*tion of the King*, written in the 1470s and dedicated to the first activist pope, Sixtus IV, engaged in restoring the temporal power of the papacy in Rome and the papal states. A Sienese humanist, Patrizi was made bishop of Gaeta.

As in the other humanist advice-books, Patrizi sees the locus of *virtus* in the prince. But it should be noted that, along with his fellow pro-prince humanists as well as the earlier republicans, Patrizi's virtuous prince is very much the model of Christian virtue. The prince must be a staunch Christian, and must always seek and cleave to justice. In particular, the prince must always be scrupulously honest and honourable. He 'is never to engage in deceit, never to tell a lie, and never to permit others to tell lies'. Alone with his fellow later humanists, however, Patrizi speaks of the prince as having a different set of virtues from his more passive subjects. As the maker of history and the seeker after glory, for example, the prince is not supposed to be humble. On the contrary, he is supposed to be generous, lavish in spending and altogether 'magnificent'.

The triumph of the *signori* led to many advice-books entitled, simply *The Prince* (*Il Principe*). One was written by Bartolomeo Sacchi (1421–81) in 1471 in honour of the duke of Mantua, and an important one by Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503) who introduced himself to King Ferdinand of Naples by writing *The Prince* in his honour in 1468. In return, King Ferdinand made Pontano his secretary for more than 20 years. Pontano continued to extol his patron, in two separate treatises praising the twin princely virtues in Ferdinand of generosity and lavish splendour. In *On Liberality*, Pontano declares that 'nothing is more undignified in a prince' than lack of generosity. And in *On Magnificence*, Pontano insists that creating 'noble building, splendid Churches and theatres' is a crucial attribute of princely glory, and lauds King Ferdinand for 'the magnificence and majesty' of the public building he had constructed.

### 6.4 'Old Nick': preacher of evil or first value-free political scientist?

The Italian humanists had propounded the doctrine of absolute political rule, first by republican oligarchs and next by the glorified despot, the monarch or prince. But one crucial point remained to free the ruler of all moral shackles and to allow and even glorify the unchecked and untrammelled rule of royal whim. For while the humanists would hear of no institutional check on state rule, one critical stumbling block still remained: Christian virtue. The ruler, the humanists all admonished, must be Christian, must cleave always to justice, and must be honest and honourable.

What was needed, then, to complete the development of absolutist theory, was a theoretician to fearlessly break the ethical chains that still bound the ruler to the claims of moral principle. That man was the Florentine bureaucrat Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) in one of the most influential works of political philosophy ever written, *The Prince*.

Niccolò Machiavelli was born in Florence, to a moderately well-off Tuscan noble family. His personal preference was clearly for the old oligarchic republic rather than for the *signori*, and in 1494, when the republicans kicked the Medicis out of Florence, young Niccolò entered the city bureaucracy. Rising rapidly in the government, Machiavelli became secretary of the Council of Ten, which managed the foreign policy and the wars of Florence. He held this important post until the Medicis reconquered Florence in 1512, serving in a series of diplomatic and military missions.

Machiavelli was nothing if not 'flexible', and this philosopher *extraordinaire* of opportunism greeted the return of the hated Medicis by attempting to ingratiate himself in their eyes. During the year 1513 he wrote *The Prince*, superficially yet another in the traditional series of advice-books and panegyrics to princes. Hoping to induce the Medicis to read it so that he might be restored to a top bureaucratic post, Machiavelli had the lack of shame needed to dedicate the book 'to the magnificent Lorenzo de Medici'. The Medicis, however, did not take the bait, and the only thing left for Machiavelli was to embark on a literary career, and to drift back into republican conspiracies. Machiavelli took part in conspiratorial republican meetings at the Oricellari Gardens on the outskirts of Florence, owned by the aristocrat Cosimo Rucellai. It was at the Oricellari Gardens that Machiavelli discussed the drafts of his second most important book, the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, written from 1514 to 1519.

Niccolò Machiavelli was reviled throughout Europe during the sixteenth century and on into the next two centuries. He was considered to be someone unique in the history of the West, a conscious preacher of evil, a diabolic figure who had unleashed the demons in the world of politics. The English used his given name as a synonym for the Devil, 'Old Nick'. As Macaulay put it: 'Out of his surname they have coined an epithet for a knave, and out of his Christian name a synonym for the Devil.'

In modern times, Machiavelli's reputation as a preacher of evil has been replaced by the admiration of political scientists as the founder of their discipline. For Machiavelli had cast off outdated moralism to look at power coolly and hard-headedly. A tough-minded realist, he was the pioneer developer of modern, positive, value-free political science. As the mercantilist, power-oriented, founder of modern 'scientific' method, Sir Francis Bacon, was to write early in the seventeenth century: 'We are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do.'

