a leadership deficit among Cuba’s reformists and Batista’s usurpation changed the rules of the political game, from one based on the counting of votes, however marred by fraud, to one of violence and war. The combination of the two conditions biased the political struggle in the direction of the most aggressive and daring of men. Castro fit the bill perfectly. Frustrated in his attempt to exercise

leadership at the university and within the Ortodoxo party, Batista's trampling of Cuba's tainted democratic institutions handed Castro the excuse to break out of the legal constraints under which his violent temperament had long chafed. He gambled his life on the *Moncada* attack, winning instant national recognition.

The second gift of fortune was Batista's amnesty. Feeling politically secure, Batista pardoned the *Moncada* prisoners after having ruled out that very possibility only months earlier. Actually, the amnesty was only symptomatic of the kind of dictator Batista was, one who wanted to preserve constitutional formalities. Between 1954 and 1958, Batista seemed to be caught in a never-ending cycle in which he suspended and restored, and again suspended and restored constitutional guarantees, never following one or the other policy consistently. Every time he restored constitutional guarantees, a storm of criticism would break out, and the courts would start granting writs of habeas corpus in favor of political prisoners. When, in 1957, on orders from the military commander in Oriente province, who was intent on choking off Castro's sources of supplies for the *Sierra*, "more than a thousand families were rounded up and moved to concentration camps," "widespread criticism of the army's ruthless tactics forced the president to order their release" (Quirk, 138).<sup>17</sup> As for the army, although well equipped it was riddled with corruption and nepotism, poorly trained and led, and had no will to fight. A self-made prince himself, having risen from sergeant to general to president during the 1930s and 1940s, Batista had long ago gotten in the habit of thinking, in Machiavelli's laconic phrase, "more of amenities than of arms," a sure way, he said, for a prince to lose his state (Mansfield, 58). As Quirk puts it, "The Bolivian army that destroyed Guevara's guerrillas in October 1967 would have crushed Fidel Castro's ragtag army early on" (Quirk, 208). Fortune favored Castro when he paired him off against Batista and not a more ruthless and vigorous adversary.

Castro, by contrast, seems to have developed a passion for military matters early on, and never to have lost it. Since childhood, he has exhibited a fascination with weapons (from slingshots all the way to nuclear missiles) and war. "His life, as a child and as a revolutionary, was one long love affair with firearms. His speeches were studded with references to blood and to the prospects of violence and death" (Quirk, 10). Castro himself recounts that in the sixth grade, when sent to his room to study, he would, instead, play imaginary war games: "I'd start off by taking a lot of little scraps and tiny balls of paper, arranging them on a playing board . . . , setting up an obstacle to see how many would pass and how many wouldn't. There were losses, casualties. I played this game of war for hours at a time" (Quirk, 13-14).

Like a would-be prince, who Machiavelli says must supplement the study of war with that of the lives of men worthy of emulation, even as a child Castro was also interested in "history and geography," "particularly the accounts of wars and battles, and stories about Cuba's great men, revolutionaries such as José Martí, Antonio Maceo, and Calixto García, who had fought for independence against the Spanish. And about the brave and noble Spartans who had died holding back the Persian hosts at Thermopylae" (Quirk, 13). While at university, he began to collect books on Benito Mussolini, and before leaving on the *Cayo Confites* expedition willed to José Pardo Llada his twelve volumes of the Italian fascist's writings.<sup>18</sup> In prison, he read a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte. Castro identified with the Corsican who made himself emperor of the

French, admiring not only his military campaigns but his artful speeches, too.<sup>19</sup> Also, he wrote admiringly of Marx and Lenin<sup>20</sup> to his mistress, noting “‘I laugh and enjoy myself when I read them. Both were implacable, and they put fear into the hearts of their enemies. Two genuine prototypes of the revolutionary!’” (Quirk, 69).

During his first year in the *Sierra*, Castro

developed the life-style and tactics that were to mold his battle plans for the months to come. He and his men moved incessantly, to improve their stamina, he said, and to preserve security. Guillermo García, nearly a decade later, spoke in admiration of Castro’s prowess. ‘Fidel had never been in these mountains before. But in six months he knew the whole sierra better than any *guajiro* who was born there. He never forgot a place that he went. He remembered everything—the soil, the trees, who lived in each house. In those days I was a cattle buyer. I used to go all over the mountains. But in six months Fidel knew the sierra better than I did, and I was born and raised there.’ (Quirk, 129)

Even heavily discounting this account for hyperbole born of sycophancy, the point is well taken. As Machiavelli advises, Castro spent time training his men to endure physical hardships and becoming intimately familiar with the terrain of the *Sierra*, two basic conditions for the successful waging of war. He would put this training to good use in turning back the army’s (one and only) timid offensive in the area in mid-1958.

As we have seen, a Machiavellian prince knows how to imitate the lion and the fox, the former “to frighten the wolves” and the latter “to recognize snares” (Mansfield, 69). There is a certain ambiguity in this precept, however. Take the lion first. If by imitating the lion Machiavelli simply means to be proficient in the art of war, then we have established that Castro accomplished that. But perhaps Machiavelli means something more than war-making. The signature of the king of the jungle is not ferocity, a quality shared with other beasts, but its fearsome roar. It could be, then, that what Machiavelli means is that a prince must periodically threaten potential enemies with violence.

If this is the case, Castro passes the test with flying colors. As a child he threatened his parents with burning their house down if they did not return him to school. While in prison, Castro learned that his brother-in-law had arranged a phantom appointment for his wife at the Interior Ministry, in which he served as under-secretary. Outraged at the damage done to his “reputation and honor,” he threatened to kill him (Quirk, 76-77). Learning that his wife had divorced him, he roared in a letter to one of his sisters: “‘One day I’ll be out of here, and I’ll get my son and my honor back, even if the earth is destroyed in the process’” (Quirk, 79). When his call for the 1958 general strike went largely unheeded, Castro, blaming the 26<sup>th</sup> of July National Directorate, summoned them all to the *Sierra* for a dressing down, threatening to shoot anyone who did not show up. When a letter allegedly from his brother Raúl Castro to Ché Guevara commenting favorably on Stalin and communism fell into the hands of the government and was made public, Castro exploded. He “walked back and forth ‘like a caged lion.’ He threatened to

kill Raúl: ‘I don’t give a fuck if he is my brother, I’ll shoot him!’” (Quirk, 162). After the rebel victory, he had hundreds of Batista’s soldiers summarily shot and organized show trials for others. When the pace and lack of due process of the executions drew criticism from Mexico and the United States, Castro angrily rejected their objections, blurting out that if the U.S. were to dare to intervene in Cuba, “200,000 gringos would die” (Quirk, 224). This was less than two weeks after his triumphal entry into Havana, long before the Bay of Pigs, the Missile Crisis, and countless other smaller confrontations with the U.S. In the years to come, Castro’s bellicose rhetoric, directed mostly at Washington and his own subjects, would escalate to apocalyptic proportions.

