

Nationalist Princes and Patriotic Publics :

Machiavelli and Rousseau's Enduring Insights on Nationalism*

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· **Key words** : nationalism, Machiavelli, Rousseau, civic, popular, ethno-cultural, realism, ideology, freedom, legitimacy, governance, great power diplomacy

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[ABSTRACT]

Machiavelli and Rousseau left significant marks on both the study and practice of politics, and yet today's students of nationalism tend not to recognize Machiavelli and Rousseau's foresight on what would become one of the world's most politically influential ideologies. In regards to nationalist aims, Machiavelli's philosophy provides a basis for great-power nationalism, whereas Rousseau's goals resemble those of civic nationalism. In terms of actors, Machiavelli's nationalism is top-down and elite driven; Rousseau's is more bottom-up and popular. As for government policy, Machiavelli advises the instrumental use of nationalism to shape public opinion; Rousseau advocates effective state institutions supported by ethno-cultural ties. This article compares Machiavelli's and Rousseau's visions of nationalism to bring each philosopher's insights into sharper focus while expanding our view of nationalism's intellectual heritage. The article concludes with a discussion of how present approaches to studying nationalism in many ways build upon Machiavelli and Rousseau's philosophies.

I . Introduction

Nationalism remains one of the most influential political ideologies and social phenomena of the modern world: its significance spans international questions of war and peace and local questions of identity and governance.¹⁾ Yet today's students of nationalism tend not to recognize the insights offered

1) A good historiography and working definition of nationalism is provided by Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), p. 3: "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation.'" The present study intentionally does not attempt to resolve definitional debates or provide a comprehensive intellectual history of nationalism, the nation or the state. Instead, this article is devoted to demonstrating that contestation over human nature and identity politics, presently associated with the modern state, indeed preceded the Westphalian era and that Machiavelli and Rousseau offer important insights into this contestation.

on the subject by two of the modern world's most prominent philosophers.²⁾ Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) are well known for their counseling of power-hungry princes and social contract-seeking societies. Machiavelli and Rousseau helped shape modern political philosophy and political science, and their ideas continue to influence the politics of governing around the globe.³⁾ So it is worthwhile to ask, "What were the views of these two preeminent thinkers concerning nationalism?" This article argues that Machiavelli and Rousseau foresaw nationalism's importance and that by comparing their perspectives, we can learn about early nationalist ideas while bringing each philosopher's views into sharper relief.

For Machiavelli, nationalism was a vehicle for power and control, contributing to the glory of the nation and the effectiveness of its government. For Rousseau, nationalism was a vehicle for freedom and equality, realizing the essence of humanity and providing for government legitimacy. When I refer to Machiavelli's and Rousseau's nationalisms, I recognize that they themselves did not use our present terminology and that their concepts of nation and government are not identical to how these concepts are understood and debated today. It would be anachronistic to foist contemporary concepts of nationalism on philosophers who lived in different political eras. Nonetheless, it is a meaningful exercise to explore the intellectual heritage of a contemporary subject—especially within influential writings that wrestled with timeless and fundamental questions of human nature, including material and psychological demands, social organization, and political competition.

2) The work of an earlier generation of nationalism scholars, including Hayes (Carlton J. H. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1931) and Kohn (Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York: Macmillan, 1944), more often mentioned the importance of Machiavelli and Rousseau's philosophies. Some political theorists have explored the works of Machiavelli and Rousseau in the context of the development of nationalism; see for example, Felix Gilbert, "The Concept of Nationalism in Machiavelli's Prince," *Studies in the Renaissance* 1 (1954); Anne M. Cohler, *Rousseau and Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1970). But there is little consideration of Machiavelli and Rousseau in recent scholarship on nationalism, and no clear comparison of their insights on the subject.

3) Grand as these claims may sound, they are established elsewhere and thus not argued here. Steven M. Cahn (ed.), *Classics of Modern Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-4 and pp. 366-370; Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (eds.), *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 296-317 and pp. 559-580.

II . Why Compare Machiavelli and Rousseau

This essay relies on Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and especially *The Prince*; and Rousseau's *Discourses* and especially the *Social Contract*.⁴⁾ Machiavelli wrote the *Discourses on Livy* in the early sixteenth century. It was a lengthy commentary on ancient Roman history in which Machiavelli outlined the merits of republican government and highlighted lessons for state structure, warfare, and leadership. With its attention to Roman civics, Machiavelli's *Discourses* addressed both patriotism and public participation. But Machiavelli is better known for *The Prince*, believed to have been written in 1513. *The Prince* is a concise political analysis and "how to" guide, advising a ruler on effectively acquiring, managing and increasing power. In his work, Machiavelli reflected on many historical examples from the classics as well as his personal observations in government and diplomatic service.

Rousseau also looked back to ancient history and major philosophers in presenting his new ideas. His *First Discourse* (written in 1750) argued that as a society develops the arts and sciences, it tends to suffer an erosion of morality and virtue. He excoriated scientists and artists for seeking to satisfy—but ultimately feeding—man's vanity, selfishness, greed, and ambition. In the *Second Discourse* (1755), Rousseau focused on social inequality by comparing man's situation in society to that in the state of nature. He presented natural man as uncorrupted by socialization, caring mostly for his own simple survival, yet uncomfortable to see his fellow man suffer. Over the process of leaving nature and constructing modern society, those few with power imposed a raw deal upon everyone else, according to Rousseau. In the *Social Contract* (1762), he outlined his vision (elaborated below) for breaking free of that injustice and replacing it with a fair society and legitimate government.

