

## IMPERIUM AETERNUM SPINOZA'S CRITIQUE OF MACHIAVELLI AND ITS SOURCE IN VAN DEN ENDEN

### *1. Introduction*

In an original and very stimulating article, 'Spinoza e l'acutissimo fiorentino',<sup>1</sup> Paolo Cristofolini asserts the existence of a deep 'continuity of thought' between Machiavelli and Spinoza.<sup>2</sup> He puts this continuity against the background of much sympathy for Machiavelli's work in the intellectual circle in which Spinoza's philosophy developed. An important figure, in a certain sense also the founder of this circle, was Spinoza's master Franciscus Van den Enden, who is described by Cristofolini as a '*cultore di Machiavelli*'. This title is not used for Spinoza himself, but there can be no doubt that Cristofolini considers also Spinoza as an admirer and theoretical descendant of Machiavelli.<sup>3</sup>

Machiavelli is twice mentioned by Spinoza in his *Tractatus Politicus*. Cristofolini analyses only the first place (TP 5/7) where his name makes appearance in the context of a discussion about the best political organization of an empire. Further he presents a couple of parallel texts from the *Discorsi* and the TP, which are, indeed, evidence for a strong influence of Machiavellian themes in Spinoza's political treatises. Cristofolini does not quote nor comment the second place (TP 10/1). He only derives a part of the title to his article from this place ('acutissimo fiorentino'- *acutissimus Florentinus*), explaining that the epitheton 'acutissimus', also used in 5/7, betrays an adoration of Machiavelli by Spinoza, comparable to the adoration of the Gods and heroes in Homer.

The question to be discussed in this article concerns exactly this point. Is Spinoza indeed a worshipper of Machiavelli? And second: was Van den Enden indeed a worshipper of Machiavelli? Maybe Cristofolini did not intend the word 'cultore' in its strong, that is its religious meaning. Perhaps he only wanted to stress the indisputable fact that there is in many respects a strong influence of Machiavelli's work on Spinoza's work. The reader who is well acquainted with the *Discorsi* must certainly recognize many a theme. I fully agree with this claim. But my question is, whether, after all, Spinoza shows a positive reception of Machiavelli, i.e. a reception without criticism of the headline of Machiavelli's essays. Without knowing whether Cristofolini affirms this latter formulation, I for my part wish to deny it. The whole chapter TP 10 is a long and massive, although disguised, refutation of Machiavelli's implicit proposition that the Roman system of politics, especially its intermittent refuge to the dictatorship for saving the state from a serious crisis, is an excellent and admirable system. But also the first mentioning of Machiavelli's name is not without problems. Spinoza takes at least two proviso's in his assessment of Machiavelli's intentions. "What means a prince, whose sole motive is lust of mastery (*dominandi libido*), should use to establish and maintain his dominion, the most acute Machiavelli has set forth at large, but with what design seems not to be sure." He, then, argues in favour of the hypothesis (*forsan voluit*: 'perhaps his objective was') that a free people must withhold from trusting

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<sup>1</sup> Recently (2001) published on internet URL: <<http://web.tiscalinet.it/fogliospinoziano/artic9b/>>

<sup>2</sup> "Il legame e la continuità di pensiero fra i due sono, in effetti, profondi".

<sup>3</sup> The 'filiation' Machiavelli-Spinoza was already pleaded for by other Italian scholars like A. Ravà, U. Dotti and A. Droetto, and in a provocative way by A. Negri, who in his *L'anomalia selvaggia. Saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* (Milano 1981) speaks several times about a republican and even revolutionary line 'Machiavelli-Spinoza-Marx', a thesis which is accepted by A. Matheron in his introduction to the French translation of Negri's work. "Toute la force d'antagonisme, tout le travail de la pensée novatrice de l'époque moderne, toute la genèse populaire et prolétarienne de ses révolutions et toute la gamme des positions républicaines, de Machiavel au jeune Marx, tout cela se condense dans l'expérience exemplaire de Spinoza" (*L'anomalie sauvage*, Paris 1982) 31.

the caprices of a single man. “He perhaps wished to show how cautious a free multitude should be of entrusting its welfare absolutely to one man, who, unless in his vanity he thinks he can please everybody, must be in daily fear of plots, and so is forced to look chiefly after his own interest ...” Machiavelli was a wise man, a ‘sapiens’. It can also not be doubted that he was in favour of the freedom (*libertas*) of the people. We must give him, therefore, the benefit of the doubt and should conclude that he only gave “most wholesome advices” instead of pleading for the tyrannical regime of a ‘prince’.

Ten years earlier than Spinoza Van den Enden honoured Machiavelli with the title ‘acutissimus’ in his *Vrye Politijke Stellingen* (1665) with the words: “een zeer scherpzinnige Oordelaer, en Observateur” (a very acute judge and observer).<sup>4</sup> It cannot be denied that these words indicate a certain respect. However, when we consult the many pages he dedicates to a discussion of Machiavelli’s admiration of the Roman system of a mixed form of government, we discover that his attitude vis-à-vis Machiavelli is mainly negative. Machiavelli is introduced as “an unfeigned and manifest advocate of all sorts of foul superstition and imposture” (161) and is further, as we shall see, sentenced in a most severe terminology.