As for the fox, Machiavelli says that it “recognizes snares,” but in all his examples the protagonist is not avoiding traps but drawing others into them. Machiavelli’s “fox” is an active deceiver who “gets around men’s brains.” Here again Castro earns only the highest marks. An incident from his personal life sets the stage. As he prepared to sail for Cuba from Mexico, he wrote to his ex-wife asking her to allow his son to visit him, promising “on his honor ‘as a gentleman,’ to return him to her custody within two weeks. It soon became evident, however, that Castro had no intention of keeping his word. . . . In a letter to Mexican newspapers he explained that he could not permit Fidelito ‘to fall into the hands of my most ferocious enemies and detractors, who in an act of extreme villainy . . . outraged my home and sacrificed it to the bloody tyranny, which they serve’” (Quirk, 115).<sup>21</sup>

During the struggle against Batista, Castro repeatedly tried to drive a wedge between the dictator and the armed forces. From the *Moncada* manifesto to messages sent to various officers only weeks before Batista’s flight, Castro affirmed many times that his fight was against the dictator, not the soldiers. Shortly after the rebel victory, while still in Oriente, Castro expressed to *Moncada* commander José Rego Rubido the hope “that his men and the soldiers of Batista’s army could be comrades” (Quirk, 211). Also, in a meeting with Air Force pilots, he assured them they had nothing to fear from “‘revolutionary justice’” (Bernal 1999, 392). But in a matter of days officers and men of the armed forces were being summarily shot (Raúl Castro had around seventy soldiers tried and executed on the same day). And when, less than two months after the rebel victory, a revolutionary tribunal found forty-three members of the Air Force (including mechanics) not guilty of war crimes, Castro angrily ordered a new trial, at which the men were duly found guilty and sentenced to long prison terms. (The revolutionary commander who presided over the first trial was later found dead, presumably a suicide.) Other alleged war criminals and sundry *Batistianos* would suffer similar or worse fate, some after enduring the humiliation of a show trial.

From the time Batista seized control of the government until he fled the country, in countless manifestos, speeches, and interviews with Cuban and foreign journalists, Castro repeatedly gave assurances that at the top of his agenda was the restoration of the 1940 Constitution and the holding of elections. After his release from the Isle of Pines, he wrote that “‘There can be no other formula, no other national solution, than general elections, as soon as possible, and with complete guarantees for everyone’” (Quirk, 84). Also, time and again Castro

denied that he had ambition for office. In 1958, less than a year before seizing power, he wrote to the National Directorate of his 26<sup>th</sup> of July organization that

‘I’m sick of having my motives misrepresented. I’m not meanly ambitious. I don’t believe I’m a caudillo, and I don’t want to be one. I’m neither irreplaceable nor infallible. I don’t give a shit for all the honors or the responsibilities. It disgusts me to see men running after those chimeras.’ (Quirk, 162)

As we have seen, Castro picked an obscure if honorable judge, Manuel Urrutia, to fill the post of provisional president. One of Urrutia’s first acts was to restore the 1940 constitution and schedule elections in 18 months. However, he did not stay around long enough to implement that decree. Initially, Castro feigned subordination to the civilian government: “‘No act of ours will ever interfere with or detract one iota from the authority of the president. . . . We have no ambitions’” (Quirk, 222). Yet, as Quirk tells it: “‘In the first weeks of 1959 he made speeches and issued conflicting statements, all the while undermining the provisional government.’” “. . . Though Fidel Castro continued to reiterate his respect for elections and democratic institutions and his loyalty to Urrutia, with every press conference and in every public utterance his words sapped the authority of the president.” The provisional government was scarcely five weeks old when the Prime Minister, José Miró Cardona, resigned. “A spokesman at the presidential palace announced to a surprised Cuban people that Fidel Castro would take his place” (Quirk, 223, 227).

Within five months, Urrutia, too, was gone. Castro got rid of him in a deft maneuver that combined the fox and the lion in one virtuoso act. One day in July he stunned the country by pretending to resign his post, disappearing for 24 hours, during which time thousands of his supporters were mobilized to plead that he come back. Castro reappeared in front of television cameras to accuse President Urrutia of having charged the government of being communist, an attitude that “‘bordered on treason’. . . . ‘I am not a communist,’ Castro said, ‘and neither is the revolutionary movement. But we do not have to say we are anticommunists, just to curry favor with foreign governments’” (Quirk, 251). While Castro was still speaking, a threatening crowd gathered in front of the presidential palace to demand Urrutia’s ouster. The hapless president escaped through a back door. Disguised as a milkman, he requested asylum in the Venezuelan embassy.<sup>22</sup>

A few days later, declaiming before a crowd of hundreds of thousands of cheering supporters, Castro repudiated elections and representative institutions. He characterized the event, which would be replicated countless of times in the life of the regime, wherein he worked himself into a frenzy speechifying for hours on end before an assembly that unanimously applauded his lines and chanted adulatory slogans in unison, as a “‘real democracy’” reminiscent of ancient Athens, only better, because “‘Cuba’s revolutionary government was not for the privileged classes, for oligarchies or ‘castes of the military’” (Quirk, 253). As Quirk puts it, “‘To Castro democracy consisted in discussing problems that vexed the leadership and in shouting approval of his decisions in the plaza” (Quirk, 649).

