To Keep His Subjects Low: A Machiavellian Interpretation of Henry VII

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When Henry Tudor became Henry VII on August 22, 1485, following his victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field, many believed the anarchic course of English politics would continue unabated. The Wars of the Roses had gone on for thirty years, a period so long that intrigue, murder, and military force were now common political tools. Furthermore, there was no outward indication that Bosworth would be the last great political upheaval in the conflict; the new king was a twenty-eight year old former exile to the French court who had asserted his royal claim with nothing more than what his rival Richard III sneeringly called “a number of beggarly Britons and faynte harted Frenchmen.”¹ The victory had only been achieved due to the fractured and distrustful state of English politics, and many, commoner and noble alike, probably wondered how long the young upstart would last before he was killed and replaced after sitting upon a bloody throne of his own. Time proved this initial impression incorrect; just as Henry Tudor was strong enough to attain the crown, Henry VII was shrewd enough to keep it. The new king understood that his success, and England’s, required more than a mere change of dynasty; nothing less than a radical departure from medieval political practice in favor of a more

centralized government would enable him to secure a united England capable of navigating the political turbulence of early modern Europe. The first Tudor accomplished his objectives by anticipating the precepts of power first outlined by Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince*, and through methods that were not always popular or just, Henry fused the Red and White Rose together.

Machiavelli’s letter to Lorenzo II provides an excellent theoretical lens for the evaluation of Henry VII, a monarch who reigned during Machiavelli’s own political career and died only three years before *The Prince* was completed in 1512. Louis XII, Alexander VI, and Ferdinand of Aragon were Henry’s contemporaries as well as models for Machiavelli’s bold new science of politics intended to advise princes living in the early sixteenth century. The pragmatic philosophy of *The Prince* emphasizes ends, with almost any means wholly justifiable; hypocrisy and the embrace of moral contradiction are necessary for sound governance, narrowly defined as the preservation of order, stability, and peace within the realm of the prince. If sound governance is achieved by moral actions, then those actions are, in his view, laudable, but if that same goal requires amoral or immoral actions, than those actions are also praiseworthy, if done properly. In Machiavelli’s view, nothing is as dangerous as anarchy, and order, the font of princely power, must be the main objective of any effective royal government. Henry VII seized power, established order, and brought about sound governance through four of the political skills Machiavelli emphasizes: using *virtù* to manipulate fortune, choosing and managing effective advisors, actively enriching the crown and enlarging the state, and judiciously using both force and diplomacy. Historians such as J. D. Mackie have already implicitly and explicitly connected Machiavelli to the early Tudor dynasty:
Judged by the theory of the middle ages, the rule of this sort may seem to be a shocking innovation: but it was not, in fact, far removed from medieval practice. It was the service of the Renaissance to tear away the decent sheepskin which had covered the medieval wolf, and incidentally to justify his existence on the ground that one great wolf was better than a pack of carnivores.2

Mackie’s words echo Machiavelli’s own syntax:

Since a ruler, then, needs to know how to make good use of beastly qualities, he should take as his models among the animals both the fox and the lion, for the lion does not know how to avoid traps, and the fox is easily overpowered by wolves.3

Mackie’s understated use of Machiavelli’s language subtly asserts the relevance of *The Prince* in understanding the reign of Henry VII, and tacit agreement with Henry’s Machiavellian policy. Thomas Penn acknowledges the method, but despairs: “Looking into the world of dynastic uncertainty, he [Henry VII] was perfecting a system, idiosyncratic and terrifying, that would allow him unprecedented control over his subjects. He would describe this plan in terms that were an uncanny foreshadowing of Machiavelli’s own.”4 Deliberately invoking the sinister reputation of Shakespeare’s “murderous Machiavel” for the effect it will have on the reader, Penn’s *Winter King*

2 Ibid., 5-6.
often approaches pathography; the title itself evokes a cold, bleak environment ravaged by dread and anxiety. For Penn, the Henrican system, stony and impersonal as the Tower of London itself, was not worth the price of an oppressive central state that seemed to foment suspicion everywhere in England.  

Although they might disagree on the morality of Henry’s political system, Tudor historians agree that the methodology of the new state centered on the elaborate structuring of political debt. The Wars of the Roses had become so perpetual that even the death of bona fide royal claimants was not enough to end dynastic dispute; impostors such as Lambert Simnel or Perkin Warbeck were still championed by highborn schemers despite the fact that they were obvious counterfeits. Political and military tactics proved minimally effective in thwarting noble ambition, and Henry soon decided that rendering civil war unaffordable was the only option available for curtailing future hostilities. Tudor historians agree that Henry devised a financial system meant to debase and impoverish the nobility, but, as the arguments of Mackie and Penn demonstrate, they disagree as to whether Henry VII was a financier or miser. This may be a question of particular importance for moralists, but not for Machiavelli, for whom only an effective outcome matters; a good prince should be parsimonious, but not rapacious, for the surest way to angering the