Well, which was Machiavelli, a teacher of evil or a value-free political scientist? Let us see. At first glance, *The Prince* was very much like other mirror-of-princes advice-books of the late fifteenth century humanists. The prince was supposed to seek *virtù*, or excellence, and was supposed to pursue

honour, glory and fame in the development of such excellence. But within this traditional form, Machiavelli wrought a radical and drastic transformation, creating in this way a new paradigm for political theory. For what Machiavelli did was to redefine the critical concept of *virtù*. For the humanists, as for Christians and classical theorists alike, *virtù*, excellence, was the fulfilment of the traditional classical and Christian virtues: honesty, justice, benevolence, etc. For Old Nick, on the contrary, *virtù* in the ruler or prince – and for the late humanists, after all, it was only the prince who counted – was, simply and terribly, as Professor Skinner puts it, 'any quality that helps a prince 'to keep his state'.[2] In short, the overriding, if not the only goal for the prince was to maintain and extend his power, his rule over the state. Keeping and expanding his power *is* the prince's goal, his virtue, and therefore any means necessary to achieve that goal becomes justified.

In his illuminating discussion of Machiavelli, Professor Skinner tries to defend him against the charge of being a 'preacher of evil'. Machiavelli did not praise evil *per se*, Skinner tells us; indeed, other things being equal, he probably preferred the orthodox Christian virtues. It is simply that when those virtues became inconvenient, that is, when they ran up against the overriding goal of keeping state power, the Christian virtues had to be set aside. The more naive humanists also favoured the prince's keeping his state and achieving greatness and glory. They believed, however, that this could only be done by always maintaining and cleaving to the Christian virtues. In contrast, Machiavelli realized that cleaving to justice, honesty and other Christian virtues might sometimes, or even most of the time, conflict with the goal of maintaining and expanding state power. For Machiavelli, orthodox virtues would then have to go by the board. Skinner sums up Machiavelli as follows:

> Machiavelli's final sense of what it is to be a man of *virtù* and his final words of advice to the prince, can thus be summarised by saying that he tells the prince to ensure above all that he becomes a man of 'flexible disposition': he must be capable of varying his conduct from good to evil and back again 'as fortune and circumstances dictate'.[3]

Professor Skinner, however, has a curious view of what 'preaching evil' might really be. Who in the history of the world, after all, and outside a Dr Fu Manchu novel, has actually lauded evil *per se* and counselled evil and vice at every step of life's way? Preaching evil is to counsel precisely as Machiavelli has done: be good so long as goodness doesn't get in the way of something you want, in the case of the ruler that something being the maintenance and expansion of power. What *else* but such 'flexibility' can the preaching of evil be all about?

Following straightaway from power as the overriding goal, and from his realism about power and standard morality being often in conflict, is Machiavelli's famous defence of deception and mendacity on the part of the prince. For then the prince is advised always to *appear* to be moral and virtuous in the Christian manner, since that enhances his popularity; but to practise the opposite if necessary to maintain power. Thus Machiavelli stressed the value of appearances, of what Christians and other moralists call 'hypocrisy'. The prince, he writes, must be willing to become 'a great liar and deceiver', taking advantage of all the credulous: for 'men are so simple' that 'the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived'. Or, in the immortal words of P.T. Barnum centuries later, 'There's a sucker born every minute'. And again, in praising fraud and deceit, Machiavelli writes that 'contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles'. Or, in the words of another astute American social critic: 'nice guys finish last'.

There is, of course, an inner contradiction in a preacher of deceit candidly(!) broadcasting such views to one and all. For, as rulers begin to adopt a 'pragmatic' philosophy which is their natural inclination in any case, the deluded public may begin to awaken to the true state of affairs ('the suckers may wise up'), and then continuing deceit by the ruling class might well prove counterproductive. The 'great liars and deceivers' might no longer find so many subjects so 'ready to be deceived'.

Niccolò Machiavelli, therefore, was unquestionably a new phenomenon in the western world: a conscious preacher of evil to the ruling class. What of his alleged contributions in founding a hard-nosed, realistic, value-free political science?

First, one of his main contributions has been claimed to be the overwhelming use of power, of force and violence, by the rulers of state. Machiavelli was scarcely the first political philosopher who understood that force and violence are at the heart of state power. Previous theorists, however, were anxious to have that power curbed by ancient or Christian virtues. But there is a certain refreshing realism in Machiavelli's total casting off the cloak of virtue in politics and in his seeing the state plainly as unadorned brutal force in the service of sheer power.

