



## **Machiavelli**

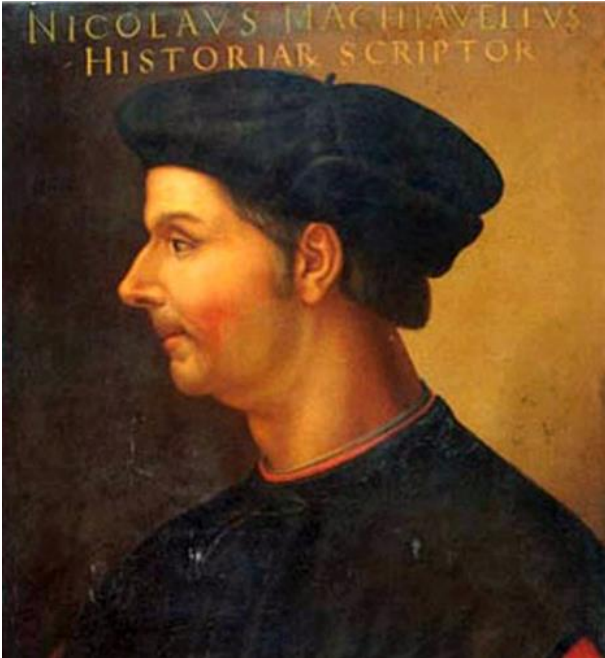
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# Machiavelli

Reply to Kenneth Burke in 'An Exchange on Machiavelli' (letters), *New York Review of Books*, 6 April 1972, 35–6 at 36



TO THE EDITORS, *NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS*

[*published* 6 April 1972]

I do not disagree with anything that Professor Kenneth Burke says in his letter and the relevant chapter of his book to which he refers. Indeed, his view of the 'rhetoric' advocated by Machiavelli and the spectrum of pressure, stretching from violence to persuasion, seems to me original, important, and true. Moreover, I think Professor Burke to be entirely right, against Cassirer, in his conception of the relationship of the last chapter of *The Prince* to the rest of the treatise.

The purpose of my article was, however, to find an answer to a problem different from that with which Professor Burke is concerned, namely, what it is that so deeply shocked so many readers of Machiavelli, who did not react similarly to equally tough-minded

<sup>1</sup> In the same issue.

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sentiments in Thucydides or Aristotle or the Old Testament and later writings. My answer to it – whether it is right or wrong – does not seem to me to conflict with anything in Mr Burke’s argument. It is directed against the interpretations of those who believe either that Machiavelli had no moral position at all, or that he allowed the possibility of creating a successful secular state founded upon, or compatible with, the institutions or basic tenets of Christianity or of the secular beliefs that derive from it, or even the possibility of a kind of compromise between these ways of life (such as has historically obtained). Machiavelli does not seem to me to hold a realistic position; but it has enough truth in it to have upset many generations of readers. This is a different thesis from Mr Burke’s, but seems to me wholly consistent with it.

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