

04. Machiavelli, *The Prince*
September 14, 19, 21, 2000

Page references are for the Donno translation first and the Bull translation second.

- RP #3 [Due Sept. 14: Why does Machiavelli admire "armed prophets"? What is the significance of fortune and ability or prowess for him?]
- RP #4 [Due Sept. 21: Why is fortune like a woman for Machiavelli? What, if anything, in his work is useful for women's equality?]

I. Machiavelli introduction

- A. Three contexts of *The Prince*: Three ways to read it:
- B. As a critique of Plato

1. Read: chap. 15, 1st para (56/90-91). This is a direct criticism of Plato and anyone who would follow him. (Kant, etc.)

2. Q: What does he mean when he says "it is necessary that a prince who is interested in his survival learn to be other than good"? (56 Donno), or "it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be virtuous"? (91 Bull)

2. "Mirror of princes" literature that Machiavelli is responding to. This literature told leaders to rule through virtue and wisdom and principled behavior. It was Xian but they got it from Plato. Machiavelli is writing *against* this literature. Keep in mind: Machiavelli is not so much writing against Xian morality as against its use in politics.

3. D. Machiavelli wrote the book as a housewarming gift to Lorenzo de Medici.

1. Read: First and maybe last paragraph of the letter to Medici (12-13 Donno)

2. He had just gotten out of jail, where he was held and tortured on suspicion of being involved in a plot to assassinate members of the Medici family. This book is Machiavelli's loyalty oath to the new regime. It's a job application! (Or is it a clever trick to undermine the Medicis' power?)

II. Background to Machiavelli (1469-1527) and *The Prince* (1514)

A. The Renaissance. Started with:

1. The invention of the printing press, which broke the Church's monopoly on knowledge.
2. The invention of gun powder, which broke the nobleman's monopoly on warfare.
3. The increase in travel to faraway places, which leads to the rediscovery of different cultures long since forgotten in the Dark Ages. The center of the universe shifts from God to humanity.

B. Italy during the Renaissance

1. Was the center of the Renaissance
2. While most of Europe was ruled by monarchies, Italy was divided into numerous city-states. (Italy did not become a unified nation until 1871).

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p.10

Q: Why add Plato to that of Mach? vice-versa? Aristotle?

1. Q: How does this book compare previous texts? Is it more modern? Why?

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of Xianity

in Europe,

Middle Ages,

etc.

1/2 of Islam &

it's golden

etc. etc.

for serving the Florentine Republic before Medici came to power.

in Europe

kingdoms

C. Life of Machiavelli

1. Born in Florence. Florence was considered a republic but was really an oligarchy dominated by the **Medici** family.
2. At 29 he becomes the 2nd chancellor of Florence. He was sent as an envoy to form an alliance between Florence and Cesare Borgia's territory in northern Italy. It's here where Machiavelli became impressed with Borgia. Served the Florentine republic for 14 years (1498-1512).
3. Florentine republic collapses in 1512 and the Medici family takes over again. Machiavelli is ousted from the government. In early 1513 he is accused of participating in a plot to overthrow the Medici government. He is arrested and tortured but soon exonerated and released.
4. He lived in relative poverty on his family farm and spent the next 13 years trying to get back into public service. He loved politics and was a strong Florentine (and Italian) patriot. Finally enjoyed a brief reappearance in government in 1526, and died in 1527.
5. Machiavelli's **purpose in writing *The Prince* is threefold**: a) he wants to prove to the Medicis that he is an obedient and loyal servant, b) he wants to show them that he is an expert on political matters and therefore indispensable to them. He wants his job back! c) Wants to restore Italy's former glory. Classical Rome always looms large in the back of Machiavelli. Many people describe him as a Florentine patriot, and he was, but Machiavelli was primarily an Italian patriot. He wanted to see a united Italy above all, and would support just about any prince who could achieve it.

D. **Central lesson of *The Prince***: A ruler cannot be inflexible in the face of changing circumstances. One must be able to mold one's character to the times rather than trying to force the times to mold to your personality.