The different appreciation of the merits of Machiavelli’s work constitutes a problem as soon as we realize that Van den Enden and Spinoza are both writers on politics who think that the democratic structure is the best possible political organization of a people and further, that democratic institutions are the only safeguard of a permanent and strong republic. Both even do not hesitate to see in a sound democracy the condition for an ‘imperium aeternum’. This is Spinoza’s qualification in TP 10/9, which is also anticipated by his master with ‘eeuwighdurende Politie en gemeene beste’ (eternal empire and commonwealth).<sup>5</sup> Both authors come to this point in the context of a discussion of Machiavelli’s requirement that in behalf of its stability and a long duration every state has now and then to “return to its principles”.<sup>6</sup> How is it possible that both draw the same inspiration from an author whom they yet interpret in an opposite direction? Must we conclude that either Spinoza or Van den Enden was wrong in his understanding of Machiavelli’s text? It is my intention in this essay to prove that neither was the case. I pretend that Van den Enden and Spinoza drew the same inspiration from Machiavelli’s works and, moreover, that Spinoza is here tributary to his master, as in many other aspects of his political theory. A further purpose of this paper is to show at the hand of Van den Enden’s text a current misunderstanding of the relation of Spinoza to Machiavelli, as if he would be an unconditional admirer of this great political writer which he is certainly not.

It seems to me that the best method for fulfilling this program is to acquire *first* an impression of the contexts in which Spinoza does praise the Florentine master and to try to find out why he refers to this famous but much decried man who was his predecessor as a writer on politics. *Second*, the same research must be done on the text of Van den Enden. What was the function of his discussion of Machiavelli’s assumptions and advices in reading Titus Livius and interpreting the Roman political history with an eye on his own time? In a *third* section we will consider the results of these two procedures and

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<sup>4</sup> The title of Van den Enden’s treatise will be abbreviated to VPS. The reference is on p. 223 of the edition of the VPS by Wim Klever (Amsterdam 1992).

<sup>5</sup> VPS 191.

<sup>6</sup> The title of *Discorsi* III/1 sounds: “In order that a Religious Institution or a State should long survive it is essential that it should frequently be Restored to its original principles”. See *Discourses*. Ed. by B. Crick (Penguin Classics 1981) p.385.

their comparison. I foretell the reader that they are surprising and will bring him to a better appropriation of Spinoza's radical position.

## 2. Spinoza against a putative or real doctrine of Machiavelli

Spinoza's first reference to Machiavelli occurs in the fifth chapter of the *Tractatus Politicus*, in which he explains 'the best state of an empire'. Such a state is characterized by 'peace (*pax*) and security (*securitas*) of life'. "Therefore that state (*imperium*) is the best, where men pass their lives in unanimity (*concorditer*) and the laws are kept unbroken".<sup>7</sup> Harmony, however, cannot be found in a commonwealth "whose subjects are but hindered by terror from taking arms" or in a state, where "peace depends on the inertia of the subjects that are lead about like sheep".<sup>8</sup> An ideal state is inconsistent with the situation of slavery for the people. The eventual peace of such a state is only on the surface. It has nothing of the essence of a state, namely the cordial conspiracy and cooperation of the many, on the basis of equality, towards the collective organization of things that are of common interest.<sup>9</sup> A 'multitude of free people' (*libera multitudo*)<sup>10</sup> cannot strive after anything else. The republic which is instituted by a free multitude cannot be a state under the reign of fear instead of hope. When such a state is captured by a (foreign or native) potentate 'by right of war', this means the end of concord and peace, the end also of the method according to which people usually help and save each other.

Well, this being said and agreed upon, it might be objected that Machiavelli in *Il Principe* must cherish a different opinion, since he seems to recommendate the hard line of aggressive conquering of states by ambitious princes and their subsequent inhumane regime of terror in order to stabilize the newly occupied countries. It is against this background - a possible but unfounded objection against his political theory - that Spinoza tries to correct the superficial and wrong impression a reader might acquire from reading that work and so to strengthen his thesis. His reasoning is as follows. We must distinguish between a technical part and a moralizing part in *Il Principe*. On the one hand Machiavelli gives a description of the "means a prince must use in order to establish and maintain his dominion" and provides us with many historical illustrations of this technique. On the other hand Spinoza confesses that he does not know precisely Machiavelli's intention but can only have a suspicion about it. He thinks that Machiavelli, famous as a wise man fighting for liberty, pictured the tricks of tyrans in order to warn us against their diabolical threatening of peaceful commonwealths. A 'free multitude ought to be on its guard not to entrust its welfare absolutely to one man'.<sup>11</sup>

This is a clear position, for which Spinoza would be inclined to put his hand in the fire. But is this hypothetical conclusion about the intentions of Machiavelli, as discussed in TP 5/7, not in straight contrast with Machiavelli's obvious sympathy, shown abundantly in his *Discorsi*, for the Roman political system, especially its rule to nominate a so-called 'dictator' for a certain period in highly critical circumstances of the republic? Chapter ten of the *Tractatus politicus*, the final chapter of Spinoza's treatment of aristocracy, is dedicated to this problem.

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<sup>7</sup> Quotes from TP 5/2.

<sup>8</sup> Quotes from TP 5/4.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Spinoza's explanation of the origin of a state in *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ch.16.

<sup>10</sup> Term which is three times used in TP 5/6.

<sup>11</sup> *Libera multitudo cavere debet ne salutem suam uni absolute credat* (TP 5/7).

