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## The Lion and the Fox: Montaigne, Lipsius and Post-Machiavellian Conservative Prudence<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This essay deals with the post-Machiavellian phase of the history of prudence in Western political thought. After the sudden rise of Machiavellism, or the reason of state discourse, the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century saw an effort to turn back to a more traditional understanding of the virtue of prudence, or at least to try to combine prudence and reason of state in a way which would help to moderate its subversive power. Confronting the warlike events of their age, in their politically oriented writings the two heroes of the present paper, Montaigne and Lipsius, expressed an interest in the question how a more tradition-based concept of prudence could and should find its place once again in politics. The paper is going to show how Montaigne's prudence integrates much of Machiavelli's insight, while Lipsius's concept of prudence combines "reason of state" and Christian stoicism. Finally it will be argued that both thinkers represent varieties of early modern conservative prudence, or alternatively, of political realism.

**Keywords:** Montaigne, Lipsius, reason of state, early modern, conservative prudence, Machiavelli, political realism

### Montaigne and Lipsius and post-Machiavellian prudence

If the early 16<sup>th</sup> century brought with it a revolutionary reinterpretation of prudence by Machiavelli, exemplified by his metaphors of the lion and the fox (Machiavelli, 1532, Ch. XVIII.), creating a new way of thinking and writing about politics, called Machiavellism or "reason of state" discourse, the second half of it, and the following century might be seen as an effort to turn back to a more traditional

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understanding of the virtue of prudence, or at least to try to combine prudence and reason of state in a way which would help to moderate its subversive power. This was made the more urgent as Machiavelli's effort was – with good reason – feared to include a break away from traditional Christian values. While Machiavelli was attacked from a number of different directions, the new discourse of reason of state seems to have been overwhelming, which prepared the ground so that both Catholic and protestant theological authors grew interested in it. It was Friedrich Meinecke who in his influential book traced back the mostly Huguenot sources of protestant discussions of reason of state (Meinecke, 1920). Apparently these authors, from Henri de Rohan (1579–1638) to Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653) and further had no scrupulous to use the Italian discourse in their own context, for their own purposes. However, the present paper has chosen to deal with two authors of the Renaissance Humanist episode of the history of prudence who seem to stand just in between the Catholic and the Protestant cause, aiming at bridging the gap between the pre- and the post Machiavellian views of politics: the views of Montaigne and Lipsius who both seem to have been strongly influenced by both ancient and Christian ideas of politics and culture but also by Machiavelli.

Why the two of them together? Skinner for example explained his choice of pairing the two of them in his “Foundations” the following way: “It was in France and the Low Countries [...] that the pure Machiavellian doctrine of *ragione di stato* gained its firmest foothold in the course of the sixteenth century. Why so? Because of the fierceness and poignancy of the clashes between the two camps (of the same political communities) making it reasonable to give up high hopes of deciding who is right in principle, and to find realistic political solutions in a practical way” (Skinner, 1978, I., p. 253). Skinner's first French example in this context is Guillaume de Vair, but after him the next one is already Montaigne.<sup>2</sup> The Cambridge historian does not share the view of Montaigne as a Stoic country gentleman, disregarding political affairs as such, and instead living a life of retreat according to the classical model. Rather, he tries to explain why Montaigne is forced by the urgency of the moment, the tragic situation of a bloody civil war to suggest that beside that of “goodness” one should also find the right place for the virtue of “prudence” in the affairs of government. Skinner quotes Montaigne's dramatic description of the political situation in contemporary France, which is according to all our best knowledge correct: “divisions and subdivisions [...] tear our nation apart today” (Skinner, 1978, I., p. 253). The role and function of prudence is, in his specific historical circumstances, to make politics useful “for sewing our society together, as are poisons for the preservation of our health” (Skinner, 1978, I., p. 253).

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<sup>2</sup> Bodin's effort to establish absolute sovereignty is not tackled either by Skinner or by the present paper.