Chapters 1-9

III. The state and justice

- fix the sub stA
- A. According to chapter 1, there are two ways of acquiring a principality:
 1. **By the arms of others or with one's own.**
 2. **By fortune (fortuna) or by ability/prowess (virtú).** (chapter 1)
 3. **Arms and fortune are the key themes of the book.**
 - B. The foundation of the state for Machiavelli isn't justice, good laws, or moral citizens. **The foundation of the state for him is arms.**
 1. **Read: 53-54/87** (1st para of chap. 14). Forget about justice, laws, morality, etc. That's the stuff of philosophers, maybe, but not princes. **The prince's primary concern is power.**
 2. "wars cannot be avoided and can only be deferred to the advantage of others." (18 Donno) or: "there is no avoiding war; it can only be postponed to the advantage of others." (Bull 40), ch. 3.
 - C. The people he admires in history are "**armed prophets**": Moses, Romulus, Theseus, etc. We remember these people as wise men, but we shouldn't forget that they were warriors, too, and that the reason we remember their words is because of their deeds on the battlefield.

D. Political knowledge is therefore the knowledge of strategies of war.

1. Don't accept fate like Xian philosophers tell you to. You have to fight fate and take it on. Try not to rely on fate or fortuna except to provide you with an opportunity. Taking advantage of that opportunity depends on one's ability/prowess. To use one's prowess or ingenuity means always thinking a step ahead. It means thinking in terms of strategy. Think: How can I win? not What is the just?

E. State power is the central concern of any prince, not morality or justice. If a prince focuses on morality he will lose his state, given the baseness of human nature. The virtuous man doesn't triumph; he is harmed and taken advantage of by others.

F. Machiavelli is concerned with the world of the cave, not the sun. He is concerned with the world of what is, not what ought to be. He constantly counterposes "the ideal" (saying, wouldn't that be nice...) and "the real."

G. Mach. as the first theorist of realpolitik.

IV. Fortuna and prowess: Duke Valentino

A. Mach. says one can acquire a principality through fortune or ability/prowess.

B. Fortuna: Fortune, fate, luck.

1. Q: Is fortuna good or bad?

2. It can be either. A wise prince knows how to both avoid the dangers of fortuna and how to make use of the opportunities it presents.

C. Ability/Prowess: Ingenuity, cunning, wisdom used for one's advantage.

D. It is easier to win a principality through fortune than through ability/prowess, but it's much more difficult to hold on to.

E. Example: Cesare Borgia, or "Duke Valentino" (chap. 7)

1. Borgia did everything a prince should do. He made the right allies and picked the right battles to expand his rule. He secured stability within his kingdom (Romagna) by letting Remirro de Orco do all the necessary but cruel work to whip the population into a fearful obedience, then he cut de Orco in two pieces.

2. However, he ran into bad luck: his father died and he got deathly ill at the same time, weakening him. Then, he let an enemy become Pope. This one error plus a stroke of bad luck ruined his plans to rule all of Italy.

3. Despite his considerable ability/prowess, the Duke failed due to bad fortuna.

4. Q: What ruined Borgia, fortune or a bad choice? Machiavelli gives conflicting answers. Compare p. 34 with 35 (Donno) / p. 55 with 61 (Bull). Which is the stronger force? It seems that even Borgia had power over his own fate in Machiavelli's opinion.

~~Does Mach. send new modern or "realistic" to you?~~

- Q: Does Mach. send new modern or "realistic" to you? why?

- Hottel: I'd like Plato for a friend, but Mach. on my side in politics

- Mach. has abolished the states hierarchy that Plato (intellectual Europe) took for granted. We're all bring, & the k. that matter isn't war, but techné - technical k. in the strategies of war.

- Also: importance of your own crime³ over that of others' for Mach.

- Put Mach in context of Renaissance (IA-B)

Armed peoples do not answer directly on but really for... #2 reliance on power

September 19, 2000

Chaps 10-18

Announcements:

- Any questions about the 1st essay assignment?

RP #4 [Due Sept. 21: Why is fortune like a woman for Machiavelli? What, if anything, in his work is useful for women's equality?]

I. Machiavelli in context

A. [go over II.A. - II.B. from Sept. 14 notes]

II. Arms and ability

A. **Arms** sumup: Machiavelli likes "armed prophets" because 1) they use their own arms rather than relying on the arms of others, 2) they rely on fortune only for opportunity, 3) they mostly rely on their ability (virtú)

B. **Fortuna and virtú**: A prince should rely more on virtú than fortune for his success. [get from IV., 9/14 notes]

C. **Q**: Does Machiavelli sound more "realistic" to you? Are his ideas more in tune with the modern world than Plato's? Why?