4) Machiavelli's and Rousseau's philosophies operate on multiple levels simultaneously, and their views evolved over their own lifetimes, so resolving all the disputes between them on issues related to nationalism and giving due attention to the complexity of their entire bodies of work is not possible in the present space. This article does not pretend to offer all the answers from Machiavelli and Rousseau, but rather makes a case for revisiting the original texts for insights on nationalism.

1. *More than Material Realism vs. Romantic Idealism*

Machiavelli and Rousseau are interesting to study together because they are pillars of different traditions of thought. Machiavelli's realism made such a break with the past that he is often credited as the first modern political philosopher.⁵⁾ Machiavelli was a pioneer in the social scientific study of power politics. He cared about drawing lessons from empirical observations—determined to see things as they are, not as man wishes (or God commands) they ought to be. But while Machiavelli was radical in his departure from existing political treatises, his philosophy can be considered conservative for its interest in preserving power (maintaining the status quo) while soberly recognizing timeless patterns of human behavior. Ultimately, Machiavelli's name became synonymous with a “do whatever it takes” brand of politics because he counseled that a leader must know when to be good, when to be merciless, and how to strike the most effective balance between the two in any given circumstance. Such pragmatism earned Machiavelli posthumous praise, but also criticism for preaching situational ethics.⁶⁾

In contrast, Rousseau is often remembered for promoting high ideals. It is not entirely fair to call Rousseau an idealist (he keenly observed political realities), but he was much more concerned with what most people would regard as principle and morality than was Machiavelli. Rousseau was a progressive: he was concerned with lack of fairness in the status quo and believed that government can and should improve the condition of the people. Rousseau's critical views on the trends of the Enlightenment made him of great intellectual influence to both Romanticism and the French Revolution.⁷⁾

However, the claim here is not that Machiavelli and Rousseau were originators of the nationalist concept or even that they shaped its historical development.⁸⁾ Rather, the argument put forward by this article is that

5) Ross King, *Machiavelli: Philosopher of Power* (New York: Atlas Books/HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 234-235.

6) For a review of such criticisms as well an argument for re-interpretation, see Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

7) Nicholas Dent, *Rousseau* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 215-217 and pp. 224-226.

8) Although the author does believe a more detailed intellectual history than the current space allows would demonstrate that Machiavelli and Rousseau significantly shaped the development of nationalism.

Machiavelli and Rousseau anticipated nationalism's importance, and that it is a subject on which Machiavelli's and Rousseau's political philosophies can be productively compared. Interestingly, Machiavelli and Rousseau agree on a number of points related to nationalism. Both were advocates for independent republics and believed that nations should have different political orders with institutions that define and protect the nation's distinct identity. They saw national self-determination as righteous and good, and national allegiance as paramount for governance and stability. Both Machiavelli and Rousseau stressed the importance of history, particularly of how a polity is formed and structured. Both recognized a need for extraordinary individuals: Machiavelli emphasized the role of national heroes such as founders and pivotal rulers; Rousseau's social contract required people of exceptional skill to serve patriotically as legislators. Machiavelli and Rousseau also saw education and religion as tools for shaping social rules and orders, and even as means of political control.

2. Nationalists of Their Time?

Both Machiavelli and Rousseau consciously waded into the stream of history to make nationalist calls. Machiavelli presented a nationalist agenda in his conclusion to *The Prince* (Chapter 26: "Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians"), imploring Lorenzo de' Medici to liberate Italian lands from French, German and Spanish influences. Free of its foreign masters, Italy could be united and its pride and honor restored to the grandeur of its past. Rousseau also made a direct nationalist call in his *Considerations on the Constitution of Poland*. In the Polish case, Rousseau saw an opportunity for a constitutional founding with public opinion endorsing the new state. He argued that the character of legislators and the quality of institutions were the keys to maintaining public approval and active involvement.

It is debatable whether Machiavelli was actually an Italian (or Florentine?) nationalist and whether Rousseau was a true advocate of various nationalisms in Europe. Scholars question Machiavelli's desire for a political renaissance of the Roman republic and Rousseau's intention to inspire national revolutions.⁹⁾ One could argue that Machiavelli was just following his own advice and trying to use nationalism for instrumental purposes, and that Rousseau would despise many of the states later formed and policies pursued

in the name of nationalism. Nonetheless, it is clear from a close reading of their works that both philosophers understood the potential of what would become one of the most powerful ideological forces in human history.

The similarities that Machiavelli and Rousseau share in supporting nationalist concepts and aims are fascinating in and of themselves, but even more interesting are the insights that result from their different philosophical approaches. While both Machiavelli and Rousseau were interested in national self-determination and state building, and cared about peace and stability, their philosophies had very different ways of getting there.

This article uncovers the competing insights of Machiavelli and Rousseau by considering the *what*, *who*, and *how* of their nationalisms. The first section examines the purposes of nationalism, where Machiavelli focuses on power, control and glory, and Rousseau on freedom, equality and legitimacy. The second section looks at nationalist actors, of whom Machiavelli concentrates on the ruling elite and Rousseau on the will of the people. The third section considers the application of nationalism where Machiavelli's distrust contrasts to Rousseau's empathy, and Machiavelli's recommendations for political theater and physical force contrast to Rousseau's preference for civic education and government institutions. The article concludes by discussing the schools of nationalism that in many ways build upon Machiavelli's and Rousseau's philosophies.