If Skinner is right, Montaigne is a good example for the type of early modern political thinker who is interested in political-philosophical topics of the utmost practical urgency in his age. The same is obviously true about Lipsius, who – in the somewhat different context of the Dutch War of Independence against the Spanish – was also sometimes considered as an apolitical writer, arguing for a withdrawal from the bloodthirsty fields of politics in favour of a sceptical, neo-stoical mode of self-discipline and *ataraxia*. In what follows, therefore, I try to introduce these two influential thinkers' respective views on how prudence should find its place in politics. In what follows, they will be presented as special, conservative advocates of a political understanding of prudence, where it has the function to preserve the order of society, in other words, a conservative agenda. In this regard the key issue is their ambiguous relationship to Machiavelli.

## Montaigne's prudence: integrating Machiavelli?

Skinner's point is taken over and elaborated by the literary historian Francis Goyet in an essay on "Montaigne and the notion of prudence." Premising that "in the sixteenth century, prudence is the concept used to think about action and especially political action" (Goyet, 2005, p. 118), and also that Montaigne's political position is rightly characterised as conservative, he provides an assessment of Montaigne's prudence from the following three points of view: of his being a nobleman, a *prudens* and an "artist". While Goyet portrays Montaigne as conservative in politics, he argues that as a writer he proved to be really innovative, identifying his role as that of "the director of conscience" (Goyet, 2005, p. 121). In this respect Goyet, with Fumaroli, finds similarities between Montaigne's position and that of the Jesuits.

On the other hand, Goyet, too, connects sixteenth century uses of prudence with Machiavellianism, and therefore needs to address the issue of Montaigne's relationship to the latter. The point Goyet wants to make is that Montaigne does not reject outright Machiavelli. He must have been one of those "political professionals' who populated all the chancelleries and courts of the sixteenth century" (Goyet, 2005, p. 123). This meant in his case an active engagement on the Catholic side in the political struggles, as "go-between for the very Catholic Foix clan and their enemy Henri de Navarre" (Goyet, 2005, p. 123). His retreat to his country cottage was only a tactical move, and even his Essays should be interpreted within the context of the strategic political game he was playing. That Montaigne was not the sort of person hesitatingly waiting until it becomes clear who wins is proven in the essay mentioned above where he describes his own way of behaviour the following way: "To keep oneself wavering and half-and-half, to keep

one's allegiance motionless and without inclination in one's country's troubles and in civil dissensions, I consider neither handsome nor honourable" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 601). To lend the claim authority, he also refers to Livy, who thought that "That is not a middle way, but no way at all, like that of people awaiting the event so as to adapt their plans to fortune" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 601).

Montaigne's book is addressed to that part of the nobility, which belonged to the "middle rank", the mediocrity. It aims to reconcile this duality of his readership: their being noble as well as mediocre, and also their political and moral considerations, which also seemed to be antagonistic in the age. As he sees it, what needs to be done with Machiavelli's legacy is not to deny it, but to add to it a further dimension: "to reconcile the 'skillful man' and the 'honest man'" (Goyet, 2005, p. 125), in other words the negative (Machiavellian) and the positive (virtue-like) sense of the word prudence. "Montaigne works therefore to construct an ethical configuration favourable to the reappearance of the ancients' prudence, favourable to its dialectic reappropriation, so to speak, which would integrate Machiavellianism." (Goyet, 2005, p. 125). In this reappropriation of the ancient term, the middle rank has the same function as the golden mean of Aristotle, and prudential is strongly connected to *sophrosyne*, or moderation. Montaigne's aim is to create this old and new ideal in his Essays, which, on the other hand, are meant to mirror his true self, in other words, himself as the embodiment of his ideals. This effort is based on the very essence of the meaning of prudence: it is a virtue which functions as a substitute for moral rules or political norms: the prudent person "is himself the role or *kanon* on which to govern our actions" (Goyet, 2005, p. 129); "the *prudens* is the rule incarnate, in Greek *kanon kai metron*, in Latin *norma et mensura*" (Goyet, 2005, p. 129).

