On Timon as a Mediaevalist

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Synopsis

In the first half, the idea of Timon's love to human being is compared with that of Thomas More in Utopia, and from the point of view we find Timon mediaeval in his way of living and thinking. In the second half, we find the flattering lords to be modern, and their attitude toward life is regarded as Machiavellian. We study Timon's way of living against the modernists, flattering lords. Thus, this paper presents the conclusion that Timon could not make his rational living to meet the contemporary social requirements.

(Postscript)

(What would become of Timon in such a situation was discussed in my paper entitled 'A Psychoanalytical Study of Timon'... a study on Timon's situation and character from dynamic psychology. It has been printed in 'The English Literature in Hokkaido No. V., 1958')

(1)

Man is bound by various bonds in his society. It is human love that is the most essential and common of all. It is humanity itself. Now it is said that the spirit of the Renaissance is selfknowledge - the establishment of self. For instance, learning developed, not for the dependence or service for other things but for its own sake, and established itself, different from the fact that learning in the medieval ages had depended on religion. But as the spirit of self-knowledge pervaded the world, man has come to find himself to be selfish more, and to refer everything to self without Thus and thus the world has come to be egoism in various relations...individual, social, national, racial. So today, it does not always follow that humanity is human love. That is, the expansion of the field of the vision by the rapid development of science, the agitation of the medieval morals caused by the promotion of foreign trade, the innovation of economic setup by the population growth, the new production method by the development of mechanical power... that became a new power over man, and, in a sence, set the life of man inconvenient. there rose the various difficulties in the sociality and the co-operative spirit of man, for which man, who is naturally free, became unfree, and then humanity came to be perverted. A new significance different from that by nature was advocated on human love itself, by which human love was perverted, and embodied many defects in the new significance, The sociality and the cooperative spirit of man is at a crisis when the spirit of self-pursuit openly controls humanity, of which the meaning becomes "a deep sympathy with egoism in the pursuit of sensibility to happiness", (1)

Love is a spirit which links us into closer relations with one another, who should stand equal, and must be confederate in love. Love is mutuality that a person devotes himself to his partner. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,

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but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (2)

Timon's daily life is full of human love. He embodies Chritian charity in his life. His service and charity is not perverted. His love is pure and unselfish. That comes from society of the Pre-Renaissance— that is, medievalism. His charity can be found everywhere.

'Tis not enough to help the feeble up, But to support him after. (Shakespeare, Timon of Athens, I. i. 108-9) O! no doubt, my good friends, bud the gods themselves have provided that I shall have much help from you: how had you been my friends else? why have you that charitable title from thousands, did not you chiefly belong to my heart? I have told more of you to myself than you can with modesty speak in your own behalf; and thus far I confirm you. O you gods! think I, what need we have any friends, if we should ne'er have need of'em? they were the most needless creatures living should we ne'er have use for 'em, and would most resemble sweet instruments hung up in cases, that keep their sounds to themselves. Why, I have oftne wished myself poorer that I mightcome nearer to you. We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call own than the riches of our friends? O! what a precious comfort 'tis, to have so many, like brothers, commanding one another's fortunes, O joy! e'en made away ere it can he born. Mine eves cannot hold out water, methinks: to forget their faults, I drink to you (I, ii. 92-115)

Saying thus, he is moved to tears. He demands nothing from others for himself, whose idea is that of the universal service to others — that is equal to that of Christ. It is the idea to build up the kingdom of heaven on the earth. It is the idea that virtue brings its reward with it. When his fortune begins to ebb, and he sends his steward, Flavius, to his friends to ask for the loan of money, he says:

And, in some sort, these wants of mine are crown'd.

That I account them blessings; for by these

Shall I try friends. You shall perceive how you

mistake myfortunes; I am wealthy in my friends. (II. ii. 191—4)

Though he has an optimistic view that he measures others by his own standard. Timon's idea is exceedingly human love.