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5 Ibid., 167-170.
7 Mackie, The Earlier Tudors, 120-121.
populace is to garner a reputation for stealing their property. This leads to a prince becoming hated and in Machiavelli’s view this is the most dangerous thing a ruler can allow to happen, for it erodes his legitimacy and fosters the breeding ground for conspiracy. Disaffected elites are far less likely to turn to plotting if they believe the people will not be with them; a prince can die, but killing his dynastic authority is another thing entirely, as Brutus and Cassius learned after the mob chased them out of Rome. The real question should not be whether Henry’s financial assault on the nobility was just, but whether it led to his being hated by the entire populace at the time.

Richard III’s actions quickly led to his being despised by the elite and the populace, and characterized the entirety of his two year reign. The brutal methods he and his brother, Edward IV, had employed to secure their throne turned the English people against the Yorkist regime, and more importantly, the support for Richard III within the House of York itself:

Edward IV had alienated the old aristocracy by his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. He had broken the King-maker, he had executed Clarence. Richard III had declared the issue of Edward IV illegitimate, had murdered the princes, and had seized the Crown himself. Each successive act of violence had left its legacy of hate, and the once powerful Yorkist party was shivered into fragments, mutually distrustful but all ill disposed to the king.

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9 Ibid., 57.
The Yorkist kings were certainly barbarous, but they were also unsuccessful in employing cruelty in an instrumentally effective way. The populace will tolerate a massacre at the beginning of a prince’s reign as long as violence is not prolonged, but continuous assassinations, even on a small scale, will incur their hatred and harm a prince’s legitimacy. Machiavelli looks to Agathocles the Sicilian, a man who consolidated his power in a quick massacre of the entire senate of Syracuse, as a better example of “well-used cruelty”:

Perhaps you are wondering how Agathocles and others like him, despite their habitual faithlessness and cruelty, have been able to reside in their homelands year after year, and to defend themselves from enemies abroad…. I think here we have to distinguish between cruelty well used and cruelty abused. Well-used cruelty (if one can speak well of evil) one may call those atrocities that are committed at a stroke, in order to secure one’s power, and are then not repeated, rather every effort is made to ensure one’s subjects benefit in the long run. An abuse of cruelty one may call those policies that, even if in the beginning they involve little bloodshed, lead to more rather than less as time goes by. Those who use cruelty well may indeed find God and their subjects are prepared to let bygones be bygones, as was the case with Agathocles. Those who abuse it cannot hope to retain power indefinitely. 11

Spectacular ferocity at the beginning of a prince’s reign tempered by subsequent tranquility makes a ruler seem unassailably powerful, and the people are left grateful that they were not among the dead. However, steady and continued violence makes a ruler appear

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tenuously weak, and therefore dangerous and reprehensible. After Richard’s nephews suspiciously disappeared, he failed to capture and summarily execute anyone else with a dynastic claim to power. Thus, he was forced to, in Machiavelli’s words, “hold a bloody knife in his hand all the time,” slowly killing off his opposition.\(^\text{12}\) That bloody knife, eventually dirtied with the blood of Buckingham, the former Yorkist supporter, allowed Henry the opportunity to gain the support of those who feared they might soon be next. Richard III had severely tarnished his legitimacy through continuing the steady commission of political crime that Edward IV began, while remaining incapable of killing all the major conspirators and claimants against his crown; moreover, no one wanted to be ruled by a king with a reputation as a vicious and impotent child-murderer.

Machiavelli warns, “A ruler need not worry too much about conspiracies as long as the people wish him well; but if the people are hostile to him and hate him, then he should fear everything and everyone.”\(^\text{13}\) An allegation of one such crime, more unnatural than bloody, had a debilitating effect on Richard’s rapidly waning moral authority: the rumor that he intended to marry his niece, Elizabeth of York, Henry Tudor’s betrothed. In a pact sealed in Rennes Cathedral on Christmas Day, 1483, between Henry Tudor and the disaffected adherents of the White Rose, Henry Tudor had promised to marry Elizabeth, and immediately after became the strongest claimant to the English crown.\(^\text{14}\) Polydore Vergil relates that Richard’s reaction was to overreach by plotting incest in an effort to deny the upstart Tudor the

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 31.
\(^\text{13}\) Machiavelli, The Prince, 58.
\(^\text{14}\) Mackie, The Earlier Tudors, 50.
ability to strengthen his relatively weak royal claim through marriage into the House of York:

A rumor came unto his [Henry’s] eare that king Richerd, his wife being dead, was amyndyd to mary Elizabeth, his brother Edwardes dowghter, and that he had maryed Cecyly, Edwards other daughter, unto an obscure man of no reputation. This matter being of no smaule weyght, as the which cut away from the confederates all hope of executing ther delyberat resolution, pinchid Henry by the veray stomak, because therby he saw that cowld not now expect the marriage of any of king Edwardes dowghters, wherfor he thought yt was to be fearyd least his frindes should forsake him.15

Whether or not Richard intended to marry Elizabeth —and it appears he did despite denying the rumor after the public reaction— the English people were ready to believe it.16 The truth of the Richard’s intent or action no longer mattered, for he had acquired a reputation as a loathsome depot, capable of any depravity. The rumor of Richard’s marital plans not only prompted Henry’s invasion, but transformed the young exile into a chivalric liberator bent on rescuing his bride and freeing England. Richard, through either malice or blunder, was as much to blame for this perception as Henry, as there are no liberators without tyrants.