Urrutia was not the last of Castro's pre-revolutionary supporters to be discarded once his usefulness had been spent. Recall Machiavelli's observation that it often happens that a new prince finds his most reliable and useful supporters not among those who had helped him gain control of the state but among those whom he had initially viewed with suspicion. In Castro's case, the list of people he used on his way to power, only to be discarded or crushed (exiled, imprisoned, or shot) is very long. A few of the best-known names (all of whom ended up in exile, some after spending time in prison, unless otherwise noted) will suffice for illustration: Luis Conte Agüero, Miguel Angel Quevedo, José Pardo Llada, Mario Llerena, Humberto Padilla, and Carlos Franqui, who propagandized for him; businessmen and politicians like Felipe Pazos, Justo Carrillo, and former president Carlos Prío, who raised or gave out of their own pockets tens of thousands of dollars to his movement or to him personally; Teresa Casuso, who opened her apartment to him while in Mexico; Costa Rican president José Figueres, who allowed a shipment of arms to be flown from his country to the *Sierra*, whom Castro ridiculed at a mass meeting; and *Sierra* comrades Hubert Matos (sentenced to 20 years in prison), Humberto Sorí Marín (shot after having fled and come back, supposedly on a mission to assassinate Castro), and Ché Guevara, whom Castro sent away on a good will tour around the world, then on a mission to Africa, and finally to his death in Bolivia. Although a special case, because he was discarded much later, is Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez, who as a youth joined Castro in the *Sierra*, attended a Soviet military academy, rose through the ranks to command large numbers of troops in Angola and Ethiopia, and was "designated 'an exceptional warrior of the fatherland'" (Quirk, 828) in 1989, only six months before being put on trial on corruption and drug-trafficking charges, convicted, and shot.

These are only the best known names. Countless other minor figures were thrown overboard when they no longer served Castro's purposes. In fact, even before the rebel victory, Castro was already looking to shed the 26<sup>th</sup> of July organization, which he was finding difficult to control. Once in power, he cut it down to size, elevating, instead, the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), a Moscow-line communist party, which after having kept to the sidelines for most of Batista's dictatorship (it had served on his cabinet in an earlier government), sent one of its top cadre to the *Sierra* late in 1958. After the rebel victory, it was the PSP which put itself unconditionally under Castro's command, facilitating his take-over of agriculture, labor unions, the press and cultural organizations, the university, and countless other institutions, and easing his turn toward the Soviet Union. In the next few years, purged of recalcitrants and malcontents, i.e., anyone who demurred from Castro's dictates, the two organizations were fused under him.

Castro's discarding of old friends once victory was achieved and the unmaking of a general of Ochoa's stature brings to mind another of Machiavelli's precepts, the one regarding where a new prince should look to for support, the people or "the great." He noted that one who acquires a state with the help of "the great" cannot rule as he pleases, because he is surrounded by equals who are not in sufficient awe of him, whereas one who relies on the support of the people finds all but a few ready to obey. Therefore, a prince wanting to exercise absolute mastery of the state should seek to reduce dependence on the great, placing his regime, instead, on a popular footing. A prince has to live with the same people, but "he can well do without the

same great persons, since he can make and unmake them every day, and take away and give them reputation at his convenience” (Mansfield, 40).

From the beginning, Castro set out not just to reduce the power but to mow down any and all of Cuba’s “great,” until no one was left standing that would not bow down to him. The first of the “great” to go had to be the greatest of all, i.e., the United States, under whose economic and political shadow Cuba had acquired independence from Spain and relative prosperity.<sup>23</sup> If he could “unmake” the United States’ position in Cuba, no one else would be able to resist him, not the landowners, not the sugar industrialists, not the labor unions, not the professional associations, not the University of Havana or the student union (FEU), not the Catholic Church, in short, no one else would be able to stand between him and absolute power. It was a risky venture, but Castro had taken deadly gambles before, and he was willing to roll the dice again.<sup>24</sup> In the process of unmaking the U.S. in Cuba, he made another great, namely the Soviet Union. But Havana being so far from Moscow, whatever position it would attain in Cuba, whose value was primarily strategic, would depend on keeping Castro happy, supplying him with vast quantities of weapons (since childhood his favorite toys)<sup>25</sup> and catering to his Napoleonic ego. Thus, for the purpose of aggrandizing his personal power, Castro’s decision to unmake the U.S. and make the USSR in Cuba makes perfect Machiavellian sense.<sup>26</sup>

There was another Machiavellian reason for taking on the United States: it was a singular enemy, one much resented in intellectual circles in Latin America and around the world, and if Castro emerged victorious from the encounter, it would be to his everlasting glory. Recall that, according to Machiavelli, when *fortuna* wishes to make a new prince great, she finds formidable enemies for him to overcome so that their very opposition to him provides the ladder he climbs to a radiant reputation. Which leads many to believe that, when presented with the opportunity, a new prince should nourish some enmity, so that upon crushing it his prestige will be all the greater. A new prince with a gargantuan appetite for glory, it was Castro’s fortune to find in the United States a ready-made, worthy (if vacillating) enemy against which to prove his mettle. In the end, having been left stranded in an impoverished Island by the historical wave that swept communism out of Europe, the fact that he remains a thorn that the United States never managed to pull out of its side may turn out to be his only claim to fame.<sup>27</sup>

Having destroyed Cuba’s pre-revolutionary “great,” and made and unmade new ones at will, did Castro follow Machiavelli’s advice for winning the support and avoid incurring the hatred of the people? All they want, said Machiavelli, is to be left alone to prosper in peace. If the prince refrains from taking their property and encourages them to pursue productive occupations, if they do not hesitate to improve or increase their possessions for fear of confiscation or higher taxes, in short, as long as they find that under the rule of the prince their private affairs are thriving, they will be content and will defend him. Thus, Machiavelli advised, a prince should keep taxes low and abstain from taking the property of his subjects, but he can do this only if he is very thrifty with his money, even to the point of incurring the charge of miserliness.

Castro scorned this advice. From the moment he rode into the capital, he acted with complete disregard for the property of others. Having settled himself in a luxurious suite in the Havana Hilton, Castro would “eat what he wanted, whenever and wherever he wanted it, and not worry about paying for it. He never brought cash. Like a reigning monarch, he lived completely outside the money economy” (Quirk, 232).<sup>28</sup> Beginning with the expropriation of the holdings of real or alleged *Batistianos*,<sup>29</sup> then large landed estates,<sup>30</sup> the sugar mills, and American companies, then anyone who fled the country, and so on down the line, through the revolutionary offensives of the sixties, progressively more and more property, large and small, was confiscated, until practically the entire country came under the control of a panoply of agencies of the party-state, all subject to the will of Fidel Castro, lord of the manor. To this day, whatever anyone possesses is subject to confiscation for arbitrary reasons, so that people are in fear of losing what little they have if they displease the regime.