We may conceive of Timon's idea as Thomas More's idea. The idea of Thomas More is widely known as that of medievalism and unswerving Catholicism. But he does not depict the ideal model of the Christian monarch in his Utopia. To improve moral sense in society, he tells in the name of Raphael Hythloday the oppression by the feudal rulers, the indiscreet vanity of human wishes, the desire for fame, and the desire to possess. "The king ought to take more care for the wealth of his people than for his own wealth, even as the office and duty of a shepherd is, in that he is a shepherd, to feed his sheep rather than himself." (3) And again: "Counsels think the defence and maintenance of peace to consist in the poverty of the people." (4) "And if any king were so smally regarded and so lightly esteemed, yea, so behated of his subjects, that other ways he could not keep them in awe, but only by open wrongs, by polling and shaving and by bringing them to beggary, surely it were better for him to forsake his kingdom than to hold it by this means." (5) "And, verily, one man to live in pleasure and wealth while all others weep and smart for it, that is the part, not of a king, but of a jailer." (6) In short, he wishes to materialize a communitarian society with a protest and a reform bill. Gerhard Ritter tells the conception on a communitarian society with a concise style. It is as in the following. "Sodann die eifersüchtige Wahrung der Freiheitsrechte des Volkes gegen Willkür und Tyrannei der Herrschenden: durch häufigen Amtswechsel, Verbot aller nichtöffentlichen Beratung über politische Dinge, aller Parteibildung, die der Freiheit gefährlich werden könnte, häufige volksbefragung durch die unteren Amtsstellen. Besserung der Lage des gemeinen Mannes durch streng gerechte, gleichmäßige Verteilung der Konsumtionsgüter, starke Beschränkung der Arbeitszeit, groβantige öffentliche Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen und Bildungsanstalten, milde Strafjustiz, Abschaffung aller ständischen Unterschiede vor dem Gesetz." (7) It is very important why More advocates common property. He was not a dreamer who knew little of the world, but a business-like man who knew much of the world. He regards "Pride, the princess and the mother of all mischief," (8) as a daemonic will for power which is to be an attribute of man. He, as a Christian, was well aware that man is possessed by self-interest, which man can not get rid of. In his opinion, if anyone, of course the feudal rulers, rises above self-interest and we cultivate it to be truly useful and beautiful with reason, we can make the ideal society actuality. Man, knowing that to be realized, nevertheless, remains not to be able to do that. Why? Raphael Hythlodoy answers the question: "And I doubt not that either the respect of every man's private commodity, or else the authority of our Saviour Christ (which for His great wisdom could not but know what were best, and for His inestimable goodness could nod but counsel to that which He knew to be best) would have brought all the world long ago into the laws of this weal-public, if it were not that one only beast, the princess and mother of all mischief, Pride, doth withstand and let She measureth not wealth and prosperity by her own commodities, but by the misery and incommodities of other. She would nod by her goodwill be made a goddess if there were no wretches left over whom she might, like a scornful lady, rule and triumph, over whose miseries her felicities might shine, whose poverty she might vex, torment, and increase by gorgeously setting forth her riches. This hellhound creepeth into men's hearts and plucketh them back from entering the right path of life, and is so deeply rooted in men's breasts, that she cannot be plucked out," (9) But Gerhard Ritter negatively makes comment on this as follows: "Menschliche Vernunft und Liebesgebot der Bergpredigt (die Philosophia Christi des Erasmus!) stimmen also darin überein, da β sie den Egoismus bekämpfen. Aber die Hoffahrt, der Ehrgeiz, die Herrschsucht, die nicht zufrieden ist, ehe sie fremdes Unglück zum eigenen Vorteil ausgebeutet hat, die sich sonnen will im Glanz ihres Triumphes über das Elend der Mitmenschen, ist stärker als Vernunft und Religion." (10) On this account, More sees a remote possibilities in his Utopia in Europe where the Christian faith becomes corrupt. But he does not give up his Utopia. He ends the whole volumes, entertaining a wish: "So must I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-public which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope for." (11) This is a wish for a communitarian society against capitalism.

As we have already said in 1. ii. 92—115, Timon expresses the idea of community of property. The same is true in the following.