There is a profound sense, too, in which Machiavelli was the founder of modern political science. For the modern 'policy scientist' – political scientist, economist, sociologist, or whatever – is a person who has put himself quite comfortably in the role of adviser to the prince or, more broadly, to the ruling class. As a pure technician, then, this counsellor realistically advises the ruling class on how to achieve their goals, which, as Machiavelli sees,

boils down to achieving greatness and glory by maintaining and expanding their power. The modern policy scientists eschew moral principles as being 'unscientific' and therefore outside their sphere of interest.

In all this, modern social science is a faithful follower of the wily Florentine opportunist. But in one important sense the two differ. For Niccolò Machiavelli never had the presumption – or the cunning – to claim to be a true scientist because he is 'value-free'. There is no pretend value-freedom in Old Nick. He has simply replaced the goals of Christian virtue by *another* contrasting set of moral principles: that of maintaining and expanding the power of the prince. As Skinner writes:

> it is often claimed that the originality of Machiavelli's argument...lies in the fact that he divorces politics from morality, and in consequence emphasises the 'autonomy of politics'...[but] the difference between Machiavelli and his contemporaries cannot adequately be characterized as a difference between a moral view of politics and a view of politics as divorced from morality. The essential contrast is rather between two different moralities – two rival and incompatible accounts of what ought ultimately to be done.[4]

Modern social scientists, in contrast, pride themselves on being realistic and value-free. But in this, ironically, they are far *less* realistic or perhaps less candid than their Florentine mentor. For, as Machiavelli knew full well, in taking on their role of adviser to the rulers of state, the 'value-free scientist' is willy-nilly, committing himself to the end, and therefore to the overriding morality, of strengthening the power of those rulers. In advocating public policy, if nowhere else, value-freedom is a snare and a delusion; Old Nick was either too honest or too much of a realist even to consider thinking otherwise.

Niccolò Machiavelli, therefore, was *both* the founder of modern political science *and* a notable preacher of evil. In casting out Christian or natural law morality, however, he did not presume to claim to be 'value-free' as do his modern followers; he knew full well that he was advocating the new morality of subordinating all other considerations to power and to the reasons of state. Machiavelli was the philosopher and apologist *par excellence* for the untrammelled, unchecked power of the absolute state.

Some historians like to contrast the 'bad' Machiavelli of *The Prince* with the 'good' Machiavelli of his later though less influential *Discourses*. Failing to convince the Medicis of his change of heart, Machiavelli reverted, in the *Discourses*, to his republican leanings. But the Old Nick of the *Discourses* is in no sense transformed by goodness; he is simply adapting his doctrine to a republican as against a monarchical polity.

Obviously, as a republican Machiavelli can no longer stress the *virtù* and the greatness of the prince, and so he shifts ground to a kind of collective

*virtù* by the community as a whole. Except that in the case of the community, of course, *virtù* can no longer be doing great deeds and maintaining one man's power. It now becomes acting always in the 'public good' or the 'common good', and always subordinating an individual's or a group's private, 'selfish' interests to an alleged greater good.

In contrast, Machiavelli condemns the pursuit of private interest as 'corruption'. In short, Machiavelli is *still* holding the maintenance and expansion of state power to be the highest good, except that now the state is oligarchic and republican. What he is really preaching is similar to the creed of earlier republican humanists: each individual and group subordinates itself and obeys without question the decrees of the oligarchic ruling class of the republican city-state.

Niccolò Machiavelli is the same preacher of evil in the *Discourses* as he had been in *The Prince*. One of the first atheist writers, Machiavelli's attitude toward religion in the *Discourses* is typically cynical and manipulative. Religion is helpful, he opined, in keeping subjects united and obedient to the state, and thus 'those princes and those Republics which desire to remain free from corruption should above all else maintain incorrupt the ceremonies of their religion'. Religion could also make a positive contribution if it glorified strength and other warlike qualities, but unfortunately Christianity has sapped men's strength by preaching humility and contemplation. In a tirade anticipating Nietzsche, Machiavelli charged that Christian morality has 'glorified humble and contemplative men' and that this peaceful spirit has led to existing corruption.