III . Purposes of Nationalism

What are the main goals of nationalism for Machiavelli and Rousseau? Both Machiavelli and Rousseau professed the aims of peace and stability, and both recognized a need for national unity. But the two philosophers had

9) These debates not only stem from scholars' different interpretations of the original texts, but also alleged internal contradictions expressed across the various writings of Machiavelli and Rousseau. See Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999); John T. Scott (ed.), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Paradoxes and Interpretations* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Specifically on the debate over Machiavelli and Florentine nationalism, including the views of Machiavelli scholar Felix Gilbert and contemporary applications, see Joseph M. Parent, *Uniting States: Voluntary Union in World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 159-172.

contrasting purposes for nationalism. This section addresses the question of purpose in two parts. First, it considers what Machiavelli and Rousseau were reacting against, which provides context for what they wanted nationalism to accomplish. Second, it looks at their different concepts of national unity to explain why both were proponents of nationalism.

1. Machiavelli's New Morality, Rousseau's Re-Enlightenment

In the *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli notably looked toward ancient Rome and away from Christianity. Whereas the Christian faith focuses on strength of spirit with concern for the afterlife, Machiavelli studied Rome to understand strength of mind and body for mastering tangible life on earth. Machiavelli was not only using material realism to respond to Christian theology; he was largely reacting against the political power of the Catholic Church. Machiavelli called for a political renaissance akin to a rebirth of the Roman republic. An important part of Machiavelli's nationalism is his argument that to persist, a republic must return to its founding principle and core identity.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli reacted strongly against traditional (Christian) definitions of morality. Machiavelli had contempt for what he considered imagined ideals; for Machiavelli, nothing should be sacred, instead he wanted to get to the "effectual truth" of matters, arguing it is good to know when not to be good.¹⁰ Machiavelli saw great virtue in Romulus killing his brother Remus and founding Rome. Machiavelli was not the first to praise what others considered evil, nor was he the first to recommend ruthlessness. What stands out about Machiavelli's rejection of Christian morality is the logic with which he presented his claims: Machiavelli called for a liberation from morality in order for national rule to be effective and better able to realize the greater good. Machiavelli envisioned a politics that plays only by the rules of politics, that is, no rules aside from the reoccurring patterns on which Machiavelli bases his "remedies" and advice.¹¹ Uninhibited by normative standards and moral codes, Machiavelli's prince will be no more ruthless or

10) Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated by H. C. Mansfield from the 1532 original (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 61.

11) *Ibid.*, pp. 9-16.

generous than he needs to be. Not having to answer to a higher power (i.e. not beholden to the Christian God, church or value system), makes the nationalist leader unrestrained and able to strategically choose the most effective course of action.

In stark contrast, Rousseau wanted to increase self-restraint for the sake of reestablishing morality. Whereas Machiavelli saw the beginning of a state as good because that is when founders act out of necessity and succeed under fear, Rousseau looked back to what he imagined as an era of innocence, before man's corruption by materialism and the evils of political society. This is why Rousseau preferred ancient Sparta to Rome—he saw goodness in living closer to the state of nature.¹²⁾ Natural man is good because he is simple and self-sufficient. With little need to interact with or rely on others, man is free to follow his own will. And since all men are equal in nature, they empathize with each other.

According to Rousseau, progression and accidents of history brought man out of nature into a situation of increasing social and economic interdependence. In a social world, man is compared to and compares himself to others. Private property causes man to think ahead for his own self-benefit; with the ability to imagine and realize even greater benefit, man becomes greedy and vengeful.¹³⁾ Artificial scarcity and competition result. Cooperation can yield some economic prosperity and development of the arts and sciences, but this then leads to materialism, and man becomes the slave of his own vanity. Rousseau was thus reacting against what he saw as the economic inequality and intellectual arrogance of the Enlightenment. His implication was that inequality is an unnatural construct and that any government, laws, or social hierarchy that perpetuates inequality is not just.

2. National Unity: Power and Glory, Freedom and Legitimacy

Parallel with what they were reacting against, Machiavelli and Rousseau maintained very different concepts of national unity and hence purposes for nationalism. Machiavelli believed national unity had great utility because he

12) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, translated from the 1762 original and edited by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 41-152.

13) *Ibid.*, pp. 21-38.

anticipated nationalism's ability to affect material outcomes. Machiavelli's historical studies suggested that unity is vital for state stability, survival and prosperity. First, national unity allows a practical concentration of power such that the center can effectively gain control over and manage the whole. Nationalism is thus important for internal rule. Second, Machiavelli saw unity as a necessary condition for the national strength and sacrifice required to protect against external threats, invasion and influence from outsiders. Seeing international relations as a perpetual state of war, Machiavelli considered unity an ingredient for victory. Nationalism is thus a recipe for improving 'our' situation and standing at the inevitable expense of 'them.'¹⁴

Machiavelli did not have time for humanitarian or cosmopolitan concerns. His goal was not to raise politics to a higher bar of morality, but to lower the standard of justice to the level at which politics actually work. In Machiavelli's reality, nationalism is a vehicle of control and an effective tool for maintaining and increasing power. And unlike philosophies assuming some process of evolution or transcendence, Machiavelli's asserts a constant universalism. Machiavelli saw the balance of good and evil in his time to be the same as the days of the ancients. What changes is that different nations have times of pride and glory and times of failure and despair. Strauss observed of Machiavelli's nationalism that "the end is the aggrandizement of one's country or fatherland—but also using the fatherland in the service of self-aggrandizement of the politician."¹⁵

While Machiavelli wanted to alter the balance of power in favor of his nation state, Rousseau sought to transform the nature of how the people of a nation relate to each other, and to their government. Rousseau believed that *amour de soi* (love of self) expands to *amour-propre* (pride) as man leaves the state of nature.¹⁶ Herein lies the danger of competitive materialism, because pride inspires a desire to feel victorious over others. Rousseau's nationalism thus has a communitarian purpose: for the individual to understand and take pride in serving the interest of the community. Rousseau wanted people to avoid corruption, improve their characters, and focus on giving of self to country and fellow citizen. He aspired for a good society that

14) Niccolò Machiavelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-87.

15) Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (eds.), *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 297.

16) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-21.

would allow man to be free as in nature: with freedom of choice and freedom from want, living in fairness and equality.

This desire informed Rousseau's concept of national unity. He saw national union as saving each from each other: the social contract was to protect citizens' life, liberty and property from other citizens and prevent civil war.¹⁷⁾ Rousseau's nationalism combines love of self with love of fellow nationals, forming an artificial bond for the sake of morality and the public goods of peace, national independence and stability. Rousseau's social contract entails the alienation of individual rights to the whole community, completely putting common interests over private. Rousseau advocated the nationalist rule—that all citizens and groups put the nation first before any other association—because he detested interest-based politics and class-based society. Rousseau pictured a society without a ruling aristocracy, merchant elite or military class. Where Machiavelli might have agreed that “might makes right,” Rousseau believed legitimacy should be based on popular support.¹⁸⁾ Rousseau argued that in order to realize oneself, to have pride in belonging, to have an arrangement of mutual help, respect and equality, the people must submit to the general will. Government is only to be an expression of the general will, while the people should have the same education, language, culture and history in a small community of shared empathy. National unity is what Rousseau prescribed for the nation to be free and for the people to benefit from good governance.

IV. Nationalist Actors

Who did Machiavelli and Rousseau consider as the relevant agents of nationalism? As explained above, both Machiavelli and Rousseau thought the people should be united, albeit for different ends. Both philosophers also recognized the importance of exceptional individuals and devoted attention to state-society relations. However, Machiavelli and Rousseau exhibited very different views on who should be at the helm of nationalism. This is clear in their contrasting concepts of virtue and how people were expected to interact

17) *Ibid.*, p. 106.

18) *Ibid.*, pp. 30-44.

with government. Also in considering Machiavelli's and Rousseau's relevant nationalist actors, it is useful to compare how different nations were expected to interact with each other.

1. Machiavelli's Ruling Elite, Rousseau's General Will

Machiavelli and Rousseau did not agree on human nature and morality. This is clear in who's virtue and what virtue they wrote about. When one thinks of virtue, what probably comes to mind are Plato's courage and wisdom, or Cicero's modesty, temperance, justice and faith.¹⁹⁾ Machiavelli wanted to revolutionize morality, seeing self-interest and acquisition as virtuous. For Machiavelli, true virtue was knowing when to act morally and when to act out of necessity.²⁰⁾ But such enlightened selfishness and calculating effectiveness was intended for use by rulers—ultimately for the greater good of the nation. Machiavelli saw the people as a source of consistency and continuity. The masses were good and were to be acted upon but respected. The leadership was to be the driver of change and determinant of virtue, responsible for introducing “new modes and orders.”²¹⁾ Machiavelli routinely praised rulers who practiced brutal expediency and wrote of those who deserved their status because of objective accomplishments. Machiavelli wanted government to be effective such that the people are better off than they would be otherwise and live under the perception that government serves them. The ideal roles envisioned by Machiavelli's nationalism were the elite shaping and directing the nation, and the people loyally following their leaders.

Rousseau had a different view of relevant actors and virtue. Rousseau wanted to restore rather than redefine morality. He was interested in pre-civil society life and the human soul as a basis for his political philosophy. The romanticism of Rousseau's time was preoccupied with a sense of fate, elevated common custom to noble status, and was in awe of nature.²²⁾ According to Rousseau, people are naturally free and equal. Natural man was

19) Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 215.

20) Niccolò Machiavelli, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

21) *Ibid.*, pp. 20-33.

22) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

virtuous: simple, not greedy; he did not engage in reason, only focused on meeting basic needs; he was not violent except under the threat of pain or scarcity.²³⁾ Where Machiavelli called for selfishness and acquisition, Rousseau called for self-sacrifice and restraint. Rousseau criticized the top-down control of his times because he saw it as corrupt. He did not subscribe to the elite rule that Machiavelli did; instead, Rousseau cared about good institutions.²⁴⁾ Even then, he did not focus so much on the agency of these institutions or of national leaders. Rather, he focused on the agency of the people in the form of the general will.

Rousseau's innovation was that each member of the nation was to submit his all to the group, but remain free because the will of the group would include and advance everyone's best interests. "Each of us puts his person and his full power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole."²⁵⁾ Rousseau wanted government to embody the good nature of the people and further promote morality and moderation in society. Government was a necessary evil (insofar as it limited freedom) in order to execute the general will; laws and institutions were only to provide guidelines and take actions for advancing the greater good. According to Rousseau's nationalism, for a state to be legitimate, it must be the extension of a national people.