Events leading up to the Battle of Bosworth were far more complex and prosaic, and Henry’s decision to engage Richard III

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16 Mackie, The Earlier Tudors, 49.
militarily was grounded in political calculation. Certainly Henry was distraught at the news of Richard’s plan to marry Elizabeth of York, but Henry’s first reaction was to negotiate for another spouse from another powerful family. However, before such negotiations were concluded, Henry began to have a number of important nobles declare sympathy for his cause; among them were John de Vere, earl of Oxford, and James Blount, de Vere’s former jailer turned companion. Their arrival in France to join Henry’s compatriots was a sign that Richard’s power was ebbing; both captor and captive had flouted Richard’s authority and escaped England together. A more important development was Henry’s growing popularity in Wales; his uncle Jasper, earl of Pembroke, enjoyed high standing among the Welsh and was a figure capable of uniting them around their mutual hatred of Richard III. As Henry’s domestic support in England began to build, he was able to persuade the French to lend him money and mercenaries. Although he was not as prepared as he would have liked, the twenty-eight-year-old exile committed himself and acted resolutely, leaving God to judge his cause. Henry landed his small invasion force on the Welsh coast, and after some military maneuvering, the Henrican and Ricardan forces met on Bosworth Field. Henry’s troops were outnumbered, but mutual distrust caused many of Richard’s noble retinues to hesitate, and the wavering Stanleys advanced for Henry at the crucial moment. Despite leading a brave charge—perhaps the most kingly act of his royal career—the last Yorkist king fell, and Henry Tudor became Henry VII, King of England. The new king had shown characteristic prudence in planning his invasion, but he was aided by the incalculable river of fortune, which eventually overflowed its banks, drowned the Yorkist
line, and deposited fertile soil for the Red and White Rose to take root.\footnote{Mackie, \textit{The Earlier Tudors}, 50-53.}

Machiavelli describes fortune as a river, an elemental force that cannot be overcome through the actions of mortals; it is a natural energy that can never be entirely tamed:

I compare her to one of those torrential rivers that, when they get angry, break their banks, knock down trees and buildings, strip the soil from one place and deposit it somewhere else. Everyone flees before them, everyone gives way at the face of their onrush, nobody can resist them at any point….. The same thing happens with fortune: She demonstrates her power where precautions have not been taken to resist her…\footnote{Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 74.} \footnote{Ibid., 20.}

The metaphor of fortune as a river meant that a future ruler’s political destiny is often subject to forces outside his control, but preparations can be made to channel natural forces even if they cannot be conquered. Richard III had failed to adequately prepare, for not only had he allowed his moral authority to be compromised, he had not organized his military force into one singularly under royal command. Machiavelli warns, “People are by nature inconstant…. So you have to be prepared for the moment when they no longer believe.”\footnote{Ibid., 20.} The moment Richard needed them, his most powerful subjects doubted him, and he died an ignominious death. In his second comparison to fortune as lady, however, Machiavelli indicates that fortune also tends to reward those firm in their purpose:
I do think, however, that it is better to be headstrong than cautious, for fortune is a lady. It is necessary, if you want to master her, to beat and strike her. And one sees she more often submits to those who act boldly than to those who proceed in calculating fashion.20

Machiavelli held that a prince must act in the moment, and unflinchingly exploit his every opportunity. Henry Tudor saw the chance that stemmed from Richard III’s missteps, and moved resolutely and decisively to exploit it.

Although Machiavelli believed that mastery of fortune required bold action, he was adamant that achievement requires more than simple daring; the successful man is one who possesses virtù. The complex concept of virtù is central to the Machiavellian theory of successful rule, and thus essential to the proper evaluation of Henry Tudor’s leadership. The Prince, in many ways, is a constant exhortation to virtù, an elusive concept, that intangible quality that separates the ruler from the ruled. It is not “virtue” in the Christian sense, nor in the classical sense as one might expect from the Latin root, vir, for Machiavelli is not interested in the ethos of saints or heroes. David Wootton clarifies this essential difference:

Machiavelli approves of rash actions when they are successful; he advocates the stratagems of a coward when they are necessary to ensure survival or are likely to lead to victory; he believes rulers must be prepared to lie, murder, and act unjustly. They must therefore master the arts of deception, appearing to be one thing while in fact being another, cultivating a public image at odds with the facts…. In

20 Ibid., 76.
Machiavelli’s world a virtuous general would win battles other would lose, a virtuous politician secures power where others would lose it. Virtue is thus role-specific: virtuous soldiers are strong and brave, virtuous generals intelligent and determined. The virtuous man is the man that has those qualities that lead to success in his chosen activity. The virtuous man will know when to seize his chances and will recognize what needs to be done. He will identify opportunities where others see difficulties, and recognize necessity where others believe they have freedom of choice.