O! by no means,

Honest Ventidius; you mistake my love;
I gave it freely ever; and there's none
Can truly say he gives, if he receives:
If our betters play at that game, we must not dare
To imitate them; faults that are rich are fair. (1. ii. 8—13)

O! what a precious comfort 'tis, to have so many, like brothers, commanding one another's fortunes. (]. ii. 110--2)

More declares gold, silver, and jewels to be of no value as one of the most fundamental policies in order to build up a communitarian society. He believes this policy to be the most important means to contain self-interest. In Utopia where noble metals are rich, he contrives a policy to the utmost so that the capital accumulation may be made impossible. Because this is a contrivance to keep away the economic power and the moral corruption which are caused by it. So in Utopia these noble metals are used for trifling tools, "Of gold and silver they make commonly chamber-pots and other vessels that serve for most vile uses not only in their common halls but in every man's private house. Furthermore, of the same metals they make great chains, fetters, and gives wherein they tie their bondmen. Finally whosoever for any offence be infamed, by their ears hang rings of gold, upon their fingers they wear rings of gold, and about their necks chains of gold, and, in conclusion, their heads be tied about with gold. Thus by all means possible they procure to have gold and silver among them in reproach and infamy. And these metals, which other nations do as grievously and sorrowfully forgo, as in a manner their own lives, if they should altogether at once be taken from the Utopians, no man there would think that he had lost the worth of one farthing. They gather also pearls by the seaside, and diamonds and carbuncles upon certain rocks; and yet they seek not for them, but by chance finding them, they cut and polish them, and therewith they deck their young infants. Which, like as in the first years of their childhood they make much and be fond and proud of such ornaments, so when they be a little more grown in years and discretion, perceiving that none but children do wear such toys and trifles, they lay them away even of their own shamefastness, without any bidding of their parents, even as our children, when they wax big, do cast away nuts, brooches, and puppets" (12) There are often found in Timon of Athens expressions that noble metals, such as gold and silver, are the source of self-interest.

: the learned pate

Ducks to the golden fool: all is oblique;

There's nothing level in our cursed natures

But direct villany. (IV. iii. 17-20)

Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,

Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.

Ha! you gods, why this? What this, you gods? Why this

Will lug your priests and servants from your sides,

Pluck stout men's pillows from below their head:

This yellow slave

Will knit and break religions; bless the accurs'd;

Make the hoar leprosi ador'd; place thieves,

And give them title, knee, and approbation,

With senators on the bench; this is it

That makes the wappen'd widow wed again;

She, whom the spital-house and ulcerous sores

Would cast the gorge at, this embalms and spices

To the April day again. (IV. iii. 28-41)

What a god's gold,

That he is worshipp'd in a baser temple

Than where swine feed! (V. i. 52-54)

Timon, having full confidence in man, becomes aware that man is untrustworthy. He knows that insincerity, ingratitude, and other vices similar to these — all is caused by gold. Since Thomas More does thoroughly know self-interest of avariciousness, he wishes for a communitarian society. Of Timon, the case contrasts in a striking way with that of Thomas More. Not having cognizance of self-interest, Timon is drowned in human love and community of property. The gross ignorance of self-interest of avariciousness brings about Timon's ruin. He resigns his idea. He gives up all hope. Timon's resignation differs from that of More. This is wish, and that is no hope — Nothing doing! Then Timon becomes a misanthrope. It is very anomalous:

: let not thy sword skip one.

Pity not honour'd age for his white beard;

He is a usurer. Strike me the counterfeit matron;

It is her habit only that is honest,

Herself's a bawd. Let not the virgin's cheek

Make soft thy trenchant sword; for those milkpaps,

That through the window-bars bore at men's eyes,

Are not within the leaf of pity writ,

But set them down horrible traitors. Spare not the babe,

Whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy;

Think it a bastard, whom the oracle

Hath doubtfully pronounc'd thy throat shall cut,

And mince it sans remorse. Swear against objects; Put armour on thine ears and on thine eyes, Whose proof nor yells of mothers, maids, nor babes, Nor sight of priests in holy vestments bleeding, Shall pierce a jot. (IV. iii. 111—127)

Timon gives up all his love to others. As a result, he falls into pessimism, and into nihilism. Friedrich Nietzsche says: "Damit ist der Nihilismus da: ··· Hier entsteht das Problem der Stärke und der Schwäche;

- 1) die Schwachen zerbrechen daran;
- 2) die Stärkeren zerstören, was nicht
- 3) die Stärksten überwinden die richtenden Werthe.

