For more than a century subsequent to his death in 1527, Niccolò Machiavelli was known to the larger world as a counselor of princes, as an enemy to morality and the Christian religion, and as an inspiration to the advocates of raison d’état. It was not until after the execution of Charles I in January 1649 that he would become almost equally famous also as an advocate for republican rule.

There is no great mystery in this. Machiavelli’s Prince is, at least on the surface, a much more accessible book than his Discourses on Livy. It is shorter, pithier, and more vigorous, and it enjoyed a grand succès de scandale from the very first. In contrast, the Discourses on Livy is long, subtle, complex, and difficult to decipher. In short, the work in which republicanism looms large is as unattractive to the casual reader as The Prince is alluring. Even now, the longer book is much more rarely read.

Of course, from the outset, there were those who argued that Machiavelli revealed his true opinions only in his Discourses on Livy. Within six years of the appearance of the Florentine’s two great masterpieces in printed form, an inquisitive and well-connected English visitor to Florence named Reginald Pole was told by one or more of Machiavelli’s compatriots that the author of the Discourses on Livy had written The Prince solely in order to trip up the Medici and bring about their demise. Machiavelli had purportedly acknowledged as much himself. Although Pole was not himself inclined to entertain this claim, others who learned of the report were perfectly prepared to do so, and the

1 See the report in his Apologia ad Carolum Quintum (1539), in Epistolarum Reginaldi Poli S. R. E. Cardinalis et aliorum ad ipsum collectio, ed. Angelo M. Quirini (Brescia: J. M. Rizzardi, 1744–57), 1:66–171 (esp. 151–2), where Pole refers to a visit to Florence that took place in the winter of 1538.

2 See, for example, Giovanni Matteo Toscano, Peplus Italice (Paris: Morelli, 1578), 52; André Rossant, Les meurs, humeurs et comportements de Henry de Valois (Paris: P. Mercier, 1589), 11. Cf., however, Thomas Fitzherbert, The First Part of a Treatise Concerning Policy and Religion (Douai: L. Kellam, 1606), 412. Although Pole’s Apologia ad Carolum Quintum was not published

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tendency for students of the subject to discount *The Prince* on one ground or another and to treat the *Discourses on Livy* as representative of Machiavelli’s real thinking has had adherents ever since – especially in the English-speaking world, where in some quarters Machiavelli’s apparent espousal of republican-ism has long inspired admiration.

Alberico Gentili is a case in point. In a scholarly volume on the conduct of embassies, which he dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney and published in 1585, not long before he was created Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford University, Gentili singled out as “precious” the *Discourses on Livy*, described their author as “*Democratiae laudator et assertor*,” termed him “a very great enemy to tyranny,” and claimed that he had written *The Prince* not “to instruct the tyrant but to expose openly his secret deeds and exhibit him naked and clearly recognizable to the wretched peoples” of the world. “It was,” he explained, “the strategy of this most prudent of all men to educate the people on the pretext of educating the prince.”

Some of the most enthusiastic seventeenth-century admirers of Machiavelli’s republican reflections thought this sort of special pleading preposterous. Henry Neville was one such. After the Restoration, James Harrington’s longtime friend and associate published an English translation of Machiavelli’s works, to which he contributed a preface. Included in his preface was a letter purportedly by Machiavelli himself, describing *The Prince* as “both a Satyr against” tyrants “and a true Character of them.” To this letter, which was to mislead unsuspecting readers from the late seventeenth well into the nineteenth century, Neville puckishly assigned the date 1 April 1537 – which was April Fool’s Day, some ten years after its putative author’s death.

Neville’s gentle mockery of those who could not stomach *The Prince* should serve as a warning to us all, for Machiavelli’s republican book is by no means as unfriendly to principality as one might suppose. In fact, the author of the *Discourses on Livy* appears to have been no less willing than the author of *The Prince* to dispense his advice indiscriminately – not just to republics and their citizens, but to princes, to aspirants to one-man rule, and even to those in printed form until the eighteenth century, what he said therein almost immediately found its way into diplomatic reports: See *Letters and Papers (Foreign and Domestic) of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. W. Brewer, James Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie (London: Longman, 1862–1910), 1441, no. 200.

For an analysis and critique of the most influential recent attempt to drive a wedge between *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* and to justify giving precedence to the latter, see Paul A. Rahe, “Sitting Machiavelli,” in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 270–308.