Virtù can be strength, skill, or even savagery; it is an innate expression of a deep sense of purpose. Virtù belongs to one who is willing to do anything to achieve that purpose, no matter the cost in blood, treasure, or morality. In the case of the virtù required of one who is coming to power, Machiavelli provides as examples great men known better to legend than history:

Let us look at those who through their own skill [virtù] and not merely through chance, have become rulers. In my view, the greatest have been Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and others like them…. You will find them all admirable. And if you look at the actions and strategies of each one of them, you will find they do not significantly differ from those of Moses, who could not have had a better teacher. If you look at their deeds and their lives, you will find they were dependent on chance only for their first opportunity. They seized their chance to make of it what they wanted. Without that first
opportunity their strength [virțu ] of purpose would never have been revealed. Without their strength [virțu ] of purpose, the opportunity they were offered would never have amounted to anything.22

In the context of the events leading up to Bosworth, Henry Tudor demonstrated the virțu Machiavelli requires. He had the political skill to win powerful supporters to his side and the intuition to sense that Richard’s legitimacy as king was at its lowest point, creating his opportunity. Once presented with his opportunity, Henry acted deliberately, with a strength of purpose the Florentine might have admired.

The virțu Henry VII possessed went beyond the seizure of power, and his political skill was evident in the philosophy that characterized his personal methods of rule:

A comparison of the reigns of Richard III and Henry VII cannot fail to show us how much the destinies of a nation may be influenced for good or evil by the personal character of their sovereign. Their position upon the throne, their relations to their subjects, and to foreign powers, were not materially different. They might both have been considered as usurpers; both had to meet rebellions in their own dominions; both had rivals abroad supported by foreign princes. Richard was the last of a dynasty of soldiers, Henry was the beginner in a dynasty of statesmen. The morality of statesmanship in that day was not high, but it was better than the cruelty of brute force and violence, and it secured for itself the supremacy which force and violence had been unable to attain. There was

a recklessness in the personal character of the House of York that might have sufficed to ruin their cause, apart from their internal divisions, injustice, and ferocity. The Tudor throne had to be supported by the most cautious diplomacy, and by a strict regard for the law. 23

The difference in the success of Tudor and the failure of York lies within the pragmatic statesmanship of Henry VII, rather than the base ferocity of Edward IV and Richard III, and it is this practicality that makes the first Tudor the sort of monarch Machiavelli requires. The Yorkist kings failed to see that blood and power alone would never be a mandate, and Henry VII resolved not to make the same mistake. His virtù as leader enabled him to see what the House of York could not; political legitimacy in England needed to be enshrined in legal authority, for even unjust regal actions could be countenanced if they were legal.

According to Machiavelli, careful management of finance is necessary to the preservation of stability and order in a principality, and a prince should prefer to be thought of as miserly rather than generous, for the latter is potentially destabilizing. He explains:

A ruler who pursues a reputation for generosity will always end up wasting all of his resources; and he will be obliged, in the end, if he wants to preserve his reputation, to impose crushing taxes upon the people, to pursue every possible source of income, and to be preoccupied with maximizing his revenues. This will begin to make him hateful to his subjects,

and will ensure no one thinks well of him, for no one admires poverty. The result is that his supposed generosity will have caused him to offend the vast majority and to have won favor with few. Anything that goes wrong will destabilize him, and the slightest danger will imperil him…. So we see a ruler cannot seek to benefit from a reputation as generous without harming himself. Recognizing this, he ought, if he is wise, not to mind being called miserly.24

For Machiavelli, lavish expenditure of riches gathered through taxation was something that a ruler’s subjects will quickly find odious. Furthermore, such generosity cannot go on forever; eventually an excessively luxurious lifestyle or constant gratuities to subjects will prove unsustainable. Once that happens, and a prince raises taxes to fund his government, all the good times will be forgotten. Machiavelli believes that any actions leading to a prince being hated are inherently delegitimizing, and excessive rapacity particularly so:

You become hateful, above all… if you prey on the possessions and women of your subjects. You should leave both alone…. Indeed one of the most effective defenses a ruler has against conspiracies is to make sure he is not generally hated. For conspirators always believe the assassination of the ruler will be approved by the people. If they believe the people will be angered, then they cannot screw up the courage to embark on such an enterprise, for conspirators have to overcome endless difficulties to achieve success.25

25 Ibid., 56.
Historians agree that Henry VII was conservative in his finances, but Tudor historiography has not settled the argument as to whether he went beyond careful prudence and into hateful avarice.\textsuperscript{26} In Henry’s own time, the nobility, the focus of his fiscal assault, thought him so, but there is evidence that indicates the English people were satisfied with his fiscal policies.