Machiavelli thundered that citizens can only achieve *virtù* if their highest goal is maintaining and expanding the state, and that therefore they must subordinate Christian ethics to that end. Specifically, they must be prepared to abandon the restraints of Christian ethics and be willing 'to enter on the path of wrongdoing' in order to maintain the state. The state must always take precedence. Therefore, any attempt to judge politics or government on a scale of Christian ethics must be abandoned. As Machievelli puts it with crystal clarity and great solemnity at the end of his final *Discourse*, 'when the safety of one's country depends upon the decision to be taken, no considerations of justice or injustice, humanity or cruelty, nor of glory or shame, should be allowed to prevail'.

Machiavelli's views, and the essential unity with his outlook in *The Prince*, are shown in his discussion in *The Discourses* of Romulus, the legendary founder of the city of Rome. The fact that Romulus murdered his brother and others is justified by Machiavelli's view that only one man should impose the founding constitution of a republic. Machiavelli's wily conflation of the 'public good' with the private interests of the ruler is shown in the following mendacious passage: 'A sagacious legislator of a republic, therefore, whose

object is to promote the public good, and not his private interests [sic]...should concentrate all authority in himself'. In such concentration, the end of establishing the state excuses any necessary means: 'a wise mind will never censure any one for taking any action, however extraordinary, which may be of service in the organizing of a kingdom or the constituting of a republic'. Machiavelli concludes with what he calls the 'sound maxim' that 'reprehensible actions may be excused by their effects, and that when the effect is good, as it was in the case of Romulus, it always excuses the action'.

Throughout the *Discourses*, Machiavelli preaches the virtue of deceit for the ruler. He insists, also, in contrast to previous humanists, that it is better for a ruler to be feared than to be loved, and that punishment is far better than clemency in dealing with his subjects. Furthermore, when a ruler finds that a whole city is rebelling against his rule, by far the best course of action is to 'wipe them out' altogether.

Thus, Professor Skinner is perceptive and correct when he concludes, *in re The Prince* and the *Discourses*, that

> the underlying political morality of the two books is thus the same. The only change in Machiavelli's basic stance arises out of the changing focus of his political advice. Whereas he was mainly concerned in *The Prince* with shaping the conduct of individual princes, he is more concerned in the *Discourses* with offering his counsel to the whole body of the citizens. The assumptions underlying his advice, however, remain the same as before.

Machiavelli is still at one and the same time a preacher of evil and a founder of modern political and policy science.

## 6.5 The spread of humanism in Europe

The newly fashionable Italian humanism, marked by its philological and literary devotion to the classical texts, its absolutist political thought, and its contempt for the systematic thinking and natural law doctrines of the scholastics, spread like wildfire to the north – to France, England, Germany, and the Netherlands – during the fifteenth century. This conquest of northern scholarship and northern universities by the sixteenth century was nearly as influential as the upsurge of the Protestant Reformation in putting an end to scholastic thought, and in paving the way for the dominance of the absolute state. There was one important difference, however, in the political thought taken over by the northern humanists: in countries such as France, Germany and England, where the king was acquiring ever more centralized and dominant power, all discussion of the virtues of oligarchic republicanism seemed like bizarre and irrelevant blather. For the northern humanists, in contrast, were solidly committed to the 'prince' – although of course, to the virtuous pre-Machiavellian prince – and to themselves as sage counsellors to power.

The first Italian humanist to teach in France, and to cause a sensation in so doing, was the Neapolitan Gregorio da Tiferna (c.1415–66), who arrived at the University of Paris in 1458 to become its first professor of Greek. Other Italian humanists soon came to storm successfully that venerable redoubt of medieval and early renaissance scholasticism. Filippo Beroaldo (c.1440–1504) came in 1476 to lecture on poetry, philosophy and humanist studies. Particularly influential at the University of Paris was Fausto Andrelini (c.1460–1518), who taught at the University of Paris for 30 years, beginning in 1489, winning great fame for his classical scholarship on the Latin poets and essayists.

Humanism penetrated England beginning with Pietro del Monte (d.1457) who, from 1435 to 1440, was a collector of papal revenues in England, and more importantly, was a literary adviser to Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, brother to King Henry V, who became the first English patron of humanism. Gloucester brought an Italian rhetorician into his household, and he collected a remarkable library, including all the major humanist texts, many of which he later presented to Oxford University. Oxford and Cambridge also served as the home for Italian humanist scholars in the later fifteenth century. The Milanese scholar Stefano Surigone (fl. 1430–80), taught grammar and rhetoric at Oxford between 1454 and 1471, and Cornelio Vitelli (c.1450–1500) became the first professor of Greek at an English university, coming to teach at New College, Oxford in the 1470s. The Italian humanist Lorenzo da Savona taught at Cambridge in the 1470s, and published a handbook on rhetoric in 1478, which went into two printings by the end of the century. And Caio Auberino (fl. 1450–1500) became official professor of rhetoric at Cambridge, and taught Latin literature there in the 1480s.