D. **Machiavelli has abolished the status hierarchies** that Plato and medieval Europe took for granted. In Machiavelli's world, **we're all bronze**. The kind of knowledge that matters isn't *nous* or *episteme* but *techne*: technical knowledge in the art of war.

E. Hortencia told me she'd like Plato for a friend but Machiavelli as a politician fighting for her interests. Do you agree?

1. **Q**: Should the qualities of politicians be different from that of our friends?

2. **Q**: Should the morality of politicians be different from private persons? I.e. should a politician follow a "dual morality": moral in private life, immoral when necessary in public life?

III. Virtue and morality: How not to be virtuous

A. Let's go back to the quote from chapter 15 (read yesterday): "it is necessary that a prince who is interested in his survival learn to be other than good"? (56 Donno), or "Therefore if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous." (91 Bull)

1. **Q**: Why must a prince learn how not to be virtuous? *other than good?*

B. **Q**: What does Mach. say about the Christian/Platonic ideals of generosity, charity, humility, etc.?

1. **Read**: 62 & 63/100 & 101 (chap 18)

2. **One doesn't need to have these virtues, only to appear to have them**. Don't rule according to virtue, rule in accordance with what is necessary to keep your power. Use virtue to your advantage: claim to be virtuous while not being virtuous when necessary.

3. A prince who tries to rule based on virtue will lose his principality, cos the world ain't set up to rule that way. Don't base your principles of rulership on some

ideal republic or to emulate the realm of the sun. Deal with the world as it is, the world of shadows and the cave. The conditions of this world make ruling based on virtue unfeasible.

4. Thus, **it's better to be miserly than generous** (chap. 16), **cruel than merciful** (chap. 17), **feared than loved** (chap. 17) because these qualities will help you keep your power, while the other qualities, the "virtues," will only lead you to lose your power.

5. **Mach. doesn't care about the soul of rulers or ruled.** Keeping one's power is what is important. Therefore, a **prince does not need to be educated in the virtues but in tactics and strategies**, especially the strategies of war.

C. **Machiavelli's virtues or moral values are the virtues of a warrior:** manliness, heroism, cunning, etc. Like Nietzsche, Mach. wants to reach back to pre-Christian ideals of the Romans and the Greeks. He has little use for Christian morality, at least in politics.

D. **Example: cruelty.** Socrates and Christian teachings both condemn cruelty.

1. For **Socrates/Plato, cruelty makes a person less excellent**, and so the just person and just polis should never inflict cruelty on its own people or on other people. Think about the horse trainer example in Book I of *Republic*.

2. For **Christianity, cruelty violates the golden rule.**

3. For Machiavelli, on the other hand, the question is not whether or not to use cruelty but **good and bad uses of cruelty**, in which "good" is defined as helping to keep one's kingdom and "bad" is defined as helping to lose it.

a. **Good cruelty:** Used all at once, swiftly and massively.

b. **Bad cruelty:** Increases gradually rather than once and done.

c. **Read 38/65-66 (chap. 8; also the subject of chap. 17)**

E. **Machiavelli's definition of "goodness":** that which helps keep one's kingdom. "Bad" is that which leads toward its destruction.

3. Conf: Violates golden rule.

the Apology or

Note the emphasis on strategy & tactics, which we haven't seen in previous texts.

→ IV. The relation between the prince and his subjects

A. A prince needs the goodwill of the inhabitants.

B. **A prince should be feared and awed, but not hated.** Being loved is not necessary, but if you are hated by the people or the nobles, it will be your downfall. Plus, no one can control whether or not someone loves you, but you can control whether or not someone hates or fears you. So, rely on what you can control: Don't worry whether the people love you, but make sure they don't hate you.

1. **Q:** How does one avoid being hated?

2. **A:** By staying away from the property and women of his subjects.

C. **Q:** What's Machiavelli's conception of human nature?

1. **Read 60/96-97 (chap. 17)**

2. Humans are essentially self-interested and greedy. Thus, **your politics have to be based on that reality.** You have to be able to **fight like a beast** as well as like a man. **Chiron the Centaur** analogy (chap 18, 62/99).