Foreign ambassadors and official visitors in Henry’s court reported his financial acumen back to their masters, and tended to interpret the results of his methods in very different ways. Of particular importance to the ambassadors was not simply the way the English people viewed their king, but how the crown’s fiscal policies impacted the overall economy. Pedro Ayala, the wily Spanish ambassador, thought Henry’s fiscal strategy unsound, as he made clear in a letter written in July of 1498:

The King of England is less rich than is generally said. He likes to be thought very rich, because such a belief is advantageous to him in many respects. His revenues are considerable, but the custom house revenues, as well as the land rents, diminish every day. As far as the customs are concerned, the reason of their decrease is to be sought in the decay of commerce, caused partly by the wars, but much more by the additional duties imposed by the king. There is, however, another reason for the decrease of trade, that is to say, the impoverishment of the people by the great taxes laid on them. The king himself has said to me, that it is his

\textsuperscript{26} In addition to the presented arguments of Williams and Guy, see Fischer, \textit{The Political History of England}, 127.
intention to keep his subjects low, because riches would only
make them haughty.27

Ayala took a dim view of Henry’s economic policy, asserting that it
was not only oppressive, but destructive to the economic health of his
realm, and the Henry in Ayala’s report sounds more like a haughty
bully than a Machiavellian prince. However, Ayala does not distinguish
between aristocrat and commoner in his statement, and this is an
important omission. The noble subjects Henry wanted to keep low were
probably eager to fill Ayala’s ear with their complaints, and they had
far more access to the Spanish ambassador than the average working
Londoner. It is possible that selective feedback led to Ayala’s
impression that the English economy was dismal, and that Henry’s
rather impolitic statement referred to the entire English populace
instead of the disaffected elites.

John Guy’s analysis only partly agrees with the Spanish
ambassador. For Guy, much of Henry’s purported miserliness stems
from a need to bring an end to the Wars of the Roses by rendering the
nobles financially incapable of making war. Guy writes, “He compelled
leading figures at Court to enter into bonds, recognizances, or
obligations” that forced loyalty and peaceable behavior on pain of
financial ruin.28 The process by which the debts were enforced very
often did not depend on the courts, a practice that was smart, but unjust,
politics. It was the actions of the Council Learned in the Law, of which
the majority of Henry’s chief councilors were members, in the second
half of Henry’s reign that Guy believes ultimately created an

27 A.F. Pollard, ed. The Reign of Henry VII from contemporary sources,
oppressive government. The employment of recognizances skyrocketed, and landowner debts to the crown that had not been enforced in decades were suddenly and vigorously pursued, often in the form of post mortem inquests. This may well have been overreach, and although Guy quotes Edmund Dudley’s famous testimony that the king wanted “to have many persons in danger at his pleasure,” he also, and fairly, relays another lesser known quotation of Dudley’s from the same trial regarding Henry’s amassing of noble indebtedness, “I think, verily, that his inward mind was never to use them.” In quoting both statements, Guy presents a more complex picture of Henry Tudor than Pedro Ayala communicated to his masters in Spain; a man perhaps too suspicious of over-mighty aristocrats, yet wise enough to understand that men in arrears are men under control. Still, Guy believes that whatever Henry’s motive or however strong the political necessity, his financial policies were ultimately too harsh.

Not everyone felt that Henry’s fiscal policies were overbearing, and Ayala’s picture of a tyrannical Tudor was not a view shared by an Italian observer to Henry’s court. Although the name of the author and the date of his correspondence are lost, the letter begins by stating:

From the time of William the Conqueror to the present, no king has reigned more peaceably than he (Henry VII) has, his great prudence causing him to be universally feared; and, though frugal to excess in his own person, he does not change any of the ancient usages of England at his court, keeping a sumptuous table, as I had the opportunity of witnessing twice

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29 Ibid., 66-67.
30 Ibid., 64.
31 Ibid, 68.
32 Ibid, 64-68.
that your Magnificence dined there, when I judged that there might be 600 to 700 persons at dinner.  

The author goes on to outline the income of the crown from rents and estates and other large sums of money taken in by the government. Like Ayala, he also refers to the customs duties, but provides an important explanation for their increase: “Subsequently, to keep the coast free from pirates, the duty was raised from three to fifteen pence.”