As a political architect who designs the constructions mankind eventually wants to live in, Spinoza has laid and explained the foundations of a type of aristocracy which comes rather close to a democratic system. He has especially cared for its stability because nothing does more wrong to a people than the collapse of its political organisation and the subsequent anarchy. There must be, therefore, built in a provision which will avert the danger of its being changed into another form. One ought not cherish illusions about any system. There will always creep in certain threatening diseases which need curation. It is here that Spinoza refers again to Machiavelli, quoting and paraphrasing the *Discorsi* III/1:

that like a human body a state (*imperium*) has daily added to it something that at some time or other needs to be remedied. And so, he says, it is necessary for something occasionally to occur, to bring back the state to that first principle, on which it was in the beginning established. And if this does not take place within the necessary time, its blemishes will go on increasing, till they cannot be removed but with the state itself. And this restoration, he says, may either happen accidentally, or by the design and forethought of the laws or of a man of extraordinary virtue (*vel casu contingere potest, vel consilio et prudentia legum aut viri eximiae virtutis*).<sup>12</sup>

Comparing this passage with the original text of Machiavelli one must conclude that Spinoza treads upon his heels. But this appearance is deceptive. Writing about the ‘*prudenza intrinseca*’ of a state Machiavelli has something in mind which according to Spinoza is more detrimental to a state than anything else, namely the Roman dictator. Machiavelli was very enthusiastic about this method as becomes clear from a passage in *Discorsi* I/33:

From among the remedies which they were accustomed to use when danger was imminent, the Romans chose to appoint a dictator, i.e. to give power to some one man to make decisions without consulting others and to carry them out without anyone having the right to appeal. This remedy not only proved useful at the time, and enabled them to overcome the dangers still threatening, but was always of the greatest help in all those eventualities which from time to time betokened ill to the republic as its empire grew.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Elwes’ translation, o.c. p.378-379, in which I only changed ‘dominion’, his word for ‘*imperium*’, into ‘state’. - With ‘man of outstanding virtue’ Spinoza does not mean the legal dictator but the leader who acquires his high authority from the consent of the people. - I add here, according to Walker’s translation (o.c.p.385) the original passage to which Spinoza refers:

**(Title III/1) In order that a religious institution or a state should long survive it is essential that it should frequently be restored to its original principle [verso il suo principio].** (Text) It is a well-established fact that the life of all mundane things is of finite duration. But things which complete a whole of the course appointed them by heaven are in general those whose bodies do not desintegrate, but maintain themselves in orderly fashion so that if there is no change; or, if there be change, it tends rather to their conservation than to their destruction. Here I am concerned with composite bodies, such as are states and religious institutions, and in their regard I affirm that those changes make for their conservation which lead them back to their origins [li riducano inverso i principii loro]. Hence those are better constituted and have a longer life whose institutions make frequent renovations possible, or which are brought to such a renovation by some event which has nothing to do with their constitution. For it is clearer than daylight that, without renovation these bodies do not last.[...] This return to its original principles in the case of a republic is brought about either by some external event or by its own intrinsic good sense [prudenza].

<sup>13</sup> O.c.p.190.

Machiavelli's positive evaluation of this custom is worked out in the subsequent chapter (I/34) under the title: "Dictatorial authority did good, not harm, to the republic of Rome; it is the authority which citizens arrogate to themselves, not that granted by free suffrage, that is harmful to civic life". Here we find even a remark in which this custom is generalized and recommended for all states:

Actually, then, of Rome's various institutions this is one that deserves to be considered and ranked among those to which the greatness of Rome's vast empire was due. For without such an institution cities will with difficulty find a way out of abnormal situations. For the institutions normally used by republics are slow in functioning. No assembly nor magistrate can do everything alone. In many cases they have to consult one another, and to reconcile their diverse views takes time. Where there is question of remedying a situation which will not brook delay, such a procedure is most dangerous.<sup>14</sup>

Rome had rather often dictators. Machiavelli judges that "no dictator ever did anything but good to that republic".<sup>15</sup> This sweeping generalization is contested by scholars, "but Machiavelli is right to insist that the Roman dictatorship was a constitutional office and that some such institution is needed in all republics, whether called by that name or 'emergency powers'."<sup>16</sup> Spinoza certainly does agree with this statement of a text translator but yet abhors Machiavelli's encomium of the Roman system to save the state from an untenable and intolerable situation. His praise of Machiavelli's general requirement that the state needs sometimes to be cured from diseases and return to its principle is but a benevolent introduction to his most severe criticism of the temporary investment of one man with absolute power. Let us follow his comments.

The first remedy, that suggested itself for this evil, was to appoint every five years a supreme dictator for one or two months, who should have the right to inquire, decide, and make ordinances concerning the acts of the senators and of every official, and thereby to bring back the empire to its first principle. But he who studies to avoid the inconveniences, to which an empire is liable, must apply remedies that suit its nature, and can be derived from its own foundations; otherwise in his wish to avoid Charybdis he falls upon Scylla. It is, indeed, true that all, as well rulers as ruled, ought to be restrained by fear of punishment or loss, so that they may not do wrong with impunity or even advantage; but, on the other hand, it is certain, that if this fear becomes common to good and bad men alike, the empire must be in the utmost danger. Now as the authority of a dictator is absolute, it cannot fail to be a terror to all.<sup>17</sup>

This is also the case, Spinoza continues, when the dictator is not made at a fixed time, but only under the pressure of some accidental necessity and for a determined short period. The terrifying and devastating effects of the 'tumor of dictatorship' (Cicero)<sup>18</sup> will not be less, because like everybody else

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<sup>14</sup> O.c.p.195.

<sup>15</sup> O.c.p.194.

<sup>16</sup> L.J. Walker in note 25 (p.533) to the quoted edition of the *Discorsi*.

<sup>17</sup> TP 10/1.

<sup>18</sup> The reference to Cicero is given by Spinoza in the context.

a dictator is dominated by greed and ambition, but unlike other people he can *and will* favour his cupidity to the disadvantage of the whole people. Nobody is able to withhold him from bringing the state to its ruin or to make him uneasy on account of the consequences of his behaviour. Spinoza, therefore, pleads for a different political system, in which the 'sword of the dictator' (*dictatoris gladius*) is entrusted to a permanent institute, a council of syndics which has to supervise the execution of the laws and to enforce their renewal when necessary.