D. Don't rely on the promises of men. Human nature makes such words unreliable. Instead, make men dependent on you. Likewise, the prince should never keep his word when it's in his advantage not to. **Read 63/99-100, ch. 18.**

start here →

September 21, 2000
Chaps. 19-26

Announcements:

- No RP due next week, but your paper is: Sept. 28
- Any questions on the paper?

I. **Fortuna**

A. ~~(skip?)~~ The **dangers of fortuna**, or luck, fate, etc. Machiavelli believes that princes are too inclined to ride their lucky streaks and don't prepare for the bad times, which are inevitable. When bad times come to unprepared people, disaster is the result. *E.g. Cesare Borgia*

B. ~~(skip?)~~ **Controlling fortuna**

1. **Q:** Does Machiavelli believe more in fate or more in free will?

2. I think more in free will and the possibility of political action. He believes **bad luck is inevitable but he doesn't believe that fortune is uncontrollable. Bad times are the result of lack of foresight and lack of planning, not fate.**

3. We can have control over our destiny. We can't control the future completely but **we can prevent or mitigate disaster through politics.** He is not one to talk about the limits of human action in the face of fortuna. Fortuna exists, but it has to be prevented and attacked so it can be controlled.

4. **Political disorder is like a wasting disease:** if it is diagnosed quickly it can be healed, but if it is allowed to fester it is difficult to cure. Prudent rulers have the foresight to diagnose early.

5. The secret of a prince's success is to control fortune. "He who has relied upon Fortune less has maintained his position best." (chap. 6) A wise ruler depends on his **ability/prowess rather than fortune.** "only those methods of defense which depend upon one's own resourcefulness are good, certain, and enduring." (84 Donno) or "The only sound, sure, and enduring methods of defense are those based on your own actions and prowess." (129 Bull)

6. A successful prince will rely on fortune only to provide one with opportunity.

Read 26/50-51 *(Chap. 6)*

C. **Two metaphors of fortune**

1. **Fortuna is a river**

a. **Read:** 84/130-31 *(Chap. 25)*

b. To control it, build dams and dikes and embankments. Be prepared so you can control the flow of fortuna to where you want it to go (or least prevent it from going where you don't want it to go). Planning, foresight, technological expertise (e.g. military strategy and good weapons) are the tools for this. This is a **defensive strategy.**

2. **Fortuna is a woman**

a. **Read:** 86-87/133 *(Chap. 25)*

b. How does one control a woman? You beat her. You use force to control fortuna. This is an **offensive strategy.**

3. **The wise prince, then, knows how to adapt to the times.** He doesn't wait for fortune to hit him; he's prepared for it. He doesn't stick with the same ideas and plans, he's constantly changing them for a constantly changing world.

4. **Q:** But can people change their character and their habits so easily? Is Machiavelli asking too much of a ruler?

D. Machiavelli on women

from Arlene Saxonhouse, *Women in the History of Political Thought: Ancient Greece to Machiavelli* (New York: Praeger, 1985)

1. **Q:** What are we to make of Machiavelli's claim that "fortune is a woman" and that it is sometimes "necessary to beat her"?

2. Saxonhouse argues Woman or the feminine play two roles in Machiavelli's thought (and in much of Western political thought in general):

a. **The woman as Mary.** Woman as weak, submissive, yet holy and pure and somehow "better" than man. The woman here is a **symbol of weakness**, which includes weak fathers, husbands, and princes as well. It is a symbol of fear, of the avoidance of conflict, the resort to religious appeals, etc.

b. **The woman as Eve.** The woman as the **temptress** that induces man to the Fall. Eve is Fortuna: deceptive, wily, unpredictable. This woman has to be kept down or else she will lead men to their downfall. 153

3. First point: **Machiavelli takes these two portraits of women and transfers them to men.** He in a sense makes men women. 154

4. Second point: **He also inverts Mary and Eve:** Machiavelli invests "good" (i.e. powerful) princes with all the attributes of Eve—cunning, dominating, free, action-oriented—while painting the "bad" (weak) princes with the attributes of Mary—weak, submissive, subordinate, passive.