Neither has Castro practiced thriftiness. On the contrary, he recklessly squandered vast resources on a series of projects lacking economic rationale, zigzagging from crash industrialization to attempting to harvest ten million tons of sugar, breeding a new hybrid of cattle, producing more milk than Holland, making better cheeses than France, and other fantasies. Practically every year since 1959, while Castro regaled his subjects with promises of great abundance in a future that never arrived, new restrictions were imposed on consumption, new sacrifices required, greater “discipline” demanded. Nor did he allow the people any quiet, or to live in peace. Hundreds of thousands of youths were sent to fight and many of them to die in far-away wars and other conflicts of his own choosing. Periodically, Cubans wake up to a new crisis, or another paroxysm of cruelty, thousands of thugs mobilized to stamp out yet another internal enemy, “‘common scum’,” “‘lumpen’,” “‘bums, loafers, and parasites’,” to be spat on, beaten, and dragged through the streets, their honor and dignity trampled underfoot (Quirk, 808).

In short, Castro did just the opposite of what Machiavelli advised a prince to do in order to avoid being hated. On the contrary, he has done many things which the Florentine thought incur hatred, not just among the “great,” as Castro himself expected,<sup>31</sup> but among the people at large: he does not respect their property or their honor, or allow them any peace and quiet. Neither has he ceased being cruel. Thus, a student of Machiavelli would have reason to suspect that Castro is hated by the majority of Cubans. This hypothesis, however, goes against much of the conventional wisdom in the press and in academia which, at least until recently, has perceived Castro as popular with the masses, even if he is hated in Miami. If the conventional wisdom is true, then Machiavelli was wrong on an important point of political psychology. Or, it could be that whether the subjects love or hate the prince is contingent on a number of other conditions that are independent of how he treats their property and their honor. Or, conceivably, Machiavelli’s insight is correct and those who believe that Castro is not hated but loved are being taken in by appearances, by what they see with their eyes, not by what they touch with their hands, to paraphrase the Florentine.<sup>32</sup>

In any case, whether Castro is loved or hated by the majority of Cubans is a question that cannot be determined at this point because, on account of widespread fear of the regime, it would be nearly impossible to get honest answers from his subjects. However, Mussolini’s

ignominious end at the end of a rope, his body mutilated; the sudden collapse of communism in Europe; and the (to many journalists and academics) surprising defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 Nicaraguan elections should give pause to those who believe too readily in the illusions of popularity which totalitarian regimes manage to project.

If whether Castro inspires love or hatred among his subjects is unsettled, there can be no doubt that he is feared. Machiavelli said that a prince cannot control and should not rely exclusively on the love of his subjects, but he can on their fear, which is “sustained by a dread of punishment, which is always effective” (S&P, 59). Beginning in 1959, with the wholesale execution of *Batistiano* soldiers and police, eventually thousands of people were sent to the *paredón*,<sup>33</sup> and tens of thousands to serve long prison terms under subhuman conditions for opposing the regime, or simply criticizing it.<sup>34</sup> Merely laughing at someone’s satirical impersonation of the Maximum Leader risks a jail term. The Island is blanketed with informers, in the neighborhood, at work, and in the street. A political police trained in the techniques of the KGB can pick up anyone, at any time, for any reason, hold him incommunicado, and interrogate him at will until he signs a suitable confession. There is no independent judicial authority that will issue writs of *habeas corpus* on behalf of political prisoners, or defense counsel that can do anything beyond pleading for clemency from the court, the guilt of the accused being a given. Reporting news of natural or man-made disasters or the outbreak of an epidemic, let alone of the corruption that pervades the regime (Payne 1996), or giving that information to the foreign press, is a punishable offense. A politically incorrect remark can get one fired, and since there are few sources of employment other than the party-state, especially for professionals, dissimulation is the order of the day (Planas 1992). In Cuba, forty years of Castro’s rule have produced a culture of evasion and pretense (Montaner 1981: 163-168).

Nor does anyone dare display contempt for Castro, in the sense of treating him with disrespect or disdain. To avoid being despised, Machiavelli advised, a prince must be well armed, something Castro has always taken care to do. His early obsession with guns has been noted. While in the *Sierra*, he sought to monopolize all weapons, and to leave none in the hands of the July 26<sup>th</sup> urban underground. To this day, Castro packs a pistol, and he is protected by hundreds of security guards armed to the teeth. Machiavelli also warned against “being considered inconstant, frivolous, effeminate, pusillanimous and irresolute” (S&P, 64) adjectives that, to the best of my knowledge, nobody has used in describing Castro.

In addition, Machiavelli counseled the prince to avoid becoming impoverished, which would cause him to be held in little regard. This was another reason, apart from avoiding hatred bred of the necessity for higher taxes, for being cautious about spending money. In the case of Castro, though, we have noted that he’s been ever the spendthrift, and that Cuba’s economic conditions have deteriorated under his rule. A question that comes to mind, though, is whether *he himself* is poor. At home he enjoys countless privileges and *Forbes* magazine ranks him as one of the richest rulers in the world.<sup>35</sup> If this is the case, then perhaps he need not fear being despised on that account. I say perhaps, because the condition of the country will, to some extent, reflect on the reputation of the prince. Other things equal, one would expect the rich ruler of a rich country to command more respect than the rich ruler of a poor country.

But there is one maxim for avoiding contempt that Castro has never minded, and it has to do with the quality of his ministers. Machiavelli advised the prince to pick his “secretaries” with care, because people will form opinions on his intelligence from the quality of the men he selects to serve him. If they are “capable and loyal,” the prince will be judged wise, but if they are “mediocre and disloyal,” he will be held in low esteem. Also, Machiavelli devised a formula for avoiding flatterers, namely, to order his ministers to speak candidly about anything he asks them, to ask about everything, to listen patiently, and then to make his own decisions, without wavering in their implementation. In Castro’s case, his pattern has been to pick ministers primarily for their loyalty, even if they are not all that competent, to think he knows more about everything that authorities in their respective fields, to disregard the advice of experts or to get angry with them when they contradict him, and obstinately to plunge into a project or campaign which specialists warn him has no chance of success, like the ten million sugar harvest. Then, when the undertaking fails, he refuses to take responsibility, finding scapegoats among those who were put in charge of implementing it. Such behavior does not breed respect.<sup>36</sup>

But it may be that as long as people fear Castro, they will swallow their contempt. This suggests that not all sources of contempt are equally dangerous for a prince. As long as he is armed, ferocious, and cruel, and Castro is all three, he will be feared, and this will offset or swamp any contempt derivative from his country being poor, the incompetence of his ministers, the flatterers and sycophants that serve him, and the wrongheadedness of his policies.

