



WHY POLITIES DECLINE: CORRUPTION, TYRANNY AND BAD LEADERSHIP



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Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence, Italy

Why Polities Decline: Corruption, Tyranny and Bad Leadership

Niccolò Machiavelli witnessed the degeneration of the Republic of Florence into a *de facto* principality dominated by the Medici family as well as the consolidation of foreign domination over Italy. Both experiences radically affected his life and shaped his political reflections. Even if he also wrote on the decline and fall of kingdoms, principality and empires, for us today his considerations on the corruption and death of republics are especially relevant.

He invites us, in the first place, to take at all times in consideration the international context and be prepared to face the threats of war and the changes in the balance of power. The second major danger to republican liberty is for him tyranny, especially the veiled tyrannies that permit a man or a party to establish their domination over the republic by means of a policy of favors designed to build a network of private loyalties. The third form of deterioration of civil life that Machiavelli identifies is what he calls “license”, or “licentious state”, a dreadful moral and social condition where citizens have no respect for the laws and for the common good.

When widespread license pervades the social body, Machiavelli warns us, no one is safe and only the domineering and astute individuals obtain public honors while good and competent citizens are ridiculed and humiliated. The last evil that endangers republican liberty is poor leadership. His writings provide us with many examples of leaders of republics who failed to protect the liberty of their fatherland and the liberty of the citizens because they lacked political wisdom or courage, or because they were utterly corrupt. Whereas the degeneration and the death of republics is for Machiavelli an almost natural process, regeneration and rebirth is an almost impossible task that only honest, wise and good citizens can accomplish, if God or Fortune are willing to help them. How to educate great political leaders was the chief purpose of his writings. To them we should turn, if we want to enhance our political wisdom.

PROGRAM

- 2.00 pm Welcome – Mattias Hessérus, Dr., Project Leader, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation
Introduction – Ulf Wickbom, Moderator

Of Tyranny and License

- 2.05 pm Maurizio Viroli *Machiavelli's Theory of the Degeneration and Redemption of Republics*
2.20 pm James Hankins *Living with Tyranny: The Renaissance Humanists on Tyranny*
2.35 pm Erica Benner *Three Causes of Corruption in Republics*
2.50 pm Discussion
3.10 pm TEA AND COFFEE

On Moral and Political Corruption

- 3.40 pm Hilary Gatti *When the People Choose: Anticipations of Electoral Errors in Machiavelli and Shakespeare*
3.55 pm Raphael Ebgi *On Political and Religious Corruption in Machiavelli*
4.10 pm Christopher Coker *A Philosophy of Decline? Spengler, Pseudo-morphosis and the Moral Corruption of Russia*
4.25 pm Discussion
4.45 pm TEA AND COFFEE

Leadership Matters

- 5.15 pm Philip Bobbitt *The Unity of Machiavelli's Thought*
5.30 pm Richard Ned Lebow *Machiavelli: A Political Psychologist*
5.45 pm Harvey Mansfield *Machiavelli's Remedy for Decline in la Verita Effettuale*
6.00 pm Discussion
6.20 pm Seminar Ends

LECTURERS

ERICA BENNER

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