Montaigne's appropriation of it is crucial in the modern history of political prudence: it presents prudence as both a realistic option and an ideal, which is embodied in the precedent of the prudent person, because it cannot be simply translated into conceptual language. The individual who acquires the virtue is an example who helps us to understand the norm without conceptually articulating it by words or other forms of abstract language. The prudent person deliberates in a considerate way, decides correctly and acts in accordance with her deliberation and decision, without being able to conceptualize this process in a way to make all of that explicit (Goyet, 2005, p. 130). Her form of knowledge is embodied knowledge and not an abstract, articulate form of knowledge. To use a later philosophical distinction, it is more like "knowing how" than "knowing that" (Ryle, 1949) – but even more precisely, it is conditioned and habituated action and not the knowledge of the school. In this sense it comes close to that ancient Greek idea of wisdom according to which – as Hadot reconstructed it (Hadot, 1995) – philosophical knowledge is itself not much more than the

choice of a certain form of life. In traditional Latin the term used in connection with this understanding of prudence is *habitus*, while the accepted Greek term for that is *hexis*. Montaigne, too, relies on the term, in the format of *habitude*. It is through constant learning, in other words through taking the necessary exercises that one can facilitate the acquisition of a virtue. Both Montaigne's withdrawal from the turmoil of political life in order to pacify his soul and to moderate his passions and his spiritual exercises, the "Essays" serve the purpose of conditioning himself to become an exemplary prudent person, a *prudens*. If we look for the context or tradition of which Montaigne might be a descendant, a good approximation might be to refer to Cicero's dictum of the aim of one's efforts being nothing less than an "*ars bene vivendi*" (Goyet, 2005, p. 132).

It is at this point that the closeness between the moral and the literary stakes of Montaigne's venture becomes more visible. His effort is to become and help others to become politically wiser, but the way to achieve this aim is by forming the perfect practically wise person out of himself. In this programme the ancient understanding of philosophy, Cicero's notion of practical wisdom and an early modern way of self-formation come close to each other. To see what is meant by this last term, let us recall Hamlet's effort to find the right decision in a tight political and existential situation, or the art of self-fashioning, as analysed by Stephen Greenblatt, in connection with some of the best minds of Renaissance Britain (Greenblatt, 1980). Greenblatt's notion of self-fashioning is not far away from the way Castiglione presents in his "The Book of the Courtier" (1959/2002) the challenge that needs to be confronted by those who want to become successful courtiers in the early modern courts. Montaigne himself, even in his retreat, remains such an ideal courtier on his own right.

But he also adds to this typical early modern engagement with self-formation a political dimension: to manage yourself is the first prerequisite to manage the affairs of your political community. On the other hand studying and reflecting on the management of the city/state in a historical dimension helps to understand human nature itself. This truth can be learnt from those ancient historians who were rather sceptical about human nature. No doubt, their scepticism helped Montaigne to identify his political conviction as relying on accepted customs, in other words as conservative: "the defense of the old-time order always has this in its favour, that even those who are troubling it for their private purposes excuse its defenders" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 602).

On the other hand, however, when he embarks on the long process of self-formation, which is documented and illustrated in the "Essays", he is embarking on a risky voyage of changing one's own nature – and politically, the customary ways of managing the state. In this respect Montaigne's literary effort, aiming not simply at self-understanding, but even at making sense of the hu-

man condition as such, and through that of the real nature of politics, brings him the closest to Machiavelli, who is described in the secondary literature as the innovator in politics. This makes his stance ambiguous: Montaigne's sceptical political conservatism does not exclude an innovative dimension in his literary pursuits, which is supported by his moral venture of self-formation. As a result, while his prudential political paradigm can with good reason be labelled conservative, he is generally viewed as one of the first moderns in his way of thinking and of life.