As well as avoiding contempt, a prince should acquire esteem. This he does by undertaking great enterprises, such as defeating a formidable enemy. Castro can lay claim to something along those lines, for he did thwart U.S. efforts at overthrowing him, and has gotten away with insulting in the coarsest terms American presidents from Kennedy to Clinton. This has made him a venerable figure in anti-American circles around the world, not excluding certain habitats within the United States itself, such as the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem and campus niches populated by leftist academics.<sup>37</sup>

Another device suggested by Machiavelli is for the prince to give the appearance of being “merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane, and devout,” especially the latter. When he arrived in Havana, Castro wore a medallion of Cuba’s patroness, the *Virgen del Cobre*<sup>38</sup> To this day, when circumstances call for it, Castro occasionally puts on the mask of benevolence and humanity, particularly with foreign visitors, especially women reporters, with whom he can be quite affable, charming, and even candid. Intermittently, in a show of magnanimity, he releases and sends out of the country (he never allows them to stay behind) a handful of prisoners whose plight has come to the attention of some foreign dignitary. In speeches and in press interviews, Castro frequently expresses heated indignation at what he says are the lies, injustices, mean ambitions, and other dishonorable acts on the part of others, all the while protesting his own truthfulness and generosity. And he never ceases to speak pious words on behalf of the world’s poor, proclaiming to be their champion.

An example of Castro’s unctuousness is drawn from a speech he gave at the United Nations on October 12, 1979. He “had driven from Kennedy Airport in a Lincoln Continental,

followed by forty-seven other luxury cars that brought in the rest of his large party” (Castro usually takes an entourage of sultanistic proportions wherever he goes). At the podium, he declared with a straight face: “I speak of behalf of the children of the world, who don’t even have a piece of bread. I speak on behalf of the ailing who lack medicine, on behalf of those who have been denied the right to life and human dignity.” He asked why it is that some people go barefoot so that others can ride in expensive automobiles. “And he concluded:

I warn that if we do not eliminate our present injustices and inequities peacefully and wisely, the future will be apocalyptic. The sound of weapons, threatening language, and arrogance in the international scene must cease. Enough of the illusion that the problems of the world can be solved by nuclear weapons. Bombs may kill the hungry, the sick, the ignorant, but they cannot eliminate hunger, disease, or ignorance. Nor can bombs destroy the just rebellion of the peoples. And in that holocaust the rich, who stand to lose the most in this world, will also lose their lives.

Let us bid farewell to armaments and concentrate in a civilized manner on the most urgent problems of our time. This is the responsibility, this is the sacred duty, of every statesman. And this is the basic premise for human survival. (Quirk, 801-802).

#### *4. Summary and Conclusion: What Kind of ‘Prince’ is Fidel Castro?*

Table 1 compares the Machiavellian prince and Fidel Castro on twenty-one items discussed in Sections 2 and 3. Note that on 19 of 23 characteristic qualities or behaviors, Castro matches the Machiavellian prince. Two items are in doubt: whether he is loved by his subjects and whether he avoided contempt by not falling into poverty. Also, there are two unambiguous discrepancies: against Machiavelli’s advice, Castro did not seek to avoid hatred by being thrifty and respecting the property and honor of his subjects; nor did he avoid contempt by appointing competent ministers and shun flatterers. Thus, one item in each pair has to do with avoiding contempt, and the other items, also one per pair, make up two sides of the same coin, one being love, the other hatred for the prince.

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Taking up the items on contempt first, note that Machiavelli offered yet a third way for avoiding being despised, namely to be well armed. That Castro is. And since there is little evidence that Castro is held in contempt by the generality of men, least of all by his subjects, it would appear that being armed, together with being feared, are sufficient to neutralize whatever threat to a prince is produced by the contempt that may be generated by his lording it over an impoverished country and surrounding himself with toadies.

The other two items are not to be disposed of so swiftly, however. Rather, they raise theoretical and interpretive issues that are central to the question that serves as the title of this paper, i.e., is Castro a Machiavellian prince? It is true that Machiavelli did not think that being

loved was all that important to a prince. In his mind, while it is good for a prince to be both loved and feared, if one is to be lacking, let it be love and not fear, because the prince cannot make his subjects love him, but he can control whether they fear him. But if love is not important, avoiding hatred is, because unless this is done, the prince can never be secure in his position, his subjects always remaining alert for an opportunity to get rid of him, and the prince will be constantly afraid of everything and everybody.

Now, these two passions being the reverse of one another, the subjects cannot both love and hate the prince. If the Cubans love Castro, they do not hate him, and vice versa. If they love him, as the conventional wisdom goes, then Machiavelli was wrong in his understanding of political psychology. If they love him, then *contra* Machiavelli, a prince can confiscate property wholesale, render everyone insecure in his possessions, make it impossible for most people to accumulate wealth and enjoy luxuries or amenities even as he squanders resources on irrational projects and distant wars, never deliver on promises of plenty, but repeatedly demand more sacrifices, constantly disturb their lives, giving them no peace—and still they will not hate but love him. Or, perhaps Machiavelli is not wrong in general but either Cubans are a peculiar people (and why should they be different from everyone else?), or they derive so much vicarious pleasure from his glory that it makes up for their penury, or there are some contextual conditions in the Cuban case that neutralize, refract, or reverse the normal relationship between a prince doing these things and the people hating him for it.

On the other hand, suppose that, *contra* the conventional wisdom, Cubans do not love but actually hate Castro, as Machiavelli would have one expect, only their hatred is well hidden, dissimulated for fear of punishment. Then this means that Machiavelli was wrong in believing that, along with contempt, hatred was dangerous to a prince, that he underestimated how much fear a modern prince can inspire in his subjects, so much fear that he can be widely hated and not lose his state.