Alberico Gentili, *De legationibus libri tres* (London: Thomas Vautrollerius, 1585), 3.9 (Sig. ziii). Traiano Boccalini’s satirical account of his contemporaries’ response to Machiavelli points in the direction of Gentili’s conclusions: See *De’ragguagli di Parnaso* (Venice: P. Farri, 1612–15), 1.89.

See *The Works of the Famous Nicholas Machiavel, Citizen and Secretary of Florence* (London: John Starkey, 1675), sig. (∗∗∗) v.
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whom he unashamedly singles out as tyrants. His Discourses are addressed neither to the citizens of republics as such nor even to “those who are princes” already, but rather to “those who, for their infinite good parts, deserve to be” princes – for, in a republic, individual citizens may “by means of their virtù become princes,” as happened, he expressly notes, in the case of Hiero of Syracuse. It is no wonder that readers have always tended to give priority to Machiavelli’s counsel concerning the acquisition and retention of political power.

Bad timing no doubt contributed as well to the eclipse of Machiavelli’s republican teaching. The Florentine composed The Prince and his Discourses on Livy in the second decade of the sixteenth century after the collapse of the Florentine republic and the reestablishment of Medici rule. The two works circulated widely in manuscript for some time thereafter, both in Florence and abroad; and, within five years of their author’s death in 1527, they were published in Rome under the imprimatur of Machiavelli’s patron Clement VII, the second of the two Medici popes. The Florentine’s two most important books could not have appeared at a moment less favorable to the republican cause. In the century that followed, everything conspired to strengthen the executive power.

The military revolution, to which Machiavelli had contributed much, restored infantry to the supremacy that it had enjoyed in classical times, but in the process it eliminated the usefulness of the feudal levy and thereby undermined the contractual foundations of limited kingship. The consequence was not a revival of the citizen militia along the lines that had sustained the republics of classical antiquity. Nor did this revolution eventuate in the arrangement Machiavelli had himself championed: the establishment of conscript armies drawn promiscuously from the various polities’ citizen and subject populations. The infantry’s new-found primacy contributed, instead, to the predominance of professional armies, the traditional tool of absolute rulers. To make matters worse, in the very same years in which the military revolution began to reshape the conditions of political rule, the Reformation shattered the unity of Christendom and gave rise to civil strife and war in central and western Europe on a scale hitherto unknown. In this environment, with rare exceptions, such as

7 See NM, D Ep. Ded., 2.2.3, which should be read in light of P 1, 6–14 (esp. 6 and 13).
8 For the prepublication and publication history of Machiavelli’s works, see Adolph Gerber, Niccolo Machiavelli: Die Handschriften, Ausgaben und Übersetzungen seiner Werke im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert (Turin: Bottega d’Erasmo, 1962). It was under the commission of Clement VII that Machiavelli composed the Florentine Histories.
10 Machiavelli did not, as is often suggested, link arms-bearing with citizenship per se: Note P 12–13, 20; D 1.21, 2.10, 12.4, 13.2, 20, 24, 30, 3.24; see AW 1.12.8–96. For further discussion, see Chapter 1.
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Venice, Genoa, and Lucca, civic republics became principalities, and, in principalities, representative assemblies ceased to meet. The formalities associated with securing consent count for little when disorder looms and life becomes increasingly nasty, brutish, and short. In times of anarchy, for the sake of peace and protection, most men will sacrifice everything else.

Of course, England was to some extent an exception to the rule, and Englishmen were acutely sensitive to this fact. Prior to the 1640s, England managed to escape the sort of disorder that had paralyzed France in the late sixteenth century, and its parliament not only continued to meet throughout this period, it gained in strength, influence, and assertiveness, while local self-government flourished in the parishes, boroughs, and shires. This caused some of the English Crown’s subjects to think of themselves as citizens and even to conceive of England as a republic of sorts, and it occasioned on the part of many of the better educated a keen interest in the political institutions, practices, and ethos of the ancient commonwealths and a curiosity concerning the sources of

11 For the fate of republican theorizing in Italy in the wake of this development, see Vittor Ivo Comparato, “From the Crisis of Civil Culture to the Neapolitan Republic ed 1647: Republicanism in Italy between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Republicanism: A Shared Heritage I: Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe, ed. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 169–93.