Das zusammen macht das tragische Zeitalter aus." (13) Timon does not know how to cope with the world, and is ruined as a man who can not cope with the world. This is one of the reasons the tragedy of *Timon of Athens* is formed.

(II)

In this drama, flattering lords are self-centered. They are quite willing to do anything for themselves in making some profit, but in the contrary case they aren't. This is their attitude toward life. They are not ashamed of doing so. They regard their way of living as the matter of course — as the way of the world. From this point of view, we remember a great thinker. The very man is Niccoló Machiavelli.

Machiavelli, as we have commonly known, is a thinker not to have held Utopian idea in polity, but to have tried to hold the facts in it. To him, polity is not included in traditional religion and morality. Moreover, he holds man in civil polity. We quote the following from his *Il Principe* as one of his statements on man: "Perché delli uomini si può dire questo generalmente: che sieno ingrati, volubili, simulatori, fuggitori de pericoli, cupidi di guadagno; e mentre fai loro bene, sono tutti tua, ôfferonti el sangue, la roba, la vita, e' figliuoli, come di sopra dissi, quando el bisogno è discosto; ma, quando ti si appressa, e' si rivoltano." (14) Machiavelli altominates "Happy mean"... a moral that Greeks liked, the necessity of which Marcus Tullius Cicero urged. Machiavelli stands for "uomo virtuoso", a powerful man that can break a spell of God. He ignores such morals as civility, courtesy, mutual aid and justice in polity. Machiavelli recognizes the existence of a daemonic will that "Die Unsicherheit eines Schicksals, das blind, tückisch und unberechenbar über uns waltet, und die grenzenlose Selbstsucht und Erbärmlichkeit des Menschengeschlechtes." (15) He is the first man, in a sense, among the thinkers that have done the modern interpretation of man, life, and human society.

According to general opinions, it is said that Shakespeare was aware of Machiavelli's doctrine. Though it is not easy to get the definite answer to what extent Shakespeare was influenced by Machiavelli, we often read in *Timon of Athens*, as many echoes from Machiavelli's doctrine as we have found from More's. The following are the echoes from the above-mentioned quatation from *Il Principe*.

We make ourselves fools to disport ourselves; And spend our flatteries to drink those men Upon whose age we void it up again, With poisonous spite and envy. Who lives that's not depraved or depraves? Who dies that bears not one spurn to their graves Of their friend's gift? I should fear those that dance before me now Would one day stamp upon me: it has been done; Men shut their doors against a setting sun. (I. ii. 143—152) All those which were his fellows but of late, Some better than his value, on the moment Follow his strides, his lobbies fill with tendance, Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear, Make sacred even his stirrup, and through him Drink the free air. When Fortune in her shift and change of mood Spurns down her late belov'd, all his dependants Which labour'd after him to the mountain's top Even on their knees and hands, let him slip down, Not one accompanying his declining foot. (I. i. 79-89)

Machiavelli delivers the hard attack against Christianity. Christianity should preach the necessity of love and faith to man. But, according to the doctrine of Machiavelli, indeed it must be confessed that Christianity - (We shall quote directly his words from I Tre Libri de' Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito-Livio: "Many are of opinion that the prosperity of Italian cities is due to the Church of Rome...; for as, where there is religion, it may be taken for granted that all is going well, so, where religion is wanting, one may take for granted the opposite. The first debt which we, Italians, owe to the Church and to priests, therefore, is that we have become irreligious and perverse. But we owe them a yet greater debt, which is the second cause of our ruin. It is the Church that has kept, and keeps, Italy divided." (16) "The Church, then, has neither been able to occupy the whole of Italy, nor has it allowed anyone else to occupy it. Consequently, it has been the cause why Italy has never come upon one head, but has been under many princes and signori, by whom such disunion and such weakness has been brought about, that it has now become the prey, nor only of barbarian potentates, but of anyone who attacks it." (17) again: "Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action, It has assigned as man's highest good humanity, abnegation, and contempt for mundane things, whereas the other identifies it with magnanimity, bodily strength, and everything else that tends to make men very bold. And, if our religion demands that in you there be strength, what it asks for is strength to suffer rather than strength to do bold things. This pattern of life, therefore, appears to have made the world weak, and to have handed it over as a prey to the wicked." (18) Machiavelli delivers the hard attack not only against the church and the priest, but against Christianity itself by the reason why Christianity has done wrong, made man weak, and made him fall a victim to knavery and sevagery. Thus he thinks that love can not support the human society. And friendship can still less support anything, "perché le amicizie che si acquistono col prezzo e non con grandezza e nobilità di animo, si meritano, ma elle non si hanno, et a' tempi non si possano spendere." (19) When we read the impudent and sly answer of Lucullus, one of fittering lords,