Unless, then, this authority of a dictator be eternal and fixed, and therefore impossible to be conferred on one man without destroying the form of the empire, the dictatorial authority itself, and consequently the safety and preservation of the republic will be very uncertain.... There is to be a council of syndics subordinate to the supreme council, to the end that the sword of the dictator should be eternal, not in the hands of any natural person but of a civil institute, whose members are too numerous to divide the empire among themselves or to combine in any wickedness (TP 10/2).

We need not to descend into the details of Spinoza's solution of the problem, how we may keep the body politic healthy so that its life is practically, if not blown away by Fortune, eternal. For us it must be enough that we are convinced of his rejection of the Roman custom for a time enduring state and his deviation from Machiavelli's approval of this custom. It is nonetheless true that Spinoza was inspired by Machiavelli in many other aspects of his describing the mechanisms of politics and his project of a concrete political architecture of a monarchy, an aristocracy and a democracy. Machiavelli is indeed a master patronizing his own theorizing. This makes the question urgent whether another master plays a role. From where comes Spinoza's independent and critical attitude against the most acute Florentine historian?

However, prior to our answer on this question it is useful to remark that both references to Machiavelli in the *Tractatus Politicus*, the positive and the negative one, have one thing in common: the context of both is a signalling of the insatiable 'libido dominandi'<sup>19</sup> of some great men (princes or monarchs, patricians or regents, dictators or tyrans) as the greatest danger for the stability of a peaceful political community. Spinoza's conviction that man, so long he is not a wise man, is unable to dominate his passions and on the other hand his persistent endeavour to devise institutional rules for protecting the people from slavery under ambitious compatriots are the themes which connect his political treatises with those of his master, Franciscus van den Enden.

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<sup>19</sup> The expression is used in the article 5/7 which contains the first reference to Machiavelli. Chapter 10, which contains the second reference (in 10/1), emphasizes especially that the condition sine qua non of a free state is the equality of all citizens., "because it is certain that equality, which once cast off the common liberty is necessarily lost (*aequalitas, qua semel exuta communis libertas necessario perit*) can by no means be maintained as soon as peculiar rights are by public law decreed to any man however virtuous" (10/8).

### 3. Van den Enden incriminating Machiavelli as a deceiving political writer<sup>20</sup>

If one thing is prominent in the two available clandestine publications of Van den Enden, this is uncontestedly his emphasis on the unconditional and unshortened equality of the citizens (as such) and the absence of any form of dominion of one citizen (or more) over the others as the necessary condition(s) for a truly free state. It is precisely this rejection of the possibility of a free state when citizens have unequal power, that makes him a predecessor of Spinoza in the fight for real democracy, which included for both a critical and selective attitude towards Machiavelli. In order to show this I immediately want to start my section on the relation of Van den Enden to Machiavelli with a quote from the *Vrye Politieke Stellingen*, which *must* remind the reader of the above discussed chapter 10 of the TP. Like Spinoza Van den Enden ties on to *Discorsi* 3/1 and finishes his argument with the same outlook on an 'eternal empire'. The quote is composed from a sentence of the main text and a long footnote to this sentence.

(*Main text*) And consequently must be as far as possible absent from our thoughts every opinion according to which any domination in conflict with the general freedom might contain in itself something good, by which we somehow could be motivated to make it [the domination] agree with its first principles\* and so bring about their improvement in behalf of the aspired common good.

(*footnote \* to 'eerste beginselen'*) In order to keep a Sect or common Government in a long life, one often has to draw it back to its first principles. Likewise is it necessary that whoever tries to change the old state of a Country, has to maintain its semblance. Both these things are affirmed by N. Machiavelli; see the first chapter in the third Book and the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter in the first Book of his *Discourses*. And this doctrine or awful opinion does not originate from anything else than that he, despairing of all political stability (*vastigheid in Politie wanhopende*), finds himself therefore coerced to keep staying as long as possible his pretended Political States by means of all sorts of imposture and violence. And if not longer possible, to give it then up, regardless whether the people was incarcerated like at Sparta or used as gun-dogs like at Rome and that when all this could only exist and run so for a long period, everything might yet be considered then O.K.. Away, away with such a lazy, yes most knavish Doctrine. In case we want to keep ourselves to the *first principles*, we *first have to examine whether they are good and agree with the principles of the evenequal<sup>21</sup> freedom<sup>22</sup>*; but if not, we may destroy them all very readily, lightly and to our greatest profit: because no calmly and competently economizing citizen will ever be found to be so dull or stupid, that he would not, in case it was well proposed to him,

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<sup>20</sup> For Van den Enden see Wim Klever, "A new source of Spinozism: Franciscus van den Enden" in *Journal of the history of philosophy* XXIX (1991) 613-633 and the 'Inleiding' (introduction) to the edition of the VPS (Amsterdam 1992) 11-133. See also Marc Bedjai, *Métaphysique, Éthique et Politique dans l'oeuvre du docteur Franciscus van den Enden (1602-1674). Contribution à l'étude des sources des écrits de Spinoza* (Thèse de Doctorat, 4 vol., Paris 1990).

<sup>21</sup> My translation of 'evengelijke', Van den Enden's technical term for the strongest variant of equality. The word 'even', which also means 'gelijk', does in fact enforce the accent on 'gelijk'.

