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**The General Public: A Clash of Perspectives**

Nicollo Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, composed as a handbook for Princes, boasts multitudes of Machiavelli’s knowledge about politics and his observations through time to assist the authoritarian rulers (and rulers-to-be) retain power and control over the “ordinary” crowd. Although in doing so, the text shows little regard to the rationale of the general “people” and utilizes them as either pawns the *Princes* are supposed to utilize in their ambitions or as cattle they’re supposed to tend to for the successful continuity of their regime. On the other hand, *Discourses on Livy* brings expands upon the credibility of the public as parallels to the Princes in intellect, governance and individuality and promotes equal accountability for both. Hence, this text better conveys the understanding of the public mindset and shuns the idea of inherent differences between the ruler and the ruled and the myth about all Princes being perfect to rule.

Considering the life of Machiavelli among the elites of Florence and his strong acquaintances with the ruling class, a lowly perception of the general public may be expected from him and is very evident from his texts. As is demonstrated at several points in the text, instead of encouraging the Princes to serve the public well and to act in the best of their interests, he constantly instructs supports the idea of manipulating the public and playing them into favoring the regime. For instance, Machiavelli instructs Princes to know when to be the Wolf and when to be the fox to manipulate the public into liking him while maintaining control (pg. 48). Similarly, the text instructs Princes to restrain from committing a brief list of acts to maintain the public affection while anything else is allowed (pg. 54) and then throughout chapters 21 and 24, Machiavelli instructs ways for the Princes to manipulate the “public” into liking them by putting on planned shows of his intellect, strategic capabilities and love for the public no matter how fake all this may be. This approach to teaching a Prince is a prime example of Machiavelli’s view of the public as nothing but a part in a Princes regime movement that needs to be controlled and conquered by fakeness. Thus, this text constantly objectifies the public as a naïve body of individuals that can easily be manipulated into own favor.

As a contrast to Machiavelli’s sternly miniscule characterization and thought to the rationale and importance of the “ordinary” crowd, the text *Discourses on Livy* discusses the ordinary public in contrast to the ruling Princes by shedding light on factors such as gratefulness, intellect, decisiveness and the inclination of loyalty and constructs the general public as superior to the Princes in these matters. The text states the general public as more prone to be loyal and “less prone to ingratitude” (Chap 38, pg.104) as they don’t fear loss of control like the Princes. In similar ways, throughout chapter 58, the text presents the ordinary crowd as capable of deciding the truth for themselves and reinforces their ability to rationalize and maintain order among themselves as wise, largely-capable beings. The text not only advocates the intellectual position of the public parallel, and under some cases better than the Princes, it goes on to state that “the voice of the people is the voice of God” (pg.109). Hence, by not objectifying them as in Machiavelli’s text, this text establishes the fact that the general crowd is capable of taking its own decision and is worthy of a Princes (and all other ruling body’s) prime attention. This demonstrates a significant shift from the perception of the general public portrayed in Machiavelli’s “Prince”.

Analyzing both the texts reveals that although Machiavelli doesn’t talk in length about the differences between public and Princes and generally presents them as naïve and gullible, the *Discourses on Livy* goes on to show stark differences between the general public and the Prince. It states that the public, considered in its true collective sense, possesses the intellect and rationale to understand their needs and manage their affairs better than what a single Prince can due to his conditional restraints. It is also noted that the public, free from all factors of power, greed, fear and influence, is better than Princes at being part of a society by practicing gratitude, loyalty, order and is able to take decisions objectively. All in all, it is clearly stated that the public isn’t as outlawed and incapable as they are considered and the Princes are not as pure and loyal as they appear to be.

Although both texts present a contrasting view of the general public, analyzing Machiavelli’s Prince from another perspective, it might also be inferred that although he doesn’t give any established importance to the public, he does indirectly bring up public as the crucial foundation of the regime of a Prince and hence emphasizes on keeping them under the leash and convinced. Hence, even while instilling the idea of the public as a body of stepping stones to power, Machiavelli implicitly and perhaps unintentionally conveys the dire need of public support and its importance to the intended readers. Hence, although implicitly, the Prince may be supplemented by the true portrayal of public in the *Discourses on Livy* and be reconciled with the text considering the fact that nowhere in the text does Machiavelli contradict the arguments presented in the *Discourses on Livy* about the stature of the general public.