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Venice’s undoubted success,16 Playwrights, such as William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, seized upon this fashion as an opportunity for the exploration of republican themes. In England, a handful of would-be statesmen even turned to the Discourses on Livy for enlightenment concerning their country’s attitude for imperial grandeur.17 By and large, however, interest in the ancients and in Machiavelli remained speculative: it did not, at that time, eventuate in a concrete program of reform, much less a political movement aimed at the establishment of a republic on English soil.18

In the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, most Englishmen took it for granted that their king governed by divine right.19 Most understood their rights and responsibilities in terms of prescription under the common law as a matter of tradition made rational by a process of trial and error and sanctioned by time out of mind.20 Some were inclined to think all government contractual, to treat the king’s coronation oath as confirmation of this fact, and even to envisage their monarchy as some sort of mixed regime,21 but republicans they were not. When Thomas Hobbes (Levathan II.xxi.8–9; Behemoth 158) blamed the English civil war on the fact that so many of his countrymen were well read in the classics, he greatly exaggerated the importance of the phenomenon.22
Sir Philip Sidney came closer to the truth in his *Arcadia* when he treated the late Elizabethan enthusiasm for republicanism on the model of Athens, Sparta, and Rome as an academic concern, “a matter more in imagination than practice” appealing solely to “the discoursing sort of men.”

It is no surprise, then, that, in England as well as on the continent, Machiavelli was at first valued almost solely for the advice that he gave to princes, their ministers, and aspirants to princely rule on matters of state. In fact, given the unfavorable character of the circumstances in which his books became available to the larger world, the only real ground for astonishment is that the Florentine ever came to be widely appreciated for his republicanism at all. In England, it took a revolution to force a reassessment of the *Discourses on Livy*, and even then there were serious obstacles standing in the way.

After all, the trial and execution of Charles I were not a part of anyone’s plan. When the Long Parliament was elected late in October 1640, its members were chosen for the purpose of achieving a redress of grievances. Apart, perhaps, from Henry Marten, no one at the time was intent on overthrowing England’s ancient constitution: Their goal was to save it. No one else even imagined that their attempt at a redress of grievances would eventuate in civil war, the beheading of a king, the abolition of the monarchy and House of Lords, and the establishment of a republic on English soil. Had anyone even suggested the possibility, nearly all of those then elected would have recoiled in horror.


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Of course, when the civil war began in earnest, as it did late in 1642, a few bold speculators did think their way through the logic then unfolding. In Parliament, from that time on, Marten, Sir Peter Wentworth, and the handful of radicals under their sway exploited the conflict mercilessly, seizing on every opportunity to attack royal authority, to intensify the antagonisms occasioned by bloodshed, and to subvert the awe and reverence then still almost universally accorded the king.

Their efforts, however, were largely wasted, for all but a tiny minority of their colleagues did, in fact, recoil in horror in December 1648 and January 1649, when the erstwhile adherents of the parliamentary cause found themselves forced to choose between the unpalatable alternatives of regicide and a compromise with Charles that was tantamount to an abandonment of nearly everything for which they had fought. There can be little doubt as to the revulsion provoked by this unprecedented, revolutionary act. Within the first year of its appearance in the immediate aftermath of Charles's beheading, the royalist tract Eikon Basilike: The Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitude and Sufferings went through thirty-five editions in London and twenty-five more in Ireland and elsewhere.

By the dark deed that gave it birth, the English republic was arguably doomed from the start. The recognition of their isolation to a very considerable degree paralyzed the Rump Parliament that governed England after Colonel Thomas Pride's purge of the Long Parliament on 6 December 1648. It was not until 19 May 1649, more than four months after the execution of the king, that this assembly even managed formally to declare England “a Commonwealth and Free State... henceforth to be governed... by the supreme authority of this nation, the representatives of the people in Parliament, and that without any king or House of Lords.”