Humanism also came to northern Europe because many young scholars, often inspired by Italian professors in their country, travelled to Italy to learn the new humanism at its source. Thus, Robert Gaguin (1435–1501), after being converted to humanism by the lectures of Gregorio da Tiferna, paid two extended visits to Italy in the late 1460s, and returned to become a distinguished French humanist at the Sorbonne in 1473, where he lectured on rhetoric and Latin literature, translated Livy, and published a treatise on Latin verse and the first history of France to be written in full rhetorical style. From England came William Grocyn (c.1449–1519), a student of Vitelli at Oxford, who studied humanism in Florence in the late 1480s. Grocyn returned to Oxford to become its first professor of Greek in 1491. William Latimer (c.1460–1545), another young Oxford student, accompanied his friend Grocyn on his trip to Italy, and then went to the University of Padua to perfect his Greek studies. Soon after Grocyn's initial Oxford post, Latimer was appointed teacher at Magdalen College, Oxford, inaugurating Magdalen as a centre of humanist studies.

The most eminent of the Oxford travellers to Italy was John Colet (c.1467–1519), a student of Grocyn at Oxford, who spent the years 1493 to 1496 in Italy. On his return from Italy, Colet, too, was appointed a professor at Oxford, and he delivered before the entire university a famous series of lectures on the Epistles of St Paul from 1498 to 1499.

### 6.6 Botero and the spread of Machiavellianism

The northern humanists, along with the Italians, were staunch believers in the necessity for the prince to practise the Christian virtues of honesty and justice. At about the same time that Machiavelli was writing his defence of the new pragmatic morality in *The Prince*, the greatest humanist of the age was penning a famous advice-book to princes, sternly reiterating the Christian virtues. Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466–1536), a Dutch Augustinian canon persuaded to study theology by John Colet, dedicated his account of *The Education of a Christian Prince* to the future Emperor Charles V in 1516. While Old Nick was proclaiming that no consideration must stand in the way of maintaining the ruler in state power, Erasmus warned the prince that he must never do anything, regardless of his motives, which may harm the cause of justice.

Machiavelli's *Prince* was not printed until 1532, and after that, as we have noted, a storm of attack on 'Machiavel' proceeded throughout Europe. In England the favourite term for Machiavelli was 'the politic atheist'. Thus, one James Hull wrote a book on Machiavelli in 1602, entitled *The Unmasking of the Politic Atheist.* The northern humanists generally took the same position, defending the focus of traditional political philosophy on justice and honesty and attacking the overriding concern of the new theorists with what one Machiavellian aptly termed the 'reason of state' (*ragione di stato*). Thus, Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500–58), one of the champions of English Catholicism as against the Henrician Reformation, and a distinguished humanist, attacked Machiavelli's political theory in 1539, in his *Apology to Charles V*, as destroying all the virtues. Roger Ascham (1515–68), another leading humanist and a long-time tutor to Queen Elizabeth in Greek and Latin, commented in horror in his *Report and Discourse of the Affairs and State of Germany* that Machiavelli taught that one may 'think, say and do whatever may serve best for profit and pleasure'.

Machiavelli also proved to be grist for the Huguenots' mill during the French religious war of the 1570s. The Huguenots attributed the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 to the wicked designs of the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici, daughter of the selfsame Lorenzo the Magnificent to whom Machiavelli had dedicated *The Prince.* The Huguenots attributed the massacre to the philosophical outlook of Machiavelli. Thus *The Awakener* continually denounced the 'pernicious heresy' of Machiavelli, and

asserted that the king 'was actually persuaded by the doctrines of Machiavelli' to try to eradicate the Huguenots. Another tract, *The Alarm Bell* (1577), maintained that Catherine had deliberately trained her son in the doctrines of 'the atheist Machiavelli', thereby instructing the young king 'in the precepts most suitable for a tyrant'. To other Huguenots Machiavelli was a preceptor in the 'science of cheating', a 'science' imported by Italians such as Catherine into France.

The outstanding example of the genre of anti-Machiavellian tracts was the *Anti-Machiavel* of Innocent Gentillet (c.1535–1595), published in 1576. Gentillet was a French Huguenot who fled to Geneva after the massacre of St Bartholomew. Machiavelli, he pointed out, was essentially a satanic writer of handbooks on 'how to become a complete tyrant'.