2. Norms of International Relations: War and Isolationism

Machiavelli's nationalism sought to effectively unify against and defeat external threats, remain competitive versus other nations, and find advantage whenever possible. This resembles what international relations scholars identify as a realist approach.²⁶⁾ Machiavelli saw the fortune (power) of nations as variable and contested—if your nation is not fighting to be stronger, then it will become weaker, if it is not plotting to defeat its neighbors, then it will be defeated. For Machiavelli, war was the natural state

23) *Ibid.*, p. 166.

24) Rousseau's nationalism also had top-down elements in terms of government's role in socializing the people; see section on "Civic Education and Institutions" in this article.

25) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

26) Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

of international relations and should be waged as needed for state benefit, because war is just to whom it is necessary.²⁷⁾ Machiavelli saw other nations as competitors at best. Likely, they are enemies that require a ruler to use nationalism to keep his own side unified against attack or efforts at sabotage, and to keep the people loyal in times of war.

Machiavelli had a practical preference for autarky (cf. Rousseau's romantic isolationism described below), because he saw reliance as a vulnerability that would be exploited by rivals. Meanwhile, Machiavelli's tolerance for other ethnicities and cultures was mixed. On the one hand, he praised Rome for its ability to absorb people of different heritage; at other points, he suggested that Rome's diversity was a factor of its undoing. At the end of *The Prince*, Machiavelli demonized other nationalities as "barbarians," but he was more concerned with material results, power and control than with the idea of ethno-cultural homogeneity.²⁸⁾

Rousseau's nationalism was concerned with meeting the needs of the people adequately and fairly; if this is accomplished, Rousseau seemed to allow space for mutual respect, a sense of equality and even fraternity among nations. Rousseau's view was certainly more cosmopolitan than Machiavelli's. But Rousseau was not someone we would consider an internationalist today. Rather, he was anti-globalization: he believed that ever-increasing economic activity should be discouraged because it undermines the common spirit and hence national cohesion.²⁹⁾ Moreover, Rousseau had isolationist tendencies: he argued that the nation should be self-concerned and self-sufficient. Rousseau had a romantic vision of a simple agricultural society, able to insulate its identity by not having to engage in economic exchange with other nations. Rousseau believed a dislike of outsiders was another necessary evil—negative views of non-nationals were needed to encourage doing good onto one's own people, which Rousseau considered much more important than doing good onto others.³⁰⁾

27) Niccolò Machiavelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 101.

29) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

30) *Ibid.*, pp. 19-38.

V. Applying Nationalism

Having investigated the aims and actors in Machiavelli's and Rousseau's nationalisms, the question remains: "How was nationalism employed in Machiavelli and Rousseau's political philosophies?" This section first accesses the logic of relations behind the application of nationalism, contrasting Machiavelli's counseling distrust to Rousseau's call for empathy. Second, contending methods of social influence are examined, including when the use of violence is seen as justified or necessary, and contrasting Machiavelli's political theater and manipulation of public opinion to Rousseau's maintenance of effective government institutions and civic education.

1. *Machiavelli's Distrust and Rousseau's Empathy*

Machiavelli saw trust as dangerous because betrayal is likely when one no longer wields power or is no longer needed. Machiavelli discussed this with particular attention to the armed forces. He said that national leaders should rely on their own arms.³¹⁾ If situations are such that one must look to others for help, one must carefully scrutinize the trustworthiness of co-conspirators. Any form of mercenary will prove to be unreliable; any prolonged reliance will prove to be a weakness. The best situation is to be powerful so that others will need you more than you need them, and others will owe you more than you owe them. If one inherits power or is otherwise indebted, then he had better find a way of being great on his own and turn the tables. Machiavelli recommends being always suspicious of others and securing loyalty by inspiring fear of reprisal.³²⁾

Despite all Machiavelli's focus on trust, he did not see betrayal as a bad thing—as long as his side was doing the betraying. Machiavelli admired the ingenious lie and the cheat that delivers results. He believed such practice is essential to maintain power and effectively manage the state. In terms of relations among nations, whereas Rousseau suggests some room for trust and hence the possibility of positive-sum relations, Machiavelli does not believe

31) Niccolò Machiavelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-57.

32) *Ibid.*, pp. 68-71.

in trusting other governments or peoples, in line with his zero-sum vision of international relations.

Rousseau had a much more positive view of trust, especially his idea that the people entrust the government with the social contract and that all members of the nation should have empathy for each other. The trust Rousseau afforded the government came with limitations on power in the form of institutional constraints on rulers who must follow the general will.³³⁾ Rousseau also believed that republics should be small, so rulers and ruled would be personally connected with shared interests, and civil society could be built on trust. Whereas Machiavelli was concerned about the size of a state for the practicality of its control, Rousseau was concerned about the capacity of each citizen to trust and empathize with others. Rousseau also believed that, in a community of common ancestry and shared culture, political representation would be more direct. Where Machiavelli emphasized self-help and necessity, Rousseau desired mutual assistance and empathy. Machiavelli famously said that kindness is easily seen as weakness and that it is better to be feared than loved.³⁴⁾ Rousseau wanted members of society to love each other, creating a national community infused with compassion and a spirit of equality.

2. Political Theater and Force, Civic Education and Institutions

Machiavelli believed that prudence in the application of force is a critical determinant of effective rule. Too much internal use of force makes the ruler hated and causes the people to rebel. Too little show of force and government authority begins to lack credibility and domestic stability falls into doubt. For Machiavelli, the external use of force was a given—to enjoy relative peace, the state had to be good at and regularly engage in war.³⁵⁾ But this was not just for securing a favorable external environment for the nation. Machiavelli advised waging war for the health of the state, to promote domestic unity and cope with internal challenges. Machiavelli believed that rulers must be masters at playing the nationalism card—making use of political theater and

33) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-26 and p. 162.