Although it is certainly true that the common man never wants to see his taxes increased, it appears that in the case of increased customs duties, the merchants were receiving an important service for their money: protection that prevented the loss of goods to piracy. Henry’s government, made stronger by his fiscal conservatism, was capable of providing the kind of security for the English people that had been sorely lacking for over thirty years.

For C.H. Williams, the assertion of the Italian observer is a more accurate picture of Henry’s monetary practices; in Williams’s view, Henry’s financial objectives were brilliant statecraft. Barely conceding that the king or his men approached rapacity, Williams argues that Henry VII ended the Wars of the Roses by finally abasing the warring aristocracy in a way that other forms of justice and authority, such as Star Chamber, had been unable to achieve:

While swaggering gangsters wore the shirts of rival parties and terrorized civilians, a hard-headed, energetic, enterprising middle class was scouring land and sea for trade. While the nobility were squandering fortunes on the upkeep of soldiers, that same middle class was amassing the wealth that would

34 Ibid., 24.
purchase for its children position and power in sixteenth-century England. These men of trade wanted peace and good government, and they saw that they might get them from Henry VII. For he was a king after their own hearts, in spirit (and despite the legend) a real bourgeoisie king. Like his subjects he knew that money was king.\textsuperscript{35}

For Williams, Henry was an innovative financier who laid firm foundations for both his own dynasty, and the beginning of modern England, by providing the order and stability prerequisite to the economic health of a nation-state. Williams does not disagree with Guy as to whether Henry was thought of as generous; they agree that he most certainly was not. However, Williams agrees with Machiavelli that it was not a fault but an asset to be thought a miser, as Henry’s fiscal policies allowed him to provide the governmental framework necessary to underpin a burgeoning economy without overburdening the merchants or tradesmen with heavy taxation.\textsuperscript{36}

Henry’s aggressive actions against the aristocracy were in line with another one of Machiavelli’s recommendations, that a prince should build his government upon the common people, rather than the nobility. Machiavelli observes, “One cannot honorably give the elite what they want, and one cannot do it without harming others; but this is not true with the populace, for the objectives of the populace are less immoral than the elite, for the latter want to oppress, and the former not to be oppressed…. If the masses are opposed to you, you can never be secure, for there are too many of them; but the elite, since there are few

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 16-19.
of them, can be neutralized.” Machiavelli’s argument suggests another interpretation of the conversation between Ayala and Henry; the king had realized that the best way to prevent obstreperous and powerful subjects from making war was to simply make it unaffordable. At their expense, he built a stable government that could afford to provide its citizens with real security, such as the protection from piracy that the Italian reported. That the common people did not find Henry’s financial schemes oppressive is perhaps evidenced best by the fact that he was never overthrown, despite several attempts supported by powerful families within England and without.

It was during one such attempt, perhaps the most dangerous point in Henry’s reign, that he antedated another precept of Machiavellian political theory: a great prince should be both bloodthirsty and cunning, and possess the wisdom to know when these attributes are appropriate. Machiavelli writes:

Since a ruler, then, needs to know how to make good use of beastly qualities, he should take as his models among the animals both the fox and the lion, for the lion does not know how to avoid traps, and the fox is easily overpowered by wolves. So you must be a fox when it comes to suspecting a trap, and a lion when it comes to making the wolves turn tail. Those who simply act like a lion all the time do not understand their business. So you see a wise ruler cannot, and should not, keep his word when doing so is to his disadvantage, and when the reasons that led him to promise to do so no longer apply. Of course, if all men were good, this advice would be bad; but since men are wicked and will not keep faith with you, you need not keep faith with them.... But

37 Machiavelli, The Prince, 32.
it is essential to conceal how crafty one is, to know how to be a clever counterfeit and a hypocrite. \(^{38}\)

For Machiavelli, possessing the ability to deceive men was paramount to political success. Stability depends on it, for the beastliness he recommends is not a palatable concept for the simple masses. Machiavelli counsels, “Everyone sees what you seem to be; few have direct experience of what you really are.”\(^{39}\) Successful princes must disguise their natures through hypocrisy, for the lion and the fox are beasts, and men only think they are not animals following the strongest in the pack. Nowhere is this essential duality more important for a monarch than in resolving contentious foreign relations and in suppressing domestic conspiracies. The most serious threat to his rule that Henry VII ever faced involved both foreign and domestic enemies supporting the cause of Perkin Warbeck; in handling the threat, the king showed himself to be both lion and fox.