### Lipsius's prudence: "reason of state" and Christian stoicism

If Montaigne's withdrawal from public life together with his opus magnum, the "Essays" is aimed at a complete reshaping of his own public persona, as a newly created exemplum of the ideal realisation of the *prudens*, in the risky and chaotic world of the French religious civil war of the 1570s and 1580s, Justus Lipsius had a less radical plan with his political masterwork. The "Politica" (Lipsius, 1589) had a more traditional aim: to argue in favour of the ideal monarchy, as was customary in the earlier mirror-for-princes literature.<sup>3</sup> However, its format was rather tricky: as we learn it from the detailed introduction of its translator, Lipsius's work was hardly more than a commonplace-book, a collection of quotes from mostly ancient authors about the different dimensions of politics, collected into thematic groups. One can easily understand that in a time of rising suspicion on both sides of the religious rivalry and of the break of the anti-Spanish struggles in the Low Countries it was clever to put his views into the mouth of accepted ancient authorities. However, as Waszink argues, one should not look at it as an open work-of-art, inviting the free interpretation of all of its readers, without internal limitations. On the contrary, Lipsius, who beside a wide horizon of classical and early modern readings and an experience also in publishing, having published some ancient works, had a large reservoir of political experience by the time of publishing this book, and had a very straightforward view of politics. He himself describes his attempt the following way: "I have taken the stones and rafters from others; but the construction and shape of the building are mine entirely. I am the architect, but I have collected material from everywhere around." (Lipsius, 1589, i.i.).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Erasmus's famous work on the Christian monarch: *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1532). Waszink rightly calls our attention to the Italian background of the genre: "the mirrors-for-princes literature grew out of the Italian humanism of the fifteenth century, which had produced many advice-books for city magistrates and podestà" (Waszink, 2004, p. 36).

Traditionally, Lipsius's philosophical position is described by the following labels: political Tacitism<sup>4</sup>, Neostoicism and "reason of state" thinking. To put it bluntly, politically it had the function to argue in favour of the absolute rule of the prince as the best possible form of a political regime in his own age. In what follows this paper shall concentrate on some of those passages of the "Politica", which described and analysed the notion of prudence – a term that turned out to be crucial in the argumentation. The point to be made is that Lipsius himself was not at all an advocate of republican values. Some of the representatives of political prudence, however, were. His great book represented in its strongest form the idea that a prudent prince embodies the strongest guarantee of both internal and external security and peace for his political group. Also, his rule, if it is not based on those ideas of fairness, which seems to have underlined the medieval concept, is also a safeguard of the survival of both classical and Christian teachings of the role of virtue in politics.

Published in 1589, Lipsius's work served both universalist, scientific aspirations for truth and very practical, political purposes. Humanists shared the ancient classification of human knowledge (based on Aristotle), which distinguished the following three levels: logic, dialectic and rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> While logic was closest to our modern notion of science, dialectic described the sort of knowledge we can gain of "human affairs", of morality and politics. While the first type is about such items, whose qualities are necessary and non-contingent, the truth about human actions cannot be strictly and formally established. In their case one can rely on rational argumentation about them, and the truth gained can be expected to be probable. When the philosophical interests of Renaissance humanists turned away from the metaphysics of the scholastic authors, and aimed at describing human (moral and social) phenomena, with this shift in research interests a re-evaluation of the category of dialectical knowledge was unavoidable.

Lipsius can be supposed to have been influenced by some of the writings which called attention to the specific nature of dialectic in the age, including Rudolph Agricola's "De inventione Dialectica" (1992). Beyond this shift of scholarly interest, Lipsius had very practical political targets as well, which must have had an impact on the rhetorical strategy he chose. His intended audience can be characterised as "humanist princes and politically experienced humanists" (Waszink, 2004, p. 82). In other words he relies on traditional academic knowl-

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<sup>4</sup> About Tacitus, Lipsius confesses: "On his own, he has contributed more to my work than all the others. The reason lies in his prudence, and in the fact that he is the richest in maxims." (Waszink, 2004, p. 53).