<sup>22</sup> My italics.

prefer to help annihilating everything which opposes the principles of the evenequal Freedom. And this I take not only for the only right medicine of all civil evils, but also for the exclusive unshakable firm ground of an eternal empire (*eeuwigdurende Politie*) or commonwealth (*gemeen beste*).<sup>23</sup>

In his draft for the constitution of a free state of Dutch colonists in Amerika, his *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants...* (1662), Van den Enden had stipulated in the first article that the civil 'evengelijkheid' (absolute equality) is the principal foundation (*voornaemste grondslagh*) of this projected community. In order to emphasize this point he, as a legislator, required from each candidate-colonist the declaration under oath, that he would never strive after any form of supremacy or commanding power nor ever tolerate that someone else in this community would endeavour to acquire it, but that he would do his utmost to oppose each activity in that direction, this in behalf of the common good.<sup>24</sup>

Van den Enden accuses Machiavelli on account of his deceiving the readers of his text. Why? He tries to convince them that in case of some deviation from its principles it is for a state always good to return to its original structure and he does so without anyhow requiring or suggesting to check whether those original principles of political organization were sound and effective. Well, whoever tries to persuade other people of a falsity or a morally rejectable opinion must be deemed to be an impostor. Van den Enden, therefore, does not hesitate to create clarity in this matter. Without exclaiming it so loudly, Spinoza had likewise rejected, albeit implicitly, Machiavelli's bad advice to return always to the principles of our political system.

It is further remarkable that Van den Enden ascribes to Machiavelli that he is ambivalent on the possibility that states may be organised in such manner, that they remain stable for ever: he is even said to be "despairing of any political stability". This is another point which distinguishes him from Van den Enden who, indeed, claims to have developed and explained constitutional regulations for a permanent self-improvement of a democratically organized state, on account of which one does need no longer drastical measures for incidental returning to the foundational principles. And here again he is followed by Spinoza, who in his *Political Treatise* always tries to found out *institutional* blockades against the outgrowth of political misbehaviour and other processes of degeneration.

But there is much more about Machiavelli in Van den Enden's *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*. From page 161 to 167 we find a rather extended controversy about the so-called mixture of political systems, of which Machiavelli is a decided advocate. The whole work is, as indicated in its full title,<sup>25</sup> a treatise in the sense of a rational justification of the unclausured equality of all citizens in a political society and their collective caring for their common interest. Van den Enden manifests himself in this work as a radical

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<sup>23</sup> VPS 191.

<sup>24</sup> p.50-51 of the private (clandestine) edition in 1662 (place and printer not mentioned on the titlepage).

<sup>25</sup> In translation: *Free political propositions and considerations of state, done after the true Christian principles of even equal freedom, serving to a just and true improvement of state and church. Everything shortly and concisely but provisionally proposed by a lover of the even equal freedom of all competent citizens and who, to the common good, 'meest van zaken houdt'* [This is Van den Enden's pseudonym]. The Wellbeing of the People is the highest Law. and The Voice of the People is Gods Voice. - The last mentioned wellknown proverbs are translations of 'Salus populi summa lex' (twice repeated by Spinoza) and 'Vox populi vox Dei'.

democrat, probably the first among all political writers in our Western history.<sup>26</sup> Machiavelli was a republicanist, but republicanism was for him not identical with democracy. This becomes clear from his treatment of the merits and demerits of the Roman republic and, though more incidentally, of the Spartan political system. Machiavelli's praising remarks about these systems elicited the venomous attack of Van den Eenden. The mixture of government by a combination of governments by one, by a few aristocrats and by the people is justified by Machiavelli on account of its stability:

He tries to justify the weight or true value of these mixed and libated (*gemenghde en geplenghde*) and pretended political states, as in Sparta and Rome, by their long duration. But surely, what is the dignity of six or eight hundred years of continuous and horrible tossing and drudging (*hobbens en tobbens*)<sup>27</sup> in comparison with the permanently growing and blossoming wellbeing of a world-enduring people? N. Machiavel, an unashamed and manifest supporter of all foul superstition and deceit, in this respect perhaps an imitator of the Greek Polibius, makes in the first book of his *Discourses*, in the second chapter where he enumerates all such species of states (*Politien*) to six, finally this conclusion:<sup>28</sup>

*Therefore I maintain that all those forms of government mentioned above are not stable nor of a long duration.<sup>29</sup> The three good ones because their life is so short, the three bad ones because of their inherent defectiveness.<sup>30</sup> Hence excellent<sup>31</sup> legislators, aware of their defects, refrained from adopting as such any one of these forms, and made the body of their state consist of three members, namely of Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy, since they thought such a government would be stronger and more stable. If in one and the same state there was principality, aristocracy and democracy, each would keep watch over the other and prevent their falling out of their bolts as a consequence of which the state would perish.<sup>32</sup>*

It is without discussion that Machiavelli himself is an adherent of this mixed form of government. The word 'prudemente' demonstrates sufficiently his approval. The reason why Van den Eenden opposes him so sharply is that the system of mixed government legitimizes the dominant position of some citizens above others as if they were by nature predetermined to be their masters. Such a system is very far away from his ideal of a democracy in which the equal citizens delegate for a certain period and

<sup>26</sup>In his wake and five years later, also Spinoza defended in his TTP democracy as "the most natural" political organisation "which comes most close to the freedom nature affords to everybody" (ch.16).

<sup>27</sup>The reader is asked to pay attention to the rime in Van den Eenden's text which betrays his deep indignation.

<sup>28</sup>The italics of the following quote in VPS suggest that Van den Eenden does literally cite the correspondent fragment of the *Discorsi*. This not the case for the first sentence which is properly a summary of the argument in the previous passages.

<sup>29</sup>The original text gives here: "Dico adunque che tutti i detti modi sono pestiferi..." Cf. N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (Milano 1984) p.67.