Warbeck, the impostor who claimed to be Richard, duke of York, arrived in Scotland in late 1495 to seek the aid of James IV in taking the English crown. Almost a year later, the Scottish king, who had been primed with false intelligence from Emperor Maximillian I and Margaret of Savoy for years in regards to Warbeck’s \textit{bona fides}, invaded England in a raid that barely lasted a day. James was shocked when the English people failed to rise to the pretender’s cause, and this ill-fated raid was probably the moment when the Scottish king realized he had been duped into believing that a well-dressed pauper was a prince. Mackie observes that “when Perkin protested against the Scottish devastations, James made the acid reply that he concerned

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 54.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 55.
himself overmuch about a land which showed very little interest in him."⁴⁰ Despite the reckless invasion, James was correct in retreating to reorganize his forces for a much greater conflict; the English were incensed and Parliament was now prepared to grant Henry a subsidy for amassing a large force to repel the Scottish threat.⁴¹

In granting this subsidy, however, Parliament had gravely misjudged the support for any additional taxation to fund martial conflict with the Scots, and the levy inadvertently sparked an uprising in Cornwall. Many of the Cornish felt no responsibility for defending England’s northern borders, and the leaders of the rebellion, Thomas Flamanck and Michael Smith, incited the unrest further by claiming that such an action was the responsibility of nobility garrisoned there. The argument that Welshmen should not be burdened with the protection of the northern borders was seductive, and the angry mob gathered supporters, and rapidly became a military threat intent on taking London. Henry was now faced with a dilemma as to where to deploy his forces; he could either send his army to the Scottish border in the hopes of seizing the initiative against James, or put down what had become a roving mob of nearly fifteen thousand Cornishmen. Wisely, he decided to address the immediate threat, and ordered his troops headed north to turn around, amassing the northern expedition with the London garrison, creating a force of 25,000 experienced and well-armed soldiers. On June 17, 1497, the crown completely overpowered the Cornish at Blackheath in Kent, capturing Flamanck and Joseph. Ten days later their heads were mounted on London Bridge, and their quarters distributed across the country. Henry’s total

⁴⁰ Mackie, The Earlier Tudors, 140.
⁴¹ Ibid., 136-141.
victory and the fearful deeds that followed were beastly; they were instrumental violence at its most savagely effective, the acts of a lion.\textsuperscript{42}

As for the threat of the Scottish king menacing his border, a different tactic was required. Although Henry continued to keep his army mustered, Richard Foxe, Henry’s chief ambassador, was dispatched to Scotland on a diplomatic mission to achieve two major goals: the prevention of war, and the acquisition of Perkin Warbeck. Foxe was given two separate instructions, one official, and the other that was intended for only the diplomat himself to read. The official instructions, which are couched in language suited to royal diplomacy, outline Henry’s demands. Chief among them was that James hand Warbeck over to England, as Henry instructs Foxe:

\begin{quote}
And therfore ye shal demaunde and require on our behalve of our seid cousyn to make delyvere unto us of Perkin Warbeck; the which delyveraunce of hym we desire not for any estimacion that we take of hym, but by cause our seid cousin received hym within his londe and favorably hath entreacted hym and dyvers others of our rebelles durying the peace concluded by twix us both, and over that, havying him in his companygh, entered in puyssaunce within our lande; the whiche was the cause and grounde of the breache of the said peace. And less therfore may we not doo with our honour then to have the delyveraunce of hym, thought the delyveraunce or havying of hym is of no price nor value…. He is not the parson that he surmised to be when he opteyned his
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{42} Mackie, \textit{The Earlier Tudors}, 141-143.
salveconduct of our seid cousyn (as it is knowen thurgh all thes parties of the worlde….)

By the time Foxe received his instructions, everyone in high political circles believed Warbeck to be an impostor (Henry refers to him as Warbeck, after all), and Henry probably suspected that James had realized his folly. However, the Scottish king had committed himself, and Henry well knew that the only diplomatic solution would involve some way to allow James to save face; after all, his actions had been prompted by the word of the Holy Roman Emperor.

Although the surrender of Perkin Warbeck was an overall theme throughout Foxe’s instructions, Henry made five specific demands. The first was that James send an embassy to discuss a lasting peace, and, second, that James come himself to Newcastle: “our seid cousyn furst to sende hs solemne ambassate unto us, as is before rehersed; and also the same our cousyn to come into person unto our town of New Castell, and further within this our realme; wher we may mete, commen and conclude with hym for thobseyng of the saide peace….” Third, Henry wanted James to submit to ecclesiastical censure for breach of a previously negotiated ceasefire at Jenyn Haugh, “not only by his letter and great seal and solemne othe, but also upon payne of the censuris of the Holy Churche…” Henry additionally demanded compensation for the damages caused by the invasion, and noble hostages to guarantee Scottish adherence to the agreement. Foxe was also to remind the Scottish court of the great expense and trouble the English had gone to in preparing for war with Scotland, implying

43 The National Archives of the UK: SP 58/1 State Paper Office: Transcripts and Documents relating to Scotland, 1065-1503.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
that war was still possible without Scottish capitulation to both the treaty of Jenyn Haugh and Henry’s additional demands. These were Foxe’s public and official instructions.\textsuperscript{46}