Or does it? There is another possibility: that despite their many similarities, Machiavelli's prince is fundamentally different from the kind of "prince" Castro is. Nowhere in *The Prince* does Machiavelli use the word tyrant or tyranny. The closest he comes to it is in the last two paragraphs of Chapter IX, where he briefly discusses the "absolute regime." There he says that such a regime is very difficult to establish, and that any prince that wishes to do so must keep the people dependent on him. By contrast, the *Discourses*, which is about republics, contains more references to tyrant and tyranny than to princes or principalities (see the Glossary in M&T, 338, 344). It is that work, in fact, that supplied the passage quoted in Part 2 of this paper discussing what a new prince who wants to found a tyrannical regime must do, i.e., to make the rich poor and the poor rich, build and unbuild cities, change their names, create new authorities, move people about from place to another, in sum, to leave nothing intact, and allow no rank, institution, or wealth that does not depend on him to exist. Machiavelli goes on to opine that "these modes are very cruel, and enemies to every way of life, not only Christian, but human; and any man whatever should flee them and wish to live in private rather than as king with so much ruin to men" (M&T, 61-62). As Olschki (1945: 37) puts it, "tyranny is always condemned

by Machiavelli. The popular view that *The Prince* was written as a manual for tyrants is based on a superficial knowledge of the book.”

But didn't Castro turn Cuba's social and economic hierarchy upside down, making the rich poor and at least a few of the poor relatively "rich"? Didn't he shift people about, establish new ruling structures, break up and rename old provinces and create new ones? If he did not literally "unmake" Havana, didn't he ruin it simply by not keeping it up and failing to make new investments in infrastructure, letting large sections of it deteriorate, go to pieces and waste away?<sup>39</sup> Didn't he leave nothing intact in Cuba's society, economy, and state, allowing no rank, institution, or wealth to emerge that is not recognized as being granted as a privilege, and subject to recall at any time by him? Didn't he, in fact, set out to do just that, as he revealed in the letter he wrote from prison to his mistress, where he confessed that he "would sincerely love to revolutionize this country from one end to another!"?

I conclude, then, that Castro, although matching the Machiavellian prince in most respects, is fundamentally different from him. Machiavelli's prince is not a tyrant as the ancients understood the term. Fidel Castro is.

## ENDNOTES

1. According to Pardo Llada (1989, 42), *The Prince* was one of Castro's favorite works as early as 1949. José Antonio Rasco, a classmate of Castro in secondary school and at university, says that, from Machiavelli Castro "learned to justify everything." Rasco also uses the term "Machiavellian" to characterize Castro's conduct (Rasco 1999, 430, 432--my translation).
2. To minimize the probability of misinterpreting key passages on account of using a possibly faulty translation, I consulted four different editions of *The Prince*, all listed in the references, which are organized according to the name of the editor indicated on the title page. I relied most heavily on Mansfield (1998) and Skinner and Price (1988) because they appear to be the most self-conscious about language, each including an appendix on Machiavelli's vocabulary. (For an example of a problem in translation, see endnote # 8.) Also, Skinner and Price contains useful biographical sketches of the principal historical figures mentioned in *The Prince*. For quotations, I usually alternated between Mansfield and Skinner and Price, retaining the latter's English spelling of words (e.g., "honour," "favour," etc.).
3. Surprisingly, it appears that no one has seen fit to address this question before. A key-word search of computerized data bases turned up nothing. Also, I consulted Jorge Domínguez and Edward González by e-mail, and neither could cite any previous effort to establish Castro's Machiavellian credentials.
4. Most of the editions of *The Prince* cited in the references include a brief account of Machiavelli's life. For a biography, see Ridolfi 1963.
5. As previously noted, Mansfield (1998, 113-140) and Skinner and Price (1988, 100-114) both include an appendix on the vocabulary of *The Prince*. The meanings listed here were drawn from all the translations found in the references.
6. For Mansfield, Chapter 15 of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli avers that "it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity" settles the issue. This statement "contains a fundamental assault on all morality and political science, both Christian and classical, as understood in Machiavelli's time." Machiavelli "says that no moral rules exist, not made by men, which men must abide by." However, Mansfield admits "that the prevailing view among scholars of Machiavelli is that he was not an evil man who taught evil doctrines, and that he does not deserve his infamy." See Mansfield 1998, 61, x-xi, viii). A much more sympathetic interpretation of Machiavelli is offered by DeGrazia 1989. See also Lester Crocker's "Introduction" to the 1963 edition of *The Prince*, and Isaiah Berlin's erudite essay (Berlin, 1992).
7. In the last paragraph of the penultimate chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli pronounces that "fortune is a woman; and it is necessary if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down." Which prompts Mansfield to observe that Machiavelli "makes the politics of the new prince appear in the image of rape" (Mansfield, 101, xxiii).

8. It may be objected that “virtue” is not an appropriate term to use in characterizing Agathocles. But as indicated earlier in the text, Machiavelli means many things by *virtú*, and his intended relation to the classical or Christian understanding of “virtue” is disputed. Other sources translated this phrase as “conduct and career” (S&P, 31), “deeds and the life” (Mondanella and Musa, 104), and “conduct and valor” (Crocker 1963, 36). In “A Note on Translation,” Mansfield says that he “sought to be as literal and exact as is consistent with readable English,” that he takes “very seriously the translator’s obligation to present a writer’s thought in his own words, insofar as possible,” and that he “kept *virtú* as ‘virtue,’ so that readers of this translation can follow and join the dispute over the meaning Machiavelli attaches to the word. If his use of it sounds strange, as it did when he wrote and still does today, then let the reader wonder at finding something strange. It is not the translator’s business to make everything familiar” (Mansfield, xxv). It is, indeed, strange that, in the Mansfield translation, Machiavelli both affirms and denies that Agathocles had “virtue”: “Yet one cannot call it virtue to kill one’s citizens, betray one’s friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire an empire, but not glory. For, if one considers the virtue of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities, one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to any most excellent captain. Nonetheless, his savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes, do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men. Thus, one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he achieved without either” (Mansfield, 35). In other translations, this paragraph, although less confusing, is also contradictory or, at best, ambiguous (S&P, 31; Bondanella and Musa, 104; Crocker 1963, 36). Whether Machiavelli intended such ambiguity is an intriguing question.