<sup>30</sup>I think that Walker's 'malignity' is a wrong translation of 'malignità' in the Italian original. Machiavelli must intend the inherent 'imperfection' of the six systems. Van den Eenden translates correctly 'onvolmaaktheden'.

<sup>31</sup>Van den Eenden translates 'quelli che prudemente ordinano leggi' with 'excellent legislators' (*treffelijke wetgevers*).

<sup>32</sup>It is clear that Van den Eenden presents a free translation, which, however, is according to Machiavelli's intention.

according to a constitution alternately some people among their midst to the task of government, people who are not by any means their master. “It is impossible to mix conflicting things like water and fire; so also are dominating and governing (*heerschen en regeeren*) so much opposed to each other, that they cannot be mixed. It is necessary that sooner or later the one must yield to the other and be worsted”.<sup>33</sup> Monarchy and aristocracy have a ‘freedom violating character’ and will always clash upon the power of the people that in the end must surpass them. The government of the people, on the contrary, “when not roguishly and slyly undermined by a variant of monarchy and aristocracy”, can only perish by disastrous attacks of external causes. “In its essence the solely free government of a people is the only type of government, which by its nature permits and includes the permanent improvement”.<sup>34</sup> That is why it is in principle the government with an eternal duration.

Two objections may be formulated and are in fact formulated by Machiavelli. First he boasts of the many advantages of the political mixture. Hereupon Van den Enden’s answer is simply, “that all the good, which seems to be the result of the useful mixture, must only be ascribed to the co-steering and the authority of the people”.<sup>35</sup> The eventual growth of the prosperity of the republics with a mixed government was correlated with the extension of the influence of the people. Secondly one might object that the duration of the republics of Sparta and Rome (their ‘*lankwijlige bestaaningh*’) was extremely long. This makes no impression on Van den Enden. The population was not really happy in the ‘freedom violating bridewell’ (*tuchthuis*) of Sparta or in the ‘haunt of violent robbers’ (*roofdwingent roofnest*) of Rome. After a three page exposition of the dubious institutions and the turbulent history of these republics and the misery of its citizens Van den Enden comes to the following statement which is unreconcilable with Machiavelli’s point of view and implies, therefore, their damnation.

All bodies political which are infected with some kind of high authority, let alone above the authority of the people, are to my judgment, for the above mentioned reason and on account of the natural and essential insatiableness of the human desires afflicted with a languishing mortal disease.<sup>36</sup>

A little further in Van den Enden’s text Machiavelli is reproached “not to know what he writes and what things he strives after.”<sup>37</sup> He does not fully acknowledge that “the voice of the people must be considered to be for that same people the voice of God”. The free council of the people and the mutual discussions in its bosom are the best and exclusive means to discover what is really to its common good. No individual from or above this people does have better knowledge of its wellbeing and is better able to realize it than the people itself. Machiavelli is also said to be the proponent of “a loose and totally desperate form of state”.<sup>38</sup> He extols and praises the fruits of of the Roman superstition, not knowing

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<sup>33</sup> VPS 162.

<sup>34</sup> The Dutch original of this important fragment sounds: “Anders is des volx, en alleen vrye regeeringh, de eenige, die uit haer Natuur de ghedurighe verbeeteringh toelaet, en in sich sluit”.

<sup>35</sup> VPS 163.

<sup>36</sup> “Want alle lichamen van staet, zijnde geïnfecteert met eenich uitmuntendt gezach, nevens, ik laet staen, boven ‘s volx gezach, achte ik, om voorgaende reeden, en vermits der menschen algemeene onbepaalde begeertens Natuur, of eigenschap, met een quijnende, doodtlijke ziekten aengetroffen te zijn” (VPS 167).

<sup>37</sup> “Klaerlijk N. Machiavel, en de rest der my bewuste politijke schrijvers [...] weten in ‘t minste niet wat ze schrijven en drijven”(VPS 175).

<sup>38</sup> VPS 195.

how it brought the people to its misery and final ruin. “It is all confusion. See his *Discourses* chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 en 15 of book I. On one place he seems to be very religious, but elsewhere he confesses bluntly that he has not the least knowledge of religion nor ever did believe there was any. Look and see about this the already mentioned chapter 12 and you will feel with your hands, that he conceives religion but as superstition and imposture.” Van den Enden, then, presents in his long footnote three fragments from this chapter, by which it becomes clear that Machiavelli, at the one hand, recommends to kings (*principi*) “to uphold the basic principles of religion” (“this looks quite a lot”), but that he, on the other hand, applauds their usage of religion and its ceremonies to keep their subjects in control and “do with them what they like”. And this kind of deceit is what Van den Enden abhors in those kings and in Machiavelli. After describing the oracles of the goddess Juno Machiavelli even dares, to Van den Enden’s annoyance, to hold up the simulating Camillus as an example for Christian kings: “If such a religious spirit had been kept up by the rulers of the Christian commonwealth as was ordained for us by its founder, Christian states and republics would have been much more united and much more happy than they are”. Well, this is very far away from Van den Enden’s conception of the teaching of Christ, who is considered by him to be the advocate and promotor of the common good of the state, something which can never be founded on imposture and simulation by its leaders. Christianity is primarily the striving after justice and charity, and this can only be arrived at via a sound, that is a democratical, political organization, for which true knowledge is incomparably more useful than the propagation of false opinions.<sup>39</sup> No wonder that Van den Enden cannot refrain himself from frankly denouncing the acute Florentine and straightforwardly expressing his feelings of being much scandalized: “Would it be possible to give a clearer description of a malicious imposture of any irreligious man and this under pretext of religion? And therefore is it my desire to see the good willing man, to his temporary and eternal salvation, by means of a clear and rational doctrine, freed from this cheat and distinctly taught about the true christian religion.”<sup>40</sup>

On the final pages of his magisterial political writing Van den Enden explains that “the common good (*het gemeenen-besten*) prevails above everything”, with the consequence that contracts or peaceful alliances (*Vreedens-tractaten*) between different states must be broken when they become disadvantageous in changing, often critical, circumstances. Well, this proposition seems to be pure Machiavellism! Therefore Van den Enden has to explain something to his readers, especially while he had so much campaigned against Machiavelli on earlier pages. Here is his defence, which contains at once his grievance against him and a summary of his radical ‘democratism’ on which his resistance is based.