<sup>5</sup> In what follows I rely on Waszink, 2004, pp. 49–50. I also wish to express my thanks to Iwona Tylek who called my attention to the significance of the classical notion of dialectic in this early modern context, too.

edge as well as political experience, and his point is to discuss the conclusions people can draw from the Machiavellian and later “reason of state” challenge of traditional virtue-based theories of politics. The structure of the book is itself very telling: while the first three books summarize “the traditional Christian-Ciceronian political morality”, the last three books present “reason-of-state-oriented prudence” (Waszink, 2004, p. 84).

This order of presentation might suggest that in his narrative prudence wins over traditional morality, but the picture is a bit more complex. As Waszink puts it: “the ‘Politica’ as a whole advocates a submission of Iustitia and Virtus to Prudentia (probably best translated here as statesmanship), though this must be a Prudentia ruled by a Virtue, that is a Virtus at a higher level, which consists in ruling realistically, rather than in accordance with the strict unadulterated moral goodness and the details of custom and law.” (Waszink, 2004, p. 84).

If that is the large picture, let us have a closer look at Lipsius’s description of prudence itself, in a more detailed fashion. In the first book of the “Politica” he defines civil life in a utilitarian way: “the life that we enjoy in community with other people, to the mutual benefit or profit (*ad mutua commoda sive usum*)” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 261). In the same time he introduces the notion of virtue as the leader of civil life, consisting of (Christian) faith and goodness. This move is again counterbalanced when he adds that the other leader of civil life is Prudence, which leads virtue as well. Lipsius defines Prudence as “the understanding and choosing (*intellectum et dilectum*) of what is to be sought or avoided, both in private and in public” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 283). With this distinction Lipsius makes it obvious that prudence has a say both in private morality (ethics) and in public affairs, i.e. in politics. Relying here heavily on the classical tradition, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, he claims that “Prudence is the skill of living. (*Artem vivendi esse Prudentiam*)” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 285, quoting Cicero), which reminds us of the reference above by Montaigne to Cicero’s *bene vivendi*.

Lipsius this way assures the power of prudence over the whole life of the individual, both in his private and public function, including in its realm even human happiness (*eudaimonia*). Analysing prudence he highlights the role of experience (*usus*) and remembrance (*memoria*). While the first category refers to one’s individually acquired bits of practical knowledge, the second turns out to be nothing less than an acquaintance with history. At the end of the first book he adds one final concept, learning. This one he describes as a contributor to both virtue and prudence.

So far, nothing astonishing. As we have already mentioned, Lipsius starts out from the traditional doctrine of a virtuous understanding of politics. The second book of “Politica” is about the ideal form of government, which he thinks is monarchy, and about the main virtues of the prince in particular. There is no



direct discussion here of prudence, but there is a point we have to refer to. Lipsius wants to refute “the new teachers from Tuscany” (2.15). Obviously, Lipsius’s target here must be Machiavelli and possibly Guicciardini, who do not honour faithfulness and preach to break promises. Ha asks with his own words: “So where are now those new teachers?” and then quotes from Aristophanes “To whom no altar, no faith, nor any pact is sacred.” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 333). In this first encounter with Machiavellianism he seems to be rather critical with the Toscan authors and to take the side of classical moral teaching.

It is the third book that directly addresses the issue of Prudence, understood as a cardinal virtue in accordance with the classical tradition. For Lipsius it is even more important than force or wealth in the dealings of government. In connection with public prudence, the role of councillors and ministers are discussed here. Lipsius is cautiously approaching the discourse of reason-of-state, even if his counsellors need to display goodness beside experience, as well as giving beneficial advice. Yet by the end of the chapter we arrive at the conclusion that “all power at the court is insecure” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 377).

With that we open the second half of the book, the one which is really sceptical and which is much closer to Machiavellianism than was expected after reading the first half of it.