The knowledge, however, that the regicide republicans were

60 See Underdown, Pride’s Purge, 240–1, 247–335.
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a small and insular minority did not deter the handful of men in Parliament who had already demonstrated, in the crisis of this time, the extraordinary resolution requisite if they were to follow through on the logic of what they had almost all so innocently and unheedingly begun more than eight years before. If anything, their sense of isolation made these men all the more resolute – all the more insistent on defending the propriety of all that they had done, all the more intent on asserting the dignity and legitimacy of the new regime, and all the more eager to prove it a success in its endeavors both at home and abroad.34

It was among this select group and the small proportion of those within the populace as a whole who admired their courage and determination that we find those who set out to rethink English politics from the ground up in light of the new species of republicanism championed by Niccolò Machiavelli. These were, however, exceedingly few in number, for most of their fellow republicans were Puritans, and for understandable reasons, devout Christians tended to balk at the prospect of embracing a thinker said to have given to the devil his English moniker “Old Nick.”35 In no way, however, as we shall soon see, did such concerns act as a restraint upon Marchamont Nedham or James Harrington.

Marchamont Nedham was a journalist, one of the very first and most distinguished members of a breed in his day entirely new to the world. He was born in August 1620 at Burford in Gloucestershire into a genteel family of modest means. He studied at All Souls College and took his B.A. from the University of Oxford in 1637. That year or the next, he accepted a position as an usher at Merchant Taylor's School in London, and in 1640 he successfully sought better remunerated employment as an underclerk at Gray’s Inn. Three years thereafter, as internecine strife tore England apart and effective censorship fell into abeyance, Nedham discovered his true métier. He was, then, barely twenty-three years of age.¹

Nedham was an entertainer of sorts and a time-server – “a jack of all sides,” as one contemporary critic put it, “transcendently gifted in opprobrious and treasonable Droll.”² In the course of a long and checkered career – stretching from early in the English civil war in 1643 to a time shortly before his death in


² See James Heath, A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War: The Second Impression Greatly Enlarged: (London: [s.n.], 1663), 492.

1678, when the Exclusion Crisis was just getting under way – he displayed a political and moral flexibility and a lust for lucre exceeded only by his talent. He began as a fierce defender of the parliamentary cause, switched in 1647 to the side of the king, and then, some nine months after his royal patron’s demise, while on the lam from Newgate Jail, he wrote to offer his services to the presiding officer of the regicide court.  

Nedham’s was not a costive muse. In the course of his career, he published more than thirty-four pamphlets and books. In addition, he composed most of the copy that appeared in the Roundhead newsbook Mercurius Britanicus, then edited the Cavalier newsbook Mercurius Pragmaticus; and then he edited the newsbook Mercurius Politicus – in turn for the Rump, for the Nominated Parliament, for the Protectorate, and for the Rump twice again, celebrating the coups d’etat that overthrew each and, in the end, even hailing the return of the king. On the eve of the Restoration, after publishing a brief but bitter satire warning the Roundheads of vengeance to come, he prudently withdrew into exile. But soon he managed to purchase for himself a personal pardon; and, while many of his erstwhile associates suffered execution, imprisonment, or exile, he ended his days writing pamphlets for Charles II, the earl of Danby, and their Tory allies against the Exclusion Whigs and their leader, the first earl of Shaftesbury, whom Nedham had the effrontery to denounce not just as “a man of... dapper Conscience, and dexterity, that can dance through a Hoop; or that can be a Tambler through Parties, or a small Teazer of Religions, and Tonzer of Factions,” but also as “a Pettifogger of Politicks” ever ready “to shift Principles like Shirts; and quit an unlucky Side in a fright at the noise of a New Prevailing Party,” and even as “a Will-with-a-Wisp, that uses to lead Men out of the way; then leaves them at last in a Ditch and Darkness, and nimbly retreats for Self-security.”

Nedham knew whereof he wrote. He, too, was a man of dapper conscience and dexterity; he had a well-earned reputation for shifting principles like shirts; and he was certainly a “Will-with-a-Wisp,” possessed of what one contemporary described as “a dextrous faculty of creeping into the breech of every Rising Power.” What he lacked in integrity, this inky wretch made up for in audacity.


4 See Frank, Cromwell’s Press Agent, 196–9, whose list is undoubtedly incomplete.

5 See [Marchamont Nedham], Newes from Brussels, in a Letter from a Neer Attendant on His Maiesties Person. To a Person of Honour Here, Which Casually Became Thus Publique (London: Livewell Chapman, 1660).


7 See Fanatique Queries PropoS’d to the Present Assertors of the Good Old Cause (London: Printed for Praise-God Barebones, the Rumps Leatherfeller, 1666), 4.