I guess that ignorants will now judge if not decry me as a Machiavellian. It is true, and I acknowledge this, that also Machiavelli seems to teach this. But I deny, that he would have rightly conceived and understood this, yea, I reject this in the most forceful and strongest manner, because possessing not the least concept or understanding of a common-good

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<sup>39</sup> A broader exposition of Van den Enden’s ideas about true Christianity is given in my *Definitie van het Christendom. Spinoza’s Tractatus theologico-politicus opnieuw vertaald en toegelicht* (Delft 1999) 57-65. I have also summarized Van den Enden’s ‘political theology’ in Wim Klever, “Spinoza’s concept of Christian piety” (*NASS Monograph* 9, 2000) 17-28 and in Wim Klever, *The Sphinx. Spinoza reconsidered in three essays* (Vrijstad 2000) 180-192.

<sup>40</sup> VPS 196.

(*gemeene-beste*, literally ‘common best’) he applies this holy rule, exclusively belonging to the common-good, also and by preference to all sorts of malicious impostures and tyrannies. The accurate reader and somehow knower (*kenner*) of the common-good may discover and control this in the conclusion of his 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the third Book of his *Discourses*. In the 41<sup>st</sup> chapter he seems to endorse and approve absolutely the folly of the French in their unconditional approval of the behaviour of their kings however it was, this to the confirmation of his confused opinion, that “when the safety of one’s fatherland is at stake, no attention should be paid either to justice or injustice, to kindness or cruelty, or to its being praiseworthy or ignominious”. And in the last paragraph of the 42<sup>nd</sup> chapter about keeping promises etc. he conducts himself as in his *most roguish book about the teaching of princes*,<sup>41</sup> and from which is evident, that he does conceive by common-good (*gemeene-beste*) nothing but whatever is in the interest of the dominating chiefs of a suppressed people. Against which I most forcefully oppose and speak, since according to my understanding of the *gemeene-beste* it must stretch itself to the lowest as to the highest (*tot de minste als de meeste*), according to the requirement of everybody’s nature. And of which I refer the judgment, as being truly God’s judgment concerning such an assembly, totally to the whole competent Citizenship of that society or assembly of people. And whatever this assembly finally comes to conceive and understand relating to its general best and wellbeing, all this has to prevail and anyhow to be pursued and promoted without any hesitance. And everything comes down to this that they are by mutual reasoning well taught about their best, to which no better means will ever be found nor given than to maintain carefully an evenequal freedom in their common civic deliberating.<sup>42</sup>

Back are we here to the ideal of a political community, in which the ‘libera multitudo’ decides for itself, on the basis of a perfect equality among its members, what is to be done for its salvation. This was Spinoza’s ideal, on account of which he too, a disciple of Van den Enden, had to oppose any kind of permanent or incidental, although legal, dictatorship as a solution, since it is inconsistent with the spirit and practice of a democratic state. Diseases can only be remedied by the wisdom of the people.

#### 4. *Conclusion: from a hierarchical republicanism to the promotion of the ‘common good’ (democracy)*

Whatever furthers the conservation of the republic is ipso facto sanctioned. This is pure Machiavellism, in *Il Principe* as well as in the *Discorsi*. Republican freedom is best instantiated in a multilevelled society, that is a society composed by ‘classes’ of unequal people, unequal in the sense of having different amounts and degrees of possessions, capacities and power. In this hierarchical system the contribution of each layer of the population (princes or generals or consuls, senatorial aristocracy, normal citizens or soldiers) is essential for the balance between opposing interests and so indispensable to the common liberty, but it does not exclude the *right of dominion* of one or a few above the many. This implies that Machiavellism, in spite of its pursuing the liberty and stability of the state, is not based on civil equality and in so far does not per se fight for the freedom of all the inhabitants of a country,

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<sup>41</sup> Van den Enden’s italics.

<sup>42</sup> VPS 229-230.

unesteemed their social position. It must be allowed, however, that Machiavelli, as a political writer, attributes a heavy weight to the impact of the people in this mixed government. Its wisdom and resistance to forms of slavery is greatly appreciated. In the practice of his historiography he showed often much sympathy for laws or customs by which its influence was strengthened and lead into a good channel. But the channel had to be directed towards the growth and stability of the republic as such. It must be clear, then, that this kind of sympathy with a legal contribution of the people to the wellbeing of the republic has not much to do with what we wish to indicate with the word 'democracy'.

Van den Enden and Spinoza, though republicanists too, were nonetheless radical democrats. For them the 'common good', this in the strictest meaning of 'good for every citizen nobody excepted', is a value of such a high order that the value of the republican good does no longer prevail it. It is only when the common good or *gemeene-beste* is realized that a sound and truly free republic is there. A powerful republic without prosperity of the lowest class of its citizens is, as was said by Van den Enden, 'infected with a mortal disease' and can never, setting aside the disasters coming from the outside, enjoy eternal life.