La, la, la, la! 'nothing doubting,' says

he? Alas! good lord; a noble gentelman 'tis, if

he would not keep so good a house. Many a time

and often I ha'dined with him, and told

him on't; and come again to supper to him, of

purpose to have him spend less; and yet he

would embrace no counsel, take no warning by

my coming. Every man his fault, and

honesty is his; I ha' told him on't, but I could

ne'er get him from it. (III. i. 23—32)

We are taught that it is a most thoughtless man that relies upon others from carelessness, and gives alms to others without deliberation. First of all, such a thoughtless man is ruined in the course of the struggle for life. Machiavelli says, "E quel principe, che si è tutto fondato in sulle parole loro, trovandosi undo di altre preparazioni, rovina." (20) "Perché elli è tanto discosto da come si vive a come si doverrebbe fare, impara piú tosto la ruina che la preservazione sua: perché uno uomo, che voglia fare in tutte le parte professione di buono, conviene rovini infra tanti che non sono buoni." (21) We shall study further into this subject.

(N)

The doctrine of Machiavelli, in England, germinated in physiocracy and developed to succeed till the golden age of it. Now, what became of the results of the inflow of a large quantity of goods, especially precious metals, and the expansion of foreign trade by the opening of the road to the East and by the discovery of the New World, the increase in population, the revolution of the production method? what influence didn't these results have in society? Yes, these resulted in unsettled the state and national economy. This social upheaval put the mode of living in social economy that had been based on mediaeval morals into disorder. Prof. Harold J. Laski masterly treats of this problem in his The Rise of European Liberalism. "What was the essence of this new society? Above all, I think, its re-definition of the productive relations between men. For they then discovered that, to exploit those new relations in all their fullness, they could use neither the institutions nor the ideas they had inherited. The reason for the need of this transforation is a simple one. By the end of the fifteenth century the capitalist spirit began to attain a predominant hold over men's minds. What does this imply? That the pursuit of wealth for its own sake became the chief motive of human activity. Whereas in the middle ages the idea of acquiring wealth was limited by a body of moral rules imposed under the sanction of religious authority, after 1500 those rules, and the institutions, habits, and ideas to which they had given birth, were no longer deemend adequate." (22) "The middle ages are permeated by the idea of a suprme end beyond this life to which all earthly conduct must conform. The pursuit of wealth for its own sake is deemed incompatible with that idea. Wealth was regarded as a fund of social significance and not of individual possession. The wealthy man did not enjoy it for himself or for its own sake; he was a steward on behalf of the community. He was therfore limited both in what he might acquire and in the means whereby he might acquire it. The whole social morality of the middle ages is built upon this doctrine, ... This spirit begins to disappear with the emergence of