First of all, the prudence of the prince is “hard to bind down to rules”, “is fluctuating and veiled”. Therefore no “full instruction on this topic” is possible (Lipsius, 1589, p. 383). Lipsius here follows an Aristotelian direction, who kept emphasizing that knowledge in the moral field is of a different kind than the knowledge of the external world. Yet by declining a direct instruction for the prince he is liberating him from moral control, as such.

We do not deal here with one of the most important aspects of prudence discussed by Lipsius in connection with the prince: that his religious prudence teaches him “that he must preserve unity of religion” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 387). Neither can we elaborate here on his views of Force (*vis*), a key stabiliser of the realm, when cooperating with virtue, while a disturbing element when combined with Vice (4.7). But let us shortly refer to his discussion of what might be referred to as legitimacy today. An unexpected concept of Lipsius’s analysis of reason-of-state prudence is authority (*auctoritas*), which he strongly defends, defined as “a reverent opinion of the king and his government [...]” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 425). This focus on the “soft” power of the ruler is joined by his discussion of the relevance “to obtain the goodwill of the people”, and his reflections on *maiestas*, to build up his line of arguments that politics is not simply about the sheer use of force. Lipsius wants to show that politics is more than to prove one’s determination in the position he obtains: successful rule requires to win the support of the citizens in the long run as well as keeping the ancient and Christian moral stan-

dards – the latter, of course, limiting the former. However, Lipsius holds the view that moral standards can only play a limited role among the considerations of an active ruler, as it might endanger the potential for action which is the first prerequisite of governability and its lack might risk civil unrest or external peace.

For our present purposes his key discussion in this context is his presentation of Mixed Prudence. This is a concept Lipsius introduces to talk of the virtue of prudence when it is mixed with “a bit of the sediment of deceit”. The argument is simple and intriguing: if your enemies behave like foxes, are you not allowed to defend your cause and your standing (status) playing the fox? Quoting Cicero, who made it the obligation of the statesman to act “in the interest of the people and the community” (Cicero, *Of Duties*, 3.31.), Lipsius also refers to Tacitus who ensured that “it belongs to educated behaviour to mix the honourable and the useful (*utilia*)” (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 8.1.). He seems to be worried about misinterpretation and wants to exclude any miscomprehension, and therefore makes it clear that he does not want to aim at anything else but virtue. However when the direction and power of the winds are not optimal, sometimes you have to zig-zag with your ship. The same way as good wine remains good wine even if you drink it mixed with a little bit of water, prudence remains prudence even if “it is mixed with a little drop of deceit” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 509).

Obviously Lipsius is arguing here against both Machiavelli and those critics of Machiavelli, who represent in his eyes the other extreme. His own position is a typically in-between position: he wants to preserve the advantages of both views without falling into either extremes. That it is the Machiavellian debate that he addresses is made obvious by his reference to the symbols of the lion and the fox, used earlier – following ancient examples – by Machiavelli, even if he takes it directly from ancient sources: “And as the Spartan king warned: Where the Lion’s skin does not suffice, one is allowed to sew on a Fox’s skin.” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 511, quoting Plutarch). In a side note at the end of the chapter in the original edition he even adds a remarkable comment: “Some rage too much against Machiavelli.” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 511). This sort of referencing is sharply criticised by the Vatican censor of “*Politica*”. Yet the editor of the recent English language edition explains that “Lipsius has removed the reference to and (mild) defence of Machiavelli, without changing the purport of the passage in any really meaningful way. In fact [...] the ‘Machiavellian’ content has only been masked, and not even that very thoroughly.” (Waszink, 2004, p. 184).