Foxe’s secret instructions, attached to a copy of the original instructions, show Henry’s craftiness. Foxe was to demand all five of the items if Warbeck was not given up, but was given permission to negotiate down to just two of them in order to conclude the deal. Furthermore, Henry gave his ambassador permission to show James’s advisors the official set of instructions if he could not conclude the deal outright, so that they would think that Henry’s demands were unmovable and that Foxe had no leeway in the peace negotiations:

\begin{quote}
Our mynde and pleasour is that ye kepe unto your selff secretly this boke of instruccions, and that ye shal …. {lost} well as ye shal thinke good, shewe unto the comyssioners of our seid cousyn that other boke of instruccions, and also [the] letter wheirin thei were encl[o]sed; signyfieng unto heym that ye have no ferther auctorite then is comprised in those instruccions so t[o] theym by you shewed. And over that, for thavoydyng and eschewing of wer bytwix us and our seid cousyn, we wol that ye inserte in suche convencion as shalbe betwixt you and his seid comyssioners made, an article accordyng to the tenour comprised in a paper herin enclosed oresle by your wisdome of like or more force, as shalbe thought unto you behoveful, for the putting aparte and escheweng of all maner of …. Seid cousyn by meane of any attemptatte to be don …. By any of ours or his subjects.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
It is plain that Henry intends that deception be employed as a tool for both avoiding war, and securing custody of Warbeck. James resolved the matter differently; he felt he could not honorably hand over the pretender, so he evicted him from the kingdom shortly after Foxe’s negotiations began. In a politically necessary show of Scottish defiance, James made another cursory invasion of England, and was repulsed. England, in turn, perfunctorily raided Scotland, but could not entice James into any major battles. In September of that year, the two nations formally concluded peace negotiations. Henry had successfully avoided major conflict through deception, the method of the fox.48

The Machiavellian method of Henry VII held a distinct and overarching purpose, as every policy was designed to ensure political stability and maintain peace. Reversing the constant political violence of the Wars of the Roses required a strong, decisive ruler, and in sensing his opportunity and boldly leading an inferior force to victory at Bosworth, Henry showed he had the political skill and certainty of purpose, the *virtù*, to be that strong king England so needed. Once king, he consolidated his power through generosity to those who had supported his claim, or whose attainder reversals were in Henry’s interests. He was also wise in the selecting and handling of pragmatic and capable councilors who unremittingly pursued the best interests of their king and established the strong state necessary for preserving order. In pursuing a tough fiscal policy, Henry achieved the double aims of strengthening the state and enhancing the protections it could provide to necessary endeavors such as commerce, while suppressing the warlike nobility into a position that made violence an unaffordable and infeasible political tool. When political violence did arise, Henry demonstrated the animalistic duality of spirit that Machiavelli

emphasized; the ability to be the brutal lion and the cunning fox, and
the inherent wisdom to know the necessity and occasion for each.

As to the question of the morality in promoting policies that
arguably created an oppressive government, a government that often
circumvented legal procedure in favor of direct justice, Machiavelli is
quite clear: it does not matter. In establishing peace out of a culture of
ferocity, extraordinary means are often both necessary and advisable, as
Machiavelli writes:

I recognize every ruler should want to be thought of as
compassionate and not cruel. Nevertheless, I have to warn you
about being compassionate. Cesare Borgia was thought of as
cruel; but this supposed cruelty of his restored order to the
Romagna, united it, rendered it peaceful and law-abiding. If
you think about it, he was, in fact, much more compassionate
than all the people of Florence, who, in order to avoid being
thought cruel, allowed Pistoia to tear itself apart. So a ruler
ought not to mind the disgrace of being called cruel, if he
keeps his subjects peaceful and law-abiding, for it is more
compassionate to impose harsh punishments on a few than,
out of excessive compassion, to allow disorder to spread,
which leads to murders or looting. The whole community
suffers if there are riots, while to maintain order the ruler only
has to execute one or two individuals…. This leads us to a
question that is in dispute: is it better to be loved than feared
or vice versa? My reply is one ought to be both loved and
feared; but, since it is difficult to accomplish both at the same
time, I maintain it is much safer to be feared than loved….49

49 Machiavelli, The Prince, 51.
Men control who they love; the prince controls who they fear. Fear, therefore, is a ruler’s ultimate base of power. Henry VII knew he had to choose between fear and love, and he chose fear. That fear allowed him to bring England under tight state direction, and through wise decisions and the passage of time, the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses came to an end. His compassion extended beyond his own personal interests, for he endured the emotional pain of being unloved by many of his subjects, so that the English people would not suffer the fate of Pistoia. Unconsciously anticipating Machiavellian political theory, Henry VII accomplished the Florentine’s vision of good governance, and the result was a secure political framework based on peace and order rather than war and chaos. Through the economic growth made possible by security and stability, England was soon able to join its rivals, France and Spain, as a true Renaissance nation-state and the fulcrum of the balance of power in Western Europe.