5. Now, this ain't feminism. **Machiavelli still believes in these two stereotypes of women. He also has no place for women in politics.**

6. **But Machiavelli undermines the natural hierarchies and clear lines of authority created by Plato and the early Christian church. He overthrows and transforms the certainties upon which the political thought of the last 2,000 years had been based.** Machiavelli turns bad into good, virtue into vice, cruelty into kindness—and also men into women and women into men. To be more precise, he makes the differences between men and women, differences that once had been unassailable, so ambiguous that we can no longer tell good from bad or women from men. 151

7. **By overthrowing the old foundations of politics, Machiavelli not only creates an uncertain world, he also opens up new possibilities and new ways of defining old roles.**

8. So, one way to consider Machiavelli's violent imagery is as **an attempt to drive folks out of their passivity and into political activity.** It's a clarion call for action.

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- can you think of how to reorganize this?

II. Machiavelli's conception of politics

[from Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), chap. 7]

A. Q: Is Machiavelli a teacher of evil?

1. Q: What are some differences between Plato and Machiavelli?

2. [to answer if students say yes]: Machiavelli distinguished public from private ethics. Christian morality applied to one's private life, but not to public life, especially the public life of a prince. If a government operated in a stable, safe, environment, then yes, act according to Christian morality. In an era of instability, flux, and danger, however, the objective is power, and sometimes Christian morality must be set aside or cynically used to maintain one's power. 225

B. The Prince vs. the philosopher king

1. For Machiavelli, **politics is autonomous from morality**. For Plato as for Xian theology, politics and morality are intertwined. Not so for Machiavelli. Sheldon Wolin calls *The Prince* **the first great experiment in a "pure" political theory**, freed of religious or moral polemics. *The Prince* excludes everything but what deals specifically with ruling a territory effectively. 197-98

a. **The central concern of politics for Machiavelli is the state** (not morality), and the prince's **power** (not the souls or welfare of the polis). That's why **politics is about war, not justice**.

b. **Machiavelli divorces statecraft from soulcraft**. For Plato politics is "internal": its main goal is to prove that justice is superior to injustice intrinsically, on its own merits, and that what is good for the soul is good for the polis and vice-versa. **Machiavelli makes politics external to its participants**: stuff is good only to the extent that it is in one's interests. Politics is not about improving man's soul or "interior life," as Wolin puts it, it's about ruling over others and maintaining one's power.

c. For this reason, Wolin says Machiavelli is "the first truly modern political thinker." 199

2. **For Plato, the goal of politics was the steady elimination of violence. For Machiavelli, it is an inherent function of the state.** Coercion or the threat of it is at the heart of the state's power. Thus, the key is to use power/force well, not to try to eliminate it, which is impossible. Wolin argues that Mach. was not the first to talk about power, but the first to link it with force, and to see the state as the aggregate of force and steady coercion. 208-209, 220-224

3. For M, **the ends justifies the means**. For Plato **the means are just as important as the ends**. Justice is harmony is goodness. **Read 63-64**

a. Q: Or is it for Plato? What about the Noble lie?

4. **Politics is about flux not stability**. Politics is on-going and ever-changing. Rather than trying to prevent change, which is what Plato tries to do with his kallipolis, **a wise prince accepts change and adjusts to it**. Fortune, ambition, conflict are all inevitable aspects of the human condition; deal with it.

5. Machiavelli also discovers the **power of the masses**. The bronze class has no power or influence in Plato's kallipolis, only an imperative: find your job and do it. For Machiavelli, however, they have power: they need to not be oppressed, or else they'll make trouble for the prince. And with masses come divisions among them, due to different interests.

6. **Machiavelli introduces interests into politics:** the prince's interest is to maintain (or expand) his power; the masses' interest is to not be oppressed (nor to have their property taken away from them). **Politics is a means to serve one's self-interests.** It's not about achieving harmony among the major classes of society by finding one's job and doing it, it's about the prince competing with others to secure the best possible position for oneself. Politics is about **limited goods and limitless desires.** To get what you desire you have to beat out everyone else.