34) Niccolò Machiavelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-68.

35) *Ibid.*, p. 59.

manipulating the passions of the people.³⁶⁾ Machiavelli had a sophisticated understanding of exploiting nationalism for instrumental purposes. He understood the utility of a national myth, having discussed national founding and heroes at length.³⁷⁾ He understood the rally around the flag effect and prescribed nationalism as a way to fool and control the people.

Machiavelli especially liked what we would refer to today as government propaganda. He believed that a leader should secure the goodwill of the people through a façade of virtue and the careful management of expectations.³⁸⁾ In other words, Machiavelli encouraged good public relations, staying in tune with the people's needs and opinions, and being flexible with the times. A leader should keep up some appearance of sympathy, piety and integrity. But he should not give much away to appear generous; instead, he should make people think he will take much, and then take less than expected. Thus, a leader will be seen as generous even while taking. Likewise, a leader should demonstrate cruelty to be feared, and to make himself appear merciful, he should not overly indulge in mercy, but instead apply cruelty selectively and judiciously.

In contrast to Machiavelli's rule by force and propaganda, Rousseau believed in rule by law and persuasion. Rousseau was highly critical of governments that violently enforced the interests of the governing upon the people.³⁹⁾ He detested a social order that protects the 'haves' and oppresses the 'have-nots.' Rousseau wanted laws to be made in accordance with the national interest and applied to the people equally. He believed that government institutions need to serve the people, be free of corruption and assume responsibility with authority. Rousseau demanded that law approximate the general will and that the state approximate the people. This was reflected in the roles he delineated for the legislator and executive.⁴⁰⁾ Rousseau emphasized that the national characteristics of the people should inform their government institutions. However, his philosophy was sophisticated in recognizing that the arrow goes both ways—Rousseau's institutions were also to improve the character and customs of the people.

36) *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42.

37) *Ibid.*, pp. 21-25.

38) *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

39) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

40) *Ibid.*, pp. 82-137.

The idea at the heart of Rousseau's civil and moral education was that people of a nation should have a common identity to provide unity for a stable, productive society.⁴¹⁾ Rousseau's nationalism involved a "politics of sympathetic identification" where individuals, fearing disorder, seek the certainty of a shared community and social contract.⁴²⁾ Rousseau believed that nations should have their own distinct identity based on the characteristics and strengths associated with their particular territory. In addition to local customs and traditions, Rousseau cared about the origins of language and the teaching of music. So his nationalism was not only civic but also ethno-cultural. Rousseau argued that magistrates should play a key role in the development of a uniform national culture, building up the common spirit needed to support a well functioning state. Rousseau seemed to believe that people must be made ready—socially experienced and moral enough—for good government. Through public education and persuasion, the friction between individual self-interest and the pursuit of the greater good is to be resolved as citizens take active ownership of the public order.

VI. Enduring Insights on Nationalism

To grasp a complex phenomenon that remains a force today, it is incumbent upon students of nationalism to understand its heritage. Nationalism has met a human need for a sense of belonging, and has made people willing to sacrifice for a community too large for any individual to identify personally with all its members.⁴³⁾ Nationalism has developed across space and time and manifested itself in numerous forms: liberating people, enslaving others; propping up governments, toppling others; encouraging economic development, spurring destructive wars. To understand what makes nationalism such a powerful force, it is important to research not only its social psychological foundations and historical development, but also its basis in political theory. Machiavelli and Rousseau are pillars of nationalism's

41) *Ibid.*, pp. 49-53.

42) Arthur Melzer, "Rousseau, Nationalism, and the Politics of Sympathetic Identification," in M. Blitz and W. Kristol (eds.), *Educating the Prince* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 111-128.

43) Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 37-46.

philosophical heritage.

Perhaps the most cited definition of nationalism, attributed to Ernest Gellner, says nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy positing that ethno-cultural boundaries should coincide with political ones.⁴⁴⁾ Gellner considered nationalism historically recent, as having developed alongside industrialization. There is more to his and related arguments than can be appreciated here,⁴⁵⁾ but this article has shown that Machiavelli and Rousseau seemed to understand nationalism quite well. Despite having written before the Industrial and French Revolutions, they wrote about political legitimacy and ethno-cultural community. Machiavelli and Rousseau incorporated elements of both primordial and social constructivist views on nationalism—recognizing pre-political groups with distinct culture and spirit, and also the creation and manipulation of national consciousness and identification.

Machiavelli's nationalism was more than a realist-materialist reaction to the influence of Christianity or a mere call for a political renaissance to overcome the divisions of Italy. Rousseau's nationalism was more than a romantic-idealist reaction to the universalism and rationalism of the Enlightenment, or a plea to transcend the materialism and corruption of his time. Both philosophers fleshed out a greater portion of the body of modern nationalism than has been previously recognized. Machiavelli and Rousseau analyzed nationalism as an important political phenomenon and preached it as an art, or at least a necessary evil. Their insights remain relevant today, especially after scholars built upon their work a better understanding of nationalism, its various forms, and its serious consequences.⁴⁶⁾ This article thus concludes by examining how Machiavelli's and Rousseau's philosophies flow into different streams of nationalism scholarship.