9. I am not sure what to make of Machiavelli’s claim that “fraud alone” can suffice to seize a state. Neither Agathocles nor Cyrus relied exclusively on fraud. As we saw earlier, Agathocles employed deception to lure to their deaths those he wanted eliminated. For his part, Cyrus’ conquests were military in nature, even if he used guile to take the enemy by surprise. The examples in the paragraph that follow also demonstrate that fraud is used not by itself but as an aid to the decisive use of lethal force.

10. Sulloway (1996) argues that supporters of revolutions, in science, religion, and politics, tend to be disproportionately drawn from among later born children. Castro matches that description, only he was not a “supporter” but a maker of a total revolution.

11. There is some doubt as to the year of Castro’s birth, whether it was 1926, 1927, or 1928 (Quirk, 3). I have taken the middle number.

12. Pardo Llada also says that, years later, he learned that President Prío had given strict instructions to the soldiers not to fire on the crowd in case of disorder, that he preferred to resign the presidency than ignite a civil war. In other words, Castro’s proposed stunt just might have worked (Pardo Llada 1989, 70-73.).

13. Ironically, these terms apply to Castro just as well.

14. According to Mesa-Lago, between 1960 and 1990 the Soviets subsidized the Castro regime to the tune of \$65 billion. Cited in Pérez-López 1999, 116.

15. The fate of Camilo is a mystery, although Quirk thinks he was accidentally shot down by Castro's own air force, which mistook his plane for that of an exile group that had been engaged in economic sabotage, dropping incendiary bombs on cane fields (Quirk, 272).

16. "Fortune is a woman," declared Machiavelli, and one can't help noticing how Castro has been favored by the female sex throughout his life. His mother doted on him, as did several sisters. He married into a good family, and his wife continued to be loyal to him long after he ceased paying her much attention. Another woman from high society became his mistress, comforting him by correspondence while in prison. Teresa Casuso took pity on him when she visited him in a Mexican jail and after his release gave him free use of her apartment. After the rebel victory she accompanied him on trips abroad. Celia Sánchez picked up where his mother left off, performing other duties as well. Many others served him faithfully. And countless anonymous women, procured wherever he goes, at home or abroad, by his security guards, have catered to his lustful appetites in one-night stands (Quirk, 15).

17. A decade later, Castro would employ these very tactics on an even larger scale to "cleanse" the Escambray Mountains of anti-communist guerrillas (Clark 1990, 97, 614-615; Encinosa 1995, 59-61). The army "forcibly" relocated "large numbers of peasants" from central Cuba to Pinar del Río, the westernmost province (Quirk, 661). Of course, by then no domestic criticism was allowed and whatever came from abroad was ignored or peremptorily rejected. Be it noted that, according to Jorge Edwards, a Chilean diplomat, he first ran afoul of the Castro regime when he chaired a panel of judges that awarded the *Casa de las Américas* literary prize to Norberto Fuentes for his collection of short stories on the war in the Escambray against anti-Castro guerrillas. See Edwards (1973) and Fuentes (1968).

18. I once saw a documentary on Castro that juxtaposed video clips of his speeches with those of Mussolini, and the resemblance in gestures was uncanny. Also, Castro's 1961 dictum to writers and artists, "Inside the revolution everything, outside the revolution, nothing" merely substituted "revolution" for "state" in one of Mussolini's own proclamations.

19. In a letter to his mistress, Castro sounded like Machiavelli when he compared Napoleon to other conquerors: "I shall always think of [Napoleon] as best . . . . You must remember that Alexander inherited the powerful throne of Macedonia from his father. Hannibal was given an army, tempered in battle, by his father. And Julius Caesar owed much to his patrician forebears. Napoleon was indebted to no one, only to his own genius and his indomitable will" (Quirk, 64). Recall (see endnote #1) that, according to Pardo Llada, *The Prince* was one of Castro's favorite books as early as 1948-1949, long before his prison term.

20. According to Rasco, a former classmate (see endnote #1), as early as 1948 Castro was an admirer of Marx and Lenin, having attended workshops on their thoughts organized by the communist party (Rasco 1999, 420).

21. To recover Fidelito, his mother had to have him kidnapped from Castro's sisters while on an outing in a Mexico City park.
22. As editor of *Revolución*, the newspaper which shocked the country by headlining Castro's fake resignation, Carlos Franqui was an accessory to the cruel treatment meted out to Urrutia. In one of his memoirs, he confesses that this affair left a "bitter taste" in his mouth, and a case of "bad conscience" (Franqui 1981, 83).
23. The expulsion of American influence from the Island is reminiscent of previous purgations in the history of the Spanish-speaking world, such as Ferdinand of Aragón's "expelling of the Marranos from his kingdom and despoiling it of them" (Mansfield, 88), noted by Machiavelli.
24. Franqui relates that, at the beginning of the confrontation, when many of his inner circle feared an American invasion and the PSP and the USSR were counseling moderation, Castro plunged ahead, predicting that the U.S. would not invade: "'No. No. They will not invade. We took them by surprise. They do not react rapidly.'" Added Franqui, "We Cubans know the yankees" (Franqui 1981, 141).
25. For an inventory of the "huge amount of military technology" supplied to Castro by the Soviets (and China) by April 1961, see Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 99. But this was a down payment. A lot more was to come.
26. For an interesting psychological interpretation of Castro's attitude toward the United States, called "the hubris-nemesis complex" by their authors, see Gonzalez and Ronfeldt (1986).
27. Which leads me to believe that those who think that if only the U.S. lifted the embargo or did this or that to accommodate Castro, it would induce him to want to have better relations between the two countries, are mistaken. Castro has little to gain, and a great reputation to lose, by improving relations with the U.S. on anything other than his own terms. Any American concession will in all probability be interpreted by Castro as another victory, to be trumpeted accordingly.
28. The lack of separation between what is public and what is Castro's (reminiscent of what was common in Machiavelli's own time) dates back to revolutionary days. There was no treasurer and no accounting for the moneys raised for the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement--all funds were under his control. While in Mexico, he spent money contributed for the revolution on a young woman he was briefly engaged to. And the revenues raised through "revolutionary taxes" in areas of guerrilla operations were kept "in a mysterious box that contained the 'treasury' of the Rebel Army," under the exclusive control of Celia Sánchez, Castro's intimate confidante. Guevara, too, refused to account for money sent to him by the underground, which he placed in the hands of his mistress (Quirk, 102, 113, 154, 200).
29. I.e., Batista, his friends, business partners, and anyone else who had done business with the regime, a category elastic enough to encompass a great many people and hundreds of businesses (Quirk, 246).