It is important to recall that Lipsius has a strong argument why and when to rely on deceit. Relying on the authority of Aristotle he makes the following claim: “a man is needed who is not ignorant of the things that happen in this world.” (Lipsius, 1589, p. 511, quoting Aristotle). This claim makes it the obligation of the statesman to take reality as the final standard of his own behav-

our. In this sense we can therefore rightly call Lipsius' position a realistic view of politics. Surprisingly, however, this realism was not antagonistic with the traditional ancient-Christian understanding of virtue politics. On the contrary: Lipsius's aim seems to be to save that tradition against the Machiavellian challenge by coopting some elements of Machiavellism, based on the Machiavellian preliminary principle that this-worldly politics need to be realistic. Realism in this sense is nothing less than an acceptance of the anthropology of Tacitus of (fallen) human nature. But that fallen nature is not in explicit contradiction with – for example – the Augustinian line of anthropology within the Christian tradition.

## Conclusion: varieties of early modern conservative prudence

This paper wanted to show that there are directions within the post-Machiavellian literature, which are less vehemently anti-Machiavellian as the mainstream is. Our two examples, Montaigne and Lipsius were actively engaged in politics, and therefore they found some of Machiavelli's sensitive innovations true. On the other hand, we also wanted to show that for both Montaigne and Lipsius, the aim was not to subvert their respective societies, but rather to work out a theory which can combine the power of Machiavellism with the virtues of the Christian tradition.

Montaigne, as was shown, seems to have admitted that Machiavelli was right as far as the necessity of innovation in politics was concerned. Yet his innovation never turns into a revolution or an aggressive act of transformation. As opposed to Machiavelli's metaphor of rape, Montaigne's own message is better conveyed by the term marriage, as far as the relationship of the Prince and Fortune is concerned. Here, human (male) action is not against the will of the female recipient of it, rather, Montaigne prefers to describe the relationship as a cohabitation, and not as a mastery of one over the other. His idea is political amendment, as "true reform", instead of the aggressive intrusion into the affairs of the state envisaged by Machiavelli. It is at this point where moderation, self-discipline and the golden mean becomes relevant: Montaigne's hero is a real Christian humanist who however has the necessary political experience, through which he acquired practical wisdom, which is perhaps the most important virtue in practical politics. In this respect his position is not far away from those of the Jesuits (Hörcher, 2016). Fumaroli argues that Montaigne is not far from becoming the "Loyola of an order without vows or ecclesiastic discipline", while his magnum opus is hardly less than "the Spiritual Exercises of the Christian nobleman" (Fumaroli, 1992, pp. ix, xi).

If we compare Montaigne's nuanced position with that of Lipsius, one can certainly argue that while Montaigne is very cautious, Lipsius is somewhat less hesitant to imply that he and Machiavelli are not taking opposite positions. On

the contrary, Lipsius seems to accept that politics has its own rules or rather its own culture. In the same time, Lipsius does not follow Machiavelli in the direction of a complete denial of Christianity and the whole tradition of virtue politics. He, too, takes a “middle position” between these extremes. As Waszink puts it: “for Lipsius Tacitus and Machiavelli were the central axis of a vision of power and morality which, supplemented with the respective endorsement or dismissal of ideas from, most importantly, Sallust, Seneca, Guicciardini, Bodin, and the Christian-Ciceronian ‘system’, produced a theory of a morally founded Reason of State.” (Waszink, 2004, p. 102).<sup>6</sup> Prudential politics, in this sense, turns out to be nothing less but a morally founded Reason of State. And this morally founded early modern, but post-Machiavellian “reason of state” has a special conservative flavour in the oeuvre of these authors, as its aim is not conquer but rather to defend and run peacefully the regimes ruled by the prince, and safeguard its basic values.

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<sup>6</sup> Waszink positions himself close to De Landtsheer and Van Houdt, who wrote: “Lipsius’ aim was to develop a political doctrine which was no less pragmatic or realistic than that of his Italian predecessor, but at the same time more in agreement with the morality formulated by the ancient philosophers and historians, and adopted by the subsequent Christian Mirrors-for-Princes.” De Landtscheer and Van Houdt, in: Tournoy, Papy, De Landtsheer, 1997, p. 209.

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