1. Great-power Nationalism vs. Civic Nationalism

Machiavelli's philosophy advocated a great power (or state-centered)

44) Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1.

45) A concise review and helpful analysis of different views on the origin of nationalism is provided by Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001).

46) Of course, the different forms of nationalism outlined here are not mutually exclusive, and some were arguably expressed by both Machiavelli and Rousseau.

nationalism in search of power, glory and control. Rousseau's civic nationalism was rather concerned with freedom, legitimacy and equality. Machiavelli wanted to see his fatherland reclaim its sovereignty, redefine its virtue, restore its greatness and realize its destiny. Rousseau wanted to improve the human condition, civil participation, state-society relations and the pursuit of justice. These different nationalist aims set up key contrasts between Machiavelli and Rousseau. Rousseau was concerned about limitations on power; Machiavelli wanted to remove artificial limits. Machiavelli envisioned better results from lowering the moral standard; Rousseau advocated higher moral standards for a better quality of life. Machiavelli believed in enlightened selfishness; Rousseau encouraged constrained self-interest and fulfilling one's duty to others. Rousseau detested man's growing thirst for the material and was passionately against corruption; Machiavelli stressed the need for continuous acquisition and the virtue of the expedient deal.

While Machiavelli wanted state leadership to tame fortune, shape the national fate and harness nature, Rousseau wanted the people to tame themselves, repress individual greed and return to the beauty of nature. Machiavelli saw nationalism as a source of national strength, enabling the state to succeed at the necessary expense of others. Rousseau believed civic nationalism was needed to promote the general will such that people would act morally and out of duty, rather than out of self-interest and instinct. Civic nationalism was to protect against the competition of many particular wills (political deadlock or anarchy) or the imposition of a particular will (the tyranny of dictatorship).

Machiavelli's study of nationalism was drawn upon by Hans Morgenthau's⁴⁷⁾ seminal work on national power and international competition, and advanced by subsequent realist scholars. Rousseau's efforts to develop civic nationalism were followed by Ernest Renan⁴⁸⁾ who answered the question, "What is a nation?" by arguing that a nation exists as a "daily plebiscite" on the will of a population to live together and cooperate. More recent contributions in the civil tradition include Yael Tamir's⁴⁹⁾ investigation of

47) Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1948).

48) Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" translated from the 1882 original in G. Eley and R. Suny (eds.), *Becoming National* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

49) Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

liberal nationalism, defined by a society of free, tolerant, equal individuals, and Will Kymlicka's⁵⁰⁾ examination of multicultural citizenship under constitutional nationalism.

2. Elite-driven Nationalism vs. Popular Nationalism

Machiavelli's and Rousseau's concern for different actors shaped their contrasting forms of nationalism. Machiavelli's political advice was for use by the elite who could seize and maintain power. The prince was to embody national sovereignty, determine the national interest, implement new modes and orders, and be at the reigns of national destiny. Compared to this top-down orientation, Rousseau offered a bottom-up vision. Whereas Machiavelli sought to understand and manipulate interest politics, Rousseau wanted to get rid of the aristocracy and abolish class and interest groups. Rousseau helped redefine the concept of sovereignty by effectively promoting the idea that different peoples could choose different forms of government. He did this by focusing on the general will, related to what we refer to today as popular sovereignty. However, while sovereignty was to lie with the people, Rousseau did not advocate liberal democracy and party politics; rather, people were expected to vote individually, but only in the national interest. Rousseau believed such popular input was critical for legitimacy and so people would trust the government with matters of state. Rousseau's popular nationalism (general will) sought to realize freedom and equality under the law (social contract).

Machiavelli would have probably seen Rousseau's social contract as a sham, but may have approved when it delivers results. Machiavelli seemed to believe that without his elite-driven nationalism, the state would eventually be overrun by enemies, foreign and domestic. Rousseau disagreed, arguing that without popular nationalism, a selfish ruling class would inevitably sacrifice the 'good life' of the people in the name of preserving the nation.⁵¹⁾ These competing ideas relate to each philosopher's concept of human nature. Machiavelli regarded the people as deserving of attention, but as relatively consistent and therefore not agents of change. Rousseau thought humankind

50) Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

51) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

embodied great potential for progress with its pride and faith in self-improvement. Machiavelli saw people as predisposed to zero-sum interaction and material acquisition. Rousseau saw human nature as living in peace and equality, and practicing diffuse reciprocity.

The concept of human nature in Rousseau's nationalism influenced the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant,⁵²⁾ and helped shape Elie Kedourie's⁵³⁾ thoughts on political community and relations between the people and the state. Bottom-up political forces were expressed in different historical forms of popular nationalism after Rousseau. A prominent analysis of these was John Breuilly's⁵⁴⁾ study of nationalisms used against the state. Machiavelli's top-down perspective was expanded by studies on the origins and proliferation of nationalism. Gellner's⁵⁵⁾ thesis of nationalism developing along side industrialization and the homogenization of culture was elite driven. Elite-driven processes, especially the spread of print media, helped create what Benedict Anderson⁵⁶⁾ referred to as "imagined communities." One could argue that both bottom-up and top-down mechanisms were present in Machiavelli's and Rousseau's nationalisms. Charles Tilly⁵⁷⁾ later showed that the two often do interact.