the capitalist spirit as predominant. A social conception of wealth gives place to an individualist conception. The idea of divine sanction for the rules of behaviour is gradually replaced by a utilitarian sanction. And the principle of utility is no longer determined by reference to cocial good. Its meaning is taken from the desire to satisfy individual want — it being assumed that the greater the wealth the individual possesses, the greater will be his power to secure this satisfaction. Once this attitude begins to obtain its hold over men's minds, it develops a revolutionary power,"(23) Such transformation — the power of wealth came to be recognized by people in general. That there exists no undertaking but depends upon wealth was generally recognized. so the capital accumulation not only was regarded as important but also was put into practice individually and systematically. This developed to have an impotant meaning both in a domestic and in a foreign policy. For instance, even in a problem of the passage to the New World, "it is impossible that an individual undertaking can supply a necessary condition to have the right of a passage to itself. The monopoly of the right of a passage can not be gotten if he does not keep the powers to conquer the navy power of his rivals. And more, he must hold the ports of naval importance in order to achieve this great purpose. If he can not do so, he can not be given any security against his rivals, even if it comes from the order of the Holy Father to treat him favorably. We have already known the historical facts that the monopoly of the passage to East Indian by Portugal, which had been given by the Holy Father, was taken by England and the Netherland in proportion as Portugal lost his navy power." (24) Under these reasons, there is something in the doctrine of Machiavelli; "s' elli è prudente, non si curare del nome del misero: perché col tempo sarà tenuto sempre piú liberale, veggendo che con la sua parsimonia le sua intrate li bastano, può defendrsi da che li fa guerra, — E non ci è cosa che consumi sé stessa quanto la liberalità: la quale mentre che yu usi, perdi la facultà di usarla; e diventi o povero e contennendo." (25) On this, Prof. Laski says, "Utility is the keystone of his practice, with power as the criterion of utility." (26) In England, therefore, Machiavelli's doctrine was attached importance to, and it developed into physiocracy.

Great Timon, noble, worthy, royal Timon!

Ah! when the means are gone that buy this praise,

The breath is gone whereof this praise is made: (II. ii. 178—180)

For his right noble mind, illustrious virtue,

And honourable carriage,

Had his necessity made use of me,

I would have put my wealth into donation,

And the best half should have returned to him,

So much I love his heart. But, I perceive,

Men most learn now with pity to dispense;

For policy sits above conscience, (III. ii. 88—95)

These words reflect the phases of those times. Machiavelli tells, "Credo ancora che sia felice quello che riscontra el modo del procedee suo con le qualita de tempi, e similmente sia infelice quello che con il procedere suo si discordano e tempi." (27) "In human affairs men should study the nature of the times and act accordingly." (28)

Flattering lords, who are the modernists pursuing wealth for its sake, are unequivocally opposed

to Timon, who is a mediaevalist. The tragedy of *Timon of Athens* is an episode of a man who was not able to adapt his life to the times.

"se è tempi e le cose si mutano, rovina, perché non muta modo di procedere." (29)

The End

[Notes]

- (2) Galatians, V. 13-15
- (3) Thomas More, Utopia (Everyman's Library), p. 45
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 45
- (5) *Ibid.*, p. 45
- (6) *Ibid.*, p. 45
- (7) Gerhard Ritter, Die Dämonie der Macht (Leibniz Verlag, bisher R. Oldenbourg Verlag, Miinchen, 1948), pp. 74—5
- (8) Thomas More, Ibid., p. 134
- (9) Ibid., p. 134
- (10) Gerhard Ritter, Ibid., pp. 69-70
- (11) T. More, Ibid., p. 135
- (12) Ibid., p. 79
- (13) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht* (Nietzsches Gesammelte werke: Musarion Verlag München, 1926), pp. 30—1
- (14) Niccoló Machiavelli, Il Principe (Sansoni-Firenze, 1957), p. 98
- (15) Gerhard Ritter, Ibid., p. 34
- (16) Niccoló Machiavelli, *I Tre Libri de Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito-Livio* Translated by Leslie J. Walker (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London), p. 245
- (17) *Ibid.*, pp. 245—6
- (18) *Ibid.*, p. 364
- (19) N. Machiavelli, Il Principe, p. 99
- (20) *Ibid.*, pp.98—9
- (21) Ibid., p. 92
- (22) Harold J. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism* (Unwin Books, London, 1962), pp. 16—7
- (23) *Ibid.*, pp. 17—8
- (24) Kentaro Nomura, *Eikoku Shihonshugi no Seiritsukatei* Translated by Y. Takeuchi (Yuhikaku, Japan, 1948), p. 265
- (25) N. Machiavelli, Il Principe, pp. 95-6
- (26) Harold J. Laski, *Ibid.*, p. 32
- (27) N. Machiavelli, Ibid., p. 139
- (28) N. Machiavelli, Discorsi, p. 496
- (29) N. Machiavelli, Il Principe, p. 140