But still the seductive nature of the new morality, of the justifying of evil means by the allegedly overriding end of maintaining and advancing state power, began to take hold among various writers. In Italy, a group of Machiavellians appeared during the sixteenth century, headed by Giovanni Botero (1540–1617), and his treatise of 1589, *The Reason of State*.

Botero was a leading humanist from Piedmont who joined the Jesuit Order. It is indicative of the decay of scholasticism in Italy in this period that this proponent of 'reason of state' and hence opponent of natural law ethics in political life should have been a member of the great Jesuit Order. Since Machiavelli was scarcely popular in Europe, especially in Catholic circles, Botero took care to attack Machiavelli explicitly and *pro-forma*. But that was merely a ritualistic cover for Botero's adoption of the essence of Machiavellian thought. While beginning by paying lip service to the importance of the prince's cleaving to justice, Botero quickly goes on to justify political prudence as crucial to all government, then defines the essence of prudence that 'in the decisions made by princes, interest will always override every other argument'; all other considerations, such as friendship, treaties or other commitments must go by the board. The overall view of Botero is that a prince must be guided primarily by 'reason of state', and that actions so guided 'cannot be considered in the light of ordinary reason'. The morality and justification for actions of the prince is diametrically opposed to the principles that must guide the ordinary citizen.

Botero's work touched off a raft of similar works in Italy over the next 40 years, all of which had the same title, *The Reason of State*.

In addition to being a leading theorist of political pragmatism and reason of state, Giovanni Botero has the notable but dubious distinction of being the first 'Malthusian', the first bitter complainer about the alleged evils of population growth. In his *On the Cause of the Greatness of Cities* (1588), translated into English in 1606, Botero laid out almost the entire thesis of Malthus's famous essay on population two centuries later. The analysis was, therefore,

highly mechanistic: human population tends to increase without limit, or rather the only limit is the maximum possible degree of human fertility. The means of subsistence, on the contrary, can only be increased slowly. Therefore, the growth of population always – to use Malthus's famous words – tends to 'press on the means of subsistence', with the result being ever-present poverty and starvation. Population growth, then, can only be checked in two ways. One is the dying of large numbers of people through starvation, plague, or wars over scarce resources (Malthus's 'positive' check). Second is the only element of free will or active human response permitted by Botero's theory: that starvation and poverty may induce some people to abstain from marriage and procreation (Malthus's 'preventive' or 'negative' check).

In an epoch marked by rising population *and* rising living standards and economic growth, Botero's gloom-and-doom about population growth was hardly likely to fall on friendly ears. Indeed, as we shall see further below, those seventeenth and eighteenth century theorists who foresaw unlimited population growth *favoured* the idea as a spur to prosperity and economic growth.[5]

In any case, whether one draws pessimistic, neutral or optimistic conclusions from the thesis of unlimited population growth, its basic flaw is assuming that people will not react if they see their living standards declining from bearing large families. Botero (and Malthus after him) indeed gave the case away by even mentioning 'preventive' checks. For if people will lower the number of children when faced with absolute destitution, why may they not lower it long before that? And if so, no such mechanistic tendency can be postulated.

Historically, indeed, the facts totally contradict the gloomy Malthusian forecasts. Population only tends to rise *in response to* greater economic growth and prosperity and the consequent rise in living standards, so that population and standards of living tend to move together, rather than in diametric opposition. This rise in population generally comes in response to falling death rates caused by the better nutrition, sanitation, and medical care attendant on higher living standards. The dramatic declines in death rates lead to accelerated population growth (roughly measured by birth rate minus death rate). After a few generations, the birth rate usually falls, as people act to preserve their higher living standards, so that population growth then levels off.

The main defect of the Botero–Malthus doctrine of population is that it assumes that two entities – population and the means of subsistence (or production, or living standards) – operate under laws that are totally independent of each other. And yet, as we have seen, population growth may be highly responsive to changes in production. Similarly, the reverse can be true. Increases in population may well encourage the growth of investment

and production, by providing a greater market for more products as well as more labour to work on these processes.[6] Schumpeter puts the overall point well in his critique of Malthus: '...there is of course no point whatever in trying to formulate independent "laws" for the behavior of two interdependent quantities.'[7]

In England, a leading humanist and colleague of Cardinal Pole in defending the Catholic Church as against the Anglican reform was Stephen Gardiner (c.1483–1555), bishop of Winchester. Gardiner, in contrast to Pole, was the first northern humanist to take a pro-Machiavellian line. Written appropriately enough when he was Lord Chancellor under the despotic Queen Mary Tudor in the early 1550s, Gardiner's *Discourse on the Coming of the English and Normans to Britain* was dedicated to King Philip II of Spain. Written as an advice-book to King Philip on the eve of his marriage to Queen Mary, the book counselled the king on how to govern England. Gardiner openly endorsed Machiavelli's view that it was far more important for a prince to *appear* virtuous than actually to be so. It is useful, opines Gardiner, for the prince to appear 'merciful, generous and observant of faith', but any ruler who really feels bound to actually observe such qualities would come to more harm than good.