In order to demonstrate the theoretical difference between Machiavelli on the one hand and Van den Enden and Spinoza on the other hand, as also the agreement of the latter two, I would like to present here further textual evidence. In VPS 146 Van den Enden gives his formal definition of the *Gemeene-beste*:

Under *gemeene-beste* of a gathering of people, then, I understand, after the foregoing foundation of an evenequal freedom, to include such a proportionality of orders, laws and supports between more or less intelligent, more and less well-to-do people, male and female sex, parents and children, servants and served or governor and governed, to discover by reason and experience, from which one may conclude and find out most surely, that *each member* in his degree is not only not weakened by this and injured, but on the contrary, that he is, with common profit as its effect, helped up (*opgeholpen*), and more and more advanced in respect of his pleasure and appetite, and both his soul and body are always furthered to a greater well-being.

In the explanation of this definition of a 'vandenendenian' republic is once more emphasized that a 'true republic' (*ware politie*) focuses succesfully on the *increase* of everybody's wellbeing, "so that nobody, however base and low (*gering*), deteriorates by any disorder of the republic". The reason is simple and mathematically convincing: "het *gemeen-best* is the sum or total addition of everybody's particular best".<sup>43</sup> If there would not be felt any improvement in one's own situation by means of the cooperation with fellow men for the public and common things, why should one, then, do so? This may not be expected from thoughtful people. Accordingly, the state which is not in the interest of everybody in particular, will certainly fall apart. Well, of thus a character is certainly the state, in which one group of the population has dominion about another group, this, again, on account of the unsatiable and irresistible ambition and avarice, which necessarily leads to the oppression and exploitation of the subordinated. Hence the deafening emphasis Van den Enden very frequently puts on the unavoidable basis of the perpetual free government: the *evengelijkheid*, the unshortened radical equality of the members of the

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<sup>43</sup> VPS 149.

society. Let me finish with a striking quotation from Van den Enden's earlier work, the *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants...* in which he, as 'Mother New-Netherland', addresses the poor children under the dominion of the greedy 'regenten': "where is it written by Divine Nature on their forehead that they are destined to dominate you absolutely, like irresistible gods, ... in order to condemn you forever to the life of asses or slaves?"<sup>44</sup>

We miss the chapter Spinoza had just started to write about democracy when he died. We may be sure that he would have elaborated further the rich ideas (and filled in the framework) of his master about a kind of democratic government which would be in the interest of everybody and so acquire the highest possible degree of stability. This is, of course, always on the assumption of the absence of overpowering external causes, which may destroy a political entity. To preclude this possibility from the discussion, Spinoza premises the following axiom to his political treatise contained in *Ethica 4*: "There is in Nature no individual thing that is not surpassed in strength and power by some other thing. Whatsoever thing there is, there is another more powerful by which the said thing can be destroyed." In this treatise Spinoza's *name and characterisation* of the 'societas' which we use to call our state, is no other than '*bonum commune*'. This expression has to be read very strictly. If master Van den Enden wanted to have understood his 'gemeene-best' in a mathematical way, Spinoza, the 'ingenium mathematicum'<sup>45</sup> who demonstrated his propositions 'more geometrico', even more so. In this 'common good', i.e. the civil state, "is decided by common agreement (*ex communi consensu*)"<sup>46</sup> what belongs to the one and what to the other, what has to be done and what has to be avoided. Since everybody's voice counts and nobody's voice counts more than one, the democratic state is the most natural form of political organisation: "in this way all remain *equal* to each other, just as in the earlier [imaginary] natural state".<sup>47</sup>

In his sketch of the 'senior democracy' of the Jewish state in TTP 17, in which the seniors were by (Mosaic) law appointed to direct and defend the community of their tribes, this under the supervision of the priests, Spinoza underlines especially "that nobody was the servant of his equal co-citizen" (*nemo suo aequali ... serviebat*). In this historical system "the loving service to the co-citizen (*conciuem*) was considered the highest piety". All people, seniors included, had 'equal rights' and were 'equally holy' (*aeque sanctos*). The only reason that this empire had no eternal life and was doomed to perish, was that Mozes had made a constitutional mistake by attributing supervising authority to the Levitical priests. They constituted in fact an 'imperium in imperio' which in the long run awakened jealousy and hatred, finally leading to the detestable longing for kings.

By this argument 'a contrario' as well as by the earlier quoted affirmations it must have become evident that as a political writer Spinoza moves completely in the same line as Van den Enden. Inequality among citizens, insofar as their permanent and unalienable power to decide with one's compatriots about things of common interest is concerned, is the beginning of the end of any state. Inequality in this respect will, given the weak human nature, lead unstoppably to the being dominated of one part of this society by another part and so, further on to the ruin of the empire. We must, therefore, conclude, that Spinoza,

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<sup>44</sup> See the *Na-reeden* of this 1662 clandestine writing. .

<sup>45</sup> This honorific title was given to Spinoza by one of his correspondents, Heinrich Oldenburg, in a letter (*Epistola 16* d.d. 4-8-1663).

<sup>46</sup> *Ethica 4/37* scholium 2.

<sup>47</sup> TTP 16. I have inserted 'imaginary' because Spinoza qualifies elsewhere the natural state like that and he, moreover, does not accept any fully apolitical way of human life and interactivity in mankind's history.

not less than and in full agreement with his master, is likewise opposed *against Machiavelli's connivance* - to give the least blaming and most benevolent interpretation - of a hierarchically mixed government. External causes being excluded only a radically democratic government of equal citizens, always correcting and improving their own decisions, can flatter itself with the prospective of an eternal life on earth.

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