3. Instrumental Nationalism vs. Ethno-cultural Nationalist Institutions

Neither Machiavelli nor Rousseau was particularly modest about their ideas. In a sense, each wanted to found his own religion—Machiavelli, a religion of realism and political expediency, and Rousseau, a civil religion of romantic secularism. Both wanted to replace what they saw as an outmoded order. Machiavelli wanted to usurp the influence of foreign powers and of Christianity; Rousseau wanted to cut the excesses of the arts and sciences and overcome materialism. Machiavelli wanted liberation from morality and political

52) Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. by Pauline Kleingeld and trans. by David L. Colclasure from the 1795 original (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

53) Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (New York: Praeger, 1960).

54) John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

55) Ernest Gellner, *op. cit.*

56) Benedict Anderson, *op. cit.*

57) Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

constraints; Rousseau wanted liberation from corruption and inequality. Rousseau did see value in established religion, as an important source of faith, honesty and trust. Machiavelli's situational ethics only called for the instrumental use of religion and ideology. These various roles of religion weighed prominently in John Armstrong's⁵⁸⁾ study of primordial nationalism.

As elaborated in this article, Machiavelli and Rousseau had different methods for putting nationalism to work. Machiavelli believed that for the ends of peace and stability, the nation needs to be strong, unified and self-reliant. This, in Machiavelli's view, requires rulers to employ instrumental, manipulative methods without remorse and to abstain from trust. Putting necessity over morality, Machiavelli prized effective propaganda and political theater: he encouraged a glorious political re-founding to inspire pride, and cruel or extreme punishment to inspire loyalty and deter bad behavior. Machiavelli's methods of revising history and uniting against (drummed up) foreign enemies were understood and criticized by Karl Deutsch.⁵⁹⁾ More recently, Eric Hobsbawm⁶⁰⁾ chronicled the instrumental use of ideology, glory and appearance of virtue in the history of modern nationalism.

In contrast to Machiavelli, Rousseau believed that for the ends of freedom and equality, a social contract was required whereby the people entrust their lives, liberty and property to the state and to each other. Everyone is to engage in self-restraint and self-sacrifice, mutual empathy and common effort. All are to do their share in the business of ruling. For this arrangement to work, people need to live in a community of common nationals and be endowed with a sense of patriotism. So first, the state was to sit atop a natural geographic region, in an area where the people are of the same ethnicity and culture, speaking the same language and practicing the same traditions. Second, the state was to have strong social and political institutions to provide a civic education, protect the rule of law and promote the general will. Johann Gottlieb Fichte's "Address to the German Nation"⁶¹⁾ focused on

58) John A. Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

59) Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Its Alternatives* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

60) Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

61) Johann G. Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. by R. F. Jones and G. H. Turnbull from the 1806 original (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1922).

people sharing the common characteristics Rousseau stipulated and further spread their influence. More recent and academic works illuminated the ethno-cultural forces behind Rousseau's institutions: Anthony D. Smith⁶²⁾ demonstrated the centrality of ethnicity in nationalism's development, and John Hutchinson⁶³⁾ expanded the study of cultural nationalism.

VI. Conclusion

The political philosophies of Machiavelli and Rousseau are particularly useful to compare for the different insights each offers on matters of lasting importance. History demonstrates it is difficult to have both the order of Machiavellian rule and the liberty that Rousseau saw in the state of nature. Republics around the world continue to wrestle with the appropriate relationship between government and society, trying to find the optimal balance of freedom and control, peace and security, dynamism and stability, fairness and opportunity. Machiavelli not only understood the paradoxes and dilemmas of national governance; his philosophy appeared to relish in the ideas of using violence for peace, lying for good, employing fraud for legitimacy. Rousseau broke new ground in addressing these matters, but seemed intent to leave paradoxes and ambiguities in his work for others to decipher and further explore.

Nonetheless, there are clear and important distinctions between each one's approach. In terms of international politics, Machiavelli's nationalism was more externally aggressive, whereas Rousseau's was comparatively isolationist. In terms of domestic politics, Machiavelli's nationalism prescribed manipulation of the people's contributions and opinions on matters of state, but suggested that a leader should otherwise leave people to their own business. Rousseau's nationalism was more socially intrusive, focused largely on shaping the education and behavior of the people. One might say that Rousseau was high-minded about low politics whereas Machiavelli engaged high politics with base means. It is also interesting to observe that

62) Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

63) John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

the facets of Machiavelli's nationalism—power focused, elite driven, employing instrumental methods—appear to travel together today. However, many contemporary studies of nationalism consider civic and ethnic nationalism as near opposites, and yet the two coexisted in Rousseau's vision of the social contract.⁶⁴⁾

It can be hazardous to read classics in political theory and try to understand old meanings in new contexts. Who is to say whether Machiavelli would consider today's Chinese government to be following his advice? Or whether Rousseau would believe his brand of nationalism is presently at work in France or the United States? What is clear is that the works of Machiavelli and Rousseau are worthy reading for students of contemporary nationalism. One only need look as far as North Korea's new leader, Kim Jong-un, to find a nationalist prince, or across the DMZ to South Korea to find a patriotic public. Insights about nationalist goals, relevant actors, and methods of application that may seem to be the discoveries of recent generations are in fact much older phenomena.

Machiavelli's nationalist prince is distrusting. He fixates on power, control and glory. He is skilled in war, the selective use of domestic force, and political theater. In marked contrast, members of Rousseau's patriotic public empathize with each other. Their greatest priorities are freedom, equality and legitimacy. The general will of the people mandates moral education and is to be embodied in well-developed government institutions. These nationalist ideas were articulated in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and remain very much alive and contested today.

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64) On civic vs. ethnic nationalism, see Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

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