An ardent if implicit disciple of Machiavellism was the prominent late sixteenth century Belgian classical scholar and humanist Justus Lipsius (1547–1606). Lipsius had moved from Antwerp to Leyden, in Holland, to avoid the rigours of the war against Spanish rule. In 1589, in Leyden, Lipsius published his *Six Books of Politics*. The prince, wrote Lipsius, must learn how to engage in 'profitable deceit', and judiciously be able to 'intermingle that which is profitable with that which is honest'. Reason of state was again triumphant.

### 6.7 Humanism and absolutism in France

Before humanism made its mark in France, political thought was medieval rather than absolutist. Thus, near the end of his life, the prominent royal bureaucrat, jurist, and churchman, Claude de Seyssel (c.1450–1520), published a treatise on monarchy summing up the post-medievalist perspective in politics. He wrote *The Monarchy of France* on the death of King Louis XII in 1515, and presented it to the new king, Francis I. The book was published four years later under the more presumptuous title, *The Grand Monarchy of France*, and was reissued often thereafter.

De Seyssel was born in Savoy, trained as a jurist, and served King Charles VIII and King Louis XII, the latter as member of the Grand Council and on numerous occasions as ambassador. But despite his long service in the bureaucracy and his great admiration for Louis XII, de Seyssel was a constitutionalist rather than an absolutist. The king, he averred, is indeed absolute

within his own sphere, but that sphere is severely delimited by a network of rights held by others in accordance with customary, natural, and divine law.

In contrast, the lengthy reign of Francis I (1515–47) saw the beginning of the triumph of absolutism in French political thought. This new trend was launched by the leading humanist in France, Guillaume Budé (1467–1540). A highly erudite classical and legal scholar, Budé travelled in Italy in the early 1500s, imbibed humanism there, and returned to write a bitter attack on scholastic jurisprudence in his *Annotations on the Pandects* in 1508. The advent of Francis I in 1515 had characteristically contrasting effects on the veteran de Seyssel and on the younger Budé. De Seyssel wrote his *magnum opus* to instruct the young king on the greatness of what he believed to be the old king's constitutionalist regime. Budé was inspired by the advent of the new prince to write *The Institution of a Prince* in 1519, celebrating the king's potentially absolute greatness and power.

In this French form of advice-book to the king, Budé developed the idea, then new in France, of the prince as totally and absolutely sovereign, whose power and every whim must never be limited or questioned. The prince, intoned Budé, was a quasi-divine person, a man necessarily superior to all others. Laws that bind the prince's subjects do not bind or apply to him; for laws apply only to the average and the equal, not to the prince who closely approaches the perfect ideal of mankind. The prince, in short, was a god among men and a law unto himself. The monarch, therefore, was superhuman, himself the source and the criterion of all justice.

For Budé, the king's actions are always right because 'the heart of the king moves by instinct and by impulsion of God, who controls and attracts it according to his pleasure, to undertake enterprises that are praiseworthy and honest and useful to his people and himself...'. Ruling by divine right and inspired directly by God, the king needs only the advice of philosophers – and it did not take much imagination to see *who* the great Budé had in mind as philosophic counsellor to Francis I.

Budé's work was carried on and developed by succeeding decades of humanists and particularly legists. The French kings were delighted at these dominant theories of their age, and proceeded happily to put them into practice. In this they were greatly aided by the absolutist jurists being themselves top bureaucrats in the service of the king. Two of the leading jurists wrote in the reign of Francis I: Barthélemy de Chasseneux (1480–1541), whose *Catalogue of the Glory of the World* was published in 1529, and Charles de Grassaille, whose *Regale of France* was written in 1538. Grassaille declared that the king of France was God in the flesh, that all his actions were inspired and brought about by God operating through the person of the king. The king was therefore God's vicar on earth and a living law. In a sense, then, Charles de Grassaille said it all: the king is God on earth.