30. Castro appointed himself first president of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA), which was initially envisioned as “the government within the government” (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 42). In its first year of existence INRA carried out a monumental land grab and eventually came to exercise hegemony over the entire agricultural economy.

31. From the Isle of Pines prison, he wrote to his mistress that “I would sincerely love to revolutionize this country from one end to the other! I feel certain that this would bring happiness to the Cuban people. I would not be stopped by the hatred and ill will of a few thousand people, including some of my own relations, half the people I know, two-thirds of my legal comrades, and four-fifths of my former schoolmates!” (Quirk, 66). Note that he anticipated the loss of most of his “legal comrades” after seizing power.

32. The conventional wisdom is no longer so sure that Castro is popular. This is evident in the careful wording that characterizes explanations offered by seasoned Cuba watchers of why Castro survived the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Take the following examples (*italics added*): “the regime remains in power because it retains the allegiance of *enough* of its people” (Dominguez 1993, 107); “inside Cuba Castro’s rule is still considered by *some* to be legitimate, and Western diplomats say *many* Cubans are more committed to Castro as a person than to Marxism-Leninism as an ideology” (Gunn 1990, 144); whether Castro *could any longer* win an election—or, more to the point, an approval rating—is open to question. Even so, there remains a *significant* reservoir of support, if only because *many* Cubans see no alternative to the Revolution and because *many* have a vested interest in its survival” (Smith 1992, 97). “Enough,” “many,” “some,” “significant”—these are hedge words, the observers no longer being confident that Castro commands even majority support. By contrast, Montaner boldly contends that “The overwhelming majority— I dare say eighty percent— hates Castro and communism” (Montaner 1996, 61—my translation).

33. *Paredón* (“to the wall”) means execution by shooting. The word derives from the practice of having the condemned man stand in front of a firing squad, a wall behind his back, although being tied to a stake or a pole will do just as well. During the early years of the regime, crowds would yell “*paredón, paredón*” on cue to terrorize whatever class, group, or individual was the target of Castro’s ire at the moment. Franqui estimates that there were 10,000 executions in the first 30 years of the regime (1988, 350), or an average of almost one per day.

34. On Castro’s repressive machinery, see Bernal (1999), Córdova (1999), Golendorf (1978), Padilla (1989), Valladares (1985), and Valls (1986). See also Edwards (1973).

35. On the many privileges enjoyed by Castro and his ruling clique, see Clark (1999). The *Forbes* estimate is available at <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/98/0706/6201240tab1.htm>.

36. For an illustration, see the case of the British geneticists Thomas Preston and Malcolm Willis. In 1965, Castro “invited them to Havana to direct the newly founded Institute of Animal Sciences,” one of his pet projects. After several years in Cuba they became totally disillusioned. They spoke of Castro as “an amateur geneticist getting his kicks from a multi-million dollar experiment,” who “had set himself up as an expert and imposed his ‘ignorant policies’ on the

scientists.” They “expressed their contempt for the ‘low level’ of research in Cuba, which they attributed to Fidel Castro’s ‘combination of ignorance and stubborn determination to have the last word.’ He would rather make a mistake than listen to outsiders.” Willis complained about many of his students, “‘political types’” who “‘don’t have the mental energy for really detailed effort. They go into politics to get easy kudos and perks. They are the ones who are sent abroad on conferences. They can’t risk sending the bright people out of the country. They won’t come back. The deadheads have to come back because they would starve anywhere else. The keenest party people are the worst’” (Quirk, 626-627).

37. On Castro’s mid-decade visit to Harlem, see Solomon 1996. She notes that, at that event, only journalists hand-picked by the regime for their “historic presentation of Cuba” were allowed. As for academics, be it noted that the Latin American Studies Association, which has condemned every one of the region’s right-wing regimes, and even some democratic ones, for violating human rights and academic freedom, has maintained a studied silence on Castro’s long record of wrongdoing. In fact, it has gone out of its way to preserve cordial “scholarly relations” with the regime. See Cuzán (1994, 1995).

38. He later discarded it, launching a vicious attack on the Catholic Church, taking over its schools and charities, expelling many priests and nuns, thereafter keeping it at the margin of society.

39. In a recent telephone interview Guillermo Cabrera Infante laments that “‘Of Havana nothing is left even in Havana, it is destroyed, as if it had been bombed from within, of the buildings all that is left are the shells, the facades, behind which there is nothing. It is a painful disaster for me, but Havana has been totally destroyed by Fidel Castro’” (Laguna 1999, 11A—my translation).

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**Table 1. Machiavelli's Prince and Fidel Castro Compared**

Machiavelli's Prince	Fidel Castro
Humble or obscure origins	Yes
Characterized by <i>virtú</i> : audacity, courage, energy, spiritedness, strength	Yes
Characterized by <i>prudenzia</i> : astuteness, cleverness, sagacity, shrewdness	Yes
Favored by <i>fortuna</i> : luck, intervention by others, opportunities	Yes
Studies history, modeled himself after great men	Yes
Relies on own resources, especially military	Yes
Engages in military exercises, acquires practical knowledge of terrain	Yes
Imitates the lion: roars ferociously to scare his enemies	Yes
Imitates the fox: "works around men's brains" to deceive them	Yes
Dissolved old army and built a new one loyal to himself	Yes
Exchanged country's old allies in favor of new ones	Yes
Declared himself for one of two states in conflict, did not stay neutral	Yes
Discarded many of those who supported his seizure of the state	Yes
Found reliable servants among those he had initially viewed with suspicion	Yes
Did not rely on the "great" for support; made and unmade the "great"	Yes
Acquired esteem by nurturing an enmity, defeating a great enemy	Yes
Projects appearance of humanity, benevolence, piety	Yes
Avoids contempt by being well armed	Yes
Instills fear in subjects	Yes
Is loved by subjects	?
Avoids contempt by not falling into poverty	?
Avoids hatred by keeping taxes low and respecting property of subjects	No
Avoids contempt by appointing competent ministers and avoiding flatterers	No