C. On political theory and knowledge

1. **Political knowledge is knowledge of the strategies of war, not of the good.** Political knowledge for the ancients was aimed at the steady elimination of evil from public society, to the extent possible, while Machiavelli sees evil as an inevitable part of politics. Political knowledge, then, serves the struggle for power, not for the good.

a. As a result, **political knowledge doesn't depend on philosophy** for Mach like it does for Plato but on **history.** The theorist gathers his or her **experiences** and her knowledge of others' experiences and uses them to make generalizations to guide future action. No knowledge of virtue or the good is necessary to do this; only *observation and experience.*

2. **Political action takes place in a world without a realm of the sun,** a world in which there is **no independent standard of truth or underlying reality to draw rules of conduct from.** Politics becomes its own standards: **what is right is what gets you power.** After Machiavelli, political science "must be conversant with evil and its major concern [is] to avoid hell." 237

3. **Role of the theorist:** The political theorist is like a person sketching a landscape, as he says in the Dedication. The theorist stands in the valley to view the mountains (the prince). Also, like the prince, the theorist understands the valley (the people) best from the mountaintop. The theorist, then, is like a neutral observer, standing outside of the phenomena and faithfully recording it in her "sketch." Allows the theorist to offer impeccable advice as well, because she can see both positions equally well.

4. Theorists should look at politics from a **problem-oriented perspective** rather than an ideological one. 203

5. In a sense, **this is a more democratic conception of knowledge than Plato's.** Even people from humble stations can acquire knowledge in the art of war and use it to rise up the ranks. **No class of philosophers have a lock on knowing how to rule.** 201

6. **Q:** Is Machiavelli's knowledge "scientific," i.e. objective?

a. I'd say no. It expresses realpolitik, but also patriotism (e.g. the last chapter). His "realistic" analyses have a purpose: liberate Italy from its enemies. Machiavelli's political knowledge is a combination of realism and passion.

D. Machiavelli inaugurates a new attitude in political theory: a **hostility to social distinctions** like the "three metals" and a rejection of aristocracy's claimed right to rule. This is further evidence of the more democratic turn in Machiavelli, even though he himself was not a democrat (though he was a republican). 202

E. Q: Whose conception of politics do you prefer, Mach or Plato? Why?

1. **A problem with Machiavelli's politics:** What brings together all these various interests together into a sense of a common life? Mach. never explains how the realpolitik *virtú* (ability/prowess) of the Prince leads to a common consciousness to offset the disorder and flux and strife of factional politics. **Is there any stability in the principality? Any common good?** Creating a theory that creates a common good and stability in a society in which people act in their own interests will be the task of Locke. How might this be done? [By replacing the Prince with popular institutions]

2. Isn't it a good thing to try to eliminate evil from politics and society? Isn't the purpose of politics to shape how men ought to live as much as to deal with them as the currently are? Where's the utopian vision in Machiavelli?

3. **Is it right to separate public from private moralities?** (E.g. Lewinsky scandal) Should we expect our politicians to act morally? For Plato and the Greeks, humans develop their moral capacities through a life devoted to politics (even if it's a chore, as for Plato). For Machiavelli, the goal is not the moral perfection of a leader but his ability to preserve the social order.

X. Machiavelli's advice to princes

- A. Consider the ends, not the means. The final result is what counts.
- B. It's okay to be wicked but avoid appearing wicked. Be feared, not hated.
- C. Be flexible and willing to change strategy when necessary.
- D. Plan to protect yourself against fortuna
- E. Q: Are we missing anything else?

[from 1999 notes, placed at beginning of chap. 10-18 notes:]

V. Machiavelli (and Thrasymachus) vs. Plato on justice:

A. **Exercise:** [tell them to take out a sheet of paper and answer the following two questions: What would Plato think of Machiavelli? What would Machiavelli think of Plato? Give them 10 minutes]

1. Discuss.

B. Further questions

1. Is ruling a craft or a strategy? Is a ruler bound by the rules of justice or should he be able to rule as he pleases?) Thras: justice might be a craft but ruling is a strategy.

2. Does ruling promote virtue or self-interest? Is politics about doing what is right or about power?

3. Is the just life advantageous to the just man, or is justice for suckers?

4. Should justice concern itself with the world as it is or as it should be? Is Socrates too utopian?

Q: Is Mach. a teacher of evil?
- add RT Q's from p 5 of P11 (10) etc