The sixteenth century French legalists also systematically tore down the legal rights of all corporations or organizations which, in the Middle Ages, had stood between the individual and the state. There were no longer any intermediary or feudal authorities. The king is absolute over these intermediaries, and makes or breaks them at will. Thus, as one historian sums up Chasseneux's view:

> All jurisdiction, said Chasseneux, pertains to the supreme authority of the prince; no man may have jurisdiction except through the ruler's concession and permission. The authority to create magistrates thus belongs to the prince alone; all offices and dignities flow and are derived from him as from a fountain.[8]

The most important contribution to the tearing down of the intermediary structures hampering the monarch's absolute rule over his subjects was that of the greatest jurist of his age, Charles du Moulin. We have already seen du Moulin's (Molinaeus') critique of the prohibition of usury, in his *Treatise on Contracts and Usury* (1546). Far more important was his *magnum opus*, *Commentaries on the Customs of Paris* (1539), a compilation and commentary on customary law in France. This book dealt a lethal blow to the medieval rights and privileges of intermediary orders, and placed virtually all authority into the hands of the monarch and his state.

### 6.8 The sceptic as absolutist: Michel de Montaigne

It is a favourite conceit of modern, twentieth century liberals that scepticism, the attitude that nothing can really be known as the truth, is the best groundwork for individual liberty. The fanatic, convinced of the certainty of his views, will trample on the rights of others; the sceptic, convinced of nothing, will not. But the truth is precisely the opposite: the sceptic has no ground on which to stand to defend his or others' liberty against assault. Since there will always be men willing to aggress against others for the sake of power or pelf, the triumph of scepticism means that the victims of aggression will be rendered defenceless against assault. Furthermore, the sceptic being unable to find any principle for rights or for any social organization, will probably cave in, albeit with a resigned sigh, to any existing regime of tyranny. *Faute de mieux*, he has little else to say or do.

An excellent case in point is one of the great sceptics of the modern world, the widely read and celebrated sixteenth century French essayist, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–92).[9] Montaigne was born to a noble family in the Périgord region of south-western France, near the city of Bordeaux. He became a judge in the Bordeaux *parlement* in 1557, at the age of 24, as his father had been before him. He also joined at the *parlement* an uncle (his father's brother), a first cousin of his mother, and a brother-in-law. Remaining in the *parlement* for 13 years, and then denied promotion to the upper

chamber of that body, Montaigne retired to his rural chateau in 1570 to write his famous *Essays*. There he remained, except for a four-year stint as mayor of Bordeaux in the early 1580s. A leading humanist, Montaigne virtually created the essay form in France. He started writing these brief essays in the early 1570s, and published the first two volumes in 1580. The third book of essays was published in 1588, and all three volumes were posthumously published seven years later.

Though a practising Catholic, Montaigne was a thoroughgoing sceptic. Man can know nothing, his reason being insufficient to arrive either at a natural law ethics or a firm theology. As Montaigne put it: 'reason does nothing but go astray in everything, and especially when it meddles with divine things'. And for a while, Montaigne adopted as his official motto the query, 'What do I know?'

If Montaigne knew nothing, he could scarcely know enough to advocate setting one's face against the burgeoning abolutist tyranny of his day. On the contrary, stoic resignation, a submission to the prevailing winds, became the required way of confronting the public world. Skinner sums up Montaigne's political counsel, as holding 'that everyone has a duty to submit himself to the existing order of things, never resisting the prevailing government and where necessary enduring it with fortitude'.[10]

In particular, Montaigne, though sceptical about religion itself, cynically stressed the social importance of everyone outwardly observing the same religious forms. Above all, France must 'submit completely to the authority of our [Catholic] ecclesiastical government'.

Submission to constituted authority was, indeed, the key to Montaigne's political thought. Everyone must remain obedient to the king at all times no matter how he discharges his obligation to rule. Unable to use reason as a guide, Montaigne had to fall back on the *status quo*, on custom and on tradition. He warned gravely and repeatedly that everyone must 'wholly follow the accepted fashion and forms', for 'it is the rule of rules, and the universal law of laws, that each man should observe those of the place he is in'. Montaigne hailed Plato for wanting to prohibit any citizen from looking 'even into the reason of the civil laws', for those laws must 'be respected as divine ordinances'. Although we may wish for different rulers, we 'must nevertheless obey those that are here'. The finest achievement of the Christian religion, according to Montaigne, was its insistence on 'obedience to the magistrates and maintenance of the government'.

Considering Montaigne's fundamental outlook, it is no wonder that he warmly embraced the Machiavellian concept of 'reason of state'. (May we say that he held the reason of *man* to be worthless, but the reason of *state* to be overriding?) Characteristically, while Montaigne writes that he personally likes to keep out of politics and diplomacy because he prefers to avoid lying